Inter-firm Relationships of Russian SMEs: A Way to Survive the Crisis and to Innovate

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Abstract: The purpose of the paper is to acquire a better understanding of the impact that inter-firm relationships exert on the survivability of Russian firms in the uncertain conditions of crisis and on the firm’s ability to innovate. Based on survey data gained from Russian CEOs in 2010, the paper discusses developments in the Russian market caused by the global crisis. The research contributes to clarifying the role of inter-firm collaboration in the strategy of Russian companies.

Key words: inter-firm relationships, crisis, innovation, strategy, competitiveness, Russia

JEL Classification: M10, M13, M21
I. Introduction

The global crisis caused economic downturns which have changed firms’ strategic behavior all over the world. The aftermath of the financial crisis is characterized by great uncertainty in local and international markets. The development of an anti-crisis strategy implies search for both stability and flexibility to improve business performance and competitiveness in the market.

There exists some literature that suggests that firm survivability is related to the ability to learn or leverage knowledge and to acquire new technologies (Vermeulen and Barkema, 2001) and that innovative behavior is crucial to maintaining a firm’s competitive advantage. It is impossible to ignore that innovation is a key driver of sustainable success on contemporary markets.

Since it is almost impossible for a single firm to manage all the knowledge that is necessary to innovate, value chains and manufacturing activities are scattered among several business partners, each specializing in different parts of the overall process, in an extreme cognitive subdivision of work (Paiola, 2010).

Presently, emerging (transition) market firms have started to realize the strategic value of relationships and the value creating aspects of networking and boosting innovation (Filippov and Settles, 2011). In April 2010, The Economist published a special report on innovation in emerging markets, titled ‘The world turned upside down’. The report states that the emerging markets are developing their own distinctive management ideas, not simply imitating the West.

Still, despite general interest in this topic and its relevance, the role and place of inter-firm relationships in sustainable development and innovation in emerging markets, including Russia, remain under-researched. There is also an obvious need to investigate the role of relationships in the anti-crisis strategies of Russian firms.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the impact that inter-firm relationships exert

I. Введение

Глобальный кризис послужил причиной экономического спада, и это изменило стратегические подходы компаний во всем мире. Последствием финансового кризиса стала возросшая неопределенность на национальных и международных рынках. Разработка антикризисных стратегий требует от компаний найти верное сочетание стабильности и гибкости, позволяющее повысить результативность и конкурентоспособность.

В значительном числе научных публикаций обосновывается, что выживаемость компаний находится в тесной связи с их способностью к обучению и наращиванию знаний, а также со способностью усваивать новые технологии (Vermeulen и Barkema, 2001), и что инновативное поведение имеет принципиальное значение для сохранения конкурентных преимуществ фирмы. Невозможно игнорировать тот факт, что инновации являются ключевым фактором успеха на современных рынках.

Поскольку в рамках отдельной фирмы практически невозможно сконцентрировать все знания, необходимые для осуществления инноваций, цепочки создания ценности и производственные усилия распределяются между бизнес-партнерами, каждый из которых специализируется на отдельных элементах общего процесса (Paiola, 2010).

В настоящее время компании развивающихся (переходных) экономик начали осознавать стратегическую ценность взаимоотношений и понимать важность сетевых аспектов создания ценности и стимулирования инноваций (Filippov и Settles, 2011). В апреле 2010, журнал «The Economist» опубликовал специальный обзор «The world turned upside down», посвященный инновациям на развивающихся рынках. В нем утверждается, что развивающиеся рынки создают свои собственные управленческие идеи, не сводя все к имитации Запада.

Однако, несмотря на общий интерес к этой тематике и ее актуальность, роль и место межфирменных взаимоотношений в устойчивом развитии и инновациях на развивающихся рынках, в том числе в России, остаются недостаточно изученными. Ощущается также явная необходимость исследования роли взаимоотношений в стратегиях российских компаний.
on the anti-crisis strategy of Russian firms and on their ability to innovate. Based on survey data with CEOs conducted in 2010, developments in the Russian market caused by the global crisis are discussed, and overall changes in the strategies of local companies are specified.

The paper is structured as follows. First, a theoretical background is presented through a brief review of the academic literature on relevant topics, such as inter-firm networks as a source of sustainable competitive advantage, the interplay between inter-firm networking and innovation, and the role of inter-firm collaboration in emerging markets including Russia. Secondly, a brief overview is given of the developments in the Russian market caused by the recent financial crisis, and feasible changes in the attitudes of Russian management are discussed. In particular, there is an evident shift towards network relationships and innovation. Thirdly, the research proposition and the methodology of the study are formulated, followed by a closer look at the Russian companies’ behavior using secondary data available as well as key findings from survey data gathered in 2010. The last section provides conclusions and future research proposals.

II. Literature Review

The paper takes the network paradigm as a basis of investigation, taking into consideration the fact that inter-firm collaboration is an important determinant of company competitiveness and sustainability in the rapidly changing environment. Interaction between companies is seen from a relationship perspective, where relationship is defined as “mutually oriented interaction between two reciprocally committed parties” (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). The market can be described as networks of multidimensional exchange relationships between business actors. These actors control heterogeneous, interdependent resources and conduct inter-linked activities.

Over the past decades, the literature has increasingly considered inter-firm col-

В данной статье ставится цель показать влияние межфирменных взаимоотношений на антикризисную стратегию российских компаний и на их способность к инновациям. На основе данных, полученных в ходе опроса топ менеджеров в 2010 г., обсуждаются изменения на российском рынке, вызванные глобальным кризисом, а также изменения в стратегиях российских фирм.

Статья построена следующим образом. В первой части дается краткий обзор академической литературы по соответствующей тематике, включая вопросы о роли межфирменных сетей как источника устойчивых конкурентных преимуществ, о связи между межфирменным сетевым взаимодействием и инновациями, о роли межфирменного сотрудничества на развивающихся рынках, включая Россию. Вторая часть статьи посвящена изменениям на российском рынке, вызванным финансовым кризисом и наблюдаемым изменениям в стратегических подходах российских менеджеров. В частности, отмечается явный сдвиг в пользу сетевых взаимодействий и инноваций. В третьей части сформулированы вопросы исследования и методология, затем рассмотрено поведение российских компаний. На основе изучения вторичных данных и результатов проведенного в 2010 г. исследования сделан ряд выводов, а также сформулированы предложения по дальнейшему исследованию.

II. Обзор литературы

Статья основывается на сетевой парадигме, учитывающей тот факт, что межфирменное сотрудничество является важной детерминантой конкурентоспособности и устойчивости фирмы в условиях быстро меняющегося окружения. Взаимодействие между компаниями рассматривается с точки зрения взаимоотношений, где взаимоотношения определяются как «взаимодействие между двумя сторонами, ориентированными на друг друга и учитывающими интересы друг друга» (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995). Рынок может быть описан как сети многолюдных взаимоотношений между игроками рынка, контролирующими гетерогенные, зависимые друг от друга ресурсы и осуществляющими взаимосвязанные действия.

В последние десятилетия в научных публикациях растет внимание к межфирменному сотрудничеству как эф-
laboration as an efficient form of organizing business activities and an important source of sustainable competitive advantage (Achrol, 1997; Ford, Gadde, Håkansson and Snehota, 2003; Gadde, Huemer and Håkansson, 2003; Rumyantseva and Tretyak, 2003; Jackson, 2008). Firms are encouraged to collaborate to be successful (Håkansson and Snehota, 1989, 1995; Christopher, Payen and Ballantyne, 1991; Mattsson and Johanson, 2006), they increasingly depend on the resources controlled by other actors and thereby are "able to combine resources in new ways, gain additional resources, and dispose of superfluous resources" (Wilson and Daniel, 2007). Thus, collaborative relationship management is of crucial importance in contemporary markets (Håkansson and Ford, 2002; Gadde, Huemer, and Håkansson, 2003; Gemünden, Ritter and Walter, 1997; Ritter and Ford, 2004; Rampersad, Quester and Troshani, 2010).

There is an obvious interplay between inter-firm networking and innovation. Murovec & Prodan (2009) point out that in order for innovation activity to provide a desired output, an organization needs to possess knowledge from many different fields, to absorb information from all kinds of sources – not just internal, but also all available external sources. Hence "the ability to exploit external knowledge is a critical component of developing innovative capability and competitive advantage. Companies and organizations that use networks can improve their level of innovation, since the more they absorb new knowledge from partners, the more competitive advantages they will obtain in the process (Håkansson and Waluszewski, 2001; Harrison and Laberge, 2002; Johansson, 2010). The 'innovation journey' (Van de Ven Polley, Garud and Venkataraman, 1999) takes place outside of any initiating company or organization and stretches across many different technological, organizational and economic rationalities (von Hippel, 1988; Waluszewski, 2010). Joint innovation development is one of the most valuable relationships outcomes (Walter, Ritter and Gemünden, effective form of organization of business and a valuable source of sustainable competitive advantage (Achrol, 1997; Ford, Gadde, Håkansson and Snehota, 2003; Gadde, Huemer and Håkansson, 2003; Rumyantseva and Tretyak, 2003; Jackson, 2008). Firms are encouraged to collaborate to be successful (Håkansson and Snehota, 1989, 1995; Christopher, Payen and Ballantyne, 1991; Mattsson and Johanson, 2006). They increasingly depend on the resources controlled by other actors and thereby are "able to combine resources in new ways, gain additional resources, and dispose of superfluous resources" (Wilson and Daniel, 2007). Thus, collaborative relationship management is of crucial importance in contemporary markets (Håkansson and Ford, 2002; Gadde, Huemer, and Håkansson, 2003; Gemünden, Ritter and Walter, 1997; Ritter and Ford, 2004; Rampersad, Quester and Troshani, 2010).

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The role of a firm’s partners as a source of knowledge and other resources for enhancing innovativeness has been stated clearly in the research literature (Elias, Cavana and Jackson, 2002; Tsekouras, McGovern and Brady, 2006; Peters, 2010, Fogg and Peers, 2011), also concerning emerging, or transition, markets (Tsekouras, 2005; Sheng and Rui, 2006; Smirnova et al., 2009). Thus, the research fields of networking and innovation in transition economies, as well as research on survivability and anti-crisis strategy, overlap significantly.

As an economy in transition, Russia provides a unique opportunity to investigate network structures. The characteristics of business relationships in the Russian market have been investigated since the early 1990s (Davis, Patterson and Grazin, 1996; Salmi, 1996). At present some studies exist which analyze the nature of these new long-term relationships (Tretyak and Sheresheva, 2004, 2008; Smirnova and Kouchtch, 2007; Sheresheva, 2006). Stability and flexibility gained through long-term cooperation serves as a base for trust within the network and thus makes it possible to get some confessions (i.e. agent’s payments postponed) and sometimes not only to survive but to increase profits (Sheresheva and Kolesnik, 2010). A company which is active in building a network of relationships usually manages to coordinate the flow of information and goods quite successfully.

There are a number of cases demonstrating that Russian companies have started to realize the value creating aspects of innovation (Filippov and Settles, 2011) and inter-firm networking as a main source of competitive advantage (Gruzdeff and Sheresheva, 2007; Smirnova and Kouchtch, 2007). At the same time, firms often miss the opportunity to develop joint innovations due to low trust and low ability to make joint investments (Smirnova et al., 2009).

There are also some recent papers presenting research results in the field of survivability and innovations in an uncertain crisis environment. Research conducted postulated in the academic literature (Elias, Cavana and Jackson, 2002; Tsekouras, McGovern and Brady, 2006; Peters, 2010, Fogg and Peers, 2011), and this in a range of verum and for developing markets (Tsekouras, 2005; Sheng and Rui, 2006; Smirnova et al., 2009). Thus, the research fields of networking and innovation in transition economies, as well as research on survivability and anti-crisis strategy, overlap significantly.

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by Gurkov (2009, 2010) proposed principles of corporate strategy development under extreme uncertainty and ready-to-use instruments for corporate analysts and decision-makers in Russia. Other researchers (Smirnova et al., 2009; Filippov and Settles, 2011) investigated innovation strategies and processes in emerging Russian multinational companies.

Still, despite the general interest in this topic and its relevance, the role and place of inter-firm relationships in sustainable development and innovation in Russian market remain under-researched.

III. Russian SMEs After the Financial Crisis

Relatively recent (in the 1990s) integration into the global market has created a specific environment for Russian firms. A number of features in transition economies determine the strategic decisions of local companies, including greater instability of relationships in the market, the lack of information about potential partners due to the short-term history of market economy, low information disclosure readiness, higher time pressure (Johanson, 2007; Salmi, 1996).

Russian firms are to a great extent unique, since they operate in a society with a strong scientific tradition inherited from the Soviet system with limited success in translating these scientific intentions into innovative products (Filippov and Settles, 2011). One of the reasons of this could be that weak network architectures are prevailing in Russia, which have limited value without strong ties (Rost, 2011).

Opportunistic behavior is highly widespread in Russia and is attributed to weak enforcement of contracts, low transparency of the legal system, and persistent corruption (Gruzdeff and Sheresheva, 2007; Filippov and Settles, 2011). Russia is considered to be one of the most corrupt nations in the world (DataMonitor, 2008). Corruption and increasing criminal activity have negatively affected the emergence of inter-firm relationships, lowering the level of trust and causing the growth of uncer-
tainty.

The financial crisis reinforced negative tendencies. Under present conditions of uncertainty, misunderstanding and asymmetry of information, it is difficult for enterprises to collaborate. The process is contradictory and inconsistent, with the institutional environment giving Russian enterprises more stimuli to vertical integration than to networking (Sheresheva, 2010). But, in a growing trend, the traditional emphasis on optimizing single transactions is being supplemented with a long-term collaborative view.

Nevertheless, the previous decade became a starting point of reconsideration in terms of inter-firm relationships in Russia. Our previous research, carried out by means of in-depth interviews with Russian managers, has shown a mindset difference in the management of high-tech start-ups and the firms from mature industries. Most of Russian top managers leading “traditional sector” companies are not free of their previous experience of Soviet “networking” and try to succeed under new circumstances using this experience, while most managers in start-ups are quite young and have a more entrepreneurial mindset.

The study conducted by Vahtra (2010) concludes that the evidence of R&D investments by Russian companies remains notably scarce. One of the explanations is that innovation in Russia tends to be concentrated in large companies that possess sufficient financial, human and intellectual resources for it. Large companies are concentrated in the low-tech and natural resource-based industries; the share of high-tech sectors in Russian economy is marginal.

The strategic value of innovation has been realized only recently by Russian SMEs. Now there are success histories of some SMEs being able to survive the crisis and to innovate.

An example is the Russian company Sitronics, which is involved in the telecommunications industry, information technologies, system integration and consulting, and the development and production of microelec-

снижающий уровень доверия и являясь основой роста неопределенности.

Финансовый кризис усилил негативные тенденции. В современных условиях неопределенности, взаимного непонимания и асимметрии информации предприятиям сложно сотрудничать. Процесс является противоречивым и непоследовательным, у российских предприятий пока больше стимулов к вертикальной интеграции, а не к сетевому взаимодействию (Sheresheva, 2010). Однако, наметилась растущая тенденция к отходу от традиционной склонности оптимизировать отдельные трансакции и ориентации на долгосрочное сотрудничество.

Первая декада нового тысячелетия стала точкой отсчета в пересмотре отношения к межфирменным взаимоотношениям в России. Наше недавнее исследование, проведенное в форме глубинных интервью с российскими менеджерами, показало, в частности, что существуют различия в подходах у менеджеров высокотехнологичных стран, и компаний реальных отраслей. Большинство российских топ менеджеров из «традиционного сектора» были невольны от прежнего опыта «сетевого взаимодействия советского типа» и пытались добиться успеха в новых условиях, используя этот опыт; большинство менеджеров стартапов были молодым и в большей степени обладали предпринимательским мышлением.

Исследование, проведенное Vahtra (2010), указывает на то, что инвестиции в НИОКР российских компаний остаются на низком уровне. Это связано с тем, что инновации в России концентрируются в первую очередь в крупных компаниях, обла дающих достаточными финансовыми, человеческими и интеллектуальными ресурсами. Однако крупные компании сконцентрированы в низкотехнологичных и сырьевых отраслях; доля высокотехнологичных секторов в России очень невысока.

Российские малые и средние предприятия лишь недавно стали осознавать стратегическую ценность инноваций. В настоящее время уже появились истории успеха таких компаний, сумевших выжить в кризис и осуществлять инновации.

Один из примеров - компания Sitronics, работающая в области телекоммуникаций, информационных технологий, системной интеграции и консалтинга, разработки и производства микроэлектроники. Соединяя исследовательскую
tronics. By combining research activities in Russia and international development and production activities, Sitronics has been able to successfully innovate in the Russian market. Its network of R&D facilities connects Russian and Ukrainian specialists with Czech, Slovak, and Greek facilities. Through this network the firm has been able to create commercially viable patents and other intellectual property. Sitronics is now the leading microchip manufacturer in Russia. It is involved in a series of research partnerships with major Russian research institutes, as well as in joint projects including an e-government project with Rostelekom to produce personalized banking cards with digital electronic signatures, a joint project with state corporation RUSNANO to establish a full scale 90 nanometre microchip manufacturing capability, and projects to use RFID technology in retail, forestry, farming and postal services.

Another example is Whisker, a Russian high-tech start-up company. For 5 years it has been developing technology for industrial production of oriented crystalline growing of tips array for Atomic-force microscopy (AFM) purposes. The management of the company appeared to be aware of the lack of managerial skills and market information needed to foster commercialization of the innovative product. At the same time, they did not intend to sell the company. In this case, the choice was made to build a network of relationships and to interact intensively with a number of actors (in Russia and abroad) with skills considered to be crucial for the firm’s stable growth and gaining competitive advantage from the technology. The main purpose of developing a relationship network, says one of the top managers, was to gain added information and knowledge benefits. It will help the company to choose an adequate marketing strategy of entering target markets, including USA, Germany, and Japan, where customer’s demand abilities are the highest, and to compete with the firms already established in the world market of AFM probes for R&D and industrial usage.

Development in Russia with production and internationalization, the company Sitronics puts the innovative activity on the Russian market. Its network of R&D facilities connects Russian and Ukrainian specialists with Czech, Slovak, and Greek facilities. Through this network the firm has been able to create commercially viable patents and other intellectual property. Sitronics is now the leading microchip manufacturer in Russia. It is involved in a series of research partnerships with major Russian research institutes, as well as in joint projects including an e-government project with Rostelekom to produce personalized banking cards with digital electronic signatures, a joint project with state corporation RUSNANO to establish a full scale 90 nanometre microchip manufacturing capability, and projects to use RFID technology in retail, forestry, farming and postal services.

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technology is patented, and mass manufacturing of highest quality AFM probes for R&D and industrial usage has started.

An example of a successful Russian firm in the consumer durables and electronics market is VITEK. Its success can be traced to its extensive distribution network, the brand and pricing strategy, service centre geographic distribution across Russia and effective use of Russia based and outsourced manufacturing. Now it has over 650 models of audio, video and home appliances in 60 product categories and a network of over 350 service centers.

So, there is evidence that networking is of great importance in the Russian market, and establishing network relationships helps local firms to gain positions in high-tech markets. Are inter-firm relationships in Russia also helpful in the unstable crisis environment and do they serve as an additional basis for sustainability and innovation? Aiming to answer the question, a survey was conducted by means of structured questionnaire.

IV. Empirical Research: Hypotheses and Design

In this research we aimed to test two main hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): networking helps Russian SMEs to survive in unstable environment.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Russian SMEs which are active in establishing network relationships implement more innovations

Empirical data for the study was collected in the second half of 2010 and resulted in a sample of 130 Russian SMEs with 100-1200 employees. The study was designed on a basis of face-to-face structured interviews with respondents representing top management. The data was collected in personal interviews with an average duration of 1 hour.

The sample includes companies from a

1. The production process of the tips is based on managed growing of oriented crystalline needles. The cantilevers of the AFM probes are formed of single crystalline silicon with broader surface oriented along the plane, and the tips are also single crystalline epitaxially grown on the cantilevers.

издания

1. Уникальная технология запатентована, начато массовое производство нанозондов высочайшего качества для исследовательских и промышленных целей.

Примером успешной российской компании на рынке потребительских товаров длительного пользования и электроники может служить фирма VITEK. Ее успех основан на создании обширной дистрибуторской сети, брендинге и ценовой стратегией, на создании сети сервисных центров по всей России и на эффективном использовании аутсорсинга в производстве. В настоящее время фирма предлагает более 650 моделей бытовых приборов, аудио- и видеотехники в 60 продуктовых категориях и имеет сеть из 350 сервисных центров.

Таким образом, есть явные свидетельства значимости сетевых взаимодействий на российском рынке, в том числе того, что создание сети взаимоотношений помогает российским компаниям завоевывать позиции на высокотехнологичных рынках. Помогают ли межфирменные взаимоотношения также и в условиях кризиса, служат ли они дополнительной основой для устойчивости и инноваций? С целью ответа на этот вопрос было проведен опрос с использованием структурированной анкеты.

IV. Эмпирическое исследование: гипотезы и дизайн

В данном исследовании тестировались две главные гипотезы:

Гипотеза 1 (H1): сетевое взаимодействие способствует выживанию российских малых и средних компаний в нестабильной среде.

Гипотеза 2 (H2): российские малые и средние компании, которые активны в создании сетевых взаимоотношений, внедряют больше инноваций.

Эмпирические данные были собраны во второй половине 2010 г., выборка состояла из 130 российских малых и средних компаний с числом занятых от 100 до 1200 человек. Опрос проводился с использованием личных структурированных интервью с респондентами, представлявшими топ менеджмент компаний. Сбор данных осуществлен в ходе персональных интервью со средней длительностью 1 час.

1. Процесс производства основан на управляемом выращивании ориентированных кристаллических игл. Консоли зондов для атомно-силовых микроскопов выполнены из монокристаллического кремния.

9
number of industries: machine manufacturing industry – 19,4 %, light industry – 17,5 %, food industry – 14,6 %, construction – 12,6 %, power industry and ferrous metal industry - 5,8 % each, chemical and petrochemical industry - 4,9 %. Other companies were from telecom, woodwork-ing, timber, pulp & paper, and some other industries.

To describe existing patterns of anti-crisis behavior, a number of variables were used. The key respondents (CEOs) had to assess the financial crisis impact on the industry performance, the firm’s target market performance, as well as the firm’s performance in 2010 as compared to 2008; to identify the degree of their firm independence/embeddedness, the respondents assessed the firm’s activity in new product development (NPD) and outsourcing NPD in 2009-2010.

V. Key Findings

Since 2008, Russian companies have been faced with a lot of new problems caused by the global financial crisis. They have to operate in a severe environment characterized by decline in their industries, the lack of clear demand and supply view under current market conditions, volatility and growth of risks, and high levels of uncertainty in their markets. In accordance with the survey results, the impact of the financial crisis on the industry and firm’s target market performance appeared to be quite significant, since less than 2% of the CEOs considered the industry development to be boosted by the crisis, and more than 85% of them were sure that the industry performance had declined (Fig.1). At the same time, slight or moderate growth of the firm’s target market was pointed out by almost 75% of CEOs involved in the survey (Fig.2).

According to additional information gained from 5 in-depth interviews with experts, Russian firms need to change their strategies to withstand stresses, pressures, or changes, but they did not switch automatically to new strategies. Still, CEOs have become more knowledgable and have better judgment of the situation, and the role

Выборка включает компании из разных отраслей: обрабатывающая промыш-ленность – 19,4 %, легкая промышленность – 17,5 %, пищевая промышленность – 14,6 %, строительство – 12,6 %, электроэнергетика - 5,8 %, черная металлургия - 5,8 %, химическая и нефтегазохимическая промышленность - 4,9 %. В выборе также представлены компании телекоммуникационной, деревообрабата-ивающей, лесной, целлюлозно-бумажной и некоторых других отраслей.

Для описания существующих паттернов антикризисного поведения был использован ряд переменных. Респонденты (ключевыми являлись CEO компаний) оценивали влияние финансового кризи-са на состояние отрасли, на состояние целевого рынка компании, а также состояние компании в 2010 г. по сравнению с 2008 г.; определяя степень не-зависимости или включенности в сетевые взаимодействиям совей фирмы, респон-денты оценивали активность фирмы в разработке новых продуктов (NPD) и аутсорсинг NPD в 2009-2010 гг.

V. Основные результаты

После 2008 российские компании столкнулись с целым рядом проблем, вызван-ных глобальным финансовым кризисом. Им приходится вести деятельность в жестких условиях, характеризующихся спадом и высоким уровнем неопреде-ленности на целевых рынках, недоста-точной ясностью в отношении спроса и поставок, волатильностью и ростом рис-ков. В соответствии с результатами на-шего опроса, влияние финансового кри-зиса на отрасли в целом и на целевые рынки фирм оказалось значительным, поскольку менее 2% топ менеджеров отметили, что кризис ускорил развитие отрасли, при этом более 85% респон-дентов высказали уверенность, что по-казатели отрасли снизились (рис.1). В то же время, почти 75% топ менедже-ров, участвовавших в опросе, указали, что происходит слабый или умеренный рост целевых рынков фирмы (рис.2). В соответствии с дополнительной ин-формацией, полученной в ходе 5 глубин-ных интервью с экспертами, российским фирмам необходимо внести изменения в стратегию, чтобы устоять перед стресса-ми, вызовами и изменениями, но такое изменение не происходит автоматиче-ски. Тем не менее, топ менеджеры стали более компетентными и знающими, луч-
of inter-firm long-term relationships is now reconsidered.

Figure 1: Assessment of the financial crisis impact on the performance of the firm's industry

Рис. 1: Оценка влияния финансового кризиса на состояние отрасли, в которой работает фирма

Figure 2: Assessment of the financial crisis impact on the performance of the firm's target market

Рис. 2: Оценка влияния финансового кризиса на состояние целевого рынка фирмы

There are many different designs for inter-firm networks and a broad variety of approaches for implementation (Grandori and Soda, 1995; Miles and Snow, 1986; Riemer, Gogolin and Klein, 2005). Still, in the framework of the research presented in this paper, there was no attempt to quantify the prevalence of different forms. In Russian economy, which is now at the last stage of transition, organizational forms are instable, they intertwine or overlap to a great extent, a considerable proportion of rapidly developing com-

Существуют различные формы организации межфирменных сетей и довольно широкий спектр подходов к их формированию (Grandori и Soda, 1995; Miles и Snow, 1986; Riemer, Gogolin и Klein, 2005). Но в рамках исследования, представленного в данной статье, не делалось попыток определить, какие именно формы преобладают. В российской экономике, которая находится на завершающей стадии переходного периода, организационные формы нестабильны, в высокой степени пересекаются и накладываются друг на друга, значительная часть быстро развивающихся
bimations of inter-firm networking being of very recent origin (Dolgopyatova, 2003; Sheresheva, 2010). That’s why the classification of networks in Russia is hardly possible. The degree of independence was the only affordable criteria to characterize the dynamics of integration processes in Russian industry.

Table 1: The degree of independence of the firms surveyed in 2010 as compared to the results of survey conducted in 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of integration</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The firm is absolutely autonomous</td>
<td>60,5</td>
<td>48,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The firm is a member of an informal business group</td>
<td>11,7</td>
<td>15,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The firm is a member of a large economic entity which determines its business strategy</td>
<td>8,6</td>
<td>19,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The firm is a member of a large economic entity which determines its strategy and operation</td>
<td>10,7</td>
<td>9,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No ready answer</td>
<td>8,5</td>
<td>6,8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To understand the current attitude to the importance of inter-firm relationships in the Russian market, the degree of independence of the firm in 2010 was assessed and then compared to the results of the survey conducted in 2001 under the Higher School of Economics project The Non-Market Sector in the Russian Economy (Table 1). The results of this survey revealed that in 2001 over 60% of the companies believe that they operate absolutely on their own, and only some 12% of the respondents admitted that their company belongs to an informal business combination (Dolgopyatova, 2003). The results obtained from CEOs in our survey show that there are still many companies (almost 50% in our survey) which stay absolutely autonomous. At the same time, the overall results confirm the hypothesis that more Russian companies are now more intensive in building relationships, since about 40% of the firms surveyed are now members of some informal business group (15,5%) or some large economic entity (Fig.3).

Для того, чтобы понять текущее отношение к важности межфирменных взаимодействий на российском рынке, был оценён уровень независимости фирм в 2010 г. И затем проведено сравнение с аналогичным показателем, полученными в результате опроса, проведенного в 2001 в рамках проекта Высшей Школы Экономики «Нерыночный сектор в российской экономике» (Таблица 1). Результаты опроса показывают, что в 2001 более 60% компаний считали, что они действуют совершенно автономно, и только около 12% респондентов отметили, что их компании принадлежит к неформальной бизнес группе (Dolgopyatova, 2003). Результаты, полученные в ходе нашего опроса топ менеджеров, показывают, что по-прежнему сохраняется высокая доля компаний, действующих абсолютно автономно (почти 50% опрошенных). В то же время, результаты опроса в целом поддерживают гипотезу, что многие российские компании стали более интенсивно выстраивать взаимоотношения, поскольку около 40% обследованных фирм являются теперь членами тех или иных неформальных бизнес групп (15,5%) или крупных экономических единиц (рис.3).
It is important to admit that the firms which reported to be absolutely autonomous appeared to have less stable positions. Many of them underperformed in 2010 as compared to their results in 2008. More than half of the firms that reported to be members of an informal business group have retained their positions in the crisis, though they also have not shown any significant growth, just like those companies that are members of a large economic entity (see Table 2).

**Figure 3:** Degree of independence of the firm in 2010

![Figure 3: Degree of independence of the firm in 2010](image)

Table 2: Self-assessment of firm’s performance in 2010 as compared to 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of independence of the firm</th>
<th>Assessment of firm’s performance in 2010 as compared to 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stепень независимости фирмы</td>
<td>Оценка результатов работы компании в 2010 г. по сравнению с 2008 г.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The firm is absolutely autonomous</td>
<td>More than 30% decline; Снижение большее чем на 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Фирма совершенно независима</td>
<td>10-30% decline; Снижение на 10-30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The firm is a member of an informal business group</td>
<td>Insignificant fluctuations: plus or minus 10%; Незначительные колебания: плюс-минус 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Фирма является членом неформальной бизнес группы</td>
<td>10-30% increase; Рост на 10-30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The firm is a member of a large economic entity which determines its strategy</td>
<td>More than 30% increase; Рост больше чем на 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Фирма является частью корпорации (холдинга), которая определяет стратегические планы развития</td>
<td>10,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The firm is a member of a large economic entity which determines its strategy and operation</td>
<td>10,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Фирма является частью корпорации (холдинга), которая определяет как стратегические, так и операционные вопросы</td>
<td>10,0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We also found out that less than 20% of firms that are completely autonomous practice new product development (NPD) within its traditional sphere of activity on a regular basis. Nearly 65% of these companies do not have this activity or only plan it in the future. Regarding the NPD in a new domain, this percentage is even higher (80% of the respondents in this category). This is a clear sign of passivity, which may be largely explained by the uncertainty caused by the crisis.

Members of informal business groups are less cautious and more active in NPD, as well as members of large economic entities, especially in their traditional spheres of activity. Still not more that 10% in these categories have enough reasons to develop new products in a new domain (see Tables 3, 4). Members of informal business groups are quite active in generating ideas about new products (see Table 5). They are fully comparable to the members of large economic entities and clearly outperform absolutely autonomous companies whose activity in this sphere is poor.

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Table 3: NPD within the firm’s traditional spheres of activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of independence of the firm</th>
<th>NPD within the firm’s traditional scope of activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NPD as a trial project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No NPD</td>
<td>Planning NPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The firm is absolutely autonomous</td>
<td>22,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Фирма совершенно независима</td>
<td>22,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The firm is a member of an informal business group</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Фирма является членом неформальной бизнес группы</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The firm is a member of a large economic entity which determines its business strategy</td>
<td>10,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Фирма является частью корпорации (холдинга), которая определяет стратегические планы развития</td>
<td>10,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The firm is a member of a large economic entity which determines its strategy and operation</td>
<td>20,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Фирма является частью корпорации (холдинга), которая определяет как стратегические, так и операционные вопросы</td>
<td>20,0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Мы также выявили, что менее чем 20% независимых фирм разрабатывают новые продукты на регулярной основе в традиционных сферах своей деятельности. Примерно 65% таких компаний не планируют этого и в будущем. Что касается разработки новых продуктов в новых для компании областях, то эта доля еще выше (80% респондентов из этой категории). Это явный признак пассивности, которая может в большой степени объясняна кризисом.

Члены неформальных бизнес групп менее осторожны и более активны в разработке новых продуктов, как и фирмы, являющиеся частью корпораций (холдинга), - особенно в традиционных для них сферах деятельности. Однако не более 10% таких респондентов видят для себя основания разрабатывать новые продукты в новых для себя областях (см. таблицы 3, 4). Члены неформальных бизнес групп довольно активно генерируют идеи новых продуктов (см. таблицу 5). По этому показателю они полностью сравнимы с членами крупных бизнес единиц и явно превосходят абсолютно автономные компании, у которых очень низкие показатели.
Table 4: NPD of a firm in a new domain

Таблица 4: Разработка новых продуктов (NPD) в новых для фирмы областях

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of independence of the firm</th>
<th>NPD in a new domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No NPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>НПД не происходит</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The firm is absolutely autonomous</td>
<td>52,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Фирма совершенно независима</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The firm is a member of an informal business group</td>
<td>31,3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Фирма является членом неформальной бизнес группы</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The firm is a member of a large economic entity which determines its business strategy</td>
<td>30,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Фирма является частью корпорации (холдинга), которая определяет стратегические планы развития</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The firm is a member of a large economic entity which determines its strategy and operation</td>
<td>20,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Фирма является частью корпорации (холдинга), которая определяет как стратегические, так и операционные вопросы</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Generating ideas about new products

Таблица 5: Генерирование идей новых продуктов

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of independence of the firm</th>
<th>Generating ideas about new products</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is impossible in our industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>В нашей отрасли это невозможно</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The firm is absolutely autonomous</td>
<td>12,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Фирма совершенно независима</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The firm is a member of an informal business group</td>
<td>0,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Фирма является членом неформальной бизнес группы</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The firm is a member of a large economic entity which determines its business strategy</td>
<td>15,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Фирма является частью корпорации (холдинга), которая определяет стратегические планы развития</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The firm is a member of a large economic entity which determines its strategy and operation</td>
<td>10,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Фирма является частью корпорации (холдинга), которая определяет как стратегические, так и операционные вопросы</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As to developing of new technologies, concepts of new products, testing and implementation, absolutely autonomous firms and members of informal business groups are in equally bad position, as compared to members of large economic entities (see Table 6, 7).

Что касается разработки новых технологий, концепций новых продуктов, тестирования и создания образцов, независимо действующие фирмы и члены неформальных бизнес групп находятся в одинаково слабой позиции по сравнению с компаниями, входящими в состав крупных бизнес единиц (См. таблицы 6, 7).
Based on the above results, we can say that the first hypothesis (H1) has been fully confirmed. Russian SMEs which operate independently in the market underperformed in 2010 compared to their results in 2008. Their positions were less stable than those of the members of informal groups.

The second hypothesis (H2) has not been
confirmed. The obtained results vary depending on the types of innovative activity. Members of informal business groups outperformed autonomous companies in generating ideas and in new product development. At the same time, autonomous firms and members of informal business groups equally underperformed in developing of new technologies, concepts of new products, testing and implementation.

VI. Conclusions

Our main conclusions are as follows.

Russian small and medium firms have to struggle with a number of problems caused by the crisis. To survive in the contemporary environment, they need to be more active in establishing network relationships. Inter-firm relationships appeared to be very helpful for SMEs as a means to gain more stable positions in the market at the crisis and in the post-crisis stagnation.

Our survey has shown that many Russian small and medium firms fail to be effective in implementing innovations. Their limited abilities in translating ideas and scientific inventions into innovative products may be attributed to a number of factors, including the inability of management to create a clear picture of the firm’s long-term goals and implement this vision through joint actions with partners.

From our point of view, the hypothesis that Russian SMEs which are active in establishing network relationships implement more innovations should be re-tested, since most published results demonstrate that sustainable network relationships help to strengthen firms’ consolidated position due to combining complementary assets and key competencies, and thus to implement innovations more successfully.

Acknowledgments

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VI. Выводы

В заключение можно сделать ряд выводов.

Российские малые и средние фирмы вынуждены преодолевать целый ряд проблем, обусловленных кризисом. Для того, чтобы выжить в современных условиях, они нуждаются в более устойчивых сетевых взаимодействиях. Межфирменные взаимодействия оказались крайне полезными для малых и средних компаний как средство добиться устойчивости на рынке в условиях кризиса и в период посткризисной стагнации.

Наше исследование показало, что многие российские малые и средние фирмы пока не способны осуществлять эффективные инновации. Они терпят неудачу на этапе перевода идей и изобретений в инновационные продукты вследствие действия комплекса факторов, включая неспособность менеджмента сформулировать долгосрочные цели компании и реализовать стратегическое видение в процессе взаимодействия с партнерами.

На наш взгляд, требует дополнительной проверки гипотеза о том, что российские компании, проявляющие активность в развитии сетей взаимодействий, осуществляют больше инноваций, поскольку большинство опубликованных результатов исследований подтверждают, что устойчивые сетевые взаимодействия способствуют усилению консолидированных позиций фирм благодаря комбинированию комплементарных ресурсов и компетенций и, таким образом, более эффективно осуществлять инновации.

Благодарности

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