

OPEN CALL FOR PAPERS
California Management Review (CMR)
Special Issue on

Business Agility In Response to Increased Uncertainty

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Context

Business agility has gathered much attention and interest in the management world, in response to the high uncertainty and fast change brought by changing social norms, (de)globalization, climate change, and digital disruption. COVID has accelerated this interest. A 2020 McKinsey survey placed adaptability and resiliency, and agile ways of working among the top four priorities of CEOs [1]. In the academic literature, the concept of agility, both as an overall ‘capacity to react quickly to rapidly changing circumstances’ [2] and as a ‘set of specific tools and methods,’ has gained importance [3].

For executives in large, non-digital native firms, business agility has become a key imperative as they seek to adapt to the fast-changing business environment noted above. Business agility requires a multi-layered effort – at the strategic, organizational, team and leadership levels of analysis [4], and in different functions such as IT, HR, marketing, finance, and operations [5].

However, a May 2020 IMD survey of 550 executives also revealed that executives struggled with how to build greater business agility. One reason for this might be the disconnect between the concept’s popularity and the availability and understanding of the tools and principles that underpin it. As recently argued, the notion of agility has received ‘neither a consistent treatment in the literature nor a coherent typology or theory of its meaning (i.e., what it is) and significance (i.e., why it matters) to guide a systematic program of research’ [6]. The ambiguity in the meaning of agile (as a specific set of techniques) and agility (as a broader capability) does not help, for example, if it has been shown that companies can establish a high degree of agility without deploying agile methods [7].

This special issue aims to resolve and enrich our understanding of these issues by showcasing current research on the topic of business agility. Building on earlier CMR publications and the 2014 special issue on Strategic Agility [8], we welcome papers that tackle all the different facets of business agility.

Aims and Scope

All articles in this special issue must focus on unresolved questions and issues with a clearly stated scholarly and practice contribution. A perspective on how businesses will continue to change is also welcome [9].

Given the scholar/practitioner orientation of the journal, this topic, and the editorial team, co-created papers (between scholars and practitioners) are welcome, as are sole or co-authored scholarly papers with a clear practitioner-focused impact. We encourage papers from a variety of disciplinary fields, geographic locations, as well as multidisciplinary work: from strategy to international business, technology, organizational theory and behavior, and leadership. We will welcome quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods, as well as more innovative methodological approaches.

We welcome articles on a wide range of questions and issues, including but not limited to the following (if you have an idea not listed here feel free to contact us for advice):

Definitional issues

- How do we recognize that a business has a greater degree of agility than another? What do we measure when we talk about (the degree of) agility?
- Is business agility about more than just speed?
- How does business agility overlap with and differ from pre-existing concepts such as flexibility, adaptability, resilience, and ambidexterity?

Strategic agility

- How should firms think about their strategic choices and their allocation of resources when faced with high levels of uncertainty?
- What are the levers available to managers to handle the competing demands for stability and change?
- How does digital technology help to address the competing demands that come with strategic agility?
- What types of processes and practices are most effective in achieving strategic agility?
- How does strategic agility relate to ambidexterity, dynamic capabilities, and other concepts of organizational adaptation [10]?

Organizational designs for agility

- How does organizational agility help managers deal with uncertainty?
- What do organizational designs based on agile methods look like? How do they affect performance?
- How can the interface issues between agile and non-agile teams be resolved?
- What do non-agile related organizational designs look like? How do they affect performance?
- What does organizational agility mean for the different functions and operations with an organization?
- What is the role of digital technology in supporting new organizational designs?

- What organizational solutions enhance hyper-awareness to weak external signals and/or organizational learning?

Agility and Leadership

- How do executive leadership teams become more agile?
- How do executives manage the transition from more traditional to more agile ways of working?
- What are the implications of agile at scale for middle managers and how do they adapt?
- How does agility change the leader-follower relationships?

Inter-level integration and agility transformation journeys

- How do multiple levels of agility relate to one another? With what performance implications?
- How do firms transform for agility? Where do they start? What are the challenges? How are they resolved? Are there better ways to transform?
- How does business agility impact change management [11]?
- Should agility transformation start from the top or are there models where it emerges from the bottom-up? What are the key lessons?
- How do companies sustain a healthy level of agility over time? Should companies remain agile over time?
- What are the dark sides of agile?

Performance implications

- Are there any degrees of business agility that perform better for given firm circumstances? What are the important contingencies and how do they affect firm performance?
- Are there different principles of agility in different cultures?
- Do companies deploying a greater degree of business agility outperform those with less of it? Is it worth the effort?
- What are key performance indicators for agility?

Review Process & Timelines

Please read the submission process carefully. The initial full papers must be submitted no later than **November 1st, 2021**. Papers submitted in the second round have a due date of **December 1st, 2021**. Please submit to the attention of Stéphane JG Girod (CMRbusinessagility@gmail.com) according to the following guidelines.

The draft must run between five to nine thousand words, double-spaced, font-size 12. In your email please clearly state (i) the author(s)' details; (ii) purpose of your study; (iii) the research question(s) being addressed; (iv) how your piece addresses the core thrust of the special issue; (v) the relevance of your study for practitioners, scholars, and CMR readership; and (vi) what impact you hope to make with your paper.

In this initial round, the Guest Editors will select those papers (approximately 12) that are most likely to result in first-rate, high-impact submission.

The three guest editors will provide a first level review to help these authors strengthen their submission by **March 1st, 2022**. The authors of these manuscripts will be given the opportunity to revise and resubmit their paper through the CMR online portal based on the feedback provided by **June 15th, 2022**.

Papers will be then reviewed by multiple CMR anonymous reviewers. Therefore, the final acceptance by the journal cannot be guaranteed.

Papers submitted via the online portal without having received an invitation will not be considered for publication in the special issue.

NOTES:

1 McKinsey, 2020. Accelerate Survey (August).

2 Brown J.L. and Agnew, 1982. Corporate Agility. *Business Horizons*. 25(2):29–33, citation p 29.

3 Doz, Y. and Kosonen, M. 2008. The Dynamics of Strategic Agility: Nokia's Rollercoaster Experience. *California Management Review*. 50(3): 95-118. Lewis, M.W., Andriopoulos, C., and Smith, W.K. 2014. Paradoxical Leadership to Enable Strategic Agility. *California Management Review*. 56(3): 58-77. Prange, C. and Heracleous, L. 2018. *Agility.X. How Organizations Thrive in Unpredictable Times*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Sull, D. 2010. Competing Through Organizational Agility. *McKinsey Quarterly*, 1: 1–9.

4 Girod, S. and Králik, M. 2021, forthcoming. *Resetting Management: Thriving with Agility in the Age of Uncertainty*. Kogan Page.

5 Prange, C. 2020. Strategic Agility. *Decision-Making Beyond Speed*. Working Paper. Tongji University.

6 Sing, J., Sharma, G., Hill, J., and Schnackenberg, A. 2013. Organizational Agility: What It Is, What It Is Not, and Why It Matters. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, 1, <https://doi.org/10.5465/ambpp.2013.11813> , citation p3.

7 Girod, S. forthcoming, 2021. *The Agile Organization*, Chapter 6 in Fjeldstad, O. & Snow, C. *Designing Modern Organizations*. Cambridge University Press.

8 Weber, Y. and Tarba, S., Y. 2014. Strategic Agility: A State of the Art. Introduction to the Special Issue. *California Management Review*. 56(3): 5-12.

9 Birkinshaw, J. and Ridderstråle, J. 2017. *Fast Forward: Make Your Company Fit for the Future*. Stanford University Press.

10 Birkinshaw, J. and Gupta, K. 2013. Clarifying the Distinctive Contribution of Ambidexterity to the Field of Organization Studies. *The Academy of Management Perspectives*, 27(4): 287-298.

11 For example, Hamel, G. & Zanini, M. 2020. *Humanocracy: Creating Organizations as Amazing as the People Inside Them*. Harvard Business Review Press.