

Strategic analysis for the development of manufacturing SMEs in the Chontalpa region, Tabasco

Análisis estratégico para el desarrollo de las Pymes manufactureras en la región de la Chontalpa, Tabasco

DE LA CRUZ-ALCUDIA, Abi Roxana*†, LIGONIO-HERNÁNDEZ, Nínive, HERRERA-JIMÉNEZ, Laura Elena and JIMÉNEZ-BAEZA Alberto Enrico

Universidad Politécnica del Golfo de México, Carret. Fed. Malpaso-El Bellote Km. 11, Monte Adentro, Paraíso, Tabasco

ID 1st Author: *Abi Roxana, De La Cruz-Alcudia*

ID 1st Coauthor: *Nínive, Ligonio-Hernández*

ID 2nd Coauthor: *Laura Elena, Herrera-Jiménez*

ID 3rd Coauthor: *Alberto Enrico, Jiménez-Baeza*

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Abstract

The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Mexico, are an essential part of the country's economy, accounting for 99.7% of the 5.14 million economic units in the country, contributing to the creation of many jobs, 95 % of economic units has 10 people working in a small business (INEGI, 2010). So it is necessary to strengthen its management to improve and / or achieve competitive success, management where leadership plays a key to understand and implement strategies that improve business competitiveness paper. The aim of this paper is to analyze the situation of manufacturing SMEs in the region Chontalpa, Tabasco, to determine in a second step, the competitive strengths and the main difficulties for its development, allowing develop proposals for action that contribute to their competitiveness. The results indicate that there are many areas for improvement in SMEs in the region, in order to position the manufacturing sector in a market that is increasingly immersed within globalization and before the arrival of new transnational corporations, it is urgent to design appropriate strategies to leverage their resources and opportunities in the environment.

SMEs, strategies, competitiveness

Resumen

Las Micro, Pequeñas y Medianas Empresas (Mipyme) en México, constituyen una parte fundamental de la economía del País, representan el 99.7% de las 5.14 millones de unidades económicas que existen en el país, contribuyendo a la generación de muchos empleos, el 95% del total de unidades económicas cuenta con 10 personas laborando en una microempresa (Inegi, 2010). Por lo que se hace necesario fortalecer su gestión para mejorar y/o alcanzar el éxito competitivo, gestión donde el liderazgo desempeña un papel fundamental para conocer y aplicar las estrategias que mejoren la competitividad de la empresa. El objetivo del siguiente trabajo es Analizar la situación de las Pymes manufactureras de la Región de la Chontalpa, Tabasco, para determinar en una segunda etapa, las fortalezas competitivas y conocer las principales dificultades para su desarrollo, que permita elaborar propuestas de actuación que contribuyan a su competitividad. Los resultados indican que existen muchas áreas de mejora en las Pymes de esta región, con la finalidad de posicionar al sector manufacturero en un mercado que cada vez se encuentra inmerso dentro la globalización y ante la llegada de nuevas empresas transnacionales, es urgente diseñar estrategias adecuadas para potenciar sus recursos y las oportunidades del entorno.

Pymes, estrategias, competitividad

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* Correspondence to the Author (e-mail:acruz@upgm.edu.mx)

†Researcher contributing first author.

Introduction

The business environment is not static but dynamic, which is why it is necessary to have a deep understanding of organisations in order to identify the factors that become the key elements of their competitive success, so that they can position themselves in a given market, maintain and improve that position. Today, being competitive is vital for the survival of organisations. Globalisation, increased competitiveness and constant change demand that organisations design processes and strategies that enable them to achieve competitive success or improve their competitive position.

The challenge of staying in the market needs to be faced through a strategic analysis, which allows to know the main strengths and difficulties that SMEs face in order to achieve a better positioning in the face of the arrival of products from all over the world.

The knowledge of strategic resources will contribute to deepen the knowledge of SMEs, at the same time as it will be useful for the practical management of this type of companies. In order for SMEs to improve their position relative to their competitors, it is necessary for managers to be able to identify the key management areas, i.e. those elements that the company must ensure in order to be competitive. The aim of the following paper is to analyse the situation of manufacturing SMEs, considering their organisational structure, strategies and main competitive factors.

This paper is structured as follows: firstly, a literature review of the main theoretical alternatives to explain the achievement of competitive success is presented, including the theory of resources and capabilities and the analysis of the competitive environment through the model established by Porter (1985). The methodology, the results obtained and the conclusions of the work are presented.

Literature review

According to Cardona (2011), the theory of resources and capabilities states that organisations are different from each other according to the resources and capabilities they possess at a given time and according to the characteristics of each company.

This theory allows us to focus the internal analysis on the most relevant aspects within the organisation, as a basis for the general strategic approach and human resources. It is also a tool that allows us to determine the internal strengths and weaknesses of the organisation. According to this theory, the only way to achieve sustainable competitive advantages is through the development of distinctive capabilities.

According to Wernerfelt (1984) "the efficiency acquired by a firm is a function of the distinctive resources and capabilities it controls, which are a source of synergy and competitive advantage because they come from the collective and unique learning of the organisation competing in imperfect markets". Barney in 1991 argued that "the firm's resources include all the assets, capabilities, organisational processes, firm characteristics, information, knowledge that are controlled by the firm and that enable it to devise and develop strategies to increase its effectiveness and efficiency".

This theory has a great influence on strategic management as it represents a conceptual framework, a way of seeing and understanding the company. Moreover, the development of strategies for the company is done taking into account its resources and capabilities.

According to the model expressed by Grant (2006), the company interacts the elements that make up the strategy - its objectives and values, resources and capabilities, and structure and systems - with the competitive environment, forming a nexus that takes the form of the need to make continuous strategic adjustments.

Quinn (1980) defines that "A strategy is the model or plan that integrates into a coherent whole the main objectives, policies and sequences of action of an organisation. A well-formulated strategy helps to order and allocate an organisation's resources in a unique and feasible way, based on the organisation's internal competencies and shortcomings, foreseeable changes in the environment, and the possible manoeuvres of intelligent adversaries", later referenced by Grant in 2006.

The approach that looks for the sources of competitive advantages not externally, but within the organisation, emphasises the relevance of resources and capabilities to create, maintain and appropriate the potential benefits that generate sustainable competitive advantages (Penrose, 1959; Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991; Peteraf, 1993; Teece et al., 1997; Grant, 2004).

The lines of thinking on strategy converge to the perspective of its configuration and dynamic capabilities taking into account the ever-changing environment, competitive conditions, proactive and innovative entrepreneurial capacity. As well as generating unique and heterogeneous resources and capabilities and sustainable competitive advantages (Minzberg, 1994; Teece et al., 1997).

In conclusion, establishing competitive advantage through the development and deployment of resources and capabilities has become the main objective of strategy (Grant, 2006), because as Andrews mentions "resources and competencies are distinctive or superior to those of rivals and can provide the basis for a firm's competitive advantage if they are used correctly in the face of environmental opportunities".

Analysis of the competitive environment

According to Porter (1982), "the essence of formulating a competitive strategy is to relate a firm to its environment".

The aim of this paper is to carry out an analysis of the business environment using the Competitiveness Model proposed by Michael Porter, showing how the forces that compose it have a direct impact on the internal functioning of companies, frequently conditioning their strategies and therefore influencing their results.

Porter's Five Forces is a holistic model that allows any industry to be analysed in terms of profitability. Also called "Porter's Extended Competitiveness Model", as it explains better what the model is about and what it is for, it is a management tool that allows an external analysis of a company through the study of the industry or sector to which it belongs.

This model presents a simple scheme to be able to formulate an analysis of each industrial sector, through which the company can determine its current position in order to select the strategies to follow.

Porter postulates that there are five forces that shape the structure of an industry and that influence prices, costs and investment requirements: Bargaining power with customers, bargaining power with suppliers, threat of new competitors, threat of substitute products, rivalry between competitors.

As a main conclusion of this model, it is highly necessary to understand the functioning of the environment, as well as the extent to which its forces relate to organisations and affect the way they operate.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is the process of creating and maintaining strategic congruence between the organisation's goals and capabilities and the changing opportunities of the environment in which it operates.

It aims to set a course of action, establishing the principles that will guide it, the sequence of operations and the determination of the time and resources required for its realisation. It is important to analyse the internal and external context of the company, since it is necessary to identify opportunities and threats and to determine strengths and weaknesses, which will allow them to formulate strategies appropriate to their objectives.

Much research has focused on the relationship between strategic planning and organisational performance, confirming a positive relationship between the two (Robinson, 1982; Bracker, Keats and Pearson, 1988; Bracker and Pearson, 1986).

Among the most widely used and accepted strategic typologies in the literature is the one proposed by Miles and Snow (1978). Raymond Miles and Charles Snow conducted fieldwork and research covering different organisational types and developed a typology of adaptive strategies, related to the process of adapting to their context. They are:

1. Defensive type
2. Exploratory type
3. Analytical type
4. Reactive type

The authors suggest that the defensive type strategy corresponds to organisations that concentrate on a narrow and limited product-market scope, are experts in a specific area, do not seek new opportunities outside their business, but try to protect their market sector. They need few adjustments in technology, structure or processes. They emphasise cost reduction and efficiency gains.

The explorer type strategy is the opposite of the defensive type, as they continually seek new market opportunities through innovation and product development processes. They are quick to respond to emerging trends in the environment and often drive industry change. They have highly flexible technologies, which can affect their internal efficiency.

When adopting an analytical strategy, organisations act in a defensive or exploratory mode depending on the environment in which they find themselves and the balance they require. When their environments are stable, organisations operate routinely, formally and efficiently through formal structures and processes; in turbulent environments they follow the most innovative competitors, trying to quickly adopt the ideas that seem most promising. Organisations that adopt a reactive strategy are characterised by instability and inconsistency due to their inability to respond to changes in the environment because they lack a consistent and clear strategy.

Methodology

As mentioned above, this research analyses the current situation of manufacturing SMEs in the Chontalpa region of Tabasco. This research is qualitative in nature, identifying through direct interviews with managers of SMEs in the Chontalpa region of Tabasco, Tabasco, the competitive strengths and the main difficulties for their development; the information obtained from the surveys was analysed in detail. Likewise, direct observation and the researcher's experiences form part of this analysis.

On the other hand, it is documentary and field research, under the descriptive method, through the application of a survey to a sample of SMEs established in the Chontalpa Region, Tabasco, to later analyse the results and reach a conclusion.

Research Design

During the development of this research, the economic development secretariat of the municipalities of the Chontalpa region was contacted in order to find out the number of manufacturing SMEs, but much of the information was not up to date. Therefore, we proceeded to consult the web, identifying in the National Statistical Directory of Economic Units of the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics, a total of 52 companies in the manufacturing sector that are within the range of small and medium enterprises in the region of the Chontalpa, Tabasco. This is based on the classification published in the Official Journal of the Federation (2009), which states that small enterprises are those with 11 to 50 employees and medium-sized enterprises with 31 to 250 employees. Based on the number of manufacturing SMEs established in Chontalpa, it was decided to survey the total population.

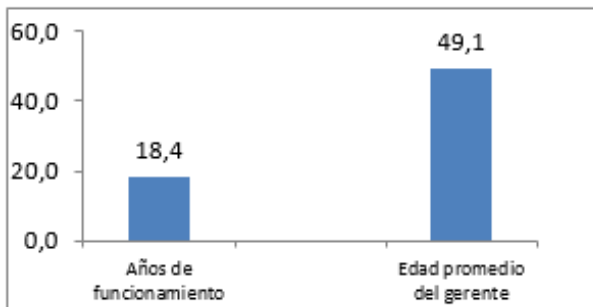
Subsequently, a review of the data collection instruments that have already been empirically validated in other research was carried out, with the aim of choosing the one with the greatest validity and reliability according to statistical parameters, highlighting the data collection instrument used by the research foundation of the Mexican Institute of Finance Executives, A.C. to carry out a strategic analysis of SMEs at the national level.

The questionnaire consists of 5 blocks: general data, perception of the business climate and environment, strategy and organisation, technology, quality, innovation and ICT, accounting, financial and technical aspects, with a total of 23 items. The application of the instrument began with a personal interview with managers and/or administrators of small and medium enterprises in the Chontalpa region of Tabasco. However, it is important to mention that many of the SME managers were reluctant and unwilling to agree to the interview, and only 40 SMEs were interviewed, representing 77% of the total of 52 enterprises.

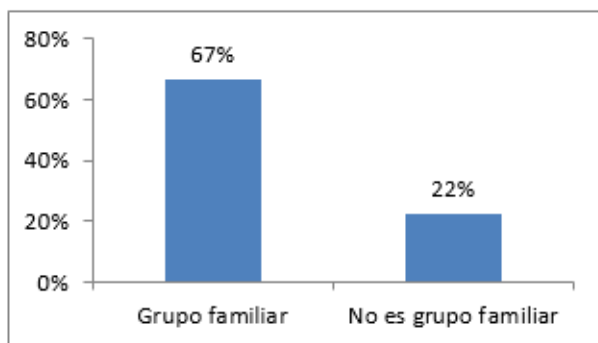
Results

The general characteristics of the manufacturing SMEs surveyed show the following:

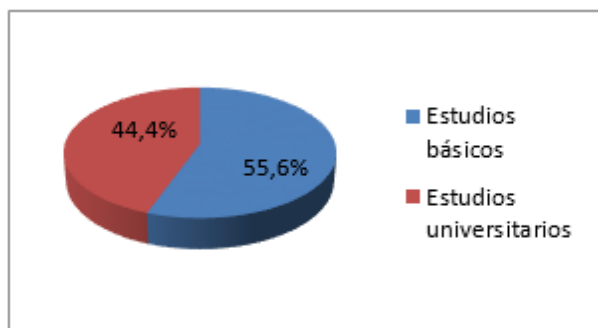
The average age of the enterprises is 18 years and they are managed by managers with an average age of 49 years (Figure 1). 67% of the enterprises are family-run and 22% are incorporated (Graph 2). Only 44% of the enterprises are managed by managers with a university education, 56% only have a technical or high school education (Graph 3). Regarding the type of market to which their products are oriented, 69% are local, 26% are state markets and only 4% are national (Graph 4). On the other hand, the main market from which they source their inputs is distributed as follows: 63% state, 23% local and only 13% national (Graph 5).



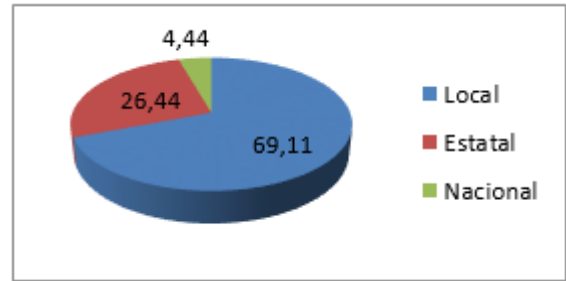
Graph 1



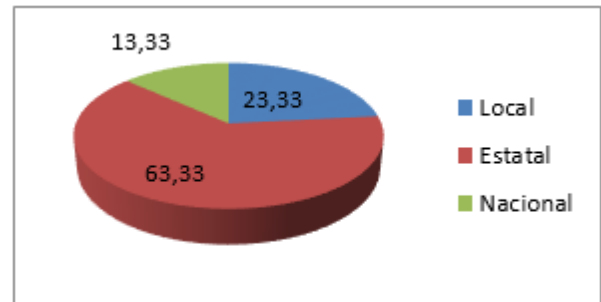
Graph 2



Graph 3

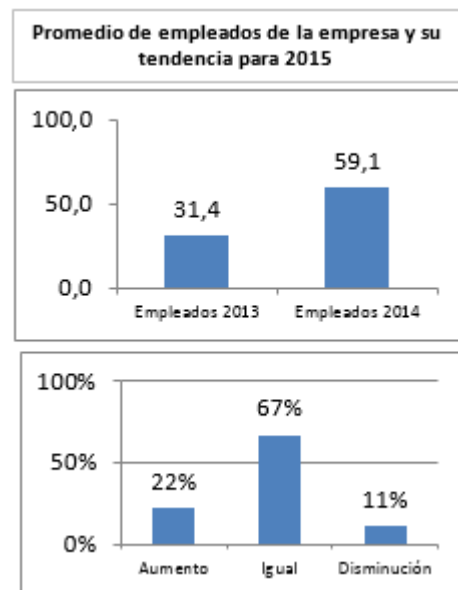


Graph 4



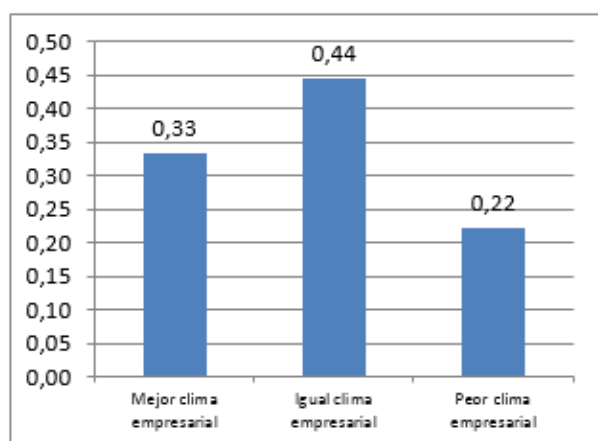
Graph 5

The average number of employees over the last two years (2013-2014) has slightly increased in 2014 by 27.7% compared to 2013. However, the trend towards 2015 indicates that 67% of the enterprises will remain with the same number of employees, 22% will have an increase of one or two jobs and 11% will have a decrease in staff (Figure 6).



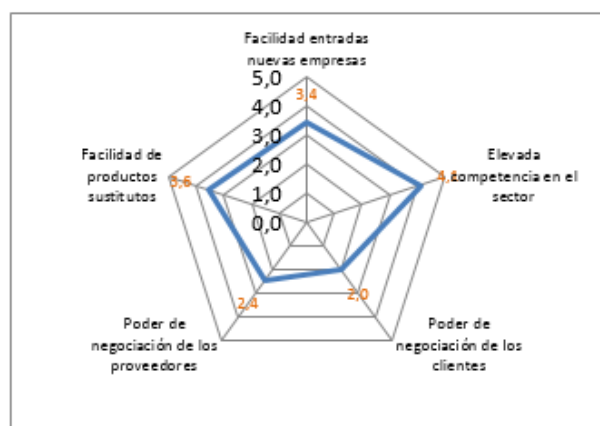
Graph 6

On the other hand, the perception of entrepreneurs regarding the business climate on a scale of 0 to 10, the average score was 7.3. The general environment in which the company operates in 2015 compared to 2014, the largest proportion of companies (44%) think that it is the same as the previous year, followed by 33% who consider that it has improved and 22% perceive it as the worst business climate. (Graph 7)



Graph 7

As indicated above, Porter's (1980) five competitive forces model is an important methodology for understanding the main characteristics of the competitive environment in which manufacturing SMEs in Chontalpa, Tabasco operate. The characteristics of the sector or industry as measured by five factors were analysed: rivalry among existing competitors, the possibility of entry of new competitors, the threat of substitute products, the bargaining power of buyers and the bargaining power of customers. SMEs were asked to rate on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) the impact of the five competitive forces on the development of their activities. (Figure 8).



Graph 8

As can be seen, firms consider the most important factor to be the high level of competition in the sector (4.1), followed by the ease of substitute products (3.6), which is closely related to the entry of new firms into the sector (3.4). The competitive factor least valued by the companies refers to the bargaining power of customers (2.0), followed by the bargaining power of suppliers (2.4).

In order to analyse whether or not the firm carries out formal activities to identify objectives and goals, and if so, in what time frame, managers and/or owners of manufacturing SMEs in the Chontalpa region of Tabasco were asked if they carried out a formal strategic planning process, and if so, to what time horizon it corresponded. The following table shows that only 44% of the enterprises carry out formal planning, and of these, 75% do so with a time horizon of one year, i.e. in the short term.

Planeación estratégica formal (%) y horizonte temporal (%)

No realiza	56
Si realiza	44
Total	100
Realiza a 1 año	75
Realiza a más de 1 año	25
Total	100

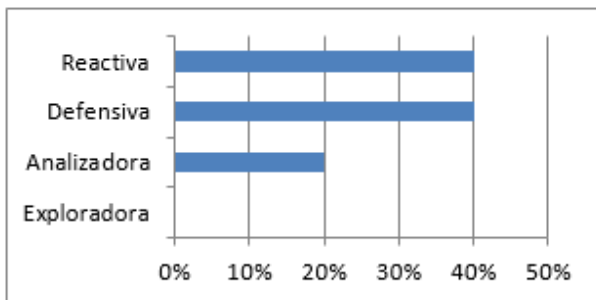
To find out the extent to which SMEs establish links and relationships with other companies, the survey asked a question related to alliances or cooperation agreements with other companies in the last two years, for commercial, purchasing and supply, logistics, research, development and innovation activities.

Tipos de alianzas establecidas (%)

Comercialización	56%
Compras y abastecimientos	22%
Logística	22%
Investigación y desarrollo	11%

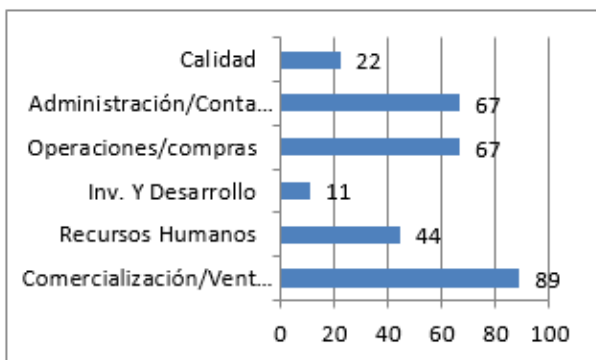
According to the table above, it can be seen that the main types of alliances made by the SMEs are in the area of marketing, while the least common type of alliance is in the area of research and development.

To analyse strategic behaviour, the managers and/or owners of the SMEs in the Chontalpa were asked about their competitive strategy, taking as a reference point the classification of Miles and Snow (1978). They found that the majority of the companies surveyed have adopted a reactive and defensive strategy (40%), only 20% of them adopt an analysing strategy and none of the SMEs in this region adopt an exploratory strategy (Figure 9). (Figure 9).



Graph 9

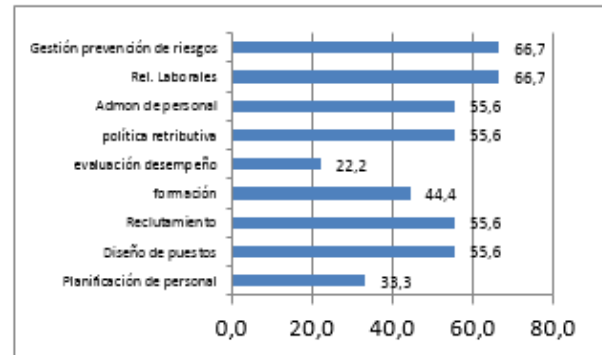
In order for a company to be managed efficiently, it requires an organisational structure with well-defined areas to assign responsibilities that contribute to the achievement of objectives. Manufacturing SMEs in the Chontalpa Region, Tabasco, only have the following areas assigned within their organisations: 89% have marketing and/or sales departments or areas; followed by Administration and/or accounting departments as well as Operations and Purchasing with 67%. The departments with less affluence in the organisational structures of SMEs in the Chontalpa are Research and Development with 11% and Quality with 22%. (Figure 10).



Graph 10

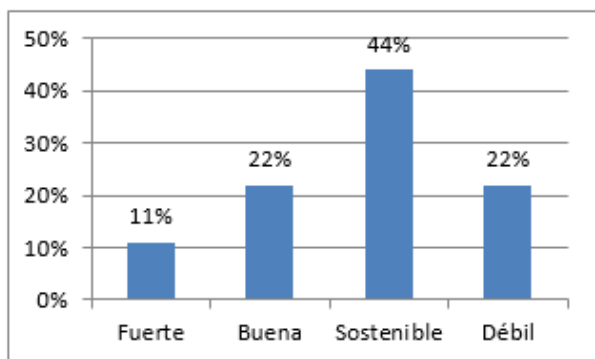
In general, manufacturing companies in this region of Tabasco have an average of 3 departments or functional areas in their organisational structure.

With reference to the human resources practices most used by the SMEs, the most used are Labour risk prevention management and labour relations, while the least used are performance evaluation and personnel planning (Figure 11). (Figure 11).



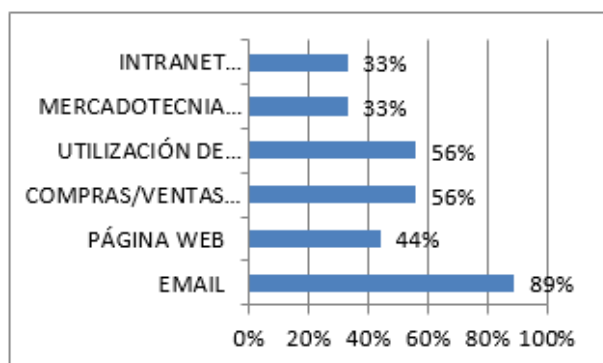
Graph 11

It is important to analyse the technological infrastructure currently available to SMEs in Tabasco's Chontalpa region. To this end, the managers and/or owners of these companies were asked about their perception of their level of technological development, with 11% of the companies qualifying as having a strong position (they develop the technology they use internally), 22% have good technology (the technology is acquired and its use puts them ahead of the competition), 44% of the companies have sustainable technology (they use technology identical to that of the majority of companies in the sector and only make new investments when they see that the competition is obtaining good results), and 22% have weak technology (they use technology identical to that of the majority of companies in the sector and only make new investments when they see that the competition is obtaining good results); 44% of the companies have a sustainable technology (they use technologies identical to those of the majority of companies in the sector and only make new investments when it is observed that the competition is performing well; and 22% have a weak technology (the main competitors have more efficient or modern technology). (Graph 12)



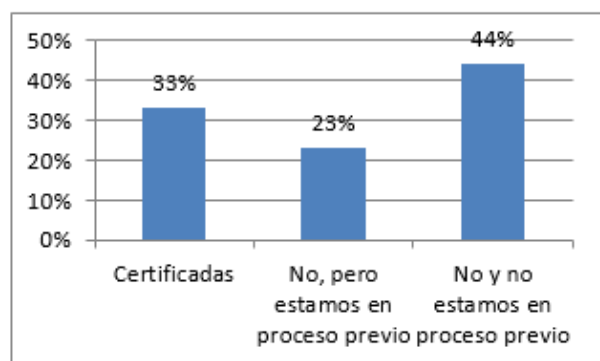
Graph 12

With regard to the technological practices used by SMEs, it can be seen that the majority of companies only use email (89%), while the least used is a corporate intranet and internet marketing (33%). (Graph 13).



Graph 13

Managers were also questioned about the situation of their company with regard to quality certifications issued by external companies. They found that only 33% have quality certification, 23% are in the process of obtaining it and the majority (44%) do not have it and are not in the process of obtaining it (Graph 14). (Graph 14).



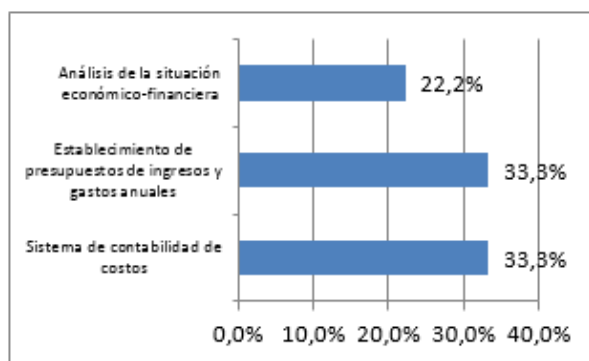
Graph 14

To measure performance, indicators constructed from the perception of the firm's manager regarding its competitive position have been used. Eight performance variables are used, based on an approximation to the classification proposed by Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983). What are the factors in which the entrepreneurs of manufacturing SMEs in Chontalpa, Tabasco think they are better off than their competitors? Figure 15 shows that the most favourable aspects are: more satisfied customers and adaptation to change. On the contrary, they think that they are worse positioned with respect to the profitability of their companies.



Graph 15

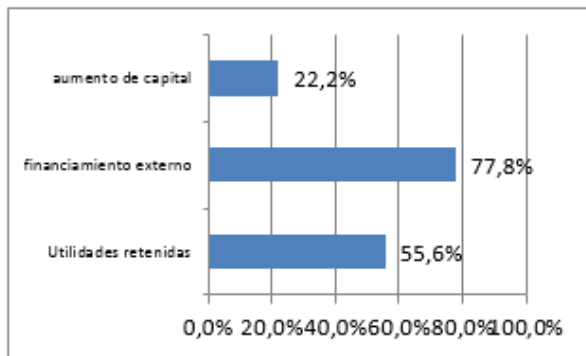
Finally, it is important to mention the accounting and financial situation of the SMEs, for which managers were questioned about the use that the companies make of economic and accounting techniques, such as cost accounting, annual budgeting and economic and financial analysis, as well as the use that the company makes of the different sources of financing, including: retained earnings, external financing and capital increase.



Graph 16

According to the previous graph, the most used techniques are the establishment of annual income and expenditure budgets, although only 33% of the enterprises use this practice, as well as having a cost accounting system; and only 22% carry out analyses of the economic-financial situation of their enterprise.

With regard to the types of financing most used, the main one is external financing through bank loans (77.8%), followed by retained earnings (55.6%) and the least used is capital increase. (Graph 17)



Graph 17

Conclusions

This research has presented a qualitative analysis of the current situation of manufacturing SMEs in the Chontalpa region of Tabasco. The results indicate that the manufacturing enterprises established in the Chontalpa Region, Tabasco, have been operating for an average of 18 years, most of them are family-run and their owners have an average age of 49 years, with an academic background mostly at a technical level.

The main type of market to which they direct their products is local with 69%, and from where they source their inputs is the state with 63%. This implies that SMEs in the Chontalpa require new strategies to expand their sales coverage outside the local market, but also a structural change is needed to adopt new ways of managing their enterprises.

The trend regarding the number of jobs in 2015 is to remain the same as in 2014, with only 22% considering an increase and 11% stating that there will be a decrease in staff, which is mostly favourable for the majority of enterprises with 67% stating that there will be no increase but also no decrease.

SME owners perceive the business climate as average, with 44% saying it is the same as the previous year, only 33% saying it has improved and 22% perceiving it as the worst business climate.

With regard to the valuation of the environment in which they carry out their activities and according to Porter's model, the companies consider that the most relevant factor is the high level of competition in the sector and the least valued is the bargaining power of the clients, which indicates that up to now the entrepreneurs maintain control over the conditions and prices of their products, with the observation made by many of the entrepreneurs that these are governed by supply and demand. It can also be seen that the majority (56%) of the entrepreneurs do not usually carry out formal strategic planning, and those who do, do so only in the short term. Without good planning, companies in the manufacturing sector will not be able to design appropriate strategies to compete in a changing environment.

On the other hand, the cooperation agreements and alliances that manufacturing SMEs in the Chontalpa most frequently apply are those related to the commercialisation of their products, but these agreements are still at the local level; agreements or alliances in the area of research and development are minimal.

According to Miles and Snow's classification, the strategy most frequently followed by manufacturing SMEs in the Chontalpa is a reactive and defensive strategy; there are no companies in the manufacturing sector that adopt an exploratory strategy, which are those that make changes and improvements in products and markets relatively frequently, trying to be the first to develop new products, even with the risk that these innovations will not be successful.

SMEs in the Chontalpa reflect a weak organisational structure, according to observations, most of their personnel perform multiple tasks, sometimes only one person is in charge of management, accounting and human resources activities. The most developed departments are Administration and Operations/Purchasing with 67%; and Research and Development and Quality are the least developed in the organisational structure of these enterprises.

The human resources practices they use most often are Occupational Risk Prevention Management, while the least used are performance appraisal and staff planning. Managers do not give importance to the latter two factors, omitting that evaluating the performance of their staff would allow them to detect areas of improvement for higher productivity.

Managers' perception of their level of technological development is that only 11% of the companies rate it as a strong position, i.e. that they carry out internal development of the technology they use.) Most companies perceive their technology as sustainable, use technologies identical to those of most other companies in the sector, and only make new investments when they see that the competition is performing well. Among the technological practices most used by SMEs is the use of email (89%) and the least used are the corporate intranet and internet marketing. There are great areas of opportunity in this area, as it is now vitally important to make use of information technologies to promote and disseminate their products.

In a globalised market, it is important for organisations of all sizes to have quality certification; the situation of manufacturing SMEs in this area is as follows: only 33% have quality certification, 23% are in the process of obtaining it, and unfortunately the majority (44%) do not have it and are not in the process of obtaining it. It is important to note that according to the discussions with managers, they give priority to sales and downplay the importance of implementing a quality management system.

The aspects in which the entrepreneurs of manufacturing SMEs in the Chontalpa, Tabasco, consider themselves better than their competitors are the following: More satisfied customers and adaptation to changes. However, the least favourable aspect in relation to their competitors is that they consider themselves to be less well positioned in terms of the profitability of their companies.

The economic-accounting techniques most commonly used in this sector are the establishment of annual income and expenditure budgets, as well as cost accounting systems, but these are used in a minority of enterprises.

SMEs in Chontalpa most frequently use external financing through bank loans (77.8%), and less frequently resort to capital increases.

According to these results, it is proposed as a second stage of this project, to design appropriate strategies to enhance the resources and opportunities of the environment of manufacturing SMEs in the Chontalpa, Tabasco. On the other hand, it will be necessary to implement these strategies in a sample of these companies as a pilot study. In order to verify their effectiveness by measuring their profitability.

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