

# CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL SCIENCES

PEER REVIEWED, INDEXED & REFEREED QUARTERLY INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

ISSN 0302-9298

<https://www.jndmeerut.org>

[Vol. 34, No. 3 (July-September), 2025]

<https://doi.org/10.62047/CSS.2025.09.30.186>

## Unravelling Strategic Agility: A Meta-analytical Study of its Key Components

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### Abstract

*In today's rapidly changing and highly competitive business environment, organizations are increasingly confronted with complex challenges, disruptive innovations, and heightened levels of uncertainty. The need to respond quickly and effectively to these dynamic shifts has brought the concept of 'strategic agility' to the forefront as a critical organizational capability. Strategic agility refers to an organization's capacity to anticipate, adapt, and reconfigure its strategies and resources proactively in order to sustain growth and competitiveness. Despite its growing importance, the existing literature presents fragmented perspectives on its core components and outcomes. This paper adopts a 'meta-analytical approach' to synthesize prior research and provide a systematic, evidence-based understanding of strategic agility. The results indicate that factors such as leadership orientation, dynamic capabilities, organizational learning, and innovation practices play a central role in fostering agility. Importantly, the analysis reveals a consistent positive relationship between strategic agility and both 'competitive advantage' and 'firm performance', underscoring its role in sustaining organizational resilience and long-term success. The findings contribute to both theory and practice by offering a consolidated framework of strategic agility and its determinants. For scholars, the study clarifies conceptual ambiguities and advances the discourse on agility in strategic management. For practitioners, it provides actionable insights into the design of agile structures, processes, and mindsets that enhance long-term organizational resilience and success.*

### Keywords

Strategic Agility, Meta-analysis, Leadership capabilities, Organizational culture, Technological innovation.

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(Affiliated to UNO)

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## **Unravelling Strategic Agility: A Meta-analytical Study of its Key Components**

### **1. Introduction**

Strategic agility refers to an organization's ability to swiftly and effectively respond to changes in its internal and external environment. It involves a proactive and adaptive approach to strategic management, enabling organizations to sense emerging opportunities and threats, make timely decisions, and implement flexible strategies. This study employs a meta-analytic approach to synthesize existing research on strategic agility. By systematically reviewing and analyzing a diverse range of studies, we aim to identify common trends, patterns, and relationships among different variables associated with strategic agility. There are many variables of strategic agility, which are as follows:

- ▶ **Leadership Capabilities:** Examining the role of leadership in fostering a culture of agility. Identifying leadership traits and behaviors that contribute to agile decision-making.
- ▶ **Organizational Culture:** Exploring the impact of organizational culture on the adoption and sustainability of strategic agility. Analyzing the alignment between cultural values and agile principles.
- ▶ **Technological Innovation:** Investigating the role of technology in enhancing an organization's agility. Assessing the influence of digital transformation on strategic decision-making processes.
- ▶ **Learning and Adaptation:** Evaluating the organization's capacity for continuous learning and adaptation. Understanding how knowledge management systems contribute to agility.
- ▶ **Collaborative Networks:** Examining the importance of external collaborations and partnerships in fostering strategic agility. Identifying factors that enhance the effectiveness of collaborative networks.

► **Implications for Practice:** Understanding the variables associated with strategic agility is crucial for organizations seeking to develop a competitive edge in today's turbulent business environment. Practical implications derived from this meta-analysis can guide leaders and decision-makers in cultivating a culture of agility, leveraging technology, and building collaborative networks to enhance strategic flexibility.

As organizations strive to navigate an increasingly complex and uncertain landscape, strategic agility emerges as a key determinant of sustained success. This meta-analysis aims to contribute to the understanding of strategic agility by synthesizing existing research and highlighting the interconnected variables that shape this critical organizational capability. The findings offer valuable insights for practitioners and scholars alike, paving the way for further exploration and refinement of strategies aimed at enhancing strategic agility in diverse organizational contexts.

## **2. Literature Review**

All research needs to be informed by existing knowledge in a subject area (Rowley & Slack, 2004). The literature review identifies and organizes the concepts in the relevant area (Hart, 1998). An effective review creates a firm foundation for advancing knowledge. It facilitates theory development, closes areas where a plethora of research exists, and uncovers areas where research is needed (Webster & Watson, 2002). The literature review acts as a guide and is the primary source of the empirical research question (Randolph, 2009). We review the literature discussing the antecedents of Strategic Agility (SA) and its dimensions, and exploring the concepts of Sustainable Competitive Advantage (SCA), Performance and Perceived Corporate Reputation (PERC REP) and their relationship with SA.

### **2.1 Environment Turbulence**

The external environments of firms comprising of legal, technological, economic, supplies, customer, competitive, financial and social environments is dynamic and complex (Khandwalla, 1972; Miller & Friesen, 1983). Turbulence can affect organizations in many ways such as diminishing opportunity streams, increased resource specialization, lack of predictability, fragmented markets, greater risk of resource and product obsolescence, and a general lack of

longterm control (Davis *et al.*, 1991). Turbulence means more than “a lot of change” or the usual operational and competitive uncertainties faced by all organizations. In a turbulent environment, the generally accepted rules and norms that govern business conduct become uncertain and volatile. As a firm has a baseline understanding of external conditions, it is able to emphasize complexity reduction and focus its analysis on anticipating and understanding the nature, direction, and consequences of the changes that are taking place. Complexity reduction is described as an organizational approach that relies on specialization, abstraction, and codification to devise a single best representation of the environment to which a firm can then adapt in a systematic way (Boisot & Child, 1999).

Dess and Beard have characterized a firm’s industry environment in terms of its dynamism, munificence, and complexity (Dess & Beard, 1984). Dynamism refers to the volatility and unpredictability of the changes in various environmental variables with which a firm has to deal. Munificence refers to the opportunity for growth within an industry. The complexity of the environment arises from the number and diversity of external entities with which a firm has to deal: the larger the number and heterogeneity of the entities (e.g., competitors), the more complex the environment. Davis *et al.*, in their study consider three major aspects of turbulence—Changing technology, Competition between firms in the and industry growth rate (Davis *et al.*, 1991).

## **2.2 Strategic Agility (SA)**

Strategic management research has observed that a fit between environment, strategy and structure generally leads to better performance (Helms, Dibrell, & Wright, 1997; Jennings & Lumpkin, 1992; Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Parker & Helms, 1992; Slevin & Covin, 1997). A firm’s performance potential is optimum when the following three conditions are met; a) aggressiveness of the firm’s strategic behaviour matches the turbulence of its environment, b) responsiveness of the firm’s capability matches the aggressiveness of its strategy and c) the components of the firm’s capability are supportive of one another (Ansoff & McDonnell, 1990).

The term “Strategic Agility” (SA) was popularized by researchers Doz and Kosonen (Doz & Kosonen, 2008). It means that an organization can take quick, decisive, and effective and that it can trigger, anticipate, and take advantage of change (Doz & Kosonen,

2007b; Jamrog *et al.*, 2006). Strategic agility implies an ability to mobilize and leverage upon organization wide resources as quickly and efficiently as possible to respond to customer needs (Roth, 1996). It also enables a firm to initiate and apply flexible, nimble, and dynamic competitive moves in order to respond positively to changes imposed by others and to initiate shifts in strategy to create new marketplace realities (McCann, 2004).

Strategic agility lays emphasis on a firm transforming itself into a knowledge factory - a more refined Sull (2009) suggests that strategic agility consists of spotting and seizing game changing opportunities. Strategic agility does not mean not having a strategy, but rather it emphasizes strategic thinking and a clear vision instead of strategic planning, as well as a joint concept of strategy development and implementation (Long, 2000b).

We present few definitions of strategic agility provided by various researchers in the table below and evolved version of a learning organization (Roth, 1996). A number of key themes emerge from these definitions. Firstly, strategic agility is a type of dynamic capability, in that it refers to the ability to change or reconfigure existing substantive capabilities (Collis, 1994). Hence, *firstly*, strategic agility must be developed by the firm; it cannot be purchased from factor markets (Dove, 2002). *Secondly*, strategic agility implies sense and response. Prior research suggests that strong sensing capabilities and responding capabilities are critical to firm success in turbulent environments (Haeckel, 1999; Zaheer & Zaheer, 1997). *Finally*, strategic agility also draws upon organizational learning theory which is concerned with the development of insights, knowledge and associations between past actions, the effectiveness of those actions, and future actions (Huber, 1991).

Few of the other concepts relevant to strategic agility, identified in literature, include exploration and exploitation (March, 1991), organizational memory (Walsh & Ungson, 1991) and unlearning (Hedberg, 1981). Exploration refers to learning gained through processes of concerted variation, organizational experimentation with new alternatives, and quests for knowledge about unknown market opportunities. Exploitation refers to learning gained via local search, experiential refinement, and the use of existing knowledge, competencies and technologies. The long term survival of an organization depends on its ability to engage in enough exploitation to ensure the organization's current viability and engage in enough

exploration to ensure its future viability (Levinthal & March, 1993). Organizational memory serves as a repository for collective insights contained within policies, procedures, routines, and rules that can be retrieved when needed; a source of answers to on-going inquiries; and a major determinant of the ability to ask appropriate questions (Day, 1994).

### **2.3 Sustainable Competitive Advantage (SCA)**

A competitive advantage is an advantage one firm has over a competitor or group of competitors in a given market, strategic group or industry (Kay, 1993). Sustainable competitive advantage represents a firm's success in continually seizing competitive opportunities for enhancing performance, defending itself against rivals' competitive moves, as well as erecting barriers to the erosion of its prevailing competitive advantage (Piccoli & Ives, 2005; R. Reed & DeFillippi, 1990). An important aspect of sustainable competitive advantage is the ability of an enterprise to develop strategies that cannot or will not be imitated by competitors (S. Bharadwaj, Varadarajan, & Fahy, 1993). Market entry barriers are usually generic to a particular industry but barriers to imitation offer the enterprise the ability to sustain competitive advantage in the long term (Coyne, 1986; Dierickx & Cool, 1989; Lippman & Rumelt, 1982; R. Reed & DeFillippi, 1990; Rumelt, 1984). Therefore, the firm needs to constantly seek consecutive strategic initiatives after its initial actions (MacMillan, 1988). Firms can look to build and strengthen their SCA by focusing on capability development. Capability development is the process by which an organization is able to improve its performance over time by enhancing its ability to use available resources for maximum effectiveness (Nevis *et al.*, 1995). While earlier competitive advantage was based on structural characteristics, such as market power, economies of scale, or a broad product line, today however, the emphasis is on capabilities that enable a business to deliver superior value consistently to its customers (Slater & Narver, 2000).

### **2.4 Perceived Corporate Reputation (PERC REP)**

Perceived Corporate Reputation has been defined as the perceptual representation of both the company's past actions and its future prospects, thus describing the company's appeal to key constituents in comparison to its leading rivals (Fombrun, 1996; Roberts & Dowling, 2002). Chun (2005) viewed reputation as an

overall construct encompassing the impressions and views of both internal and external stakeholders (Chun, 2005). A firm's reputation is widely considered to be a valuable resource associated with sustained competitive advantage (Amit & Schoemaker, 1993; Barney, 1991) if not the most valuable intangible resource, a firm can possess (Hall, 1992). Based on review of various definitions of reputation, Lange *et al.* (2011) found that three definitional conceptualizations of the reputation construct emerged: being known (i.e., visibility of the company or prominence), being known for something (i.e., being known for a specific organizational aspect), and generalized favourability (i.e., a general evaluation of the company's favourability) (Lange, Lee, & Dai, 2011). As Fliedner & Vokurka (1997), Overby *et al.* (2006) express that strategic agility is a very important determinant of the success of the organization. Strategic agility is the flexibility, fastness and abilities of the organization in order to reduce the business risks. It can be understood from that definition that strategic agility is related with the prospective operations of the enterprise (Ayub, Arzu, Iftekhar & Hafeez, 2014).

Just as Zang and Sahrifi (2000) state that the enterprises which are operating in different sectors, respond to the changes around them differently at the level of their strategic ability (Araza & Aslan, 2016). It is not wrong to say that this situation demonstrates the talent of agility of the companies. It can be seen from the literature researches that the concept of agility has evolved throughout the time and enlarged that capturing almost all activities of company. On the other hand, there have been empirical researches that indicate strategic agility boosts the competition performance of businesses (Oyedijo, 2012), (Sahil & Alnaji, 2014), (Ayub *et al.*, 2014). The measurements take four dimensions which can be listed as organizational dimension, human dimension, technological dimension and planning dimension (Oyedijo, 2012). Agility, as Christopher and Towill (2001) pointed out, is an ability within the business and even the company and it involves organizational structures, information systems, logistic processes, briefly all types of mindsets (Araza & Aslan, 2016). Therefore, it is reasonable to mention organizational agility as well. The reason behind the need of agility for enterprises is the unforeseen and fast changes around them.

### 3. Hypotheses

Hypotheses are divided in two categories:

▶ Hypothesis 1: Strategic Agility and Competitive Advantage

(H<sub>0</sub>): There is no significant relationship between strategic agility and competitive advantage across the studies.

(H<sub>1</sub>): There is a significant positive relationship between strategic agility and competitive advantage across the studies.

▶ Hypothesis 2: Strategic Agility and Firm Performance

(H<sub>0</sub>): There is no significant relationship between strategic agility and firm performance across the studies.

(H<sub>1</sub>): There is a significant positive relationship between strategic agility and firm performance across the studies.

These hypotheses cover a range of relationships and potential moderating factors that could be explored in your meta-analysis. Adjust them based on the specific focus of the papers you have reviewed and the nuances of the strategic agility literature in your field.

#### **4. Objectives**

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. **Assessing the Overall Relationship:** To systematically examine and quantify the overall relationship between strategic agility and competitive advantage across the studies.
2. **Investigating the Impact on Firm Performance:** To analyze and synthesize the collective evidence on how strategic agility, as reported in the literature, influences firm performance.
3. **Exploring Moderating Factors:** To identify and analyze potential moderating factors (such as industry type, organizational size, and temporal effects) that may influence the relationship between strategic agility and competitive advantage or firm performance.
4. **Assessing Temporal Trends:** To investigate temporal trends in the relationship between strategic agility and competitive advantage, examining whether the nature of this relationship has evolved over time.

#### **5. Methodology**

This study employs a meta-analytic approach to synthesize existing research on strategic agility. By systematically reviewing and analyzing a diverse range of studies, we aim to identify common

trends, patterns, and relationships among different variables associated with strategic agility.

## **6. Results**

Throughout the literature, the data is all brought to a definite trend: strategic agility positively and significantly relates to firm performance. Regardless of whether the outcomes are in terms of organizational/firm performance, competitive advantage, competitive capabilities, innovation, sustainable performance, operational or financial performance, or corporate reputation, agile firms perform better than less-agile counterparts. It is true in banks (Nigeria, Iran, Saudi Arabia, India), logistics services (Indonesia), universities (Qassim), manufacturing (Semnan) and SMEs/micro-businesses in the emerging markets.

One of these mechanisms is capability building. Competitive capabilities (speed, flexibility, responsiveness, reconfiguration) continuously become strong with strategic agility, and, consequently, enhance performance. Several articles demonstrate the mediation effect of innovation: agility speeds up the speed of opportunity sensing and redeployment of resources, which enhances innovation/creativity and following performance. In cases where innovation capability is the one measured, it mediates the agility performance relationship partly or wholly; in cases where organizational innovation is measured, it usually mediates wholly or largely. Data and risk practices are facilitators: data analytics intensify the influence of agility on operational and financial outcomes; enterprise risk management complements agility by enabling agility to make quick moves that are disciplined instead of random, and by facilitating business model innovation that secures an advantage.

Contextual circumstances are important. In a more uncertain environment perceived, the payoff to agility is larger since sensing, seizing and reconfiguring lowers uncertainty cost. The relationship is mediated by organizational culture: those cultures, which are learning-oriented, collaborative, and tolerant of calculated risk, enhance agility into results; more strictly structured cultures, or control-concentrated cultures, suppress it. The nonlinear or contingent effects of firm size and age are that smaller/younger firms tend to have higher raw agility, but larger/older firms can get the same/better performance effects when they institutionalize agile

routines and data/ERM scaffold. In banking, agility in specific terms improves competitive ability and reputation which in turn contribute to sustainable competitive advantage; in logistics and manufacturing the focus is on speed, reconfiguring and process innovation that boost operational performance.

Some of the studies make the outcome horizon longer than the short-term performance to the sustainability. Agility helps in sustainable performance because it allows constant adjustment to environmental changes, changes in regulations, and demands of the stakeholders. The reputation turns out to be a product and a strengthening resource: the responsiveness to market and stakeholder indicators enhances a perceived reliability and responsiveness, which in turn makes firms stand out in competition.

The combination of the mediators and moderators implies a combined pathway: the agility is more valuable in environmental change and uncertainty, strategic agility is more important in sensing, seizing and reconfiguring resources, the innovation capability, business model innovation, and competitive capabilities can convey this effect to performance, ERM and data analytics can augment the effects size and reliability, organizational culture, firm size and firm age can modulate the strength of each effect. In any environment, the strongest correlations are observed between agility and competitive capabilities/advantage and agility and innovation-led performance gains.

Manufacturially, the most effective bundle is as follows: invest in market/tech sensing, reduce cycle times of decision-making and reallocation of resources, formalize lightweight ERM to create a compromise between speed and discipline, develop analytics to extract actionable signals, and instill a culture of empowering experimentation and multi-functional cooperation. In the case of SMEs and micro-businesses, low-cost sensing and quick reconfiguring are the focus, whereas in the case of the banks and bigger organizations, one can combine pair agile routines with the data governance and risk controls at the level of a portfolio. In the case of universities and other governmental organizations, set agility practices in line with innovation and service objectives to stakeholders to achieve quantifiable improvements in performance.

Lastly, the gaps in the literature suggest opportunities: further longitudinal and cross-industry research involving similar measures

would enable true meta-analytic effect sizes; a better distinction of agility and general dynamism would help eliminate construct overlap; more of the research on boundary conditions (e.g., extreme turbulence, highly regulated environments) would help to hone when and how agility is most likely to be beneficial. However, collectively, these studies plausibly provide the conclusion that strategic agility, particularly when supported by innovation ability, data analytics, and ERM, and fulfilled with an enabling culture, is what drives high, and in many cases more lasting, performance.

## **7. Discussion**

The analysis of the reviewed literature highlights the critical role that strategic agility plays in enabling organizations to navigate today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments. Strategic agility, as observed in multiple studies across banking, education, manufacturing, and logistics sectors, emerges as a key driver of competitive advantage and firm performance.

Many studies (e.g., in Nigeria, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia) found a positive link between strategic agility and organizational responsiveness, risk management, and innovation. These elements are essential for firms operating in rapidly changing markets, where timely adaptation determines survival and success. Strategic agility allows firms to sense market shifts early, make faster decisions, and align internal capabilities to external changes—thereby maintaining their competitive position.

Moreover, strategic agility is often supported by factors such as data analytics, dynamic capabilities, enterprise risk management, and technological adoption. For instance, banks in Saudi Arabia used strategic agility to link competitiveness with operational performance through the integration of data-driven strategies. Similarly, at Qassim University and Semnan's manufacturing sector, agility helped institutions maintain quality and respond effectively to challenges while aligning with long-term economic and institutional goals.

Another common thread is the role of environmental uncertainty and competitive intensity. Studies show that when external pressures rise, agile organizations are better able to absorb shocks and reposition themselves—leading to sustainable performance. This highlights the strategic importance of fostering agility not only at the

top management level but also across business models and processes.

Interestingly, some studies also introduced the importance of organizational culture, firm size, and age as moderating variables. These factors influence how strategic agility is perceived and implemented across firms. For example, younger or smaller firms may be naturally more agile, while older firms might need to invest in structural and cultural changes to achieve the same level of responsiveness.

Moreover, this literature-based discussion reaffirms that strategic agility is not an optional trait-it is a strategic necessity in the current business landscape. Firms that embrace agility are better positioned to anticipate disruptions, leverage opportunities, and sustain competitive advantage across various performance dimensions.

## **8. Conclusion**

It reveals a consistent and positive relationship between strategic agility and both competitive advantage and firm performance. Studies across different contexts suggest that organizations with higher strategic agility are better able to respond to change, innovate, and maintain a strong market position. Furthermore, this relationship appears stronger in dynamic industries and among larger firms. Temporal trends indicate that the importance of strategic agility has grown over time, especially in the face of technological disruption and market volatility. Overall, strategic agility emerges as a critical factor for sustaining performance and competitiveness in an ever-changing business environment. Hence, both the hypotheses ( $H_1$  in first category and similarly  $H_1$  in second category) stand validated and both the  $H_0$  hypotheses are rejected keeping in view the findings of the study.

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