

ORGANIZATIONAL AGILITY IN SMES DURING CRISES: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW AND AN INTEGRATIVE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.

Auteur 1 : BINKKOUR Mohamed,

Auteur 2 : SAFOUANE Lina,

Auteur 3 : BENSAL Sara,

Mohamed BINKKOUR, (Professor of Higher Education.)

1Ibn Zohr University, Faculty of Legal, Economic and Social Sciences, Morocco.

Lina SAFOUANE, (16-0009-0009-2815-5729 *, PhD Student.)

2 Ibn Zohr University, Faculty of Legal, Economic and Social Sciences, Morocco.

Sara BENSAL, (Associate Profess.)

3ISIAM Business School, International University of Agadir (IUA), Morocco.

Déclaration de divulgation : L'auteur n'a pas connaissance de quelconque financement qui pourrait affecter l'objectivité de cette étude.

Conflit d'intérêts : L'auteur ne signale aucun conflit d'intérêts.

Pour citer cet article : BINKKOUR .M, SAFOUANE .L & BENSAL .S (2026) « ORGANIZATIONAL AGILITY IN SMES DURING CRISES: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW AND AN INTEGRATIVE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK», African Scientific Journal « Volume 03, Num 38 » pp: 001 – 028.



DOI : 10.5281/zenodo.22815556

Copyright © 2026 – ASJ



Abstract

Better business performance is a major goal for companies working in changing and unsure conditions, especially during times of trouble. In this setting, organizational agility and strategic agility have become more important as key ways that help companies notice changes in the environment, react quickly, and adjust resources. This problem matters more for small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) because their structure limits make them more vulnerable to outside impacts. Though there is increasing study connecting agility to performance results, the current writing is broken up with related ideas such as agile organization, agility abilities, and dynamic capabilities being applied unevenly.

This study undertakes a systematic literature review aiming at clarifying and synthesizing extant knowledge about organizational agility in crisis contexts. Based on a structured search from three major academic databases, qualitative content analysis of 75 peer-reviewed articles has been used in the final sample. This study reviews to identify four core categories: agility drivers, agility enablers, agility capabilities, and agility dimensions that are integrated into one comprehensive conceptual framework explaining how firms develop and deploy agility in response to environmental turbulence.

Based on the dynamic capabilities view, it framed how under crisis conditions, organizational mechanisms work to develop agility capabilities. This paper contributes toward building a more coherent theory and at the same time is actionable for SMEs that intend to maintain resilience and sustain performance in times of crisis.

Keywords Organizational agility, Strategic agility, Agile organization, Agility capabilities, Dynamic capabilities, SMEs, Crisis

Introduction

The major challenge toward the achievement of competitiveness and better performance in organizations is highly attributed to small and medium enterprises since they have low resources and are more vulnerable to any external shocks in times of crises. Vinodh et al. (2010b) stated that market conditions have become quite complicated due to dynamic customer expectations and frequent changes in the environment as indicated by Ahlbäck et al. (2017). This has led to high competition among firms as noted by Vinodh et al. (2010a); Vinodh, 2010. Therefore, organizational capability for quick readjustment of resource configurations is critical in responding to changes while taking advantage of emerging opportunities. Firms with a high level of organizational agility can quickly seize opportunities (Hatzijordanou et al., 2019) which operates as a means of differentiation under dynamic environments (Meinhardt et al., 2018). The ability of SMEs under crisis to reconfigure resource capability means survival and resilience in maintaining competitive advantage hence making agility the central performance determinant under uncertainty.

The concept of agility was first introduced in a business context in 1982, described as “the ability to respond rapidly to changing circumstances” (Brown & Agnew, 1982). Although rarely cited, this original understanding closely resembles modern definitions: organizational agility (OA) refers to a firm's ability to thrive in fast-changing and unpredictable environments (Vinodh et al., 2012a). Researchers often trace the origins of OA to the 1991 Lehigh Report by the Iacocca Institute, commissioned to identify causes of declining manufacturing competitiveness in the United States. Agility emerged as a central recommendation to enhance industry competitiveness. Across industries, managers widely agree that organizational agility is a critical success factor determining competitiveness in volatile contexts (De Smet & Aghina, 2015). A recent survey found that increasing OA was one of the top strategic priorities for most respondents (Ahlbäck & al., 2017). Its impact reinforces this importance: 81% of participants observed improved business performance after adopting agile practices (Ahlbäck & al., 2017). Academic research corroborates the positive effects of OA on performance (Inman & al., 2011; Vickery & al., 2010). Studies show that agile organizations generate revenue 37% faster and achieve 30% higher profitability than non-agile firms (Glenn, 2009; Wang & al., 2014). For SMEs operating under crisis-driven pressures,

whether economic, geopolitical, or health-related, these performance advantages associated with agility may represent not only a competitive edge but also a key mechanism for resilience.

Despite growing interest and widespread intent to implement OA, significant conceptual ambiguity persists in the literature (Van Oosterhout & al., 2006). Conceptual ambiguity is common in management research and may have far-reaching consequences (Podsakoff & al., 2016). Multiple definitions and disagreements over terminology hinder cumulative knowledge development. For SMEs seeking to adopt agile practices, these inconsistencies complicate the identification of actionable levers and obstruct managerial guidance in crisis contexts, where clarity and rapid decision-making are essential.

Against this background, this study aims to clarify and synthesize the fragmented literature on organizational agility in SMEs during crises and to develop an integrative conceptual framework explaining how agility enables SMEs to respond, adapt, and sustain performance under crisis-induced disruptions. More specifically, the study seeks to identify and integrate the main drivers, enablers, capabilities, and dimensions of organizational agility and to examine their role in supporting resilience and strategic renewal. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, the theoretical background clarifies the conceptual foundations of organizational agility and its relationship with dynamic capabilities. Second, the methodology describes the systematic literature review process, including the PRISMA protocol, database selection, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and coding procedure. Third, the results of the review are presented and synthesized into an integrative conceptual framework. Finally, the paper discusses the theoretical, managerial, and policy implications, acknowledges its limitations, and proposes directions for future research.

1. Theoretical Background

1.1. Conceptual Ambiguities in Organizational Agility Research

Despite the growing prominence of organizational agility (OA) in management research, the literature remains characterized by significant conceptual ambiguity. In the organizational sciences, insufficient conceptual clarity has been shown to undermine theory building, empirical comparability, and cumulative knowledge development (Podsakoff et al., 2016). This challenge is particularly acute in agility research, where multiple definitions and overlapping terminologies coexist without consensus (Klein et al., 2009).

These ambiguities are especially problematic when examining organizational agility in SMEs during crises. SMEs operate under severe resource constraints and heightened exposure to environmental shocks, which makes conceptual clarity essential for translating theory into actionable managerial guidance. Without a coherent understanding of what organizational agility entails, SMEs facing crisis conditions may struggle to identify which practices enhance resilience and which capabilities are critical for survival and recovery.

A major source of confusion stems from the interchangeable use of related concepts. Terms such as agility and flexibility are often used synonymously (Monplaisir, 2002), contributing to conceptual proliferation, where similar constructs are labeled differently or distinct constructs are conflated (Podsakoff et al., 2016). This lack of distinction weakens construct validity and limits the robustness of empirical findings, particularly in crisis-oriented studies where precision is vital.

1.2. Confusion Between Agility Components: Drivers, Capabilities, Enablers, and Dimensions

Consistent with the dynamic capabilities' perspective, organizational agility is conceptualized as a firm's capacity to sense environmental changes, seize emerging opportunities, and reconfigure resources in a timely and effective manner. Within this framework, agility is not viewed as a static organizational attribute but as a higher-order capability that enables continuous adaptation in volatile and uncertain environments. This perspective is particularly relevant for SMEs operating under crisis conditions, where rapid shifts in demand, resource constraints, and institutional disruptions require swift and coordinated strategic responses.

Drawing on Teece et al. (2016), organizational agility reflects the firm's ability to redeploy and recombine resources toward higher-value activities in response to both external shocks and internal challenges. Prior studies emphasize that agility encompasses both an offensive dimension, associated with opportunity recognition and entrepreneurial action, and a defensive dimension, related to adjustment, recovery, and risk mitigation (Lee et al., 2003). The coexistence of these dimensions is especially critical during crisis periods, as SMEs must simultaneously stabilize ongoing operations and explore adaptive or transformative strategic options.

Subsequent research conceptualizes organizational agility as a second-order dynamic capability emerging from the interaction of lower-level functional and managerial capabilities (Lee et al., 2015). These include strategic sensitivity, resource fluidity, and leadership unity, which together

enable firms to anticipate disruptions, mobilize resources efficiently, and implement rapid strategic change. In crisis contexts, the development of such capabilities allows SMEs not only to withstand external shocks but also to leverage uncertainty as a source of renewal and competitive repositioning. As a result, organizational agility constitutes a key mechanism through which SMEs enhance resilience and sustain performance under crisis-induced turbulence.

1.3. Perspectives on Organizational Agility

Organizational agility has been conceptualized from multiple theoretical perspectives, reflecting its multidisciplinary roots. Prior research has framed OA as a management philosophy (Sharp et al., 1999), a philosophical orientation (Bernardes & Hanna, 2009), a manufacturing paradigm (Meade & Sarkis, 1999; Narasimhan et al., 2006), a performance capability (Sambamurthy et al., 2003; Cho et al., 2008), a strategic capability (Chakravarty et al., 2013), and a dynamic capability (Bessant et al., 2001; Teece et al., 2016).

Narasimhan et al. (2006) distinguish between two dominant views: agility as a broad organizational paradigm and agility as a specific capability. While the paradigm perspective emphasizes values and cultural orientations, it often lacks operational precision. In contrast, the capability-based perspective allows for clearer definition, measurement, and empirical testing. This distinction is particularly relevant when analyzing organizational agility in SMEs during crises, where actionable and measurable constructs are essential.

Consistent with recent research (Lu & Ramamurthy, 2011; Tallon & Pinsonneault, 2011; Hazen et al., 2017; Teece et al., 2016), this study adopts the view of organizational agility as a dynamic capability enabling firms, especially SMEs operating under crisis pressure, to sense environmental changes, seize emerging opportunities, and rapidly reconfigure resources. From this perspective, organizational agility is not a static organizational attribute but a higher-order capability that supports continuous adaptation in turbulent and uncertain contexts. In crisis situations, this capability is particularly critical for SMEs, as it allows them to respond swiftly to external shocks, manage resource constraints, and sustain performance despite heightened environmental volatility.

1.4. Organizational Agility as a Dynamic Capability in Crisis Contexts

Dynamic capabilities refer to a firm's capacity to purposefully adapt, integrate, and reconfigure internal and external resources in response to changing environments (Teece et al., 2016). Within

this framework, organizational agility represents a higher-order capability that enables rapid and effective responses to uncertainty, disruption, and volatility.

Teece et al. (2016) define organizational agility as the ability to redeploy and reconfigure resources toward higher-value activities in response to internal or external change. This definition is particularly salient for SMEs operating during crises, where swift reallocation of scarce resources can determine organizational survival. Lee et al. (2003) further distinguish between an offensive (entrepreneurial) dimension and a defensive (adaptive) dimension of agility, emphasizing that both are necessary to cope with crisis-induced threats while exploiting emergent opportunities.

Subsequent research conceptualizes organizational agility as a second-order dynamic capability emerging from the orchestration of lower-level functional capabilities (Lee et al., 2015). This hierarchical view explains how SMEs, despite structural constraints, can develop agility through recombination rather than resource abundance. Consequently, organizational agility becomes a source of sustained competitive advantage, particularly under crisis conditions where adaptability is rare and difficult to imitate (Teece et al., 1997)

1.5. Definitions and Effects of Organizational Agility in SMEs During Crises

Although definitions of organizational agility vary, several core elements recur across studies. Organizational agility is consistently associated with responsiveness to frequent, unpredictable change (Lu & Ramamurthy, 2011), emphasizing speed, flexibility, and timely decision-making (Gunasekaran & Yusuf, 2002). Its ultimate objective is to enhance competitiveness by improving efficiency, quality, cost-effectiveness, and customer responsiveness (Cao & Dowlatsahi, 2005). Empirical evidence suggests that firms exhibiting high levels of agility achieve superior operational and financial performance, including faster market response, higher productivity, and improved revenue growth (Vázquez-Bustelo et al., 2007). For SMEs during crises, these effects extend beyond performance to include organizational resilience, continuity, and strategic renewal. In such contexts, agility functions not only as a competitive lever but also as a survival mechanism.

1.6. Core Categories of Organizational Agility: An Integrative View

To address conceptual fragmentation, organizational agility can be structured into four interrelated categories that are particularly relevant for crisis contexts:

Table N°1 : Key Categories of Organizational Agility in SMEs Facing Crises

Category	Definition (Crisis-Oriented)
Agility Drivers	Internal and external pressures (e.g., crises, market volatility, technological disruption) that create the need for agility in SMEs
Agility Capabilities	Core organizational abilities enabling anticipation, rapid response, adaptation, and opportunity exploitation under uncertainty
Agility Enablers	Organizational mechanisms and resources (e.g., digital tools, flexible structures, leadership practices) that activate agility capabilities
Agility Dimensions	Organizational domains (e.g., operations, HR, supply chain, governance) where agility is manifested during crises

Source : Authors

In SMEs operating under crisis conditions, drivers intensify environmental pressure, capabilities determine response effectiveness, enablers translate intent into action, and dimensions represent the concrete organizational expressions of agility. Together, these elements form an integrated system that supports resilience and adaptive performance.

1.7. Justification for an Integrative Theoretical Framework

Although several literature reviews on organizational agility exist, most focus on specific domains such as manufacturing, supply chains, or information systems. Moreover, persistent confusion between agility and related constructs, such as flexibility, adaptability, and resilience, continues to limit theoretical consolidation. Crucially, no prior review offers a fully integrated framework explicitly contextualized for SMEs during crisis periods.

This theoretical background therefore provides the foundation for a systematic review aimed at clarifying agility concepts, integrating fragmented perspectives, and reinforcing the crisis lens throughout the analysis. By doing so, it supports both scholarly rigor and managerial relevance,

offering a coherent theoretical basis for understanding how organizational agility enables SMEs to survive, adapt, and renew themselves in times of crisis.

2. Methodology

2.1. Epistemological Stance

This study adopts a positivist epistemological stance, which is consistent with the systematic and structured nature of the literature review. This positioning aims to synthesize existing knowledge through explicit, transparent, and replicable procedures in order to clarify conceptual boundaries and identify recurring theoretical patterns in the literature. From this perspective, organizational agility is treated as a theoretically observable construct whose components and relationships can be systematically identified, classified, and compared across empirical and conceptual studies.

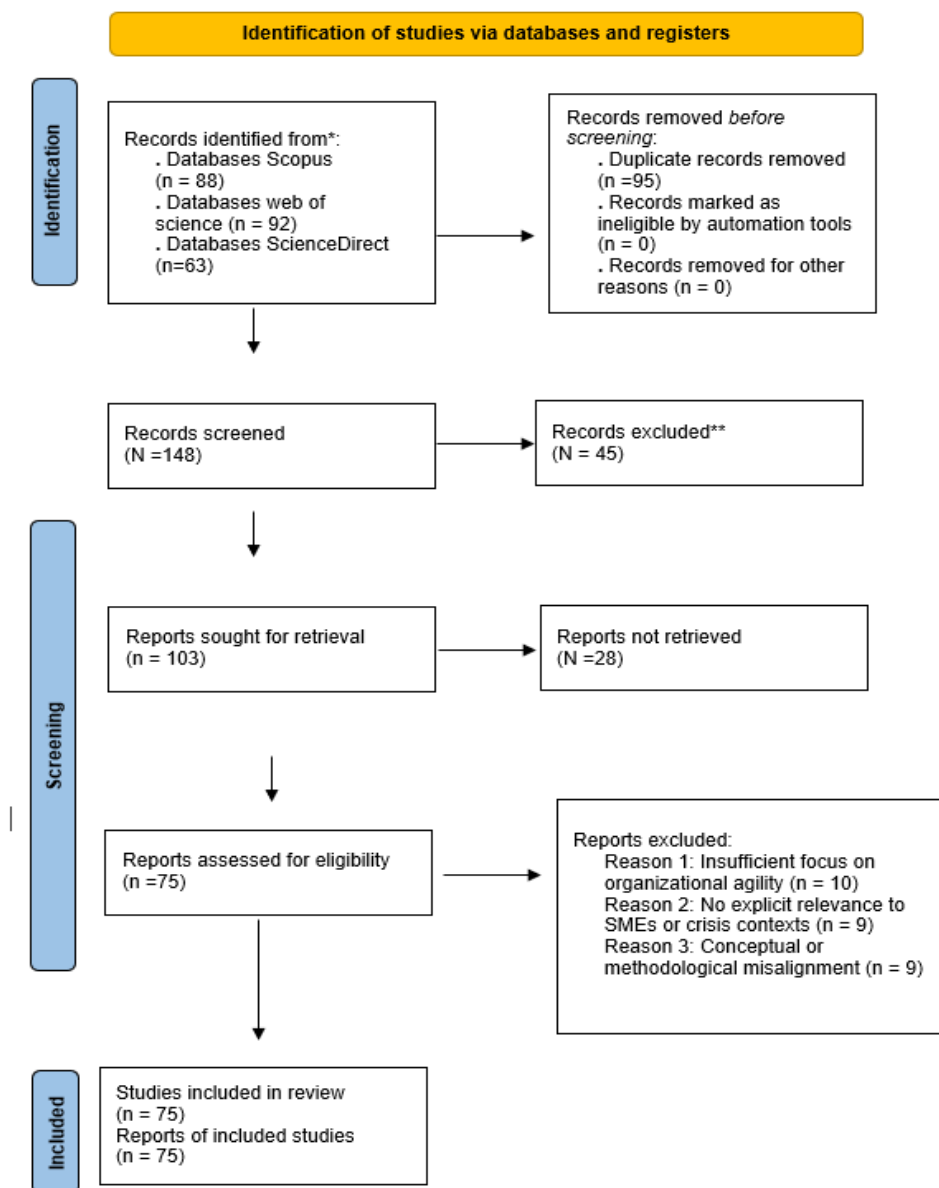
This epistemological positioning is particularly appropriate for examining organizational agility in SMEs during crisis contexts, where fragmented conceptualizations have hindered cumulative knowledge development. By relying on predefined search procedures, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, and systematic coding, the review seeks to reduce interpretive bias while ensuring analytical rigor and methodological transparency.

Regarding the mode of reasoning, this study combines deductive and inductive reasoning. A deductive logic is initially employed to guide the review through theoretical concepts and analytical categories identified in the existing literature, particularly organizational agility, strategic agility, dynamic capabilities, agility drivers, capabilities, enablers, and dimensions. At the same time, an inductive logic is applied during the qualitative content analysis, allowing additional themes, relationships, and patterns to emerge from the selected studies. This combination enables the study to remain theoretically grounded while allowing the systematic review to generate an integrative conceptual framework from the evidence synthesized in the literature.

2.2. Presentation of the Systematic Review Approach

This systematic literature review follows the PRISMA guidelines to ensure transparency and methodological rigor in the identification and selection of relevant studies. The review process comprised four stages: identification, duplicate removal, screening, and eligibility assessment. The complete document selection process is illustrated in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1).

Figure N°1 : PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Systematic Literature Review Process



Source : Authors

2.3. Summary of Representative Studies

Table 2 presents a selection of representative studies from the final sample to illustrate the diversity of contexts, methodologies, and theoretical perspectives addressed in the literature on organizational agility in SMEs during crisis contexts.

Table N°2 : Representative studies included in the systematic review

Author(s)	Year	Context (SMEs / Crisis)	Methodology	Key focus / Main findings
Acciarini et al.	2021	SMEs – Italy – COVID-19	Case study	Strategic agility enhances resilience during crisis
Acciarini et al.	2024	Organizations – Crisis contexts	Systematic review	Strategic change as adaptive response to disruption
Clauss et al.	2022	SMEs – Europe – COVID-19	Quantitative	Temporary business model innovation as agile response
Clauss et al.	2019	Firms – Dynamic environments	Quantitative	Strategic agility mediates performance outcomes
Elali	2021	Firms – COVID-19 crisis	Conceptual	Strategic agility as survival mechanism
Doz & Kosonen	2008	Large firms – Turbulent markets	Longitudinal case	Strategic agility through leadership and resource fluidity
Teece et al.	2016	Firms – Uncertainty & risk	Theoretical	Organizational agility as a dynamic capability
Sambamurthy et al.	2003	Firms – Digital turbulence	Conceptual	IT-enabled agility and competitive advantage
Tallon & Pinsonneault	2011	Firms – Uncertain environments	Quantitative	Alignment and agility improve firm responsiveness
Lu & Ramamurthy	2011	Firms – Dynamic markets	Quantitative	IT capability as driver of organizational agility
Nurjaman	2020	SMEs – Emerging economies	Conceptual framework	Strategic agility dimensions in SMEs

Clauss et al.	2021	Firms – Competitive environments	Quantitative	Strategic agility resolves exploration–exploitation tension
Andersson et al.	2019	Organizations – Crisis-prone contexts	Quantitative	Balancing stability and flexibility builds resilience
Kantur & İşeri-Say	2012	Organizations – Turbulent contexts	Conceptual	Integrative framework of organizational resilience
Walter	2021	Organizations – General	Systematic review	Conceptual clarification of organizational agility

Source : Authors

2.4. Choice of Keywords and Databases

To ensure comprehensive and unbiased coverage of the literature, the search was conducted across three major academic databases widely recognized in management and organizational studies: Web of Science, Scopus, and ScienceDirect. These databases were selected due to their broad disciplinary scope, rigorous indexing standards, and strong reliance on peer-reviewed publications, thereby ensuring scientific rigor and minimizing selection bias. The search strategy was based on a carefully defined set of keywords formulated in English and related to organizational agility and crisis contexts. Core search terms included *organizational agility*, *strategic agility*, *agile organization*, *agility capabilities*, *dynamic capabilities*, *SMEs*, and *crisis*. To optimize the relevance and exhaustiveness of the results, these keywords were systematically combined using Boolean operators such as “AND” and “OR”, allowing the capture of conceptual variations and interrelated constructs. This keyword strategy was designed to identify studies addressing organizational agility both as a general organizational capability and as a response mechanism in environments characterized by uncertainty, disruption, or crisis, with particular relevance for SMEs operating under crisis-driven conditions.

2.5. Selection of Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The article selection process was guided by a rigorous and transparent methodological approach aimed at ensuring the relevance, consistency, and scientific quality of the sources included in the review. In line with the PRISMA guidelines, inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined prior to the screening process and systematically applied at each stage of document selection. The initial keyword search resulted in a broad pool of publications, which was subsequently refined through

sequential filtering. Only peer-reviewed journal articles directly related to organizational agility were retained, while conference proceedings, book chapters, editorials, and practitioner-oriented publications were excluded to preserve academic rigor. The selection was further restricted to articles published in English, given its predominance as the primary language of scientific communication, and to studies for which full-text access was available. Bibliographic management, classification, and the removal of duplicate records were conducted using Zotero software. The detailed inclusion and exclusion criteria applied throughout the selection process are summarized in Table 2.

Table N°3 : Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Selection Criteria	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Publication period	2008–2025	Publications outside the selected period
Document type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Conference papers, book chapters, theses, editorials
Subject relevance	Studies addressing organizational or strategic agility	Studies unrelated to agility or focused solely on technical aspects
Language	English	Publications in other languages
Availability	Full-text articles accessible	Documents without full-text access

Source : Authors

2.6. Coding Process

Following the final selection of articles, a structured coding process was conducted using qualitative content analysis. Each article was systematically examined and coded according to predefined analytical categories derived from the literature, including agility drivers, agility capabilities, agility enablers, agility dimensions, and crisis-related contextual factors.

The coding process was iterative and inductive, allowing new themes to emerge while maintaining alignment with the theoretical framework. Particular emphasis was placed on identifying how

agility mechanisms were conceptualized and operationalized in **SMEs operating under crisis conditions**.

3. Results

3.1. Results of the Document Selection

The systematic search conducted across Web of Science, Scopus, and ScienceDirect initially yielded **243 records**. Following the removal of duplicates and the application of predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, the number of eligible studies was progressively reduced. Screening based on titles, keywords, and abstracts resulted in a refined subset of publications, which were subsequently assessed through full-text reading. This final step led to the selection of **75 articles**, which constitute the empirical basis of the review. The document selection process reflects a rigorous and transparent filtering procedure consistent with PRISMA guidelines and is summarized in Table 3 and the PRISMA flow diagram.

Table N°4: Document Selection Process by Source

Source	Collected Articles	After Inclusion & Exclusion	After Titles/Abstracts	Final Sample
Web of Science	92	55	38	28
Scopus	88	52	36	27
ScienceDirect	63	41	29	20
Total	243	148	103	75

Source : Authors

3.2. Results of the Lexical Analysis

To identify dominant themes in the literature on organizational agility in SMEs during crisis contexts, a lexical frequency analysis was conducted on the final corpus. This analysis highlights the conceptual emphasis of the reviewed studies and provides an objective overview of the most recurrent terms.

[illegible]

The word cloud reveals the strong predominance of terms related to *agility*, *strategic*, *SMEs*, *crisis*, and *capabilities*, confirming that the literature conceptualizes organizational agility primarily as a strategic and dynamic response to environmental turbulence. The visibility of terms such as *resilience*, *adaptation*, and *uncertainty* further reinforces the crisis-oriented nature of the selected studies.

Word	Frequency
Agility	3850
Organizational	3120
Strategic	2760
SMEs	2340
Crisis	2180
Performance	1950
Capabilities	1820
Dynamic	1610
Resilience	1480
Flexibility	1320
Adaptation	1190

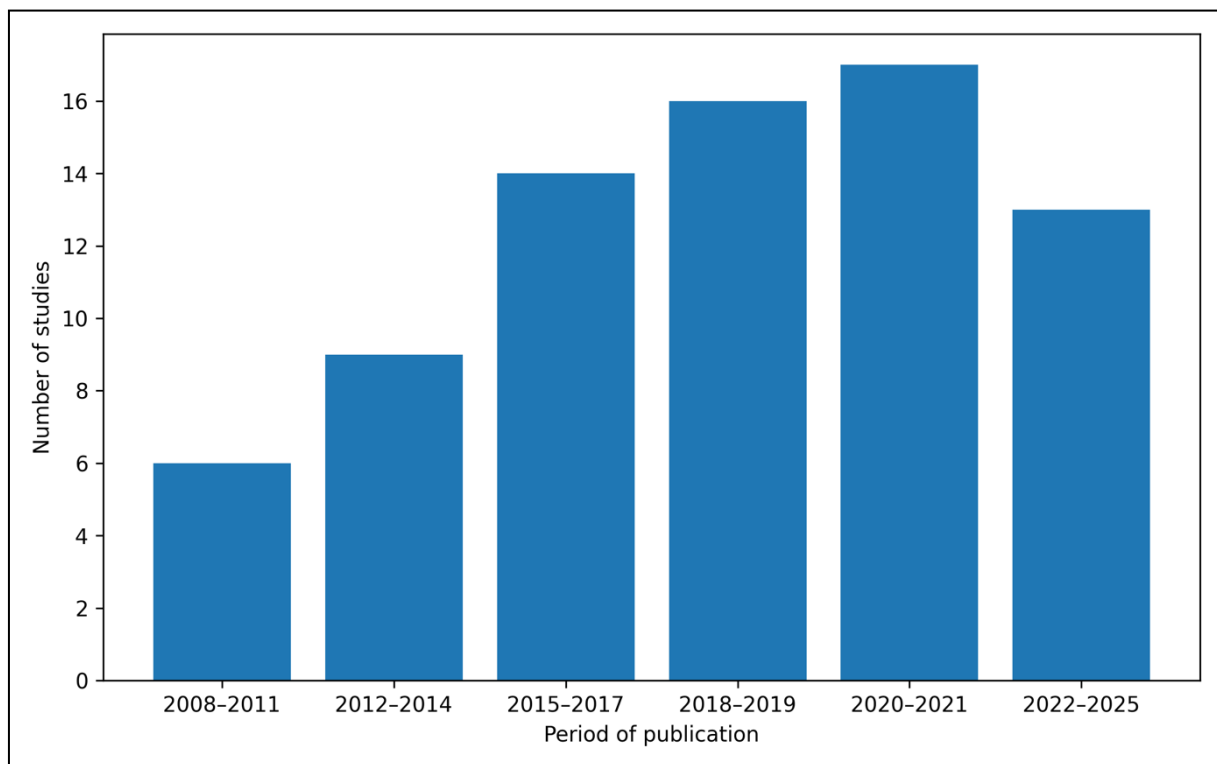
Innovation	1110
Uncertainty	980
Environment	910
Leadership	850
Resources	790
Decision	730
Digital	680

Source: *Authors.*

3.3. Distribution of Selected Studies by Year of Publication

An analysis of the temporal distribution of publications reveals a steady and accelerating growth in research on organizational agility, particularly in response to increasing environmental turbulence and global crises

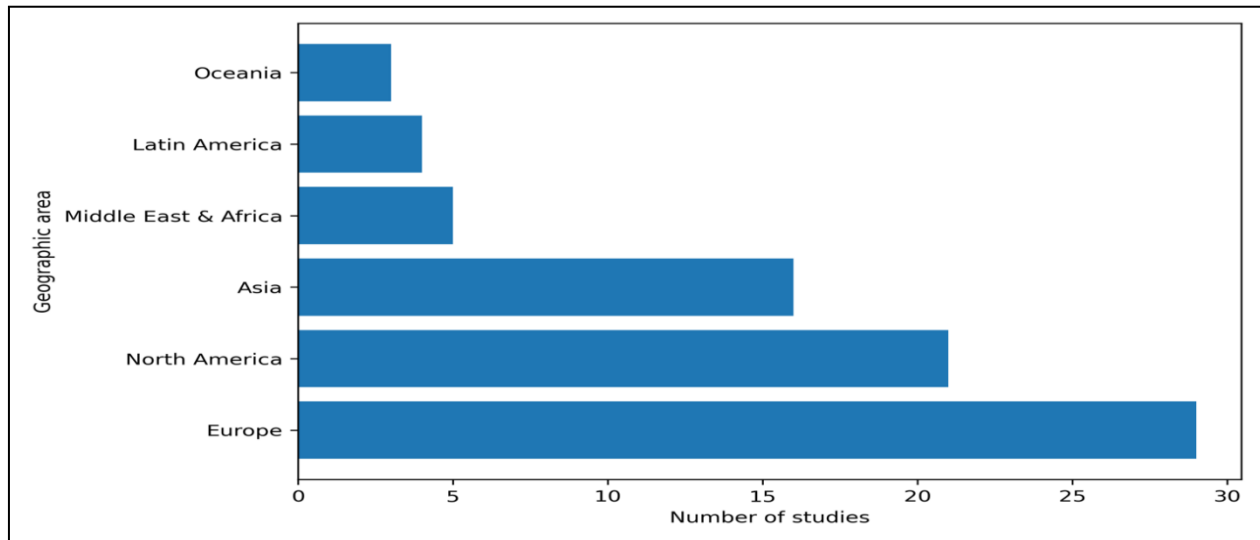
Figure N°3 : Distribution of Studies by Year of Publication



Source : *Authors.*

3.4. Distribution of Selected Studies by Geographic Area

The geographic analysis highlights the international diffusion of research on organizational agility, while also revealing regional disparities.

Figure N°4: Distribution of Studies by Geographic Area

Source : *Authors*

European and North American contexts dominate the corpus, reflecting strong scholarly engagement with agility and crisis management in advanced economies. Contributions from Asia have increased in recent years, while studies focusing on Africa and emerging economies remain limited, pointing to an important gap for future research on **organizational agility in SMEs during crises**.

3.5. Results of the Exploratory Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative synthesis of the selected studies reveals strong convergence around four core components of organizational agility: **drivers, capabilities, enablers, and dimensions**. In crisis contexts, external shocks such as economic downturns, pandemics, and supply chain disruptions act as primary agility drivers, intensifying the need for rapid organizational responses.

The findings indicate that SMEs rely heavily on dynamic capabilities such as sensing environmental changes, seizing emerging opportunities, and reconfiguring scarce resources. Digital technologies, leadership cohesion, and flexible organizational structures emerge as key enablers that translate agility intentions into effective action. Across the reviewed studies, agility dimensions are most frequently observed in strategic decision-making, operational reconfiguration, and human resource practices.

Overall, the results confirm that **organizational agility in SMEs during crises** functions not only as a performance-enhancing mechanism but also as a critical condition for resilience, strategic

renewal, and survival under extreme uncertainty. These insights provide the empirical foundation for the integrative conceptual framework developed in the subsequent section.

3.6. Conceptual Model of Strategic Agility in SMEs During Crisis Contexts

3.6.1 Positioning and Novelty of the Conceptual Model

While prior studies have examined organizational and strategic agility across various organizational and environmental contexts, existing frameworks remain fragmented and rarely integrate crisis-induced disruptions as a central mechanism for understanding how SMEs develop and mobilize agility. In particular, crisis conditions are often treated as contextual factors rather than as external disruptions that intensify the need for rapid strategic adaptation.

The conceptual model proposed in this study addresses this limitation by positioning **crisis-induced disruptions as an external trigger that increases the need for strategic agility in SMEs**. Strategic agility is conceptualized as a multidimensional organizational capability comprising **strategic sensitivity, leadership unity, and resource fluidity**, which jointly enable firms to detect environmental changes, coordinate strategic decisions, and reconfigure resources under conditions of severe uncertainty.

The novelty of the proposed framework also lies in the integration of **dynamic stability** as an intermediate organizational mechanism linking strategic agility to organizational outcomes. Dynamic stability reflects the ability of SMEs to preserve essential organizational continuity while simultaneously maintaining sufficient flexibility to adapt to crisis-induced change. The framework therefore integrates **crisis-induced disruptions, strategic agility, dynamic stability, and organizational outcomes** into a coherent conceptual structure tailored to SMEs operating under crisis conditions.

By connecting these constructs, the model provides an integrative explanation of how SMEs may translate crisis pressures into adaptive organizational responses and, ultimately, into **SME resilience, strategic renewal, and sustainable growth**. Rather than establishing empirically tested causal relationships, the proposed model develops theoretically grounded relationships derived from the systematic synthesis of the literature.

3.6.2 Articulation of External and Internal Mechanisms

The proposed model clearly distinguishes between **external mechanisms** and **internal organizational mechanisms**. Crisis-induced disruptions represent an external shock originating

from the environment, characterized by heightened uncertainty, volatility, and time pressure. Strategic agility operates as an internal dynamic capability through which the firm responds to these external pressures. Through strategic sensitivity, leadership unity, and resource fluidity, SMEs internally translate external crisis signals into coordinated strategic action. This articulation allows the model to remain analytically bounded while capturing the dynamic interaction between environmental turbulence and organizational response mechanisms.

3.6.3 Explanation of the Relationships Between Constructs

The directional relationships depicted in the model reflect theoretical relationships consistently identified in the literature. Crisis-induced disruptions increase environmental complexity and unpredictability, thereby activating strategic agility as a necessary organizational response. Strategic agility, in turn, is expressed through three complementary dimensions: strategic sensitivity, which enables firms to detect and interpret weak signals; leadership unity, which supports aligned and rapid decision-making; and resource fluidity, which facilitates the reconfiguration of scarce resources. The interaction of these three dimensions generates dynamic stability, which represents an intermediate state allowing SMEs to balance continuity and change during crises. Dynamic stability subsequently is proposed to contribute to key organizational outcomes, namely SME resilience, strategic renewal, and sustainable growth, by enabling firms to withstand shocks while adapting their strategic trajectory.

3.6.4 Theoretical Foundations and Development of Propositions

Based on the theoretical foundations and empirical patterns identified in the systematic review, four conceptual propositions are formulated to clarify the relationships represented in the integrative framework. These propositions are not empirically tested hypotheses but theoretically grounded relationships derived from the synthesis of the selected literature.

P1 – Crisis-Induced Disruptions and Strategic Agility

Crisis-induced disruptions increase environmental uncertainty, time pressure, and resource constraints, requiring SMEs to rapidly reconsider their strategic priorities and organizational responses. Previous research indicates that agility becomes particularly important under conditions of sudden disruption because it facilitates adaptation, strategic change, and organizational survival (Acciarini et al., 2021; Elali, 2021; Clauss et al., 2022). These pressures are particularly significant for SMEs because their limited resource base increases their vulnerability to external shocks.

P1. Crisis-induced disruptions increase the need for strategic agility in SMEs.

P2 – Strategic Agility and Dynamic Stability

Strategic agility enables firms to respond to environmental change through the complementary functioning of strategic sensitivity, leadership unity, and resource fluidity (Doz & Kosonen, 2008). Strategic sensitivity supports the detection and interpretation of environmental signals, leadership unity facilitates coherent and rapid decision-making, and resource fluidity enables the flexible redeployment of organizational resources. Together, these dimensions allow SMEs to adapt to crisis conditions while maintaining essential organizational continuity.

P2. Strategic agility positively contributes to dynamic stability in SMEs during crises.

P3 – Dynamic Stability and Organizational Outcomes

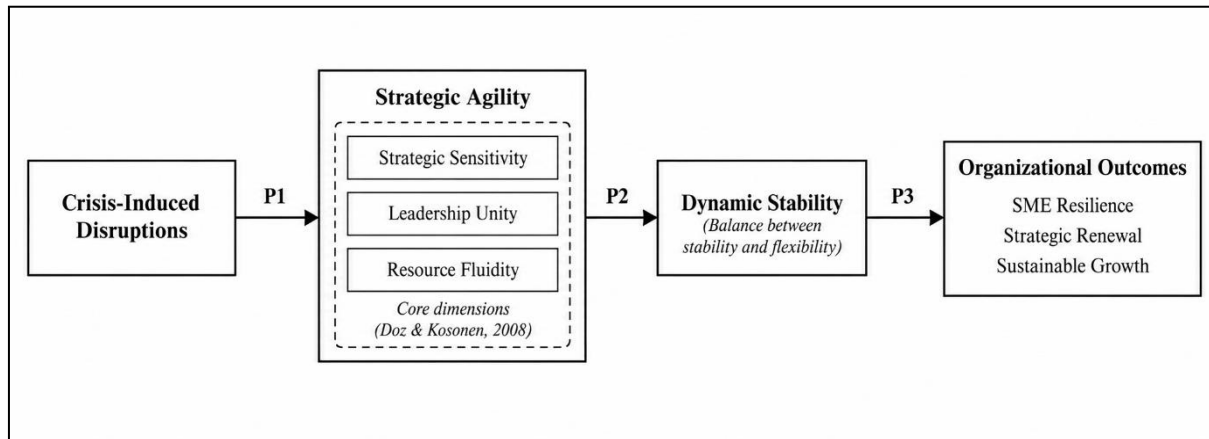
Dynamic stability reflects the capacity of organizations to combine continuity with adaptability rather than choosing between stability and change (Boynton & Victor, 1991). This balance is particularly important during crises, when SMEs must protect essential activities while simultaneously adapting their strategies and operations. Prior research also suggests that balancing organizational stability and flexibility contributes to organizational resilience (Andersson et al., 2019).

P3. Dynamic stability positively contributes to SME resilience, strategic renewal, and sustainable growth during crises.

3.6.5 Presentation of the Conceptual Model

Based on the synthesis of the selected studies and the theoretical propositions developed above, an integrative conceptual model of strategic agility in SMEs during crisis contexts is proposed. The model positions crisis-induced disruptions as an external trigger that increases the need for strategic agility, conceptualized through the complementary dimensions of strategic sensitivity, leadership unity, and resource fluidity. Strategic agility is proposed to contribute to dynamic stability, which in turn supports organizational outcomes including SME resilience, strategic renewal, and sustainable growth. The conceptual model is presented in Figure 5.

Figure N°5 : Conceptual Model of Strategic Agility in SMEs During Crisis Contexts



Source : Authors.

3.6.6 Crisis-Induced Disruptions as a Trigger of Strategic Agility

The model positions **crisis-induced disruptions** as the primary trigger of strategic agility in SMEs. Crises, whether economic, health-related, geopolitical, or supply-chain driven, intensify environmental turbulence and reduce predictability, thereby increasing pressure on SMEs to respond rapidly despite limited resources. In this context, crisis-induced disruptions act as external shocks that activate strategic agility by forcing SMEs to reassess their strategic priorities, decision-making processes, and resource allocation mechanisms.

3.6.7 Strategic Agility as a Central Orchestrating Capability

Strategic agility occupies a central position in the model as an orchestrating capability that enables SMEs to cope with crisis-induced disruptions. It reflects the firm's ability to rapidly sense changes, make timely strategic decisions, and reconfigure activities under severe uncertainty. Rather than functioning as a single isolated capability, strategic agility operates as a coordinating mechanism that mobilizes multiple internal dimensions in response to crisis pressures.

3.6.8 Core Dimensions of Strategic Agility

- **Strategic Sensitivity**

Strategic sensitivity refers to the ability of SMEs to detect weak signals, anticipate environmental changes, and interpret emerging threats and opportunities during crises. Due to their proximity to markets and customers, SMEs often rely on informal sensing mechanisms, which become critical when formal forecasting systems are absent or insufficient.

- **Leadership Unity**

Leadership unity captures the degree of alignment and cohesion among decision-makers in SMEs during crisis situations. In resource-constrained environments, unified leadership enables rapid interpretation of crisis signals and facilitates swift and coherent strategic responses, reducing internal conflict and decision-making delays.

- **Resource Fluidity**

Resource fluidity reflects the ability of SMEs to rapidly redeploy financial, human, and operational resources in response to crisis-driven needs. Given structural resource limitations, SMEs rely on flexibility, cross-functional roles, and rapid reconfiguration to maintain continuity and seize emerging opportunities.

3.6.8 Dynamic Stability as an Intermediate Outcome

The interaction between strategic sensitivity, leadership unity, and resource fluidity generates **dynamic stability**, which represents the firm's ability to balance stability and flexibility under crisis conditions. Dynamic stability allows SMEs to preserve core organizational structures and identity while simultaneously adapting strategies and operations in response to external disruptions.

3.6.9 Organizational Outcomes of Strategic Agility in SMEs During Crises

The model identifies three key organizational outcomes of strategic agility in SMEs during crisis contexts. First, **SME resilience** reflects the capacity to withstand shocks and maintain essential operations. Second, **strategic renewal** captures the ability to transform business models, reposition offerings, or explore new markets in response to crisis-driven changes. Finally, **sustainable growth** represents the long-term ability of SMEs to remain competitive and create value in volatile and uncertain environments.

Conclusion

This study set out to clarify the concept of organizational agility and to develop an integrative framework explaining how **strategic agility enables SMEs to cope with crisis-induced disruptions**. Through a systematic literature review conducted in accordance with PRISMA guidelines, the article synthesized fragmented research streams and proposed a crisis-contextualized conceptual model. The findings highlight strategic agility as a central orchestrating capability that allows SMEs to balance stability and adaptation under conditions of extreme uncertainty. By structuring the relationships between crisis triggers, agility dimensions, dynamic stability, and organizational outcomes, this study provides a coherent and comprehensive understanding of agility in SMEs during crises

- *Theoretical Implications*

This study makes several important theoretical contributions to the literature on organizational agility and dynamic capabilities. First, it addresses persistent conceptual ambiguities by clearly distinguishing between strategic agility and its core dimensions, thereby enhancing construct clarity. Second, the article explicitly embeds organizational agility within **crisis contexts**, responding to calls for greater contextualization in agility research. By conceptualizing crisis-induced disruptions as a trigger rather than a background condition, the proposed model advances existing theories of agility and dynamic capabilities. Third, the integration of **dynamic stability** as an intermediate outcome extends the agility literature by explaining how SMEs reconcile flexibility and continuity, a tension that remains underexplored in prior research.

- *Managerial Implications*

From a managerial perspective, the findings offer actionable insights for SME leaders operating in crisis-prone environments. The model emphasizes that strategic agility is not solely dependent on resource abundance but on the effective orchestration of strategic sensitivity, leadership unity, and resource fluidity. SME managers are encouraged to strengthen informal sensing mechanisms, promote leadership alignment during crises, and enhance flexibility in resource allocation. Moreover, the concept of dynamic stability suggests that managers should avoid excessive rigidity or uncontrolled change, instead fostering an adaptive balance that preserves core operations while enabling strategic renewal.

- *Policy and Institutional Implications*

At the policy level, the results highlight the importance of institutional support mechanisms that enhance SMEs' agility during crises. Public policies and support programs should move beyond short-term financial assistance and focus on developing SMEs' strategic and organizational capabilities. Training initiatives aimed at crisis leadership, strategic decision-making under uncertainty, and resource reconfiguration can strengthen SMEs' long-term resilience. Such policies are particularly relevant in economies where SMEs play a central role in employment and value creation.

- *Limitations and Further Research*

Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, as a systematic literature review, the findings are inherently dependent on the scope and quality of the studies included in the final corpus. Although rigorous inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied, relevant studies published in other languages or outside the selected databases may have been excluded, potentially limiting the comprehensiveness of the review.

Second, while the review explicitly focuses on **organizational agility in SMEs during crisis contexts**, the literature itself remains uneven in its treatment of crises. Many studies address agility in turbulent environments without explicitly conceptualizing crisis conditions, which may constrain the depth of crisis-specific insights derived from the synthesis. In addition, the reviewed studies vary in terms of methodological approaches, sectors, and geographic contexts, which limits the ability to draw universally generalizable conclusions.

Finally, the proposed conceptual model is derived from secondary data and qualitative synthesis rather than empirical testing. As such, the relationships identified between crisis-induced disruptions, strategic agility, dynamic stability, and organizational outcomes remain theoretical in nature and should be interpreted as propositions rather than causal claims.

Further Research

Building on these limitations, several avenues for future research can be identified. First, empirical studies are needed to validate and refine the proposed conceptual model, particularly through quantitative analyses examining the causal relationships between strategic agility dimensions and

organizational outcomes in SMEs during crises. Longitudinal research designs would be especially valuable in capturing how agility capabilities evolve before, during, and after crisis events.

Second, future studies could explore contextual moderators such as industry characteristics, institutional environments, and levels of crisis severity to better understand the boundary conditions of strategic agility. Comparative research across countries and regions would also help address the geographic imbalance identified in the reviewed literature.

Third, further research could deepen the micro-foundations of strategic agility by examining the role of leadership cognition, decision-making processes, and organizational culture in shaping SMEs' responses to crisis-induced disruptions. Finally, integrating digital transformation and sustainability perspectives may offer additional insights into how SMEs leverage agility not only for survival but also for long-term strategic renewal in increasingly volatile environments.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Acciarini, C., Boccardelli, P., & Peruffo, E. (2024). Strategic change: A systematic review, synthesis, and a future research agenda. *European Management Review*, 21(4), 782–802.
- Acciarini, C., Boccardelli, P., & Vitale, M. (2021). Resilient companies in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic: A case study approach. *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Public Policy*, 10(3), 336–351.
- Acciarini, C., Brunetta, F., & Boccardelli, P. (2021). Cognitive biases and decision-making strategies in times of change: A systematic literature review. *Management Decision*, 59(3), 638–652.
- Aghina, W., De Smet, A., & Weerda, K. (2015). Agility: It rhymes with stability. *McKinsey Quarterly*, 51(4), 2–9.
- Ahlbäck, K., Fahrbach, C., Murarka, M., & Salo, O. (2017). How to create an agile organization. *McKinsey & Company Organization*.
- Andersson, T., Cäker, M., Tengblad, S., & Wickelgren, M. (2019). Building traits for organizational resilience through balancing organizational structures. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 35(1), 36–45.
- Arokodare, M. A., & Asikhia, O. U. (2020). Strategic agility: Achieving superior organizational performance through strategic foresight. *Global Journal of Management and Business Research*, 20(3), 7–16.
- Bazigos, M., De Smet, A., & Gagnon, C. (2015). Why agility pays. *McKinsey Quarterly*, 4, 28–35.
- Bernardes, E. S., & Hanna, M. D. (2009). A theoretical review of flexibility, agility and responsiveness in the operations management literature: Toward a conceptual definition of customer responsiveness. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 29(1), 30–53.
- Bessant, J., Francis, D., Meredith, S., Kaplinsky, R., & Brown, S. (2001). Developing manufacturing agility in SMEs. *International Journal of Technology Management*, 22(1–3), 28–46.
- Boynton, A. C., & Victor, B. (1991). Beyond flexibility: Building and managing the dynamically stable organization. *California Management Review*, 34(1), 53–66.
- Brown, J. L., & Agnew, N. M. (1982). Corporate agility. *Business Horizons*, 25(2), 29–33.

- Cao, Q., & Dowlatshahi, S. (2005). The impact of alignment between virtual enterprise and information technology on business performance in an agile manufacturing environment. *Journal of Operations Management*, 23(5), 531–550.
- Chakravarty, A., Grewal, R., & Sambamurthy, V. (2013). Information technology competencies, organizational agility, and firm performance: Enabling and facilitating roles. *Information Systems Research*, 24(4), 976–997.
- Clauss, T., Abebe, M., Tangpong, C., & Hock, M. (2019). Strategic agility, business model innovation, and firm performance: An empirical investigation. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, 68(3), 767–784.
- Clauss, T., Breier, M., Kraus, S., Durst, S., & Mahto, R. V. (2022). Temporary business model innovation: SMEs' innovation response to the Covid-19 crisis. *R&D Management*, 52(2), 294–312.
- Clauss, T., Kraus, S., Kallinger, F. L., Bican, P. M., Brem, A., & Kailer, N. (2021). Organizational ambidexterity and competitive advantage: The role of strategic agility in the exploration–exploitation paradox. *Journal of Innovation & Knowledge*, 6(4), 203–213.
- Denhardt, J., & Denhardt, R. (2010). Building organizational resilience and adaptive management. In *Handbook of adult resilience* (pp. 333–349).
- Doz, Y., & Kosonen, M. (2008). The dynamics of strategic agility: Nokia's rollercoaster experience. *California Management Review*, 50(3), 95–118.
- Elali, W. (2021). The importance of strategic agility to business survival during the corona crisis and beyond. *International Journal of Business Ethics and Governance*, 1–8.
- Geroski, P. A., & Masson, R. T. (1987). Dynamic market models in industrial organization. *International Journal of Industrial Organization*, 5(1), 1–13.
- Gunasekaran, A., & Yusuf, Y. Y. (2002). Agile manufacturing: A taxonomy of strategic and technological imperatives. *International Journal of Production Research*, 40(6), 1357–1385.
- Hazen, B. T., Mollenkopf, D. A., & Wang, Y. (2017). Remanufacturing for the circular economy: An examination of consumer switching behavior. *Business Strategy and the Environment*, 26(4), 451–464.
- Lu, Y., & Ramamurthy, K. (2011). Understanding the link between information technology capability and organizational agility: An empirical examination. *MIS Quarterly*, 931–954.

- Narasimhan, R., Swink, M., & Kim, S. W. (2006). Disentangling leanness and agility: An empirical investigation. *Journal of Operations Management*, 24(5), 440–457.
- Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2016). Recommendations for creating better concept definitions in the organizational, behavioral, and social sciences. *Organizational Research Methods*, 19(2), 159–203.
- Sambamurthy, V., Bharadwaj, A., & Grover, V. (2003). Shaping agility through digital options: Reconceptualizing the role of information technology in contemporary firms. *MIS Quarterly*, 237–263.
- Teece, D., Peteraf, M., & Leih, S. (2016). Dynamic capabilities and organizational agility: Risk, uncertainty, and strategy in the innovation economy. *California Management Review*, 58(4), 13–35.
- Walter, A. T. (2021). Organizational agility: Ill-defined and somewhat confusing? A systematic literature review and conceptualization. *Management Review Quarterly*, 71(2), 343–391.
- Zhang, Z., & Sharifi, H. (2007). Towards theory building in agile manufacturing strategy: A taxonomical approach. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, 54(2), 351–370.