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ANALYZING CORE COMPETENCE AND CORE PRODUCTS FOR DEVELOPING AGILE AND ADAPTAPTABLE CORPORATION

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1 INTRODUCTION

The core competence concept was introduced by Prahalad and Hamel in 1990, and the concept received much attention particularly in the management field. They were arguing that in short run, a company's competitiveness derives from the price/performance attributes of current products. On the other hand, in the long run the competitiveness derives from an ability to build the core competencies that spawn unanticipated products. The real source of corporate advantage is the abilities to consolidate corporate technologies and products in order to adapt quickly to changing business opportunities (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990).

Core competencies are seen as collective learning in the organization, not individually based learning or skill (Gallon, Stillman & Coates, 1995). Core competence is the way of work is performed, the ability to coordinate diverse production skills, to integrate and harmonize multitude of skills and technologies into products that deliver value to customers. Core competencies are the glue that binds existing business and also the engine for new business development (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990). Core competence is a combination of complementary skills and knowledge bases embedded in a group or team providing a superior product (Coyne, Hall & Clifford, 1997). Core competence has to be linked with end products. In between core competencies and end products we can identify a set of core products that can be used in a number of different combinations and finally different end products. Therefore there are numerous relations between core competencies, core products and end products.

Global competition and the dynamic changes of markets and customers puts pressure on corporations to identify their core competencies in order to develop capabilities to adopt to changing environment and technological development. The crucial issue for management is to perform analysis of what the core competence is in their corporation and how those core competencies can be related to core products and end products. If management does not find those answers they can not put focus in developing long run competencies and technologies that can be combined in a set of core products and strategic end products.

2 RESEARCH APPROACH - MATRIX-BASED APPROACH FOR ANALYZING CORE COMPETENCE

The methodology that is used to handle dependences and relations between items is widely known as the design or the dependency structure matrix (DSM) (Steward, 1981). A DSM is a square matrix representing the elements in a system and their interactions in two alternative ways; clustering of elements in a matrix or partitioning tasks in a matrix (Browning, 2001). DSMs have limited direct utility for inter-domain analyses. Over the years the DSM approach has been extended from the traditional square based matrixes. They have only been applied with this intent with the assumption that two domains did and should contain an equal number of the same elements (e.g., any product component would have a corresponding organizational unit responsible for its development). To move beyond this limitation, a rectangular matrix, mapping from one domain to another, is required. Only with such a rectangular matrix can the dynamics between different domains can be captured, relations and dependencies identified, and information that needs to be exchanged pointed out.

Danilovic presented studies of dependencies between domains, product architecture versus organization structure and task structure versus organization structure. Danilovic and Sigemyr presented dual-domain analyses of product requirements, product specifications, functional requirements, and product components. In addition, Maurer et al. showed a rectangular matrix relating product architecture and customer requirements. To make a clear distinction between the square matrices that provide a self-mapping of the relationships among the elements of a system in a single domain and the rectangular matrices that map the elements of one domain to another, we developed the term domain mapping matrix (DMM) for the latter set to provide contrast with the term DSM, which has traditionally applied to the former set. Thus, while a DSM is always a square matrix, a DMM will usually be rectangular, although it can be square in cases where two domains contain an equal number of elements in their respective systems (Danilovic and Browning, 2006).

3 APPLICATION OF DOMAIN MAPPING MATRIX

In this research we worked intensively with a small and high-technology based Swedish corporation. This corporation has been very successful in developing new technological solutions and incorporating them into new products on the international markets. The major issue was how to understand what was the core competence of this corporation on order to achieve focus in the development of core products and how to identify competence areas that needed to be developed in order to support future core and end products. This core competence, core products and end products analysis is seen as a strategic issue.

Initially, all relevant competence areas for all departments were listed by main areas, which in order to be more specific was sub-divided on up to three levels. Likewise, a list of prioritized products was formulated by listing main product areas with one level of sub-division. The term "product" covers any delivery from the department no matter whether it is hardware, software, IP or a service. The two analyses of relevant competence and prioritized core products, respectively, are used as the input for the DMM with relevant competence in the vertical axis and prioritized products in the horizontal axis. Since the DMM method is used as a tool for analyzing strategic resource needs a new step is added to the procedure. Each relevant competence in the vertical axis the matrix is given a value from 0 to 3 according to a self-evaluation of the skills in the department within the given competence areas. The meaning of the scale is as follows:

0	No skills
1	Low skills
2	Medium skulls
3	High skills

The input to the DMM is finalized by indicating the importance of each competence in the vertical axis for each product in the horizontal axis in the following way:

0	No importance (white)
1	Low importance (yellow)
2	Medium importance (violet)
3	High importance (red)

Based on that analysis a comprehensive DMM is designed and the matrix was clustered.

4 **RESULTS**

When DMM matrix was clustered a number of patterns were exposed. In the first place we could expose the patterns of different areas of competencies, with a number of competence sub-levels, and products. Finally the patterns of competencies and products could be related to each other and clustered into a few areas of well identified core competencies and core products. Besides those major patterns a number of other patterns were identified that showed possible direction for competence and product diversification.

In addition, the DMM analysis identified areas of knowledge that were strategically important and could be deployed further and showed areas for the development of new core products. When those core competence and core product areas were exposed resource allocation could be made in order to develop existing and new core competencies.

Small corporations in particular are depending on collaboration with other companies in different organizational settings. The DMM analysis identified areas where alliances could be developed in order to strengthen identified core competencies and exploit core products and outsourcing of non-core competence areas. For strategic and long run business development the DMM analysis exposed the areas for acquisition of new competencies and technologies for future core products and end products.

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The importance of core competence

- The core competence concept was introduced by Prahalad & Hamel in 1990.
- In the short run a company's competitiveness derives from the price/performance attributes of current products.
- In the long run the competitiveness derives from an ability to build the core competencies that spawn unanticipated products.
- The real source of corporate advantage is the abilities to consolidate corporate technologies and products in order to adapt quickly to changing business opportunities.
- Core competence is the way work is performed, the ability to coordinate diverse production skills, to integrate and harmonize multitude of skills and technologies into products that deliver value to customers.
- · Core competence is the glue that binds existing business.
- Core competence is the engine for new business development (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990).
- Core competence is a combination of complementary skills and knowledge bases embedded in a group or team providing a superior product (Coyne, Hall & Clifford, 1997).
- Core competence has to be linked with end products.
- In between core competencies and end products we can identify a set of core products that can be used in a number of different combinations and finally different end products.
- · There are numerous relations between core competencies, core products and end products.



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Research issues

- The crucial issue for management is to understand and identify the core competences, and
- how those core competencies can be related to core products and end products
- How can we identify core products among deliverables and end products?
- How can we identify knowledge areas and skills that are core competences from a corporate perspective?
- If management does not find those answers they can not put focus in developing competencies and technologies in the future that can be combined in a set of new core products and new end products

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Research approach – Information driven management approach

- We explore the structure of the problem to make assumptions explicit, rather than implicit
- The structure of the problem is seen as a spreadsheet showing for each item the information needed to solve the problem and what other items it directly depends on
- Matrices are used to map a set of items toward itself (NxN) or to map a set of items toward another set of items (NxP)
 - NxN approach is named Design (or Dependence) Structure Matrix (DSM) (Steward 1967, 1981, Eppinger et. al.)
 - NxP approach is named Domain Mapping Matrix (DMM) (Danilovic, 2001, 2005, Maurer 2005, Danilovic & Browning, 2007)



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Participative research approach

- Research method
 - Interviews with people in one small company
 - Direct observation of their daily work in product development
 - Workshops using dialogue in identifying relations between competences and products
 - Feedback of data and the analysis to respondents in order to check that chosen approach is reasonable well reflecting their working experiences
- Feedback to management in order to support their strategically analysis of data in order to define strategic actions to achieve core competence development in the company

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Step 1 – Identification of competencies

- Seven major competence areas were identified
- For each of the major seven competence areas sub-competence areas were identified
- A competence hierarchy was outlined



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Step 2 – Identification of products and subsystems

PRODUCT STRUCTURE - MAJOR PRODUCTS AND SUBSYSTEMS



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Step 3 – Mapping competences across products

- · Mapping of identified competence areas across products and subsystems
- Each relevant competence area in the table is given a value from 0 to 3 according to a selfevaluation of present/available skills within identified competence areas related to major products



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Step 4 – Domain Mapping Matrix (DMM) were designed



- Rows reflects identified competence areas
- Columns reflects identified major products/subsystems
- Points of interaction contains information on how each competence is related to each product



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Step 6 – DMM Output – Identification of core products



- DMM analysis identifies three CORE PRODUCT areas
- Identification of three major product areas i.e. CORE PRODUCTS:
 - Embedded modules
 - Flexible electronics (including wearable computers)
 - Wireless high frequency systems
- Those CORE PRODUCTS
 are strategically important
 to focus on from corporate
 perspective



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Step 7 – Detailed description of CORE PRODUCTS and its major competence areas

Cluster	1. Upper left	2. Center	3. Lower right
Characteristics	Embedded modules	Flexible electronics	Wireless HF
Products	- Sensor Modules Pressure.	- Flex Substrate mfg.	- Power Amplifier Wireless Module.
	- Sensor Modules Gas.	- Wearable Electronics Wired.	- Radar Front EndIndustrial.
	- Thin film substrate mfg Embedded Passives.	- Wearable Electronics Wireless.	- Radar Front EndAutomotive.
	- Sensor Modules Strain.		 Antenna Integrated Phased Array.
	- Sensor Modules Temperature.		- Embedded Systems Wireless.
	- Space Electronics/MCM.		- Wireless Transceivers 26-100GHz
	- Embedded Systems Robust.		- Wireless Transceivers 1-26GHz.
	- Opto-El Communications.		
Mostly needed competence	- External MCM-C processing.	- Electroplating	- SMT
	- Wedge/Ribbon bond Au/Cu/Al	- MCM-D processing (BCB,Cu/Ti/AI)	- Flip Chip Mounting
	- Wire ball bond Au	- Substrate design MCM-D	- Stud bumping
	- Mask production	- Thermal design	- External PCB processing
	- Processing MCM-D embedded passives Resistor	- Environmental testing	- HF measurement on-substrate
	- Thermal testing	- Encapsulation	- Substrate design PCB/MCM-L
	- Thermomechanical testing	- Electroplated bumping	- Characterization radar system
	- Electroplating	- EMC testing	- HF Circuit Design
	- MCM-D processing (BCB,Cu/Ti/AI)	- Processing flex	- HF integrated components design distributed
	- Substrate design MCM-D	- External Flex processing	- HF antenna design
	- Thermal design	- SMT	- Analog embedded system design
	- Environmental testing	- Flip Chip Mounting	- Characterization antenna 2-26 GHz
	- Encapsulation	- Stud bumping	- Radar System design
	- Electroplated bumping	- External PCB processing	- Characterization antenna 26-80 GHz
		- HF measurement on-substrate	- HF interconnect design
		- Substrate design PCB/MCM-L	- Circuit Design
			- Radio Transceiver design
			- Characterization radio tranciver
			- HF chip design SiGe

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Step 8 – Identification of CORE COMPETENCES – matching competencies and core products

- Identification of CORE COMPETENCIES were based on identified CORE PRODUCTS
- By comparing the actual skills of the mostly needed competence areas with the needed skills (discrepancy) indicated in respective clusters, competence areas
 - with critically low skills can be identified. and
 - strategically important competence areas can be identified

In the DMM analysis a color code has been used to highlight the actual skill in each competence area according to the following scale:

- 0-No skills, white colour,
 - 4 competence areas were identified
 - 1-Low skills, yellow colour,11 competence areas were identified
 - 2-Medium skills, violet colour,
 - 22 competence areas were identified
 - 3-High skills areas, red colour,
 - 5 competence areas were identified



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Step 9 - Identified discrepancy in competence areas – present competence level and strategically needed competence

Skill	Present level	Needed level	Conclusion	Possible solution on competence problem
Wedge/Ribbon bond Au/Cu/Al	Low	Medium	Potential lack of competence	Realise budgeted investment in new bond head and practice with it.
Thermal testing	Medium	High	Potential lack of competence	Increase access to competence through cooperation with YY and eventually XX
Thermomechanical testing	Low	High	Serious lack of competence	Increase access to competence through cooperation with YY but even YY is not on a high level. Competence increasing projects are needed.
Substrate design MCM-D	Medium	High	Potential lack of competence	General PCB/MCM design competence has typically been achieved by consultants or ex-jobb.
Environmental testing	Low	high	Serious lack of competence	Increase access to competence through cooperation with XX
Encapsulation	Low	high	Serious lack of competence	Require competence in encapsulation by future recruitment in Jönköping.
External Flex processing	Low	High	Serious lack of competence	Flex circuit design and processing has not been needed yet.
SMT	Low	High	Serious lack of competence	Traditional packaging/assembly competence is lacking.
HF measurement on-substrate	Medium	High	Potential lack of competence	Current projects must be verified at 80GHz- upgrade lab or find partner.
Substrate design PCB/MCM-L	Medium	High	Potential lack of competence	Maybe by influencing future recruitment in electronic design at YY and establishing cooperation.
HF antenna design	Low	High	Serious lack of competence	Should be solved by recruitment 2006
Characterization antenna 26-80 GHz	Non	Medium	Serious lack of competence	Make agreement with XX, who already has invested in equipment and skilled personal
Radio Transceiver design	Low	High	Serious lack of competence	Training and recruitment.

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Conclusions

- DMM analysis enabled to expose different areas of competencies, with a number of competence sub-levels
- · DMM analysis enabled to expose different areas of end products and identify core products
- · DMM analysis identified patterns across competencies and products
 - Those patterns could be related to each other and clustered into few areas of well identified core competencies and core products
 - A number of other patterns were identified that showed possible direction for competence development, and product diversification
 - In addition, the DMM analysis identified competence areas
 - that were strategically important and
 - could be deployed further and
 - identified areas for the development of new core products
 - When those core competence and core product areas were identified resources could be reallocated in order to exploit existing and develop new core competencies
 - In particular small corporations are depending on collaboration with other companies in different organizational settings.
 - The DMM analysis can be used to identify areas where strategic alliances could be developed in order to exploit identified core competencies and core products and outsource non-core competences
- For strategic and long run business development the DMM analysis exposed the areas for acquisition of new competencies and technologies for future core products and end products

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