Department of Business and Management
Master’s degree in strategic management

Organizational Ambidexterity: managerial challenges and transitional practices.
A case study on The Social Hub.

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Introduction

Today's business environment is forcing companies to constantly reinvent themselves, demanding new ideas and product development to meet compelling needs and withstand increasing competition. The flexibility, speed, and ease with which companies respond to the pace of change and the pressing demands of the marketplace determine their position, success, and overall survival within the industry.

A study of the *Fortune* 500 and the S&P 500[1] clearly demonstrates that corporate longevity has sharply declined. While companies listed before 1970 had a 92% chance of surviving over a five-year span, the survival rate[2] of firms listed from 2000 to 2009 sharply decreased to 63% (George, 2017). Similarly, a 2015 analysis by the Boston Consulting Group confirmed the higher mortality rate, while noting that the trend may be due to the inability of newer companies to survive.

Yet, new businesses are still being created to replace those that fail. The Financial Times shows an upward trend when it comes to entrepreneurship, with the pandemic being the trigger of a surge in start-ups across major economies. The USA received a 95% increase in new business applications in 2020. Though, only about 50% of those businesses are expected to survive for five years or longer, with only 30% projected to resist 10 years (Otar, 2022).

Nevertheless, new model businesses are more vulnerable and increasingly exposed to the risk of imitation (George, 2017). For them to gain a competitive advantage, and consequently be able to stand against their competitors, innovation activities are exceptionally important.

[1] The sample included about 29,688 companies that listed on U.S. stock markets from 1960 to 2009.
[2] The survival rate can be defined as the proportion of businesses started in a given year *n* that are still operational after a certain period of time *nth*.

Formalized and mechanistic structures appear to be dysfunctional for the management of innovation, stifling disruptive change before it has a chance to take hold. Ambidexterity and strategic agility have been found to be enhancers of this position.

The achievement of balance between exploratory and exploitative activities is defined as ambidexterity. More to the point, it refers to the organization's ability to leverage existing capabilities while remaining responsive to changes in the environment (O'Reilly III & Tushman, 2016), emphasizing exploration or exploitation in pursuit of an optimal mix. Following the lead of many successful companies, including Hewlett-Packard, 3M, and Intel, the modern literature on organizational adaptation has demonstrated how the development of disruptive innovations through incremental improvements has helped companies succeed and survive in the face of environmental and technological change. (e.g., Schumpeter, 1934; Tushman & O’Reilly, 2002).

A common approach to restructuring companies’ organizational architecture involves the establishment of structural ambidexterity, that is to create separate structures for different types of activities (Gibson, 2004). The relevance of ambidexterity lies in its complex scheme, which allows efficient allocation of resources across units while preventing cross-contamination. Coordination at the managerial level enables knowledge sharing while ensuring organizational separation between the distinctive processes, structures, and cultures of the new units (O’Reilly III & Tushman, 2016). Ambidexterity has been associated with growing sales, innovation, and survival while properly responding to the so-called innovator’s dilemma[3].

Organizational ambidexterity is not without its challenges. The shortcomings of the model are underlined by the fragmented nature of related research. While most of the issues related to the

[3] The term was coined by Harvard professor and businessman Clayton Christensen. This refers to the fact that successful, well-established companies are more likely to face organizational inertia and fall behind their less-established competitors in the face of disruptive innovation.

innovator's dilemma can be successfully addressed, challenges may arise in case of improper implementation. Keeping new processes separate might lead to isolation and failure due to lack of connection to the core business. In addition, the transformation of organizational culture, management mechanisms, and leadership structures are major obstacles to organizational success. Despite current research on how to facilitate the transition to ambidextrous models, the literature on the role of leadership and other organizational factors remains fragmented (Junni et al., 2015).

Managing different while co-existing operating models is therefore an ambidexterity-related-challenge, and so it is the paucity of empirical studies on the ambidexterity–performance-related variables (De Clercq et al., 2013, He and Wong, 2004). Despite the tendency to study ambidexterity at the business unit level, there is a growing interest in examining this organizational pattern at the team/individual level. In a collection of 41 empirical studies, different streams of research related the effects of employee characteristics, leader characteristics, and organizational structure on ambidexterity. Among these sources, an important stream emerged focusing on the role of human resources[4], which continues to receive significantly less attention (Junni et al., 2015).

Further research conducted respectively from Chang, Yang & Chan (2009) and Mom, van den Bosch & Volberda (2009) demonstrated the increasingly positive influence on ambidextrous outputs of social relationships, HR practices, leadership, and system as well as employee characteristics. Interviewing managers in 5 firms on organizational structure and social relationships ultimately served to establish the extent of the impact of managers' decision-making, formalization of tasks and connectedness on ambidexterity.

[4]Human Resources Management focuses on ensuring an effective organizational structure by hiring employees, guaranteeing leadership, growth to employees through their life cycles within the company. In organizational design, the HR department is tasked with recruitment; performance management while ensuring skilled managerial figures.

The purpose of the experimental research will be reviewing the evolution of organizational ambidexterity, while identifying the main deficiencies that characterize the above-mentioned model. To better address the inquiry on an individual and team level functions, organizational structure, leadership, and employee characteristics will be examined too. The Social Hub transition to a new business model and organizational structure will serve the experimental part of the research. Data will be used to assess the extent to which ambidexterity-related challenges can be properly addressed through organizational, management and employee characteristics to guarantee the successful transition of organizations to ambidextrous structures.

Chapter I

Organizational Ambidexterity

1.1 Academic Debate about origins and definitions

One of the most abiding ideas in organizational science is that an organization's long-term success and overall survival depends on its ability to leverage its current capabilities while exploring new ones (Raisch et al., 2009). Building on earlier definition provided by Duncan in 1976 and March (1991), Tushman and O'Reilly (1996) were the first to come up with a theoretical framework related to organizational ambidexterity. They suggested that the expectation of superior performance is in ambidextrous organizations, giving continuity to the research with their contribution on the matter.

Anyhow, as anticipated above, the term “ambidexterity” was first introduced by Duncan in 1976. It referred to conceptual work that took a contingency perspective on organizational design, focusing on dilemmas that organizations face in managing innovation projects. The model consisted of recommendations for managing two broad phases[5] of innovation, each of which had significantly different demands on organizations. This resulted in a dual structure in which organizations were required to move between structures of low and high complexity, formalization, and centralization, either within or across organizational units.

[5] Namely, initiation and implementation. The initiation stage of the innovation process has an organizational structure that is characterized by a high degree of complexity, a low degree of formalization, and a low degree of centralization. Conversely, implementation implies low complexity, high formalization, and increased centralization. Duncan (1976) suggests that the implementation of a new system must be followed by a period of adaptation.

Following studies of James March have been of equal importance. Most importantly, the article *Exploring and Exploiting Organizational Learning*[6] has often been cited as the impetus for the current interest in the subject. The author depicted organizations as adaptive systems and in doing so, he noted the relationship between the exploration of new possibilities and the exploitation of old certainties in organizational learning. He also examined the underlying complications and the tradeoffs involved in processes and activities (Wilden et al., 2018).

Ultimately, Tushman and O'Reilly defined organizational ambidexterity as follows:

> "*The ability to simultaneously pursue both incremental and discontinuous innovation … from hosting multiple contradictory structures, processes and cultures within the same firm.*"

required for long term survival (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013).

As the conceptualization of the ambidexterity framework gained momentum, the research base has expanded. The framework has been applied to strategy, new product development, technology, software development, intellectual capital, and others with practical implications for how managers and organizations handle exploration and exploitation. Organizational ambidexterity has become the synthesis of a dichotomy, that is exploring and exploiting to compete in mature technologies and markets where efficiency, control, and incrementalism are important, as well as to compete in emerging technologies and markets where agility, self-reliance, and experimentation are needed. (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013).

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[6] March, J. G. (1991). Exploration and exploitation in organizational learning. *Organization Science*, *2*(1), 71–87. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2.1.71

The above definition is particularly useful for the purposes of the present analysis. There is a common pattern to the growth and evolution of organizations, with success resulting not only from continuous research and development, but also to the ability of management to ensure strategy alignment. Companies continuously face discontinuous and revolutionary change as they move through the tree stages of growth described in *Figure 1*. In this framework, different competencies, strategies, structures, cultures, and leadership skills are required at each stage. However, despite enhancing and driving performance in the short-term, these factors are only helpful for pursuing incremental change, which is not sufficient to succeed in the long one (Tushman & O'Reilly III, 2018).

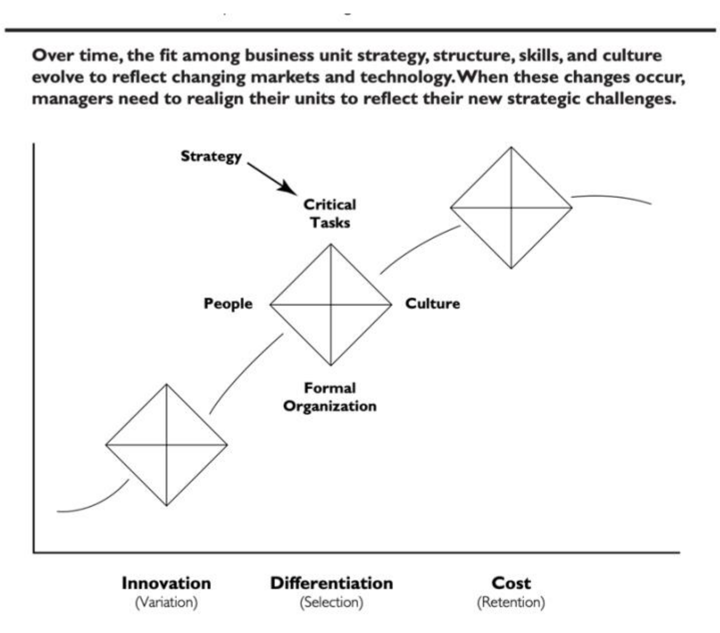

Figure 1- The Three Stages of Growth

While it is true that the technology cycle occurs in almost every industry, the frequency with which the phases repeat themselves creates severe discontinuity. Incremental change becomes then incongruous. *Figure 2* illustrates this. Technology cycles begin when product or service innovations enter the market and gain acceptance. As they develop and unfold, companies need to come up with new strategies to compete and meet the demand. To support these revolutionary changes, management must ensure alignment between strategy and the company's objectives. Ambidextrous models help manage organizational paradoxes while simultaneously achieving seemingly divergent or even contradictory goals.

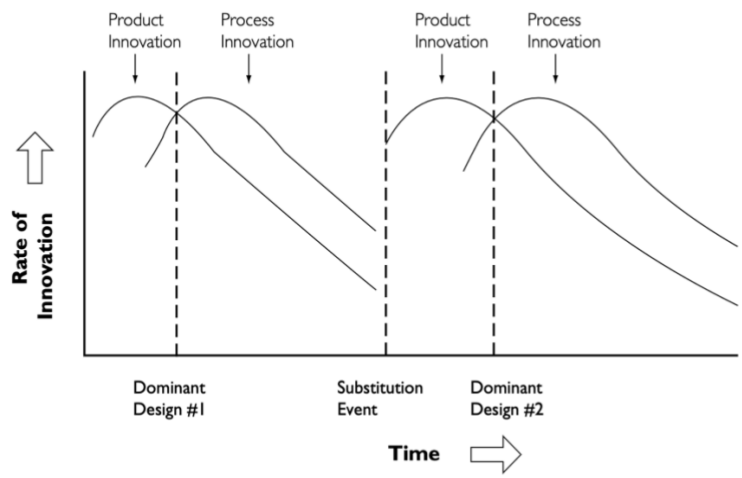

Figure 2 - Mastering the Dynamics of Innovation

1.1.1 Exploring and Exploiting

Exploration and exploitation are at the core of the ambidextrous model. Since the publication of March's foundational paper, the notions of exploration and exploitation have become prominent in organizational analyses of disruptive innovation, organizational design and learning, competitive advantage, and survival. Building on his line, Benner and Tushman suggested:

"Exploitation consists of improving existing components, and builds on the existing technology path, whereas exploratory innovation involves a shift to a different technology path."

On the other hand, among opposite streams of research there is a growing tendency to define exploration as all activities that involve learning and innovation, while limiting the concept of exploitation as the benefit that results from previous knowledge rather than the pursuit of developments of any kind. Despite the ongoing debate, all definitions imply a degree of improvement or the acquisition of new notions. As a matter of fact, even when a company chooses to leverage prior knowledge and optimize the strategy already in place, it's still accumulating experience and progressing down the learning curve, albeit in an incremental manner (Gupta et al., 2006).

It is in his previous work that March noted: "*The essence of exploitation is the refinement and extension of existing competencies, technologies, and paradigms. The essence of exploration is experimentation with new alternatives.*" Nonetheless, it must be noted that *Exploring and Exploiting Organizational Learning* approached the topic from a behavioral-theory perspective only, eventually placing it in the context of organizational learning. Moving away from March's ideas, current studies use exploration and exploitation to explain innovation at a firm level and through its performance (Wilden et al., 2018).

In this context, inherent limitations arise from the management and administration of diverging objectives. The implementation of exploitative strategies relies on the assumption that companies have complete information about external opportunities and internal capabilities. Exploitative activities are usually implemented within stable environments, where low risk-exposure allows for the quick resolution of clearly defined problems (Chen, 2017). Besides focusing on the improvement of existing businesses and assets, incremental innovation[7] is aimed at achieving short-term goals and delivering reliable revenues and profits. Ongoing operations are optimized to improve organizational efficiency, reliability, and control.

Unlike exploitation, exploration strategies are tailored for companies exposed to higher levels of complexity and uncertainty, pushing them into uncharted territory (Chen, 2017). At the heart of exploration is the belief that firms may not have reached their maximum potential. Seizing new opportunities becomes essential and greater emphasis is placed on gathering knowledge through research, discovery, and acceptance of risk and failure (O'Reilly et al., 2021). Returns are uncertain, distant, and delayed with risks of poor performance in the short-term.

March ultimately noted that further issues with addressing the dilemma lays in the difficulty of achieving balance. There's a widespread tendency to favor exploitation with its greater certainty of short-term success while exploration is by its nature inefficient, acting as the trigger for a risk-averse behaviors. March concluded that because of this short-term bias "established organizations will always specialize in exploitation, in becoming more efficient in using what they already know.", resulting in a dominant position in the short run which will gradually become obsolescent in the long one.

[7] Incremental innovation is relatively moderate, focused on the enhancement of prior knowledge, assets, and capabilities. Management is familiar with procedures, systems, and methods as well customers' needs and expectations.

Again, it follows that by supporting structural ambidexterity at the firm level, contextual ambidexterity[8] at the business unit level, and sequential ambidexterity[9] at the project level, firms must strive to excel at both exploration and exploitation, and to accommodate the conflicting logics of the two activities.

1.1.2 Incremental and disruptive innovation

In order to innovate, develop and implement the two-handed model while securing the company's position within the industry, managers must be prepared to cannibalize[10] their business during the gradual transition to the new strategy and model. This adds another layer of complexity. In fact, the more successful the company, the higher the likelihood to breed inertia and clash with dynamic conservatism, further encouraging risk-averse behavior and stifling innovation itself. For this reason, experts differentiate the scope of innovation into two broad categories: incremental and disruptive.

Incremental innovation is widely recognized as an alternative to breakthrough innovation and cannibalization of the core business. In fact, it is usually easier to experience because it builds

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[8] Contextual ambidexterity allows greater autonomy in deciding whether to explore or exploit, and for exploratory initiatives to emerge within the existing organizational framework if the new activities do not radically differ from the core business of the firm. The opposite is not true.

[9] Sequential ambidexterity enables exploration and exploitation by separating them in time. Sequential ambidexterity is effective when implemented at the project level, typically moving from an exploration phase to an exploitation phase.

[10] Cannibalization occurs when the introduction of new products leads to a reduction in sales, turnover or market share. From an organizational point of view, the ambidextrous model can trigger cannibalization by transitioning to a new model or by focusing on a new business activity that proves detrimental to the core business.

on productivity gains through continuous efforts in product development and cost improvement, as well as increasing efficiency and enhancing user experience of products and services.

In other words, traditionally appreciated products and services become quicker and less expensive, with improvements that draw on existing body of knowledge while moving along a known trajectory. This is not only critical to support and increasing share in mainstream markets (Baden-Fuller and Pitt, 1996; Hill and Jones, 1998; Johnson and Scholes, 1997), but they are also fundamental for the development of technologies and the industry. Google's Gmail is perhaps the most popular example when it comes to incremental innovation. Originally devised to simplify communication, it made email exchange faster and better through constant addition of new features and updates. Since then, the search engine giant gained a dominant position increasingly improves their offering, making it the best in the field.

While it is true that the use of incremental innovation is essential to remain competitive without necessarily sacrificing budget or sustainability, expanding the product range of the company and consumer preferences by encouraging the iteration of new ideas, incremental change is not suitable when large and rapid change is required (Carleton, 2023). An example of how incremental innovation can be a hindrance to a company's innovation activity is the case of Kodak's failure. Originally pioneering the photographic industry, Kodak was completely displaced when digital cameras began to appear. The disruptive concepts prevailed, and Kodak became obsolete.

Christiansen (1997) described disruptive innovations as those that cause dramatic change through the introduction of groundbreaking products and technologies, thereby displacing market leaders and the old normal standardized value propositions. This paves the way for the emergence of new innovative paths, creating a duality of choice for consumers who in turn are called to select either lower quality and cheaper novelties, or luxurious ones. Disruptive innovation deals with changes that are discontinuous or revolutionary in nature, opposing to evolutionary or incremental innovation. Nevertheless, it often depends on incremental refinements and modifications in complementary technologies.

The introduction of disruptive innovations typically follows a common pattern. It starts with a focus on addressing the unmet needs of an emerging or niche segment by offering a cheaper alternative. The latter is not considered as a threat to the incumbents since they only appeal to the low end of the market. Truth is that they transform the niche market into a mass market process. Products and services with little or no value change the basis of competition and reduce the share of sustained innovations. The mass-market phenomenon increases the awareness and popularity of the new value proposition among competitors and customers at detriment of standardized mainstream solutions. The change in the mainstream market's perception of what it values is the catalyst that enables the innovation to disrupt. Indeed, disruption occurs when the performance trajectories of the disruptive technologies intersect with the performance trajectories of the mainstream market (Alpkan & Gemici, 2016).

Wood et al. (2013) argued that companies engaged in disruptive innovation can only survive if organizational ambidexterity is implemented correctly, i.e., by encouraging the exploration of new opportunities while exploiting established capabilities, and by differentiating the organization into specialized units while integrating them as needed. In some cases, the first disruptive move may come from a newly formed company that has just been exploring. In this case, the disruptor does not need to be ambidextrous at the outset, but as its brand and market share grow, it must develop the capabilities to exploit the fruits of disruption. Tushman and O'Reilly

(1996) suggested that the key to success lies in balancing efforts to adapt to the current or mature environment, by achieving efficiency and incremental innovation goals, with efforts to adapt to changing conditions, by achieving flexibility, speed, and radical innovation goals (Alpkan & Gemici, 2016).

1.2 Fundamental tensions and central challenges

The ambidextrous organizational structure poses inherent challenges that will be addressed as central tensions. First and foremost, challenges relate to differentiation and integration as alternative or complementary paths to ambidexterity. While differentiation entails the implementation of structural ambidexterity, that is separating exploitative and exploratory activities into distinct organizational units, integration strategies enable organizations to address exploitative and exploratory activities within the same organizational unit. However, the two approaches have often been positioned as mutually exclusive.

The differentiation of tasks within the ambidextrous environment provides greater tolerance and autonomy for independent organizational units to properly develop exploitation and exploration frameworks. Following this approach, the objective is to gradually carry on exploration activities in a decentralized, and more flexible way. This helps ambidextrous organizations maintaining different competencies with which to address inconsistent demands arising from emerging and mainstream business opportunities. On the other hand, integrative techniques emphasize efforts to promote synergies, and actions (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009).

Integration requires a reference system that transcends and extends organizational boundaries. This is achieved by capturing knowledge, introducing a common language to facilitate communication, and encouraging ongoing socialization and interaction. Interaction between departments or business units can create bridges that enable knowledge transfer, continuous job rotation and joint training. The alignment of the organizational structure with company's strategic objective establishes a shared vision, and the continuous iteration of ideas and skills that foster creativity.

The challenge for managers is to determine the extent to which differentiation and integration are appropriate to mitigate tensions. It is likely that the right balance between differentiation and integration depends on the relative importance of exploitative and exploratory activities (Gulati and Puranam 2009). Technology cycles cause exploitation and exploration to shift over time, making managing the tension between differentiation and integration an important dynamic capability for creating and sustaining organizational ambidexterity.

Other concerns relate to whether the implementation of the ambidextrous model should be limited to the individual or organizational level. In this framework, researchers have recognized that top management should act ambidextrously by integrating exploitative and exploratory activities. Conversely, Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004) suggested that ambidexterity is rooted in an individual's ability to explore and exploit, and described business unit contexts that allow employees to engage in both exploratory and exploitative activities. In a similar vein, Mom et al (2007) show that managers are the ones to be engage in high levels of exploitative and exploratory activities simultaneously. In both cases, individuals are a critical source of organizational ambidexterity. This brings to light challenges such as managing contradictions, conflicting goals, and taking on and fulfilling multiple roles.

Converging perspectives on static versus dynamic ambidexterity have led scholars to debate whether innovation is sequential or simultaneous. While proponents of sequential ambidexterity suggest that innovation is expected to emerge from the dynamic, temporal sequencing of routines for exploitation and exploration, modern contingency theory shows that ambidexterity is a dynamic process rather than a matter of static configurations. Despite the common belief that organizations become ambidextrous through the adoption of certain configurations, current market conditions tend to pursue static and dynamic strategies together. O'Reilly and Tushman (2008) support the argument that for ambidexterity to become a dynamic capability, management must repeatedly and deliberately orchestrate the firm's resources. Organizations must continually reconfigure what they do to meet the changing demands of the internal and external environment.

Ultimately, the tensions relate to the ways in which ambidexterity should be pursued, that is by encouraging exploitation and exploration internally or externally. Related research on innovation and knowledge processes emphasizes the importance of external acquisition of new knowledge for exploration, suggesting the importance of interrelationships between internal and external knowledge processes that play an important role in firm renewal. There is a need to explore the interplay between internal and external processes in creating and maintaining organizational ambidexterity.

In order to solve the paradoxical requirements of exploitation and exploration, the solution has been to externalize one or another set of activities through outsourcing or by establishing alliances. Benner and Tushman (2003) concluded that the externalization of exploitation or exploration processes might be harmed by the difficulties in realizing strategic integration across independent firms. On the other hand, other stream of research stressed the importance of the external acquisition of new knowledge. Ultimately researchers have found that interorganizational activities, such as customer relationships, corporate venturing, and strategic may enable both exploitative and explorative knowledge processes.

Chapter II

Research Method

2.1 Research Setting: The Social Hub and the transition to the hybrid structure

Founded in 2006 by Charlie MacGregor, The Social Hub (TSH) is a unique example of an ambidextrous organization. As a result of its rapid expansion and success, the strategic decision to embark on a rebranding process fits perfectly with the conceptual lessons outlined in Chapter One.

In line with the definition of ambidexterity, the company completely overturned its structural organization, capitalizing on pre-existing knowledge of how to meet student demand to shift the focus onto providing different types of services and accommodation, while targeting a new market niche[11]. By aiming to fill a significant gap in the market, TSH was eventually able to establish itself in the hotel sector, pioneering the hub concept. Shifting the focus to a completely different concept and target, the company was able to further develop its ability to pursue its mission and goals, backward integrating services usually provided by third parties[12] to sharpen its competitive advantage. Today, The Social Hub model is being imitated by many with poor results, while the latter continues to create flexible spaces that can simultaneously meet the needs of traditional hotel guests, students, and workers[13].

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[11] Besides students, the rebranding and restructuring strategy is aimed at attracting and retaining the so-called digital nomads. Those are the people who are location-independent and use technology to perform their job. They usually work remotely, telecommuting rather than being physically present at a company's headquarters or office.

[12] With this, it is emphasized that the hotel houses numerous communal spaces including a courtyard, meeting rooms and coworking spaces that can be used and opened to occasional, traditional and/or extended guests.

[13] According to unofficial statistics, 35 million people identify themselves as such, a figure that is expected to triple in the next three years. More and more professionals working remotely will be looking for modern and comfortable spaces and environments.

Formerly known as The Student Hotel, the company made its debut in the hospitality sector in 2006. With an overflowing desire to offer students better deals than those available on the market, MacGregor started the company with a simple belief: students deserve better (More than just a hotel). However, what is currently known as The Social Hub was originally intended to be a city center accommodation option for students only. At the heart of the company's mission was the need to improve the quality of student housing, something MacGregor became aware of after experiencing poor accommodation as a student. With the creation of the TSH chain, the founder set out to create comfortable, almost stylish spaces that could adapt to the needs of students without neglecting the wellbeing and overall standard of their stay. Away from moldy dormitories, the hotel established itself as a meeting place where young people could feel valued, find their purpose and pursue their careers.

Figure 3 – This Is Us

After the opening of the first TSH in Rotterdam in 2012, the business developed rapidly. The growing interest, the fame gained among applicants and the constant demand made the founders realize that The Student Hotel was more than just a place for students, but rather a place for like-minded people from near and far to connect (The Social Hub). This became the matrix of change that led the hotel to expand into a multi-product platform, that could address the ongoing demand and deliver tailored solutions to their guests. A major milestone was eventually reached in 2015 with the opening of TSH Amsterdam City, where coworking spaces, shared restaurants and meeting and event facilities were added for the first time (The Social Hub).

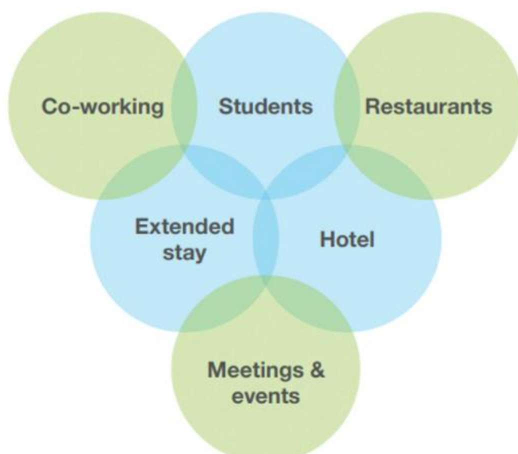

Figure 4 – This is Us

Since the decision to add new areas to the site, the company has continued to expand and innovate. The outbreak of the pandemic was one of the main reasons why Scottish entrepreneur and CEO decided to further expand the range of guests and activities on offer. As a result of Covid's advance, the mechanisms of the hotel industry were completely disrupted, and more traditional establishments have been subject to the downturn in the trend of the market. In turn, the number of remote work opportunities has grown exponentially, with the work-from-anywhere movement having a massive impact on the logic of the hospitality industry. The measure of success, apart from the quality of the structure itself, has turned to be the degree of interaction with the environment and the community. In this framework, TSH has come to dominate the new concept, and the connection between people and place is the key to its success.

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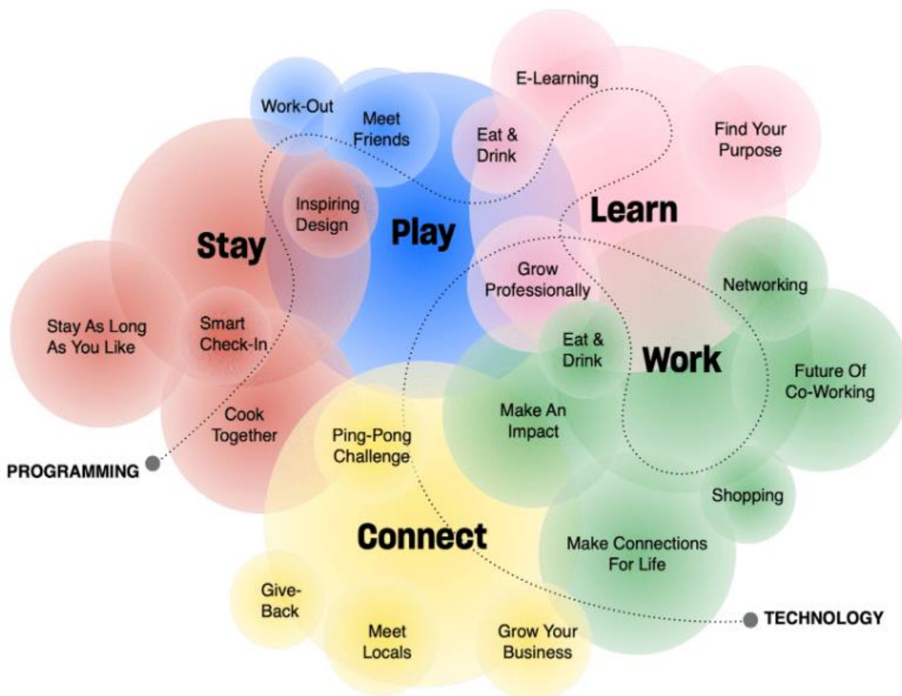


Figure 5 – The Social Hub

By strategically responding to the needs and new demands of its customers, TSH has chosen to follow the evolutionary rhythms of society by evolving with it. Under the leadership of

MacGregor, hybrid hospitality[14] represented the main execution provider for the brand to switch towards an ambidextrous structure and the main tool to enhance sources of value. Not only has the latter allowed TSH facilities to expand their offerings, but to better exploit underutilized spaces, connect guests to a community and attract the new demographic.

The new wave of guests was looking for additional value from their hospitality experience, and TSH was able to deliver a new value proposition implementing flexible workspaces and technology solutions such as a digital key to access facilities on the go. The adoption of a more customer-centric perspective, enabled the brand to generate new revenue streams, optimize their spaces, build brand loyalty and to overcome hospitality industry barriers (Ziliak). As the CEO stated in an interview with Forbes:

> "We're so much more than a hotel, and more than a home. The Social Hub's unique hybrid hospitality model means we're as flexible as it gets, welcoming guests from all walks of life: from a day to a year. It's a space to learn, stay, work and play, with flexible working spaces, a Workcafé & Bar for bites and cocktails, and meeting and event spaces for functions big or small, and a whole lot more." (Leggieri, 2022).

The TSH hybrid model can be better explained by looking at the *Figure 6* below:

[14] Hybrid hospitality indicates the blend of the traditional hotel experience with elements of coworking and co-living spaces.

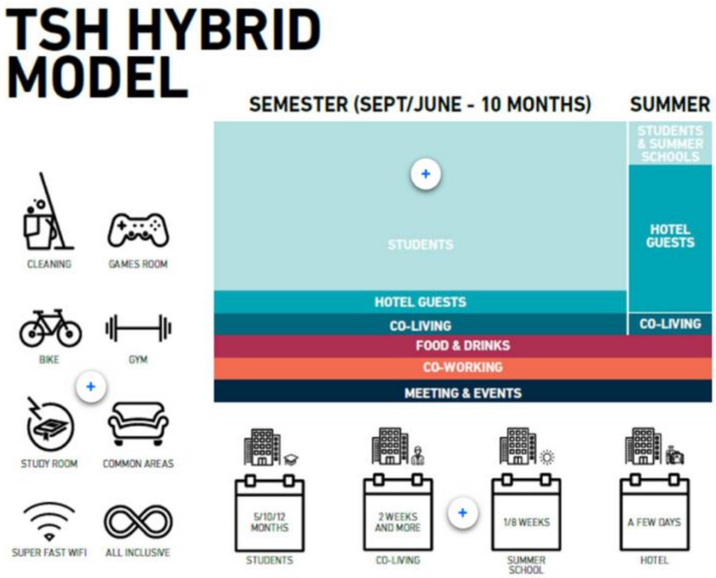


Figure 6 – TSH Hybrid Model

The best way to understand the hybrid model is to think about it in terms of an academic year. With the left side of the model representing the academic year running from September until June, the right side shows the summer season that goes from July to the end of August. Over the periods described above, guests change continuously. In this framework, the flexible model makes it possible to follow the cyclical and rotational demand of customers, adapting nimbly to their needs and demands.

This is better explained by *Table 1* below:

Hotel Guests	Looking to stimulate their explorer's mindset by blending into the local culture
Coworkers	Looking to connect with like-minded people over inspiration & ideas to feed their curiosity.
Extended Stay	Looking for a kickstart into local communities and set roots into the city.
Students	Looking to make natural connections that fuel their growth.

Table 1 – TSH Customer Base

The rotation plan just described allowed the structure to survive the Covid wave. In fact, shortly after the tourism shutdown, many rooms were converted into student dormitories. Others, served as “rooms as offices”, housing dozens of workers forced into smart working.

Similarly, The Social HUB has reviewed how employees are selected during the recruitment process and how roles are managed. By implementing the so-called 3.0 model, they are looking for people who fit into the dynamic and flexible structure of the company. With the aim of building a blended team, TSH breaks down specialization and departmental limitations. All employees at the entry level receive thorough training so that they are prepared to change roles quickly in the event of an emergency. This has resulted in new job titles that emphasize the multifaceted nature of the employees and their willingness to do anything.

Priding itself on providing excellent care to its guests, the company needed to secure the same outstanding level of service and customer experience across its brand. The ambidextrous structure enables the brand to continuously improve service delivery and consistency, while ensuring the delivery of its hybrid strategy. In addition, the Support Hubs cover all 'back-end' logistics, allowing the main locations to focus on their value proposition and guest experience. The Support Hubs have deep expertise in finance and legal, real estate, people and culture, and digital and technology. Simulatively, the brand receives immense support from the so-called COCO Hub teams, whose focus is on everything that goes from the brand to the community and how it looks to the outside world. The support hubs are based in Barcelona and Amsterdam, but some departments have offices in Paris, London, and Milan.

Figure 7 – The Social Hub Locations

In accordance with it, the company ultimately revised their values and mission. It managed to do so further undergoing a rebranding phase and focusing on the relationship with their customers. By deciding to double down on who they were, they changed the name from The Student Hotel to The Social Hub in order to show awareness and be responsive to its guests. The Social Hub creates boundary blurring spaces to inspire connection, creativity and playfulness while filling generational gaps (*More than just a hotel*).

> "People have never felt a greater need for genuine connection and positive change. We're inspired by the multitude of efforts we've witnessed in our community to make society a better place, and we want to further empower that passion. This is the proof we have outgrown our own name, and most importantly, so has our community. So today a new chapter to our story begins: say goodbye to The Student Hotel – and hello to The Social Hub." (Leggieri, 2022)

TSH has improved its service and committed to delivering a superior value proposition while differentiating itself from the competition. With 11,000 rooms across Europe and valued at €2.1 billion in its last funding round, TSH has moved from being known simply as a student hotel to a name that puts social at the heart of its identity, connecting guests with the local community. Its name now carries enormous value, which is reflected in the way customers interact with the company. By 2022, TSH has expanded to 15 locations, including Amsterdam, Berlin, Paris, Florence, and Barcelona while expecting to open a further 10 hotels across Europe by 2025. Under MacGregor's leadership, TSH was recognized by Deloitte as one of the 51 best managed companies in the Netherlands in 2017-18, achieving gold status after being included for more than four years (TravelQuotidiano, 2022).

As a result of the above, it can be deduced how relevant the hybrid hospitality model presented by The Social Hub is to the research purpose of this thesis. The hotel chain formerly known as The Student Hotel, underwent a huge rebranding and repositioning phase. This these two mechanisms made official the implementation and pioneering of the model of hybrid hospitality. The latter has helped the company achieve a new, flexible organizational structure, simultaneously capitalizing on existing competencies to build a new brand identity and moving away from traditional hospitality patterns.

By implementing hybrid hospitality, the challenge was to create a new offering that would meet the needs of guests and students for flexible spaces and length of stay. At the same time, the aim was to enable connections, relationships, and community building, regardless of the reason for the guests' visit. In line with the concept of ambidexterity, the facility has been able to transform itself from a traditional hotel into a creative and innovative hub, where the renovation has set it apart from traditional student accommodation and encouraged the integration of flexible spaces. In doing so, The Social Hub moved out of a crowded industry and created a blue ocean of unmet demand. To date, the brand remains unmatched and there are no competitors that can replicate The Social Hub's model while generating the same revenue and success.

Although the above-mentioned characteristics significantly help the organization achieve their strategic goals, hindering factors should also be taken into consideration. The company is exposed to a certain degree of risks especially when taking into consideration change management related challenges. Besides carrying on substantial investments in R&D, marketing and advertising to increase brand awareness and recognition, leadership style might actually pose a threat to the company as well as creating confusion among employees and lead to risk-averse behavior, thus jeopardizing the health of the entire chain.

2.2 Research Method

The purpose of the study is to provide a holistic perspective of the ambidextrous structure, by taking into account both team and organizational levels. Indeed, a careful analysis is carried out to investigate over the challenges and tensions related to the ambidextrous model and the transition to a flexible organizational structure, which supposedly ensure the company's longevity and long-term soundness. The motive behind the present research is rooted in data regarding the mortality of companies, which are increasingly required to respond to the pace of change and pressing market demands with innovative and creative solutions. Ambidexterity and strategic ability have been found positively correlated to disruptive change, innovation, and long-term survival.

Nonetheless, transforming the organization while simultaneously revising culture, management mechanisms, and leadership structures present major obstacles to organizational success. In this context, the interviews carried out at The Social Hub were particularly relevant to the purpose of the study. Despite the hybrid model implemented by the brand served to attract a new audience by filling an unmet need within the industry, the structural and managerial transformation of the company revealed several issues related to the four ambidexterity tensions described in *Chapter One*.

Taking inspiration from a collection of 41 studies gathered by exploring the effects of employee and leader characteristics, and organizational structure on ambidexterity (Junni et al., 2015), managers and supervisors of The Social Hub Florence were asked to participate to a brief interview that served to examine the consequences of such transition and related triggers. At the same time, answers pointed out to the correlation between exploitative and explorative activities at both organizational and team level.

In this framework, qualitative methodology was found to be the most appropriate for this paper. Based on direct interviews, a semi-structured approach was used to carry out the survey. This allowed the research not to lose the scientific rigor of quantitative surveys (Gioia D.A., Corley K.G., Hamilton A., 2013). To put in other words, semi-structured interview consists of a set of predefined open-ended questions repeated to all subjects. This provides a rigorous structure to the interview, preventing the interviewee from digressing from the main topic.

A thematic approach to describing patterns was used to extrapolate major themes from the interviews. Thematic analysis is an integral part of qualitative research, and it provides a valuable framework for analyzing qualitative data. The most important consideration for thematic analysis is that qualitative data is often unstructured and requires some sort of organization to make the data relevant to the researchers and their audience. Thematic analysis can involve any number of qualitative research methods to collect data including interviews (Sybing, 2023).

In order to categorize the data, themes were identified through the establishment of codes. Codes were mostly pre-determined based on pre-existing theory. Finally, inductive coding was used based on familiarity with the data. Working from the bottom up with the data and developing codes using the theory as a starting point provided the foundation for identifying meaning and interpreting the data. Conversely, approaching the data deductively brought in theoretical concepts and provided a framework for clustering data and developing themes. (Willig, 2017).

At a later stage in the data analysis process, it will be possible to do a comparison of responses, reporting qualitative level information and draw results.

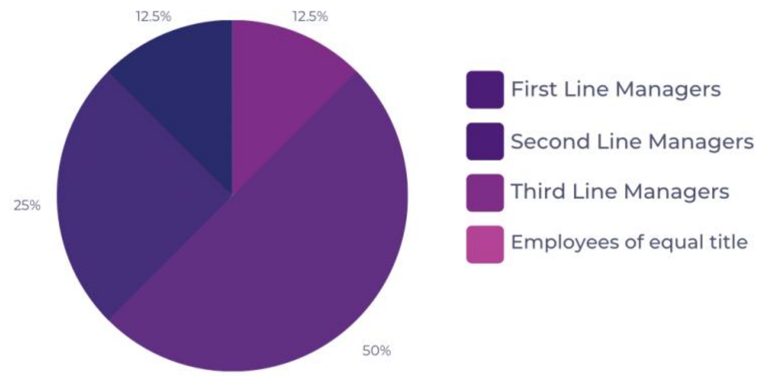
2.3 Data Collection

Table 2 describes the criteria based on which the subjects of the empirical study were selected.

a.	Respondents are currently employed by The Social Hub.
b.	Respondents have been working for the company for at least 1 year.
c.	All respondents were involved in the rebranding and repositioning phase, which made the transition to the hybrid hospitality model official. This is crucial to express an opinion that is appropriate and consistent with the purpose of the research.
d.	All respondents are managers, supervisors, or employees of equal title.
e.	All respondents have prior experience in the hotel industry.

Table 2 – Criteria for data collection

Ten TSH employees met the above-mentioned requirements. All selected participants were subject to careful selection and were initially contacted by e-mail. Eight responded positively, while the last two did not agree to have their opinions published. Six preferred to be interviewed in person. Two preferred to receive the questionnaire and then respond by e-mail. The protocol was sent to all interviewees before the interview, in Italian and English. Given the choice of some respondents to participate anonymously, *Graph 1* will describe interrogators who participated in the survey and their job title as a percentage of the total.



Graph 1 – Respondents by Job Title

Starting from the interviews with first-line managers, the analysis continues with second-line managers' responses. These are represented by the contribution of the Brand and Marketing Department and that of the Meetings and Events Department, with direct testimonies from Martina Nesti, Giulia Mariotti and Virginia Carraro. In addition, a further assessment will be made with the opinion of Leonardo Manco, until concluding with the last section represented by the Food & Beverage team. All of them have been directly involved in the rebranding and repositioning of The Social Hub. They represent the most tangible ramifications of the analysis and provide direct evidence of what has been studied in previous chapters.

The qualitative analysis comes under the form of five questions, supported by any sub-questions for specific research purposes. The latter refers to a pattern that mirrors that of the survey criterion mentioned above. The following can be observed in *Table 3* below:

1.	You kindly mentioned that you were already working for the Student Hotel when the CEO decided to give the chain a new face. How was the change announced and explained to the employees? And especially to those who were not based at the head office in Amsterdam.
2.	My dissertation focuses on innovation and ambidextrous structures. The term ambidexterity points at the ability of a company to leverage existing capabilities, while working towards integrating new knowledge and skills to innovate. The flexibility of the ambidextrous structure usually facilitates change and transitioning into new segment of the industry. The Social Hub underwent a heavy transitioning phase during rebranding and restructuring. How do you think the operational and organizational structure of the hotel has changed? What features of The Student Hotel are still present in The Social Hub?
3.	The Social Hub facilitates support for new and existing employees through training and related content platforms (Personio, TSH Hang out etc.). What has been the biggest challenge in capitalizing on existing knowledge and simultaneously absorbing and passing down new ones?
4.	One of the tensions of ambidexterity relates to whether exploitation and exploration should be pursued internally or externally. Related research on innovation and knowledge processes emphasizes the importance of external acquisition of new knowledge for exploration, suggesting the importance of interrelationships between internal and external knowledge processes that play an important role in firm renewal. How do you think The Social Hub managed that?

5.	Other concerns relate to whether the implementation of the ambidextrous model should be limited to the individual or organizational level. In this framework, researchers have recognized that top management should act ambidextrously. Conversely, Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004) suggested that ambidexterity is rooted in an individual's ability to explore and exploit, and described business unit contexts that allow employees to engage in both exploratory and exploitative activity. What is your perspective on that?

Table 3 – Interview Questions

The study then begins with a general question about the individual's experience. It then moves on to central issues, ultimately heading to extremely specific analysis questions. In fact, as early as the second question, the definition of ambidextrous structure is explained. With the help of the interviewer, the aim is to show why The Social Hub is in line with the ambidextrous concept and how rebranding and repositioning were triggers and drivers of the organizational and structural transition.

The third question is designed to get the interviewee to express an individual opinion and then to examine the ambidextrous model from an organizational and team perspective. At the same time, it seeks well-defined data and information that can answer one of the central conflicts of the ambidextrous model. The purpose is to investigate the importance of prior knowledge and how much it can be used in explorative activities for innovation.

The last two questions examine two studies mentioned in chapter one. Following the individual reflections, an attempt is made to guide the interviewee to more specific topics. Following Benner and Tushman's (2003) study, the interviewee is asked to suggest whether internal or external forces are less or more important for exploration activities. Remembering The Social Hub, the interviewee makes a connection by expressing an opinion without omitting objective data related to the TSH transition process.

Similarly, the last question aims to analyze the ambidexterity phenomenon at the individual and organizational levels by expressing an opinion about the Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004) study. In addition, the question is phrased to intentionally draw attention to employee and leadership characteristics. Thus, specific information is sought that can answer the fourth and final tension of ambidexterity, which pits the interests of management against those of subordinates.

2.4 Data Analysis

The study analyses the data according to the method of Gioia & Corley (2004), which provides a scientific framework for analyzing and processing information derived from interview questions. The methodology allows the research to be presented in a way that demonstrates the connections between the data collected, the emergence of concepts and to eventually link the case study to grounded theory.

The inquiry breaks the data down into three categories. In this framework, repeating and most relevant concepts are classified as 1^{st} order concepts. The latter represent key notions that might often be echoing through the responses obtained. Elements that emerge might be numerous, sometimes conflicting as they become apparent from the combination of several accounts. Statements that emerged in support of the above-mentioned labels are mentioned in *Table 4* below:

1st Order Concepts	Statements
Need for a new structure	"As The Student Hotel continued to incorporate more content, open new branches and attract new types of customers, the restructuring was key."
Rebranding	"Moving on to the rebranding phase, it essentially occurred to formalize the changes that were taking place at TSH and the transition to hybrid hospitality."
Brand awareness	"The word 'student' no longer identified the brand, and the new name has opened new doors, facilitated new collaborations and partnerships, while improved the perception of the brand."
Structured transition approach	"In general, the structured work facilitated the transition."
Decentralization	"In addition, the decentralization of decision-making power initiated during Covid has been a great motivator for local management." "At local level there is a degree of autonomy to respect the characteristics and needs of the client and the country in which the facility is located."
Increasing demand for new skills	"The 3.0 working model involves the flexibility and versatility of the individual."
Organizational alignment	"Operationally, we are still trying to figure out how to implement the new vision."
Alignement of strenghts and resources	"The introduction of these new tools has improved many processes."

Time management	“With so many people, I thought it was too short notice.”
Work overload	“Information came all at once.” “At the operational and organizational level, change came in a cascade.”
Internal sources of innovation	“It must be pointed out that this is not only due to repositioning and new strategy, but also to the experience gained over time.” “The initial input always comes from the central hub.”
External sources of innovation	“The best way to ensure that level of integrity is maintained is to seek help outside the organization.” “External project managers were involved. They were hired specifically for this type of work and supported the internal project managers and TSH staff who managed the project”

Table 4 - Representative data for first order concepts

After identifying and summarizing 1st order concepts, similarities and differences between categories will be reduced to a more manageable number. These descriptors are called 2nd order themes. Simply put, themes indicate patterns, i.e., topics and concepts that can be identified within the data set. The main themes of the research are eventually grouped into conceptual macro-categories, called aggregate dimensions, which reconstruct and answer to the research question mentioned in the previous chapters.

The set of 1st order concepts, 2nd order themes and aggregate dimensions constitute Gioia & Corley scheme, as shown in the *Figure 8*:

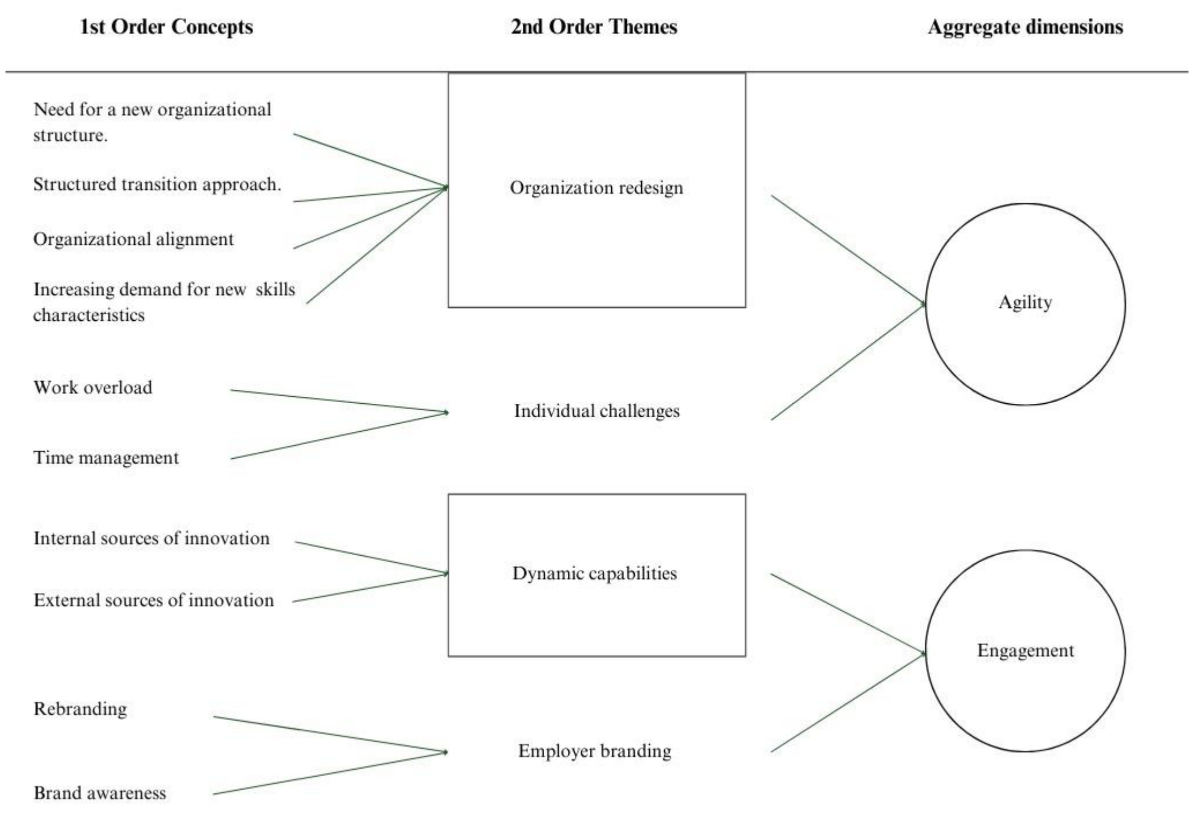


Figure 8 – Gioia & Corley scheme

Chapter III

Results

Regarding what has just been reported, it is possible to elaborate a comprehensive analysis with regard to the research question. The latter concerns the main tensions of the ambidextrous model and aims to assess the extent to which organizational, managerial, and employee characteristics could positively influence organizational redesign. In the following section, the analysis of the above-mentioned points is proposed in accordance with the experimental research.

3.1 First order concepts

By coding the answers of respondents, ten major concepts emerged as follows:

- Need for a new organizational structure.

After experiencing exponential growth and expansion, changing market conditions and new strategic objectives drove The Social Hub to redesign the company. Although it was never just a student house, the implementation of the hybrid model benefitted the company in several ways:

- Prepared the business for growth.
- Address a new market.
- React to changes in service demand.
- Improve working practices.
- Reorganize internal functions.

As a matter of fact, by leveraging on existing knowledge and working towards improving its service offer, the chain entered a new segment of the industry turning pioneering the concept of hybrid hospitality. The newly implemented organizational structure allowed for the implementation of a proper rotation plan, distributing, and allocating the use of rooms according to the market demand of the period. In this regard, it is important to recall the words of the General Manager:

> "During Covid, the demand for hotel rooms was very low. On the other hand, the demand for students to stay for a longer period was increasing. So, we adapted and converted most of the rooms into student accommodation. Similarly, we converted most of the rooms on floor 0 into 'office rooms'. The latter were rooms converted into offices, which many people used during the period when smart working was compulsory."

The flexibility of the structure is also evident when it comes to events. Despite the limited number of meeting rooms available, efforts are made to make the most of the spaces. Many events are held in the auditorium, in the courtyard or even on the terrace. The facility can meet a variety of needs and attract new types of customers through the way the space is used.

Internal functions have been reorganized according to both functional and divisional schemes. The divisional structure is implemented according to different geographical areas, while company-wide functions such as Human Resources, Legal, Finance and Technology are centralized at the headquarters. Hubs are in several European regions, while support Hubs remains headquartered in Amsterdam. This is still a major obstacle as the customization of services is still very limited and guidelines mainly come from Amsterdam. Indeed, they are not always adequately tailored to the needs of individual institutions.

- Rebranding.

Rebranding involves the change of corporate image of an organization. The strategy includes the roll out of a new name, symbol, or change in design for an already-established brand. The aim is to give a new face to the company to remain competitive within the market and stand out against competitors (Whitler, 2022). Proactive rebranding occurs when there is an opportunity to grow, innovate, tap into new businesses or customers. Indeed, it is important to assess the following strategic intents:

- Customer base
- How the brand is perceived
- How the perception change

During the interviews, respondents emphasized the importance of repositioning through rebranding. Rebranding was the catalyst for The Student Hotel to become The Social Hub. The new name sealed off unofficial mechanisms that were already taking place within the institution. In this context:

> "[…] I would say that the rebranding phase formalized the changes that had already taken place gradually over the years, so that the organizational and operational structure could be recognized as hybrid."

The rebrand helped the hotel chain to reposition itself against its competitors. By adopting a customer-centric perspective, TSH was able to adapt to the changing needs and demands of a new market segment, while outlining winning customer retention strategies. The new name successfully served this purpose by communicating and spreading inclusivity and community. However, the abruptness of change is also cause of widespread confusion and frustration. The brand struggles to be remembered as The Social Hub, and employees are still learning how to implement the new policies. In this case, it must be noted that executive leaders are not the only people employees and customers look at when thinking about the rebrand. Employees can deeply influence each other in how brand is perceived.

- Brand awareness

Since rebranding and the role of employees were mentioned in the previous lines, brand awareness and recognition must be mentioned. Brand awareness can be defined as the strength of the brand, or rather the attachment to the company and the alignment with its intrinsic values which lies in the involvement of the employee's subjectivity. Brand attachment, and therefore brand strength, gives employees a greater sense of purpose. Knowing what is worth the effort and loyalty promotes talent retention and greatly influence the decision to leave or not to leave the company. The Social Hub's employees emphasized the importance of being in an environment of shared values and unified support for achieving the company's ultimate purpose, while supporting overall change and innovation.

- Structured transition approach.

In sharp contrast with the flexible structure, interviewees underlined the importance of a methodical structure during transition. Amsterdam Central Hub lead the rebranding and redesign very carefully. The change was disruptive, but the communication method was highly structured. The Amsterdam Hub thought everything through in detail, involving project managers from outside the company to carry out the plan. By planning graphics, logos, and the way news would be disseminated on social media, the communication method seemed foolproof to first line managers. To avoid information leakage, communication with respect to corporate restructuring followed staff seniority.

Starting with announcements to cluster and general managers and continuing with second line managers and supervisors the timeline was very precise. All the rest of the TSH team, on the other hand, was notified only a few days in advance.

> "[…] we were called together at the central HUB. Here there was a real walkthrough, explaining what the starting point was and why there was a need for change, as well as the new goals of The Social Hub. We then regrouped the team to explain the reasons why The Student Hotel had changed. The methodical and structured communication we received also helped us to manage communication at a local level."

The communication method, while well structured, was a barrier. Although some managers were involved well in advance, the rest of the staff did not feel the same sense of empowerment. Many had difficulty coping with the new shifts and the amount of work involved.

- Decentralization

TSH organizational redesign highlighted the need for decentralization. Main issues of centralized systems were the geographical distance and the resulting lack of knowledge about local circumstance. Decentralization allowed the various divisions of the company to be granted with a greater degree of autonomy. Heads and project managers were tasked with key decision-making responsibilities, thus freeing top management and business owners to focus on strategic planning. Hierarchy was retained but decision-making power is currently shared across various levels of the organization. Some of the benefits of the hybrid divisional structure are listed below:

- Organizational response to diversification.
- Customization of the product
- Employee empowerment

This arrangement seemingly works particularly well in the case of The Social Hub, which presents definite characteristics. The company has a business model that can change with respect to new developments, gained in flexibility and makes decisions quicker. In addition, it seeks to provide personalized service to the customer. Nonetheless, the main problem with decentralization is the lack of cohesion between different business units and departments (e.g., Food and Beverage and reception), as each unit works independently. Plus, as previously anticipated, employees may not feel aligned to the overall mission of the company and start making decisions that reflect their best interests.

- Increasing demand for new skills

One of the consequences of the organizational re-structure is the increase in skills required. In the case of The Social Hub, the recruitment process changed accordingly. The Social Hub looks for lively personalities, who prove to be ready for anything, and reflect the dynamism and flexibility of the structure they are working for. In case of emergency, it is necessary to step in and know what to do. The Social Hub refers to this as 3.0 working model. In this framework, the attitude of the employee, their willingness to learn and to get involved is very important. It is not necessary to have a specific background, but rather specific characteristics.

The managers were very clear. In line with Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004), they suggested that adaptability and flexibility, and therefore ambidexterity, are rooted in the intrinsic ability to explore and exploit. Companies play a marginal role and can only enable employees to develop and foster these tendencies by providing them with the right tools. At The Social Hub, there is a belief that not everyone is inclined to the 3.0 model. Ambidexterity is innate, and there are people who immediately show the right attitude and inclination to work accordingly.

> “In the traditional hotel industry, the path is predetermined and there is no such possibility. At The Social Hub, the career path is flexible, just as the structure is flexible.”

Nevertheless, the company sends the input. It is a creative and innovative space that welcomes the uniqueness of the individual. Top management that takes responsibility for employee training and for welcoming creativity.

- Organizational alignment

One of the most challenging aspects of undergoing change in an organization is to maintain and secure overall alignment with the organization's vision and mission. Existing brand features need to be adapted into new plans while also confirming the elements that come with the change. Organizational success is often linked to inspiring vision, clear mission, and strong values. But without employee buy-in, these concepts are worthless. Employee engagement is essential to an organization’s success, and alignment is arguably even more important.

While at the organizational level the company was able to choose a structure that was in line with the strategy and overall goals, many issues were faced at operational level. Acceptance and change prone behavior come from understanding and knowing the motivations behind the change. Indeed, strategic intent and goals must be made clear for the sense of belonging to remain the same.

Also, it is essential to live and incorporate the mission, vision and values for the employees to be able to see the bigger picture. It is true that alignment starts at the top with senior-level executives who need to constantly try to educate subordinates, who, by understanding how each component works together, will support business grow and work towards a single goal. This is precisely why the communication method used by The Social Hub was flawed. Although the goal was to create excitement and surprise, not everyone understood where the company was going. Many among managers were overloaded with information, while others just preferred to leave the company when faced with the 3.0 work model.

- Time management

More than half of the respondents cited time as a major obstacle. They all had prior knowledge and a solid foundation to start with, but they mentioned they did not have enough time to absorb and digest the new information. In fact, absorbing knowledge does not just mean learning something new but committing it to memory and being able to recall and apply it to future situations. It is very well acknowledged that processing information over extended periods of time leads to higher retention than trying to process that information all at once. This is what happened to the staff at The Social Hub, who appreciated the support they received, but would have asked for more time to avoid information overload:

> "If I could go back, I would have preferred to act on different timelines. The ideas and information came at the right time, but the change was abrupt. More time would have been helpful for everyone to take in and absorb the information."

All of this has had a profound impact on day-to-day operations. By the time the company was undergoing structural change, incoming information and communication were innumerable. At The Social Hub, managers and supervisors received many and varied messages. However, information often came too late. The use of existing knowledge was beneficial to keep daily operations running, but when new rules had to be implemented, employees had to learn it all over again, finding it hard to get to the optimal way to use what they were used to and what they had to learn.

Ultimately, interviewees were asked to indicate whether internal or external forces were less or more important to exploration activities, while assessing the extent to which employee and leadership characteristics were relevant to the transition to organizational change. In this framework, the most relevant concepts were:

- Internal sources of innovation
- External sources of innovation

With respect to the tensions of the ambidextrous framework, which suggests that exploitation and exploration shall be pursued internally or externally, respondents resolved the dichotomy by asserting the equal importance of each. In other words, both internal and external resources were said to be essential in the pursuit of exploitative and exploratory activities.

Internal sources of innovation were often associated with exploitative activities. Experience and prior knowledge could help identify problems and weaknesses in the company's organizational chart, as well as those related to the strategy and structure adopted. However, to avoid a state of inertia, it was important for interrogators to also consider external sources of innovation in the pursuit of exploratory activities. By looking at the external environment, the company can identify unmet needs, acquire new knowledge, and ultimately work toward a new value proposition and offering.

3.2 Second Order Themes

After careful analysis, four major themes arise:

- Organization redesign

To learn about organization redesign, organization design must be defined first. Organization design refers to the configuration of organizational characteristics. These may include, but are not limited to, structural dimensions, the number of vertical levels, and the degree of specialization of organizational units or personnel. Organizational characteristics such as culture, primary operational processes and even strategy are included in the concept of organizational design (Druckman et al, 1997).

However, the surrounding business environment continuously poses threats to the soundness of a company's structure. Interaction and changing conditions of the market exposes the organization to competition, technological innovation, and demographics. These combined determine the process of organizational adaptation. As a result, organizations might feel the need to adapt by shifting focus, changing objectives, increasing the demand for new skills, and eventually develop new organizational forms. Adaptation efforts fall under the general category of redesign.

To put in other words, the company works to transform its structures, processes, and people to support the execution of its strategy. This includes operations, the management of individual performance, talent acquisition and retention strategies, and the alignment of its strengths and resources. Successful organizational redesign shall be aligned with overall strategic intent in order to better support key outcomes and the company’s efforts to achieve them while securing growth, reduce costs, and improve decision making systems (Aronowitz et al., 2015).

Aronowitz (2015) further explains that successful firms are able to combine stable design elements with dynamic elements that change in response to evolving markets. In effect, business redesigns enable firms to identify stable elements and, consequently, prepare mature elements for dynamic change. Successful leaders and companies leverage such changes to gain a competitive advantage and sustain their business over the long term.

This gateway further emphasizes the ambidexterity model, which perfectly represents the dynamic capacity of an organization and is essential for its long-term survival (Tushman and O'Reilly, 1996). The ability to ensure adaptation between the organization and its environment, but also to reconfigure existing resources and develop new ones to simultaneously address emerging threats and opportunities, determines the chances of survival. Leaders who demonstrate the ability to learn and to manage the processes associated with change and its paradoxes are the same ones who first inspire their organization to an ambidextrous approach.

- Individual challenges

Having mentioned the leadership and individual characteristics that accompany organizational change, it follows that ambidexterity is a multilevel phenomenon. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze how it develops at the individual level. According to Junni et al. (2015), there are certain characteristics that can be identified in the behavior of employees. These are the result of the juxtaposition of the individual's background, orientation, and cognition.

A particularly relevant study is that of Greco et al. (2019). The authors focus on behaviors related to goal orientation and find two main trends. The "mastery" tendency which refers to the individual's ability and capacity to acquire new skills and the commitment to develop existing ones. The elements in this case are learning, self-efficacy and pre-training motivation. Most stimulated by challenges and innovation, individuals who exhibit more of this type of orientation are also the same ones who have a greater motivation and preference for exploration, uncertainty, experimentation, and continuous discovery.

Instead, achievement-oriented employees seek approval and positive feedback. This is a more exploitative mindset. The focus is on existing skills and activities and avoiding mistakes. Training is no longer relevant as task performance becomes a key element. Individuals with such an approach are likely to be more anxious due to the increased comparisons made, and then have less effectiveness in dealing with change (Greco et al., 2019).

However, the possibility that individuals can simultaneously perform exploitative and exploratory tasks raises numerous challenges that need to be addressed. In addition to personal characteristics, organizational characteristics also influence an individual's ability to act ambidextrously. Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004) and Lubatkin et al. (2006) discuss the ability of top management to manage contradictions.

The latter claim that managers who are ambidextrous possess distinct characteristics and face three challenges simultaneously: managing contradictions, multi-tasking, and refining and innovating their knowledge and expertise. They must engage in managing contradictions and conflicting goals, engage in paradoxical thinking, and fill multiple roles. Individuals engaged in creative or exploratory activities may also differ on a personal level from those engaged in implementation or exploitation. Again, Gupta (2006) argues that excelling in both activities is a difficult goal to achieve.

- Dynamic capabilities

As anticipated earlier, at the organizational level, the concept of dynamic capabilities explains how organizations can achieve and sustain competitive advantage in a changing environment. By definition, dynamic capability is "the ability of the firm to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to cope with rapidly changing environments" (David J. Teece, Gary Pisano, and Amy Shuen). Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) later extended the concept to organizational redesign. In this framework, dynamic capability theory goes beyond the idea that sustainable competitive advantage is based on acquiring valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources, rather considering sustainable competitive advantage and superior performance as the results of processes that enable an organization to reconfigure its strategy and resources (Franco et al., 2016).

Dynamic capabilities are very different from operational or "ordinary" capabilities, which are related to the day-to-day operations of an organization. The latter typically refer to operational, administrative, and managerial capabilities and enable the organization to perform definable tasks. On the other hand, dynamic capabilities refer to "an organization's ability to intentionally create, expand, or modify its resource base" (Helfat et al., 2007). They help in assessing and maintaining strengths, developing these assets, building synergies between business processes and the business environment, and/or shaping the business environment in one's favor. Firms with strong dynamic capabilities exhibit market agility, which they achieve through less hierarchy. Agility, coupled with the ability to sense new opportunities and threats, supports evolutionary fitness. Strong dynamic capabilities require firms to sense, seize, and transform in conjunction with a sound strategy.

The foundational elements of dynamic capabilities are:

1. Processes that determine the effectiveness of organizational routines. Dynamic capabilities lie in the managerial, entrepreneurial, and leadership skills of top management and in management's ability to design, develop, implement, and modify these routines.

2. Position, defined by the company's resources and improved when resources meet Barney's VRIN criteria. The way in which the resources are deployed is a matter of entrepreneurial "orchestration" by management. The focus of the dynamic capabilities' framework is on how firms can create, extend, integrate, modify, and deploy their resources and/or specific assets while managing competitive threats and achieving necessary transformations.

3. Path or strategy needs to be aligned with processes, resources (positions) and capabilities. Strategy must be consistent, coherent, and innovative. It is necessarily a legacy of the past, but it is also a map of the way forward.

- Employer branding

Employer branding supports retention and attraction strategies, thereby positioning the organization as an employer of choice for both current employees and prospective candidates. In essence, it's about how employees view the organization, its values, and what it's like to work for it. The purpose of employer branding is twofold, providing companies with a competitive advantage in talent acquisition and recruitment. On the one hand, it's an internal strategy to help retain and refer employees. On the other, it's an external strategy aimed at attracting top talent through marketing.

The concept of employer branding has been linked to corporate reputation (Ruiz, García, & Revilla, 2016), with some authors identifying it as a reputation protector. Indeed, in the context of analyzing the relationship between organizational restructuring and employee attitudes, it is important to consider how employees perceive the brand. In the case of employer branding, the emphasis is on the importance of the brand from the perspective of employees, who must share its logic and mission in such a way that they feel a sense of belonging to the company they work for.

This is why one of the most important elements that emerged from the analysis is the company's ability to communicate its values, mission, and vision to its employees. This seemingly increases empowerment and overall sense of ownership of the company, even among younger resources. Therefore, it is mostly about the unfiltered expression of what makes the company tick, by mantra-like phrasing in office décor, corporate communications, and best practice training. Furthermore, it is important to highlight the "attributes" of the company.

Attributes refers to the specific characteristics of the company, distinguishing between instrumental and symbolic ones: the first category basically concerns the tangible characteristics of the company, such as average salary, office location or benefits, i.e. everything that can be considered objective and given, while the second category focuses on less obvious characteristics, such as innovation, competence and prestige, i.e. characteristics that are difficult to measure objectively but reflect the company's personality. Employer branding, then, is about creating a set of business conditions in which the employee is both consciously and unconsciously attached to the company, immersed in an environment that is imbued with values that he or she personally shares.

3.3 Aggregate dimensions

The final methodological step is categorizing previously listed elements into conceptual macro-categories. This will result in a few dominant groups containing the core theoretical notions, and concepts expressed by the respondents. The analysis comprehends two aggregate dimensions:

- Agility

Organizational agility achieved through the introduction of ambidextrous structures is essential for business survival in a dynamic and uncertain environment, as the need persists to develop capabilities to identify and seize new business opportunities as they arise. This characteristic implies numerous benefits, including faster time to market, higher quality and employee engagement, and increased productivity. This is further supported by research by Mckinsey & Co. that documented that organizations with agile practices embedded in their operating models prior to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak were more likely to manage the crisis better (Handscomb et al., 2020).

This was also true for The Social Hub hotel chain, which had already developed and implemented a decentralized management model based on a culture of innovation and creativity and an agile organizational structure. The latter enabled it to pioneer the concept of hybrid hospitality and to respond effectively to the first wave of the pandemic, and which caught its hotel competitors around the world off guard.

Organizational agility can be defined as the ability of an organization to foresee and exploit changes within the surrounding environment. This characteristic enables the company to respond efficiently, and effectively, while making timely changes that create sustainable competitive advantage. In pursuing agility, managers must focus and develop strategic, operational and leadership agility. The first is the ability to continuously adapt a company's strategies to new conditions imposed by the environment. The second is the ability to rapidly change organizational structures, processes, and culture to align with changing strategic priorities and the third is the ability of an organization's leaders to foster strategic and operational agility, create a culture of alignment, simultaneously adapting to changing demands (Joiner, 2019).

Nonetheless, the journey to agility remains a difficult one for many organizations because of trade-off between the need for speed and flexibility and the quest for stability. To manage this paradox, it is essential to develop an ambidextrous organizational design that is concerned not only with exploitation, or the efficient use of existing resources and capabilities through known processes, but also with exploration, or fostering the search for new opportunities and new business models (Sia et al., 2021). They are characterized by a primary structure consisting of stable elements that evolve slowly over time, coordinated by a secondary structure formed by a network of cross-functional and self-managed groups whose members determine, plan, and manage their daily activities and tasks with little or no supervision.

Moreover, one of the most overlooked variables when it comes to agility is organizational culture, which can influence the success or failure of any transformation towards an agile organizational model (Felipe et al., 2017). In this regard, an article in the Journal of Entrepreneurship Management and Innovation, (2020) analyzed the influence of different cultural values on achieving higher levels of organizational agility, and how their different combinations within the company can hinder or facilitate digital transformation. This ultimately reached the conclusion that companies with hierarchical cultures cannot survive the current business scenario, as they would not be able to keep up with the intense pace of change in the external environment (Goncalves et al., 2020).

- Engagement

Considering the previous paragraph, it makes sense to talk about engagement as a determinant of the sense of belonging to the corporate culture and, consequently, as a determinant of organizational change and restructuring. Engagement is a critical strategy aimed at creating a long-term relationship between the employee and the organization. As a matter of fact, the latter creates a sense of empowerment, belonging and overall responsibility towards the organization, making additional efforts to achieve organizational goals useful and necessary. Not by coincidence, it is an indicator of sustainable excellence[15].

When thinking about the correlation between organizational performance and engagement, it is important to consider different layers of engagement, or rather from both an internal and external perspective. In the former case, it implies a clear exposition of corporate values and strong internal communication to ensure that these are clear and known at all levels. With a strong Employer Branding effort, the professional involved will be strongly engaged, both by the more

[15]Achieving sustainable excellence means adopting new ways of conducting business and new ways of thinking about global challenges.

obvious characteristics of the company with which he or she works, and at an unconscious level by the perceptions and bonding that this set of elements combine to generate.

On the other hand, engagement from the more external point of view, that is, how one's company is seen and interpreted from the outside, will also be crucial. In this sense, the work of Brand Awareness will be fundamental in the perspective of positioning the company in the minds of consumers and people in general, since the latter will contribute in an indirect way to influencing the subjectivity of the bond with the employee. A professional who is proud to belong to a given entity will inevitably perform better than one who is indifferent or out of context, because he or she will first be involved in a framework that he or she has an interest in advocating and improving.

In terms of what then emerged from the interviews, it can be said that the aggregate dimensions are interdependent, as in the absence of one, the other could not individually produce the same effectiveness in the areas covered by the paper. A company that proposes to work only on structural agility, while neglecting the development of agile leaders, may find that employees have low engagement with the organization, resist change, and lack productivity and willingness to work toward common goals. Similarly, a company that proposes a model based solely on engagement without providing the right structure for flexibility will clearly not be effective.

3.4 Ambidexterity as an emerging organizational strategy

In light of the results of the experimental study and the interviews conducted, it is clear that the ambidextrous structure is emerging as a solution to ever-changing economic, technological, and social environment landscape. In fact, this has increasingly led companies to re-evaluate existing organizational and management systems and to adopt an attitude of readiness towards change and innovation. Accepting and embracing both internal and external pressures for change by developing adaptation secure the long-term survival of an organization.

Ambidexterity succeeds in ensuring the proper fit between the organization and the environment, the ability to reconfigure existing assets and develop new ones to deal with emerging threats and opportunities– simultaneously. In line with this, organizations that implement ambidextrous schemes are able to coexist with processes, and cultures that are often inconsistent with each other, but are fundamental to coping with periods of incremental change and others of radical change. The case study of The Social Hub further confirmed the above theories. The transition to a hybrid or ambidextrous structure supported the hotel chain in its search for an organizational structure that could meet the emerging needs and demands of the market and ensured that it could withstand the pandemic phenomena.

The changing environment requires simultaneous realignment and change in strategy and structure, in people, their skills and capabilities, and in the culture itself. The former involves the process of moderate and gradual improvement by leveraging existing structure, know-how, products and technologies; discontinuous change, on the other hand, involves creative, radical and unstable destruction leading to new structure, new ideas and new products/services. The ability to manage this dynamic is exploration (Maci, 2017).

Indeed, knowing how to identify and seize new opportunities enhances the ability to renew knowledge, while knowing how to exploit what one does best, with its greater certainty, promotes short-term results. Most scholars agree, however, that getting the balance right between these two opposing types of organizational learning is critical. The behaviors and knowledge flows emanating from higher hierarchical levels (top-down) and those emanating from lower levels (bottom-up and horizontal) are also central to this competitive advantage.

In order to simultaneously manage the characteristic tensions of exploration and exploitation, structural and contextual ambidexterity models have been identified as useful. The structural approach is determined by the choice of a company, as introduced by the author Duncan (1976), to structurally separate business units (or groups within business units) that deal with exploitation-related activities from others that focus on exploration activities. The contextual approach, on the other hand, is about empowering people to spend time on adaptation and innovation and creating the context to respond appropriately to stimuli and pressures.

The study highlights respective strengths and weaknesses, while assessing the importance of both in the pursuit of balance. Chen and Katila (2008) agreed on the opposing and competitive nature of exploration and exploitation, eventually claiming they should be complementary within an organization (O'Reilly and Tushman, 2013). The study showed that balance between the two opposites is difficult to achieve, mainly because of opposing needs and goal to achieve, especially in organization redesign. On the other hand, responders pointed out to how dealing only with exploration would lead to the risk of impracticality of ideas.

Balancing the two requires constant managerial attention. At the team level, a given composition, specific team-related data favor ambidexterity, while at the organizational level, top management must take a dynamic approach toward ambidexterity, consisting of the availability of investment, resources and personal will for its achievement. The dynamic ability to manage the two fronts involves developing mastery of incremental change and episodes of revolutionary change. As the authors report, the pursuit of ambidextrism reflects a long-term decision with associated changes in strategy, culture, and structure (Luger, Raisch, and Schimmer, 2018).

The result of combining exploration and exploitation mostly translates into the juxtaposition of hierarchy and network that can ensure adequate coordination. Exploration-related units, based on the concepts of agility and innovation, will tend toward more fluid mechanisms; in contrast, those belonging to exploitation will favor a more stable and hierarchical structure. In this way, there are two conflicting needs within a given structure, met by the respective organizational structures that are the key to the growth of an ambidextrous organization. Integration and coordination between the two areas are necessary to ensure short-term efficiency and long-term innovation (Tushman and O'Reilly, 1996).

3.4.1 Culture and organizational alignment to manage ambidexterity.

Both culture and corporate identity emerge as key strategic capabilities for properly managing ambidexterity. Promoting a common identity becomes difficult when a company is also trying to adapt to the demands of the outside world. It is particularly complex to determine which values and principles are appropriate for both exploration and exploitation (O'Reilly and Tushman, 2013). Culture reflects the values of the organization that influence the behavior of all employees in a company, from top management down to the operational level. Lin et al. argue that without consistent and shared norms and values, the conditions for information and knowledge sharing, and human commitment by individuals are not created (Lin et al., 2013).

The characteristic of having an open attitude on the part of an organization fosters the choice of individuals to take risks and initiative, and to be open to others. The latter is foundational in the pursuit of trust, mutual respect, and an increasing willingness to collaborate and learn from each other to achieve a common goal. From a team level perspective, collaboration encourage exploitative activities by promoting the improvement of traditional activities, while at the same time it becomes a source of innovation (exploration). As a matter of fact, organizational cultures where individuals respect and support each other also encourages a more risk-taking and entrepreneurial attitude, in terms of their propensity toward discovery and change (Lin et al., 2013). This is the key to the development of both incremental and radical innovations.

However, successful ambidexterity also results from companies' willingness to learn what has worked well in the past and incorporate it into their forward-looking strategy (Tushman and O'Reilly, 1996). To sustain an ambidextrous culture, the support of leaders who are aligned with the company's values and who personally encourage other levels of the organization to promote them by becoming models and direct carriers of them is critical. In the case of TSH, local autonomy and accountability are encouraged, along with a robust reference system with a global vision. Vision emphasizes the boundaries within which top management can make decisions (Tushman and O'Reilly, 1996). A vision creates a unified purpose and direction that guides the actions and behaviors of the business group. It is an effective means of motivating people toward the future perspective desired by management and provides a reference point for both short-term and medium- to long-term goals.

3.4.2 Leadership and ambidexterity

As previously anticipated, the ambidextrous schemes and processes demands for the ability of senior management to wisely coordinate and integrate trade-offs and contradictory exploration and exploitation activities.

According to TSH employees, top management is an advocate and promoter of the accomplishment of the ambidextrous structure. This finds support from the authors O'Reilly and Tushman (2008, 2011) who advance five propositions that are necessary for the development of ambidexterity-based leadership. These involve:

1. "A compelling strategic intent that intellectually justifies the importance of both exploratio and exploitation".
2. "An articulation of a common vision and values that provide for a common identity across the exploitative and exploratory units".
3. "A senior team that explicitly owns the unit's strategy of exploration and exploitation; there is a common-fate reward system; and the strategy is communicated relentlessly.
4. "Separate but aligned organizational architectures (business model, structure, incentives, metrics, and culture) for the exploratory and exploitative units and targeted integration at both senior and tactical levels to properly leverage organizational assets".
5. "The ability of the senior leadership to tolerate and resolve the tensions arising from separate alignment" (O'Reilly, Tushman, 2011, p. 9)

3.5 The absorptive capacity

Finally, aspects such as absorptive capacity and the stock of knowledge have been considered highly relevant in relation to the tensions associated with referential knowledge, its transfer, creation and use. One generalization that can certainly be drawn from the above experimental research, both at the individual and organizational levels, is that prior knowledge enables the assimilation and exploitation of newly acquired knowledge (Volpato, 2007, p.204). Prior knowledge is related to new knowledge because it facilitates the assimilation and creative use of new information.

According to Cohen and Levinthal, the definition of prior knowledge suggests two important considerations that affect innovation performed in changing and uncertain environments. The accumulation of absorptive capacity allows better and greater accumulation of knowledge in future periods with the firm being already able to accumulate the additional information. If the organization is not able to accumulate new knowledge in the first place, it will be unable to take advantage of opportunities as they arise. Moreover, if absorptive capacity is not developed at the outset, it will be more costly to develop it at a later stage, and this may reduce the propensity to invest in innovation, even if the firm does then become aware of technological opportunities. Plus, having the appropriate experience will enable the firm to better assess the significance of intermediate changes that provide early signals of the eventual development of a new trajectory.

These factors have an enormous impact especially in the search for creativity and innovation (Anderson et al., 2014). Contextual factors that shape the resources needed for ambidexterity involve absorptive capacity. Having the very ability to acquire and process new ideas by also leveraging sources outside the company allows one to understand their value and know how to best contextualize them in the business reality, creating a competitive advantage. If the above is true, organizations with a developed absorptive capacity tend to be proactive, taking advantage of opportunities in the environment regardless of current performance. Conversely, firms with modest absorptive capacity tend to be reactive, seeking new alternatives in response to the failure of some performance criterion.

In most cases, when the firm invests heavily in R&D, it demonstrates that it is also capable of identifying and exploiting available external resources. Along with employees who are able to recognize the potential of externally derived resources for their own use, exploration is encouraged (Greco et al., 2019). Investing in R&D brings benefits, such as greater availability of skills and useful elements to learn and then put into practice new processes and capabilities. The need to respond to increasingly volatile market demands, competition, and the proliferation of new and increasingly complex technologies makes it imperative to select, recruit, and train personnel with appropriate technical know-how, as well as to implement infrastructure and process flows that support ambidexterity and, consequently, innovation.

Ultimately, experimental research has shown how organizational transformation and the transition to ambidextrous structure succeeds in maintaining high job performance of companies and ensuring their long-term survival. Through more in-depth studies about main tensions, it has been possible to highlight the adversities involved in abandoning traditional structural and organizational patterns and transitioning to hybrid structures that meet the demands of new consumer trends and needs. The main findings relate to:

- Regarding the first tension, theories regarding the mutually exclusive nature of differentiation and integration strategies were completely overturned by the data collected during the interviews and the theory. The respective strategies would be subordinated to the implementation of structural and contextual ambidexterity. However, it is the proper management of both that enables the simultaneous management of exploration and exploitation trade-offs.
- Ambidexterity is a multilevel phenomenon. It goes without saying that it will affect all levels of the organization. However, special attention should be paid to the type of leadership and skills expected of senior management. The conflicting goals, the strategy, and the dual nature of the structure require open-mindedness, a willingness to take risks, and, ultimately, the ability to deal with contradictions, to multi-task, and to refine and innovate one's knowledge and skills. It should be noted, however, that culture plays a key role in supporting ambiguity-based leadership. A strong culture that is consistently and effectively communicated, develops brand awareness, and continually works to define a strategy in line with the company's values, mission, and vision, increases empowerment and a sense of belonging at the team level.
- Ultimately, the findings support the concept of ambidexterity as a dynamic process, or in other words, that innovation is mostly a disruptive phenomenon rather than the result of fixed patterns. Although opinions differ, with the research study emphasizing the importance of the structured approach to transitioning to a flexible structure and managing change, this theory is better explained in the dynamic capabilities’ framework. The latter explains how organizations can achieve and sustain competitive advantage in a changing environment through the three core elements of process, position, and path.

- Finally, another consideration is in respect to the importance of prior knowledge and absorptive capacity. In fact, it is only through prior knowledge that the organization and the individuals who make use of it are able to seize an opportunity. Moreover, the accumulation of knowledge promotes the rapid acquisition of new knowledge

Conclusion

In conclusion, the experimental study served to highlight the tensions and difficulties of the ambidextrous model, trying to provide appropriate solutions that would ensure the simplification of organizational redesign. Starting from the definitions of ambidexterity and continuing with the description of the elements underlying an agile and dynamic structural model, it was consequently possible to highlight the main tensions. The lack of research and the consideration of ambidexterity as a multilevel phenomenon motivated the research.

In this regard, The Social Hub's hotel chain was used to study the phenomenon at the organizational, team and top management levels. In fact, after conducting interviews with eight managers and supervisors, it was possible to analyze their responses and draw important conclusions. Based on the Gioia & Corley method, ten first-order concepts, four second-order themes and two aggregate dimensions were identified.

As a result, important considerations regarding the relevance of organizational agility and overall commitment as a result of the actions of senior management and the development of dynamic capabilities have been instrumental in determining the strategies to be implemented to ensure a smooth transition, organizational redesign, and assessment of the relationship between the various organizational layers and the survival and overall success of the company. More to the point:

4.1 Managerial implications

From a strictly managerial point of view, implications are many. In order to achieve breakthrough innovations managers must seize and develop opportunities that are contradictory, deal with conflicts, and learn to reason through paradoxes. A company’s senior team must be committed to operating ambidextrously even if its members aren’t ambidextrous themselves.

Resistance at the top levels of an organization can’t be tolerated, and support from the organization's top management makes change legit.

Communication is a further element to be analyzed for successful change. The latter is necessary to inform all stakeholders about the importance of the change itself and the positive aspects it would bring. Good communication is essential to avoid misunderstandings, resentment and unintended consequences at both the organizational and individual levels. However, this might only be achieved by both acknowledging the importance of prior and new knowledge and engage in research that goes beyond organizational boundaries, while encouraging subordinates to do the same. At the same time, managers shall master transversal knowledge, play multiple roles, perform both routine and non-routine activities, and transcend the boundaries of their work by developing creative actions and building a cohesive culture to pass down to employees.

4.2 Limitations and future research

The thesis has several limitations. Besides basic tensions, many elements, or factors in favor of ambidexterity were not considered but might have provided a more complete overview of the topic. Regarding the case study, more companies from different sectors could have been analyzed to better compare different realities. It is important to notice that intermediate and hybrid realities are emerging in the sector, The Social Hub is a valid example. In addition, only members of the top management were interviewed in the empirical research. Instead, it would have been interesting to interview people from other operational levels as well, allowing for a stimulating and constructive discussion, while also providing possible material for individual companies to support better human resource management. In the case of The Social Hub, only members of the Italian office were interviewed. In fact, the structure is branched and expanding, and the involvement of employees from other European locations could have given the research a global impact. In the future, it would be stimulating to carry out more in-depth research on the HR policies of ambidextrous organizations.

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Summary

Organizational ambidexterity refers to an organization's ability to efficiently manage today's business while adapting to tomorrow's changing demands; it refers to the organization's ability to leverage existing capabilities while responding to environmental changes (O'Reilly III & Tushman, 2016), emphasizing exploration or exploitation in search of an optimal mix. Experimental research has shown how organizational transformation and the shift to an ambidextrous structure have been successful in sustaining the high work performance of firms and ensuring their long-term survival.). The relevance of ambidexterity lies in its complex scheme, which allows for efficient allocation of resources across units while preventing cross-contamination.

Attentive and constant coordination at the executive level allows for knowledge sharing while ensuring organizational separation between the distinctive processes, structures, and cultures of the new units (O'Reilly III & Tushman, 2016). In spite of the strong correlation found between ambidexterity, innovation and long-term survival, organizational ambidexterity might be extremely difficult to reach. As a matter of fact, the management of contradictory and coexisting operating models is a unique challenge, just as the paucity of empirical studies on the variables related to ambidexterity performance is (De Clerc et al., 2013, He and Wong, 2004). In addition, the tendency to study ambidexterity at the business unit level, leaves aside the focus on organizational patterns at the team/individual level.

In this framework, ambidexterity central tensions and related challenges are summarized as following:

- Differentiation versus integration
- Individual versus organizational ambidexterity

- Static versus dynamic ambidexterity
- Internal versus external based ambidexterity

Thus, the present study focuses on exploring the aforementioned tensions and aims at proposing solutions that resolve the challenges. The Social Hub is used as a case study. Founded just over a decade ago, the hotel chain is a perfect example of a successful organizational transformation. In fact, after a period of development and exponential expansion, the transition to an ambidextrous structure, combined with a rebranding and repositioning process, allowed the hotel to expand its customer base and adapt nimbly to changing needs and demands. In this framework, interviews with the staff of The Social Hub Florence were essential to assess the extent to which ambidexterity-related-tensions could hinder the success of the change and transformation. At the same time, they served to highlight management practices that address and mitigate the trade-offs associated with such a controversial structure.

Ten first-degree concepts, four second-degree themes, and two aggregate dimensions were identified using Gioia & Corley's method of analysis. Agility and overall commitment were found to be closely related to the success of an ambidextrous structure. Organizational agility, achieved through the adoption of ambidextrous structures, is essential for business survival in a dynamic and uncertain environment, as there is a continuing need to develop capabilities to identify and exploit new business opportunities as they arise. There are numerous benefits associated with this characteristic, including faster time to market, higher quality and employee engagement, and increased productivity. The second aggregate dimension relates to overall engagement as a contributor to a sense of belonging to the corporate culture and, consequently, as a determinant of organizational change and restructuring. Engagement is a critical strategy aimed at creating a long-term relationship between the employee and the organization, resulting in the latter's trust and support.

In this context, ambidextrous leadership and the role of absorptive capacity have been elements not to be underestimated in resolving the dual and contradictory nature of the ambidextrous structure. The latter has often been seen as useful for the development of experience and the accumulation of new knowledge itself, even though prior knowledge can pose a risk of organizational inertia.

The dissertation has several limitations. In addition to the fundamental tensions, many elements or factors in favor of ambidexterity were not taken into account but could have provided a more complete overview of the topic. As far as the case study is concerned, a greater number of companies from different sectors could have been analyzed in order to have a better comparison of different realities. It is important to note that intermediate and hybrid realities are emerging in the sector, The Social Hub being a valid example. In addition, the interviews in the empirical research were conducted only with members of the top management level. It would have been interesting to interview people from other operational levels as well, allowing for a stimulating and constructive discussion, while also providing possible material for individual companies to support better human resource management. In the case of The Social Hub, only members of the Italian office were interviewed. In fact, the structure is branched and expanding, and the involvement of employees from other European locations could have given the research a global impact.