
Securing the future: competitive but 'fair'

Jacqueline Hall

University of Sheffield, UK

Key Words: Fair trade, SMEs, Intangible, Tangible Success Factors, Competitiveness.

Abstract

Purpose: A critical exploration of the interconnectedness between business and human tangible and intangible success factors that enable SMEs to balance values based decisions with business competitiveness.

Design/Methodology: Interpretivism and social constructivism. Inductive exploratory research, using a case study approach with 13 SMEs, with a narrative interview approach based upon Porter's (1980) competitiveness framework. Content analysis draws upon grounded theory to develop a coding framework to present tangible and intangible success factors.

Findings: Intangible factors for competitiveness are critical for success, together with human values that sustain SME's reputation and intellectual capital, enabling them to compete and respond to the power of significant large retail buyers, currency fluctuation and costs.

Research Limitations/Implications: The study was confined to four UK regions: Cumbria, Lancashire, Yorkshire and London. Future studies should explore whether the impact of human values upon competitiveness are consistent over time.

Practical Implications: Typology of fair trade SMEs that illustrate the potential impact of mainstreaming strategies upon business competitiveness. The model and framework can be adopted by SMEs, consultants and be applied across values based enterprises to contribute towards the identification and management of business, human and intellectual capital.

Originality/value: Research on fair trade SMEs is limited, within a growing, but competitive virtuous market, where it will be insufficient to trade upon fair trade credentials alone. Intangible and tangible success factors have been developed within a coding model, together with a typology of fair trade SMEs.
