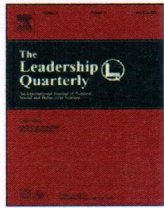


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How top management team behavioral integration and behavioral complexity enable organizational ambidexterity: The moderating role of contextual ambidexterity

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ABSTRACT

Little is known about how top management teams (TMTs) make balanced strategic decisions (exploration and exploitation) and spearhead organizational ambidexterity. To address the theoretical call to explore how TMTs can help create ambidexterity, we propose a theoretical model where TMT behavioral integration cultivates behavioral complexity in a TMT that can build organizational ambidexterity. Further, we argue that the relationship between TMT behavioral complexity and organizational ambidexterity is moderated by contextual ambidexterity. Drawing on research in the areas of leadership, TMT, organizational context and ambidexterity, we explore implications for future research.

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1. Introduction

Research in fields such as managerial economics, organization theory and strategic management (e.g., Ghemawat & Ricart Costa, 1993; Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004; Holmqvist, 2004; Van den Bosch, Volberda, & de Boer, 1999; Winter & Szulanski, 2001) have recently adopted the human trait of *ambidexterity* (an individual's ability to use both hands with equal skill) as a metaphor to describe competent organizations (Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996, 1997, 2004). To ensure their viability and competitiveness in an increasingly turbulent environment in which multiple and inconsistent contextual demands can emerge (Christensen, 1998; Smith & Tushman, 2005; Tushman & O'Reilly, 1997), organizations look to expand their capacities to successfully confront intensifying paradoxes and effectively manage contradictory challenges. Nevertheless, the existence of organizational paradoxes, contradictions and conflicts (Lewis, 2000; Poole & Van de Ven, 1989) is crucial to keeping the system viable and enabling it to adapt and survive in the face of environmental disturbances (Thompson, 1967, p. 7). The synchronous pursuit of both exploration and exploitation via loosely coupled and differentiated subunits or individuals, each of which specializes in either exploration or exploitation (i.e., ambidexterity) (Gupta, Smith, & Shalley, 2006, p. 693) has been conceptualized as critical for adaptation, viability, and success (e.g., Benner & Tushman, 2003; March, 1991).

Research has tended to focus on how organizational ambidexterity is enabled and built. For example, researchers have studied structural ambidexterity (Tushman & O'Reilly, 1997) and contextual ambidexterity (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004) as important cultivators of the ambidextrous organization. However, in spite of these and other efforts we still need to better understand the drivers of ambidexterity in different situations, such that the conditions that give rise to more coordinated organizational research that can effectively straddle the scope and depth of the subject are more fully explored (Venkatraman, Chi-Hyon, & Iyer, 2005). Specifically, researchers acknowledge that an organization's TMT should play a key role in enabling and developing the requisite

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