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Analysis of an inter-firm partnership between a multinational and a local company Case: Enad-Henkel

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Abstract

The use of inter-company partnership agreements has become, over the last two decades, an increasingly popular strategic option, as it offers significant potential benefits to the companies that use it, thus contributing to an improvement in competitiveness. However, such an option is not free of risks and disadvantages, and of certain conflicts whose consequences can be harmful, not only for the alliance but also for the local partner. Therefore, in this paper, we will try to answer the question whether alliances are really a valid strategic alternative for the local company. We try to answer this question by analysing the motivations and resources of the partners. For this purpose, we propose hypotheses on the possible relationship between the motivations and resources involved and the success of the partnership. The hypotheses are introduced by a theoretical argument based on the existing literature and are then tested on a case study of the Enad-Henkel alliance, adopting a qualitative study. Our results show that partnership with foreign partners are only a successful if the local partner has specific bargaining power and learning motivations.

Keywords: partnership, local partner, foreign partner, motivations, resources, asymmetry, effects.

JEL Classification: J53, M29, F23.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Since the early 1980s, the interest of strategy researchers in inter-firm partnership has increased dramatically, resulting in a proliferation of articles and books on strategic alliances and cooperative arrangements. This has also allowed the study of this phenomenon to be approached from different theoretical perspectives such as those offered by transaction cost theory, agency theory, resource theory, or the organisational learning approach, considerably enriching the understanding derived from the literature from the strategic approach alone. Indeed, these different approaches have helped to explain why companies resort to cooperation and to identify the main factors determining the success or failure of these agreements. Indeed, alliances offer many important potential benefits, but they are also characterised by equally important risks for the allied firms, mainly due to the difficulty of reaching an equilibrium, which is also unstable. It is now clear that alliances are a versatile strategic option, with many potential benefits for both local and large companies, in both traditional and emerging sectors, to support strategic decisions such as innovation, internationalisation, diversification, etc. Thus, business-to-business cooperation can be seen as an option that

can help achieve almost any objective. However, it is not clear that this option is used in the same way by all kinds of companies. And so we ask the question: What are the basic conditions that help local enterprises to achieve their goal through inter-firm partnership?

Thus, the central objective of this paper is to verify whether firms are more or less likely to resort to cooperation, depending on their size and their strategic inputs and orientations. Understanding this aspect of the phenomenon of alliances is, in our opinion, a necessary step in formulating, evaluating, and enriching some institutional programmes aimed at improving the competitiveness of local companies, and encouraging international companies to share their efforts and some of their resources and skills, in order to take advantage of the synergies thus created through cooperation.

To answer this question, we have structured our paper as follows:

First, we review the main benefits, risks and challenges of alliances, in order to identify some reasons why alliances may be more or less attractive to each of the partners, i.e. local and foreign. Then we have presented our study based on a qualitative investigation in order to test our hypothesis,



through semi-structured interviews using verbatim extraction as a means of analysis. Finally, we discuss the results and present our conclusions.

2. **REVIEW OF LITERATURE:**

Many motives for partnership have been identified in the literature, and the logic of alliances can be seen as threefold, in that the understanding of the benefits of cooperation comes mainly from three different and complementary perspectives (Menguzzato, M; 1995): that of strategy (Contractor and Lorange, 1988), that of transaction costs theory (Hennart,

1988), and that of organizational learning (Hamel, 1991; Mowery et al. 1996). But from a practical point of view in developing countries between a foreign partner and a local firm, these relationships are seen as offensive or defensive strategies (Bekkar, 2007), depending on the reasons for the business-to-business relationship.

We show the main reasons, from different perspectives, for forming partnership agreement in the following table:

Table1: Main reasons to set a cooperation agreement

Main reasons for the defensive partnership		Main reasons for the offensive partnership	
Foreign companies	Local companies	Foreign companies	Local companies
Spreading the risks of operating in foreign markets; Circumventing legislative restrictions; Coping with rising factor costs in industrialised countries; Addressing barriers to growth in local markets; Gradually implement an exit strategy.	Renewing technical processes; Addressing the under-use of existing facilities; Find funding opportunities through credit lines from northern governments; Overcoming barriers to exporting to foreign markets.	Entering markets that are known to be difficult, remote, or regulated; Securing new market opportunities; Enhancing its technological potential; Ensure a secure supply of raw materials; Rationalizing production.	Enhancing a business asset; Start the production phase; Acquire new technologies and establish better technological control over them; Serving an integration strategy Achieving the technological standards required by export markets.

Source : Adapted from BEKKAR, B, « La coentreprise comme option stratégique de coopération entre le Nord et le Sud » Revue Algérienne de management, numéro 3. Juin 2008, p70.

In this paper, we will, on the one hand, try to verify the motivations and resources attributed to partnership correspond to both the local and the foreign partner. On the other hand, if the logic underlying the cooperation strategies seems solid and it is clear that alliances can bring important advantages, it is also necessary to take into account that they are not free of disadvantages, risks, and conflicts, as many obstacles sown on the path of the alliance (Menguzzato, 1992). Any company considering using the cooperation option will therefore tend to evaluate and compare the potential advantages and disadvantages of cooperation before deciding on its appropriateness. It should be noted that cooperative relationships are characterised by their instability (Gomes-Casseres, 1987; Bleeke and Ernst, 1991; Yan and Gray, 1994; Ariño and de la Torre, 1998), with the companies involved in alliance pursuing, of course, common and/or complementary objectives, but also, at the same time, their own objectives (Borys and Jemison, 1989; Killing, 1988). Just as the conditions of the business environment change, the interdependence between the allied firms and their own respective goals and strategies may change over time; the balance between common and individual goals being difficult to achieve and maintain, especially in the case of horizontal co-operations. On the other hand, organisational and cultural differences between allies are inevitable, although they can be made manageable in the early stages of the process

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(Menguzzato and Dasi, 1999), but they can considerably complicate the conduct of joint activity through ambiguity. This ambiguity and instability characteristic of alliances can be aggravated by the greater or lesser vulnerability of the partners, who have to share resources, knowledge, and knowhow, the loss of which could be serious for them, or for one of them. Thus, interdependence emphasises the importance of the more or less cooperative behaviour of the other (Emerson, 1962; Anderson and Narus, 1984; Escriba and Menguzzato, 1999) and the risk of opportunistic behaviour of the partners (Kogut, 1988), that central imperfection of the economic agent located within the theory of transaction costs (Williamson, 1975 and 1985) which may be, among other dangers, at the origin of the appropriation and dissemination of key knowledge and skills (Hennart et al, 1999; Dussauge and Garrette, 1999).

There seems to be no strong presumption about the appropriateness of using cooperations and alliances, because certain organisational and/or strategic characteristics of firms make them more or less inclined to form them, depending on their capacity to manage this very particular kind of unstable, complex, conflictual and even dangerous inter-organizational relationships for the less gifted, and which normally require different systems of coordination and control.

3. RESEARCH AIM, METHODOLOGY AND HYPOTHESES:

In order to answer our research questions, we opted for the qualitative approach as a methodological means which is based on the analysis of descriptive data, such as written or



spoken words and the observational behaviour of people according to Taylor and Bogdan (In Kakai 2008). It refers to a research method interested in meaning and observation, so it deals with data that is difficult to quantify.

Our survey was aimed at the local partner's managers, and was designed to identify the company's motivations and to understand how the negotiations were conducted. It consisted of two parts: a preliminary questionnaire in three blocks of questions, each block relating to one of our four research questions (motivations, resources and knowledge transfer, the effect on both partners, and finally the impact on the competitiveness of the local partner) and a series of interviews conducted during September 2019 with executives of the local company. These semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face with managers of the local company. They lasted an average of two hours and allowed for the collection of information in addition to that gathered through the questionnaire. Finally, we had recourse to internal documents and the Internet to find out about the development of this partnership in order to have more objectivity in our analysis, and to secondary sources of information (press cuttings, reports, and monographs) in order to complete our analysis of the effects of the agreement. The following table summarises the study methodology:

Table 2: Summary of the study methodology

	Jummary of th		
Data	Objectives	Source	Links to the
collection			research
			questions
Comparison	Analysis of	Local	Reviewing
of the local	the	company	the results
partner	competitive		of the
before and	position		alliance
after the			
alliance			
Documentary	Secondary	Internet,	Motivations
research and	data	press	and
monitoring	analysis	articles,	information
		and	on the
		company	effect of the
		documents	alliance on
			the foreign
			partner
Semi-	Details of	Three	Motivations
structured	assessments	executives	of the local
interviews		Senior	partner;
with the local		staff of the	Effect of
partner's		local	the alliance
managers		partner	on the
			company

In order to deal with the main problem of our paper concerning the basic conditions that help local enterprises to achieve their goal through inter-firm cooperation, we have set three hypotheses which are:

Hypothesis 1: the succeed of the cooperation depend on the partnership motivation;

Hypothesis 2: the resources committed by both partners impact on the cooperation;

Hypothesis 3: the asymmetric level between partners affect the finality of the agreement.

In the following, we will provide the results in order to get answers to our research problem. As we have shown before we have chosen to adopt a qualitative study which has been conducted by us on the basis of semi-structured interviews, using an interview guide. The data collected will be a "verbatim" that we will process and analyse according to the themes raised in our interview guide (in the appendix).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

We remember that the interview campaign carried out during our qualitative study is characterised by semi-directive interviews in order to shed light on the context of the conclusion of the different stages of the Henkel-Enad partnership. The analysis of the corpus collected through the interviews with the executives of the local company by the method of verbatim analysis allowed us to identify several themes that frame and describe the partnerships between a foreign partner and a local company. For this purpose, we have grouped these themes into three clusters. The first group describes the strategic motivations of the partners and how negotiations are conducted. The second group describes the resources committed by both partners and the transfer of know-how. Finally, the third group illustrates the effects of the partnership on Enad's in order to know the finality of this agreement.

In order to test the first hypothesis which is: **the succeed of the cooperation depend on the partnership motivation,** we have identified the statements that illustrate the theme of this hypothesis, so we present the interpretations of this theme are summarised in the following table:

Table 3: Themes that emerged from Enad interview verbatim for the first hypothesis

and for tenders the initiator of launched in 2000, this Enad received go	Interpretations
and for tenders the initiator of launched in 2000, this Enad received go	
including that of Henkel, the The initiator was the ministry the following the is implementation process.	ne initiative and e contact were anned by the overnment llowing the new overnment policy. Herefore, Enad do nly to follow is initiative which part of the ivatisation of oblic enterprises.

	public	
	companies.	
The choice of partner	"This German group is a large multinational, practically the first on the world market, and it is the only one which accepted to keep the restructuring of the 03 sites (Sour ghezlane, chelghoume laid and Réghaia, and the one which had a rather consistent financial envelope, and accepted the maintenance of the jobs thus with the CNPE (National Council of the Participations of the State) one had opted for this partner for its financial envelope. "We also chose a group that has know-how in the detergent industry, and for us it was an opportunity to join forces with this internationally renowned group.	According to the director of the partnership of Enad, the Henkel group was chosen because of its international reputation and its tangible and intangible assets which are different from those of Enad and therefore complementary. Thus, this alliance allows Enad to increase its development capacity by having access to its financial resources to save it from bankruptcy, as well as to its intangible resources and its knowledge.
Conduct of the negotiations	"The negotiations for this agreement lasted six months.	This time spent in negotiation shows us that there were difficulties between the two partners.
Difficulties in negotiating the agreement	"No, there were no particular difficulties, but at the beginning of the negotiations we felt that we had some	It must be said that there was an asymmetry in bargaining power. Henkel had taken advantage of Enad's lack of bargaining

	bargaining power over them because Henkel absolutely wanted to get the contract, but as the negotiations went on, they had some power over us, and we mustn't forget that we wanted at all costs to follow the new industrial strategy of the government at the time, which was to privatise the public companies.	experience to strengthen its bargaining power. According to Schelling (1956) and Tinlot and Mothe (2005) when a firm is in a hurry to cooperate to improve its situation and obtain financial benefits quickly, it offers the available partner an advantage in the relationship. In an irrevocable situation of urgency, the alliance is the only opportunity for strategic deployment. Available partners will be able to take advantage of this weakness to strengthen their bargaining power.
Partners' objectives	"The main reasons for our decision to enter into a partnership agreement with Henkel was to ensure the survival of the company", "it should not be forgotten that Enad was in financial difficulties when the partnership agreement was concluded". "Our main objective was not to increase our competitiveness. "Henkel's strategic motivations were to be able to access the Algerian market,	The objective of Enad is to achieve continuity and survival of the company and to avoid bankruptcy, so it can be said that improving competitiveness was not a primary objective for the local company. Moreover, according to Enad executives, Henkel's objective was to establish itself on the Algerian market at all costs.

and to access our	
commercial	
network.	

In order to test the second hypothesis which is: **the resources committed by both partners' impact on the cooperation 'success,** we have identified the statements that illustrate the theme of this hypothesis, so we present the interpretations of this theme are summarised in the following table:

Table 4. Themes that emerged from Enad interview verbatim for the second hypothesis

Theme: the resources committed by both partners impact on the cooperation 'success		
Sub-theme	Verbatim	Interpretations
Resources of the foreign partner	"At the time, we wanted to access financial and technological resources through this partnership.	Henkel contributed its financial assets and its technology and know- how.
Local partner resources	"We made our knowledge network and production facilities available to Henkel, even though Henkel knew that the condition of our factories was poor.	Enad provided Henkel with its network of knowledge, such as relations with local authorities and suppliers. And also its knowledge of the Algerian market, not to mention its production facilities.
Production techniques	"There was an exchange of detergent formulas. "And especially since we gave them the formula of the ISIS product, they added other components that we did not know at the time. "Thanks to the restructuring of the production sites and the upgrading programme, they have improved the production processes.	Enad provided Henkel with its star product Isis and its composition formula, and Henkel improved this product by adding new components, thus transferring new techniques to Enad. Without forgetting that within the framework of this alliance, Henkel had the task of restructuring the production sites by modernising them.
Staff	"Upgrading of	Henkel's task was to

training	staff at the three	maintain the staff and
	production sites".	to train them by
		transferring know-
		how, as stipulated in
		the memorandum of
		understanding
		between the two
		partners.

In order to test the third hypothesis which is: **the asymmetric level between partners affect the finality of the agreement**, we have identified the statements that illustrate the theme this hypothesis, so we present the interpretations of this theme are summarised in the following table:

Table 5. Themes that emerged from Enad interview verbatim for the third hypothesis

Theme: the asymmetric level between partners affect			
the finality of the agreement			
Sub- theme	Verbatim	Interpretations	
Appreciat ion of the partnersh ip with Henkel	"This partnership was beneficial at the macro level for the country more than at the micro level for the company Enad. "Thanks to this partnership, we managed to maintain the survival of the detergent business in Algeria.	The partnership with Henkel was an opportunity for the survival of the company and to maintain jobs at the time. But also this partnership allowed the development of the detergent market in Algeria.	
Enad's reaction to Henkel	"Now Henkel is our strongest competitor.	After the end of the alliance, Henkel became a fierce competitor of Enad.	
Enad's competiti veness after the partnersh ip	"A positive effect, thanks to this partnership, was that a large sum of money was made available for staff training, more than 200 million dinars. "Our situation has certainly improved, but our competitiveness remains mediocre compared to the change in the detergent sector in	This partnership led to changes in the environment, especially after its transformation into a fully privatised joint venture, which caused a considerable loss of market share for Enad, and thus its problem of poor sales. Enad's competitiveness is still low compared to an internationally renowned competitor.	

However, Algeria, we must its not forget that we competitiveness have gone from a needs to be improved monopolistic despite the fact that it market has benefited from to market of pure learning during its perfect and partnership with competition. Henkel. "But Henkel has benefited the company's lack of from this partnership, experience through Enad, it has negotiations been able to establish played tricks on itself in Algeria. The us and Henkel, asymmetry which is bargaining power multinational with was to Enad's a lot of experience disadvantage, which negotiations, had a negative effect took advantage of lack of competitiveness after the partnership. experience and we were going to pay dearly for it.

Examination of these tables has enabled us to identify several findings which are as follows:

- 1. Concerning the motivations of the partners have impacted the course of negotiation, we can say that the motivations of Enad from this partnership was centred on the endowment of financial resources in the first place, because its situation before the conclusion of the partnership contract with Henkel was in deficit, and given that the choice was made on the partner who had the most financial resources, because the main objective of Enad before the conclusion of the alliance was survival, given the will of the State to disengage from the public enterprises at the time with a view to privatizing the detergents sector. Also, Enad favoured secondly the contribution of intangible assets (notoriety, brand image, know-how, management, and marketing expertise) in the choice of its foreign partner Henkel, because its second objective was to improve the quality of detergent products on the Algerian market. It can be said that in the case of the Enad-Henkel agreement, Enad seemed perfectly vulnerable to its partner, despite the fact that it had a problem of poor sales, it favoured the contribution of financial assets because it wanted to achieve the objective of survival, so this finding confirm the first hypothesis that the succeed of the cooperation depend on the partnership motivation.
- 2. Concerning the resources of the two partners, in our study we raised the point that the resource inputs of the two partners were of different natures. However, we concluded that the level of asymmetry between the two partners was very high precisely with regard

- to the size of the partners, the capabilities and resources committed, the level of experience in alliances, the level of development, and the geographical area. As a result, Henkel participated with a considerable share in the financial investments for the development and upgrading of all the services related to the activity, especially the production plant in Sour ghezlane. On the other hand, the contributions of the local partner can be summarised as qualified human resources in the field of detergents, a leading product portfolio, knowledge of the market and consumer culture, and a position in a relational network. At the market level, the local partner represents a solid support for the multinational, in terms of knowledge, relative to the local consumer culture, was a source of advantage and creation of added value in the activity. But, we can say that apart from their asymmetrical aspects, the partners' contributions are complementary and have strongly contributed to the achievement of results and objectives. complementarity of the partners' resources is also visible in the development and marketing of the products. The local partner offers the right positioning of the product range and the multinational participates with its know-how. However, it can be noted that the complementarity of the tangible and intangible resources is an implementation of new working procedures improving the skills in detergents and liquids on the Algerian market. The local partner benefits from the contributions in terms of technical, industrial, marketing, and commercial know-how and training. The latter have enabled the human resources of the local partner to gain experience and improve their skills and know-how of a very solid and internationally renowned company through the upgrading programmes, so this asymmetry in resources committed by both partners has impacted on the cooperation 'success.
- Concerning the different effects of the partnership on the two partners, it can be said that the technological, managerial, and governance asymmetry of the local partner gives the multinational more power when negotiating. The hierarchical and decision-making dominance contributes to the amplification of the gap and the weakening of the local partner. This trajectory is predefined by the multinational in order to progressively take over the activity and unilaterally benefit from the profits. For this reason, the asymmetry of contributions and the importance of the resources committed by Henkel do not seem to be a source of problems. Henkel was strategically and gradually preparing the ground for the full takeover of the alliance. It is important to point out that there were conflicts and divergences between the partners throughout the cooperation relationship,

however, there were problems related to differences in mentalities and ways of seeing things: different systems, ways of working. The development of the level of interdependence through the takeover of the joint venture was also a strategic move, with the multinational developing the product and business portfolio with the local partner in order to understand the market for new products and subsequently take over the entire joint venture. Henkel took over the entire share capital and transformed the company into a subsidiary. However, during this relationship, the local partner was able to improve and reduce its technical dependence through effective learning based on the successful cross-fertilisation of skills and know-how with the rapid absorption and assimilation of new knowledge. This evolution allowed a better productivity and profitability of the activity but after the privatisation of the HEA, the foreign partner turned into a fierce competitor. So we can say according to this finding that the asymmetric level between partners affect the finality of the agreement.

5. CONCLUSION:

The argument developed and the empirical results achieved in this paper allow us to affirm that inter-firm cooperation is a versatile strategic option. We have verified that the choice of the foreign partner is largely based on the motivations of the local firm to overcome the resource gap. This has been observed by the local company to want to overcome the deficit in financial resources. Thus, our study allowed us to conclude that the choice of the local partner by the foreign partner is largely based on the will to acquire an already existing market share. On the other hand, our study has allowed us to add a finding that the bargaining power of the foreign partner, and the inexperience of the local partner had a negative effect on the partnership. Indeed, our research helps to better understand the nature of the motivations between the partner relationships in a context of motivation, asymmetry of resources that could impact the finality of the cooperation agreement, so we could notice as follows:

- The evolution of the negotiating power within the partnership relations is a source of future instability in the relations, especially to the detriment of the weak partner.
- Financial motivations do not necessarily help the local partner to better position in the partnership, as the latter requires learning and know-how incentives, and The foreign partner seeks to acquire the so-called resources of the local partner in terms of the local market network (consumer habits, suppliers and public authorities), because it has tried at all costs to minimise its transaction costs in order to be able to penetrate the Algerian detergents market and to set up there via its partner, and has

- therefore taken advantage of the non-experience and vulnerability of Enad in terms of negotiations.
- The asymmetry in resources does not directly impact the finality of cooperation, as it can ensure a better complementarity and synergy for both partners but it depends on their motivations.

APPENDICES (INTERVIEW GUIDE)

Theme 1: the succeed of the cooperation depend on the partnership motivation,

- What did your agreement with the Henkel Group consist of?
- 2. Did you have any difficulties in negotiating the agreement?
- 3. How long did the negotiations of the agreement with Henkel last?
- 4. Who was mandated by your company to negotiate the agreement and where did the negotiations take place?
- 5. Were there any points of disagreement? How were they resolved?
- 6. Did you feel that you were in control of the negotiations of the agreement with the Henkel management?
- 7. What were the main reasons for your decision to enter into a partnership agreement with Henkel?
- To have a good organisation
- To gain more market share
- To increase your competitiveness
- To have the reputation and status of a multinational company
- To avoid the disappearance of your company
- 8. Could you choose and prioritise the reasons below (ranking the reasons in descending order of relative importance)
- 9. Did Enad have financial difficulties (indebtedness, cash flow problems, bank loan repayment difficulties, etc.) at the time the agreement was signed?
- 10. What were the objectives (common to both partners) of this partnership?
- 11. What were Henkel's objectives through this partnership?
- Market access
- Cost and risk sharing
- To achieve financial benefits
- Benefit from your market knowledge
- Access to your network of contacts (your personal knowledge)
- 12. What were your company's objectives for this partnership?
- 13. To what extent did the agreement with Henkel meet your company's expectations and objectives?
- 14. Was increasing the competitiveness of your company the main objective?
- 15. What was the duration of this partnership agreement and in which year did it start?



Theme 2: the resources committed by both partners impact on the cooperation's success

what were the resources you wished to access through this partnership that were agreed in the agreement? (you can choose one or more answers)

- The partner's financial resources
- Its human resources
- Its physical resources (production sites, machines...)
- Its technological resources (know-how, patents...)
- Other.....
- 16. What resources and skills did your company bring to the cooperation?
- 17. Are there any skills and competences belonging to your company that your partner should not access?
- Yes
- No
- 18. If YES, which ones?
- 19. By what means could you prevent your partner from accessing these skills and know-how?
- 20. What resources and skills did your partner bring to the cooperation?
- 21. What resources and skills did you have the right to control?
- 22. How did you master the know-how and skills of your partner?
- Through training of your staff by this partner
- Through working together with this partner
- Other....
- 23. Was there a transfer of a new production method from the Henkel Group? If not, what was the nature of the transfer?
- 24. 26. As a result of the partnership agreement, there have been changes in decision-making in your company. Can you identify the functions for which your company retains decision-making autonomy?
- 25. What were your partner's requirements for management changes?

Theme 3: the asymmetric level between partners affect the finality of the agreement

- 26. What can you say about the evolution of Enad's market share before, during, and after the partnership with Henkel?
- 27. What were the new products launched under the Henkel brand?)
- 28. How did your company react to its direct competitors before and after the partnership with Henkel?
- 29. How does Enad react to the Henkel group now?
- 30. Do you think that your level of competitiveness before the conclusion of the contract with the Henkel group has influenced the course, duration, and purpose of the partnership? How did it affect you?
- 31. Overall, do you think that the partnership with the Henkel group has improved the competitiveness of

Enad?

32. What is your overall assessment of the partnership agreement with Henkel?

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