

MECHANISM FOR ENSURING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF SMALL BUSINESSES

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Abstract. The research develops a mechanism for ensuring the competitiveness of small businesses. *The subject of the research* is the theoretical and applied development of a mechanism to ensure the competitiveness of small businesses under conditions of economic instability, wartime challenges, and post-war recovery. The study focuses on conceptualizing and structuring such a mechanism, taking into account both internal and external factors that influence business competitiveness. Special attention is given to the dynamic business environment, which demands resilience, adaptability, and innovation from small enterprises. *Research objective.* The main aim of the study is to design a modern, comprehensive mechanism that ensures the competitiveness of small businesses, tailored to their developmental stage and strategic needs. Specific objectives include identifying and justifying the structural elements of the mechanism – its principles, tools, strategies, models, and subsystems; determining appropriate criteria for assessing competitiveness; and developing a flexible, adaptive framework for managerial decision-making, based on the enterprise's characteristics and market positioning. *Methodological tools.* The study employs a combination of methodological principles (systematic development, transformation, innovation, balance, stimulation) and management methods (marketing, economic, and organizational). The mechanism also integrates analytical tools for assessing competitiveness; digital tools for process automation and communication; financial and legal instruments; and strategic tools for maintaining long-term competitive advantages. Conceptual models – such as the value orientation model, the product life cycle model, and Porter's five forces – are employed to guide strategic decision-making. Additionally, the research explores the role of institutional, financial, legal, and consulting subsystems in supporting the mechanism and promoting sustainable development. *Research conclusion.* The study concludes that the proposed mechanism enables the individualization of strategies and models for enhancing competitiveness based on a business's development level, market conditions, and sustainability criteria. It promotes effective management interaction, facilitates the transformation of competitive advantages into long-term market positions, and supports balanced economic, social, and environmental goals. The mechanism addresses the realities of wartime and post-war economies through the introduction of innovative tools and adaptive strategies. Further research will focus on refining competitiveness strategies and developing business models aligned with dynamic market demands and sustainable development objectives.

Keywords: mechanism, competitiveness, small business, enterprise, competitive advantages, sustainability, security, strategy, model.

JEL Classification: M13, M21

1. Introduction

In modern conditions, small businesses play a key role in the development of national economies, serving as an important driver of employment, innovation, and regional development. However, recent global and national challenges have significantly affected their functioning and sustainability. The destructive economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic,

followed by large-scale military aggression in Ukraine, have created extraordinary obstacles for small enterprises. These include broken supply chains, reduced consumer demand, logistical disruptions, limited access to finance, and increased security risks. As a result, the traditional approaches and mechanisms for ensuring business competitiveness have lost their effectiveness or require substantial revision.

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The processes of post-war recovery, European integration, and transition towards sustainable development models necessitate a new vision of how competitiveness should be ensured in small businesses. Under these conditions, the issue of forming a comprehensive, flexible, and adaptive mechanism that would provide not only short-term survival but also long-term development and growth becomes highly relevant. Small businesses must now operate in an environment characterized by high uncertainty, complex regulatory changes, and limited resources, which requires them to strengthen their competitive advantages, enhance resilience, and ensure strategic adaptability.

At the same time, existing scientific and practical approaches to managing competitiveness often remain fragmented or outdated. Many models do not consider the specific challenges of wartime and post-war economies, nor do they adequately integrate key dimensions such as sustainability, digitalization, environmental awareness, or security. Therefore, there is a pressing need to develop a new, systemically structured mechanism that would reflect both the internal capabilities of small enterprises and the external threats and opportunities they face.

The purpose of this research is to develop a modern mechanism for ensuring the competitiveness of small businesses, adapted to the realities of transformational change, with clearly defined structural elements: management subjects and objects, principles, methods, tools, strategies, models, and subsystems. Particular emphasis is placed on the possibility of individualizing this mechanism depending on the level of development and strategic goals of the enterprise.

2. The Essence of the Mechanism

A review of the essence of the mechanism for ensuring competitiveness allows us to conclude that it is based on the following criteria:

- Methods, tools, principles, and strategies, the implementation of which allows small businesses to achieve their goals;
- the ability to withstand environmental challenges and adapt to changing conditions;
- ensuring the sustainability of small businesses in the market.

It is proposed to understand the mechanism for ensuring the competitiveness of small businesses as a set of components that, when interacting, allow for a differentiated approach to the

selection of methods, tools, principles, strategies, models and subsystems for implementing such a mechanism in accordance with the selected criteria for ensuring competitiveness.

It should be noted that there are various structural elements of the mechanism for ensuring the competitiveness of an enterprise. The approaches considered allow us to conclude that there is a wide variety of opinions on the components of the mechanism for ensuring the competitiveness of small businesses. Together they allow us to form and implement appropriate measures to ensure the competitiveness of an enterprise. However, attention is drawn to the fact that these approaches were relevant for the pre-transformation period and, unfortunately, do not reflect the state and trends characteristic of the conditions of the war, post-war and transformation periods.

3. Mechanism for Ensuring the Competitiveness of Small Businesses

Such conditions require a new concept for building a mechanism to ensure the competitiveness of small businesses, which will take into account (Fig. 1):

- Criteria for ensuring the competitiveness of small businesses: sustainability, safety, competitiveness, optimal production, rational consumption;
- management principles, methods and tools that are specific to the operating conditions of small businesses and will be tailored to the specifics of their activities and levels of competitiveness;
- the level of competitiveness of small businesses as a basis for choosing strategies to ensure the competitiveness of the enterprise;
- a differentiated approach to the selection of strategies to ensure the competitiveness of small businesses depending on their level;
- a model for ensuring the competitiveness of small businesses, which will determine the concept of forming the competitive status of a business according to selected criteria;
- subsystems for ensuring the competitiveness of small businesses, such as supporting and stimulating business development;
- factors influencing the processes of ensuring the competitiveness of small businesses.

It should be noted that the mechanism for ensuring the competitiveness of small businesses must address the following tasks:

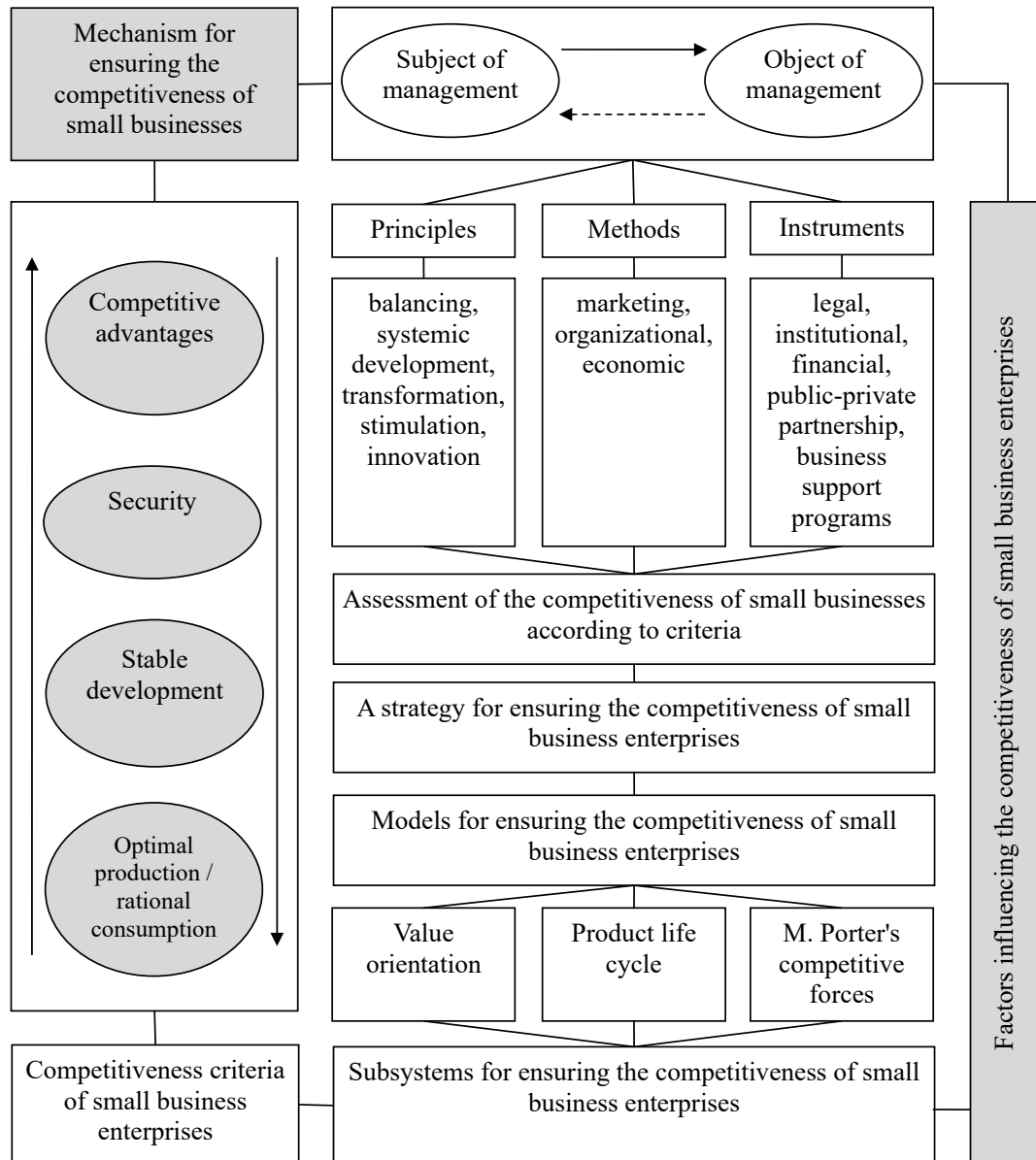


Figure 1. The mechanism for ensuring the competitiveness of small business enterprises

Source: developed by the author

- Forming and adopting balanced management decisions to ensure the competitiveness of small businesses;
- developing measures to form and develop the competitive advantages of the enterprise in a changing environment;
- develop a strategy to ensure the competitiveness of small businesses;
- ensure a strong competitive position for the enterprise in the national or international economic space;
- adapt the enterprise to the conditions of wartime, post-war and transformation periods;

- evaluate the effectiveness of the mechanism for ensuring the competitiveness of small businesses.

The main goal of the mechanism for ensuring the competitiveness of small businesses is to create a strong competitive position in the market environment and to ensure conditions for long-term development.

Let us consider the constituent elements of this mechanism. At the initial stage, the subject and object of managing the processes of ensuring the competitiveness of small businesses are identified. Various groups of stakeholders can act as subjects of management of processes ensuring

the competitiveness of small businesses, including managers of enterprises and their structural units, local self-government bodies, public organisations, investors, etc. The object of management is the processes and criteria for ensuring competitiveness: competitive advantages, sustainable development, safety, optimal production/conscious consumption. There is a management interaction between the subject and object of management, which reflects both direct (transfer of information on the enterprise's development strategy, its level of competitiveness, the concept of enterprise development, etc. This is manifested through orders, resolutions, and directives), as well as indirect (reporting on the progress of the enterprise's development strategy, measures to ensure the enterprise's competitiveness, performance, etc.) communication. The effectiveness of management interaction is important from the point of view of establishing effective communication between management levels and links, involving all personnel in management decision-making, developing a strategy to ensure the enterprise's competitiveness, and understanding problems and ways to solve them.

It should be noted that the mechanism for ensuring the competitiveness of small businesses will be effective if the following conditions are met:

- Balance between economic, social and environmental components as indicators of sustainable development of small businesses, as well as ensuring a balance between optimal production and rational consumption. Compliance with this principle will ensure a harmonious combination of society and nature (reduce the eco-destructive impact on the environment, ensure the rational use of natural resources, introduce recycling, and shape the environmental awareness of enterprise employees), improve the social component (improve the quality of life of society, ensure social stability, improve working conditions, and thus create stability and a healthy social climate in the enterprise), ensure economic development (thrifty production, development of resource-saving and environmentally friendly technologies, efficient use of production capacities). Thus, this principle will balance the interests of producers in terms of ensuring the rational production of goods, works and services, and consumers in terms of conscious consumption, which will ensure the long-term

development of small businesses without harming the environment;

- systematic development of competitive advantages of small businesses (personnel, materials, technology, information, finance, etc.). They will ensure a stable competitive position in the market and security of development. Here, it is important for the enterprise to focus its attention on unique characteristics that will allow it to scale up from a production and market perspective, increase financial capacity, ensure production flexibility, invest in further development, be innovative, and implement AI elements. Everything mentioned above will contribute to ensuring the long-term growth of the enterprise and ensuring its competitiveness in the future;

- transformation of competitive advantages into a high level of competitiveness of small businesses. This principle is aimed at the process of forming, developing and strengthening competitive advantages that will further contribute to ensuring the competitiveness of the enterprise. It is important for the enterprise to find such management levers, methods, tools and solutions that are capable of effectively transforming existing or potential competitive advantages into a high competitive status of the enterprise in the national or international arena;

- stimulating processes to ensure the competitiveness of small businesses. All enterprise personnel must be motivated to ensure the competitiveness of the enterprise and understand that their income level depends on each individual's contribution to achieving these processes. Therefore, enterprise managers must understand the importance of developing and implementing an effective system for motivating personnel to be productive in the processes of ensuring competitiveness;

- innovation in ensuring the formation and development of competitive advantages, sustainable development, security, and a rational balance between optimal production and conscious consumption. This principle involves the application of new ideas, technologies, and models for managing processes that ensure competitiveness. The introduction of innovations will allow small businesses to maintain strong competitive advantages in the market, stay ahead of competitors, ensure the principles of sustainable development and business security.

Various types of innovations can be implemented here. They include product innovations, which will allow new products to be brought to market and attract new consumers; process innovations, which will contribute to the improvement of business processes at the enterprise, reduce production costs and increase the volume of production that meets consumer demand; organisational innovations, which will ensure transformational changes at the enterprise and flexibility in management decision-making; business model innovations, which are aimed at improving the overall business development model of enterprises.

Methods for ensuring the competitiveness of small businesses include:

- Marketing methods, which involve conducting in-depth marketing research (market capacity, consumer interests, market conditions, market development forecasts), developing a marketing strategy to increase the competitiveness of the enterprise (product promotion, pricing policy, market diversification, market segmentation), creation of a product brand and trademark (strengthening consumer confidence in products, creating consumer value and an emotional "hook" for the customer, forming the prestige of the manufacturer), pricing policy (forming flexible prices depending on market conditions), digital marketing (use of social networks, targeted advertising, advertising in mobile applications, use of various digital channels to promote products);
- economic, based on economic incentives for all stakeholder groups and their desire to increase the competitiveness of the enterprise (wages, bonuses, allowances). Among this group of methods, it is worth highlighting the following: investment in the expansion of the enterprise, its innovative activities, and green technologies; financial incentives for staff for high performance, innovation, and active participation in processes to ensure the competitiveness of the enterprise; optimisation of enterprise costs through the introduction of various cost management systems and the creation of cost management responsibility centres; tax incentives, subsidies, preferential lending, participation in public-private partnerships;
- organisational methods related to the implementation of various transformational changes in the structure of the enterprise. The changes may include modification of the

enterprise's development strategy, organisational or corporate culture, general concept of the enterprise's activities, strategic vision for the enterprise's development, application of a modern quality management system (certification and standardisation), re-engineering of business processes, optimisation of the value chain, introduction of a KPI system for all levels of management, the introduction of an automated production process management system at the enterprise, information support for all business processes at the enterprise and data protection (business security), the creation of start-ups and the formation of teams for their production and implementation, the development of business scenarios and responses to various types of risks, etc.

To ensure the competitiveness of small businesses, managers can use a variety of tools that will be customized depending on the specifics of their activities, scale, budget, etc. (Boiko, Zarichny, 2023; Khalimon, 2017; Demkiv, Trepet, 2023).

The following groups of tools for ensuring the competitiveness of an enterprise can be identified:

- Digital tools that will contribute to the improvement of internal business processes at the enterprise, the automation of the enterprise's activities, the establishment of communication links with suppliers, consumers, business partners, and ensure feedback from customers;
- analytical tools that allow for the diagnosis of an enterprise's competitiveness, the identification of its strengths that will become competitive advantages, as well as its 'weak spots' compared to competitors;
- strategic, whose main goal is to maintain a sustainable competitive advantage in the market, adapt small businesses to challenges, and form a value proposition for consumers;
- legal, whose purpose is to form a favourable legal environment for doing business;
- financial, aimed at improving the efficiency of the use of the enterprise's financial resources, ensuring the investment attractiveness of the enterprise and its financial capacity;
- economic, whose task is to improve the competitive status of the enterprise by increasing its ability to compete in the market and produce competitive products.

As scientists note, "it is necessary to mention more modern approaches to competitiveness

management, which include the use of innovative methods, technologies and tools, such as innovative marketing, digital technologies, data analytics and others. The use of software for data analysis, business process automation, and the development of mobile applications and online platforms for interacting with customers and partners is also becoming increasingly common" (Kuzmin, Horbal, 2005).

An important element of the mechanism for ensuring the competitiveness of small businesses is the assessment of competitiveness. Such an assessment should be carried out according to selected competitiveness criteria: competitive advantages, sustainable development, safety, optimal production/conscious consumption. This will allow identifying problems of enterprises in ensuring competitiveness, revealing their strengths, and on this basis, developing a differentiated approach to choosing a strategy for ensuring the competitiveness of an enterprise depending on its level.

Various strategies for ensuring the competitiveness of small businesses can be chosen. An enterprise can choose basic (growth, stabilisation, reduction), competitive (cost leadership, differentiation), functional (human resources, marketing, financial, investment, foreign economic, production, etc.) strategies.

The implementation of strategies to ensure the competitiveness of small businesses requires the selection of different models. The following models for ensuring the competitiveness of small businesses can be considered:

– The value orientation model, which is quite important in modern conditions, as it allows identifying the product that is valuable to the consumer. By applying this model, a business can respond much better to consumer demand and requests and form offers from the perspective of satisfying functional, emotional or social value (Didenko, Zhurakivskiy, 2017). In this case, various forms of this model can be applied: "value proposition as value creation for customers" (Lanning, Michaels, 1988); "strategic structure of value proposition" (Payne, Frow, Eggert, 2017); "value proposition as a value creation system" (Heinonen, Strandvik, Mickelsson, 2010); "value proposition as an element of company strategy" (Day, 2014); "value proposition for other stakeholders" (Kwon, Jang, 2022); "value proposition that takes into account the interests

of customers and suppliers" (Flint, Mentzer, 2006); "value proposition based on mutual value: emphasis on cooperation" (Glaser, 2006); "forming a value map as a tool for identifying value propositions" (Kambil, Ginsberg, Bloch, 1996). An effectively formed value orientation model can be successfully transformed into an effective business model for the enterprise as a whole. It can be argued that ensuring the competitiveness of small businesses requires the formation of competitive advantages based on the value orientation of the business itself (Reshetniak, Danko, Babicheva, 2024);

– product life cycle model that allows you to determine the stages of development of a company and its level of profitability depending on the sales volume of a given product. Determining the stages of a product's life cycle is important for a company in terms of taking preventive measures to predict the transition of a product into a stage of recession or depression, or choosing specific strategies to ensure competitiveness. Taking into account the product life cycle model also allows you to optimise the main and auxiliary business processes at the enterprise, develop a strategy to ensure the competitiveness of the enterprise (for example, marketing, financial, foreign economic strategy, etc.), manoeuvre management decisions regarding the termination or continuation of production, and improve the financial performance of the enterprise. To determine the stages of the product life cycle, scientists suggest using various methods: "the method of constructing a cost function, the method of analysing revenue dynamics, the method of variance analysis, the method of least squares, the method based on the calculation of financial indicators" (Matiushenko, 2010). It should be noted that for each stage of the product life cycle, there should be individualised goals, strategies, tools to ensure competitiveness, as well as a business model for the development of the enterprise. It is also important to identify the factors that cause a product to transition from one stage of the life cycle to another in order to take preventive measures to minimise their negative impact or to enhance their positive impact on the processes of ensuring the competitiveness of enterprises.

Porter's competitive forces model, the application of which allows assessing the competitive environment of an enterprise, determining its market position, industry concentration level,

competitive status, and, accordingly, developing directions for ensuring its competitiveness (Didenko, 2017). This model allows assessing highly profitable and low-profit markets, competitors that have entered and exited the market, the extent to which suppliers are able to influence prices (Bakai, 2022), the ability of end consumers to influence the company and determine its consumer value, the availability of alternative products that can replace the company's products, etc. Thus, the application of this model can help identify the most important areas for the company to consider when assessing the competitive environment, as well as improve its competitiveness.

When researching subsystems that ensure the competitiveness of an enterprise, it is advisable to focus on the following types:

- Institutional, defining the set of institutions involved in the processes of ensuring the competitiveness of small businesses (organisations, educational institutions, scientific institutions, government bodies, public organisations). In fact, it creates an institutional environment for doing business, regulates the activities of small businesses within the legal framework during competitive struggle, supports their development and activities according to clearly defined rules, which minimises risks and conflicts, and promotes the progress of small businesses;
- financial, with main task is to provide financial assistance (investment, lending, subsidies, transfers, targeted financing, etc.) in the processes of ensuring competitiveness, as well as promoting the optimal allocation of financial resources for measures to ensure the competitiveness of the enterprise. The financial subsystem will ensure the financial stability of the enterprise, optimise its budget, plan future cash flows, and determine the need to attract additional financial resources. These will have a positive impact on the processes of ensuring the competitiveness of small businesses, increasing the value of the business, forming their competitive advantages, and ensuring the sustainable and safe development of the business in the future;
- legal support for the conduct of business activities of enterprises and ensuring their competitiveness. The legal subsystem allows ensuring the legality of business operations, providing legal support for business, eliminating various types of risks, and forming legal awareness

among both managers and all enterprise personnel. Compliance with legal mechanisms for conducting business will ensure the legality of measures to ensure the competitiveness of enterprises;

Consulting, aimed at supporting and providing consulting services to activate the processes of ensuring the competitiveness of small businesses (financial consulting, personnel development consulting, information consulting, legal consulting, assistance in adopting and implementing strategies, business planning, etc.). In fact, the main task of the consulting subsystem of the mechanism for ensuring the competitiveness of small businesses is to provide advisory support to enterprise managers in making informed decisions in these processes. Such support can cover a wide range of services, from analysing and assessing the competitiveness of an enterprise, assessing the risks and opportunities of an enterprise, to scaling and developing strategies, searching for ways to optimise business processes, and possible scenarios for the development of an enterprise's business model. Various types of consulting support can be considered here, such as "information and reference, innovation, training, financial, and advisory" (Petlin, 2022).

Turbulent environmental conditions make small businesses dependent on various factors. Factors affecting a company's competitiveness can vary in nature and strength. It is obvious that there are groups of factors that have different degrees of influence on a company's competitiveness. Internal factors include resource, investment, marketing, geopolitical, sales and organisational factors. External factors include legal, economic, infrastructural and social factors.

4. Conclusions

The conducted research made it possible to comprehensively substantiate and systematize the components of a modern mechanism for ensuring the competitiveness of small businesses under the conditions of instability, transformation, and increased external threats. The analysis of the current economic and geopolitical situation has shown that small businesses require new strategic approaches and updated managerial tools to maintain and strengthen their market positions. Traditional competitiveness management methods are no longer sufficient in the face of wartime destruction, post-war recovery needs, and the

need to transition towards sustainable and digital economies.

The proposed mechanism for ensuring the competitiveness of small businesses integrates a range of interrelated structural elements, including the object and subject of management, principles, methods, tools, models, strategies, and supporting subsystems. A key feature of this mechanism is its adaptability and the possibility of individualizing management decisions depending on the level of development of the enterprise, its sectoral affiliation, and the nature of the external environment.

The study determined that competitiveness in modern conditions should be ensured not only through classical approaches (such as price leadership or differentiation) but also through new elements: sustainable development, security, rational resource consumption, digitalization, and innovation. The implementation of these elements allows for the formation of long-term competitive advantages and increases the resilience of small enterprises to crises and environmental turbulence.

Among the most important methodological tools proposed in the mechanism are marketing, economic, and organizational methods, analytical and digital instruments, and models such as value orientation, the product life cycle, and Porter's competitive forces. The mechanism also provides for the functioning of institutional, legal, financial, and consulting subsystems that support competitiveness both at the enterprise level and within the broader economic ecosystem.

In conclusion, the developed mechanism contributes to improving the quality of managerial decision-making, increasing business adaptability, and achieving a strategic balance between economic efficiency, social responsibility, and environmental safety. The study also opens up prospects for further research aimed at developing typologies of competitiveness strategies, refining enterprise development models, and applying the proposed mechanism in various sectors of the economy, particularly those most affected by war and crisis conditions.

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