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THE EMPIRICAL STUDY OF THE CORRELATION BETWEEN THE DOMINANT STRATEGY OF “INFLEXIBLE HIPPOS” AND THE ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE CYCLE

The development of companies is characterised by the adoption of certain stages of business development, the availability of resources and outcomes. This developmental process is inherently cyclical, requiring companies to remain flexible and adaptive continuously. Each phase of the life cycle is characterised by unique challenges, perspectives and inherent features that require strategic modifications to maintain and enhance competitiveness. A holistic interpretation that integrates both life cycle phases and strategic approaches is necessary for a thorough understanding of a company's success and market performance.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the correlation between the dominant strategy employed by industry leaders, known as “inflexible hippos,” and the various stages of the organizational life cycle. The research objects are the dominant strategy “inflexible hippos” and the ten phases of the organizational life cycle: Courtship, Infant, Go-go, Adolescence, Prime, Maturity, Aristocracy, Early bureaucracy, Bureaucracy, and Death. The subject of the research is to verify the existence of a connection and its type between the research objects. The objective of the study is to ascertain the existence and nature of the connection between these research objects. The research methodology employed morphological, analytical, statistical assessment, and comparative analysis techniques. By comparing morphological statements formulated with expert input, evidence was found regarding the existence and significance of the correlation strength.

The study revealed that the correlation between competitive strategy and the phases of the company's life cycle is strongest in the “Maturity” and “Aristocracy” phases, which dictate the sequence of organizational development. The tightest connection with direct independent mutual influence is observed in the “Go-Go”, “Adolescence”, “Prime”, “Reconstruction”, and “Bureaucracy” phases. The context dependence of this correlation characterizes ongoing change processes: the company retains old features of organizational development while simultaneously acquiring new ones. Evaluating the timeliness and efficiency of managerial decision-making based on the alignment of competitive strategy with the company's life cycle, influenced by both external and internal factors, is a critical stage in the company's development process.

This study can help companies to develop more effective competitive strategies that respond to their current needs. This can lead to improving companies' competitiveness, selecting appropriate and effective project actions and their success in the market.

Keywords: *organisational life cycle, dominant strategy, corporate sustainability, project solutions, competitiveness*

JEL classification: *L13, D24, D43*

Дослідження спрямоване на перевірку та вивчення наявності зв'язків між віолентною стратегією «неповоротких бегемотів» і десяти фаз розвитку життєвого циклу організації: Залицяння, Дитинство, Давай-Давай, Юність, Розквіт, Стабільність, Аристократизм, Взаємні звинувачення, Бюрократія, Смерть. В основу емпіричного дослідження покладено метод морфологічного аналізу.

В процесі дослідження встановлено наявність трьох типів зв'язків: спорідненого, протилежного та зв'язку із безпосередньо незалежним взаємним впливом. На основі порівняння морфологічних тверджень, із залученням експертів, отримано докази наявності та значущості різних типів зв'язків.

Споріднений зв'язок є найбільшим у фазах Стабільність та Аристократизм, що визначає узгодженість організаційного розвитку. Тіснота зв'язків з безпосередньо незалежним взаємовпливом найбільша на фазах Давай-Давай, Юність, Розквіт, Взаємні звинувачення та Бюрократія. Контекстозалежність цього зв'язку описує процеси змін, що вже розпочалися: організація ще має старі ознаки узгодженості організаційного розвитку, проте одночасно набуває і нові ознаки. Протилежна тіснота зв'язку найбільша на фазах Залицяння та Дитинства. Протилежність ознак породжує конфлікт в узгодженості організаційного розвитку, формує високий опір та потребу відмовитися від впровадження стратегії на фазах де цей тип зв'язку набуває високого значення.

Результати дослідження показують, що віолентна конкурентна стратегія «неповоротких бегемотів» найбільш ефективна на фазах Стабільності та Аристократизму, коли організація вже досягла певного рівня успіху та може ефективно використовувати свої ресурси для захисту своїх ринкових позицій. На фазах Залицяння та Дитинства, коли організація ще перебуває в процесі формування, ця стратегія неефективна і навіть шкідлива. На фазах Давай-Давай, Юність, Розквіт, Взаємні звинувачення і Бюрократія стратегія неповоротких бегемотів може бути ефективною, але лише в контексті інших змін, які відбуваються в організації. Практична цінність дослідження полягає в тому, що воно може допомогти компаніям розробити більш ефективні конкурентні стратегії, які відповідають їх поточним потребам та наявним ресурсам.

Ключові слова: *життєвий цикл компанії, віолентна стратегія, корпоративна стійкість, проектні рішення, конкурентоспроможність*

JEL classification: *L13, D24, D43*

Introduction. In organisational development, it is generally accepted that companies develop through certain life cycle stages. This process is essentially cyclical and requires organisations to be ready for constant change. Each stage presents its own set of challenges, opportunities, and inherent characteristics, demanding strategic adjustments to sustain competitiveness.

As companies progress through their organizational life cycles, the evolution of their competitive strategies becomes pivotal in fortifying their market position. However, it is essential to recognise that neither the stage of an organisation's life cycle nor the

strategic approach adopted can explain a firm's performance. These factors must be combined to comprehensively understand a firm's success.

Strategic alignment with the life cycle stage helps companies to absorb change better, use resources and opportunities more efficiently, and manage risks. This synchronization is crucial for sustainable growth and competitive advantage. However, while aligning strategies with life cycle stages isn't a guaranteed recipe for success, it represents a strategic maneuver that heightens the likelihood of positive outcomes.

Despite the apparent benefits, the synergies between competitive strategies and life cycle stages are poorly understood. The lack of clear guidance on developing strategies that correlate with life cycle stages poses a challenge for companies seeking to develop robust competitive strategies.

Literature review and problem statement. The study exploring the connection between a company's life cycle and the formulation of its strategy was conducted by several scholars, including D. Lester, J. Parnell, and S. Carraher [1], A. D. Chandler [2], A. J. Rowe, R. O. Mason, and K. E. Dickel [3], H. Rahmanseresht, and E. Yavari [4], G. Linton, and J. Kask [5], A. Angeles, A. Perez-Encinas, and C. E. Villanueva [6], L. Mosca, M. Gianecchini, and D. Campagnolo [7], Rahimi, F., and Fallah, S. [8].

The research gap concerning the interconnected relations mentioned above underscores the question: how can organizations better adjust their competitive strategies to their developmental phase, ensuring sustained relevance and competitive advantage? The answer lies in the configuration approach [9, p. 1], which advocates for a thorough examination of the interactions among various organizational variables rather than isolating specific elements. This approach argues that specific strategic configurations are more successful than others because of the interconnected nature of organisational change. Various frameworks have been developed, including Mintzberg's pioneering research on types of strategy-making processes [10] and types of structure [11]. Other notable contributions include R.E. Miles and C.C. Snow's strategic types [12], M. Porter's competitive strategies [13], and Miller and Friesen's archetypes of strategy formulation [14]. Additionally, studies have investigated the relationship between environmental change and shifts in generic strategies [15; 16].

From a configurational perspective, it becomes feasible to extend the analysis beyond the influence of single aspects and investigate bivariate and multivariate outcomes [17]. The basic assumption in

this perspective is that various elements interrelate with one another, leading to certain configurations being well-aligned while others are not [18].

Our paper represents the latest installment in a series of research studies aiming to explore the extent of interconnection between predominant strategies and various stages of the organizational life cycle. The study is based on Yudanov's typology of competitive strategies [19] and Adizes's model of organisational life cycles [20; 21].

I. Adizes' model describes 10 phases in the organisation's life cycle development. The phases include "Courtship" (1), "Infant" (2), "Go-Go" (3), "Adolescence" (4), "Prime" (5), "Maturity" (6), "Aristocracy" (7), "Early bureaucracy" (8), "Bureaucracy" (9), "Death" (10) [20; 21], which sequentially succeed each other. Simultaneously, A.Y. Yudanov's typology [19] identifies five primary competitive strategies: exploitive, commutative, dominant, patient and latent. The dominant strategy is categorised into three sub-types: "proud lions", "powerful elephants" and "inflexible hippos".

Prior research has extensively compared the phases of an organization's life cycle with various strategies, including the exploitive [22], patient [23], commutative [24], and dominant strategies such as "proud lions" [25]. However, the present study uniquely focuses on examining the "inflexible hippos" dominant strategy in conjunction with the phases of the organizational life cycle. Building upon findings from our previous investigations [22-25], we demonstrate the significance and presence of diverse types of correlations. In this paper, we study the type of correlation between the phases of an organisation's life cycle and two strategies that have not been studied yet: the dominant strategy, «inflexible behemoths», and the latent strategy (Fig. 1).

The aim and objectives of the study. The aim of this paper is to investigate the correlation between the dominant strategy adopted by industry leaders, commonly referred to as "inflexible hippos," and the various stages of the organizational life cycle.

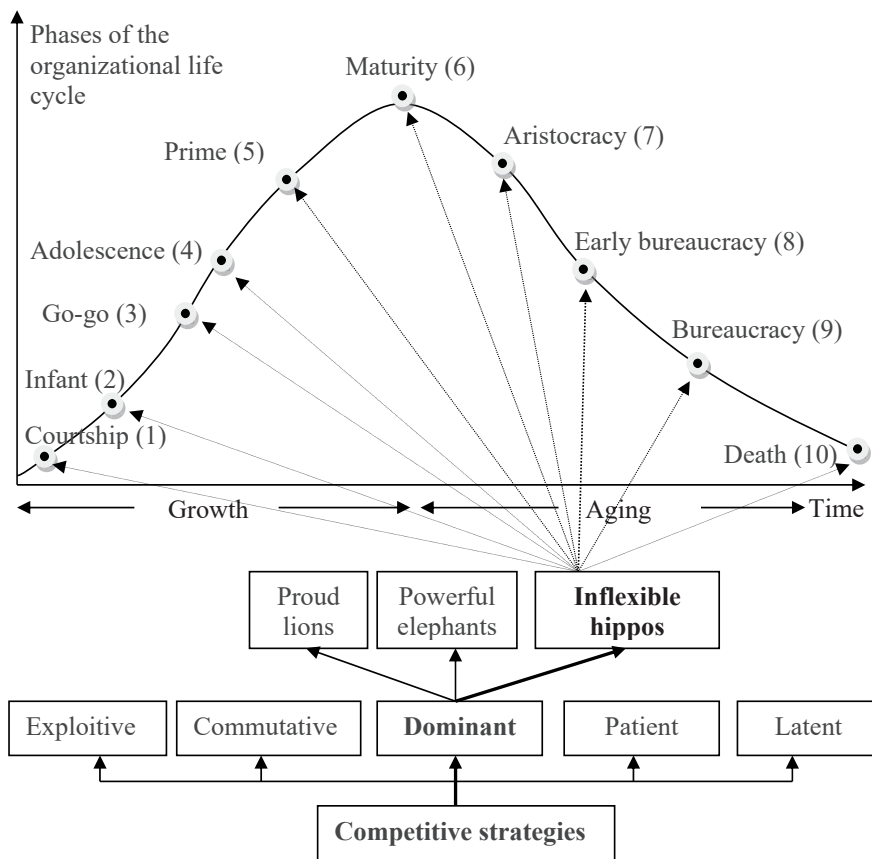


Fig. 1. The concept of studying the correlation between the dominant competitive strategy of «inflexible hippos» and the phases of the organizational life cycle
 (Source: Authors' compilation)

The study materials and methods. We used a comprehensive methodological approach to study the type of correlation between the dominant strategy of industry leaders, known as “inflexible hippos”, and the different stages of the organisational life cycle, including morphological, analytical analysis, statistical assessment and comparative analysis. Also, the study was based on quantitative research with the involvement of experts.

Within the scope of our research, we engaged experts who possessed a minimum of three years' experience and a background in project management. Prior to conducting the survey, we discussed and clarified the terminology with the respondents.

As part of our research, we proposed the hypothesis: “the success of an organization

depends on its ability to strategically adapt and align its competitive approaches with the specific requirements of the organizational life cycle.” Should the hypothesis be validated, we intend to offer recommendations for implementing project changes and managing organizational dynamics, based on the synchronization of competitive strategy with the phases of the organizational life cycle.

The research methodology employed in this study is rooted in morphological analysis [26, p. 57-58]. The justification, advantages, disadvantages, and conditions for ensuring the reliability and validity of applying this method to meet the research objectives are elaborated upon in [24]. The research algorithm comprised several steps.

The descriptive characteristics of each of the ten phases of the organizational life

cycle were subdivided into eight relatively independent morphological statements. As a result, a total of 80 morphological statements were generated. The compilation of these statements was based on sources [20; 21; 24].

The characteristics of the dominant strategy of inflexible hippos were categorised into eight morphological statements, following a similar approach [19, p. 43; p. 64]:

1. Maintaining a large size while forfeiting developmental dynamism to operate in the international market.
2. Dispersing efforts across various areas of activity, resulting in over-diversification.
3. Experiencing a progressive growth of technological backlog.
4. Slowly losing the ability to make profits appropriate to the size, and beginning to lose out.
5. Eliminating unprofitable production.
6. Reducing costs in retained businesses.
7. Maintaining huge turnover but not profits.
8. Undergoing a general industrial decline, resulting in losing out.

Results and Discussion. As previously mentioned, the focus of our study encompasses the dominant strategy of «inflexible hippos» and the 10 phases of the organizational life cycle: Courtship (1), Infant (2), Go-Go (3), Adolescent (4), Prime (5), Maturity (6), Aristocracy (7), Early bureaucracy (8), Bureaucracy (9), and Death (10). The strict competitive strategy of the “inflexible hippos” generally describes the strategy of a mature organisation. Such organizations engage with longstanding customers who purchase mass-produced goods and services.

A “morphological box” [24] was formed based on the identified morphological statements. Horizontally in the morphological box, there are eight morphological statements of the dominant strategy of inflexible behemoths, and vertically there are eight morphological statements of each of the 10 phases of the organizational life cycle. The “morphological box” represents a matrix (1):

$$\begin{pmatrix} F_{i1}B_1R_k & F_{i1}B_2R_k & \dots & F_{i1}B_nR_k \\ F_{i2}B_1R_k & F_{i2}B_2R_k & \dots & F_{i2}B_nR_k \\ \dots & \dots & \dots & \dots \\ F_{ij}B_1R_k & F_{ij}B_2R_k & \dots & F_{ij}B_nR_k \end{pmatrix}, \quad (1)$$

where F_{ij} is the i th morphological statement of the j th phase of the organization’s life cycle; B_n – is the n -th morphological statement of the violent strategy of inflexible behemoths; R_k is the k -th respondent ($i = 1; 10$; $j = 1; 8$; $n = 1; 8$; $k = 1; 4$).

3. In the subsequent stage of the research, experts evaluated morphological expressions and determined the type of correlation with the ratings “-2”, “-1”, “0”, “+1”, “+2” (Table 1).

At the intersection of morphological statements defining the dominant strategy of «inflexible hippos» (B) and the phase of the organizational life cycle (Fi), experts evaluated statements based on a rating scale (Table 1).

In the subsequent step, we compiled the total scores as presented in Table 2. The scores from all experts were aggregated in Table 3 to calculate the sums of three types of statements: bound, opposite, and those with direct independent mutual influence (Table 1).

The relative strength of correlation between morphological statements is characterized by their shared morphological or grammatical components. This implies that they possess a similar structure and employ identical morphological words based on consistent principles. The tighter the correlation, the greater the resemblance in structure and grammatical patterns used to convey the action.

The tightness of the link with the opposite context of morphological statements is defined by the presence of antonymous or contrasting morphological structures or grammatical components across different statements or phrases. This implies that morphological aspects, such as word forms, grammatical structures, or morphemes, convey opposing ideas or concepts. The stronger the link with the opposite context, the more pronounced the likelihood of observing the growth of contrasting structures and the utilization of contrasting grammatical patterns to express an action.

Table 1

A scale to assess the type and strength of correlation between morphological statements defining the dominant strategy of «inflexible hippos» and organisational life cycle

Rating	Assessment criteria	Correlation between morphological statements	
		Type	Mark
-2	Statements are opposite	Statements with opposite context	-
-1	Statements are more opposite than similar		
0	Statements that can not be directly compared, those that have different word attributes or are ambiguous and context-dependent	Statements with directly independent mutual influence	0
+1	Statements are more similar than the opposite	Statements with related context	+
+2	Statements are similar		

Source: Authors' compilation

Table 2

Aggregated score matrix depicting the comparison between morphological statements of the dominant strategy of “inflexible hippos” and organizational life cycle phases

The phase of the Organizational Life Cycle	Experts	Number of expert assessments for statements					Number of expert assessments for statements		
		-2	-1	0	+1	+2	-	0	+
Courtship (1)	R_1	48	8	8	0	0	104	8	0
	R_2	44	9	11	0	0	97	11	0
	R_3	45	12	7	0	0	102	7	0
	R_4	46	9	9	0	0	101	9	0
Infant (2)	R_1	30	18	11	5	0	78	11	5
	R_2	32	12	14	6	0	76	14	6
	R_3	29	22	9	4	0	80	9	4
	R_4	32	16	11	5	0	80	11	5
Go-go (3)	R_1	11	13	33	4	3	35	33	10
	R_2	12	14	30	5	3	38	30	11
	R_3	14	9	36	2	3	37	36	8
	R_4	16	8	33	5	2	40	33	9
Adolescence (4)	R_1	1	2	28	20	13	4	28	46
	R_2	0	3	30	16	15	3	30	46
	R_3	2	1	27	24	10	5	27	44
	R_4	1	2	26	24	11	4	26	46
Prime (5)	R_1	0	5	26	22	11	5	26	44
	R_2	0	4	23	22	15	4	23	52
	R_3	1	3	32	19	9	5	32	37
	R_4	1	2	27	20	14	4	27	48
Maturity (6)	R_1	0	2	9	25	28	2	9	81
	R_2	0	2	12	23	27	2	12	77
	R_3	0	2	8	21	33	2	8	87
	R_4	0	2	9	22	31	2	9	84
Aristocracy (7)	R_1	0	0	11	32	21	0	11	74
	R_2	0	0	9	31	24	0	9	79
	R_3	0	0	10	35	19	0	10	73
	R_4	0	0	12	36	16	0	12	68
Early bureaucracy (8)	R_1	1	21	35	7	0	23	35	7
	R_2	2	25	30	6	1	29	30	8
	R_3	3	14	41	6	0	20	41	6
	R_4	0	19	37	8	0	19	37	8
Bureaucracy (9)	R_1	10	14	29	9	2	34	29	13
	R_2	12	12	26	12	2	36	26	16
	R_3	8	17	30	8	1	33	30	10
	R_4	12	9	32	10	1	33	32	12
Death (10)	R_1	8	23	22	10	1	39	22	12
	R_2	6	27	20	11	0	39	20	11
	R_3	7	22	26	7	2	36	26	11
	R_4	8	25	19	10	2	41	19	14

Source: Authors' compilation

Table 3

Reliability and validity of expert assessment of the strength of correlation between morphological statements of the dominant strategy of “inflexible hippos” and organizational life cycle phases

Phases of the Organizational Life Cycle According to Ichak Adizes Model	Indicators of assessment of types of statements					
	Contradictory in context		Not amenable to direct comparison		Related in context	
	Variance	Variation coefficient, %	Variance	Variation coefficient, %	Variance	Variation coefficient, %
Courtship (1)	2,94	2,91	1,71	19,52	0	0
Infant (2)	1,91	2,44	2,06	18,32	0,82	16,33
Go-go (3)	2,08	5,55	2,45	7,42	1,29	13,59
Adolescence (4)	0,82	20,41	1,71	6,15	1	2,20
Prime (5)	0,58	12,83	3,74	13,86	6,40	14,14
Maturity (6)	0	0	1,73	18,23	5,19	5,19
Aristocracy (7)	0	0	1,29	12,30	6,14	6,14
Early bureaucracy (8)	4,5	19,78	4,57	12,79	13,21	13,21
Bureaucracy (9)	1,41	4,16	2,5	8,55	19,61	19,61
Death (10)	2,06	5,32	3,10	14,23	11,79	11,79

Source: Authors' compilation

The first category characterizes independent morphological statements that have different word features and do not directly influence each other.

The second category includes ambiguous morphological statements. Such statements cannot be categorised as close or opposite in meaning. They exhibit both common and opposite features and can co-exist and simultaneously contradict each other. The neutral character of these statements lies in the possibility of different interpretations depending on the specific context, where different aspects can exist simultaneously and interact with each other. Such morphological statements describe transitional, changeable, complex, opposite states or ideas and represent the versatility of a concept or situation. However, they can influence each other indirectly, through other categories.

In order to aggregate the values of «-2», «-1», «1», and «2», we employed a weighting factor. The scores of statements marked as «0» remained unchanged, and the weighting factor was not applied to them. To simplify subsequent calculations, the number of opposite statements was calculated in modulo.

The reliability and validity of the closeness of the relationship were ensured by calculating the coefficient of variation and the dispersion index for every case (Table 3). The coefficients of variation and dispersion indices were calculated according to the methodology described in [27, pp. 266-267]. Experts' conclusions are considered coherent and reliable if the coefficients of variation do not exceed 25% [27, pp. 266-267]. This criterion is met in our study (Table 3). The tightness of links (Table 4) is computed using formulas (2-4):

$$SB(-)_i = \frac{\sum F_i BR_k(-)}{\sum F_i BR_k(-) + \sum F_i BR_k(0) + \sum F_i BR_k(+)} \quad (2)$$

$$SB(0)_i = \frac{\sum F_i BR_k(0)}{\sum F_i BR_k(-) + \sum F_i BR_k(0) + \sum F_i BR_k(+)} \quad (3)$$

$$SB(+)_i = \frac{\sum F_i BR_k(+)}{\sum F_i BR_k(-) + \sum F_i BR_k(0) + \sum F_i BR_k(+)} \quad (4)$$

where: $SB(-)$, $SB(0)$, $SB(+)$, – the type of connection between the morphological statements of the dominant strategy “inflexible hippos” and the i -th phase of the organizational life cycle, accordingly, for statements with the opposite context; statements with directly independent mutual

influence; and statements with a related context. Examples of calculating the close connections for other strategies can be found in [22; 23].

The study's results are presented in the figure (Fig. 2). The Cheddock scale of regression coefficient determination [28; 29] was used to interpret the results of the qualitative estimation of the indicators of tightness of connection, efficiency and decision-making efficiency.

In the early phases of organisational development, Courtship (1), Infant (2) and Go-go (3), the correlation is absent or weakly pronounced (see Figure 1). In the following phases, Adolescence (4) and Prime (5), morphological statements gain noticeable correlation. The proximity of bonds increases significantly, reaching a high level during the Mature (6) and Aristocracy (7) phases. However, in the subsequent phase, Early bureaucracy (8), the correlation noticeably decreases, becoming weak. This trend persists until the final phase, Death (10).

Therefore, large and mature companies employing the dominant competitive strategy of "inflexible hippos" reach a level of equivalence in their organizational development by the Mature (6) and Aristocracy (7) phases.

This alignment in organizational development is evidenced by shared features, structures, characteristics, and similarities in organizational structure, activities, and approaches.

In the Go-go (3), Adolescence (4), Prime (5), and Bureaucracy (9) phases, the tightness of connection between morphological statements with direct independent mutual impact begins to emerge and becomes more moderate. By the Early bureaucracy phase (8), the correlation between morphological statements with direct independent mutual influence becomes noticeable. In the other phases, this correlation is weak or absent.

The stronger the link with direct independent mutual influence, the lower the resistance to implementing or transitioning from an existing strategy to a new one. The context dependence of this type of correlation predominantly characterizes ongoing change processes. The company maintains existing features of organizational development alignment while simultaneously acquiring new ones.

A strong connection between contextually opposite statements is evident in the Courtship (1) and Infant (2) phases. However, in the subsequent phase, Go-go (3), this type of connection becomes moderate, and its correlation decreases.

Table 4

The type of connection between the morphological statements of the dominant strategy of "inflexible hippos" and organizational life cycle phases

Phases of the Organizational Life Cycle According to I.Adizes Model	Indicators of assessment of closeness of the connection					
	Statements with contradictory context		Statements with directly independent mutual influence		Statements with related context	
	%	qualitative assessment	%	qualitative assessment	%	qualitative assessment
Courtship (1)	92,03	Very high	7,97	Absent	0	Absent
Infant (2)	82,85	High	11,87	Weak	5,28	Absent
Go-go (3)	46,88	Moderate	41,25	Moderate	11,87	Weak
Adolescence (4)	5,18	Absent	35,92	Moderate	58,90	Noticeable
Prime (5)	5,86	Absent	35,18	Moderate	58,96	Noticeable
Maturity (6)	2,13	Absent	10,13	Weak	87,74	High
Aristocracy (7)	0	Absent	12,50	Weak	87,50	High
Early bureaucracy (8)	34,60	Moderate	54,37	Noticeable	11,03	Weak
Bureaucracy (9)	44,74	Moderate	38,49	Moderate	16,77	Weak
Death (10)	53,45	Noticeable	30,00	Weak	16,55	Weak

Source: Authors' compilation

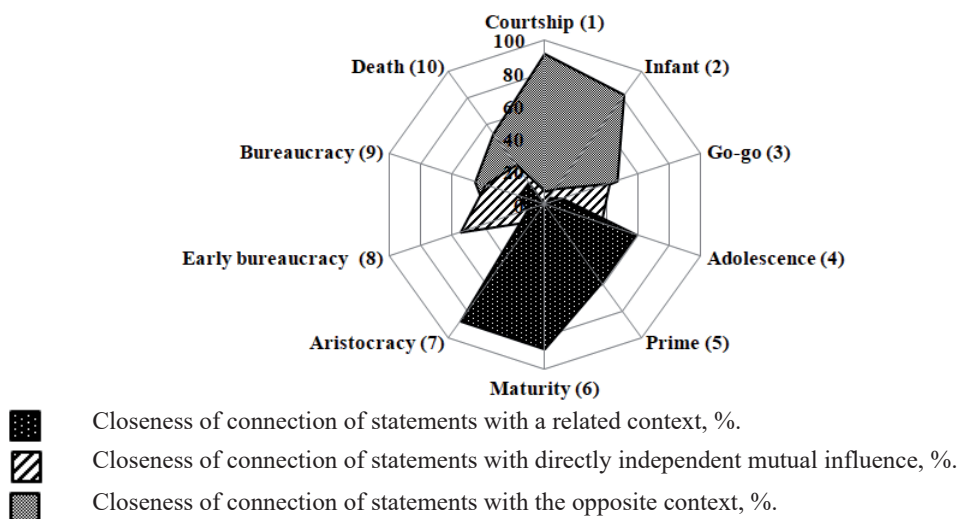


Fig. 2. The correlation between the organizational life cycle phases and the dominant competitive strategy of “inflexible hippos”

Source: Authors' compilation

This demonstrates the ineffectiveness and untimeliness of implementing the dominant competitive strategy of inflexible hippos during the Courtship (1), Infant (2), and Go-go (3) phases. The opposite features generating conflict in the alignment of organisational development generate high resistance and necessitate a withdrawal from implementing the “inflexible hippos” strategy from phase one to phase three.

In the subsequent phases: Adolescence (4), Prime (5), Maturity (6), and Aristocracy (7), there is no tight connection between the statements with opposite contexts. However, in the phases of Early bureaucracy (8) and Bureaucracy (9), this type of connection becomes moderate, and in the final phase, Death (10), it becomes noticeable. In the remaining phases, the corresponding linkage type decreases and becomes either moderate or absent.

It is important to emphasise that the dominant competitive strategy of “inflexible hippos” tends to instigate destructive processes and reduce entrepreneurial activity and profits. This strategy characterises the organisation's ageing, which is also confirmed by the results of this study. Thus, this strategy cannot be considered effective.

Hence, management actions should primarily focus on revitalizing the organization. The dominant competitive strategy of “inflexible hippos” illustrates that without efforts to rejuvenate the organization, the trend toward organizational decline will persist and intensify. Destructive processes will only gain strength over time.

If an organization consciously aims to transition into the Maturity (6) or Aristocracy (7) phase, it is essential to commence preparations for leveling organizational development and constructing the administrative framework by implementing the dominant competitive strategy of “inflexible hippos” as early as the Prime (5), Adolescence (4), or Go-Go (3) phases. In these stages, the features of the new structure begin to emerge and become apparent. Resistance to implementing the “inflexible hippos” competitive strategy diminishes, as evidenced by the moderate correlation between direct independent mutual influence and the intense closeness of ties among statements with opposite contexts.

To ensure a timely transition from the rigid strategy of “inflexible hippos” to another phase, it is advisable to initiate management changes as early as the

Aristocracy (7) phase. This recommendation stems from the high degree of closeness of connection observed in this phase with the aforementioned strategy. However, in the subsequent phase, Early bureaucracy (8), the degree of similarity in relationship is significantly reduced. Nonetheless, another type of connection is observed and traced, namely direct independent mutual influence.

In general, developing a strategy based on the strength of relations ensures coherence and adaptability in managing organisational change. In this case, project decisions regarding the implementation of the relevant strategy and phase will be effective and timely.

In addition, the type of correlation can be used as a basis for building a reflective [30] or formative [31; 32] design of organisational performance growth.

Conclusion. In our study we analysed the correlation between the phase of the organizational life cycle and the competitive strategy, using Yudanov's and Adizes' classification. Based on a comparison of morphological statements, the results provide evidence of various types of correlation and its significance. It was found that the dominant competitive strategy of "inflexible hippos" is most closely related to the phases of "Maturity" and "Aristocracy" in terms of structure, characteristics, features and organisational structure. This strategy is particularly relevant during the Maturity and Decline phases of the organizational life cycle wherein the company has already achieved a certain level of success and can effectively use its resources to defend its market position.

During the Courtship and Infant phases, when the company is undergoing growth and development, the dominant strategy of "inflexible hippos" proves to be ineffective. Thus, this strategy is irrelevant to the growth and developmental phases of the organization's life cycle.

In the phases of Go-go, Adolescence, Prime, Early Bureaucracy, and Bureaucracy, the "inflexible hippos" strategy can potentially be effective within the context of the company's active dynamic changes.

According to the study results, the dominant competitive strategy of "inflexible hippos" is associated with destructive processes, resulting in decreased entrepreneurial activity and profits. This suggests that the company is aging and faces diminishing chances of success in the market. Therefore, it is imperative to prioritize maintaining the "youthfulness" of the company or its rejuvenation by implementing alternative strategies.

If an organization consciously aims to advance to the sixth phase of "Maturity" and the seventh phase of "Aristocracy," it is crucial to commence preparation and establishment of the organizational framework for implementing the dominant strategy of "inflexible hippos" from preceding phases. During these earlier phases, resistance to implementation is low, making it easier to transition to this strategy and ensuring its successful implementation.

The conceptual framework for evaluating three types of connections has been clarified by comparing the morphological statements of competitive strategies and the phases of organizational life cycle. Definitions and characteristics of such concepts as "closeness of connection of statements with a related context", "closeness of connection between morphological statements with directly independent mutual influence", and "closeness of connection of statements with an opposite context" have been introduced.

Following the clarification of the conceptual framework, the type of connection previously defined as "closeness of connection between morphological statements that are not comparable or have both common and opposite features" has been replaced with a more correct "closeness of connection between morphological statements with directly independent mutual influence".

The clarification of the conceptual framework has enabled us to understand and describe concepts more with greater precision and clarity, thereby facilitating a more accurate study of the research object

and the development of more precise theories and models within the scope of this research.

The findings of the study can serve as valuable guidance for companies seeking to develop and implement a competitive

strategy that aligns with the phase of the organizational life cycle. Future research prospects include verifying the existence of connections between latent strategy and the phases of the organizational life cycle.

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THE EMPIRICAL STUDY OF THE CORRELATION BETWEEN THE DOMINANT STRATEGY OF “INFLEXIBLE HIPPOS” AND THE ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE CYCLE

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The development of companies is characterised by the adoption of certain stages of business development, the availability of resources and outcomes. This developmental process is inherently cyclical, requiring companies to remain flexible and adaptive continuously. Each phase of the life cycle is characterised by unique challenges, perspectives and inherent features that require strategic modifications to maintain and enhance competitiveness. A holistic interpretation that integrates both life cycle phases and strategic approaches is necessary for a thorough understanding of a company's success and market performance.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the correlation between the dominant strategy employed by industry leaders, known as “inflexible hippos,” and the various stages of the organizational life cycle. The research objects are the dominant strategy “inflexible hippos” and the ten phases of the organizational life cycle: Courtship, Infant, Go-go, Adolescence, Prime, Maturity, Aristocracy, Early bureaucracy, Bureaucracy, and Death. The subject of the research is to verify the existence of a connection and its type between the research objects. The objective of the study is to ascertain the existence and nature of the connection between these research objects. The research methodology employed morphological, analytical, statistical assessment, and comparative analysis techniques. By comparing morphological statements formulated with expert input, evidence was found regarding the existence and significance of the correlation strength.

The study revealed that the correlation between competitive strategy and the phases of the company's life cycle is strongest in the “Maturity” and “Aristocracy” phases, which dictate the sequence of organizational development. The tightest connection with direct independent mutual influence is observed in the “Go-Go”, “Adolescence”, “Prime”, “Reconstruction”, and “Bureaucracy” phases. The context dependence of this correlation characterizes ongoing change processes: the company retains old features of organizational development while simultaneously acquiring new ones. Evaluating the timeliness and efficiency of managerial decision-making based on the alignment of competitive strategy with the company's life cycle, influenced by both external and internal factors, is a critical stage in the company's development process.

This study can help companies to develop more effective competitive strategies that respond to their current needs. This can lead to improving companies' competitiveness, selecting appropriate and effective project actions and their success in the market.

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