STRATEGIC AGILITY IN PRACTICE: THE ROLE OF SELF-ORGANISED TEAMS, AGILE LEADERSHIP AND SUSTAINABILITY

Shazadi Rameen Arshad*
School of Business and Management, Lincoln University College, Malaysia
shazadi.phdscholar@lincoln.edu.my ;rameenarshad587@gmail.com

Oyyappan Duraipandi
School of Business and Management, Lincoln University College, Malaysia

Mehran Ullah
School of Business and Creative Industries, University of the West of Scotland, Paisley, PA1 2BE, Scotland, United Kingdom

Abstract: Strategic agility has become a critical organizational capability for firms operating in dynamic and uncertain environments, enabling rapid adaptation while sustaining long-term competitiveness. However, existing studies largely examine strategic agility through isolated dimensions such as leadership, innovation, or resource flexibility, offering a limited understanding of how multiple organizational practices interact to produce strategic agility as a system-level capability. Addressing this gap, this study explores how self-organized teams, agile leadership, and sustainability practices collectively foster strategic agility through a multiple-case study of five organizations operating in technology-driven industries across emerging-market contexts. Using a thematic cross-case analysis, the findings identify three mutually reinforcing dimensions that shape organizational adaptability. Self-organized teams enhance flexibility, collaboration, and knowledge sharing; agile leadership supports decentralized decision-making, innovation, and strategic responsiveness; and sustainability practices strengthen resilience, stakeholder trust, and long-term adaptive capacity. The study advances the strategic agility literature by re-conceptualizing agility as an emergent organizational system created through the interaction of structural, leadership, and sustainability-oriented practices, rather than as a set of isolated capabilities. Sustainability is positioned as a core capability that stabilizes agility over time by embedding resilience and legitimacy into adaptive processes. The findings offer both theoretical and managerial insights by providing an integrated framework for aligning team structures, leadership approaches, and sustainability initiatives to enhance responsiveness in volatile environments.

Keywords: Agile Project Management, Agile Leadership, Strategic Agility, Qualitative Design, Sustainability

1. Introduction

Organizations today operate in highly dynamic and unpredictable environments where rapid technological advancements, market volatility, and shifting customer expectations continuously reshape competitive landscapes. Firms must therefore adopt flexible strategies and adaptive systems to respond effectively to these changes (Dubey et al., 2024; Ojha et al., 2021). In such environments, strategic agility has emerged as a critical capability that enables organizations to anticipate, respond to, and capitalize on change while maintaining competitive advantage (Doz & Kosonen, 2010; Walter, 2021).

Strategic agility refers to an organization's ability to rapidly adjust its strategic direction, reconfigure resources, and align operations with evolving market conditions without compromising efficiency (Christofi et al., 2024). It has gained increasing attention across academic and practitioner domains due to its role in enhancing organizational resilience, innovation, and long-term performance (Turi et al., 2023). However, despite the growing body of literature, there remains a significant theoretical and empirical gap in understanding how multiple organizational practices interact to develop strategic agility as an integrated, system-level capability.

Existing studies have examined individual components of strategic agility, such as leadership agility, resource fluidity, and innovation practices (Kohtamäki et al., 2020; Tsilionis & Wautelet, 2022). Similarly, recent research highlights the importance of sustainability and digital transformation in shaping agile organizations (Baldassarre et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2020). While these studies provide

valuable insights, they predominantly treat these dimensions as isolated enablers, offering a limited explanation of how their interaction collectively shapes strategic agility in practice. This fragmented treatment restricts both theoretical clarity and practical guidance for organizations operating in volatile environments.

In particular, three critical dimensions repeatedly emerge in the literature: self-organized teams, agile leadership, and sustainability-oriented practices. Self-organized teams enhance flexibility and knowledge sharing, enabling organizations to respond quickly to changing conditions (Harsch & Festing, 2020). Agile leadership supports rapid decision-making and fosters an adaptive organizational culture (Walter, 2021). Sustainability practices, including environmental and social initiatives, contribute to long-term organizational resilience and stakeholder trust (Ababneh, 2021; Amjad et al., 2021). Yet an unresolved tension remains regarding whether sustainability functions merely as a long-term organizational outcome or as a core capability that actively strengthens adaptive capacity and resilience within strategic agility systems. Despite their importance, these dimensions have rarely been examined collectively within a unified framework. This study addresses this gap by investigating how these three dimensions interact as mutually reinforcing mechanisms that foster strategic agility. Specifically, the research aims to answer the following question: What are the key organizational practices that enable firms to develop and sustain strategic agility in dynamic environments?

To address this question, the study adopts a multiple case study approach involving leading organizations across different industries. By analyzing real-world practices, the study develops a comprehensive framework of best practices for fostering strategic agility. The study contributes to theory by reconceptualizing strategic agility as an emergent organizational system produced through the interaction of structural, leadership, and sustainability-oriented practices, while positioning sustainability as a core capability that stabilizes long-term adaptability. The findings contribute to both theory and practice by offering a structured understanding of how organizations can integrate self-organized teams, agile leadership, and sustainability to enhance their strategic responsiveness and long-term performance.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Strategic Agility*

In contemporary business environments characterized by rapid technological change, market volatility, and competitive pressure, strategic agility has emerged as a critical organizational capability. It enables firms to respond swiftly to environmental changes while maintaining strategic coherence and operational efficiency (Doz & Kosonen, 2010; Walter, 2021). Strategic agility is commonly understood as an organization's ability to continuously adapt its strategic direction, reallocate resources, and implement timely responses to external opportunities and threats (Christofi et al., 2024).

Organizations that successfully develop strategic agility are better positioned to enhance innovation, improve operational performance, and sustain long-term competitiveness (Turi et al., 2023). In this regard, agility is not merely about flexibility but involves coordinated and purposeful adaptation supported by organizational structures and processes (Ojha et al., 2021). Empirical evidence suggests that firms operating in turbulent environments benefit significantly from agility, as it allows them to manage uncertainty and maintain performance stability (Dubey et al., 2024). Recent research highlights that strategic agility is not a single capability but rather a combination of interconnected organizational practices. These practices enable firms to sense environmental changes, make informed decisions, and execute strategic responses effectively (Kohtamäki et al., 2020). However, important conceptual differences remain in the literature regarding whether strategic agility should be understood primarily as a leadership-driven capability, a structural resource-reconfiguration process, or an emergent system of interdependent organizational practices. While some scholars emphasize decision speed and leadership responsiveness, others highlight structural flexibility, learning capability, and cross-functional integration as the core drivers of agility. This lack of consensus reveals a critical theoretical

tension concerning which organizational elements are foundational and how their interaction shapes agility in practice.

2.1.1 Resource Fluidity in Strategic Agility

Resource fluidity is widely recognized as a fundamental component of strategic agility, referring to an organization's ability to dynamically allocate and redeploy resources in response to changing priorities. In volatile environments, rigid resource structures can hinder responsiveness, whereas flexible resource allocation enables organizations to adapt quickly and efficiently (Doz & Kosonen, 2010). Organizations that achieve resource fluidity typically emphasize cross-functional collaboration and decentralized decision-making. These practices allow resources whether financial, human, or technological to be shifted rapidly across projects and business units (Harsch & Festing, 2020). Such flexibility enhances organizational responsiveness and supports timely execution of strategic initiatives.

Moreover, resource fluidity is closely linked to continuous learning and capability development. Firms that invest in employee training and skill development are better equipped to adapt to changing requirements and exploit emerging opportunities. This adaptability not only improves operational efficiency but also fosters innovation and long-term resilience. In practice, organizations increasingly rely on digital technologies and data-driven decision-making to enhance resource fluidity. By leveraging real-time information, firms can optimize resource allocation and respond proactively to environmental changes (Dubey et al., 2024). As a result, resource fluidity serves as a critical enabler of strategic agility, supporting both short-term responsiveness and long-term strategic alignment. However, prior studies largely treat resource fluidity as a structural capability in isolation, giving limited attention to how its effectiveness depends on complementary mechanisms such as leadership adaptability, team autonomy, and sustainability-oriented decision priorities. This creates an important theoretical limitation, as resource mobility alone may improve short-term responsiveness but may not sustain agility unless supported by organizational learning, decentralized coordination, and resilience-oriented practices. Accordingly, resource fluidity should be understood not only as a resource redeployment process but also as part of a broader system of interacting organizational capabilities that collectively shape strategic agility.

2.1.2 Leadership Agility in Strategic Agility

Leadership agility plays a central role in enabling strategic agility by guiding organizations through uncertainty and change. Agile leaders are characterized by their ability to anticipate market shifts, make timely decisions, and foster a culture of adaptability and innovation (Walter, 2021). Effective agile leadership involves balancing long-term strategic vision with short-term operational flexibility. Leaders must be capable of aligning organizational goals with changing market conditions while ensuring that teams remain focused and productive. This requires strong decision-making capabilities, emotional intelligence, and the ability to engage and motivate diverse stakeholders.

Furthermore, agile leaders promote decentralized decision-making and empower teams to take ownership of their work. This empowerment enhances responsiveness and reduces delays associated with hierarchical structures. Research indicates that leadership practices that encourage collaboration, transparency, and continuous learning significantly contribute to organizational agility (Kohtamäki et al., 2020). Leadership agility is also closely associated with innovation and change management. Leaders who embrace experimentation and risk-taking are better positioned to drive organizational transformation and sustain competitive advantage. By fostering an environment that supports learning and adaptability, agile leaders enable organizations to navigate complex and evolving business environments effectively. However, the literature presents an important tension between leadership control and team autonomy, as excessive decentralization may create coordination challenges, role ambiguity, or strategic drift if not guided by clear leadership alignment mechanisms. This suggests that leadership agility should not be viewed solely as leader responsiveness, but as the capability to balance empowerment with strategic coherence across teams and functions. Accordingly, agile leadership is most effective when it interacts with self-organized team structures and sustainability-oriented

priorities, ensuring that rapid decision-making remains aligned with long-term resilience and organizational purpose.

2.2 *Key Dimensions of Strategic Agility*

Building on the existing literature, strategic agility can be understood as a multidimensional construct that integrates several organizational elements. Among these, three dimensions emerge as particularly critical: self-organized teams, agile leadership, and sustainability. Rather than functioning as independent enablers, these dimensions are conceptualized in this study as mutually reinforcing mechanisms whose interaction shapes strategic agility as an emergent organizational capability. This perspective advances prior literature by moving beyond isolated models of agility toward a more integrated and system-oriented understanding.

2.2.1 Self-organized Teams

Self-organized teams are characterized by autonomy, collaboration, and shared responsibility. These teams enable faster decision-making and enhance organizational flexibility by reducing dependence on hierarchical structures. Research suggests that self-organized teams improve knowledge sharing, innovation, and problem-solving capabilities, all of which are essential for strategic agility (Harsch & Festing, 2020). However, the effectiveness of self-organized teams is contingent upon clear strategic alignment, trust-based coordination, and leadership support; otherwise, autonomy may generate role ambiguity and inconsistent responses across teams. This indicates that self-organized teams contribute most effectively to strategic agility when embedded within leadership and governance structures that preserve strategic coherence.

2.2.2 Agile Leadership

Agile leadership supports the development of strategic agility by fostering an adaptive organizational culture and enabling effective coordination among teams. Leaders play a crucial role in aligning organizational goals with environmental changes and ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently (Walter, 2021). Beyond coordination, agile leadership acts as an integrative mechanism that connects team autonomy with strategic intent, ensuring that decentralized actions remain aligned with broader organizational priorities. This integrative role becomes particularly important in environments where rapid adaptation must be balanced with long-term resilience and sustainability objectives.

2.2.3 Sustainability

Sustainability has increasingly been recognized as an important dimension of strategic agility. Organizations that integrate environmental, social, and economic considerations into their strategies are better equipped to respond to regulatory pressures and stakeholder expectations (Baldassarre et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2020). Sustainability-oriented practices not only enhance organizational reputation but also contribute to long-term resilience and competitive advantage (Ababneh, 2021; Amjad et al., 2021). While prior studies often treat sustainability as a peripheral outcome of effective management, this study views it as a core adaptive capability that strengthens organizational resilience, legitimacy, and long-term responsiveness. An important conceptual tension emerges here: whereas agility emphasizes rapid adaptation and short-term responsiveness, sustainability requires continuity, accountability, and long-term commitment. The interaction of these seemingly competing demands suggests that sustainability does not constrain agility; rather, it stabilizes and sustains agility over time by embedding resilience into adaptive processes.

2.3 *Research Gap*

Although prior studies have examined individual components of strategic agility, there remains a significant gap in understanding how these components interact within a unified framework. Existing research tends to focus on isolated dimensions, such as leadership or innovation, without considering

the combined effect of multiple organizational practices. More importantly, prior models provide limited explanation of whether these dimensions function as parallel enablers, interdependent mechanisms, or an emergent system-level capability. Moreover, empirical evidence on best practices for fostering strategic agility is limited, particularly in real-world organizational settings. This limitation is especially evident in relation to sustainability, which has often been treated as a peripheral outcome rather than as a core capability that may strengthen long-term adaptive resilience. This lack of integration and empirical clarity highlights the need for a comprehensive framework that captures the interplay between key organizational elements. Accordingly, the unresolved interaction between self-organized teams, agile leadership, and sustainability represents both a theoretical and practical gap in the strategic agility literature. This study addresses this gap by examining the combined role of self-organized teams, agile leadership, and sustainability in fostering strategic agility. By adopting a multiple case study approach, the research provides practical insights into how these dimensions can be integrated to enhance organizational responsiveness and long-term performance. In doing so, the study advances the literature by reconceptualizing strategic agility as a mutually reinforcing organizational system in which sustainability acts as a stabilizing capability for enduring adaptability.

3. Research Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on a multiple-case study approach involving five organizations to explore best practices for fostering strategic agility. Case study methodology is particularly appropriate for examining complex organizational phenomena within real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly defined (Yin, 2018). A multiple-case design was selected to enable cross-case comparison and theoretical replication, allowing the study to identify recurring patterns in how self-organized teams, agile leadership, and sustainability interact to foster strategic agility. This design is particularly suitable for examining strategic agility as an emergent system-level capability, where the interaction between organizational mechanisms can be better understood through rich contextual evidence rather than isolated variable relationships. Accordingly, the methodological objective is analytical generalization through pattern replication across comparable dynamic-sector cases, rather than statistical generalization based on sample size.

3.1 *Research Design and Case Selection*

The study focuses on five organizations operating in dynamic and technology-driven sectors, including web development, cloud computing, and leadership-focused services. These industries were selected because they operate in highly volatile environments where strategic agility is essential for maintaining competitiveness. A purposive case selection strategy was employed to ensure theoretical relevance, focusing on organizations that had demonstrated rapid market responsiveness, innovation-driven operations, and evidence of adaptive organizational practices. The inclusion of cases from Pakistan and Malaysia provides a cross-contextual emerging-market perspective while maintaining comparability in terms of environmental volatility, resource constraints, and growth orientation. This design supports theoretical replication by enabling comparison across organizations facing similar strategic pressures but differing in size, sectoral focus, and organizational structures. Such variation strengthens the analytical depth of the study by allowing the identification of recurring mechanisms as well as context-specific differences in the interaction between self-organized teams, agile leadership, and sustainability practices.

Table 1: Case Study Overview

Case	Industry	Country	Size	Key Focus
Firm A	Web Development	Pakistan	Medium	Agile teams
Firm B	Leadership Services	Malaysia	Large	Leadership
Firm C	Leadership Services	Pakistan	Medium	Sustainability
Firm D	Cloud Computing	Malaysia	Small	Integrated
Firm E	Leadership Services	Pakistan	Medium	Leadership

The case organizations were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria:

1. Demonstrated evidence of rapid growth, market responsiveness, and adaptability to changing environmental conditions
2. Active engagement in innovation-driven activities and continuous capability development
3. Implementation of agile, flexible, or decentralized organizational practices relevant to strategic agility
4. Availability of rich qualitative and documentary data to support in-depth case analysis and triangulation

Table 2: Case Study Profile

Case	Industry	Country	Interviewee Position	No. of Interviews	Qualification	Market Growth Rate	Supporting Documents
Case 1	Web Development	Pakistan	Director	1	PhD	600%	Annual Reports
Case 2	Leadership Services	Malaysia	Operational Managers	2	MS	242%	Strategic Plans
Case 3	Leadership Services	Pakistan	Operational Managers	2	MBA	250%	Development & Annual Reports
Case 4	Cloud Computing	Pakistan	Manager	1	MS	300%	Annual Reports
Case 5	Leadership Services	Pakistan	Managers	1	MBA	290%	Annual Reports

The selected organizations are located in Pakistan and Malaysia, providing a cross-contextual perspective while maintaining comparability in emerging market settings. These contexts are characterized by high environmental volatility, resource constraints, and rapid digital transformation, making them particularly suitable for examining the development of strategic agility. The study covers the period from 2020 to 2024, a timeframe marked by significant market disruptions and accelerated organizational adaptation, during which these organizations exhibited significant performance growth and strategic transformation. This temporal scope allows for the observation of how strategic agility practices evolve in response to sustained uncertainty and changing competitive conditions.

3.2 *Data Collection*

Data were collected using multiple sources to enhance the robustness and credibility of the findings. The primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews conducted with senior management personnel, including operational managers and executives. These individuals were selected due to their direct involvement in strategic decision-making and organizational transformation processes. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility in exploring organizational practices while maintaining consistency across key thematic areas related to strategic agility.

The interview protocol was designed around three main themes: (1) organizational responses to environmental change, (2) leadership and team practices supporting agility, and (3) the integration of sustainability into strategic and operational processes. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was conducted either in person or via online communication platforms. All interviews were recorded with participant consent and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

In addition to interviews, secondary data sources were used to support data triangulation, including annual reports, strategic plans, sustainability reports, and corporate websites. These sources provided contextual and confirmatory evidence to validate interview insights and enhance the credibility of the findings. The combination of primary and secondary data enabled a comprehensive understanding of organizational practices and reduced the risk of single-source bias.

Table 3: Data Collection Summary

Source	Type	Purpose
Interviews	Primary	In-depth insights into organizational practices and decision-making processes
Reports	Secondary	Validation of organizational strategies and performance-related information
Websites	Secondary	Contextual understanding of organizational structure, services, and public communication

In addition to interviews, secondary data sources were used to triangulate findings. These included:

- Annual reports
- Strategic and development plans
- Sustainability reports
- Corporate websites and other publicly available documents

These sources were systematically analyzed to validate interview data, provide contextual insights into organizational strategies, and corroborate evidence related to strategic agility practices. The combination of primary and secondary data enabled a comprehensive understanding of organizational practices and strengthened the credibility, validity, and reliability of the findings through methodological triangulation.

3.3 *Case Study Protocol*

A structured case study protocol was developed to guide the data collection process and ensure consistency across cases. The protocol served as a standardized framework for conducting interviews and collecting supporting evidence, thereby enhancing reliability and comparability across cases. The protocol consisted of three main components:

1. Exploratory questions focusing on how strategic agility is conceptualized and understood within each organization.
2. Process-oriented questions examining how organizations implement agile practices and respond to environmental changes.
3. Practice-specific questions aimed at identifying key organizational mechanisms related to self-organized teams, agile leadership, and sustainability practices.

This structured approach ensured that data collection remained focused, systematically aligned with the research objectives, and suitable for subsequent thematic analysis.

3.4 *Data Analysis*

The study employed a cross-case analysis approach to identify common patterns and best practices across the selected organizations. Each case was first analyzed individually to understand its unique characteristics and practices. The data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach, enabling the systematic identification and interpretation of patterns across qualitative data sources.

In the first stage, open coding was conducted to identify initial concepts and recurring practices related to strategic agility, including aspects of team autonomy, leadership behavior, and sustainability integration. In the second stage, axial coding was used to group related codes into broader categories by identifying relationships between organizational practices. In the final stage, selective coding was applied to refine and consolidate these categories into overarching themes that represent key dimensions of strategic agility.

Subsequently, findings from all cases were compared to identify recurring themes and shared organizational practices. This cross-case comparison enabled theoretical replication by identifying consistent patterns across organizations while also accounting for contextual differences. This comparative analysis enabled the identification of key dimensions of strategic agility, which were consistently observed across multiple cases.

The analysis revealed three dominant themes:

- Self-organized teams
- Agile leadership
- Sustainability practices

These themes were not treated as independent categories but as interrelated dimensions emerging from the data, reflecting the interaction of organizational practices in shaping strategic agility. These themes form the basis of the proposed best practice framework for strategic agility.

3.5 *Validity and Reliability*

To enhance the credibility of the study, several measures were adopted. First, data triangulation was employed by using multiple data sources, including interviews and organizational documents. This triangulation enabled the validation and corroboration of findings across different sources, reducing the risk of bias associated with single-source data. Second, a structured case study protocol ensured consistency in data collection across cases. This contributed to the dependability of the study by standardizing the data collection process. Furthermore, cross-case comparison allowed for the identification of consistent patterns, strengthening the reliability of the findings. The use of systematic coding procedures and thematic analysis further enhanced the transparency and confirmability of the results. These methodological steps contribute to the robustness of the study and support analytical generalization by providing transferable insights applicable to organizations operating in similar dynamic and uncertain environments.

4. Findings

The cross-case analysis revealed a consistent set of organizational practices that contribute to the development of strategic agility. Across all five organizations, three dominant themes emerged: self-organized teams, agile leadership, and sustainability. Table 4 summarizes the key themes identified through cross-case analysis, along with the associated organizational practices and outcomes.

Table 4: Cross-Case Thematic Findings

Theme	Key Practices Observed	Organizational Outcomes	Supporting Literature
Self-Organized Teams	Team autonomy Cross-functional collaboration Role flexibility Continuous learning	Improved organizational flexibility, faster decision-making, enhanced knowledge sharing, and innovation capability	Harsch and Festing (2020)
Agile Leadership	Decentralized decision-making Adaptability Customer-centric orientation Support for innovation	Enhanced organizational responsiveness, improved strategic alignment, and strengthened adaptive capacity	Walter (2021); Kohtamäki et al. (2020)
Sustainability	Resource efficiency Waste reduction Integration of ESG principles Stakeholder-focused practices	Increased organizational resilience, enhanced stakeholder trust, improved legitimacy, and sustained long-term performance	Baldassarre et al. (2020); Chen et al. (2020); Ababneh (2021); Amjad et al. (2021)

Table 4 summarizes key cross-case findings; however, these dimensions were observed to operate as interdependent mechanisms rather than isolated practices, collectively shaping strategic agility as an integrated organizational system.

4.1 *Overview of Key Findings*

Across all cases, organizations demonstrated strong alignment in key organizational areas that support strategic agility. These include a clear emphasis on human capital development, adaptive leadership approaches, and the integration of sustainability into operational strategies. Organizations consistently invest in developing employee capabilities, enhancing digital competencies, and promoting continuous

learning. These findings indicate that strategic agility is not driven by isolated practices, but emerges from the coordinated interaction of multiple organizational mechanisms.

In addition, firms showed a strong ability to adapt their strategies in response to changing market conditions. This adaptability was supported by flexible processes, real-time decision-making, and an openness to innovation. Importantly, this adaptability was not solely a function of speed or flexibility, but was reinforced by organizational structures and practices that enabled alignment between short-term responsiveness and long-term resilience. These findings suggest that strategic agility is embedded within organizational systems rather than being limited to individual practices. However, the effectiveness of this system appears to depend on the balance between autonomy and coordination, as well as the integration of sustainability considerations into strategic decision-making processes.

4.2 *Self-Organized Teams*

Self-organized teams emerged as a central driver of strategic agility across all case organizations. Firms emphasized autonomy, collaboration, and shared responsibility as key characteristics of effective teams. Employees were encouraged to operate within dynamic team structures, allowing them to shift roles and responsibilities based on organizational needs. This flexibility enhanced responsiveness and improved resource utilization. These findings suggest that team-level autonomy plays a critical role in enabling rapid organizational responses, particularly in environments characterized by uncertainty and frequent change.

Organizations also placed significant emphasis on employee development through structured training programs and continuous learning initiatives. These programs ensured that employees possessed diverse skill sets, enabling them to contribute effectively across different functions. Furthermore, continuous performance evaluation systems were used to identify high performers and address skill gaps. This indicates that the effectiveness of self-organized teams is closely linked to continuous capability development, which enables employees to operate across functional boundaries and respond to evolving organizational demands.

A collaborative culture was also evident across all organizations, where open communication and participative decision-making were actively promoted. This environment facilitated knowledge sharing, enhanced innovation, and improved team performance. Overall, self-organized teams contributed to strategic agility by enabling faster decision-making, improving flexibility, and fostering a culture of continuous learning. However, the findings also suggest that self-organized teams may face challenges related to coordination, role ambiguity, and decision alignment, particularly in the absence of clear strategic direction. This highlights the importance of agile leadership in providing guidance and ensuring that decentralized decision-making remains aligned with broader organizational objectives. Accordingly, self-organized teams contribute most effectively to strategic agility when supported by leadership structures and sustainability-oriented priorities that maintain coherence, accountability, and long-term focus.

4.3 *Agile Leadership*

Agile leadership was identified as a critical enabler of strategic agility. Leaders across all case organizations demonstrated strong adaptability and responsiveness to changing market conditions. A key characteristic of agile leadership observed in the cases was the emphasis on customer-centricity, ensuring that organizational activities remained aligned with customer needs and expectations. These findings highlight the role of leadership in continuously sensing environmental changes and aligning organizational priorities accordingly.

Leaders also promoted decentralized decision-making by empowering teams to take initiative and act independently. This reduced delays associated with hierarchical structures and improved organizational responsiveness. Additionally, leaders encouraged continuous learning and innovation by supporting experimentation and knowledge sharing within the organization. Another important aspect of agile

leadership was the ability to manage uncertainty and guide organizations through complex environments. Leaders demonstrated foresight in anticipating market changes and aligning organizational strategies accordingly. This ability to balance strategic direction with operational flexibility played a significant role in fostering strategic agility. However, an important tension emerges between empowerment and control, as excessive decentralization may lead to coordination challenges, inconsistent decision-making, or misalignment with strategic objectives.

This suggests that agile leadership is not only about enabling flexibility but also about maintaining strategic coherence across teams and functions. Leaders, therefore, play an integrative role by aligning decentralized team actions with long-term organizational goals and sustainability priorities. In this context, agile leadership functions as a coordinating mechanism that connects self-organized teams with sustainability-oriented practices, ensuring that rapid decision-making remains both strategically aligned and resilient over time.

4.4 *Sustainability*

Sustainability emerged as a significant dimension contributing to strategic agility, particularly in relation to long-term organizational performance. All case organizations integrated sustainability considerations into their strategic and operational processes, focusing on economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Organizations emphasized efficient resource utilization, waste reduction, and environmentally responsible practices. These initiatives were aligned with stakeholder expectations, enhancing organizational reputation and trust. Sustainability practices were also supported by organizational culture, with firms promoting environmental awareness and social responsibility among employees. In addition, technological capabilities such as digital systems and data analytics were used to monitor sustainability performance and improve efficiency. These practices contributed to the development of resilient organizational systems capable of adapting to changing environmental conditions.

These findings suggest that sustainability extends beyond compliance or reputational benefits, functioning as a core organizational capability that enhances long-term resilience and adaptive capacity. However, an important tension emerges between sustainability and agility, as sustainability often requires long-term planning, stability, and accountability, whereas agility emphasizes rapid adaptation, experimentation, and short-term responsiveness. This tension indicates that sustainability may initially appear to constrain agility by introducing additional governance requirements and decision constraints.

Nevertheless, the findings demonstrate that when effectively integrated, sustainability does not hinder agility but instead stabilizes and sustains it over time by embedding resilience, legitimacy, and stakeholder alignment into organizational processes. In this sense, sustainability acts as a temporal and structural stabilizer of strategic agility, ensuring that rapid responses are not only effective in the short term but also viable in the long term. Furthermore, sustainability practices reinforce the effectiveness of self-organized teams and agile leadership by providing a shared purpose, guiding principles, and accountability mechanisms that align decentralized actions with broader organizational goals.

4.5 *Integrated View of Strategic Agility*

The findings indicate that strategic agility is not driven by a single organizational factor but rather emerges from the interaction of multiple complementary elements. Self-organized teams, agile leadership, and sustainability practices collectively form a dynamic system that enhances organizational adaptability and responsiveness. Rather than functioning as independent drivers, these dimensions operate as interdependent and mutually reinforcing mechanisms that jointly shape strategic agility as an emergent organizational capability.

Organizations that successfully integrate these elements are better positioned to respond to environmental changes, innovate continuously, and sustain competitive advantage. In this integrated system, self-organized teams enable rapid and flexible responses, agile leadership ensures alignment

and coordination, and sustainability provides stability, resilience, and long-term orientation. The interaction of these dimensions allows organizations to balance short-term responsiveness with long-term adaptability, addressing a key tension in the strategic agility literature.

The results highlight the importance of adopting a holistic approach to strategic agility, where organizational structures, leadership practices, and sustainability initiatives are aligned to support long-term performance. However, the effectiveness of this system depends on maintaining a balance between autonomy and control, as well as effectively integrating sustainability considerations without constraining responsiveness. These findings suggest that strategic agility is best understood as a dynamic capability system, where continuous alignment between teams, leadership, and sustainability practices determines the organization's ability to adapt and thrive in uncertain environments.

5. Discussion

This study set out to explore best practices for fostering strategic agility by examining organizational practices across multiple case studies. The findings demonstrate that strategic agility is not achieved through isolated initiatives but rather through a systematic and integrated approach involving self-organized teams, agile leadership, and sustainability practices. These elements collectively contribute to an adaptive organizational system capable of responding effectively to dynamic and uncertain environments. More importantly, the findings reconceptualize strategic agility as an emergent capability arising from the interaction of these interdependent organizational mechanisms, rather than as a collection of discrete practices.

The findings reinforce existing literature by highlighting that strategic agility is a multidimensional construct supported by organizational flexibility, responsiveness, and continuous learning (Doz & Kosonen, 2010; Walter, 2021). In particular, the role of self-organized teams aligns with prior research emphasizing the importance of team autonomy and cross-functional collaboration in enhancing organizational adaptability (Harsch & Festing, 2020). The ability of employees to operate within flexible team structures enables faster decision-making and improves the organization's capacity to respond to market changes. However, the findings also suggest that excessive autonomy may create coordination challenges and role ambiguity if not supported by a clear strategic direction, indicating that team effectiveness depends on alignment mechanisms provided by leadership. This suggests that organizations seeking to enhance strategic agility should prioritize the development of collaborative and empowered work environments while ensuring coordination and strategic coherence.

Agile leadership was also identified as a critical factor in fostering strategic agility. The findings indicate that leaders play a central role in shaping organizational behavior by promoting adaptability, enabling decentralized decision-making, and aligning strategic priorities with environmental changes. These observations are consistent with prior studies that emphasize the importance of leadership in managing uncertainty and facilitating organizational change (Kohtamäki et al., 2020). Leaders who encourage innovation, support continuous learning, and empower employees create conditions that enable organizations to remain responsive and competitive in rapidly evolving markets. At the same time, an important tension emerges between empowerment and control, as leaders must balance decentralized decision-making with the need to maintain organizational alignment and consistency. This highlights the integrative role of agile leadership in coordinating team autonomy with broader strategic and sustainability objectives.

Another important contribution of this study is the identification of sustainability as an integral component of strategic agility. While previous research has often examined sustainability and agility separately, the findings of this study suggest that sustainability practices contribute directly to organizational adaptability and resilience. Organizations that integrate economic, social, and environmental considerations into their strategies are better equipped to respond to regulatory pressures and stakeholder expectations (Baldassarre et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2020). Furthermore, sustainability-oriented practices enhance organizational reputation and trust, which are critical for long-term success. However, the findings also reveal a conceptual tension between agility and sustainability, as

sustainability emphasizes long-term stability and accountability, whereas agility prioritizes rapid adaptation and flexibility. The study demonstrates that this tension can be resolved when sustainability is embedded within organizational processes, allowing it to function as a stabilizing mechanism that supports long-term adaptive capacity rather than constraining responsiveness. This indicates that sustainability should not be viewed as a separate initiative but rather as a core element of strategic agility.

The integration of these three dimensions highlights the importance of adopting a holistic perspective when developing strategic agility. The findings suggest that organizations must align structural, leadership, and sustainability-related practices to create a cohesive system that supports continuous adaptation. This integrated perspective advances existing literature by demonstrating that strategic agility emerges from the interaction of organizational elements that jointly enable responsiveness, coordination, and resilience. This integrated approach enables organizations to not only respond to environmental changes but also anticipate and shape future opportunities.

From a practical perspective, the study provides valuable insights for managers seeking to enhance strategic agility within their organizations. The results suggest that investing in employee development, promoting collaborative work environments, and adopting sustainability-oriented practices can significantly improve organizational responsiveness and performance. Managers should also focus on developing leadership capabilities that support adaptability and innovation, as these are essential for navigating complex and uncertain environments. However, managers must also be mindful of potential trade-offs, particularly in balancing team autonomy with coordination and integrating sustainability without slowing decision-making processes.

Overall, this study contributes to the literature by providing a comprehensive understanding of how key organizational practices interact to foster strategic agility. By emphasizing the combined role of self-organized teams, agile leadership, and sustainability, the study offers a practical framework that can guide organizations in enhancing their strategic responsiveness and achieving long-term success. The findings position strategic agility as a dynamic capability system in which sustained performance depends on the continuous alignment and interaction of organizational practices over time.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to explore best practices for fostering strategic agility by examining organizational practices across multiple case studies. The findings demonstrate that strategic agility is a multidimensional capability that emerges from the interaction of self-organized teams, agile leadership, and sustainability practices. Rather than being driven by isolated initiatives, strategic agility is developed through the alignment of organizational structures, leadership behaviors, and sustainability-oriented processes.

The results highlight that self-organized teams enhance flexibility, knowledge sharing, and responsiveness, while agile leadership supports adaptive decision-making and fosters a culture of continuous learning. Together, these elements enable organizations to respond effectively to dynamic market conditions. In addition, the study emphasizes the importance of sustainability as a core component of strategic agility. By integrating economic, social, and environmental considerations, organizations can strengthen resilience, maintain stakeholder trust, and sustain long-term adaptability.

Overall, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how key organizational practices interact to foster strategic agility. By framing strategic agility as an integrated and dynamic capability system, the research offers practical and theoretical insights for organizations seeking to enhance responsiveness in uncertain environments.

7. Future Research Directions

While this study provides valuable insights into the development of strategic agility, several opportunities for future research remain. First, the findings are based on a limited number of case studies, which may restrict generalizability. Future research could extend this work by examining larger samples across diverse industries and geographical contexts to validate and refine the proposed framework. Second, this study adopts a qualitative approach focused on identifying best practices. Future studies could employ quantitative methods to test the relationships between self-organized teams, agile leadership, sustainability, and strategic agility, thereby strengthening empirical validation. Third, future research could explore the influence of external factors such as technological advancements, regulatory environments, and market dynamics on strategic agility. Understanding these contextual influences would provide deeper insight into how agility practices evolve under different conditions. Finally, further research could focus on developing performance measurement frameworks to assess the effectiveness of strategic agility practices. The identification of relevant performance indicators would support organizations in evaluating and refining their agility strategies over time.

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