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Organizational learning on coepetition strategy: an exploratory research on a Turkish private banks credit card application

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Abstract

In the Turkish banking sector, competition and the banks' costs have become more important than ever due to the global financial crisis which began at 2008 and affected the world economic and financial systems. The banks, aim to increase their share in the credit card market which is one of the most profitable market in the sector, are cooperated with the other banks which have well-known credit card brand and wide POS network. This strategy is called as "coepetition".

The primary goal of the coepetition is to increase the market share in the sector. However, organizational learning in the credit card market is the other important advantage of coepetition. In this research, we explored the relationship between coepetition and organizational learning. For this purpose, two semi structured interviews were made with the manager of operation and information technology in the bank which has applied coepetition to increase its credit card market share in the Turkish banking sector since 2007. With these interviews, the effect of coepetition on organizational learning has been explored. On the other hand the importance of documentation and communication on organizational learning, the effect of coepetition on people, information system and organizational process of the bank were also explored in this study.

As a result, organizational learning on credit card market in the Turkish banking sector is affected positively by the coepetition and knowledge transfer between competitor banks allow for the development of the banks' ability.

Keywords: Coepetition, Organizational learning, Turkish credit card market

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1. Introduction

Turkish banking sector is one of the most competitive sector in Turkey. According to third quarter figures of Turkish economy, assets of the sector equal to Turkey's GDP. Turkish banking sector has been influenced significantly by 2001 Turkish financial crisis and the current global financial crisis. Thus, competition in the sector has been increased, profit margin has been reduced and the costs of the banks have been become more important for banks.

In the 2001 financial crisis, many banks were transferred to the Savings Deposits Insurance Fund (SDIF). The costs of the crisis were about 50 billion USD. After the crisis, the Turkish Government has taken various measures to prevent a similar crisis. In this context, interest rates have been reduced, regulations will increase transparency and strengthen banks' capital structures have been implemented. For instance, the Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency (BRSA) has implemented Basel regulations. According to BRSA regulations, the banks must have a capital adequacy ratio of at least twelve percent. The effect of these regulations has been changed business processes of banks and the banks have become more sensitive to the costs.

Another important factor, increases competition in the Turkish banking sector, is the current global financial crisis. With the crisis, banks have experienced a challenge of funding and the default rate of the sector increased dramatically. As a result, competition in the sector has been increased, costs have been become more important for the banks and the high profit margin markets have been become more popular. Turkish credit card market is one of the highly competitive and cost-sensitive markets because of the high profit margin.

Market share in the Turkish credit card market depends on credit card brand value and a wide POS (point of sale) network. A wide POS network is critic for special credit card functions such as bonus, cash point, installment and deferral of installment. In recent years, the banks have cooperated with their competitors in order to get rid of the POS network and high advertisement costs. In this strategy, referred to in the literature as coepetition, both banks use same POS network and credit card brand (Gee, 2000; Luo, 2007; LeTourneau, 2004; Chan, Chin and Lam, 2007; Demirel *et al*, 2011). In coepetition, competitor banks are in cooperation and competition at the same time. Benefits of this strategy can be listed as; to reduce costs, to share risk, to increase market share and to increase organizational learning (Luo, 2007; Ganguli, 2007; Chien and Peng, 2005; Galvagno and Garraffo, 2010).

In this research, the effects of coepetition on the organizational learning are explored. For this purpose, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two mid-level managers of a Turkish private bank implementing this strategy to increase its market share using a rival bank's credit card brand and POS network. The purpose of the interview with the mid-level information technology manager is to determine the contributions of coepetition on the bank's IT systems and IT learning structure. On the other hand to determine the contributions of coepetition strategy between competitor banks on the bank's credit card operations ability is aimed with the interview with the mid-level operation manager of bank.

2. Literature Review

In this section, it is discussed the theoretical framework of coepetition and organizational learning, and explained the relationship between coepetition and organizational learning.

2.1. Coepetition

Some of the factors that increase competition are capital and other factors of production moving more quickly than in the past, technological developments, new developed financial instruments, and consumers demand better quality and more various goods. Therefore, new strategies are developed to increase profit and market share of organizations. One of these strategies implemented by organizations to

reduce costs, to share risks, to have more market share and to learn competitors' strategies about the market is cooperation.

Competition strategies can be divided into two major groups: red ocean strategies and blue ocean strategies. In the red ocean strategies, pure competition is the basic factor of the strategy. Today's business environment, most organizations' competing strategies are the red ocean strategies and these organizations are mainly using cut-throat competition as a main strategy. Because, these organizations are competing in a limited market. Therefore, when one player (organization) wins the game, other player (organization) loses. In the blue ocean strategies, competition is not pure competition and cooperation and creating value are essential factors of these strategies. In other words, in the blue ocean strategies all player can increase their market share by creating value and developing the market. In other words, blue ocean strategy aims to escape from the bloody competition (red ocean) by developing a new market with value innovation (Chan, Chin and Lam, 2007). Cooperation is the one of blue ocean strategies and to create value and to rise the market are basic goals of this strategy.

Cooperation is the simultaneous competition and cooperation either between two or more rivals in the market or among departments of any organization (Bengtsson and Kock, 2000; Luo, Slotegraaf and Pan, 2006; Brandenburger and Nalebuff, 1998; Luo, 2005; Mariani, 2007; M'chirgui, 2005; Okura, 2007). Even if research on inter-firm collaboration has begun to explore the issue of relationships among competitors, cooperation is still not a well-defined theoretical perspective in management (Galvagno and Garraffo, 2010). Cooperation which means the existence of cooperation and competition between competitors at the same time, was enhanced by combining cooperation and competition words by Ray Noorda who is founder of Novell Corporation is a leading provider of infrastructure software (Ganguli, 2007; Song, 2003).

Cooperation is a competition strategy which based on the game theory. Therefore, cooperation studies related to the game theory. In the management literature, the first substantial study was made by two academicians, Adam M. Brandenburger and Barry J. Nalebuff, in the 1996. These academicians were studied the cooperation in context of the game theory and explained the features of cooperation in the book named "Cooperation".

To be named any application as "cooperation", competition and cooperation should be observed at the same time to reduce the costs, minimize the risks or increase the market share. In other words, creating value and developing market by cooperating with the competitor are the critical functions of cooperation. Because of the cooperation is one of the blue ocean strategy, all players in the market can be increased their market share and income.

The pie example was given to explain cooperation strategy by Brandenburger and Nalebuff (1998). According to writers, every market similar to a pie, organizations worked in the market are taken a slice from the pie and cooperation is enabled to grown up the market by creating value and developing the market. Hereby organizations which create value can be taken more slices from the pie. In other words, market share of organizations which apply cooperation are increased.

There are a wide variety of reasons (such as sharing costs, minimizing risks) which organizations led to apply cooperation. Due to the wide variety of reasons, composition of cooperation and competition may be different from business to business. In other words, in the some cooperation applications, cooperation is the essential dimension of the strategy. However, in some other cooperation applications, competition is the basic major part of the application and organizations cooperate to gain some specific goals.

Luo (2007) separates cooperation strategy between global rivals into four groups according to cooperation and competition diversity.

Contending situation exists when weak or low cooperation and high or strong competition simultaneously occur between two or more companies. The goals of companies which in contending situation are intelligence gathering, niche filling, or position jockeying to increase market share or power.

Market commonality, product similarity or resource similarity are leading causes of the co-competition as a contending situation form. According to Luo (2007); “A contending situation is especially likely to occur in an oligopolistic circumstance in which several global players occupy the majority share of global markets characterized by high competition, industry deregulation in most nations, and increasingly sophisticated demand from worldwide customers or clients”. Contending situation is the most applicable method of co-competition in the business world. Because, the basic interaction between companies is competition and the most companies cooperate with each other to obtain specific purposes. Co-competition between Turkish banks about usage of credit card brand and POS network is a suitable example of contending situation exists when low cooperation and high competition simultaneously occur between rivals. The banks cooperate to use credit card brand and POS network and compete on other areas of banking such as commercial credits and deposits.

A co-competition strategy is named partnering situation when low competition and high cooperation occur at the same time between two or more competitors. In other words, cooperation between rivals is the most important part of the strategy and there is little competition between competitors. The reasons for partnering situation are as follows: synergy extension, value sharing and attachment enhancement. Furthermore, high resource complementarity and low market commonality are two necessary conditions for partnering situation. This strategy exists when companies have the chance for high level cooperation with each other. Capital ownership and having co-managers are important beginning reasons for these strategies. The goal in the synergy extension is to identify and explore additional benefits, whether technological or operational, arising from an established cooperative relationship. Organizational attempt accommodating the respective cultures, philosophies and values of two or more rivals cooperate with each other is named value sharing in partnering situation. Finally, according to Luo (2007); “attachment enhancement is a managerial attempt to seek stronger interparty ties at both the individual level (interrelationships between the firms’ CEOs) and the organizational level (connections between two firms)”.

An isolating situation exists when low cooperation and low competition between competing companies at the same time. This strategy is applied when there are very few similarities between the companies and the main purpose of this strategy is to obtain several benefits such as scale expansion and vertical integration. Domain specialization is another benefit of the strategy. Co-competition between Microsoft which leading software and operating system company and its rivals which specializes in database systems is an example of contending situation existing low cooperation and low competition. Economies of scale are a critical element for companies in isolating situation form of co-competition.

Finally, an adopting situation exists when high cooperation and high competition occurs simultaneously between rivals. Generally, high cooperation in this strategy is observed when any company needs significantly other company’s resources. On the other hand, there is significant competition between these companies to maintain market share and companies which cooperate with each other are the most important rivals of others. Adopting situation is observed at industries which need large amount of infrastructure investment such as telecommunication and defense industry. According to Luo (2007); “MNEs in an adopting situation may consider boundary analysis, loose coupling, and strategic balance as possible strategic tactics in response to a high competition-high cooperation combination with a major global rival”.

As a result, co-competition is a blue ocean strategy which used in the wide range by organizations and Turkish banks are aimed to reduce the credit card costs.

Decline in the profit margin of Turkish banking sector affected by the crisis leads to banks have become more sensitive to the costs. The banks must have well-known credit card brand to have good market share in the credit card market which has high profit margin. Another important factor of increasing and keeping market share in the credit card market is to have wide POS network. Both are very costly in this

market and need long time period. Banks, aim to have high market share in the credit card market and do not want to endure these costs, tend to cooperation with other banks have well-known credit card brand and wide POS network. With this strategy, banks get the chance to use the well-known credit card brand and wide POS network and learn rivals' strategies in the market. In other words, banks benefit by cooperation to improve their knowledge management system and organizational learning. Thus, we suggest that organizational learning is the most important benefits of cooperation in the credit card market.

2.2. Organizational Learning

Today, knowledge is one of the vital elements of organizations. According to Drucker (2011); "knowledge is the primary source for both people and the whole economy. The production factors of Classics, land or natural resource, labor, the capital stock, do not disappear, but they may be secondary. If there is any specialized knowledge, it is easy to gathering that knowledge. However, specialized knowledge is not enough for the production. It can be producer while it integrated with any task. Therefore, information society means organizations' society at the same time. The purpose and the function of any organization is to integrate the knowledge as form of objective."

Organizations should be able to get appropriate knowledge in the appropriate time and to use the knowledge in their appropriate processes. Thus, it is necessary to update the knowledge across the organization. Organizations must also have easily accessible knowledge management system across the organization. Therefore, organizations need to learn how they will get the knowledge and use it. Learning in organizations is addressed at three levels in the management literature as follows; personal-level learning, group-level learning and organization-level learning as known organizational learning (Doğan, 2010).

Organization-level learning or organizational learning is the process of gathering, using and sharing the knowledge by people and teams across the organization. Organizational learning term was used firstly by Cyert and March in 1963. Cyert and March (1963) were claimed that organization will adapt to their environment by using organizational learning.

Organizational learning is process of improving of organizational movements to achieve their aims by using better knowledge and better understanding (Yılmaz, 2011). In other words, organizational learning is addressed the process that organization learned through people and teams learned by gathering, using and sharing the knowledge by using organization's knowledge management system. Organizational learning depends on personal-level learning and group-level learning. Transforming the knowledge into the organizational asset is critical for organizational development (Aydoğan *et al*, 2011).

Knowledge sources of organizations are divided into two major groups: internal sources (in particular their people) and external sources. The most important external knowledge source of organizations is their rivals work same market. Therefore, cooperation for banks is critical to learn how they improve their process and to gather knowledge about rivals' strategies. In this context, competitors and cooperation have important impact on to improve organizational learning capability.

3. Methodology

In this section, it is discussed that research goal, research method and evidences obtained from interviews data.

Research goals are to explore relationship between cooperation which applied by Turkish banks and organizational learning and to define the effect of cooperation on organizational learning. Previous studies show that cooperation affects positively organizational learning. In other words, cooperation which exists low cooperation on credit card market and high competition between Turkish banks is a very important source for organizational learning and it may be improve organizational learning ability of the banks. Therefore, the goal of this study is to examine the relationship.

We made semi-structured interviews with mid-level managers of a Turkish private bank carrying out the work on this issue and tried to form a general framework for cooperation's effect on organizational learning. In the management literature, there are several propositions that cooperation will increase organizational learning. However, it is not discussed that how cooperation will improve organizational learning and how this interaction works. In this context, our research goal is to explain this interaction and this process. How cooperation between banks triggered the organizational learning, basic dynamics of this process, the importance of the knowledge obtained from the competitors and definition of how the banks secure their private information are the key points of this research.

In order to achieve the objectives of the research, we made two semi-structured interviews with two mid-level managers (information technology manager and credit card operation manager) of a Turkish private bank applies cooperation to increase its credit card market share. The bank cooperated with another bank has well-known credit card brand and wide POS network for 5 years and, in the 2012, the executive board of the bank has decided to cooperate with new bank which one of the two important player of the credit card market. With these interviews, we explored what the bank learned from competitor bank, how the bank's learning and knowledge management system changed and impact of the bank's experiments.

Interview texts are analyzed using the grounded theory developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The grounded theory is an inductive qualitative research method provides systematic analysis of events and conclusions from this analysis (Keskin, Baş and Yıldız, 2009).

In the grounded theory, relationships in the real world are tried to define using interview texts and analysis of these texts. These relationships are founded analyzing interview texts. When interview texts analyze, researchers are coding the texts and creating concepts using this codes. Finally, category and sub-category are created using the concepts (Allan, 2003).

4. Findings

In this section, the findings obtained interview texts of two semi-structured interviews are represented. The basic questions asked to interviewers are established by using previous studies and their surveys and extended with answers of interviewers. In this context, the findings obtained interview text and the personal evaluations which source of these findings are given in this section.

Category and sub-category obtained interview texts using grounded theory are in the Table 1.

Categorical Finding: Two banks apply cooperation on the credit card applications to increase market share on the credit card market and compete on all other applications. There is low cooperation and high competition between the banks and this application is an example of the competing situation which exists low cooperation and high competition occurs at the same time. The IT manager is stated the scope of this application as follows.

Individual Assessment: *“In the Turkish credit card market, the market share is depended on the credit card brand and POS network. We had the credit card brand and a little POS network before the cooperation application. We decided to grow in the credit card market and evaluated the alternatives to increase of the market share in this market. Then, we decided to cooperation with the banks which has a well-known credit card brand and wide POS network rather than create a new well-known credit card brand. Because, the costs of the creation a new well-known credit card brand and wide POS network are high-cost applications and cooperation with a bank which have well-known credit card brand is much more effective application in this market. Therefore, we decided to cooperate with any bank to achieve this goal. In other words, we cooperate on credit*

card applications with the bank, but competition on the other banking segments such as commercial credit, deposits is continued.”

Categorical Finding: The banks are applied this strategy to reduce the costs, increase the market share and minimize the risks. The credit card brand and POS network costs are very critical factors of the market applications and a lot of banks tend to cooperation to decrease these costs. The operation manager is stated the goal of the application as follows:

Individual Assessment: *“Our basic objectives in this strategy are to decrease the credit card application costs and to increase the market share and our credit card profits. Credit card market is still a very profitable market in Turkey. Credit card market is also a very competitive market than others. In this market, the market share depends on behaviors of the credit card consumers and, awareness of the credit card brand and wide POS network affect these behaviors. With the cooperation another bank, we increased the market share and, decreased the credit card application costs.”*

Table 1: Categories and sub-categories

Category	Sub-category
Scope	Low cooperation, cooperation on the usage of the credit card brand and POS network, high competition
Purposes	To increase market share, competitive advantage
Process	Meetings, application instructions, developing new software, integration of the new hardware
Learning	Adaptation of the process, communication, meetings between the banks, documentation of the problems, documentation of the solutions, knowledge sharing, learning the cooperation, developing the credit card process
Acquisitions	Increasing the ability on the credit card market, increasing the ability of the bank’s departments on the credit card applications, increasing the ability of the people on the credit card applications and processes, developing the problem-solving skills on the credit card applications, productivity, improvement of the performance

Categorical Finding: The IT department was influenced significantly from the cooperation application. Credit card software, staff and the credit card processes are adapted to the new application using the in-

house trainings and meetings. The IT manager is stated the process and effect on the IT system of the application as follows:

Individual Assessment: *“Our department, Alternative Distribution Channels which provides a variety of tools for our consumers to access for our products, is one of the most affected departments from the cooperation application with the other bank. The credit card applications were very simple in the 1990s. In 2000s, they have become much more complex applications because of the developing new credit card products and services. With the cooperation, we integrated these new products and services which will to increase our consumer numbers and market share to our IT system and, this process was carried out very carefully. In the integration process, we have developed new software, purchased new hardware and changed our applications. All changes have affected our credit card process and staff. Our staff have shared the all information which gathered from the other bank. We can say that knowledge sharing is the critical success factor of this strategy.”*

Categorical Finding: Coopetition has affected the knowledge and skills of the staff which working IT and Operation departments. New products and services from the application have been increased the knowledge and skills of the staff. The personnel are much more competent and to solve the problem about credit card application is very simple. The bank and its staff learned the new credit card products and services and new techniques for to solve about credit card applications. The bank can develop the new products and services and solve the problems faster and more productive than past. The IT manager is stated this situation as follows:

Individual Assessment: *“In fact, these applications are developed by Turkey. Credit card applications are diverse in Turkey. We have developed many new applications such as installment, deferral of installment, cash point, and bonus. If any bank wants to stay in this market, it should apply these tools in its applications. Development, application and problem-solving of these tools are critical factors of the success of the banks in credit card market. Cooperation with another bank provides a chance to learn these new applications. Our staff learned new tools from another bank staff and we can develop these tools for our consumers’ demands. We have responded to our consumers’ demands and complaints faster than past. Learning from another bank and developing the tools and applications are very important part of this progress.”*

5. Conclusion

Coopetition is the most important strategy to increase credit card market share for banks do not want to endure credit card brand value and wide POS network costs in the Turkish banking sector. Coopetition is simultaneous competition and cooperation between two competitor banks in the sector. With this research, we explored the interaction between coopetition and organizational learning and tried to define the process of this interaction.

In this study, we showed that coopetition strategy in the credit card market affected positively the bank’s credit card operation and banks are improved their credit card operations by using other banks’ experiments. Cooperation with another bank provides new tools, perspectives and though systems to develop new products and services and to solve problems. Developing new products and services and responding to the consumers’ complaints and demands are affecting the success of banks in the Turkish credit card market. With the coopetition strategy, banks increase their market share, minimize the risks and learn the new applications in the credit card market.

Organizational learning is one of the most important benefits of the coopetition. Cooperation with another bank provides a chance to develop the skills and knowledge of the staff about credit card products

and services. In the cooperation process, staff has learned new tools and how to use them to increase the consumer satisfaction.

Our findings which obtained interview texts using grounded theory are showed that organizational learning is affected positively by coopetition and this positive relationship is very important for banks to decrease their costs and to increase their market share in Turkish credit card market.

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