



SUCCESS FACTORS OF ASYMMETRIC CONNECTIONS - EXAMPLE OF LARGE SLOVENIAN ENTERPRISES

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Abstract

More and more companies realize the fact that networking or partner collaborations, which are based on partner relations between companies, are essential for their long-term existence. In today's global competitive environment each company is included at least in some different connections. Very common connections occur between large and smaller enterprises, where the so called asymmetric connections occur, which may be understood as the ability of one organisation to establish power, influence and control over the other organisation and its resources. According to numerous statements, the connections between enterprises are very frequently uneffectivenessful, with opinions on the optimal nature of asymmetric connections being quite common as well, whereby it is, as a rule, a synergic complementing of missing content for both partners. To verify the thesis, that companies achieve more competitiveness and effectiveness through connections, whereby the so called asymmetric connections are common, a structural model of the evolution of asymmetric connection has been developed, which connects the theoretically identified factors and all dependent concepts of competitiveness, efficiency and effectiveness. The empirical research also attempts to further expose the factors of asymmetric connections, which affect efficiency and effectiveness of the connected enterprises.

Keywords: *interorganizational connections, asymmetric connections, asymmetry of partners, success factors, competitiveness, efficiency, effectiveness*

1. INTRODUCTION

Companies in the modern environment must constantly adapt, because competition in a global market has an aspect of constant search for comparative advantages in terms of price, time and quality. Not only questions of time and expenses are at the forefront, but also the ability to meet the demands of the clients in various global markets. Globalisation brought an increased presence of competitors, which, in turn, increases the needs of companies for constant evaluation of their strategic directions and adaptation of organisations, while a growing complexity requires responsiveness and flexibility. Production and life cycles of products are ever shorter and the competitive advantage often stems from the speed of innovation and implemen-

tation of new products and / or services. Such conditions set demands for larger companies to be dynamic and achieve a higher level of adaptability as well.

The companies begin to look for solutions in connections, which is characteristic for humankind ever since its dawn. The fundamental impulses have not changed through history, even though they are sorted differently in regards to the circumstances, within which we observe the phenomenon. Fundamentally, humans connect, since they achieve goals easier together. Individuals or groups of people connect amongst themselves. Inter - entrepreneurial connection is a voluntary agreement on cooperation between two independent companies or more. The foundation of the connection is a common strategy and the achieving of benefits for all

partners, while partners share the investment for the formation and results of the connection.

Companies **cannot achieve efficiency with repetition and experience anymore**, but require creativity and innovation, which are largely brought about with the aid of asymmetric connections with smaller, creative and innovative companies. At the same time **it is not enough to be efficient**, it is mainly essential to be **responsive, adaptable and innovative**, as only this provides a **possibility to also remain effectivenessful**. Development and importance of network organisations both for large companies as well as for smaller companies has, in the last decade, increased greatly, whereby the established connections are often asymmetric. Establishing asymmetric connections enables companies to, with the help of connected companies, accelerate their creativity, innovativeness and adaptability.

Numerous analysts note a **high level of uneffectivenessful inter - organisational connections** (Harrigan, 1988a, p. 141–158; Dacin et al., 1997, p. 3–16), so a more thorough study of the factors of common asymmetric connections is a sensible course of action. I am starting from the thesis that common competitive advantages and effectiveness of connected companies depend on the type and characteristics of such asymmetric connections. With this intention, I attempt to identify the key factors of effectiveness of asymmetric connections in theory and in large Slovenian companies. In the first part, I expose the findings and theories of previous research and in the second part, I summarize the findings of a broader research of asymmetric connections, carried out among large Slovenian enterprises.

2. CONNECTIONS AMONG ENTERPRISES

An increasing number of enterprises is becoming aware of the fact, that connections or partnership cooperation, based on long term relationships are of a key significance for their future (Thomas et al., 1997, p. 178–192). Companies connect for various reasons and in today's globally competitive environment, every company is involved in at least a few different connections (Golobic, Mentzer, 2005, p. 47). **Even at the beginning of the century, it was**

a characteristic of five hundred top companies in the world, that every one of them was involved in sixty strategic partnerships on average (Dyer et al., 2001, p. 37–44).

Kovač et al. (2011, p. 211) explain the **reasons for connecting between enterprises** in the modern business environment with the fact, that companies establish and maintain their competitive ability not only by optimising their own capacities, but mainly with the ability to make use of the characteristics of other companies and their connection into a comprehensive business process. Connecting between individual companies does not only take place in order to achieve competitive advantages based on the optimisation of the process of creation of added value. The **demands for customer or user inclusion** are also placed at the forefront within the very process of new value creation. Thus, a linear series of individual levels of the process of added value creation is increasingly transforming into a vertically and horizontally branched out network of interconnections between various companies and individuals, who all take part in the entire chain of added value (Prahalad, Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 96).

Kovač et al. (2011, p. 222) list further reasons for company connection: **achieving economies of scale, implementation of growth strategy with the aid of connections, internationalisation and globalisation of operations, horizontal and vertical connections within a value chain, lowering of operation costs and quality increase of services provided** (especially in the case of non - profit associations).

Companies connect with other, smaller companies in order to maintain a higher level of competitiveness and effectiveness. The purpose of the connection can be a supply with essential entering raw materials and / or products (**purchase or supply chains**: Harland, 1996, p. 63–80; Lamming et al., 2000, p. 677–688; Hines, 1996, p. 7–20; Sako, Helper, 1998, p. 387–396), access to technology and specific knowledge for development of products or markets (**innovation chains**: Westhead, Storey, 1995, p. 355–360; Monstedt, 1995, p. 198–214) or access to specific technology and knowledge, which is not related to specific market transactions (**learning chain**: Chandler, 1992, p. 89–100). Many authors, such as Kogut

(1988, p. 319–332), Hamel et al. (1989, p. 133–139), Inkpen and Crossan (1995, p. 595–618), Doz (1996, p. 55–83), Khanna et al. (1998, p. 193–210), Todeva and Knoke (2005, p. 137–138) list the **acquisition of new knowledge** as a key motivation for numerous connections. However, knowledge can appear in different forms as well. A trend of **external operation** can be detected, due to the focus on own central capabilities or due to limited resources and specialised knowledge for all fields of work (Russo, Fouts, 1997, p. 534–559; Very, 1993, p. 85–92). Market connections are usually established in a period, when a product achieves the mature phase in its life cycle or even the phase of decline, while technological connections are established mainly in the early phases of the life cycle.

3. TYPES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF CONNECTIONS BETWEEN ENTERPRISES

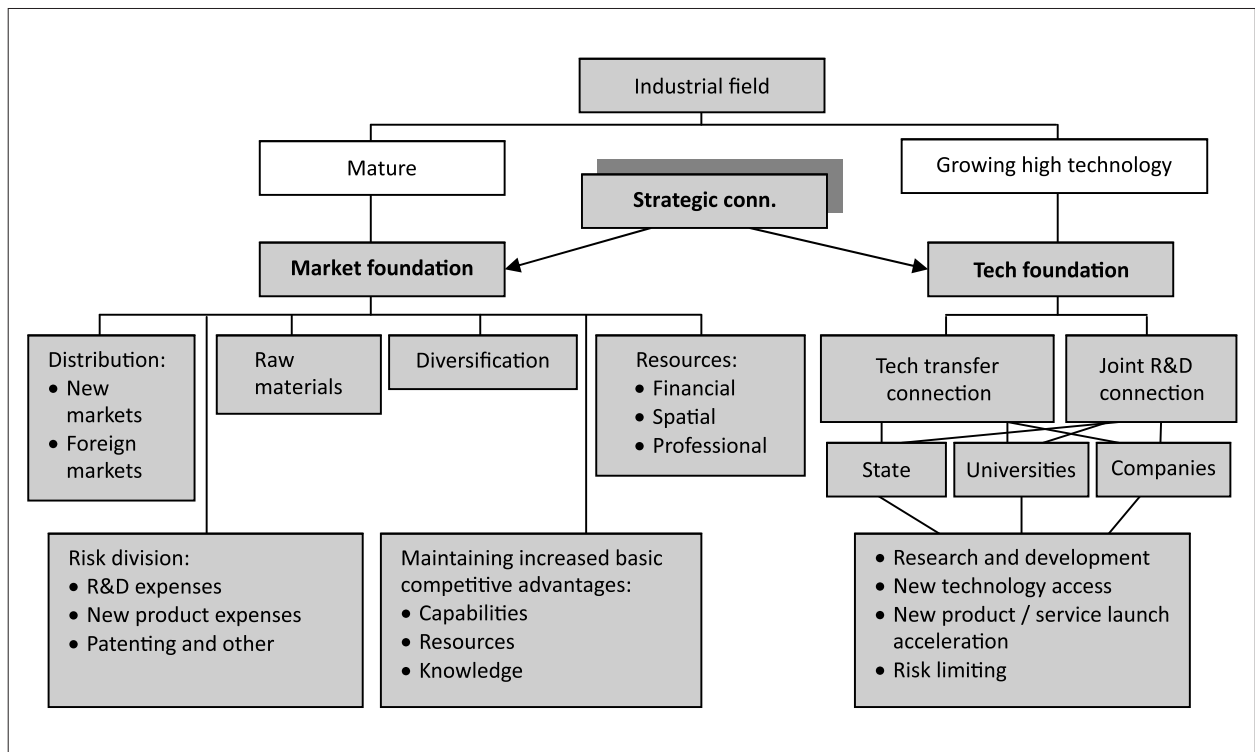
Enterprises connect on the market or even before they enter market relations amongst them-

selves. Thereby, relationships are formed among them. These are new structures, relationships between companies and not individuals. Lipovec (1987, p. 208) named them **high rank or high order structures**. Most connections mean, for the companies involved, a certain level of entwining, which depends on the rights, roles, responsibility or ownership connections between companies (Bolta, 1997, p. 24).

Connections may differ in regards to the level and kind of connection: **short term connections with limited coordination, longer lasting connections between participants, permanent connections and unification of identity among organisations**. Companies may form **non - capital connections, capital connections and joint ventures** (Bolta, 1997, p. 23–27; Pekar, Margulis, 2003, p. 4).

The possibility of choosing inter - company connections as a strategic direction of company was demonstrated by Vyas et al. (1995, p. 52) in a comprehensive diagram, which contains the basic possibilities and reasons for connections. Figure 1 presents it in its updated form.

Figure 1. Possible Choices Of Enterprise Connections



Source: Adapted from Vyas N.M., Shelburn W.L., Rogers D.C., *An Analysis of Strategic Alliances: Forms, Functions and Framework*, *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 1995, p. 52.

Various authors (Todeva, Knoke, 2005, p. 124–125; Golicic, Mentzer, 2005, p. 47–48) list various forms of connections between enterprises, which may be sorted into **thirteen different kinds of connections**, from vertically integrated ones (hierarchy led) to nearby transaction based ones (market led):

- hierarchy based connections (full control through takeover or merger),
- joint ventures
- investment in shares (purchase of minority or majority share),
- cooperative unions (mostly minor companies in order to exploit common resources),
- research and development connections (mainly in cases of demanding technology),
- strategic cooperation agreements (contractual networks),
- cartels (large companies in order to control individual fields),
- franchising,
- licensing connections,
- subcontracting networks,
- particular field groups for standardisation,
- action groups (joint lobbying) and
- market connections (exclusive use of price mechanism).

4. DEFINITION AND FORMS OF ASYMMETRIC CONNECTIONS

Very common connections occur with smaller companies, where the connections are called asymmetric. An **asymmetric connection** is an agreement of cooperation between two or more companies, which are asymmetric between each other, which operate within a common strategy and benefits or both sides (a *win-win situation*). These are reciprocal relationships, where everyone contributes and shares their knowledge and abilities with the other company, working towards the benefit of both connected companies. Partners divide the input, investments and risks. Asymmetric connections between large and small enterprises began to increase towards the end of the 80s, especially due to an increase in uneffectivenessful takeovers of small companies.

Asymmetry of connection is defined as the ability of an organisation to claim power, influence and control over the other organisation and its resources (Oliver, 1990, p. 241–265; Cooper et al., 1997, p. 67–89). Asymmetry may appear in the form of company size (Vyas et al., 1995, p. 47–60; Newburry and Zeira, 1999, p. 263–285), usually expressed with the number of employees in literature (Steensma et al., 2000, p. 951–973), relative asset size (Harrigan, 1988a, p. 154) and income size. It may also be expressed with organisational culture (Doz, 1988, p. 31–57; Segil, 1998, p. 15), national origins (Harrigan, 1988a, p. 154), connection experience level (Harrigan, 1988a, p. 154) and reputation (Vyas et al., 1995, p. 47–60; Toby, 1998, p. 668–698).

Asymmetry is generally defined as absence, lack of symmetry (Bajec et al., 2011). It means every absence of balance or equality between otherwise comparable things. Examples may be asymmetric information, meaning one side has more information than the other or asymmetric taxes, where parties in a certain transaction have different tax levels (Downes, Elliot, 2006; InvestorWords, 2011). An **asymmetric relationship** means, that not both sides are equal. This it can be a relationship, where one knows the other better than the other way around or a relationship, where one has more power than the other. Asymmetric relationships may apply both to inputs as well as the division of results of common operation (WikiAnswers, 2012). **Asymmetry of partners**, manifesting in size, technology, equipment, markets, disciplines, geographical location, business relations, etc., enables the larger partner to acquire power and control over the smaller partner. This represents one of the main encouragements for the establishment of asymmetric connections (Oliver, 1990).

Numerous larger partners enter asymmetric connections with smaller companies with hidden agendas to gain control over the smaller partner (Bleeke, Ernst, 1995). Smaller companies are more vulnerable to potential opportunistic behaviour of the larger partner (Osborn, Baughn, 1990).

Asymmetric connections may be based on capital or contractual connection, but commonly also on entirely informal business relations. Thereby it is essential to take into consideration, that the selection of the legal status of the connection is often re-

lated to or limited by the goal of the operation of a particular connection.

Some authors (e.g. White, 2010) emphasize, that **partners in a relationship never are entirely equal in all aspects or characteristics**, which adds even more significance to the study of asymmetric connections. Asymmetries are always present, whether in smaller or larger amounts, and can be the foundation to the dominant position in regards to a particular partner.

However, the **ability of one company to dominate over the other does not yet mean, that this will be so in all asymmetric connections**, especially not in equal dimensions and forms. Asymmetry of partners is very frequent, but the size or level of asymmetry itself between the partners is not decisive for the effectiveness of the connection, as other factors and characteristics of the connection prevail, and of those mainly the level, at which the dominance (submission) in the connection is actually established. For this reason, I do not study the level of the asymmetry and its influence itself in my doctorship thesis (even though it does represent a scientific challenge for more profound studies), but limit myself to the factors of connections which, in given asymmetry conditions between partners, influence

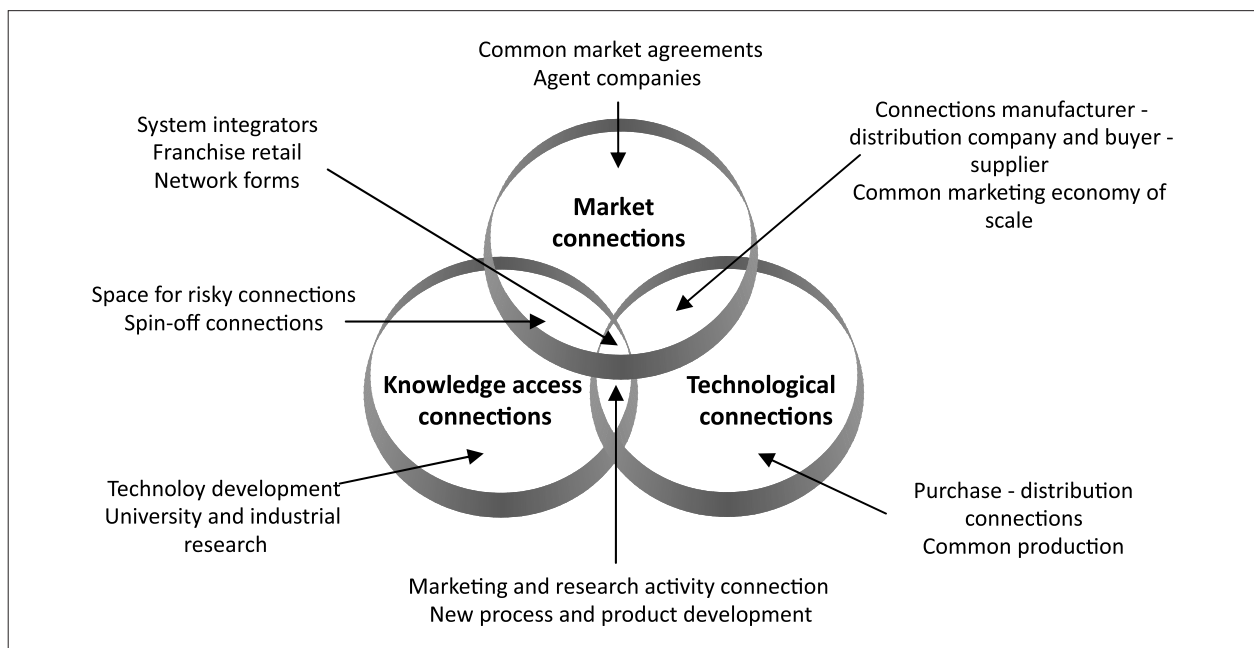
the competitiveness and effectiveness of connected companies and can, for the most part, be influenced by the partners themselves.

Patterns of asymmetric connection depend on markets, products and technologies (Figure 2).

Frequently, questions arise about the following **asymmetric partner conflicts of interest**:

- 1) **Confidentiality** or the hiding of a connection: Some large companies do not wish to publish their connections with smaller partners for several reasons, related to competitive advantage. Some of them go even further and demand that the smaller companies, for the duration of the connection establishment, maintain full confidentiality and do not uncover, that they cooperate with large companies. From this, we can sensibly deduce that large companies may lose and small companies may gain, if news of their potential connection is revealed. This could be a factor, that contributes to the effectiveness or failure of an asymmetric connection.
- 2) **Return on investment**: This is also one of the elements, which differs between large and small companies. Somnath, Pradyot and Sengupta (1998) analysed 119 strategic connections, estab-

Figure 2. Patterns Of Asymmetric Company Connection



Source: Adapted from Lynch P.R., *Business alliance guide: The hidden competitive weapon*, 1993, p. 58.

lished in the period between the years 1987 and 1991 and found out, that larger companies in connections gain less advantage for themselves, while smaller partners reap the largest benefits from technological connections. These, too, may be reasons for the failure of a connection.

- 3) **Type of connection:** another example of a conflict of interest may be related to the type of the connection. Hagedoorn (1993) found that agreements on technology exchange, which involve cooperation in top activities of the value chain such as research and development, engineering and manufacture, result in higher returns than market connections, which include cooperation in the lower activities according to the value chain, such as sales, distribution and customer service. From this we can deduce that large companies will have greater benefits from the technological connections while, on the other hand, the smaller companies will gain more from operative relationships, which are less risky and do not include high expenses.

The relative **power of a large enterprise** in a connection defines the possibility of enforcement of its goals and sets conditions for the position of a large enterprise in a connection. This **characteristic of asymmetry of partners also presents possible reasons for trouble**. The larger partner usually has dominance in terms of power, influence, financial and organisational resources, which they can attempt to enforce in an asymmetric connection, by establishing control over the smaller partner or such a partner's advantages (resources, knowledge, technology, etc.). Similar phenomena and tendencies of larger companies were already mentioned by Cooper, Ellram, Gardner and Hanks (1997, p. 75).

Opinions on the optimal nature of asymmetric connections among large and smaller enterprises are very common, as it's a synergy which complements missing content for both partners (Hennart, 1988, p. 361–374; Chi, 1994, p. 279–286; Fisher, 1996, p. 4–7). Doz (1988, p. 31–57), based on a five year observation of asymmetric connection, finds, that in most cases, smaller enterprises carry out research and development as well as the transfer of innovations for larger companies, while large enterprises enable the small ones quick access to the global market and experience with mass produc-

tion. Large enterprises also offer broader financial and physical resources, established sales paths, regulation possibility and skills for efficient achievement of the goals of the connection, while the smaller enterprises usually offer, besides innovative achievements of research and development, also the entrepreneurial energy.

Killing (1982, p. 120–127) lists, based on a broad comparative study of joint ventures, that asymmetric connections are effectivenessful and useful for both partners. Connections, within which one of the partners had a dominant role, have been shown as more effectivenessful in comparison with the connections, where the roles of both partners were equivalent. The opposite opinion is given by Harrigan (1988b, p. 205–226), equally based in a broad study of joint ventures: asymmetric connections are less effectivenessful and last less time than the connections between companies with equivalent size of resources and experience in strategic partnership. **Opposing opinions on asymmetric connections, a relatively large amount of unresearched areas and a considerable share of failure of connections confirm the reasons for a more thorough study of the subject.**

5. FACTORS OF ASYMMETRICAL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN COMPANIES

A sensible subject of studies is represented by such asymmetric connections, where there is a **possibility for a synergistic increase of added value in an extended period of time**. Achieving of common competitive advantage and effectiveness after the established connection **depends on the type and characteristics of the connection**. To find out, what enables a larger competitive advantage and consequentially effectiveness of individual asymmetric inter - organisational connections, the kinds and **influence factors of asymmetric connections** need to be studied. I am dividing this part into three subsets with the purpose of analysis:

- Formation of the connection which contains the selection of a partner, initial definition and harmonisation of intents and goals as well as the means of work between the two partners as well as the formalisation of the new partnership in itself.

- Means of work and characteristics of connection, which define the type and scope of the connection, the openness between the partners and trust as well as motivation and organisational culture.
- Actions and decision making processes, which also contain knowledge management and organisational learning, as well as encouragement of creativity and innovation in such a connected organisation.

Asymmetry of factors, such as relative asset size and level of experience in partnerships, **strongly influences the effectiveness of a connection**. Golicic, Foggin and Mentzer (2003, p. 57–76) divide the structure of connections between companies onto two elements, the **type and strength of the connection**, whereby both elements are interdependent. The **type of the connection** is defined with equal or similar actions and mainly by control, and enables a sensible division between both extreme possibilities: a simple, purely transaction based connection and a complete connection in the form of unification. The **strength of connection** represents the level or scope of proximity or power of the connection and is defined with eight elements: competence, expected benefits, external influences, history, significance, relations between parties, quality of implementation and coherence of strategies.

Complementing, which is based on the advantages of the small company and the scope of assets of the large company is the basic motive, which has brought the companies to the connection, however the **direction towards common goals** is nonetheless difficult to achieve (Doz, 1988, p. 31–57). Lubatkin (1983, p. 218–225) as well as Jemison and Sitkin (1986, p. 145–163), based on a study, conclude that the incoherence of goals often causes the discontinuation of a connection. In most cases, the partnership is also competitive. Large companies want to direct the technology of the small company onto their processes and slowly claim it, while the small companies attempt to maintain constant control over their technology. Such competition may lead to strategic opposition, while the currently unified technological direction may cover up even future strategic inconsistency (Doz, 1988, p. 31–57).

Differing organisational cultures between the entrepreneurially oriented small company and large

bureaucratic company may bring about disagreements in a partnership (Doz, 1988, p. 31–57). A study by Segil (1998, p. 15) on 200 companies, involved in connections, has shown that the failure of a connection was, in 75 percent of the cases, caused by mismatched organisational culture of the companies. Co-workers in a large company establish a hierarchy in their relationships, both within and outside of the company, while the relations in a smaller company are more genuine and characteristic for smaller groups, so they find it difficult to accept the processes of the large companies and understand them. Differences in decision making processes are reflected in a different approach to planning, implementation and control of the company environment (Doz, 1988, p. 31–57). In large companies, decisions are made slowly and through compromise, passing through various intermediate levels, which are directly involved in processes and necessary for the final decision of the management. Small companies are more dynamic, have a strong informal, vertical and horizontal communication and a closer connection with the management.

The organisational culture of the companies, involved in the connection, may also have a powerful influence on the development of **trust**. Establishing trust is a very uncertain process and the uncertainty is increased by the differing cultures of the companies (Park, Ungson, 1997, p. 279–307). Spekman (1998, p. 752–759) and Jennings et al. (2000, p. 25–44) emphasize trust as the most significant factor of influence for the effectiveness of the connection. Ring and Van de Ven (1992, p. 483–498) as well as Sabel (1993, p. 1133–1170) prove with their research that trust increases both efficiency and the effectiveness of the connection.

Two opposing tendencies in a connection are **rigidity** and **flexibility**. Rigidity is required for the connection is required for the connection of interests of both partners and prevention of opportunism, while flexibility limits the risk and adapts to changing conditions. Strategic connections are, in comparison to other forms of organisation, internally more flexible, but we need to emphasize, that the domination of rigidity or flexibility may lead to an unstable connection. Too much of an emphasis on flexibility may cause a new system in a connection, which requires very little control (Das in Teng, 2000, p. 77–101).

When establishing asymmetric connections, **uncertainty** and **misunderstandings** are commonly present (Doz, 1988, p. 31–57; Hamel, Doz and Prahalad, 1989, p. 133–139). Large companies find it difficult to evaluate, what the technology of the smaller company would enable for them. The technology often isn't clear and evolved enough, which may also be a consequence of the so far insufficient harmonisation of the goals for the connection. Das and Teng (2000, p. 77–101) also write about imperfect strategic planning and implementation and unrealistically set goals as the possible reasons for instability in a connection. Stafford (1994, p. 64–74) is in favour of the opinion, that companies in a connection are not patient enough to achieve the goals, set for the connection. Uncertainty is also shown in the differing contributions of a company into a connection. In the case, where a company does not contribute enough, it will be uneffectivenessful and will not fulfil the goals of the connection, while contributing too much and being too open bring a partnered company to a dominating negotiation power within the connection (Doz, 1988, p. 31–57).

Simultaneous presence of **cooperation** and **competitiveness** between the partners is a significant characteristic of connections. While the competitiveness is defined as following one's own interests at the expense of the partner, cooperation means following the common interests and benefits of the connection (Das and Teng, 2000, p. 85). A dominating presence of cooperation or competition is also influenced by the type of the connection: similar companies compete more, but should the individual companies be involved in different chains or network connections, it's these that may compete more be-

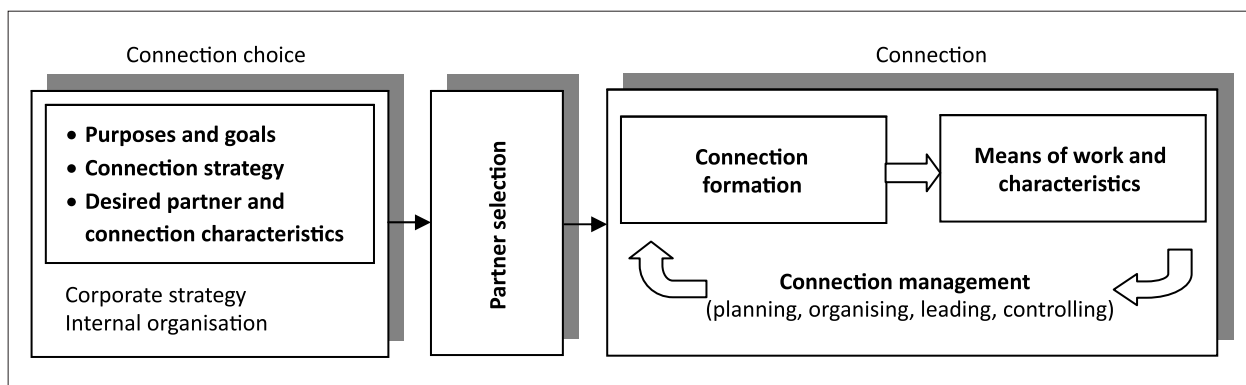
tween each other. **Actions of a connection** should find a balance between both factors (Teece, 1992, p. 1–25). Lacking cooperation may bring about dominating behaviour of a partner and dissatisfaction with the connection (Das and Teng, 2000, p. 85).

O'Farrell and Wood (1999, p. 133–151) simultaneously emphasize the **influence of managers** with not enough knowledge and feeling for the establishment of these types of processes, development and maintenance of inter - organisational relations and for the factors, which define the level of effectiveness in a strategic partnership.

As opposed to other formal forms of organisations, strategic partnerships face unusual doubt whether to focus on **short - term** or **long - term** directions, which may be a cause for the failure of a connection. Too much short - term focus may cause neglect of long - term sustainability of the connection and inadequate management of resources, while the emphasis on the long - term direction may overlook short - term results, which demotivates a partner in the connection (Das and Teng, 2000, p. 85).

In the professional literature, mainly in the scope of enterprise connection analysis, the concepts of **competitiveness and effectiveness** are often not separated (Kolar, Tomažič, 1993; Čater, 2003). Some authors explain effectiveness as an automatic consequence of competitive advantage, be it in price or differentiation (Porter, 1991, p. 95–117; Day, 1994, p. 31–44; Michalisin, Smith, Kline, 1997, p. 360–387; Lynch, Keller, Ozment, 2000, p. 47–67). Often, however, equal competitive advantages are not expressed in the equal effectiveness of companies (Coff, 1999, p. 119–132; Ma, 2000, p. 16–32).

Figure 3. The Concept Of Asymmetric Connection Factors



6. STRUCTURAL RESEARCH MODEL

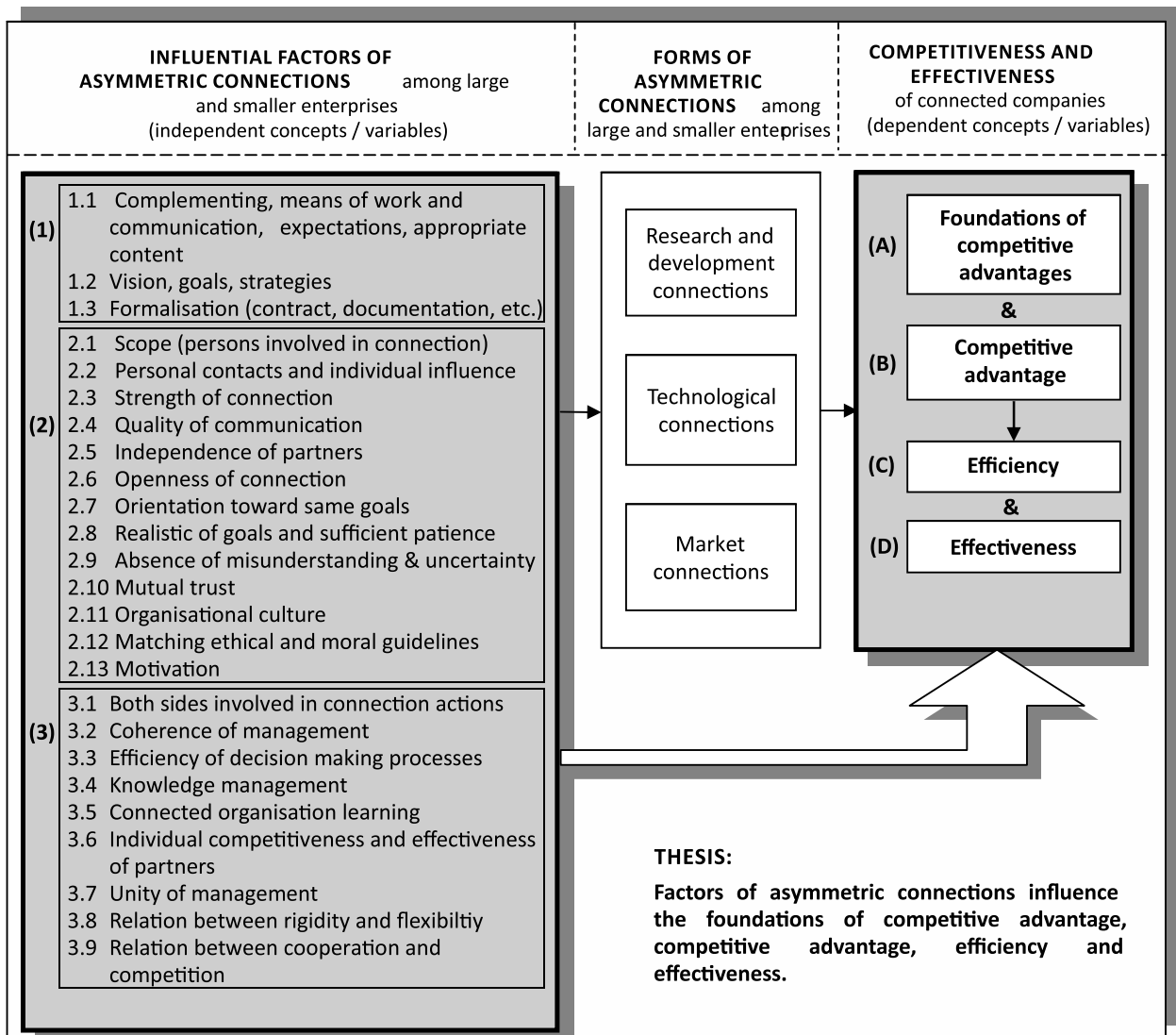
6.1 The Concept of Asymmetric Connection Factors

In asymmetric connections and their factors of effectiveness, I divide the field of study onto three subsets: establishment (formation) of a connection, implementation (means of work and characteristics) of a connection and the actions of a connection. Although the sets overlap, as schematically shown by Figure 3, I study them separately as conceptually rounded out groups of factors, which influence competitiveness and effectiveness of asymmetrically connected partners.

6.2 Model of Asymmetrical Connection Development

The fundamental set thesis is, that in the contemporary competitive environment, large companies achieve greater competitiveness and effectiveness through connections, whereby connections with smaller companies are frequent, and such connections are asymmetric. I also set the thesis, that common competitive advantage and effectiveness of such connected companies rely on the type and characteristics of such asymmetric connections.

Figure 4. Research Model for the Asymmetrical Connection Development In Large Enterprises



The general theses are verified with the following three groups of hypotheses:

- The first group (hypotheses 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3) verifies the initial part, that is, before the establishment of an asymmetric connection and during it. Specifically, the influence of the right choice of partner for the connection, clarity of the initial definition and harmonisation of purposes and goals, as well as the level of formalisation of the partnership.
- The second group (hypotheses 2.1a, 2.1b, 2.2a, 2.2b, 2.2c, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5a, 2.5b and 2.5c) verifies the means of connected work in an asymmetric connections, specifically the influence of the type and scope of connection, dependence from specific individuals, means of work, openness between organisations and entwinement thereof, the level of mutual trust and the suitability and unity of organisational culture of both partners.
- Third group (hypotheses 3.1a, 3.1b, 3.1c, 3.2a, 3.2b, 3.2c and 3.2d) verifies the influence of actions of an asymmetric connection or a connected common union and the decision making processes, as well as the influence of knowledge management and learning process in both connected companies as results of a effectivenessful connection between a large and smaller enterprises.

Taking the listed factors, connections and expected related concepts into consideration, based on a theoretical justification, a structural model has been set for an empirical research (Figure 4).

6.3 Methodology of Empirical Research

Empirical research was based on a survey with a structured survey questionnaire of the closed type, where large Slovenian enterprises were surveyed, chosen based on a given selection criterion.

The sampling frame represents 275 large Slovenian companies that have been chosen with the following selection criteria:

- a large enterprise according to the classification of the Slovenian Companies Act (ZGD-1),
- an average of at least 100 employees in the last financial year,
- not a bank or insurance company (which are otherwise classified as large companies by the Slovenian Companies Act).

Hereby I must state that the unit of this research was not the enterprise but, in fact, asymmetric connections, which large Slovenian companies have established. In the empirical part, I limited myself to asymmetric connections, which exceed just supplier connections and service provider connections according to instructions or under kind of control by the large company.

As meaningful for the purpose of studying I chose such asymmetric connections, which indicate the potential for a synergistic increase in value added over time, so I chose to deal with asymmetric connections that 1) operate more than one year, 2) have been identified as strategically important and 3) allowing the exchange of knowledge between the two connected companies.

From all 275 companies in Slovenia, which fit the above criteria (Ajpes, 2010; Gvin, 2010), n=115 companies filled out and returned the survey questionnaire for at least one asymmetric connection, making the level representative of a share of 41,8% (=115/275). All n=115 large Slovenian companies, which participated in the survey research, completed survey questionnaires for n=256 established asymmetric connections.

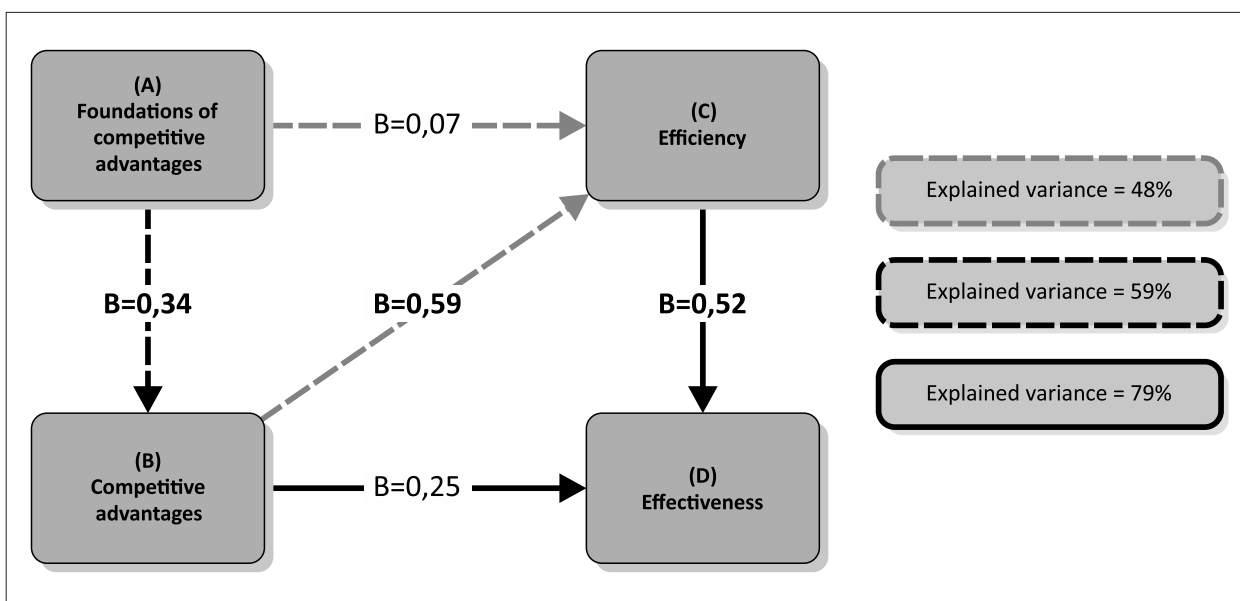
7. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH RESULTS

7.1 Mutual Influences Between Foundations Of Competitive Advantages, Competitive Advantages, Efficiency and Effectiveness

Acquired data have been analysed with univariate, bivariate and multivariate statistical methods. Figure 5 shows the results of the following models of linear multiple regressions:

- the arrows with the narrow dotted line and grey colour represent the regression model, where the dependent variable is the concept (B) *Competitive advantages*, while the independent is the concept (A) *Foundations of competitive advantages*;
- the arrows with wide dotted line in black colour present the regression model, where the dependent variable is the concept (C) *Efficiency*, while the independent concepts are (A) *Foundations of competitive advantages* and (B) *Competitive advantages*;

Figure 5. Presentation of mutual influences between foundations of competitive advantages, competitive advantages, efficiency and effectiveness



Source: Data from the research of factors of asymmetric connections in large Slovenian companies, 2011.

- the arrows with a full line in black present the regression model, where the dependent variable is the concept (D) *Effectiveness*, while the independent concepts are (A) *Foundations of competitive advantages*, (B) *Competitive advantages* and (C) *Efficiency*.

Based on the results of the regression models (Figure 5), I can deduce that the dependent concept (D) *Effectiveness* is, in the largest part, influenced by concept (C) *Efficiency*, the concept (C) *Efficiency*, in turn, is in the largest part influenced by the concept (B) *Competitive advantages* and the concept (B) *Competitive advantages* is relatively strongly influenced by the concept (A) *Competitive advantage foundations*.

If I summarise the mentioned strongest connections, it is possible to detect a relatively strong causal connection:

(A) *Foundations of competitive advantages* →
 → (B) *Competitive advantages* → (C) *Efficiency* →
 → (D) *Effectiveness*.

This is in accordance with the theoretic starting points and expectations and with the conceptual model in the research.

7.2 Analysis of Links Between Factors of Asymmetric Connections

I present a summary of correlation and regression analyses in the continuation. The check marks, »✓«, in Table 1, demonstrate statistically significant links or causal influences of the chosen independent factor (from the studied influence factors of asymmetric connections) with dependent variables or concepts, which are marked in the columns of the table. In the extreme right column of the table, it is specially marked if the set independent variable is confirmed in both regression models (mark »✓✓«), only in a single regression model (mark »✓«), or if it is not confirmed in any of the regression models (mark »×«). Thereby, the emphasis is on regression models (with the method *STEPWISE*), where the results are more objective than the results of correlation coefficients.

Table 1. A summary of testing of links between factors of asymmetric connections with the foundations of competitive advantages and efficiency

Influence factors (independent variables):	Correlation (A) Foundations of competitive advantages	Regression (A) Foundations of competitive advantages (Stepwise)	Correlation (C) Efficiency	Regression (C) Efficiency (Stepwise)	Factor: ✓✓ confirmed in both regression models ✓ confirmed in one regression model ✗ not confirmed
1.1 Complementing, means of work and communication, etc.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓✓
1.2 Vision, goals, strategies	✓	✓	✓		✓
1.3 Formalisation (contract, documentation, etc.)	✓		✓		✗
2.1 Scope (no. of persons involved in connection)	✓	✓	✓		✓
2.2 Personal contacts and individual influence	✓		✓		✗
2.3 Strength of connection	✓		✓		✗
2.4 Quality of communication	✓		✓		✗
2.5 Independence of partners	✓		✓		✗
2.6 Openness of connection	✓	✓	✓		✓
2.7 Orientation toward same goals	✓		✓	✓	✓
2.8 Realistic goals and sufficient patience	✓	✓	✓		✓
2.9 Absence of misunderstandings & uncertainty	✓		✓		✗
2.10 Mutual trust	✓		✓		✗
2.11 Organisational culture	✓		✓		✗
2.12 Matching ethical and moral guidelines	✓		✓	✓	✓
2.13 Motivation	✓		✓	✓	✓
3.1 Both sides involved in connection actions	✓	✓	✓		✓
3.2 Coherence of management	✓		✓		✗
3.3 Efficiency of decision making processes	✓	✓	✓		✓
3.4 Knowledge management	✓		✓		✗
3.5 Connected organisation learning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓✓
3.6 Individual competitiveness and effectiveness of partners	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓✓
3.7 Unity of management	✓		✓	✓	✓
3.8 Relation between rigidity and flexibility	✓		✓		✗
3.9 Relation between cooperation and competition	✓		✓		✗

It has been demonstrated that the majority of analysed influence factors of asymmetric connections (thirteen out of twenty five) has a causal effect onto (A) *Foundations of competitive advantages* or (C) *Efficiency*.

Similar Table 2 relates to the independent variables or concepts of (B) *Competitive advantage* and (D) *Effectiveness*.

Table 2. Testing of hypotheses

Influence factors (independent variables):	Correlation (B) Competitive advantages	Regression (B) Competitive advantages (Stepwise)	Correlation (D) Effectiveness	Regression (D) Effectiveness (Stepwise)	Hypothesis:	
					✓✓ entirely confirmed	✓ partly confirmed ✗ not confirmed
1.1 Complementing, means of work and communication, etc.	✓	✓	✓	✓	H1.1	✓✓
1.2 Vision, goals, strategies	✓	✓	✓	✓	H1.2	✓✓
1.3 Formalisation (contract, documentation, etc.)	✓		✓	✓	H1.3	✓
2.1 Scope (no. of persons involved in connection)	✓		✓		H2.1	✗
2.2 Personal contacts and individual influence	✓	✓	✓		H2.2	✓
2.3 Strength of connection	✓		✓		H2.3	✗
2.4 Quality of communication	✓	✓	✓	✓	H2.4	✓✓
2.5 Independence of partners	✓		✓	✓	H2.5	✓
2.6 Openness of connection	✓	✓	✓		H2.6	✓
2.7 Orientation toward same goals	✓		✓	✓	H2.7	✓
2.8 Realistic goals and sufficient patience	✓		✓	✓	H2.8	✓
2.9 Absence of misunderstandings & uncertainty	✓		✓		H2.9	✗
2.10 Mutual trust	✓	✓	✓		H2.10	✓
2.11 Organisational culture	✓		✓		H2.11	✗
2.12 Matching ethical and moral guidelines	✓		✓		H2.12	✗
2.13 Motivation	✓		✓	✓	H2.13	✓
3.1 Both sides involved in connection actions	✓		✓	✓	H3.1	✓
3.2 Coherence of management	✓	✓	✓		H3.2	✓
3.3 Efficiency of decision making processes	✓		✓		H3.3	✗
3.4 Knowledge management	✓		✓		H3.4	✗
3.5 Connected organisation learning	✓	✓	✓	✓	H3.5	✓✓
3.6 Individual competitiveness and effectiveness of partners	✓		✓	✓	H3.6	✓
3.7 Unity of management	✓		✓		H3.7	✗
3.8 Relation between rigidity and flexibility	✓	✓	✓		H3.8	✓
3.9 Relation between cooperation and competition	✓		✓		H3.9	✗

Source: Data from the research of factors of asymmetric connections in large Slovenian companies, 2011.

Check marks, »✓«, in Table 2 denote a connection or causal influence of the chosen independent factor with the mentioned dependent concept(s). Since the latter analysis is a lot more objective, I consider a hypothesis at least partly confirmed, if the related dependent concepts was included in at

least one of the regression models (B) or (D). I consider a hypothesis entirely confirmed, when the related dependent concept was included in two regression models, those being the one where the dependent variable is (B) *Competitive advantages*, as well as the one, where the dependent variable is

(D) *Effectiveness*. In other words, this means, that a hypothesis is confirmed, should it influence both (B) *Competitive advantages* as well as (D) *Effectiveness*, whereby this influence must be proven with linear multiple regression and the method *STEPWISE*.

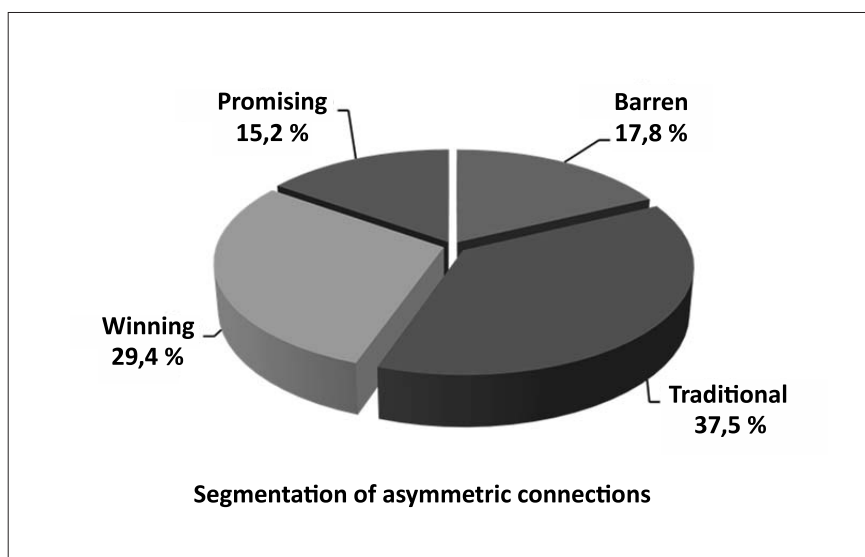
Based on confirmed and partly confirmed hypotheses, I can confirm the set thesis, that **factors of asymmetric connections influence the foundations of competitive advantages, competitive advantages, efficiency and effectiveness** of connected companies.

7.3 Segmentation of Asymmetric Connections

I have also carried out additional analyses of connections, among those a segmentation of asymmetric connections based on the method of two step clustering. The segmentation of asymmetric connections from the research sample is based on the so called method of two step clustering. Based on chosen criteria variables, I sorted the connections into segments with the mentioned method. The method, similarly to all other methods of segmentation, defines such segments, that are as different as possible from each other, while the units or asymmetrical connections within the segments are as homogenous or similar to one another as possible. I have given segments names based on the results and their distinguishing characteristics, as can be seen from Figure 6.

Further analyses demonstrate the reasons for such naming of segmented asymmetric connections. **Winning** asymmetric connections were named thus as they have the highest average grade of dependent concepts (C) *Efficiency* and (D) *Effectiveness*. In both cases, this segment of asymmetric connections shows average values of these two concepts or their Likert scales 4,84 and 4,49, while the average values of these two concepts with other variables are between 2,60 and 3,50 (on a scale of 1 to 7, where a higher grade means higher efficiency or effectiveness). **Promising** asymmetric connections, too, have relatively high values (above 4,5) for these two concepts - (A) *Foundations of competitive advantages* and (B) *Competitive advantages*, whereas connections from other segments have values between 1,24 to 3,31 (on a scale of 1 to 7) for these two concepts. This is also the reason, that the connections from the segment *promising* are named thus. Since they have high values of concepts (A) *Foundations of competitive advantages* and (B) *Competitive advantages*, but not also (C) *Efficiency* and (D) *Effectiveness*, these connections (at least for now) are not as efficient and effectivenessful yet, as the *winning* connections, but, due to good foundations in the field of competitiveness, have good possibilities to become effectivenessful asymmetric connections. **Barren** asymmetric connections represent a segment, which shows the worst average grades of dependent concepts (A) *Foundations*

Figure 6. Asymmetric connection segment size, n=248



of competitive advantages, (B) *Competitive advantages*, (C) *Efficiency* and (D) *Effectiveness*. **Traditional** asymmetric connections are a segment of asymmetric connections, which shows below average grades of dependent concepts, but still higher from the worst segment of *barren* connections, and is mainly characteristic for manufacture and more mature disciplines with a dominating number of technological connections.

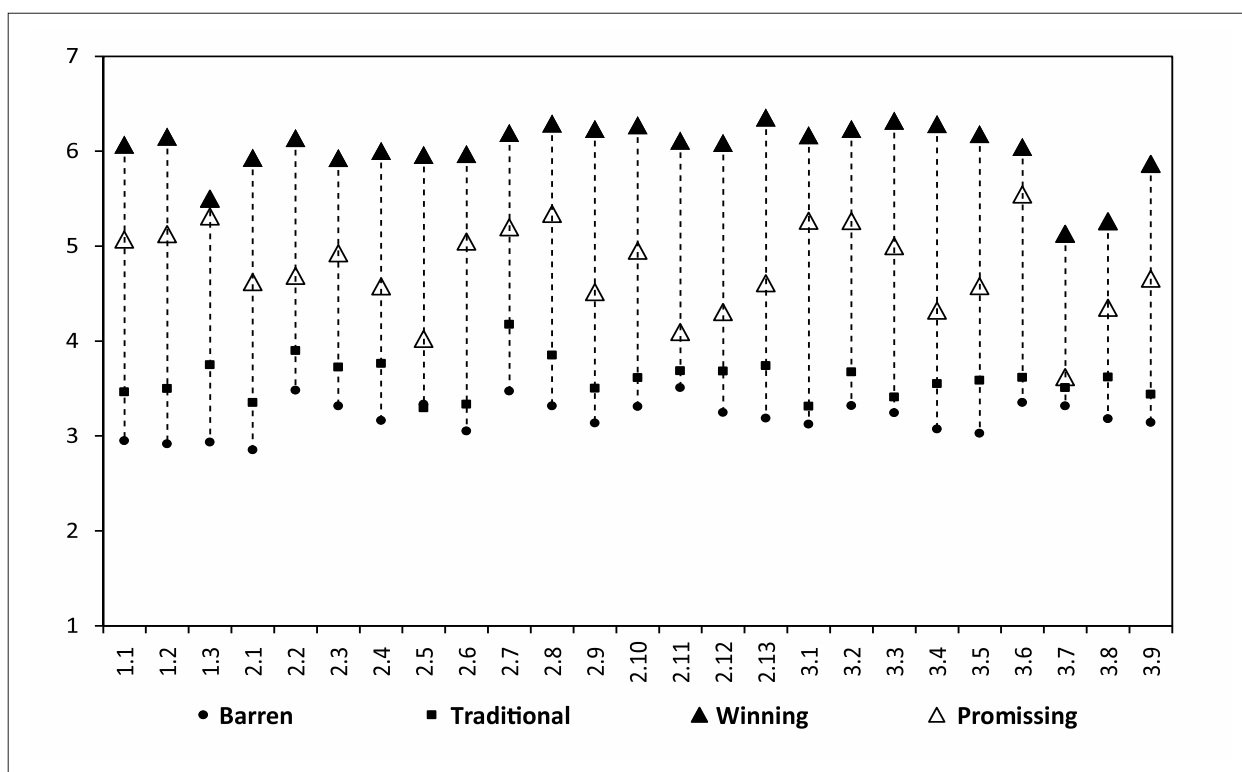
In continuation, an analysis of segments of asymmetric connections is demonstrated in relation to independent variables or influence factors of asymmetric connections (Figure 7).

Based on the analysis of influence factors from Table 3, one can also see why *winning* asymmetric connections have been given such a name. These have the highest average values for all analysed independent variables or studied factors of asymmetric connections.

It is important to emphasize, that there is a causal influence among all four dependent concepts, which indicates an entwining among independent factors and dependent studied concepts.

The findings presented here, as goes for the majority of this type of research, are affected by limitations in size and homogeneity of the sample, which

Figure 7. Independent variables by asymmetric connection segments



Legend:

- 1.1 Complementing, means of work and communication, etc.
- 1.2 Vision, goals, strategies
- 1.3 Formalisation
- 2.1 Scope (no. of persons involved in connection)
- 2.2 Personal contacts and individual influence
- 2.3 Strength of connection
- 2.4 Quality of communication
- 2.5 Independence of partners
- 2.6 Openness of connection

- 2.7 Orientation toward same goals
- 2.8 Realistic goals and sufficient patience
- 2.9 Absence of misunderstandings & uncertainty
- 2.10 Mutual trust
- 2.11 Organisational culture
- 2.12 Matching ethical and moral guidelines
- 2.13 Motivation
- 3.1 Both sides involved in connection actions
- 3.2 Coherence of management

- 3.3 Efficiency of decision making processes
- 3.4 Knowledge management
- 3.5 Connected organisation learning
- 3.6 Individual competitiveness and effectiveness of partners
- 3.7 Unity of management
- 3.8 Relation between rigidity and flexibility
- 3.9 Relation between cooperation and competition

Table 3. Analysis of independent variables by segments of asymmetric connections

Influence factors (independent variables):	Segments of asymmetric connections			
	Barren	Traditional	Winning	Promising
	n=44	n=93	n=73	n=38
1.1 Complementing, means of work and communication, etc.	2,95	3,46	6,07	5,07
1.2 Vision, goals, strategies	2,92	3,50	6,15	5,13
1.3 Formalisation (contract, documentation, etc.)	2,93	3,75	5,50	5,31
2.1 Scope (no. of persons involved in connection)	2,85	3,35	5,93	4,62
2.2 Personal contacts and individual influence	3,48	3,90	6,14	4,69
2.3 Strength of connection	3,32	3,72	5,92	4,92
2.4 Quality of communication	3,16	3,76	6,00	4,57
2.5 Independence of partners	3,33	3,29	5,96	4,02
2.6 Openness of connection	3,05	3,33	5,97	5,05
2.7 Orientation toward same goals	3,47	4,17	6,19	5,20
2.8 Realistic goals and sufficient patience	3,32	3,85	6,29	5,34
2.9 Absence of misunderstandings & uncertainty	3,13	3,50	6,23	4,51
2.10 Mutual trust	3,31	3,61	6,27	4,95
2.11 Organisational culture	3,51	3,68	6,11	4,09
2.12 Matching ethical and moral guidelines	3,25	3,68	6,08	4,30
2.13 Motivation	3,18	3,74	6,35	4,61
3.1 Both sides involved in connection actions	3,12	3,31	6,17	5,27
3.2 Coherence of management	3,32	3,67	6,23	5,26
3.3 Efficiency of decision making processes	3,24	3,41	6,32	5,00
3.4 Knowledge management	3,07	3,55	6,28	4,32
3.5 Connected organisation learning	3,03	3,59	6,18	4,58
3.6 Individual competitiveness and effectiveness of partners	3,35	3,62	6,04	5,54
3.7 Unity of management	3,32	3,51	5,13	3,62
3.8 Relation between rigidity and flexibility	3,18	3,62	5,26	4,35
3.9 Relation between cooperation and competition	3,14	3,44	5,87	4,66

stems from the population of large Slovenian companies, as well as the time frame of the measurement, as asymmetric connections of companies, depending on the type of connection, enable more visible results only after a certain amount of time has passed (e.g. research and development connections).

A comparison of both extreme groups of the best and the worst asymmetric connections by the criterion of effectiveness has shown a considerable difference in factors of asymmetric connections, which show statistical differences in all studied factors of asymmetric connections.

8. CONCLUSION

Connection between companies, which has spread wider in the last decade with the development of communication - information technology and the trend of specialisation with the focus on key capabilities, has become a useful tool for the large companies to achieve their goals. By connecting, such companies achieve **responsiveness and adaptability** and develop their **fundamentals of competitive advantages**.

In spite of the popularity of inter - entrepreneurial connection, however, the understanding of complexity of their establishment and effectiveness prediction is still in development. Many advantages of connecting are known, as well as many disadvantages and dangers. Research and experience shows, that **effectiveness** in this area, more than being a matter of lucky coincidence, can be attributed to a planned and comprehensive approach of companies in their involvement in partnerships.

Even though it may seem relatively simple, a **combination of partner asymmetry** in size, resources, financial assets, professional knowledge, goals and other things causes numerous and serious issues and consequentially a very high level of failure and dissolution of connections. Interests and achieved benefits of both sides have been shown as different and often entirely opposite. Small enterprises, especially find asymmetry and unsuitability very important. A lack of resource abundance, which would protect small enterprises from errors, forces them to assume connection initiative themselves and accept less than optimal conditions, simply to become involved in a connection with a larger, well recognised enterprise. In time, the small enterprise begins to discover certain traps, and thus struggle, attempting to manage connections in directions, which generally prove that they will have serious consequences and will end in failed connections or higher levels of failure. Thus, during the phase of connection establishment, it is essential to completely understand and know the desired resources of the partner and characteristics of such an asymmetric partnership.

Learning from the connection is an important aspect of connecting. A higher level of organic or-

ganisation enables a generally better learning of a company. The process of learning is, in such a case, based on the acquisition of new knowledge from the partner and common creation of new knowledge. Literature often emphasizes the **importance of external knowledge acquisition** and the ability to assimilate and spread knowledge in a company. Essentially, it encourages proprietary knowledge creation, but is also open to externally acquired knowledge. In spite of directing employees into thinking outside the rules and standardized work in terms of content, it is possible to use it in otherwise highly standardised processes, where a high level of technical efficiency is pursued.

In **managing employee capabilities**, the key role of management is once again demonstrated, as early as in the search for and selection of new co - workers. Individuals have different personality characteristics, knowledge and abilities as well as motivation, which differ between implementative orientation (ability to carry our routine tasks with efficiency and quality) and creative orientation (high creative potential). Large companies of ten choose their new employees with a lot of care and thoroughly test them before deciding on their suitability regarding the needs of the organisation. The task and responsibility of management is to further suitably distribute in regards to tasks or expectations (implementation or creativity) and mutual harmonisation of employees in a large enterprise (organisation). The aspect of connecting with other enterprises must thereby be suitably taken into consideration. Assigning creative tasks to strictly implementation oriented individuals or routine tasks to an explicitly creative individual can not result in a long term effectiveness in the company operation, as the dissatisfaction of employees alone prevents a minimal required level of motivation.

The question which arises in the end is related to the actual difference between those effectivenessful large companies, which are adorned by asymmetric connections and very recognisable achievement of competitiveness and effectiveness with them and enterprises, which have seemingly similar asymmetric connections as well as approaches, but still do not achieve comparable results with their aid. The thoughts are directed towards an establishment of relation between organisations, with an emphasis on individuals in both companies and the aforemen-

tioned "softer" factors (development of trust, facing uncertainty, motivation, learning and enthusiasm, misunderstanding management, etc.), which may be the very difference, even though approaches are very similar. Thus, e.g., **trust** is claiming a key role in connected organisations, mainly due to its function of uncertainty reduction, which enables easier coordination and course of business. Trust reduces complexity, which is largely present in the business world. Within the context of strategic partnerships, it, on one hand, enables greater integration of partners, and on the other a reduction of control, formal contracts and demands (Das, Teng, 2001; Bennett, Gabriel, 2001). This "soft" field should be further researched in terms of inter - organisational connections.

Employees of both companies have important roles in the development of trust, as it begins with them as trustworthy persons, which, as expected, confirm or waste this. Just like the individuals from both companies, so do the companies as a whole gain a certain reputation through time as a trustworthy company, which enables them to attract better partners and establish asymmetric connections with more ease (Blomqvist, 2002).

Employees must adapt, and **adaptation** is achieved through learning. At first, they begin with tight cooperation and broad, frequent communication, then gradually open enough for mutual learning and the development of trust. Broad and frequent communication is required to get to know one another and begin adapting to one another. Organisational culture, which supports openness and communication, influences the development of trust. Trust will, in sufficient amounts, develop only when a flow of knowledge and skills is enabled and the inequality of partners (employees) is mutually

accepted or there is a flow of mutual learning. Trust effectiveness develops in an environment of openness, transparency and diversity. Only when knowledge is exchanged, a level of cooperation is achieved, which enables the development of trust (Homin, Tain-Jy, 2002; Jarcke, 2012).

It still seems, that more stable networks prevail, as companies do not find their strategic partners as fast and the establishment of connections, primarily, takes time and approaches which do not give short-term results. A dynamic environment and demands for ever shorter development and production cycles condition more dynamic networks, where the issues of selection of primary partners and insufficient time for quality connections occur. Companies must decide for connections quicker and shorten times of adaptation and harmonisation. Blomqvist (2002) mentions the so called **quick trust**, where companies must trust the new partner very quickly, even though there is not a proper foundation for that (yet). This, unavoidably, brings risk. Experience with past connections, work in connections and the reputation of partnered company (or personal reputation of employees in the partnered company) are key contributors to such quick decisions.

Reputation of a company, which stems from its past effectivenessful connections and trust, which it receives from other companies and individuals, can also be understood by the potential partners as protection from opportunistic behaviour. This enables establishment of connections with less formality, as the initial level alone is higher (Blomqvist, 2002). Proportionally to the level of trust, the need for control and centralised actions, as well as the formalisation of connection is reduced. Similarly, with the growth of trust, the desires for capital connections are reduced (Homin, Tain-Jy, 2002).

EXTENDED SUMMARY / IZVLEČEK

Vse več podjetij se zaveda dejstva, da so povezovanja oziroma partnerska sodelovanja, ki temeljijo na partnerskih odnosih med podjetji, kritičnega pomena za njihov dolgoročni obstoj. Z razvojem komunikacijsko-informacijske tehnologije in stopnjevanjem pomena hitrosti v poslovanju so se predvsem v zadnjem desetletju množično razširile različne oblike povezav med podjetji. Naraščajoče število integracij pomeni, da veliko podjetij skuša pomakniti meje svojega notranjega razvoja s pomočjo povezovanja in združevanja z drugimi podjetji. V strokovni literaturi je moč razpoz-

nati številne prednosti za podjetja, ki so udeležena v medorganizacijskih povezavah, saj se kažejo prednosti v višjem donosu na vložena sredstva, višjem donosu investicij ter večji uspešnosti podjetij.

Ob standardnem cilju učinkovitosti so si velika podjetja v razmerah negotovega okolja kot osrednji organizacijski cilj določila tudi prilagodljivost, ustvarjalnost in inovativnost. Večina velikih podjetij pa deluje danes v nestabilnem in kompleksnem okolju, na katerega spremembe morajo biti pripravljena bolj in se nanje odzivati hitreje kot konkurenti. Hiter odziv na zahteve okolja in tržne priložnosti postaja odločujoč dejavnik, kar pa velika podjetja pogosto dosegajo tudi s povezovanjem z drugimi podjetji. V strokovni literaturi je moč zaslediti številne opise tega, kako se velika podjetja povezujejo, da bi dosegala in ohranjala svojo konkurenčnost in uspešnost.

Že v različnih obdobjih rasti se podjetje znajde v situacijah, ko lahko predstavlja povezovanje način, s katerim si omogočijo nadaljnjo rast. Podjetja se sicer povezujejo iz različnih vzrokov, v današnjem globalnem konkurenčnem okolju pa je vsako podjetje vključeno v vsaj nekaj različnih povezav. Namen povezave je lahko preskrba z nujnimi vhodnimi surovinami in/ali proizvodi, dostop do tehnologije in specifičnega znanja za razvoj proizvodov ali trgov. Tako se v osnovi ločujejo nabavne oziroma preskrbovalne verige, inovacijske verige, veriga učenja in povezave zunanjega izvajanja. Podjetja se osredotočajo na svoje osrednje sposobnosti oziroma specializacije, takšna specializirana podjetja pa se nadalje medsebojno povezujejo za skupno nastopanje na globalnem. S pojavom vedno večjega zunanjega izvajanja storitev se je pomen partnerskih povezav še povečal. Rast in uspešnost posameznega podjetja je dandanes v veliki meri odvisna od povezav in pozicioniranja v njih. Vzpostavljane medorganizacijskih povezav je že dolgo poznano tudi kot pomemben vir inovacij ter ustvarjanja novih poslovnih priložnosti.

Zelo pogoste so povezave z manjšimi podjetji, kjer prihaja do t.i. asimetričnih povezav. Takšne povezave so značilne, saj je praviloma moč zaznati okrog vsakega velikega podjetja vsaj nekaj manjših specializiranih podjetij, ali pa se velika podjetja povezujejo z velikimi mednarodnimi korporacijami, kjer sama predstavljajo manjšega partnerja. Ta značilnost je prisotna tudi pri velikih slovenskih podjetjih. Asimetričnost povezave je opredeljena kot sposobnost organizacije, da uveljavi moč, vpliv in nadzor nad drugo organizacijo in njenimi viri. Pogosta so mnenja o optimalnosti asimetričnih povezav med velikimi in manjšimi podjetji, saj gre za sinergijsko dopolnitev manjkajočih vsebin pri obeh partnerjih. V večini primerov mala podjetja izvajajo raziskave in razvoj ter prenos inovacij za velika podjetja, medtem ko velika podjetja omogočajo malim podjetjem hiter dostop do svetovnega trga ter izkušnje z masovno proizvodnjo. Velika podjetja ponujajo tudi obsežnejše finančne in fizične vire, vpeljane prodajne poti, ravnateljske zmožnosti in spretnosti za učinkovito uresničevanje ciljev povezave, medtem ko manjša podjetja navadno ponujajo poleg inovativnih dosežkov raziskav in razvoja še podjetniško energijo.

Mnenja o asimetričnih povezavah so v strokovni literaturi pogosto nasprotujoča. Zasledimo lahko opise primerov asimetričnih povezav, v katerih je imel eden od partnerjev prevladujočo vlogo in so se pokazale kot uspešnejše v primerjavi s povezavami, v katerih sta imela partnerja enakovredni vlogi. Ravno tako pa so prisotna drugačna mnenja, da so asimetrične povezave manj uspešne in trajajo krajši čas kot povezave med podjetji z enakovredno velikostjo sredstev ter izkušnjami v partnerstvu. Potrebno je izpostaviti, da številni analitiki navajajo visoko stopnjo neuspešnih medorganizacijskih povezav. V povprečju je moč zaslediti podatke, da približno polovica vseh povezav propade, kar še dodatno opravičuje razloge za proučevanje.

Prispevek obravnava dejavnike asimetričnih povezav, kjer je poudarek na značilnostih in posebnostih povezav med podjetji, ki izhajajo iz asimetrije obeh podjetij. Z namenom ugotovitve, kaj

omogoča večjo konkurenčno prednost in posledično uspešnost posameznih asimetričnih medorganizacijskih povezav, proučujem vrste, značilnosti in vplivne dejavnike asimetričnih povezav. Ta del je z analitičnim namenom smiselno razdeljen v tri podsklope: 1) Oblikovanje povezave, ki zajema izbiro partnerja, začetno opredelitev in uskladitev namenov in ciljev ter načina dela med obema partnerjema ter samo formalizacijo novega partnerskega odnosa; 2) Način dela in značilnosti povezave, ki zajemajo vrsto in obseg povezave, medsebojno odprtost in zaupanje ter motivacijo in organizacijsko kulturo; 3) Ravnanje povezave in odločitveni procesi, ki zajemajo še ravnanje z znanjem in organizacijsko učenje ter spodbujanje ustvarjalnosti in inovativnosti v takšni povezani organizaciji.

Na podlagi dosedanjih dognanj v strokovni literaturi o razvoju asimetričnih medorganizacijskih povezav je oblikovan strukturni model, ki temelji na povezavah med dejavniki, razdeljenimi v tri podsklope, ter konkurenčnostjo, učinkovitostjo in uspešnostjo povezav oziroma posledično povezanih podjetij. Asimetrične povezave se pri temu oblikujejo preko več različnih vrst povezav.

Strukturni model za razvoj asimetričnih povezav je preverjen v empirični raziskavi z vzorcem 256 asimetričnih povezav, vzpostavljenih s strani 115 velikih slovenskih podjetij. Rezultati empirične raziskave potrjujejo temeljno raziskovalno domnevo, da dejavniki asimetričnih povezav vplivajo na osnove konkurenčne prednosti, konkurenčno prednost, učinkovitost in uspešnost.

Obraznava potrjuje tezo, da v današnjem konkurenčnem okolju velika podjetja tudi s povezoivanjem dosegajo večjo konkurenčnost in uspešnost, pri čemer so pogoste povezave z manjšimi podjetji, kjer gre za t.i. asimetrične povezave. Model razvoja asimetričnih povezav velikih podjetij hkrati prispeva k nadgradnji znanja na področju medorganizacijskega povezovanja ter razumevanju pogostih in zahtevnih pojavov povezoivanj asimetričnih partnerjev.

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