

External Factors Influencing Interorganizational Collaboration: The Strategic Perspective¹

Monika Golonka²

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Abstract

Purpose: The main purpose of this paper is to present the phenomenon of interorganizational collaboration from the strategic perspective, as a complex phenomenon, influenced by environmental factors, such as institutions – both formal and informal. Additional aims of the paper are: to present a model including all significant elements and identifying important research gaps.

Methodology: The paper presents the results of literature analyses as well as the findings of the latest research studies in the field of interorganizational collaboration, taking into account the environment of the organization.

Conclusions: The external environment of the organization, in particular socio-cultural factors, has a significant impact on the formation, development, evolution and management of interorganizational collaboration. There are still many research gaps in this field, and some of them have been presented in this paper.

Research limitations: This paper is a theoretical and conceptual study. It forms an introduction to further empirical research.

Originality: The paper presents the phenomenon of interorganizational collaboration in a broader context, taking into account the external environment as an element influencing such collaboration. Most of the works in this field focus on organizations managing or coping with the environment. This paper presents a different approach. It indicates the external factors that influence interorganizational collaboration from a strategic perspective, and subsequently presents them in the form of a model.

Keywords: environment of the organization, institutions, national culture, interorganizational collaboration, alliance portfolios, organizational strategy

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² Kozminski University

Correspondence address: Kozminski University, Jagiellonska St. 59, 03-301 Warsaw, e-mail: monikagolonka@kozminski.edu.pl.

Introduction

The organization has long ceased to be the subject of analyses and research studies in isolation from the environment in which it operates. Moreover, it is not possible anymore to analyze an organization without taking into account its relationships with business partners, since the modern organization is a relationship-centric system (Gulati, 2008). The resources of a single organization are not all that organizations, being part of alliance networks, have at their disposal. Nowadays, they have access to the resources of other organizations, the so-called network resources (Gulati, 2008). The actual relationships with business partners also become an organizational resource and building them even becomes a key competence (Romanowska and Trocki, 2002). Interfirm collaboration is becoming the subject of numerous studies in world literature, especially since it is a subject closely linked to globalization processes and competition between organizations at the international level. Without the collaboration with other firms, nowadays organizations cannot develop on the global level, and in sectors with a high level of technology and knowledge also local development becomes impossible. This is because, among other things, the rapid technological development, paired with increasing demands of customers, makes it impossible for firms to create a full-fledged offer independently and quickly enough. Firms from such sectors have become the suppliers of multi-services (Normann, 1991), or solutions consisting of a wide variety of products and services (one of the most straightforward examples is the Smartphone). Collaboration with the objective of joint production and sales, often also with competitors, is thus becoming indispensable. This is particularly evident in the case of global industries, i.e. those where “a significant part of the market is occupied by global companies that play a competitive game amongst each other at the global level, and the strategic situation of the competitors in the main local or national markets depends to a large extent on their general situation at the global level” (Gierszewska and Romanowska, 1994, p. 150). The most globalized sectors primarily include airlines and information technology. It is worth noting that in the world literature on the subject there are no longer any doubts that the portfolio of relationships with business partners³ has a significant influence on the efficiency of firms and on their competitive advantage. Collaboration between firms on both local and international level is therefore becoming a strategic necessity (Beckett, 2005; Heffernan, 2004). Therefore, it is essential to be aware of and understand this phenomenon to the greatest possible extent.

The Many Faces of Collaboration

In the literature on the subject, interorganizational collaboration is considered to entail Interorganizational Relationships (IOR), Interorganizational Cooperation (IOC), alliances, alliance networks, as well as alliance portfolios. Theoretical approaches used to analyze the phenomenon

³ An alliance portfolio or portfolio of relationships with business partners is understood here as an egocentric network of partnerships, perceived from the perspective of the focal firm (Lavie, 2006).

of such cooperation include theories of social networks, learning of the organization, exploration and exploitation, the resource approach, the concept of dynamic capabilities, the relational approach, the transaction cost theory, the agency theory, or the school of real options.

The strategic perspective means taking into account all the elements relevant in terms of the long-term development of the organization, arising from the internal as well as external environment. Collaboration is one of the methods of competition (Obłój, 2007). Therefore, the strategic perspective in this paper also involves taking into account all the alliances that the organization has entered into and uses to build competitive advantage. Such an approach is a complex approach. However, it takes into account a wide range of benefits and costs associated with collaboration as well as its impact on the survival and development of the organization. It goes beyond the traditional, individual alliance (Wassmer, 2008). Most existing studies have focused on why and how firms enter into individual strategic alliances and how they manage them (Ahuja, 2000; Chung et al., 2000; Gulati, 1995, 1998; Spekman et al., 1998; Ireland, 2002; Latusek-Jurczak, 2011) or how networks are formed (Ireland, 2002; Czakon, 2007, 2012; Gulati and Gargiulo, 1999). Whereas an alliance portfolio is made up of many relationships, it is the result of establishing many alliances, which are often formed for a variety of reasons and with various objectives. From the perspective of the firm's strategy it is becoming important to combine the objectives of the individual alliances with the alliance portfolio on the strategic level in the organization (Hoffmann, 2007). This challenge is now faced by most firms, but only a few consciously create and manage their alliance portfolios. Often such portfolios are a combination of individual alliances, which combined together do not constitute a coherent portfolio at all (Doz and Hamel, 1998; Bamford and Ernst, 2002). Currently the reasons for creating many parallel alliances are being analyzed in the literature on the subject, as well as the ways in which firms build and manage their portfolios.

It is also noteworthy that when a firm builds an alliance portfolio this is not only for strategic reasons, but is also the result of rational choices of the firm with the objective to increase its strategic opportunities or to build competitive advantage. However, this may also be a random set of alliances that are entered into by managers in order to increase the usefulness of their function (Wassmer, 2008). It therefore becomes important to consider collaboration both from the firm level and from the perspective of individual managers.

Considerations taking into account all of its alliances with partners create more opportunities, but also become much more complex and demanding. It is enough to mention that the *alliance capability*⁴ of firms considered in the context of an individual alliance here becomes the capability to create and manage an entire portfolio of parallel alliances (*alliance portfolio capability*). Instead of the until recently applicable matter of creating and managing a relationship with

⁴ Alliance capability – a firm's ability to identify partners, initiate alliances, and engage in ongoing management and possible restructuring and termination of these alliances (Khanna, 1998, p. 351).

a single alliance, or joining alliance networks, nowadays the question is: How to create and manage relationships with many different business partners at the same time?

Seeing an alliance not as a traditional, single strategic alliance, but as any form of collaboration entered into by organizations, it can be assumed that every firm has a certain “alliance capability” or “relational competence” (Czakon, 2007), because most firms have had experience with collaboration, collaborates or is forced to collaborate with business partners. Determining the level of this capability becomes an important matter, as well as determining the factors that influence acquiring this capability. This certainly is one of the lines of research worth exploring. Researchers emphasize the existence of significant gaps in empirical research on alliance portfolios, in particular regarding their actual (including exogenous) causes, from the perspective of firms as well as managers, the coherence of the strategy with the alliance portfolio, the ways of creating, configuring and managing in various conditions, changes in the configuration of the portfolio and their impact on the organization, as well as ways to measure the effectiveness of the portfolio (e.g. Wessmer, 2008; Hoffman, 2007; Deeds and Rothaermel, 2003; Goerzen, 2007; Heimeriks et al., 2007a).

Wessmer (2008) suggested a conceptual map of the areas of research on alliance portfolios, dividing them into separate studies for each stage: creation (why and how do firms build alliance portfolios), configuration (what configuration choices do firms make in alliance portfolios) and management (how do firms manage their portfolios). This division can be supplemented by additional stages that are described in the literature on individual alliances: the discovery of the need for collaboration (Ventures, 2005), the phase prior to collaboration – including the search for and selection of partners, the initial interactions (Wilson, 1995).

Based on an analysis of international alliances (j&v) Ventures (2005) noted that all the studied alliances started the process of establishing relationships at the initial phase, during which there is a need for collaboration and the initiation of an alliance. If, as a result of such a need, firms started searching, i.e. they moved on to the next phase – the search for and selection of partners, which is accompanied by commitment, then alliances were formed. So far, many research studies have been carried out focusing on the selection of partners for alliances, including ones that demonstrate that the selection process is a function of the size and experience of the firm but also the experience and performance of the managers (CEO's) of these firms (e.g. Al-Khalifa and Peterson, 1999). This phase as well as the subsequent ones, associated with initial interaction and the formation of relationships (often referred to as the phase of negotiations, e.g. Ventures, 2005), are described as crucial for the success of the alliance or alliance network, since they have an impact on trust, commitment and opportunistic behavior in the built relationships (Moeller, 2010, Solesvik et al., 2010). The portfolio configuration concerns issues such as the size of the portfolio, or the amount as well as the quality of the alliances, competitive relationships within the portfolio, the use of network resources (exploration vs. exploitation). Research studies in this

field focus mainly on the impact of a particular set of alliances on the effectiveness of firms (e.g. Lavie, 2007; Stuart, 2000). This phase is associated with the management of the alliance portfolio, where the experiences of the firm in terms of alliance capability are becoming considerably important, as well as issues regarding a good management and coordination of alliances (especially in the context of the entire portfolio), communication, competence, treatment of partners, conflict resolution (Heimeriks et al., 2007b; Ventures, 2005; Wassmer, 2008).

While there already are many research studies on the motives of firms for establishing such relationships that make up the alliance portfolio, there is still a lack of research studies on how firms build such portfolios and how they manage them. Moreover, most researchers assume that firms act rationally and consciously initiate alliances with partners. Perhaps this is a wrong assumption, given the just recently observed impact of the environment (cultural, institutional) on the decisions made by managers, or the earlier mentioned possible separation of the interests of the organization from the objectives of individual managers, for example.

| Factors Influencing Interorganizational Collaboration

It should be clearly emphasized that the phenomenon of interorganizational collaboration needs to be considered in a broadest context. Especially since most of the conducted research studies are limited to selected elements, e.g. only considering organizational or sectoral aspects. Based on these research studies often recommendations are formed, which are detached from the broader context. The reason for this could be either the fact that until recently in the literature in the field of strategic management the matter of formal and informal institutions was ignored, or the fact that the discussed phenomena are often considered exclusively in the local context, omitting the global dimension. An example of such an approach is limiting research studies to the context of organizational culture, ignoring national cultures, which have a major impact not only on the organizational culture and the values of the members of an organization (Chang, Wong, Koh, 2003; Ralston, Holt, Kai-Cheng, 1997; Hofstede, 1980 and later), but also on the processes, structures (Rugman and Collinson, 2009), the efficiency of firms (Ghamewat, 2001; Versakelis and Kessapidou, 2002) as well as on interorganizational collaboration (e.g. Child and Faulkner, 1998; Lee, Li and Shenkar, 2008; Kogut and Singh, 1988; Kumar and Das, 2011; Bhaskaran, Gligorowska, 2009), negotiations and conflict resolution (Tinsley, Curhan and Kwak, 1999; Graham, Lee and Yang, 2006; Lin and Miller, 2003).

Under the conditions of an ever-accelerating pace of globalization processes it is hardly possible to ignore the impact of factors associated with the external environment of organizations (which are, after all, embedded in a variety of market, institutional, cultural and social contexts) on every aspect of their operations. This becomes especially important in case of interorganizational collaboration. In strategic management a new, complementary approach has emerged already – an institutional approach – filling the gap associated with the key questions

in this field of science concerning the differences between firms from different geographic regions (Peng, 2009). In the field of interorganizational collaboration, such considerations are only just emerging. Despite the existing, also in Poland, significant research studies (including Latusek-Jurczak, 2011; Czakon, 2007, 2012; Sroka, 2012), there are still many unresolved research questions, in particular those resulting from the impact of the environment on all aspects of collaboration.

For the purpose of this paper a review has been conducted of the literature regarding research studies on interorganizational collaboration published by 2012. In order to capture the diversity of contexts and meanings of the described phenomena, the selection of papers for the research sample was made on the basis of keywords⁵, as opposed to individual journals or data sources. Various data sources were used, including accessible journal databases as well as open publication repositories. This way it was possible to compare and search for links between the researched areas and their cross-exploration (Czakon, 2011). The literature analysis was conducted in several stages; some publications indicated the need for further exploration using additional keywords.

Based on the literature analysis, the external factors that are particularly relevant in the discussion on interorganizational collaboration were isolated. These are the following: national culture, and the associated: risk perception and trust, as well as formal institutions, the characteristics of market sectors (including technological development), but also from the perspective of managers – their mentality, goals, opportunities (partly culturally determined).

National culture⁶ has an impact not only on the already mentioned here aspects of the functioning of an organization, but also on the formation and the level of trust in society. National culture influences the commitment in interorganizational relationships, as well as sharing knowledge and solving problems during the course of collaboration (Griffith, 2006). It has a major impact on the ability of partners from different countries to share knowledge in the course of the collaboration (as shown by, among others, Siakas et al., in 2010, when analyzing the collaboration in the implementation of projects of the European Union). Firms that come from societies characterized by a high level of collectivism build their alliance portfolios differently than firms from individualistic countries (Golonka, 2012a), creating alliances with many different partners from different cultures, while firms from individualistic societies prefer allies that are a lot like themselves. It turns out that national culture also has an impact

⁵ The main keywords used in the analysis were: interorganizational collaboration, alliance, alliance network, alliance portfolio, international alliances, establishing collaboration, partner selection, alliance coordination, alliance portfolio configuration, alliance management, external environment of organizations, institutional factors, national culture, trust, risk, uncertainty.

⁶ National culture – there are many definitions for national culture in the literature on the subject. In 1952 Kroeberg and Klukhohn identified 160 of them. However, the most common definition is the definition suggested by Hofstede: culture is the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from others (Hofstede, 1984, p. 21). In case of national cultures this refers to shared values and norms in different societies.

on the response strategies that firms adopt in case of problems in the collaboration – the option that firms choose depends on the national culture of origin (Furres et al., 2012). Firms that come from individualistic countries have a greater tendency to opt for active strategies (opportunism, aggression, creative approach) rather than passive ones (patience, neglect, non-cooperation). The more a culture is characterized by male domination, the greater the likelihood that firms will opt for destructive strategies (neglect, withdrawal, opportunism, aggression). In such cultures also the positive social reactions to constructive strategies are weaker. The same applies to the power distance index. Whereas in societies with a high uncertainty avoidance index there is a strong preference for passive strategies.

National culture influences trust as well as risk perception in a collaboration. The impact of national culture on trust in interorganizational relationships is the subject of numerous research studies (Ibrahim and Ribbers, 2009; Doney et al., 1998; Monczka et al., 1998; Young-Ybarra and Wiersema, 1999). Trust stems from the values and norms that apply in a given society (Hofstede, 1980) as well as from institutional, organizational and relational determinants, and individual matters (Doney et al., 1998). Delbufalo (2012) points to a clear need for additional research on the contextual factors that influence trust, resulting from cultural but also institutional (formal) determinants, in various geographic regions and market sectors. However, it is a well-known fact already that each of the cultural dimensions suggested by Hofstede has an impact on the development of trust, although to varying degrees (Doney et al., 1998).

Trust⁷. Can influence the formation and development of collaborative relationships, the coordination of alliances between firms as well as the harmony within the collaboration (Rampersad et al., 2010). Some researchers believe that trust is closely linked to entering into formal contracts – because a partner can trust the other one only if he believes that the other partner also trusts him, and entering into formal agreements is a sign of a lack of trust (Malhotra and Murnighan, 2002). However, other researchers believe that formal contracts and trust are substitutes (Larson 1992, Uzzi 1997; Dyer and Singh 1998). Sitkin (1992), Lorenz (1999), Poppo and Zenger (2002) argue that formal contracts may actually increase trust (or even replace it – Camen et al., 2011), because these contracts affect the commitment to the relationship and the promotion of collaboration in firms. Trust is also crucial in international collaboration. Bianchi and Saleh (2008) believe that trust is essential even in the exchange of goods (supplier-customer). Child believes that trust is the “fundamental bond in global collaboration” (Child, 2001), although according to other researchers trust is less important if an international company is working with partners from different institutional and cultural contexts – then it is replaced by a greater control (Chen and Li, 2009). Mutual trust is, however, a prerequisite for the international development of small and medium-sized firms (Fink and Kraus, 2007). In the literature on the subject one can find

⁷ Trust – “Firm belief that a person or thing can be relied upon” Oxford Dictionary. At the organizational level, there are numerous definitions and one of them is: “interaction with a specific other who is able and willing, given a choice, to act in the trustor’s best interests” Beckett (2005, p. 327) by Hackman and McLain (1994).

a distinction between types of trust – personal, competence, contractual, and goodwill, as well as intentions-based, contractual, and affective (Ventures, 2005). All of these are important at every stage of development of an alliance (Ventures, 2005). Trust is associated with the concept of social capital⁸.

Risk perception. Delerue and Simon (2009), based on a research study of 344 alliances, argue that the values of managers associated with cultural dimensions have a significant impact on risk perception in a relationship (in the following dimensions: the risk of opportunistic behavior, the risk of using the firm for own purposes, the risk of a lack of learning in the relationship, and the risk of leaving the alliance). It turns out that individualism has an impact on the perception of the threat of opportunistic behavior, and the same goes for male domination; while there is an important, positive correlation in the studied relationships of the alliances between power distance as well as uncertainty avoidance and risk perception in the described dimensions. Interestingly, researchers have noticed that a higher long-term orientation index involves a slightly higher risk perception. Also Wagner (1995) believes that individualism affects the risk associated with collaboration, and managers from individualistic countries prefer risky strategies (Shane and Venkataraman, 1996). Researchers admit that societies that are characterized by a high power distance are averse to risk (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982), and the same applies to organizations from such cultures (Marino et al., 2002). Uncertainty avoidance affects not only the approach to collaboration in general, risk perception in relationships, but also the survival of alliances – the higher the index, the lower the chances of survival of the relationship (Berkema and Vermeulen, 1997).

Formal institutions, i.e. formal rules of the game (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Peng, 2009), or the politico-legal environment affecting the organization by setting these rules of the game (Child and Tsai, 2005). Many researchers consider formal institutions and culture jointly (Douglas, 1986; Scott, 1995; Jansson et al., 2007; Hyder and Abraha, 2008) as the institutional factors. However, for the purpose of thorough research, formal institutional factors should be distinguished from informal institutional factors – cultures, norms and ethical standards applicable in a given society (Peng, 2009). According to Demirbag et al. (2007), institutional immaturity raises transaction costs and risk level, and therefore in developing countries formal institutions are particularly important. The same applies to culture, ethical standards, the authority of government, the level of which is much lower than in developed countries (Brouthers et al., 1998). This is confirmed by the results of research studies on partner alliances from developed and developing countries, e.g. Kuad (2002). Hyder and Abraha (2008) point out that in transition economies there are certain barriers that significantly affect international alliances, such as: hierarchical working relationships, authoritarian leadership and

⁸ There is no clarity in the literature on the subject regarding the link between trust and social capital (Yoon and Hyun, 2010). Some researchers regard the two terms as synonymous (Fukuyama, 1995), some see trust as a source or form of social capital (Putnam, 1993; Coleman, 1988), and others as the sum of resources (actual or potential) resulting from all relationships in the analyzed society (Bourdieu, 1986; Burt, 1992; Yoon, 2010).

centralized decision making. They demonstrated that formal institutions and culture have an impact on learning processes in alliances, as well as on the effectiveness of collaboration in countries such as Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, Estonia, Russia, Romania and Bulgaria. The main barriers that they identified were language problems, attachment to tradition, short-term goals and centralized decision making. What's more, it is the cultural, economic and political differences between the countries of the partners that turned out to be the biggest threat to collaboration. Another important research result was that institutions appeared to be the most important during the initial phase of initiating alliances; their role is somewhat reduced during the operational phase. Socio-cultural, informal mechanisms can substitute or change the formal rules, but the extent of such phenomena depends on the institutional environment in which the collaboration takes place (Yoon and Hyun, 2010). What's more, Adobor (2011) draws attention to the fact that institutions also have an impact on the collaboration conditions created in various market sectors.

Market sector. It can be observed that in some market sectors there are many more alliances than in others. Current research shows that organizations initiate alliances because other players from the given sector also enter into such relationships (Narula and Hagedoorn, 1999). A clear leader when it comes to the number of alliances, alliance networks, as well as mergers and acquisitions is currently the ICT sector (Gabrielsson et al., 2006). This is associated with the processes of globalization as well as the technological environment. The characteristics of the market sector may influence the motivations and objectives of alliances (Li et al., 2012), e.g., according to the results of research studies on more than 400 alliances conducted by Li et al. (2012), in sectors with a high level of technology international alliances are mainly used to deal with the dynamic environment, and in sectors with a low level of technology – to share resources, risks and costs. In addition, it appears that the country of origin of the partner is much more important in the selection of the form of alliance, but the sector in which this partner operates moderates this influence (Chen, 2001). It can be observed that firms are more willing to collaborate with organizations in some sectors, while being reluctant to make alliances with other firms from other sectors. Perhaps this has to do with the reputation of the sector, which changes as the economic conditions change, among other things. However, so far, no empirical research studies have been conducted in this field.

Economic and technological factors. Both economic factors and the previously mentioned technological environment are pointed out in the literature on the subject as the most important causes of the currently observed dynamic growth in the number of alliances and networks (e.g. Chwistecka-Dudek and Sroka, 2000; Hao-Ma, 2004; Gulati, 1998, 2007; Golonka, 2012). This is primarily linked to the deepening processes of globalization and increasing competition, including from emerging markets, as well as to technological development.

The factors that may affect collaborative relationships between organizations are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 | External factors relevant to interorganizational collaboration

Factor	Relevance
National culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – interorganizational collaboration (e.g. Child and Faulkner, 1998; Lee, Li, Shenkar, 2008; Kogut and Singh, 1988; Kumar and Das, 2011; Bhaskaran, Gligorowska, 2009) – negotiations (Tinsley, Curhan and Kwak, 1999; Graham, Lee, Yang, 2006, Lin and Miller, 2003) – commitment in interorganizational relationships, sharing knowledge (Griffith, 2006, Siakas et al., 2010) – alliance portfolio configuration (Golonka, 2012a) – conflict resolution (Griffith, 2006, Fures et al., 2012) – trust in interorganizational relationships (Hofstede, 1980, Ibrahim and Ribbers, 2009, Doney et al., 1998, Monczka et al., 1998, Young-Ybarra and Wiersema, 1999). – risk perception in relationships (Delerue and Simon, 2009)
Trust*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – formation and development of collaborative relationships, harmony within the collaboration (Rampersad et al., 2010; Ventures, 2005) – international collaboration (Bianch and Saleh, 2008; Child, 2001) and international development (Fink and Kraus, 2007) – Transaction costs – entering into formal contracts (Malhotra and Murnighan, 2002, Larson 1992, Uzzi, 1997, Dyer and Singh, 1998) – control in the collaboration (Chen and Li, 2009)
Risk perception*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – trust in interorganizational relationships (Doney et al., 1998) – survival of the collaboration (Berkema and Vermeulen, 1997) – collaboration strategies (Shane and Venkataraman, 1996)
Formal institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – transaction costs and risk perception (Demirbag et al., 2007) – international collaboration, establishing alliances, learning processes in alliances (Hyder and Abraha, 2008) – conditions for the development of collaboration in various market sectors (Adobor, 2011) – socio-cultural factors (Brouthers et al., 1998, Yoon and Hyun, 2010)
Market sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – establishing collaboration (Narula and Hagedoorn, 1999; Gabrielsson et al., 2006) – collaboration motivations and objectives (Li et al., 2012) – selection of the form of alliances (Chen, 2001)
Economic factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – conditions for collaboration in various market sectors (e.g. Obłój, 2007; Gulati, 2007; Hao-Ma, 2004) – establishing collaboration, number of alliances (Chwistecka-Dudek and Sroka, 2000; Hao-Ma, 2004; Gulati, 1998, 2007)
Technological factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – establishing collaboration, number of alliances (Chwistecka-Dudek and Sroka, 2000; Stuart, 2000; Hao-Ma, 2004; Golonka, 2012)

* Trust (as well as social capital) and risk perception are linked to the socio-cultural context.

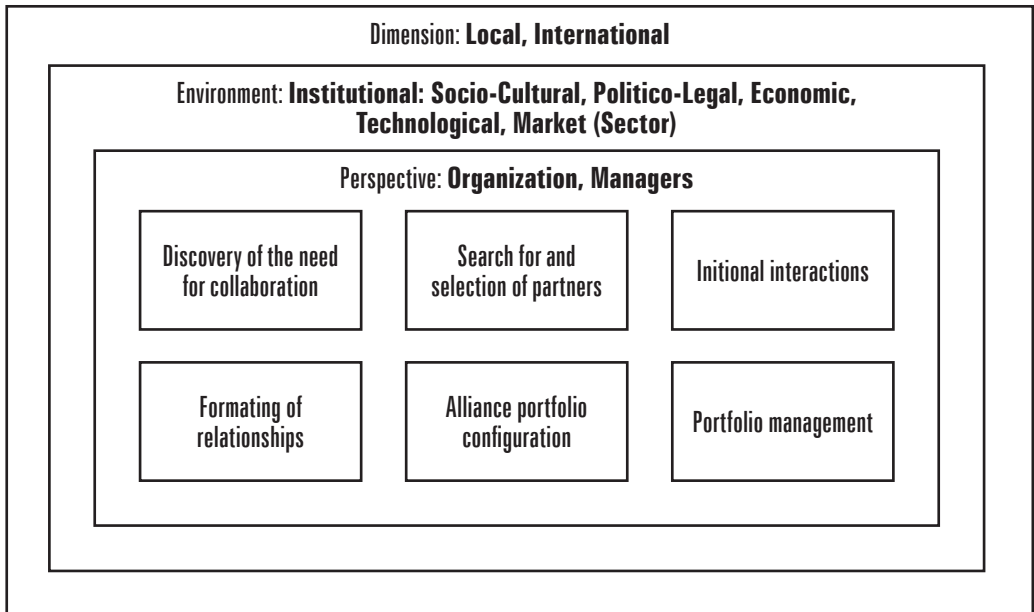
Source: own elaboration.

In addition to factors related to the organization's environment, one should not forget about the factors associated with the perspective from which interorganizational collaboration is analyzed. On the one hand, it may be the result of an organization's strategy, and on the other hand, of the individual characteristics of the managers that make the decisions. Imagine a situation in which from the strategic perspective it is clear that collaboration with foreign partners is necessary for international development, but from the perspective of the manager or managers such collaboration is impossible to establish or maintain. As an example here we can use the results of a research study on firms in the ICT sector in Poland, which demonstrated that firms are aware

of the importance of collaboration with foreign partners for their own development, but still do not have such partners in their portfolios and often do not even plan to establish such collaboration (Golonka, 2012b). Factors influencing this, apart from the earlier mentioned national culture and other external factors, are the objectives and motivations of managers, as well as their mentality (ranging from silo mentality to global mentality; Gupta and Govindarajan, 2002), i.e. individual personality traits. Another important factor that should not be overlooked is the impact the organization itself has on collaboration – alliance capability, the organizational culture, the associated employee mentality. However, it is clear that all these elements are influenced by institutional factors, and particularly socio-cultural factors.

Based on the available literature on the subject and the above considerations, a general model can be put forward, which organizes all the essential elements in terms of the analysis of the collaboration from a strategic perspective of firms, at every stage of its development (Figure 1).

Figure 1 | General model of collaboration with business partners from a strategic perspective



Source: own elaboration.

| Conclusions

Collaboration from a strategic point of view in a firm is a very complex phenomenon. The paper discusses mainly those aspects of interorganizational collaboration that are associated with the environment of the organization. To date, most research studies in this field have focused on how firms manage or try to manage the environment in which they operate and how they

establish collaboration with partners. This paper presents a slightly different approach – the aim is to determine how the environment affects interorganizational collaboration. As it turns out, it has a significant impact on the choice of partners with which an organization establishes collaboration, how the collaboration proceeds and what its results are. One of the biggest challenges faced by contemporary firms – especially those that operate in sectors where interorganizational collaboration is essential for the survival and development of the organization – is the strategic management of the relationships with all partners. Strategic relationship management here means using these relationships in order to create a competitive advantage, taking into account all collaborative relationships and combining the strategic objectives of the organization with creating an alliance portfolio. It is also important here to take into account the external factors that may have a significant impact on establishing collaboration and managing it. Based on the presented literature analysis, it can be concluded that in some countries it is much more difficult to collaborate than in others, precisely because of their socio-cultural context. This gives rise to many important research questions in this field, which need to be considered. These are the following: To what extent do institutional factors – both formal and informal, influence each stage of firms creating and developing alliance portfolios? How do firms establish collaboration with various partners and how do they manage this collaboration in a variety of settings, on the local and international level? And also – how do firms that operate in an unfavorable environment for collaboration cope? Here the respective stages of establishing and managing collaboration should be distinguished. Perhaps a variety of factors can influence, to varying degrees, the respective stages of establishing and developing relationships with partners? These issues are becoming particularly important in Poland, where the national culture is characterized by a high uncertainty avoidance index as well as a high power distance index, along with a high individualism index.

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