Chapter 2
Specialization vs. Diversification
Decision Making: Driving Forces and Challenges

Dimitris Folinas
ATEI Thessaloniki, Greece & University of Liverpool, UK

Mohammed Althrawa
Gulf Air Filters Factory Company, Saudi Arabia

ABSTRACT
This chapter has two main aims: first, to explore the role of various economical, financial, and strategic forces influencing firms towards diversification and specialization decision making within the Saudi Arabian manufacturing industry, and second to assess the challenges for both types of companies at the time of decision making and afterwards. Surveying 100 decision makers in the industrial cities of Riyadh using questionnaires developed for both groups, the chapter initially attempts to identify the factors that had the greatest impact on firm performance based on firm returns on investment. Several factors were found significant; first, attempts of specialization were found associated with risk avoidance and managers craving to achieve industry dominant economic features, whilst results show an increased concern among diversified firm decision makers towards changes in import and export policies and regulations. Moreover, industry type was found effective in managerial responses as they weigh the role of the factors presented to the direction of the expansion made.

INTRODUCTION
One noted business trend of the 20th century was the expansion of the small and medium sized manufacturers forming into large scale or multinational corporations (Chen, Hu and Zhang, 2010). Expansions can take several forms (Wang et al. 2009). Most common approaches are Diversification and Specialization: 1) Diversification, by introducing new products and diversifying businesses into new fields of business (or applying economics of scale), and 2) Specialization, by specializing and enhancing current production line capabilities.
Specialization vs. Diversification Decision Making

The decision to diversify or specialize depends on many factors economical/financial, technological and strategic. Today, more than ever, the above decision has become crucial and it is a critical success factor of the expansion strategy of manufacturers in order to establish better grounds and sustain growth in face of world free trade and local/international competition (Bartkus and Hassan, 2009; Gompers et al. 2008).

Moreover, this decision has been the subject of many research and business initiatives (Zeleny, 2010; Nooraie, 2011). However the success rates of either of the above expansion strategy have varied, not only across time but also among regions (Michalopoulos, Georgiou and Paparrizos, 2009). Continues changes in the business environment have many consequences on summarizing specific factors for decision makers to consider in regards to expansion decision making.

This difficulty is based also to the complexity to define both strategies (Kang et al. 2011; Markides and William, 1996). Scholars have long argued about the definitions of specialization and diversification in business applications. Table 1 presents the most common definitions that can be found in the literature:

Table 1. Specialization/diversification definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialization</th>
<th>Diversification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Specialization in an economic sense refers to individuals and organizations focusing on the limited range of production tasks they perform best” (Hall, 2009).</td>
<td>“A risk-reduction strategy that involves adding product, services, location, customers and markets to your company’s portfolio” (Hall and Lee, 1993).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Organizations each concentrating their productive efforts on a rather limited range of tasks. Specialization entails focusing on a narrow area of knowledge or skill or activity” (Johnson, n.d).</td>
<td>“Diversification is the process of purchasing stocks, bonds, and other investments from a variety of different companies and funds so that you have a representation of different industries and market sectors” (Stone, n.d).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Specialization/diversification definitions from dictionaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specialization</th>
<th>Diversification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The act of specializing; making something suitable for a special purpose” (thefreedictionary.com, n.d.).</td>
<td>“A portfolio strategy designed to reduce exposure to risk by combining a variety of investments, such as stocks, bonds, and real estate” (InvestorWords.com, n.d.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Specialization is the method of doing work for a singular, narrow, or limited scope of products, services, markets, or objectives” (Manalastas, n.d.).</td>
<td>“Process of becoming varied; sale of a variety of products and services” (English-test.net, n.d.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Become adapted to a specific function or environment; undergo specialization, to concentrate on a particular activity or product” (yourdictionary.com, n.d).</td>
<td>“The method of reducing risk by distributing investment assets among a variety of investment securities which have different risk/reward ratios” (InvestorDictionary.com, n.d).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bruche (2000) considered the topic of diversification and specialization too complex to generalize despite the great number of theories and empirical work applied in the field. In the 90’s, Ernest and Lee (1993) in recognition of the inherent issues argued that the definition of diversification (as in firms operating in more than one product/business line) is outdated and international/market diversification has now replaced that narrow prospective. Trellis (2005) identified three meanings for diversification. The first is “to give variety to, or to vary.” The second is “to extend business activities into disparate fields,” and the third is “to distribute investments in order to average the risk of loss.” It is obvious that each of these meanings provides a separate rationale for diversification. Additionally, Cengage and Helms (2006), as well as, Kotelnikov (n.d.) brake down diversification to two forms: 1) Vertical (or Concentric) diversification: as in companies moving into related areas of their supply chain (usually when volumes justify launching new operations), and 2) Horizontal (or Conglomerate) diversification: as in expanding operations to
27 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the product’s webpage: [www.igi-global.com/chapter/specialization-vs-diversification-decision-making/102148?camid=4v1](www.igi-global.com/chapter/specialization-vs-diversification-decision-making/102148?camid=4v1)

This title is available in Advances in Business Information Systems and Analytics, InfoSci-Books, Business, Administration, and Management, InfoSci-Business and Management, InfoSci-Select, InfoSci-Select, InfoSci-Select. Recommend this product to your librarian: [www.igi-global.com/e-resources/library-recommendation/?id=73](www.igi-global.com/e-resources/library-recommendation/?id=73)

Related Content

Team Learning Systems as a Collaborative Technology for Rapid Knowledge Creation
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/team-learning-systems-collaborative-technology/11329?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/team-learning-systems-collaborative-technology/11329?camid=4v1a)

Foundation of Linear Programming: A Managerial Perspective from Solving System of Inequalities to Software Implementation
[www.igi-global.com/article/foundation-linear-programming/69993?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/foundation-linear-programming/69993?camid=4v1a)

A Predictive E-Health Information System: Diagnosing Diabetes Mellitus Using Neural Network Based Decision Support System
[www.igi-global.com/article/a-predictive-e-health-information-system/124311?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/a-predictive-e-health-information-system/124311?camid=4v1a)

A Strategic Perspective on Using Symbolic Transformation in STEM Education: Robotics and Automation
[www.igi-global.com/article/a-strategic-perspective-on-using-symbolic-transformation-in-stem-education/149661?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/a-strategic-perspective-on-using-symbolic-transformation-in-stem-education/149661?camid=4v1a)