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**The role of cooperation and creativity in business activity**

The study presents the practical problems, positive and negative effects of the intracompany competition, advantages and disadvantages of cooperation as well as the importance of creativity.

There exists a statement according to which the lack of competition is ruining, but at the same time, even the competition itself may be fatal. The statement emphasizing that negligence of the cooperation between the partners that causes measurable damages in material resources is in harmony with this. It seems that cooperation should be more profitable, than competition.

The answer is not so easy because the problem should be divided into macro (ie. market) and micro (ie. company) level. For instance the research proves that competition stimulates creativity, if you want be the marketleader or just a survivor, you have to be creative.

Some of the hypothesis has been proofed through a new Hungarian research, which based on interviews with businessmen. Also the relationship between company size and aforementioned effects is measured in the essay. The results are exciting but not surprising, the data show that the Hungarians are not cooperative enough, and competition among a firm causes information backkeeping.

Although some hypotheses are demonstrated with new data, the limitation of this reseach should also be a realised.

**Keywords:** competition, cooperation, creativity

**JEL classifications:** A13, J2, L1, P13, P4, Z13

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**1. Introduction**

Hungary is situated in the middle of the Carpathian Basin; its territory is divided in two by the River Danube. The capital of the Hungarian Republic and its political, economic and cultural centre is Budapest. The country has 10 million inhabitants.

The Hungarian Republic is an independent state in Central Europe. It is member of the European Union and together with Poland, Check Republic and Slovakia even member of the group of the Visegrad countries. The European Union is partly an inter-governmental and supra-national organization consisting at the present time 25 European countries. Its main activity covers all domains of the policy from public health through economic policy to foreign affairs and matters of defence. The purpose of the Visegrad countries cooperation is the common representation of the economic, diplomatic and political interest of these Central European countries and harmonization of their accidental measures.

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By the 15<sup>th</sup> century Hungary became a respected great power and also from cultural aspects it had grown into one of the most important countries of Europe. Then the Turkish occupation was already threatening which made an end of the great power position of Hungary in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and also of the independence of the country for a long time. After the Turkish rule Hungary became a part of the Habsburg Empire then a partner-country of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy.

By virtue of the peace treaty of Trianon, following the I. World War, nearly two-thirds of the territory of the former Hungarian Kingdom and almost one-third of its inhabitants of Hungarian nationality got to the neighbouring countries. Therefore we are talking about the present sense Hungary since 1920.

Also the II. World War terminated with man-loss, repeated loss of territories recaptured earlier and enormous decay of resources from point of view of Hungary. After the II. World War the power was taken over with the aid of the occupying Soviets by the communists and an one-party regime set in the country. The change of the regime ensured in 1989, the most important acts of this was the proclamation of the Republic and later, in 1990, the election of the first democratic Parliament.

The target of the Hungarian economy after 1989 was the transition from planned economy to market economy. Nowadays, according to the Constitution, there exists a social market economy built on honest market competition and on minimum economic safety which is due to everybody and warranted by the state.

Hungary, as a member of OECD which comprising developed industrial countries, is regarded all over the world as a rich, developed country on the basis of the performance of this organization, but as a part of the economy of the European Union it is rather pertain to the poor category.

Hungarians are regarded as a creative nation, the before mentioned historical background could not provide us a wild range of resources, which could be the basis of finding new solutions, because this lack forces creativity. But creativity ever based on prepartation and sharing of the knowledgement, in one word creativity needs the free way of information. A business setting up lies on an original creative idea, the entrepreneur has to realise the lack of a market niche and offer a new form for covering his customers' wants and needs.

Has the nation an enough strong will to turn its fate after so many hardships? Whether Hungarians can bear the strong competition taking place in the open economy of our days? How do Hungarians face the appearance of foreign competitors on the market? Are they able

and willing to compete and cooperate? Which are the consequences of the intracompany competition? How do they suffer accidental losses? Which are the reasons responsible for the development of the present situation? How do cooperation and competition affect creativity?

## 2. Materials and Methods

The study gives a brief overview of the Hungarian competitive spirit with special regard to cooperation, competition and the information flow. First some points of interest of the opinions published in the professional literature will be presented. Then the study presents the analysis of the latest data of a new Hungarian research, which based on interviews with business leaders. The study presents the differences observable in these aspects according to the size of the companies.

The method of this research could be divided into three main steps:

- **First step:** was the analysis of press. The main topic of studied press or papers was economic and business. We would like doing research to know the opinion of everyday actors. It was given a cross sectional view about using of aforementioned terms.
- **Second step:** depth interviews were made with business leaders from several sectors and profiles. The result of press analysis gave some question. These self reports consists structured questions, but every answers are based on stories of the asked businessmen, which could be measured through the method of the content analysis. Content analysis based on the answers and stories of asked businessmen, and some quotations will confirm the conclusion.
- **Third step:** A statistical frequency distribution is afforded by the structured answers, so the following pie charts will show frequency distribution of the closed structured answers.

Altogether 56 self-report have been made and 55 from these could be evaluated. The combination of interviewed people is 41 men and 14 women. The profile of any companies is significantly various. The companies (the workplace of the asked people) can be divided into four groups:

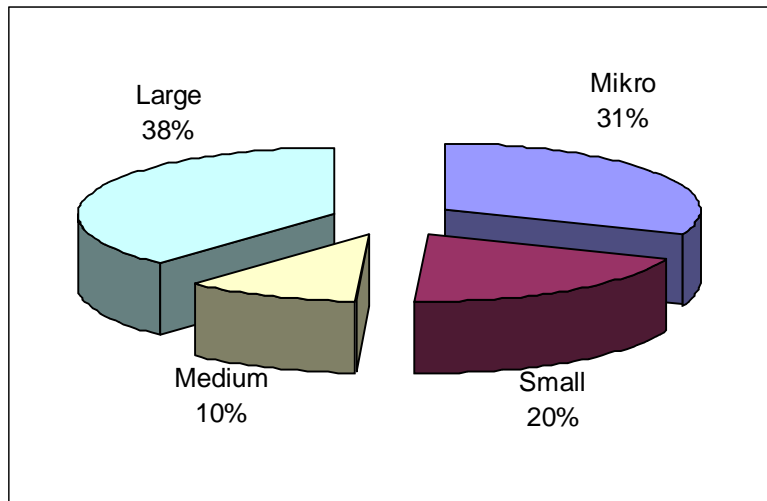
- micro enterprises (are defined fewer than 10 persons),
- small enterprises (are defined fewer than 50 employees),
- medium enterprises (are defined fewer than 250 employees) and
- large enterprises (are defined more than 250 employees).

The size of the companies is established according to number of staff headcount (or annual work unit) and the EC SME definition was followed during the analysis.

The division of the companies is the following, 17 micro enterprises, 11 small enterprises, 6 medium companies and 21 large companies. (1. figure)

**Figure 1.**

Division of companies, 2006



### 3. Results of press analysis

#### *What are the opinions of the everyday actors?*

Research has consistently shown that competition: induces the use of tactics of coercion, threat, or deception; attempts to enhance the power differences between oneself and the other; poor communication, minimization of the awareness of similarities in values and increased sensitivity to opposed interests; fosters suspicious and hostile attitudes; increases the importance, rigidity, and size of the issues in conflict. In contrast, cooperation and cooperative tasks or reward structures induce: a perceived similarity in beliefs and attitudes; a readiness to be helpful; openness in communication; trusting and friendly attitudes; sensitivity to common interests; a de-emphasis to opposed interests; an orientation to enhancing mutual power rather than power differences.” – polarized the scientists’ definitions Hubble (2005). So what are the non-scientists views about the competition and cooperation in the workplace? In this section the study presents a few opinions from real participants of the economy.

Several article claims that conflict is a naturally occurring phenomenon that has both constructive and destructive potential, depending on how it is managed. Engaging in conflict tends to generate anxiety in many people who associate it with negative or violent outcomes, which leads to fight or flight responses. In fact, conflict can provide an uniquely human opportunity to learn about ourselves and others, to motivate necessary changes in the status quo, to challenge obsolete ways of thinking, relating, working, and to innovate. (Figyelőnet, 2005; Huble, 2005) This is an idea, what is opposite of the searched ones and an other opinion is in harmony with these statements, what claims that avoidance of conflicts reduces motivation and in long term it effects efficiency as well. (Világgazdaság, 2005) Competition in turn can be efficient as well, not just cooperation, because mobilizes people's energy, and gives aims (Lovas, 2006).

So some of the article shows that we should not take the competition, cooperation and conflicts so seriously as the scientists claims, some presents exactly the opposite. There exist a statement according to which the total lack of competition is ruining, but at the same time, even the competition itself may be fatal. (HVG, 2006) Another statement emphasizing that negligence of the cooperation between the partners what causes measurable damages in material resources, is in harmony with this (HVG, 2004). At the same time competition is indispensable among employed people which, however, sets limits to cooperation, and competitiveness is influenced by psychological factors of human behavior. McCornick (2006) claims that nobody has taught persons to consider when they should compete and when should they cooperate.

The result of Hungarian business press analysis diverges from English business press analysis. For example more than 115,000,000 links were found searching for 'creative business' on the Google, but only 2840 links were found searching for 'kreatív üzlet' on the kurzor (the Hungarian version of google). Although combination of scant resouces needed creative solutions, but the term of creativity in the Hungarian language is related to arts and not to business. Business is mostly referred like innovative and not creative. Too many times creativity is identified as innovation, but creativity is the most important condition of innovation, the motor for the interpretation of innovation. 'Creativity can move to innovation; creativity can power innovation; creativity can result in innovation. Innovation never causes creativity.' (Howkins, 2005) Creativity ever based on knowledge, that is why the term of creativity is identified with it in papers.

The following quotation presents: 'Bid for knowledge and spreading information is the key of competitiveness in modern economy. But it needs corporate culture, which tolerates

mistakes, and allows brain storming.’ (Figyelőnet, 2002) This corporate culture stimulates creativity.

Howkins always says that creative industries are highly competitive. (Howkins, 2005) But creative culture needs cooperation inside of corporation, because ’sharing of knowledge, which based on experience of company, increases competitiveness.’ (Figyelőnet, 2004) So the company has to know its market: ’Nowdays most important parts of competitiveness are representing new ideas as market value, developing new process, having strategical overview and supporting.’ (Napi Online, 2005)

What are the real actors of everyday business meaning? In the next chapter the result of the self reports can be found, most question based on result of press analysis.

#### **4. Results of self reports**

##### ***How the Hungarians compete and cooperate?***

The research shows that 57,6 percent of the interviewed people said that the Hungarians have low competitive spirit.

’According to my opinion competitive spirit is strange for Hungarians but this is also because of the policy so, since it was unnecessary to compete over many years. Since the change of the regime competitive spirit is strengthening but I say still that this is a forced adaptation.’ Managing director of a commercial firm

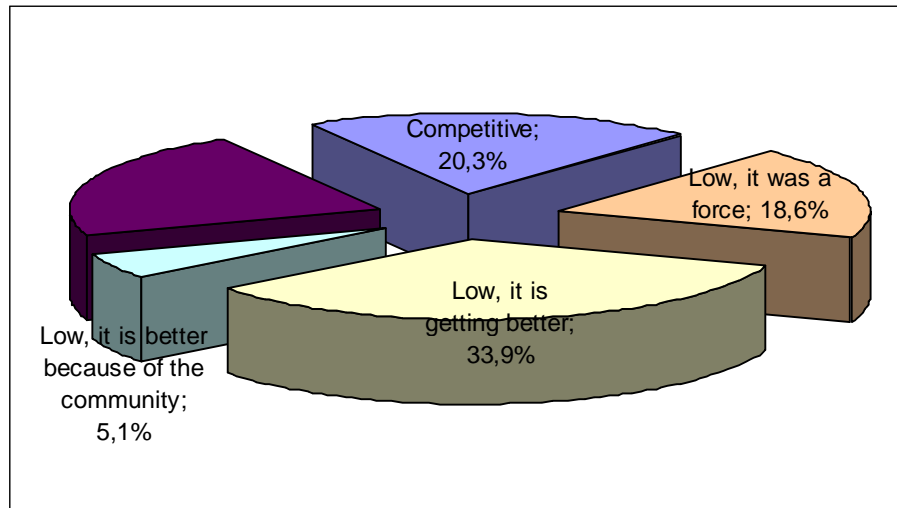
’We are not competitive spirit-minded but certain development can be experienced in this field.’ Logistical leader of a telecommunication firm

’In my opinion socialism has put its stamp on the elder people, however the youth experiences that one can survive only if the others are trampled down. And the more we move off from the change of the regime, this is the truer.’ Controlling director of a hypermarket

’Between North America and the European Union there is by all means a difference. The competitive spirit is higher in Canada. The 40 years past put the stamp also on the competitive spirit. During the time period of the socialism we rather did not compete and we said that we can not compete because of objective obstacles.’ Leader of a language-teaching firm

**Figure 2**

Competitive spirit in Hungary, 2006



It is because that to compete with one and other was a force, and they didn't want to compete in a community. (2. figure) But slowly the competitiv spirit is getting higher among people. According to the research project it is clear that the Hungarians are not as cooperative as peoples of the developed countries as some of the 'cosmopolitan' business leaders claimed. 64,1 percent of the questioned leaders answere was that it is low.

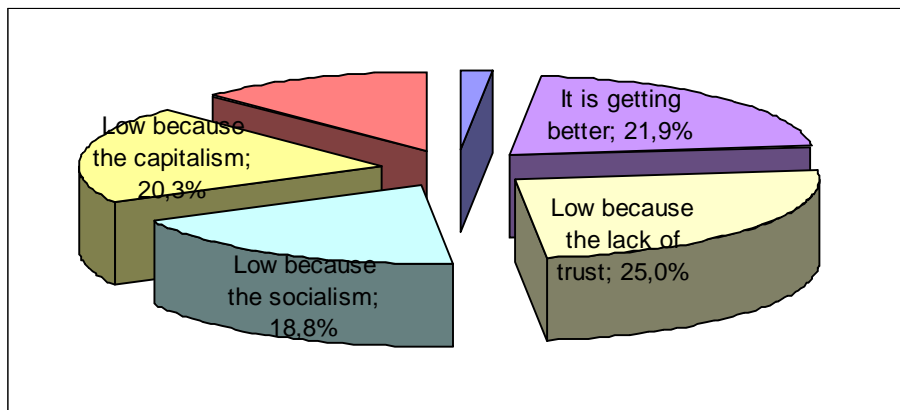
'In totality hungarians are not cooperative, 'I acquired this for myself this is mine.' There is no willingness to cooperate. I see in case of partner firms that it would be better for them to carry out some purchases and sales collectively but quite simply they could not agree. A point was reached where to make a compromise became necessary but the readiness for compromise failed and fails even nowadays. Accordingly they are distrustful and incapable of compromise. I am sorry but my opinion is unfavourable. I see as an outsider that ifthey ten had held together a progress could be reached already for a long time past. And they did not cooperate because of some small unsubstantial matter. But this should not be imputed to socialism since already there is a younger generation which exist. This is nothing else than a non-cooperativenation.' Managing director of a commercial firm

'Quick enriching, survival on the market, so the signs of the wild capitalism can be experienced in Hungary. And these reduce the readiness for cooperation. Men are distrustful. Long-term agreements, cooperations are not characteristic.' Logistical leader of a telecommunication firm

'It is terrible low. In Hungary there was never willingness to cooperate. This is a bad Hungarian tradition in which also socialism was significantly instrumental. Cooperation, market, competition exclude supposedly each other. This is the classic case of the prisoner's dilemma. In Hungary everybody tries to be released at the expense of others. In this respect there is no change or it is possible that the situation even worsened. This can only be changed very slowly, several generation are necessary to this.' President of a logistic firm

**Figure 3**

Cooperate spirit in Hungary, 2006



25 percent said it is because of the lack of trust. 20,3 percent said that it is because of the market economy and the wide-spread spirit that 'everybody for himself and the evil take the hindmost'. This is mostly characteristic of the large enterprises. 18,8 percent said that it is because of the former socialist regime. These answers came mostly from the micro and the small enterprises. And just 21,9 percent of the businessmen agreed that it is necessary to work in cooperation in order to be successful. Not surprisingly mostly the micro and the small enterprises' leaders claimed this. And only 1,6 percent of the inquired said that the level of the cooperation is satisfactory. (3. figure)

***How would the Hungarians accept the appearance of foreign competitors?***

If there is neither enough competitive nor enough cooperative spirit in Hungarians how would they accept the consequences of the economy opened 26 years ago?



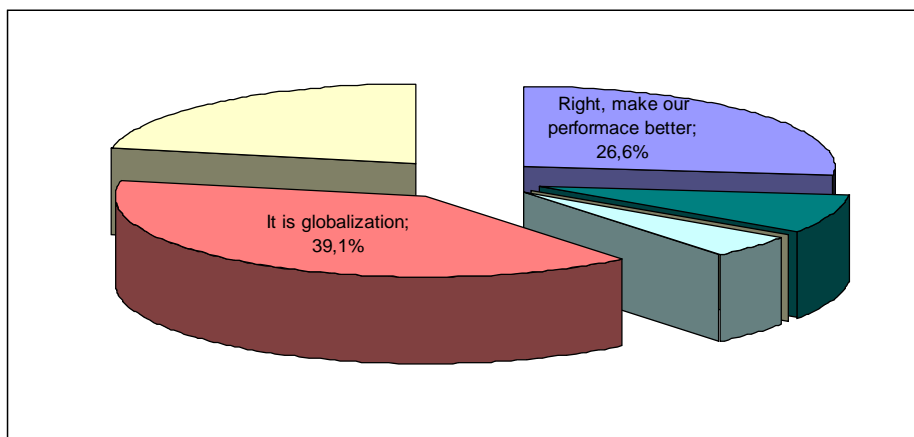
'There is democracy and this means that free competition is allowed. It is unstoppable that globalization should break in to use.' Controlling manager of a hypermarket

'Is it reasonable to let in foreign competitors since they will bring know-how. Something that is necessary. Others are organization and efficiency growth.' Leader of a language-teaching firm

'Not, since they start unambiguously from a better position.' Manager of a supplier company

**Figure 4**

Acceptation of the appearance of foreign competitors, 2006



39,1 percent of the opinions states that it is no matter of question whether will the appearance of foreign competitors or not since globalization is an irresistible process. According to the opinion of the 26,6 percent of the respondents it is suitable to let in foreigners since they will raise the scale and hereby also performance of domestic actors will be improved. According to 7,8 percent this is incorrect since competitive conditions are unequal, foreigners start from better positions. Mainly smaller-scale firms feel themselves in danger in this respect. (4. figure)

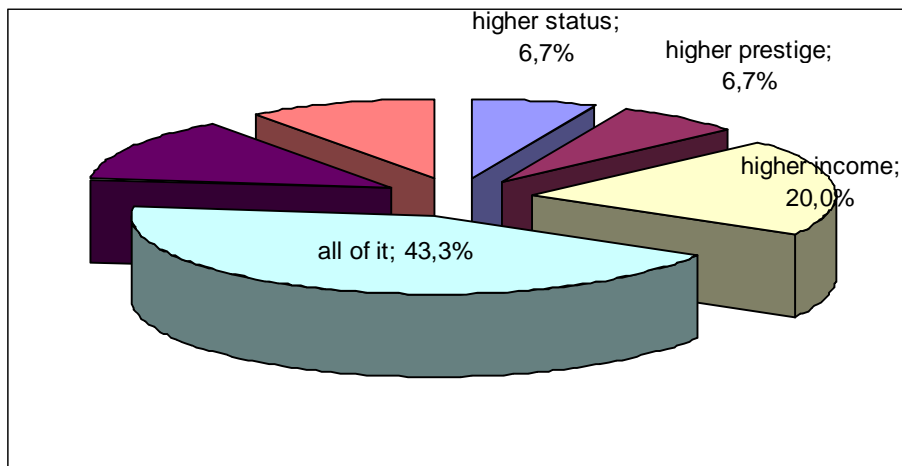
***Whether there is any competition among the workers inside a company?***

It is clear that if you work for a company your and your company's aim is the same, to be profitable. But what the leaders said about the intracompany competition?

'Within a smaller-scale firm there is not particular competition since tasks are usually given.' Managing director of a commercial firm

'Competition exists unambiguously, just as higher position, higher reputation and higher income. In our company income is possibly the most characteristic feature.'  
Logistical leader of a telecommunication firm

**Figure 5**  
Intracompany competition, 2006



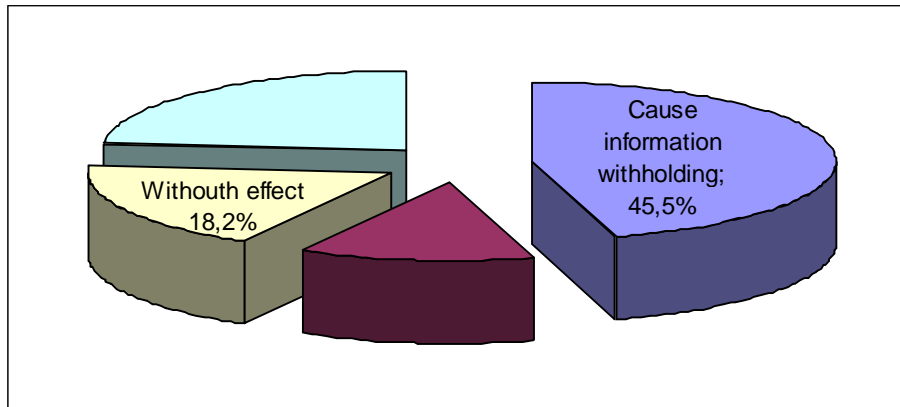
According to the 76,7 percent of the opinions the answer is clearly yes. 6,7-6,7 percent said that they compete for higher position – in micro enterprises –, and for higher appreciation – in small businesses –, and 20 percent claimed that the reason is the higher income – mostly, at the large enterprises. 43,3 percent marked each, because they claimed these are goes together, so this answer was the most frequent, independently of the company size. (5. figure)

***Whether the competition affects the information flow inside a company?***

45,5 percent of the asked said that the intracompany competition causes information withholding to a large extent – it is typical at the large enterprises. According to the leaders of mainly smaller-scale enterprises intracompany competition does not exert an important effect on the information flow. (6. figure)

**Figure 6**

Competition affects inside a company



'I don't experience in our company within the sphere of employees withholding of information either from me or from one other. Ware a small-scale company we ply the oars in the same boat. We all ply to the best of our power.' Managing director of a commercial firm

'Information-flow may be hindered by intracompany competition. If somebody knows that only he possesses the information he tries to make capital out of this.' Logistical leader of a telecommunication firm

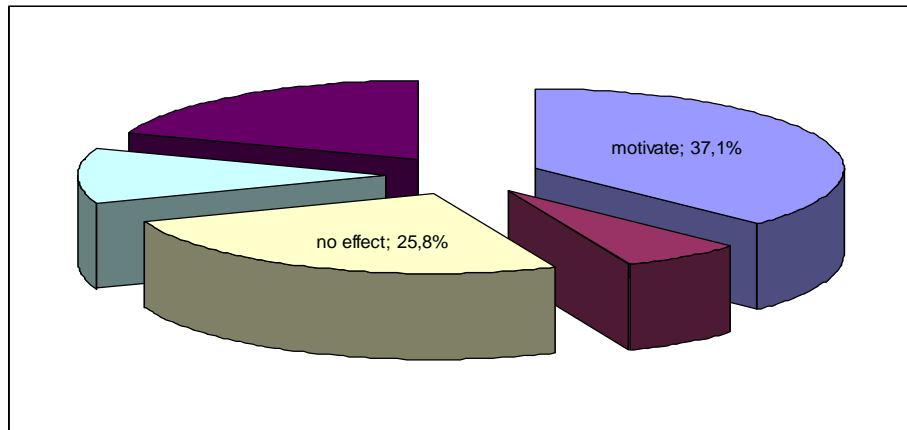
'Transmission of knowledge culminates at the middle-manager. Every information flows through him, everything must be passed to him and he will forward all information to the chief for fear that he may find out that somebody who is working in a lower position is more prudent than he. In turn downwards are only morsels of information passed that employees in lower position should not know more or be more clever, than he. In other words he should by no means be dethroned. Secretiveness exists within the company.' Controlling manager of a hypermarket

***What kind of reaction will be elicited in individuals and companies by unsuccess?***

37,1 percent of the inquirers responded that unsuccess is not discouraging rather motivating. 25,8 percent of them stressed that unsuccess does not exercise important influence on them, they step simply across the given matter. And only 6,5 percent confessed that unsuccess is laming and they have no mind for a long time to deal with the matter commenced earlier. (7. figure)

**Figure 7**

Result of unsuccess at micro level, 2006



'This depends on the life-situation. I had an example for each case during my life till now. Once we had an example for each case during my life till now. Once we had to conclude a treaty with a state firm in order to be able to sell the product and we were shortly put out from there. This made the existence of the whole firm questionable. In spite of this fact, I flug myself wholeheartedly with incredible force into work. I had almost to rebuild the firm. Then I was very motivated. I refused to be deceived. Then my instinct of survival rose. Also it happened that I tried to explain my certificate in my mind. Everybody is faulty except of me. The coworkers are thickbrained, the market is bad, import is growing more and more difficult, stupid regulations are brought. There was an example relating to the averting mechanism too. And also the fact was examplified that one becomes simply lam and thinks that affairs should be solved of their own accord. One situation did not occur at all that unsuccess didn't influenced my life. It may me however that it would be more expedient to step over unsuccess and approach to the problem in another way. I think that in less important matters one can explain its certificate buti n questions of virtual importance one has to take steps and fight or the whole matter must be left out of consideration.' Managing director of a commercial firm

'But I increasingly begin to accept 'no'-s. If we can not learn this than w eget into spiral at the end of which one has to think of worst. From sichness to suicide may be imagined. Up to the termination of my university studies I felt myself a fortunate man, every came true what I would, I felt myself very well. When I began to work I had successes and part-successes but I got often boxes in the face. This touched me

ever and ever badly. For example in relation to one of my enterprises I failed to reach any success I was driven by Hungarian and foreign partners and nevertheless the firm got finally bankrupt. I did not feel myself faulty since top-creditors were unwilling to arrive a tax agreement with us. Since then a year passed slowly and I entered into other businesses and I have already part-success. I know already if I am not willing to accept refusals I can not precede. Everybody can learn from these.’  
Controlling manager of a hypermarket

***Whether positive managerial attitude manifest itself also on company level?***

’In case of our competitors it is characteristic that winner is depreciated its reputation is ruffled on all forums. In our professional field I experienced that through scientific publications by means of such-and-such accounts astonishing relations are demonstrated as regarded the product, never seen statistical data are cited, the simple-minded human being opens the journal and he believes all these at least, he hears only these. Those who are active and are willing to describe these are unfortunately successful enough to make negative campaign. This has influencing effect and human’s beings are suggestible and this happens at the expense of the firm.’  
Managing director of a commercial firm

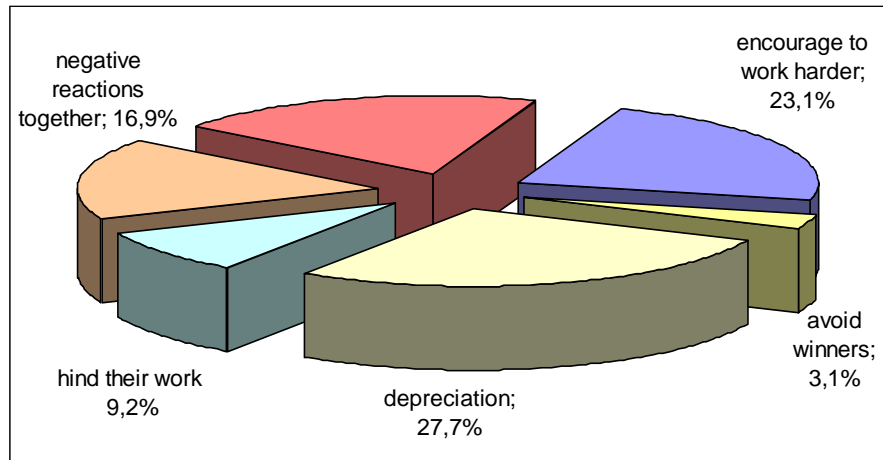
’Generally it is tried to veto the winners. This is not good, it would be better to learn from the winners. Unfortunately the principle prevails that ’if my cow perishes should perish also that of somebody else’. Controlling manager of a hypermarket

’My environment is characterized by the overtaking effect. If somebody is successful this is recognized by others.’ Leader of a language-teaching firm

On the basis of the research data in case of company unsuccess depreciation of winners and ruffling of their reputation is characteristic of 27,7 percent of respondents mainly at large scale enterprises, 23,1 percent answered that unsuccess encourages to work harder, typically at small- and medium-scale companies. According to 9,2 percent if they are winners, competitors try to hinder their work, and according to 3,1 percent unsuccessful ones avoid winners, and according to 16,9 percent of respondents these three negative reactions are collectively characteristic of the reactions of hungarian unsuccessful people. (8. figure)

**Figure 8**

Result of unsuccess at macro level, 2006



***Is there any relationship between creativity and competition***

'The competition causes creativity; you have to be creative, find new solutions, try to find new products, actions, make colourful ads. So you only could be alive on the market through brandnew ideas or pass your competitor.' General manager of a consulting group

'Inasmuch as the market could not issue every actors, so the first two or three member, which firstly enters on market will be the winner, and it requires for them highly innovation' Senior marketing manager of a communication company

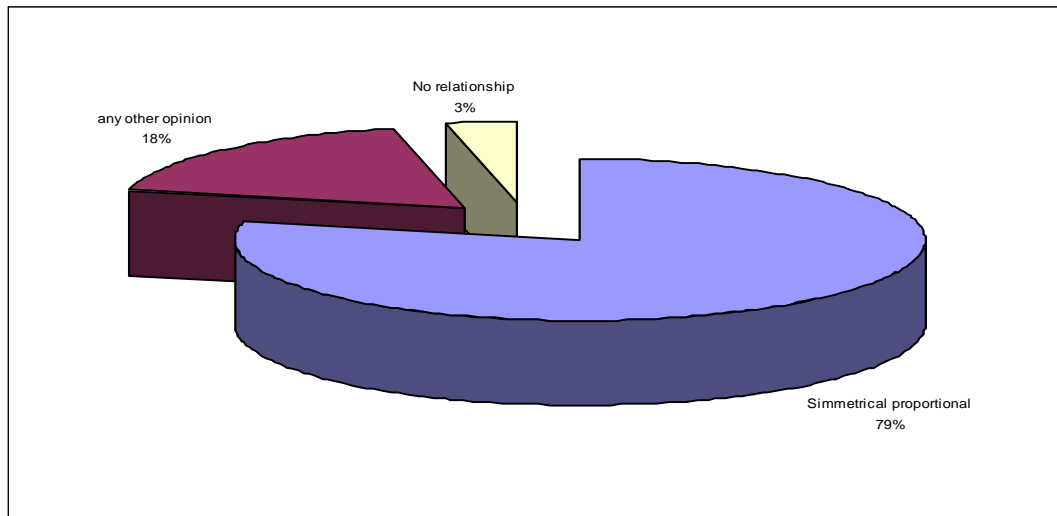
Last but not least an interesting quation:

'As many member as many are in a competition, so much the creativity plays down, and mostly the financial conditions come to the front, because you have to win' Manager of a company from the IT sector

Nearly 80 percent of the interviewed businessmen found a simmetrical proportional between these two elements. It can mean, that competitiveness stimulates creativity, if you want be the marketleader or just a survivor, you have to be creative! Nobody found opposit proportional between creativity and competition.

**Figure 9**

Relationship between creativity and cooperation, 2006



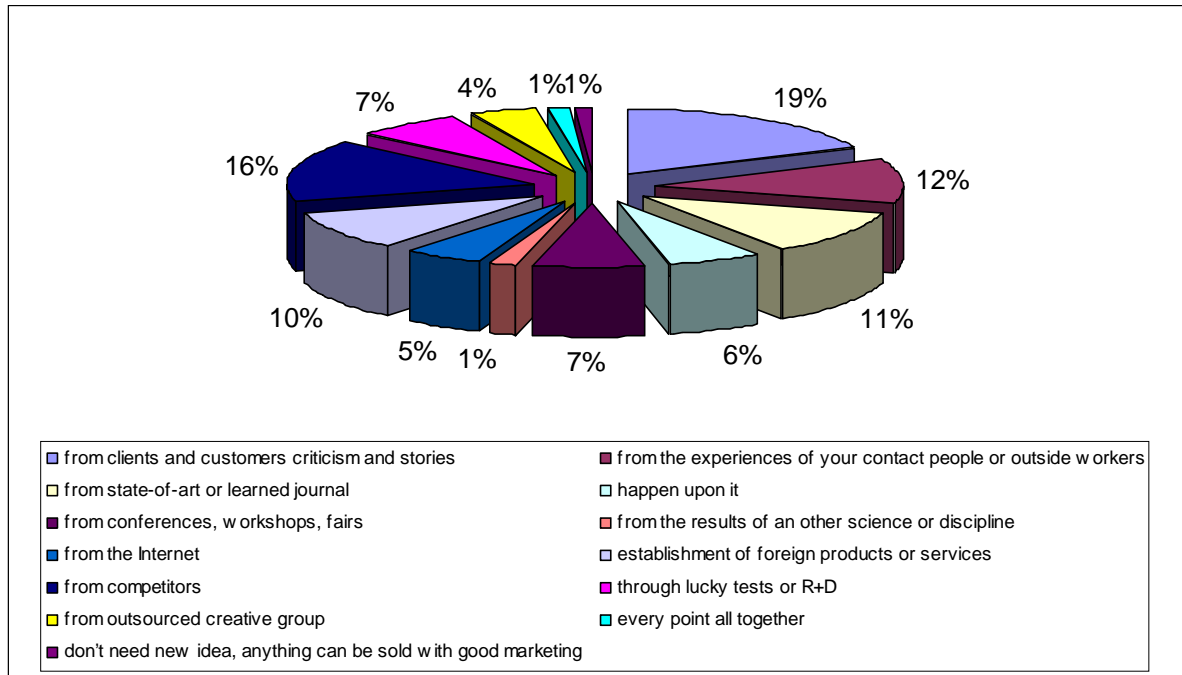
***Where are the ideas coming from?***

Also the source of new ideas was appraised in the self-report by asked businessmen. The customers' opinion was on the first place in the order. The creator must know and swing the clients. Special type of cooperation was found among of clients and entrepreneurs, it is a two-sided dependence. It is interesting, but not surprising, that the micro and large companies use the ideas of their clients by R+D. The microcompanies are too small and close to their few clients, and this limited number can be managed easily, the biggest ones have got enough money to use for special methods and tools (like: CRM softwares) for managing a professional relationship with their clients.

The activity of competitors stimulates creativity, and brings new flash, that is why the respect of IP (Intellectual Property, like licences, know-hows and so on) is the currency for longterm business life. IP is a factor in the global battle for competitive advantage, companies can realise revenue from creative products or services, which can be protected by contract law. Seitz suggests (Seitz, 2003, p387), that too many 'social and cultural forces must converge to promote creative activity, and few people are willing to invest in it' and that will generate unpopular ideas, like creative account. So the pressure or impact of environment could also determine unethical but creative practices and competition. On the third place those experienced workers can be found who keep contact with buyers on an everyday basis, and the latest articles, the choice depends on the company profile.

**Figure 10.**

The quelle of new ideas, 2006



'Only creativity is not enough, an idea only than could be good, when it can be work out, and my workers can prove by any way, that this idea hits and is worthwhile'  
General manager of a company from enviroment protection sector

'A large company can grant finding the real people for the real place, who is professional in his/her job.... It is evident that a manager of an SME company deals rather with his/her market, than manages his/her company'  
Senior marketing manager of a communication company

## 5. Conclusion

Competition can mobilize people's energy, and gives aims to them. At the same time competition can be fatal or causes measurable damages in material resources, on the other hand the total lack of competition again can be ruining.

According to the research project the Hungarians' competitive and cooperative spirit are not satisfactory. The reason is lack of trust, and because of the former socialist regime. Nevertheless great majority of the inquerrees would see with pleasure foreign competitors in our country, who would incite to reach higher performance. Although most of the Hungarians



are not competitive spirit-minded, within the company competition can be found. They compete for higher position, for higher appreciation, and for higher income. This intracompany competition however cause large scales of information withhold. The study covers also the field of unsuccess. It can be stated that while the majority of the leaders declared that they are not negatively influenced, even they are motivated by unsuccess, on company level, however, mostly impairment of the winners' reputation is typical. These reasons can hold in economic growth and development of Hungary. But as we experienced in a few years these trends can be changed, and a new generation, a younger generation will take over the leading positions, who are more optimistic and who have more competitive and cooperative spirit.

Although conflict brings the member of organisation closer together and the feeling of danger stimulates creativity because a new solution or 'the exit' has to be found. But the competition in an organisation causes information withholding (as it was proofed before), which inhibits creativity. Creation needs the aforementioned knowledge and preparation.

Although macro (i.e. on market) factors of fair competition stimulate creativity, but a balanced understandig has to be assured on microlevel (i.e. in organisation). The members of team have to trust each other, have to share their experiences and play together; in one word have to cooperate according to realise the 'creative, profitable product', because the lack of cooperation inside of company obstructs communication and creativity.

Competition, cooperation and creativity are seems to be the three driving forces nowadays, because these expressions are too frequently used. It is said that any one who is not interested in competition, cooperation or creativity will be left out and left behind.

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