

Staying Ahead of the Curve: An Analysis of Strategic Agility and its Role in Ensuring Firm Survival in a Dynamic Business Environment

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Doi:10.19044/esj.2023.v19n13p28

Submitted: 30 March 2023 Accepted: 29 April 2023 Published: 31 May 2023 Copyright 2023 Author(s) Under Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 4.0 OPEN ACCESS

Cite As:

Deshati E. (2023). *Staying Ahead of the Curve: An Analysis of Strategic Agility and its Role in Ensuring Firm Survival in a Dynamic Business Environment*. European Scientific Journal, ESJ, 19 (13), 28. <u>https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2023.v19n13p28</u>

Abstract

This research paper explores the relationship between strategic agility and firm survival in a highly dynamic business environment. The study aims to identify the key factors associated with strategic agility and to analyze how they impact firm performance in a competitive and rapidly changing market. A systematic literature review methodology was employed to gather and analyze the relevant literature. Three key factors were identified as being associated with strategic agility: resource fluidity, leadership capabilities, and strategic sensitivity. The analysis revealed that firms with a higher degree of strategic agility have a better chance of survival in a dynamic business environment. Strategic agility helps firms quickly adapt to changes in the market, anticipate future trends, and respond to customer needs, thereby enhancing their competitiveness. This study contributes to the literature by highlighting the importance of strategic agility as a critical factor in ensuring firm survival in a highly dynamic business environment.

Keywords: Strategic Agility, Firm Survival, Dynamic Business Environment, Competition, Ambidexterity

Introduction

The competitive landscape of various industries has rapidly evolved due to the existence of innovation and technology. Traditional businesses have

nowadays tried to come up with a strategic solution to mitigate loss in terms of their market share while maintaining positive profit margins. With the introduction of strategic agility, firms can cope with the existing market needs.

The concept of strategic agility is rooted in the manufacturing sector wherein it was argued that in a production process, being agile is more important than being able to engage in mass production (Reed, 2020). This concept was later adapted to the supply chain, information technology, and most recently, organizational structure (Harraf, 2015 cited by Reed, 2020). As a holistic business view, this concept is also considered to be one of the key essential factors that help businesses to survive (Denning, 2018).

Several studies from the past have revealed that there is a linkage between strategic agility and the firm's internal resources and capabilities. These three key factors are known as resource fluidity, leadership capabilities, and strategic sensitivity. When combined, these factors affect the creation of strategic agility which later drives firms to achieve better performance by adapting innovation, providing better customer experience, and creating new businesses.

Strategic agility primarily draws from the leadership that is in place and its ability to identify opportunities amidst the competition. It was mentioned by Attar and Abdul-Kareem (2020) that leadership plays an important role in the firm's organizational agility and performance as it drives the creation of its guiding principles and goal achievement. However, in some cases, leaders tend to forget about strategic sensitivity and the ability to locate opportunities amidst the competition. This scenario is usually common for family businesses wherein stagnation occurs because leaders do not want to expand or explore more opportunities (De Bellis et al., 2020). On the other hand, the allocation of resources efficiently also plays an important role in the creation of strategic agility. Ramasundaram et al.'s (2023) study shows that improved resource fluidity allows a firm to enhance its customer experience which later leads to better firm performance.

Methods

In this study, a systematic review and meta-analysis (PRISMA), including the principles and guidelines outlining various selected scholarly articles, was used. Byukusenge, Nsanganwimana, and Tarmo (2022) defined the PRISMA principles as a tool for defining the strategies, criteria, and eligibility of the collected data.

Various scholarly search engines including Science Direct and Emerald Insight were used to locate relevant scholarly articles deemed to be useful and appropriate to include in the study. A four-year time frame from 2020 until 2023 was used as a requirement for article inclusion. Consequently, keywords such as "strategic agility," "resource fluidity," "business performance," "leadership," "innovation," "strategic sensitivity," "agility," "ambidexterity," and "competition" were used as guiding reference for identifying and locating related literature for use in this study.

A total of 182 scholarly articles were located during the initial search. To further trim down the selection, a systematic selection process was used wherein the inclusion criterion was created. The criteria used for the selection of the literature were based on the provided abstract, the language used, the relevant keywords, and the publication date.

The inclusion criteria for this article review were as follows: articles published between 2020 - 2023 and from peer-reviewed journals such as Science Direct, Emerald Insight, and other reputable sources. Only articles published in English were considered. Additionally, the articles had to contain keywords related to the topic of strategic agility including, but not limited to, "strategic agility," "resource fluidity," "business performance," "leadership," "innovation," "strategic sensitivity," "agility," "ambidexterity," and "competition." These criteria were used to ensure that the selected articles were recent, reputable, and focused on the topic of interest. The use of these specific keywords helped to narrow down the scope of the search and ensure that the resulting articles were relevant to the research question.

After careful deliberation of the selected literature, a total of 95 scholarly articles were taken as references. These selected studies were carefully examined based on the provided keywords and the abstracts of the article. In addition, these articles were solely focused on businesses regardless of the industry that the firms belonged to. Out of the selected 95 scholarly articles, 64 were filtered out from the selection. The 55 selected articles were selected based on the abstract and full context of the study. This resulted in a final selection of 34 scholarly articles. Below is the sample PRISMA diagram used in the selection process of the scholarly articles used in this study.





Results

Relevant studies conducted in the past that were deemed relevant in association with the topic of strategic agility and its impact on a firm's survival were analyzed. The majority of the selection showed that strategic agility results from a firm's positive internal resources and capabilities such as resource fluidity, leadership, and strategic sensitivity. These key factors are often deemed to affect a firm's strategic decision-making process for business survival. Below is the list of selected literature relevant to the topic.

No.	Author	Title	Journal	Findings	Keywords
1	Zahoor, N., Golgeci, I., Haapanen, L., Ali, I., and Arslan, A. (2022)	The role of dynamic capabilities and strategic agility of B2B high-tech small and medium-sized enterprises during COVID-19 pandemic: Exploratory case studies from Finland	Industrial Marketing Management	Selected Finnish SMEs employed Agile Methodologies and new opportunity mitigation as a primary means of mitigating business challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic.	Strategic Agility New business Innovation
2	Tarba, S., Frynas, J., Liu, Y., Wood, G., Sarala, R., & Fainshmidt, S. (2023)	Strategic agility in international business	Journal of World Business	Strategic Agility merely relies on the firm's capacity to optimize and utilize its resources well.	Strategic Agility Resource Fluidity
3	Ferraris, A., Degbey, W. Y., Singh, S. K., Bresciani, S., Castellano, S., Fiano, F., & Couturier, J (2021).	Microfoundations of Strategic Agility in Emerging Markets: Empirical Evidence of Italian MNEs in India.	Journal of World Business	This study revealed that the firm's subsidiary CEO tenure in international operations and overall experience positively affect strategic agility	Strategic Agility Leadership Business Performance
4	Clauss, T., Kraus, S., Kallinger, F. L., Bican, P. M., Brem, A., & Kailer, N (2020)	Organizational ambidexterity and competitive advantage: The role of strategic agility in the exploration- exploitation paradox	Journal of Innovation & Knowledge	Findings from this study show that German mid-size firms can reach a competitive advantage when it is able to incorporate ambidexterity and agility into their strategies.	Strategic Agility Resource Fluidity Strategic Sensitivity Ambidexterity

Table 1. Strategic agility and firm survival in a highly dynamic business environment

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firms' efficiency in	
the production and	
operation process	
in an international	
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Meanwhile,	
explorative strategic agility	
helps the firm to	
avoid extensive	
environmental	
competition	
through the	
creation of new	
products and entry	
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7 Debellis, F., De <i>Strategic agility and</i> Journal of Family-owned Strategic	
Massis, A., <i>international joint</i> International businesses are high sensitivity	
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	Petruzzelli, A., Frattini, F., & Del Giudice, M (2020).	willingness-ability paradox of family firms.		and resource fluidity but low in strategic sensitivity.	Resource Fluidity New Business
				Family-owned businesses are prone to poor strategic sensitivity wherein it tends to be complacent about their current standing and slows down growth and expansion.	
				Family-owned businesses need to be strategically agile to formulate a successful international joint venture.	
8	Demir, R., Campopiano, G., Kruckenhauser, C., & Bauer, F (2021).	Strategic agility, internationalization speed, and international success — The role of coordination mechanisms and growth modes.	Journal of International Management	Findings from this study show that British, German, Austrian, Swiss, and Malaysian SMEs need a combination of strategic agility and internationalization speed so that can achieve international success.	Strategic Agility New Business
				However, these two key factors require various coordination mechanisms such as strategic intent and horizontal coordination for success in a global setting to be achieved.	

European Scientific Journal, ESJ May 2023 edition Vol.19, No.13

9	Alamsjah, F., & Yunus, E. N (2022).	Achieving Supply Chain 4.0 and the Importance of Agility, Ambidexterity, and Organizational Culture: A Case of Indonesia.	Journal of Open Innovation: Technology	In the case of Indonesia, a study shows there should be a collaboration between external networks and supply chain functions in a firm.	Strategic Agility Ambidexterity
10	Vuorio, A., & Torkkeli, L (2022).	Dynamic managerial capability portfolios in early internationalizing firms.	International Business Review	Early internationalization is often associated with the leader's managerial capabilities such as network capabilities and entrepreneurial decision-making process	Leadership New business
11	Li, C., Khan, A., Ahmad, H., & Shahzad, M. (2022).	Business analytics competencies in stabilizing firms' agility and digital innovation amid COVID-19	Journal of Innovation & Knowledge	In this study, the author examines the linkage between a firm's capacity and agility to adapt to digital innovation and business analytics competencies. Findings from this study show a positive relationship between business analytics and digital innovation with the mediation of a firm's agility and capacity.	Strategic Agility Innovation
12	Kumar, R., Singh, K., & Jain, S. K. (2022).	Assessment of Agile manufacturing impact on business performance of Indian manufacturing industry: A PLS- SEM approach.	Sustainable Manufacturing and Service Economics	Leaders who are committed and responsible tend to manage the firm's long-term goals.	Strategic Agility, Business Performance, Leadership

13	Saputra, N., Sasanti, N.,	Strategic role of digital capability on	Procedia Computer	Findings from this study show that	Leadership Strategic Agility
	Alamsjah, F., & Sadeli, F. (2022).	business agility during the COVID- 19 era.	Science	ambidextrous leadership is related to digital capability as it tends to result to	Ambidextrous
				better firm management.	
14	Nyamrunda, F. C., & Freeman, S. (2021).	Strategic agility, dynamic relational capability and trust among SMEs in transitional economies.	Journal of World Business,	Strategic agility is heavily reliant on the manager's capacity to nourish individual contributions and entrepreneurial behaviors.	Strategic Agility Leadership
15	Asseraf, Y., & Gnizy, I. (2022)	Translating strategy into action: The importance of an agile mindset and agile slack in international business.	International Business Review,	Having an agile mindset allows firms to utilize existing resources, and introduce new product offerings which later encourages better firm performance.	Strategic Agility Business performance Leadership
16	Chen, X., Tee, K., & Chang, V. (2022).	Accelerating Innovation Efficiency through Agile Leadership: The CEO Network Effects in China.	Technological Forecasting and Social Change	Presence of innovation can be seen if leaders have more outside directorship. Leaders' ability to network has a great contribution on innovation.	Strategic Agility Leadership Innovation
17	Ragazou, K., Passas, I., Garefalakis, A., & Dimou, I. (2022).	Investigating the Research Trends on Strategic Ambidexterity, Agility, and Open Innovation in SMEs: Perceptions from Bibliometric Analysis.	Journal of Open Innovation: Technology	The study reveals that the combination of agility and ambidexterity allows new business model innovation for SMEs in times of crisis (ie. Covid pandemic). Becoming agile is an important requirement.	Strategic Agility Innovation New business

10		0		in businesses that are faced with new challenges and pressures	a
18	Adomako, S., Amankwah- Amoah, J., Donbesuur, F., Ahsan, M., Danso, A., & Uddin, M. (2022).	Strategic agility of SMEs in emerging economies: Antecedents, consequences and boundary conditions.	International Business Review	Strategic agility is often associated with a firm's performance. Studies suggest that agility is often hard to achieve in developing economies due to resource constraints.	Strategic Agility Resource Fluidity
19	Mata, M. N., Martins, J. M., & Inácio, P. L. (2023).	Impact of absorptive capacity on project success through mediating role of strategic agility: Project complexity as a moderator.	Journal of Innovation & Knowledge	In the case of Portuguese SMEs, it is suggested that to sustain strategic agility, one should be able to incorporate external knowledge in the process so that it can reach success. However, constraints such as budget, time, and scope were also seen as a lagging factor towards achieving strategic agility and better firm performance	Resource Fluidity Strategic Agility
20	Kurniawan, R., Budiastuti, D., Hamsal, M., & Kosasih, W. (2020).	The impact of balanced agile project management on firm performance: the mediating role of market orientation and strategic agility.	Review of International Business and Strategy	Technology providers in Indonesia saw strategic agility and agile project management serve as mediating factors in market orientation and firm performance.	Strategic Agility Business Performance
21	Hurtado- Palomino, A., De la Gala- Velásquez, B., & Ccorisapra-	The interactive effect of innovation capability and potential absorptive capacity on	Journal of Open Innovation: Technology,	Firms need to create strategic tasks such as reconfiguration, resource	Resource Fluidity Business Performance

22	Quintana, J. (2022). S, I., Efeomo,	innovation Performance Demystifying	Market, and Complexity Academy of	allocation, and optimization, and process improvements to create value. The study suggests	Resource Fluidity
	R., Paul, S. O., Moyosore, K. T., & Paul, B. B. (2022)	Performance within the Context of Resource Fluidity in Nigeria.	Strategic Management Journal	that manufacturing organizations in Nigeria adopt strategies that allow and creates resource fluidity for improved agility which later on seeks improvement in the firm's performance.	Business Performance
23	Ramasundaram, A., Pandey, N., Shukla, Y., Alavi, S., & Wirtz, J. (2023).	Fluidity and customer experience in digital platform ecosystems.	Management	This study reveals that with improved resource fluidity firms are able to enhance customer experience which later results in better firm performance and increased switching costs.	Resource Fluidity Business performance Customer Experience
24	Azhar Mohd Harif, M. A., Nawaz, M., & Hameed, W. U. (2022).	The role of open innovation, hotel service quality, and marketing strategy in hotel business performance.	Heliyon	By having an open innovation on Malaysian hotel chains, hotels are able to increase business performance which are primarily targeted to the firm's ROI, ROA, ROS, and ROE.	Innovation and Business Performance
25	Larbi-Siaw, O., Xuhua, H., & Ofori Donkor, D. (2023).	Attaining sustainable business performance via eco-innovation under ecological regulatory stringency and market turbulence.	Journal of Cleaner Production	Ghanaian firms can achieve sustainable business performance if it focuses on the process of eco- innovation.	Innovation Business Performance

26	Attar, M., & Abdul-Kareem, A. (2020).	The Role of Agile Leadership in Organisational Agility.	Agile Business Leadership Methods for Industry 4.0	Leadership adapting agile methodologies tend to execute better-guiding principles, and build mechanisms and strategies which are deemed to lead to better organizational agility and firm performance.	Leadership Agility Business Performance
27	Reed, J. H. (2020).	Strategic agility and the effects of firm age and environmental turbulence.	Journal of Strategy and Management	Age contributes to the strategic agility of a firm. This study reveals that as firms reach maturity in operations, their strategic agility becomes more stable only on low to moderate environmental turbulence.	Strategic Agility Firm Age Firm Performance Environment turbulence
28	Harraf, A., Wanasika, I., Tate, K. and Talbott, K. (2015),	Organizational agility	Journal of Applied Business	Strategic agility was also adapted in the field of the supply chain, IT, and Organizational structure.	Strategic Agility Organizational Structure IT Supply Chain
29	Adim, V., & Maclayton, I. (2021)	Strategic Sensitivity and Corporate Responsiveness of Fast Moving Consumer Goods Companies in Rivers State, Nigeria.	Journal of Strategic Management	Firms should be able to create strategic foresight and insight in a dynamic business environment.	Strategic Agility Strategic Sensitivity Business Performance
30	Björkdahl, J., Fallahi, S., & Holmén, M. (2022)	Explaining business model innovation processes: A problem formulation and problem-solving perspective	Industrial Marketing Management	Firms need to change their perspective from backward-looking to forward-looking so that it could decide better on their options and business.	Strategic Sensitivity Business Performance

31	Prager, S. D., & Wiebe, K. (2021)	Strategic foresight for agriculture: Past ghosts, present challenges, and future opportunities	Global Food Security	The use of strategic foresight allows agricultural companies to mitigate challenges and identify possible opportunities in the future.	Strategic Sensitivity Business Performance
32	Economic Development Collaborative (nd)	Resource Fluidity		Firms can address the challenges of the market if they can efficiently utilize their current resources.	Resource Fluidity
33	Buehring, J., & Bishop, P. C. (2020).	Foresight and Design: New Support for Strategic Decision Making.	In the Journal of Design, Economics, and Innovation,	Firms should employ both strategic insights and foresight so that they can efficiently plan and decide matters in the future.	Strategic Agility Strategic Sensitivity
34	Cheng, C., Zhong, H., & Cao, L. (2020).	Facilitating speed of internationalization: The roles of business intelligence and organizational agility	Journal of Business Research,	Having innovation in the processes of the firm helps in speeding up the internationalization the process.	Strategic Agility Internationalization Business Performance

Many of the themes in the literature were primarily focused on the concept of strategic agility and its linkage with business performance. Since strategic agility is basically driven by resource fluidity, leadership capabilities, and strategic sensitivity, items from the literature focusing on said topics were also included in the selection process. Aside from the previously mentioned concepts, selections containing and focusing on innovation, business performance, new businesses, and better customer experiences were also included.



Figure 2. Breakdown of the keywords present in the selected literature

About 23% of the literature discussed strategic agility. Meanwhile, 18% of the literature pertained to business performance.



In terms of the drivers of strategic agility, 53% of the selected literature discusses resource fluidity, 26% of which is about strategic sensitivity, while the remaining 21% discusses leadership capabilities.

Discussion

As mentioned by Kurniawan et al. (2020), strategic agility helps firms produce better performance and market orientation. Consequently, Ahammad et al. (2021) also mentioned that strategic agility is considered to be an important factor for firms to possess, especially during times of uncertainty.

In this study, the researcher aimed to fill in the gap by answering the proposed research questions pertaining to strategic agility, the key factors or drivers of strategic agility, and its impact on the firm's ability to survive in a highly dynamicbusiness environment. Based on selected literature and conducted reviews, it was revealed that the key factors that drive a firm to achieve strategic agility are resource fluidity, leadership capabilities, and strategic sensitivity.

As defined by Dennings (2018), resource fluidity is the concept by which firms can utilize their existing resources efficiently. The Economic Development Collaborative (n.d.) also supported this concept by stating that resource fluidity serves as a measure of entrepreneurial efficiency.

There were several studies that focused on the concept of resource fluidity. For example, Mata, Martins, and Inacio (2023) conducted a study in Portugal that explored the potential laggers of resource fluidity. The findings from this study revealed that firms should consider their budget, time constraints, and scope to achieve fluidity. In the case of multinational companies, Shams et al. (2020) mentioned that firms should be able to utilize resources efficiently in the field of the supply chain, information technology, and sustainable productions to reach strategic agility. De Massis et al. (2020) also noted that family-owned businesses are high in resource fluidity as they can easily monitor their financials and optimize their resources properly. Furthermore, Nyamruda and Freeman (2021) also mentioned that microfoundational activities in transitional economies are most likely to exhibit resource fluidity as a driver of strategic agility.

Another key factor that drives a firm's strategic agility is the leadership capabilities of the leadership team. Asseraf and Gnizy's (2022) study mentioned that leaders with an agile mindset can drive changes and utilize the existing resources that can later be translated into better firm performance. This is further supported by the study conducted by Attar and Abdul-Kareem (2022) wherein it was mentioned that through the adoption of agile methodologies, leaders can strategize and build mechanisms able to drive better organizational agility and performance.

Meanwhile, Chen, Tee, and Chang's (2022) perspective mentioned a need for networking capacity so then the firm can have an external view of the market. Vuorio and Torkelli's (2022) study primarily focused on the linkage of leadership capabilities and internationalization. The findings of this study reveal that through a leader's networking and agile capabilities, firms are able to transition into international businesses.

There were fewer studies that discussed the concept of strategic sensitivity. As defined by Adim and Maclayton (2021), this concept primarily explains the ability of a firm to see the opportunities amidst the existing competition and challenges in the market. Moreover, Prager and Wiebe (2021) also mentioned that strategic sensitivity often requires firms to have strategic insight and foresight.

In the study by Zahoor, Golgeci, and Haapanen (2022), the researchers revealed that Finnish companies tend to be strategically sensitive by employing innovation and agile methodologies during the time of the COVID pandemic. Buehring and Bishop (2020) also mentioned that by integrating strategic sensitivity, decision-makers can contend with the external and organizational changes deemed to influence business operations. Conversely, De Massis et al.'s (2020) study pointed out that family-owned businesses are low in strategic sensitivity since it is heavily reliant on the current performance of the business.

With the external challenges and conditions present in the market, businesses seek to survive by employing various strategic initiatives such as being agile. More often, firms tend to innovate and expand their market reach through internationalization, the introduction of new business, and through the review of their current processes due to the complexities and competition in the business.

By being agile, firms can innovate their existing products and even open up to the potential for growth and market expansion. This is evident in the study by Ahmad et al. (2021) wherein Indian companies innovated and improved their existing product offerings due to the requirements of the market. Ghanaian firms also saw improvements in firm performance due to eco-innovation (Larbi-Saw, Xuhua, & Ofori, 2023). Consequently, the same findings were revealed by the study of Li et al. (2022) wherein it was mentioned that firms tend to innovate by using business analytics and digitalization to keep up with the existing needs of the market.

Business expansion in a global setting is also another option for firms that are already practicing strategic agility. Demir et al. (2021) also noted that select British, German, Austrian, and Swiss companies, once set up to be agile, tend to achieve internationalization with speed and success. Moreover, Cheng, Zhong, and Cao (2020) also mentioned that innovation has often paved the way for businesses to speed up the process of internationalization.

Aside from innovation and internationalization, firms also saw the opportunity to open up a new business as a part of being agile. In the study of Garefalakis et al. (2020), the findings show that during the time of the COVID pandemic, firms were able to create a new business model which can help alleviate losses and be on par with the competition.

De la Gala, et al. (2022) also noted that having an agile mindset often leads to value creation, process improvement, and optimization. This statement was further supported by the study of Efeomo et al. (2022), wherein it was mentioned that in Nigeria, manufacturing companies opt to be agile to improve their processes and product offerings.

Conclusion

The analysis of the literature on the topic of strategic agility and how it affects firm survival has produced findings that highlight the significance of important factors like resource flexibility, leadership ability, and strategic sensitivity in the growth of strategic agility. Resource fluidity refers to a company's ability to use its current resources effectively, whereas leadership capabilities include a leader's capacity to network and adopt an agile mindset. The ability of a company to recognize opportunities amid market competition and challenges is referred to as strategic sensitivity.

According to the literature review, companies are believed to require strategic agility to thrive in a fluid and unpredictably changing business environment. Flexible resource management, competent leadership, and sensitivity to strategic issues are all characteristics of companies that are more likely to be strategically agile which can enhance business performance, market orientation, and even internationalization. It should be noted that studies exploring the concept of strategic sensitivity were less common than those exploring resource flexibility and leadership abilities, suggesting a potential area for further research.

Overall, the study's findings contribute to the body of knowledge on strategic agility and the variables that affect it. A company's ability to survive and thrive in the competitive business environment of today is enhanced by resource flexibility, strong leadership, and strategic sensitivity, which is another important point that they emphasize. This study's findings can be used by businesses looking to increase their strategic agility and successfully deal with the opportunities and obstacles presented by the business environment. Future research could examine additional potential drivers of strategic agility in various contexts or sectors, as well as the mechanisms by which these important factors have an impact.

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