

Managing inter-organisational dynamics – distinctive patterns?

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The relationship between organizations is a regular topic of both relationship marketing, relationship management research and strategic management research. Such a constant, high degree of interest is not surprising. The identification of change patterns in relationships of organizations can help in the explanation of several business phenomena.

In our study, the results of a questionnaire survey are presented. The main research question is whether the development of cooperation behaviour between business enterprises could depend on the size of enterprises.

For this research the resource-based view and the theory of dynamic capabilities were used. The results confirm the relevant starting points of the approach to dynamic capabilities while providing further insights at some points in light of Hungarian specificities.

Keywords: dynamic capabilities, organizational relationship

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the problem of how to manage organisational change, and how to implement changes within an organisation. While traditional paradigms – using the vantage point of strategic management – tend to regard the problem from the perspective of competitive forces and strategic conflicts, present day standpoints have their roots instead in a resource-based perspective, evolutionary economics and in the concept of dynamic capabilities (Teece et al. 1997). The competitive forces perspective (Porter 1993) draws attention to industry structure. The management of organisational dynamics aims to recognize change within the industrial structure and to reconfigure the organisation's position within the industrial structure. The strategic conflicts approach is based on game theory.

This approach embraces both the source and management of dynamics as a function of competition, where competitors aim to keep their rivals away from those areas that are seen as key priority areas (Shapiro 1989). The resource-based view states that profit is generated from the possession or control of valuable, rare, and unique resources that have no substitutes. As the core of dynamics, this approach focuses on the acquisition of resources, the management of knowledge and know-how, or on the management of learning as a strategic area (Teece et al. 1997). To explain the strategic dynamics of organisational change, and how such change is implemented, present day approaches rely heavily on the evolutionary economics concepts of path dependency and routine (Helfat–Peteraf 2009). In this terminology, routines refer to such organisation-specific and embedded patterns of action through which an organisation can repeatedly perform those individual tasks that are tied to its functions. Path dependency means that investments and the repertoire of routines that had been set in the past by the company restrict how the company will act in the future (Penrose 1959).

In line with the above-mentioned concepts, we can see from the point of view of dynamic capabilities that routines that are responsible for the implementation of changes in an organisation and for the management of organisational dynamics, are those routines that aim to reconfigure the product, the production process, the buyers, etc. (Winter 2002). From a dynamic capabilities approach these actions are such mechanisms that implement change, and in the background, there is a pattern of a set of linked routines that help the repeated performance of a given behaviour.

2. An approach to dynamic capabilities and their characteristics

In the management of organisational dynamics, the concept of dynamic capabilities is a very frequently used term. Some definitions refer to dynamic capabilities as a set of resources, while others as capacity, and some approaches define these capabilities as complex routines or organisational competence. The concept of capacity originates from an approach by Teece et al. (1997) and refers to individual competencies with no regard to the level at which a given action is performed (Helfat–Peteraf 2009). Helfat et al. (2007) point this contradiction out and introduce the concepts of the intentional/deliberate. In accordance with the authors' concept, capacities or routine/resource sets that had been developed in order to manage change fall into the category of dynamic capabilities. Finally, it is important to emphasise the “higher-order competence” nature of dynamic capabilities, a component that regularly recurs in its definitions (Teece 2012). The capabilities to implement change can be defined as those (hierarchically higher represented) behaviour patterns that formulate the above-mentioned stable competencies.

To draw the above-mentioned definitions to a conclusion and to agree on a fixed definition of dynamic capabilities, we shall hereinafter rely on a description by Eisenhardt–Martin (2000), who state that dynamic capabilities encompass those processes that use resources to integrate, reconfigure, gain and downsize a further set resources with the specific intent to adjust to or initiate market change.

Dynamic capabilities may be present in several forms and display some rather strong characteristics (Eisenhardt–Martin 2000). A particular form of dynamic capabilities is what has been called resource integration capabilities, such as product development capabilities. Another form of dynamic capabilities is reconfiguration capabilities that copy, transfer or reconfigure resources (typically knowledge) in a distinctive way. Furthermore, capabilities that support shared development and, thus, help to create links between several areas of an organisation in order to set up a sort of collaboration network can also be identified as a type of dynamic capability. Combinations of the above can also be viewed as dynamic capabilities. Within this framework, resources with different qualities are combined in order to reconfigure business opportunities. Dynamic capabilities encompass both alliance and acquisition routines that provide access to certain resources and exit routines that serve to terminate existing resources or resource combinations.

There may be differences in how a given dynamic capability is embedded. Dynamic capabilities function differently in moderately dynamic markets than in high-velocity markets (Eisenhardt–Martin 2000). In moderately dynamic markets, dynamic capabilities establish a well-structured process and remain stable and linear. In contrast with this, in high-velocity markets, dynamic capabilities do not embrace complex processes but rather consist of simple routines and the formation of real-time knowledge. General principles and forms of behaviour are laid down for the actors in order to focus the attention of the actors within an organisation onto important areas though the provision of sufficient reference points that help the implementation of reconfiguration (Gupta–Winter 2009).

While some studies that aim to uncover dynamic capabilities focus – as demonstrated above – on how these capabilities emerge, other studies focus on those areas that these capabilities improve.

Following this line, depending on how path dependency works in the case of dynamic capabilities, Desmond (2007) defines weak and strong dynamic capabilities. Weak forms of dynamic capabilities refer to the fact that there is familiarity with how to make use of the company's resources. In contrast to that, strong forms of dynamic capabilities do not build on experiences but use innovative experiments and improvised practices to discover new resources and fields of use.

Dynamic capabilities – as their targets are considered – can aim at a given resource or an existing capability, but also at resource-architecture (Kusnoki et al. 1998). Resource (or knowledge) architectures describe the structure of resource combinations, the method of how two or more of those components combine which exist independently and function on the markets, and as a result, are able to satisfy the needs of a set of buyers. Resource architecture goes beyond organisations and, consequently, dynamic capabilities that are tied to resource-architecture are basically dynamic capabilities that are linked to inter-organisational collaborations. Such capabilities go beyond organisational boundaries and enable the actors in an organisation, in association with other components in the architecture, to redefine knowledge for the individual components (Andersson et al. 2008).

When a summary is made for the characteristics of dynamic capabilities, it becomes clear that dynamic capabilities exist in three basic forms (Teece 2011; 2012):

- (1) Sensing capabilities: the capability to identify and evaluate opportunities. Sensing capabilities encompass the observation and evaluation of phenomena and the development and evaluation of hypotheses. Such activities require either managerial insight and vision or the completion of an analytical process.
- (2) Seizing capabilities: the capability to mobilize resources, tap opportunities and take hold of certain assets. Seizing capabilities are the sum of those routines and procedures that aim to tap already identified opportunities; examples include the design of business models, ensuring access to capital, and the setup of buyer/supplier relationships.

- (3) Transforming capabilities: the capability to continuously renew in order to implement the changes and improvements within the currently existing working routines and capabilities. The function of transforming capabilities is to level out those changes between organisational capabilities that are triggered by seizing capabilities and, thus, support the management and maintenance of those organisational areas that accommodate the newly introduced functions and tasks.

3. Dynamic relationship capabilities

Dynamic relationship capability is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that has been studied and described by several disciplines. The phenomenon is approached from many different aspects: strategic management (Gulati 1999, Dyer-Singh 1998), inter-organisational collaboration (Möller–Halinen 1999, Äyväri–Möller 2008), dynamic capabilities (Knight et al. 2005, Vesalainen–Hakala 2014) and organisational learning and knowledge (Saeedi 2014, Csontos–Szabó 2017). Dynamic relationship (also termed network) capabilities can be seen as the sum of all those routines, processes, and patterns of action that allow an organisation to improve its relationship competence or make use of its collaborations, in other words, to set up its collaborations with external partners, optimize its relationship portfolio, and allocate its resources between its partner relationships (Gemünden et al. 1997, Ritter 1999, Ritter et al. 2002, Mitrega et al. 2012, Horváth et al. 2018).

Because of the nature of dynamic capabilities, dynamic relationship capabilities can be described from various aspects. Dynamic relationship capabilities already have two interpretations: on the one hand, the capability to manage collaboration – the way this process has been described above – is by itself a form of dynamic capability that can result in the reconfiguration of organisational capabilities; on the other hand, based on another approach, the literature identifies an aspect of dynamic relationship capabilities where the function of dynamic relationship capabilities is to renew relationship behaviour within organisations. In what follows, we shall proceed with dynamic relationship capabilities as defined by this latter meaning.

The literature provides plenty of examples of relationship competence reconfigurations. From a primarily learning and knowledge-based theory, Jaratt (2009) looks at dynamic relationship capabilities as the sum of those elements, learning patterns (learning that helps to advance, to adapt, and includes the use of knowledge) that can lead to the implementation of relationship management reconfiguration. As the outcome of her research, Jaratt concludes that the implementation of reconfiguration relating to relationship management competence is significantly influenced by organisational culture (the degree and type of learning orientation), the structure of organisational learning, and the degree of learning (which helps to advance, and is adaptive) that has been embedded during relationship management.

By taking a resource-based and an IMP¹ relationship-oriented aspect into consideration, Johnsen–Ford (2006) define the implementation of relationship competence reconfiguration as a multi-dimensional construct. From the authors' perspective, the role of dynamic relationship capability (in their own words: interaction capability) is to enable the collaborating actors to improve their relationship management. The authors describe dynamic relationship capability as the product of four capability factors: human interaction capability, technological interaction capability, organisational structure interaction capability, and cultural interaction capability. The study by Johnsen–Ford (2006) also clearly demonstrates that in the literature dynamic relationship capability is a construct that has been, either explicitly or implicitly, identified or investigated on multiple levels. These results have all contributed to the interpretation of dynamic relationship capabilities.

Roseira et al. (2013) highlight those features of dynamic relationship capability that are found on a strategic level. By starting from a dominantly IMP interaction approach, the authors emphasise the integration of relationship strategy, interactions, network pictures and organisational positioning. From the perspective of relationship strategy, the authors highlight that individual experience, background, and the formation of a cognitive opinion are just as important as the process of such social interaction which results in the formation of an organisational attitude. The authors stress that any reconfigurations that are made in the relationship strategy of an organisation are determined just as much by a reconfiguration in the network picture/the capability to reconfigure this picture than by the actual change in the situation itself. Consequently, to maintain a value-creating strategy in inter-organisational interactions, it is necessary to manage the full experience of all members within the organisation, the setting or reconfiguration of the perceived network position, and the formation of the network strategy.

Reinhartz et al. (2004) examine relationship management reconfiguration capability from a different angle: the perspective of CRM processes. The authors find that in connection with the composition/modification of relationship processes, there are three distinctive characteristics. Firstly, there are organisational and industry-specific characteristics, and the capability to manage the reconfiguration of these characteristics. Secondly, in the course of relationship process modifications, the authors highlight the significance of relationship life-cycle evaluation. And thirdly, the authors point out the management of the diverse distributions of relationship value, which stays heterogeneous between partners over time.

Finally, when research on the various implementation levels of relationship management reconfiguration is discussed, Havila and Medlin's 2012 study has to be mentioned. The authors focus on those characteristics that are related to the implementation of change in relationship management activities. From the perspective of project, relationship, and knowledge management, the authors have done research on the termination of collaborations, concluding that those behaviour

¹ Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group

patterns that are displayed during reconfigurations are always the products of inter-organisational and extra-organisational elements, where reconfiguration is always part of a broader network. This network has to be taken into consideration. Experience that is derived from change related to the implementation of collaborations is generalized, and the implementation process is affected by the following: experience (embedded in a process or an organisation) that members in an organisation (individuals, groups) have and that is available for the completion of a certain task; the implementation of accessible external (partner) knowledge; and the capability to manage the outcomes and effects of reconfiguration on the level of personal and organisational interactions. The study distinguishes between operational and strategic levels and concludes that when reconfiguration is successfully implemented on each of these levels then, reciprocally, it is determined that reconfiguration can also be successfully implemented within the entire organisation.

4. Aim, model and methodology of the study

In our study, we have the following research question: with a change in their size, do Hungarian business units which operate in an inter-organisation market display any change in their behaviour with the aim to improving their collaborations? Results by Eisenhardt–Martin (2000) have demonstrated that depending on industrial dynamics, the structure of dynamic capabilities displays various differences. In the field of relationship capabilities, Äyväri–Möller (2000), O’Toole and McGrath (2008) and Sutton-Brady et al. (2011) have verified the existence of these differences in connection with the size of business units as well. These facts have heightened our interest into whether, in the case of Hungarian business units, the characteristics of dynamic relationship capability that are typical of business organisations change when there is a change in the size of a business unit.

To operationalize our work, our study has focused on the issue of change management in collaboration strategy. As conclusions from previous studies have indicated, dynamic relationship capabilities surface in a rather complex way. Thus, we tested our hypothesis by placing the strategic dimension of the phenomenon into focus; on this dimension, the various patterns of reconfiguration dynamics will, by all means, leave a mark. It has been the goal of our research to examine to what extent the reconfiguration capability of relationship strategy adjusts when there is a change in the size of a business unit.

During the design of our research model, we defined the strategic dimension of dynamic relationship capabilities in the following way: how can an organisation reconfigure its relationship strategy within the very network where it fulfils its role? Relying on studies by Teece (2011; 2012) and Roseira et al. (2013), we have defined the strategic dimension (strategic flexibility) of dynamic relationship capabilities on four levels:

- Perception capability: supports those solutions, tools, and routines that allow the perception of such experience as s that derive from relationship interaction.
- evaluation capability: supports those solutions, tools, and routines that, in line with experience derived from interactions, enable the evaluation of relationship investments and relationship value.
- learning capability: supports those solutions, tools, and routines that, in line with relationship value, enable the reconfiguration of the perceived position and the network picture.
- integrating capability: supports those solutions, tools, and routines that enable the integration of the reconfigured strategic elements into the practice of an organisation.

To be able to examine the successful functioning of strategic flexibility, we have made use of two target variables that fit how we have approached dynamic relationship capabilities:

- perceived suitability of relationship capabilities: the level of suitability of those routines and methods that are utilized for relationships management.
- perceived success of collaboration: the general level of satisfaction with partner relationships.

To test the research questions posed in this study, a questionnaire methodology was made use of and carried out on a nationwide representative sample between 1 December 2016 and 31 January 2017.

From the Business Units Registry, population data was generated, and with the assistance of the staff of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH), a random sample compiled to represent the target group. After retrieving data on all publicly available and operational business organisations, we sorted out self-employed businesses and those that fall into the unknown staff numbers category. Furthermore, the population data did not include those organisations that were under liquidation, faced bankruptcy or were being wound up. When we compared the outcome with the population data, we realized that the item numbers did not match the staff number category; subsequently we made use of weighing factors. The generated sample was representative.

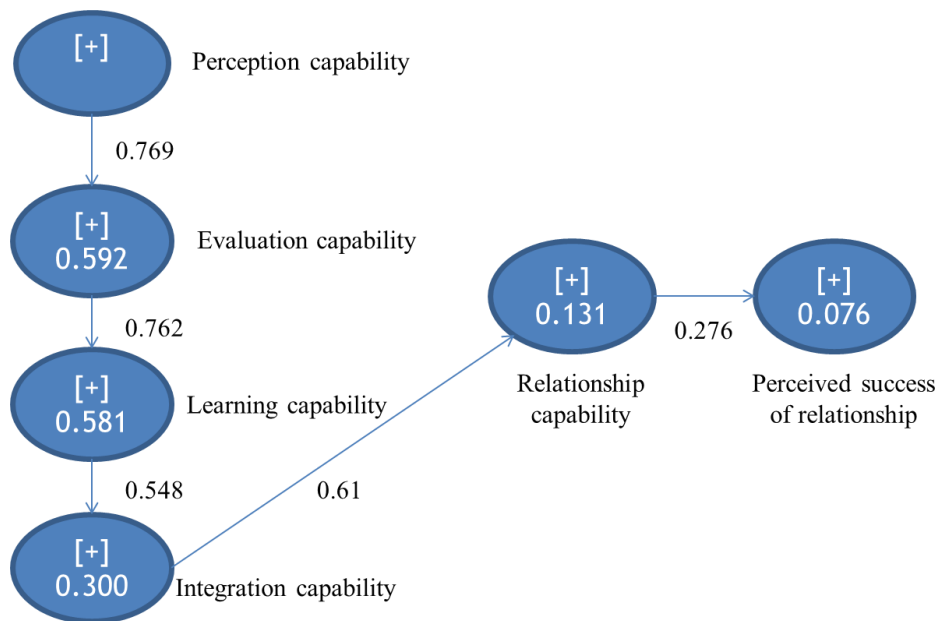
The questionnaires were sent to a thousand corporate bodies altogether, electronically, with the assistance of the staff of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office. Respondents were given two weeks to fill in the questionnaires, and it was our request that decision-makers filled in these documents. A 6-point Likert scale was used to measure the characteristics under scrutiny. 312 corporate bodies returned the questionnaires at a 30% response rate. Altogether 301 corporate bodies responded to all of our survey questions, therefore these bodies represent our research sample.

Taking the exploratory nature of this study into consideration, we have made use of PLS path analysis to examine the influential force of strategic-level flexibility factors on perceived relationship success and perceived business success (Kazár 2014).

5. Research outcomes

During the course of this study, we have analysed strategic level dynamic capabilities along four factors (sensing, evaluation, learning, and integration), while the stable relationship capability of organisations and the success of inter-organisational relationships have been measured by one factor each. For the assessment of data, we have made use of PLS path analysis. The outcomes of the assessment are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Correlation between strategic flexibility in collaborations and collaboration success



Source: Authors' own work.

The outcomes presented in Figure 1 highlight three significant correlations:

- Firstly, there is a strong link between those factors that define strategic flexibility: the perception of the network picture exerts a major (0.769) influence on how the network picture is evaluated, the evaluation of the network picture exerts influence on the learning dimension (0.762), while the learning dimension exerts influence on integration (0.548). The perception of the network picture explains in 59% of respondents how the network picture is evaluated, the evaluation of the network picture explains in 58% the learning dimension, while the learning dimension explains in 30% the reconfiguration of strategy. The resulting data reflect well on the strong link between the intertwining categories of sensing, evaluation, learning, and integration.

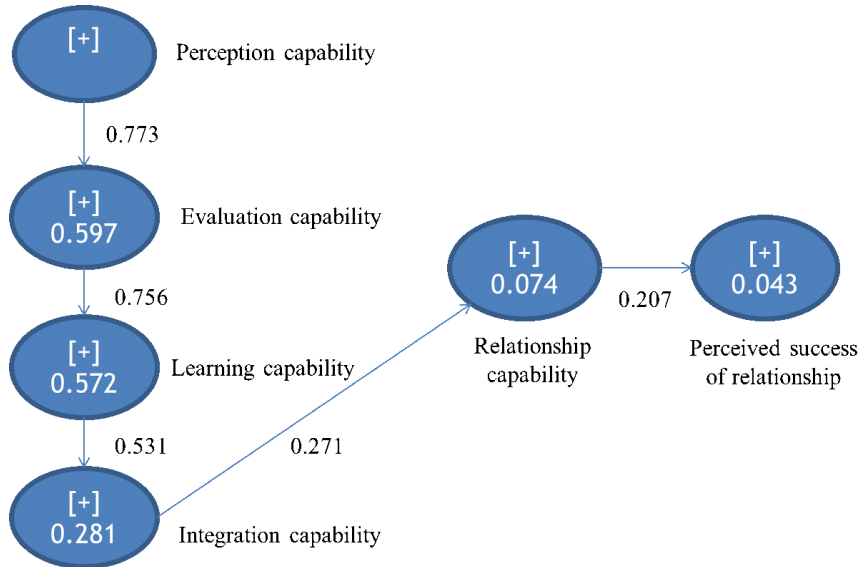
- Factors describing strategic flexibility and stable relationship capability have a weaker correlation than what is demonstrated above; the only significant one (36%) being between integration capability and stable relationship capability. However, the explanatory value of the four factors is rather low: 13% overall.
- The strategic flexibility and relationship capability of organisations affects (0.276) the success of organisations, but the explanatory value is very low: 7%.

In the second stage of our research, in line with our research question, we have divided our sample, based on their staff numbers, into two sets. This resulted in two groups: (1) businesses that employ 2–50 people and (2) businesses that employ more than 50 people. To assess the two sample groups, we have again made use of PLS path analysis. The outcomes of these assessments are presented in Figures 2 and 3.

The following correlations have been established from the research outcomes linked to businesses that employ between 2–50 people (micro and medium enterprises):

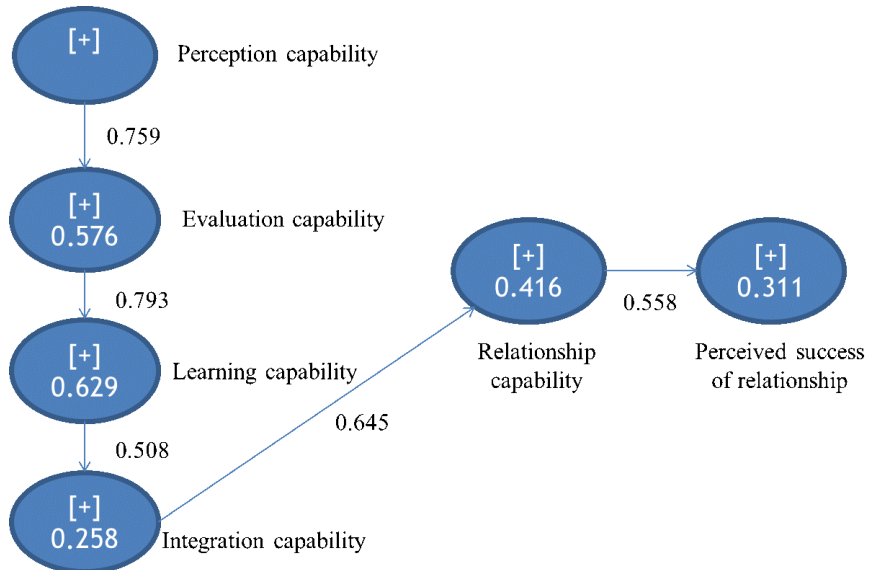
- Similar to the results derived from the entire sample spectrum, there is a strong link between those factors that define strategic flexibility. The perception of the network picture exerts a major (0.773) influence on how the network picture is evaluated, the evaluation of the network picture exerts influence on the learning dimension (0.756), while the learning dimension exerts influence on integration (0.531). The perception of the network picture explains in 59% of responses how the network picture is evaluated, the evaluation of the network picture explains in 57% the learning dimension, while the learning dimension explains in 28% the reconfiguration of strategy.
- Compared to the entire sample spectrum, there is a weaker (0.271) correlation between the factors that describe strategic flexibility and stable relationship capability. Overall, the explanatory value stays very low: 7%.
- The strategic flexibility and relationship capability of organisations affects (0.207) the success of organisations, but the explanatory value is very low: 4%.

Figure 2 Correlation between strategic flexibility in collaborations and collaboration success with businesses that employ between 2–50 people



Source: Authors' own work.

Figure 3 Correlation between strategic flexibility in collaboration and collaboration success with businesses that employ more than 50 people



Source: Authors' own work.

The following correlations have been established from the research outcomes linked to businesses that employ more than 50 people:

- Similar to the results derived from the entire sample spectrum, there is a strong (0.759; 0.793; 0.508) link between those factors that define strategic flexibility. The explanatory value is also similar to what was measured on the overall sample spectrum.
- But compared to the entire sample spectrum, there is a major difference in the correlation between factors that define strategic flexibility and stable relationship capability. Dynamic strategic capability exerts a stronger (0.645) influence on relationship capability, and the explanatory value is also higher (41%).
- Strategic flexibility and relationship capability of organisations have a stronger effect (0.207) on the success of organisations, and the explanatory value is also higher (31%).

6. Summary

Our current study has achieved two goals: first, it has made an attempt to observe how strategic level dynamic capability affects relationship capability and perceived relationship success, and, second, it has examined whether there are any changes in this model depending on the size of a business.

This study has demonstrated that, in B2B situations, dynamic strategic capability reveals itself as a clear model. The research outcomes indicate that the examined characteristics of dynamic strategic capability (perception and evaluation of the network picture, learning, and modifying strategy) significantly influence each another.

On the other hand, in B2B situations, dynamic strategic capability exerts a weak influence on relationship capability and on the perception of collaboration success. However, when the responses have been examined by taking staff numbers into consideration, we have identified a compelling distinction. In businesses that employ between 2–50 people, we have identified a pattern similar to the one that has emerged from the data related to the overall population spectrum. In businesses that employ more than 50 people, strategic flexibility exerts a stronger influence on their stable relationship capability, and, through that, on their perceived relationship success. This divergence means that in businesses that employ more than 50 people, it is clearly proven that the pattern of sensing-evaluation-learning-integrating affects the implementation of collaborative actions. On the other hand, in businesses that employ less than 50 people, the formation of collaborative behaviour does not clearly follow the model described in this study but rather occurs along a different pattern.

The research outcomes of our study partly corroborate, partly go beyond those research outcomes that had previously been demonstrated in this field of study – and in such a way that further questions arise. Firstly, our results confirm that the structure of strategic flexibility in entrepreneurship differs from the structure of strategic

flexibility in larger companies. Secondly, the study discloses the layers of strategic flexibility in businesses that employ more than 50 people. Thirdly, our results raise questions for further examination on the issue of strategic flexibility structures in entrepreneurship.

On the one hand, our results expose those areas that managers of businesses that employ 50 people should address in order to continuously improve the relationship capability of their organisations. On the other hand, our results also demonstrate that such expertise is by no means universal: the adaptation of such experience to entrepreneurship is not possible, except in limited form.

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