

EXPLORING SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN ORGANIZATIONAL AMBIDEXTERITY: INSIGHTS FROM A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

Alexandra JALBĂ (POPESCU-ZORICA)^{a1}, Iulian Marian NEDELICU^a

^a Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the conditions under which organizations succeed or fail in achieving ambidexterity, hence the ability to balance exploration and exploitation to sustain innovation and performance. While previous studies have examined structural, contextual, or leadership antecedents independently, this research offers an integrative perspective by applying a four-part analytical framework encompassing antecedents, mechanisms of implementation, outcomes, and contextual moderators. Through a systematic synthesis of recent empirical and theoretical studies, the paper identifies the primary enablers of successful ambidexterity, including adaptive leadership, trust-based culture, and technological absorptive capacity. Conversely, failure often arises from leadership misalignment, excessive structural rigidity, or a lack of dynamic reintegration following exploration initiatives. The findings reveal that organizational ambidexterity is not a fixed capability but a dynamic process requiring continuous calibration between innovation and operational efficiency, particularly in the context of digital transformation and environmental turbulence. The study contributes to the literature by linking ambidexterity outcomes to both internal and external contextual factors, offering a complementary explanation of why some organizations thrive while others stagnate.

KEYWORDS: *contextual ambidexterity, digital transformation, organizational ambidexterity, sequential ambidexterity, structural ambidexterity.*

DOI: 10.24818/IMC/2025/01.08

1. INTRODUCTION

The objective of this study is to conduct a review of the literature on organizational ambidexterity, with the specific aim of identifying and synthesizing the conditions, mechanisms, and outcomes that contribute to the success or failure of ambidexterity strategies within organizations.

Over the past two decades, research on organizational ambidexterity has significantly expanded, due to the increasing pressure on companies of all sizes to innovate while maintaining operational efficiency. The concept of ambidexterity was originally conceptualized and commonly defined as the capacity to simultaneously pursue exploration and exploitation (Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996). The literature about ambidexterity and ambidextrous strategies is rich but scattered, without a clear conclusion on how organizations can achieve success. Practical implementations and use cases are missing from the literature. However, several strategies have been studied more deeply over time and have been proposed to enable firms to achieve ambidexterity: structural, sequential and contextual approaches (Chakma et al., 2021). Structural ambidexterity describes the process of creating separate organizational units dedicated to either exploration or exploitation, allowing each to focus on its

¹Corresponding author. E-mail address: alexandra.zoricapopescu@gmail.com.

respective strategic logic without interference. Contextual ambidexterity, introduced by Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004), emphasizes the firm's ability to balance the demands of exploration and exploitation within a single business unit by fostering a work environment that supports both activities in terms of focus, time, budget and workforce allocation. Extending this perspective, He and Wong (2004) empirically demonstrate that firms achieving a balance between explorative and exploitative innovation strategies perform better than those emphasizing one at the expense of the other. The results are directly linked to sales performance. Their findings support the notion that ambidexterity enhances firm growth.

As a **research method** we used a theory driven literature review. Building on prior reviews of organizational ambidexterity (Raisch et al., 2009; Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004; Junni et al., 2013; Chakma et al., 2021), we synthesized an analytical framework consisting of four interrelated dimensions: antecedents, mechanisms of implementation, outcomes, and contextual moderators. We then structured insights using this 4-part framework and synthesized elements that lead to failure or success. All reviewed articles were mainly retrieved from the Scopus database, but other databases have been used as well.

2. THEORY OF AMBIDEXTERITY

In the last two decades, scholarly interest in organizational ambidexterity has grown substantially, reflecting the high pressure on firms to balance innovation with operational efficiency, especially in current times of extraordinary change. Ambidexterity is commonly understood as an organization's ability to engage in both exploration and exploitation at the same time in order to maintain its competitive advantage (Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996). Building on March's (1991) foundational work on the inherent tension and paradox between exploration and exploitation, O'Reilly challenges the logic of organizational ecology and the spin-off approach advocated by Christensen (2011), which recommends separating exploratory ventures into independent entities without the possibility to reunite them under same unit at a later phase of development. Instead, O'Reilly and Tushman (2004) argue that competitive firms manage ambidexterity within a single organizational framework by maintaining structurally distinct yet strategically integrated units. This configuration allows firms to leverage existing capabilities, such as logistics, real estate, and technology, across both exploratory and exploitative activities. According to O'Reilly and Tushman (2004), effective integration depends on senior leaders who have the competence to design and sustain an overarching strategic vision that aligns divergent business units and reconciles competing logics. Furthermore, as Chakma et al. (2021) emphasize, prioritizing either exploration or exploitation in isolation exposes firms to distinct strategic vulnerabilities, known respectively as the failure trap and the success trap.

Contextual organizational ambidexterity developed by Gibson, C. B., & Birkinshaw, J. (2004). Research on contextual ambidexterity emphasizes that an organization should keep exploration and exploitation within the same unit, but its ability to balance exploration and exploitation within the same unit depends largely on its culture, leadership, and control systems. McCarthy and Gordon (2011) find that management control systems can foster contextual ambidexterity when they combine mechanisms that support experimentation with formal structures that ensure accountability, particularly in R&D settings. An ambidextrous organizational culture, characterized by flexibility, openness, and shared vision, enables firms to simultaneously pursue innovation and efficiency, ultimately enhancing new product performance (Wang, C. L., Rafiq, M., 2012). Caniels and Van Assen (2019) show that empowering leadership plays a pivotal role by creating a supportive climate where employees feel trusted to engage in both exploitative and explorative behaviors. Collectively, these studies argue that contextual ambidexterity is not achieved through structural separation, but through the alignment of leadership, culture, and systems that encourage individuals to navigate conflicting demands within the same organizational context. Other authors point out that contextual ambidexterity means managing a series of inherent tensions that must be actively balanced rather than

resolved. Raisch et al. (2009) identify four core ambidexterity tensions: differentiation vs. integration, individual vs. organizational, static vs. dynamic, and internal vs. external. Ambidextrous effectiveness requires on one hand different approaches for exploration and exploitation and on the other hand integrative mechanisms that align them, with the optimal balance being decided based on business objectives. Second, while some managers may naturally engage in both exploitative and explorative tasks, this capacity is shaped by individual traits and organizational context, and is difficult to sustain simultaneously. Third, ambidexterity is not static and should be viewed as a dynamic capability. Ultimately, maintaining ambidextrous performance requires a balance between internal knowledge sharing and external knowledge acquisition through interdependent social networks. This interplay reveals that ambidexterity is less a stable structure and more a continuous managerial challenge that evolves across organizational levels.

One approach to addressing the tensions in contextual ambidexterity is to first implement **structural ambidexterity**, where exploration and exploitation are carried out in separate business or organizational units, followed by a phase of strategic reintegration. As suggested by O'Reilly and Tushman (2004), distinct units dedicated to exploration or exploitation avoid internal conflicts, while integration mechanisms ensure essential knowledge transfer between them. Integration efforts may involve purposefully interdependent subunits (Simsek, 2009), clearly defined interfaces (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013), or the creation of bridging roles and processes to facilitate knowledge transfer (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2008; Jansen et al., 2008; Gassmann et al., 2014). This sequenced strategy, from separation to reintegration, offers a pragmatic way to navigate the paradoxical demands of ambidexterity and enhance long-term innovation performance (Hansen et al., 2018).

Beyond structural and contextual approaches, scholars have also recognized a third form known as **sequential ambidexterity**, which emphasizes a temporal balance between exploration and exploitation rather than their integrative pursuit. In this context, organizations alternate between phases of exploration, when teams concentrate on experimentation and innovation, and periods of exploitation, when teams focus on operational efficiency (Gupta et al., 2006; Simsek, 2009). This temporal switching pattern is conceptually rooted in punctuated equilibrium theory (Romanelli & Tushman, 1985), which posits that long periods of strategic stability are interrupted by short bursts of transformative change. In support of this direction Chou et al. (2014) introduce the notion of a temporal switching capability, to enable firms to transition effectively between exploratory and exploitative modes in response to environmental contingencies. Their study, based on the electronics industry, finds that such capability, when aligned with absorptive capacity and appropriate strategy, enhances innovation and new product performance. Sequential ambidexterity thus represents a time-based dynamic capability that allows organizations to adapt flexibly to changing conditions without falling in the complexity trap often associated with simultaneous ambidexterity (Chou et al., 2014).

In this research a distinct cluster of studies focuses on technological absorptive capacity, regarded as a critical capability that enables firms to identify, assimilate, transform and exploit external knowledge (Zahra & George, 2002), thereby enhancing their capability to balance exploration and exploitation. The conceptual foundation is grounded in the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991), which holds that unique firm-level resources and capabilities underpin sustained competitive advantage. In recent years researchers started to analyze closely the relationship between digital transformation or technological transformations and ambidexterity. Technological integration not only facilitates ambidextrous capabilities but is also reinforced by them. Empirical evidence from Chinese manufacturing firms indicates that digital transformation contributes a great deal to enterprise value by enabling both technological innovation and business-model innovation, representing an ambidextrous innovation pattern (Ma et al., 2022). Likewise, in the tourism sector, strategic flexibility serves as a mediating mechanism through which digital transformation fosters both concurrent and sequential forms of exploratory and exploitative innovation. (Chen et al., 2025). Case research on digital innovation labs shows that firms facilitate ambidexterity by creating

dedicated spaces (labs) where teams can explore emerging technologies while leveraging established capabilities (Göbeler et al., 2020).

3. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

For analytical consistency, a four-part framework was used based on established classifications in the ambidexterity literature (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004; Raisch et al., 2009; Junni et al., 2013). The framework as in Figure 1. distinguishes between: **(1) Antecedents**, which refer to preconditions that enable or constrain an organization's ability to implement ambidexterity, such as leadership style, organizational structures, culture or strategic intent. **(2) Mechanisms of implementation** refer to the organizational methods or strategies used to balance exploration and exploitation. **(3) Outcomes**, as a third dimension, are the results or consequences of pursuing ambidexterity which is reflected in innovation performance, financial performance, competitive growth, or failure indicators. **(4) Contextual Moderators** are the external or internal factors that shape the success or failure of organizational ambidexterity initiatives, such as environmental turbulence, organizational size and age, and technological adoption. We also researched how organizations can balance exploration and exploitation in the context of the digital transformation brought about by Industry 4.0, with particular emphasis on the enabling roles of intellectual capital and technological absorptive capacity.

Table 1. Research Framework

	Framework element	Core focus	Key elements	Key references
1.	Antecedents	Preconditions enabling ambidexterity	Leadership, culture, structure, strategy	(Raisch et al., 2009; O'Reilly & Tushman (2013)
2.	Mechanisms of implementation	How ambidexterity is achieved	Structural, contextual, sequential, digital integration	Gibson & Birkinshaw (2004); Chou et al. (2014).
3.	Outcomes	Effects of ambidexterity	Innovation, performance, survival, traps	Junni et al. (2013); March (1991).
4.	Contextual moderators	External and internal conditions shaping ambidexterity	Environment, technology, size, age	Cao et al. (2009); Chen et al. (2025); (Raisch et al., 2009).

Source: authors based on literature

3.1 Antecedents

Organizations balance and synchronize exploitative (using current skills) and exploratory (innovating) activities mainly through Structural Solutions, Contextual Solutions or Sequential Solutions. Leadership-Based Solutions have a strong impact on ambidextrous performance and could be considered as overarching, regardless of the execution mode. Top management must actively manage and coordinate both activities, using their leadership to foster an organizational culture and processes that enable simultaneous exploration and exploitation. Organizational culture also has a strong impact on organizational ambidexterity. One approach is to develop different cultures within different parts of the organization: for example, creating an exploitative culture in areas like production which is focused on efficiency, and an explorative culture in areas like marketing that

focuses on innovation. This idea is known as structural differentiation (Jansen et al., 2008). Another approach is to build a single, adaptable culture that can shift between being control-oriented and flexible, known as contextual ambidexterity (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004). In short, organizational culture plays a key role in creating the environment needed for balancing both exploitation and exploration activities.

Research on ambidextrous leadership is limited due to two primary challenges: an empirical difficulty in observing how leaders encourage ambidexterity within organizations, and a theoretical limitation where most research focuses on the cognitive aspects of balancing exploration and exploitation. Existing literature suggests that strategic leaders and top management teams facilitate both exploratory and exploitative efforts through various leadership styles, including transformational and transactional approaches. There are some individual roles and activities associated with exploration and exploitation as shown in Figure 1 (Volery et al, 2013). Havermans et. al (2015) did an extensive research on the behavior of leaders in project management roles related to exploration and contextual ambidexterity, and identified following positive managerial attributes that support ambidexterity: working together, accepting mistakes, giving freedom, valuing the diversity, stimulating adoption of values related to exploration, being available, listening to others, encouraging the individual development of others and involving others.

Other perspectives emphasize the importance of strategic antecedents in fostering ambidexterity and improving organizational performance. Kafetzopoulos (2020) shows that two key organizational factors - proactiveness and quality orientation - act as significant enablers of ambidextrous capabilities. Proactiveness enables firms to anticipate environmental shifts and pursue exploratory innovation, while quality orientation fosters process discipline and customer responsiveness to enhance exploitation.

Burkert and Grossrieder (2025) emphasize that leadership styles promoting failure tolerance and psychological safety (Kang & Snell, 2008; Havermans et al., 2015) serve as critical enablers of exploratory behavior, allowing employees to experiment and learn without fear of punitive consequences. Conversely, mechanistic control systems that emphasize error avoidance support exploitative efficiency, suggesting that clear communication regarding when risk-taking is acceptable is essential for aligning behavior with strategic intent. Dynamic leadership approaches that alternate between opening and closing behaviors (Rosing et al., 2011) further demonstrate that ambidexterity is not achieved through static systems but through adaptive management, where incentive structures, performance goals, and feedback mechanisms are flexibly adjusted to balance efficiency and innovation (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2008; van der Borgh & Schepers, 2014). Goal autonomy and the combination of short and long-term targets (Hughes & Ogilvie, 2019) emerge as critical drivers of individual ambidextrous performance in the analysis of sales people performance. Financial and non-financial rewards, such as bonuses, free time for idea development, or public recognition, stimulate both idea generation and knowledge integration (Taylor & Helfat, 2009; Revilla & Rodriguez-Prado, 2018). High-performance work systems, where participative decision-making is encouraged, compensation is linked to performance and skill development, consistently correlate with higher levels of individual ambidexterity (Prieto & Pilar Pérez Santana, 2014; Patel et al., 2012; Kostopoulos et al., 2015).

When it comes to the individual level, traits such as cognitive variety, behavioral complexity, emotional intelligence, creativity, and attention to detail enhance an individual's ability to shift between exploration and exploitation, fostering adaptive problem-solving and innovative thinking (Eisenhardt et al., 2010; Rosing et al., 2011; Sok et al., 2018). Similarly, proactiveness, learning orientation, and self-efficacy support ambidextrous behavior by motivating individuals to seek new opportunities while refining existing processes (Chang et al., 2009; Kaupilla & Tempelaar, 2016). Locomotion orientation, meaning the tendency to move away from the current state, and integrational role-transition styles, which enable smooth switching between exploratory and exploitative tasks, are linked to higher ambidextrous performance (Tempelaar & Rosenkranz, 2017). Collectively, these

studies indicate that ambidexterity originates not only from organizational systems but also from the psychological and behavioral capacities of individuals, underscoring the importance of selection, training, and job design in cultivating ambidextrous talent (Burkert & Grossrieder, 2025).

Exploration	Exploitation	References
Creating variety in experience	Creating reliability in experience	Bontis et al. (2002); McGrath (2001)
Broadening a manager’s existing knowledge base; creation or acquisition of new knowledge	Deepening and refining a manager’s existing knowledge base; ability to leverage existing knowledge	Bierly and Daly (2007); Levinthal and March, (1993); Sidhu et al. (2004); Smith et al. (2005)
Searching for new organisational norms, routines, structures and systems	Optimising and stabilising organisational routines, structures and systems	Levinthal and March, (1993); Smith and Tushman (2005)
Experimenting with new approaches towards technologies, business processes or markets	Applying and improving existing competences, technologies, processes and products	He and Wong (2004); Kuckertz et al. (2010)
Innovating and adopting a long-term orientation	Focusing on production and adopting a rather short-term orientation	Andriopoulos and Lewis (2009); Kollmann et al. (2009); Walrave et al. (2011)
Reconsidering existing beliefs and decisions	Elaborating on existing beliefs and decisions	Floyd and Lane (2000); Lubatkin et al. (2006)

Figure 1. Roles and activities associated with exploration and exploitation

Source: Volery et al., (2013, p 111)

3.2 Mechanisms of implementation

Mechanisms of implementation refer to the organizational strategies through which exploration and exploitation are balanced and achieved, enabling firms to operationalize ambidexterity. The literature identifies three primary approaches that are prior described in Chapter 2: structural, contextual, and sequential, each addressing the paradox of innovation and efficiency from distinct organizational logics. Beyond these traditional mechanisms, recent research introduces process-based and technological mechanisms that expand the understanding of how ambidexterity is implemented in the digital era. Process mechanisms put an emphasis on the routines, work processes, and integrative practices that enable continuous learning and know-how transfer between exploration and exploitation. Saleh et al. (2023) highlight process mechanisms as one of seven major determinants of ambidexterity. Turner et al. (2012) argue that mechanisms grounded in human capital (skills, experience) and social capital (networks, relationships) support ambidexterity by enabling knowledge flows, boundary spanning, and collaboration across exploratory and exploitative efforts. These mechanisms that facilitate ambidextrous behavior are supportive “micro-mechanisms” that take place at the individual, team or group level. The review by Burkert and Grossrieder (2025) highlights that process mechanisms play a subtle yet important role in enabling ambidextrous performance. Clear processes, clear job descriptions, and formalized tasks are necessary prerequisites for exploitation, while autonomy and decision-making authority facilitate exploration. Moreover, personnel and cultural controls, including selection, training, and shared norms of support, collaboration and trust, encourage the necessary behaviors for balancing both modes of activity. Metaroutines, or “routines for changing other routines” (Adler et al., 1999), are valuable inputs for dynamic processes that allow organizations to switch effectively between routine and non-routine tasks. Overall, these findings suggest that a balance between structured and flexible processes, supported by trust-based cultures and continuous adaptability and innovation, are critical mechanisms through which ambidexterity translates into sustained performance (Burkert & Grossrieder, 2025). Simultaneously, technological absorptive capacity has emerged as a vital enabler of ambidexterity, allowing organizations to

acquire, assimilate, and apply external technological knowledge to support dual innovation strategies (Zahra & George, 2002). The rise of digital transformation further reinforces these dynamics: studies demonstrate that digital tools and infrastructures enhance ambidextrous innovation, facilitating both technological and business model renewal (Ma et al., 2022). Nowadays, digital transformation changes the key activities and processes that define a company's value. To take advantage of digital technologies, companies need to adopt new ways of working and update their work environment to create new value. Digitalization empowers teams with advanced knowledge, innovative tools, and seamless communication platforms, fostering a collaborative environment that encourages experimentation and learning. This enables organizations to effectively balance exploratory initiatives, such as venturing into new markets or developing new products, with the refinement and optimization of current processes (AlSaied & McLaughlin, 2024). To remain competitive and maximize digital investments, companies must develop ambidexterity, meaning they can explore new ideas and resources while also improving existing ones (Holotiuk et al., 2024). Also, organizations that prioritize creativity and innovation and invest in research and development are better equipped to respond to customer demands, introduce new products and services and gain competitive advantage. Innovation has evolved into a vital source of sustained differentiation, enabling firms to unlock new revenue streams, improve operational efficiencies and establish a strong foothold in increasingly saturated markets (Preda, 2014).

3.3 Outcomes

Building on March's (1991) foundational work, organizational outcomes of ambidexterity are best understood as dynamic trade-offs between short-term efficiency and long-term adaptability. While exploitation fosters reliability and immediate gains, exploration sustains learning, innovation, and resilience. Overemphasis on either dimension leads to the “failure trap” of excessive experimentation or the “success trap” of rigid exploitation. Effective ambidexterity thus results in adaptive equilibrium, enabling sustained competitive advantage and long-term organizational survival (March, 1991).

The meta-analysis by Junni. Et al. (2013) provides strong empirical evidence that organizational ambidexterity has a positive and significant effect on firm performance. By synthesizing data from 66 empirical studies, the authors found a moderate positive correlation ($r \approx 0.26$), showing that firms capable of balancing innovation and exploitation consistently outperform those focusing on one dimension alone. The study highlights that exploration primarily enhances growth and innovation outcomes, while exploitation drives profitability and efficiency, and that high engagement in both activities yields greater benefits than an even balance. Furthermore, the positive relationship between ambidexterity and performance is stronger in dynamic and knowledge-intensive environments, where adaptability is critical for survival. Overall, ambidexterity emerges as a strategic capability that enhances both short-term and long-term performance by integrating efficiency and adaptability within changing contexts (Junni et al., 2013).

In structural contexts, successful ambidexterity depends on the careful orchestration of integration mechanisms during the transition from exploration to exploitation. When managed effectively, these mechanisms allow firms to reintegrate innovations developed during the exploration unit, back into core business units, facilitating the commercialization of innovations and improving long-term adaptability. However, the authors emphasize that integration must be consciously timed and designed to balance resource allocation and prevent organizational rigidity. In this sense, structural ambidexterity followed by reintegration can enhance innovation outcomes and strategic renewal when executed with deliberate alignment across phases of exploration, transfer, and reorganization (Hansen et al., 2018). Kafetzopoulos (2020) demonstrates that the relationship between ambidexterity and firm performance is contingent on environmental uncertainty. In turbulent markets, ambidexterity's positive impact is amplified as firms rely on flexibility and experimentation to sustain performance, whereas in more stable environments, proactive and quality-oriented behaviors promote

gradual improvement and alignment. Ambidexterity drives performance through the development of inter-organizational learning and collaboration systems, reinforcing that sustainable competitiveness arises not from internal balance alone but through value co-creation (Sarmiento et al., 2024).

3.4 Contextual moderators

Contextual moderators refer to the internal and external conditions that influence how effectively an organization can balance exploration and exploitation or how ambidexterity impacts performance. They do not cause ambidexterity directly but shape the strength, direction, or stability of its relationships with antecedents and outcomes. Externally, contextual moderators include factors such as environmental dynamism, market turbulence, industry type, or technological change, which determine whether firms should emphasize adaptability (exploration) or efficiency (exploitation). In dynamic environments, for example, ambidexterity tends to have a stronger positive effect on innovation and performance because flexibility becomes critical for survival (Tamayo-Torres et al., 2018). Internally, moderators such as firm size, age, resource availability, and digital maturity impact a firm's ability to implement ambidextrous strategies.

External moderators

Research done by Tamayo-Torres et al. (2017) shows a moderate relationship between ambidexterity and firm performance in stable environments, and a strong one in dynamic environments where firms that effectively balance exploration and exploitation achieve greater financial and market performance. We believe that dynamic environments stimulate firms to develop ambidextrous competences, as in the absence of real adaptation, firms risk not only to lose market share and financial performance, but to become obsolete. Holotiuk et al. (2024) highlights that digitalization is an important external moderator that pushes organizations towards digital adoption and transformation, leading thus to a higher competitiveness on the market. But in order to maximize their digital investments, organizations need to balance exploration and exploitation in the use of the digital capabilities (Holotiuk et al., 2024). Folger et al. (2021) using research on 739 German employees show that employees who perceive a high degree of technological disruption in their business environment are more likely to behave ambidextrous.

Internal moderators

Dharmayanti (2023) concludes that both firm size and age act as contextual moderators that shape how ambidexterity translates into financial outcomes among micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). The findings reveal that firm age has a strong impact on the relationship between all dimensions of ambidexterity and financial performance. Older firms benefit from accumulated experience, established learning systems, and mature contextual processes, allowing them to exploit and explore more effectively. In case of firm size the authors show that it strengthens the link between exploration (product and market) and performance but does not significantly affect exploitation. This suggests that larger firms benefit from greater resources and structural differentiation that support innovative activities, yet size may also introduce rigidity that limits the activity to efficiency-oriented exploitation. Overall, the study highlights that organizational maturity and resource endowment enhance ambidexterity's performance impact, but excessive size can dilute flexibility, underscoring the importance of balancing growth with adaptability in pursuing ambidextrous strategies (Dharmayanti, 2023). Digital transformation as internal moderator enhances a firm's ambidextrous capacity (AlSaied & McLaughlin, 2024) by strengthening a firm's ability to explore emerging opportunities while optimizing existing operations. Technological innovation plays a crucial role in enabling organizations to outperform rivals in increasingly volatile markets (Zhao & Gao, 2024).

4. DETERMINANTS OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN ACHIEVING ORGANIZATIONAL AMBIDEXTERITY

In our literature review research through the proposed 4-part framework, we were able to extract main dimensions that positively or negatively affect the performance of organizations in their pursuit of becoming ambidextrous. Dimensions are summarized and presented in Table 2: Determinants of Success and Failure in Achieving Organizational Ambidexterity.

Framework element	Success Drivers	Failure Triggers
Antecedents	Leadership that promotes trust, error tolerance, and empowerment encourages exploration and balanced decision-making (Havermans et al., 2015). Learning orientation, proactiveness, and cognitive diversity foster adaptability and innovation (Kauppila & Tempelaar, 2016; Eisenhardt et al., 2010; Rosing et al., 2011). Supportive culture and high self-efficacy strengthen individual ambidextrous behavior (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004; Burkert & Grossrieder, 2023).	Rigid hierarchies, risk aversion, and lack of psychological safety constrain exploration (Hughes & Ogilvie, 2020). Leadership inconsistency or unclear vision leads to internal misalignment (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013). Absence of shared norms or adaptive mindset produces inertia which in turn leads to "success trap" (Chakma, Paul, & Dhir, 2021).
Mechanisms of Implementation	Structural ambidexterity enables firms to manage conflicting demands through separate but integrated units (O'Reilly & Tushman, 1996, 2004). Contextual ambidexterity aligns culture, leadership, and systems within a single unit (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004). Sequential ambidexterity allows temporal flexibility between exploration and exploitation (Chou, Yang, & Chiu, 2017). Process mechanisms, such as metaroutines and adaptive workflows, create learning loops that sustain dual capability (Adler et al., 1999; Burkert & Grossrieder, 2023).	Poorly timed integration or excessive structural separation causes "integration trade-offs" and failed exploration (Hansen, Wicki, & Schaltegger, 2019). Overformalization of processes stifles experimentation, while lack of coordination weakens exploitation efficiency (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009). Static implementation mechanisms that ignore dynamic alignment lead to decline (Raisch et al., 2019). Secchi and Camuffo (2019) concludes that failures in organizational ambidexterity can be embedded in the very structure of change implementation
Outcomes	Balanced ambidexterity enhances innovation, profitability, and adaptability across time (Jurni, Sarala, Taras, & Tarba, 2013). Firms leveraging both modes show superior growth and market renewal (Tamayo-Torres, Roehrich, & Lewis, 2017). Integration of exploration and exploitation improves innovation performance, particularly through value co-creation (Sarmiento, Simões, & Lages, 2024).	Overemphasis on exploitation leads to the "success trap," reducing flexibility and innovation, while excessive exploration produces a "failure trap" and resource waste (March, 1991; Chakma, Paul, & Dhir, 2021). Integration failure or loss of exploratory autonomy under pressure results in performance decline (Hansen, Wicki, & Schaltegger, 2019). Managerial impatience with innovation exacerbates the failure trap (Koops, 2013).
Moderators	Environmental dynamism amplifies ambidexterity's positive effect on performance by rewarding adaptability (Tamayo-Torres, Roehrich, & Lewis, 2017). Digital transformation strengthens ambidextrous learning and innovation through enhanced knowledge sharing and technological absorptive capacity (Zhang et al., 2022; McLaughlin & AlSaied, 2024). Firm age and size provide experience and resource depth, supporting ambidexterity in complex environments (Dharmayanti, 2023).	Strategic misfit between ambidextrous structure and environmental stability undermines efficiency (Tamayo-Torres et al., 2017). Lack of digital readiness weakens implementation of ambidextrous innovation (Chen et al., 2024). Excessive organizational maturity may lead to structural rigidity and reduced flexibility (Dharmayanti, 2023).

Figure 2. Determinants of Success and Failure in Achieving Organizational Ambidexterity

Source: authors based on literature

5. CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

This study contributes to the growing literature on organizational ambidexterity by systematically analyzing why organizations succeed or fail in achieving a sustainable balance between exploration and exploitation. Building upon prior theoretical frameworks, the research synthesized evidence from multiple studies across four analytical dimensions: antecedents, mechanisms of implementation,

outcomes, and contextual moderators. The results indicate that successful ambidextrous organizations share key enablers such as adaptive leadership, supportive culture, effective communication of strategic intent, and the integration of technological absorptive capacity and digital transformation processes. Conversely, organizations that fail to achieve ambidexterity often suffer from rigid structures, leadership misalignment, resource misallocation, or an inability to translate exploratory innovation into operational performance. These findings suggest that ambidexterity should be understood not as a static capability, but as a dynamic and iterative process requiring constant recalibration between innovation and efficiency.

From a theoretical perspective, this paper advances understanding by linking success and failure conditions to an integrative four-part framework, providing a structured lens for analyzing how antecedents, mechanisms, outcomes, and moderators interact. Practically, it emphasizes that achieving ambidexterity demands not only strategic intent but also the continuous orchestration of leadership, culture, and processes within dynamic environments.

Future research should empirically test the relationships proposed in this framework using longitudinal and cross-industry data to capture how ambidexterity evolves over time. Further studies could also explore the interplay between digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and ambidextrous capabilities, particularly how new technologies reshape exploration-exploitation trade-offs. Moreover, integrating behavioral and psychological factors, such as leadership cognition and employee adaptability, may deepen our understanding of the human mechanisms underpinning organizational ambidexterity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of Bucharest University of Economic Studies for providing access to academic databases and research resources essential for conducting this study. Sincere appreciation is also extended to the academic mentors and peers who offered valuable insights and feedback during the development of this paper. This research was carried out independently, and no external funding or conflicts of interest are declared.

REFERENCES

- Adler, P. S., Goldoftas, B., & Levine, D. I. (1999). Flexibility versus Efficiency? A case study of model changeovers in the Toyota production system. *Organization Science*, 10(1), 43–68. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.10.1.43>.
- AlSaied, M., & McLaughlin, P. (2024). Organizational culture enabler and inhibitor factors for ambidextrous innovation. *Administrative Sciences*, 14(9), 207. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci14090207>.
- Andriopoulos, C., & Lewis, M. W. (2008). Exploitation-Exploration Tensions and Organizational Ambidexterity: Managing Paradoxes of Innovation. *Organization Science*, 20(4), 696–717. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1080.0406>.
- Barney, J. (1991). Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage. *Journal of Management*, 17(1), 99–120. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014920639101700108>.
- Burkert, M., & Grossrieder, S. (2025). Individual ambidexterity and management controls: a systematic literature review. *Management Review Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-025-00493-w>.
- Caniëls, M. C., & Van Assen, M. F. (2019). How motivational orientations are related to ambidexterity. *Kybernetes*, 48(10), 2177–2189. <https://doi.org/10.1108/k-10-2018-0584>.
- Chakma, R., Paul, J., & Dhir, S. (2021). Organizational Ambidexterity: A review and research agenda. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, 71, 121–137. <https://doi.org/10.1109/tem.2021.3114609>.

- Chang, Y., Yang, P. Y., & Chen, M. (2009). The determinants of academic research commercial performance: Towards an organizational ambidexterity perspective. *Research Policy*, 38(6), 936–946. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2009.03.005>.
- Chen, S., Ou, Y., Pu, S., & Bai, O. (2025). Digital Transformation and Ambidextrous Innovation for Sustainable Growth: Evidence from Listed Tourism Firms in China. *Sustainability*, 17(13), 5923. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su17135923>.
- Chou, C., Yang, K., & Chiu, Y. (2014). Managing sequential ambidexterity: roles of temporal switching capability and contingent factors. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, 2014(1), 13537. <https://doi.org/10.5465/ambpp.2014.13537abstract>.
- Christensen, C., M. (2011). *The innovator's dilemma: The revolutionary book that will change the way you do business*. Harper Business.
- Dharmayanti, N. (2023). Does firm size and age strengthen the relationship between ambidexterity and financial performance? Empirical evidence in MSME perspective. *Journal of Economics Finance and Management Studies*, 06(07). <https://doi.org/10.47191/jefms/v6-i7-26>.
- Eisenhardt, K. M., Furr, N. R., & Bingham, C. B. (2010). CROSSROADS—Microfoundations of Performance: Balancing efficiency and flexibility in dynamic environments. *Organization Science*, 21(6), 1263–1273. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1100.0564>.
- Folger, N., Brosi, P., & Stumpf-Wollersheim, J. (2021). Perceived technological turbulence and individual ambidexterity – The moderating role of formalization. *European Management Journal*, 40(5), 718–728. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2021.10.005>.
- Gassmann, O., Frankenberger, K., & Csik, M. (2014). *The business model navigator : 55 models that will revolutionise your business*. Pearson Education Limited.
- Gibson, C. B., & Birkinshaw, J. (2004). The Antecedents, Consequences, And Mediating Role Of Organizational Ambidexterity. *Academy of Management Journal*, 47(2), 209–226. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20159573>.
- Göbeler, L., Schaar, D., & Hukal, P. (2020). Initiating Ambidexterity through Digital Innovation Labs. *AIS Electronic Library (AISEL) (Association for Information Systems)*, 55. Retrieved September 3, 2025, from https://aisel.aisnet.org/ecis2020_rp/55.
- Gupta, A. K., Smith, K. G., & Shalley, C. E. (2006). The interplay between exploration and exploitation. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(4), 693–706. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2006.22083026>.
- Hansen, E. G., Wicki, S., & Schaltegger, S. (2018). Structural ambidexterity, transition processes, and integration trade-offs: a longitudinal study of failed exploration. *R and D Management*, 49(4), 484–508. <https://doi.org/10.1111/radm.12339>.
- Havermans, L. A., Den Hartog, D. N., Keegan, A., & Uhl-Bien, M. (2015). Exploring the Role of Leadership in Enabling Contextual Ambidexterity. *Human Resource Management*, 54(S1), s179–s200. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21764>.
- He, Z., & Wong, P. (2004). Exploration vs. Exploitation: An Empirical Test of the Ambidexterity Hypothesis. *Organization Science*, 15(4), 481–494. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1040.0078>.
- Holotiuk, F., Beimborn, D., & Hund, A. (2024). *Mechanisms for Achieving Ambidexterity in the Context of Digital Transformation: Insights from Digital Innovation Labs*. AIS Electronic Library (AISEL). <https://doi.org/10.17705/1jais.00885>.
- Hughes, D. E., Ogilvie, J. L. (2019). When sales becomes service: the evolution of the professional selling role and an organic model of frontline ambidexterity. *Journal of Service Research*, 23(1), 22–32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670519878882>.
- Jansen, J. J., Vera, D., & Crossan, M. (2008). Strategic leadership for exploration and exploitation: The moderating role of environmental dynamism. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 20(1), 5–18. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2008.11.008>.

- Junni, P., Sarala, R., M., Taras, V. & Tarba, S., Y. (2013). *Organizational ambidexterity and performance: A meta-analysis*. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 27(4), 299–312. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2012.0015>.
- Kafetzopoulos, D. (2020). Organizational ambidexterity: antecedents, performance and environmental uncertainty. *Business Process Management Journal*, 27(3), 922–940. <https://doi.org/10.1108/bpmj-06-2020-0300>.
- Kang, S., & Snell, S. A. (2008). Intellectual Capital Architectures and Ambidextrous Learning: a framework for Human resource management. *Journal of Management Studies*, 46(1), 65–92. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2008.00776.x>.
- Kauppila, O., & Tempelaar, M. P. (2016). The Social-Cognitive underpinnings of employees’ ambidextrous behaviour and the supportive role of group managers’ leadership. *Journal of Management Studies*, 53(6), 1019–1044. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12192>.
- Kostopoulos, K. C., Bozionelos, N., & Syrigos, E. (2015). Ambidexterity and unit performance: Intellectual capital antecedents and Cross-Level moderating effects of human resource practices. *Human Resource Management*, 54(S1). <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21705>.
- Ma, H., Jia, X., & Wang, X. (2022). Digital Transformation, ambidextrous innovation and Enterprise Value: Empirical analysis based on listed Chinese manufacturing companies. *Sustainability*, 14(15), 9482. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14159482>.
- March, J. G. (1991). Exploration and exploitation in organizational learning. *Organization Science*, 2(1), 71–87. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2.1.71>.
- McCarthy, I. P., & Gordon, B. R. (2011). Achieving contextual ambidexterity in R&D organizations: a management control system approach. *R and D Management*, 41(3), 240–258. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9310.2011.00642.x>.
- O’Reilly, C. A., & Tushman, M. L. (2013). Organizational ambidexterity: past, present, and future. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 27(4), 324–338. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2013.0025>.
- O’Reilly, Charles & Tushman, Michael. (2004). The Ambidextrous Organization. *Harvard business review*. 82. 74-81, 140. Retrieved September 2, 2025, from <https://hbr.org/2004/04/the-ambidextrous-organization>.
- Patel, P. C., Messersmith, J. G., & Lepak, D. P. (2012). Walking the Tightrope: An Assessment of the Relationship between High-Performance Work Systems and Organizational Ambidexterity. *Academy of Management Journal*, 56(5), 1420–1442. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2011.0255>.
- Preda, G. (2014). Organizational Ambidexterity And Competitive Advantage: Toward A Research Model. *RePEc: Research Papers in Economics*.
- Prieto, I. M., & Pérez-Santana, M. P. (2014). Managing innovative work behavior: the role of human resource practices. *Personnel Review*, 43(2), 184–208. <https://doi.org/10.1108/pr-11-2012-0199>.
- Raisch, S., Birkinshaw, J., Probst, G., & Tushman, M. L. (2009). Organizational ambidexterity: balancing exploitation and exploration for sustained performance. *Organization Science*, 20(4), 685–695. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1090.0428>.
- Revilla, E., & Rodríguez-Prado, B. (2018). Bulding ambidexterity through creativity mechanisms: Contextual drivers of innovation success. *Research Policy*, 47(9), 1611–1625. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2018.05.009>.
- Romanelli, E., & Tushman, M. L. (1994). Organizational Transformation As Punctuated Equilibrium: An Empirical Test. *Academy of Management Journal*, 37(5), 1141–1166. <https://doi.org/10.2307/256669>.
- Rosing, K., Frese, M., & Bausch, A. (2011). Explaining the heterogeneity of the leadership-innovation relationship: Ambidextrous leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 22(5), 956–974. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2011.07.014>.

- Saleh, R. H., Durugbo, C. M., & Almahamid, S. M. (2023). What makes innovation ambidexterity manageable: a systematic review, multi-level model and future challenges. *Review of Managerial Science*, 17(8), 3013–3056. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11846-023-00659-4>.
- Sarmiento, M., Simões, C., & Lages, L. F. (2024). From organizational ambidexterity to organizational performance: The mediating role of value co-creation. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 118, 175–188. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2024.02.010>.
- Simsek, Z. (2009). Organizational ambidexterity: towards a multilevel understanding. *Journal of Management Studies*, 46(4), 597–624. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2009.00828.x>.
- Sok, P., Sok, K. M., Danaher, T. S., & Danaher, P. J. (2018). The complementarity of frontline service employee creativity and attention to detail in service delivery. *Journal of Service Research*, 21(3), 365–378. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670517746778>.
- Tamayo-Torres, J., Roehrich, J. K., & Lewis, M. A. (2017). Ambidexterity, performance and environmental dynamism. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 37(3), 282–299. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijopm-06-2015-0378>.
- Taylor, A., & Helfat, C. E. (2009). Organizational linkages for surviving technological change: complementary assets, middle management, and ambidexterity. *Organization Science*, 20(4), 718–739. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1090.0429>.
- Tempelaar, M. P., & Rosenkranz, N. A. (2017). Switching hats: The effect of role transition on individual ambidexterity. *Journal of Management*, 45(4), 1517–1539. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206317714312>.
- Turner, N., Swart, J., & Maylor, H. (2012). Mechanisms for Managing Ambidexterity: A review and research agenda. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 15(3), 317–332. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2012.00343.x>.
- Tushman, M. L., & O'Reilly, C. A. (1996). Ambidextrous Organizations: Managing evolutionary and revolutionary change. *California Management Review*, 38(4), 8–29. <https://doi.org/10.2307/41165852>.
- Tushman, M. L., & Romanelli, E. (1985). Organizational Evolution: A Metamorphosis Model of Convergence and Reorientation. *Organizational Behavior* 7. Retrieved September 1, 2025, from <https://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/item.aspx?num=7842>.
- Van Der Borgh, M., & Schepers, J. J. (2014). Do Retailers Really Profit from Ambidextrous Managers? The Impact of Frontline Mechanisms on New and Existing Product Selling Performance. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 31(4), 710–727. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpim.12158>.
- Volery, T., Mueller, S., & Von Siemens, B. (2013). Entrepreneur ambidexterity: A study of entrepreneur behaviours and competencies in growth-oriented small and medium-sized enterprises. *International Small Business Journal Researching Entrepreneurship*, 33(2), 109–129. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266242613484777>.
- Wang, C. L., & Rafiq, M. (2012). Ambidextrous organizational culture, contextual ambidexterity and new product innovation: A comparative study of UK and Chinese high-tech firms. *British Journal of Management*, 25(1), 58–76. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2012.00832.x>.
- Zahra, S. A., & George, G. (2002). Absorptive Capacity: a review, reconceptualization, and extension. *Academy of Management Review*, 27(2), 185. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4134351>.
- Zhao, J., Gao, P. (2024). Configurations of ambidextrous innovation and its performance implication in the context of digital transformation. *Systems*, 12(2), 60. <https://doi.org/10.3390/systems12020060>.