

**Competencies for strategic agility
enabling firm performance in the South
African wholesale and retail sector**

Student No. 23992469

A research project submitted to the Gordon Institute of Business
Science, University of Pretoria, in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration.

04 November 2024

Declaration

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

- Signed declaration form submitted via the link

Student number: 23992469

04 November 2024

Abstract

In a dynamic and globally competitive business environment there is a need for organisations and their leaders to continuously scan the environment within which they operate for threats and opportunities. Organisational strategies cannot remain static in such environments but must be agile in order to remain relevant to customer needs. This study explores the competencies requisite for managers and their organisations to achieve strategic agility, thus enabling firm performance in the South African wholesale and retail sector. To achieve this, a study was undertaken to gain insights from participants in the wholesale and retail sector.

This research employed a qualitative approach grounded in an interpretivist philosophy. The research questions were answered through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders within the South African wholesale and retail sector.

The findings show the need for a hybrid model involving virtual retail and physical brick-and-mortar outlets in response to contextual factors such as high unemployment, inequality, technological advancements, big data analytics, and customer preferences. Further findings contribute to the body of literature by identifying competencies for strategic agility and aligning these to the dynamic capabilities framework through sensing, seizing and transforming opportunities in the environment to propel the firm towards its performance objectives.

Keywords:

Strategic agility, dynamic capabilities, competitive advantage, firm performance, wholesale and retail sector.

Table of Contents

Declaration	i
Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Tables	vii
List of Figures	vii
List of Acronyms	viii
Chapter 1 Problem Statement	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Research Problem	1
1.3 Research Objectives.....	2
1.4 Purpose Statement.....	2
1.5 Research Questions	2
1.6 Research Setting	3
1.7 Research Contributions	3
1.7.1 Academic Contribution	3
1.7.2 Business Contribution	4
1.8 Definition of Key Constructs.....	4
1.9 Outline of the Report.....	5
Chapter 2 Literature review	7
2.1 Introduction.....	7
2.1 Theoretical Framework	7
2.2 Strategic Agility.....	11
2.2.1 Strategic Agility Competencies.....	13
2.3 Firm Performance	16

2.4	Research Gap	19
2.5	Significance of the Study	20
2.6	Chapter Summary.....	21
Chapter 3	Research Questions	24
3.1	Introduction.....	24
3.2	Research Questions	24
3.2.1	Primary Research Question	25
3.2.2	Secondary Research Questions.....	25
3.3	Chapter Summary.....	26
Chapter 4	Methodology.....	27
4.1	Introduction.....	27
4.2	Research Design	27
4.2.1	Purpose of Research Design.....	27
4.2.2	Research Philosophy	28
4.2.3	Choice of Research Design.....	28
4.2.4	Strategy.....	28
4.2.5	Approach Selected.....	29
4.2.6	Methodological Choices	29
4.2.7	Time Horizon.....	29
4.3	Population.....	30
4.4	Unit of Analysis.....	30
4.5	Sampling Method and Size	31
4.6	Measurement Instrument.....	31
4.7	Data Gathering Process	32
4.8	Analysis Approach.....	32
4.9	Limitations and delimitations.....	33
4.10	Quality Controls	34

4.11	Ethical Implications	34
4.12	Chapter Summary.....	35
Chapter 5	Presentation of Findings	36
5.1	Introduction.....	36
5.2	Participant Profile.....	36
5.3	Participants' Insights on Strategic Agility and Its Relation to Firm Performance	38
5.3.1	Theme 1: Leadership Competencies.....	38
5.3.2	Theme 2: Decision-Making.....	42
5.4	Contextual Factors Affecting Strategic Agility	44
5.4.1	Theme 3: External Environmental Challenges.....	45
5.4.2	Theme 4: Regulatory and Compliance Challenges	47
5.5	Competencies and Barriers to Strategic Agility	49
5.5.1	Theme 5: Technological Adaptation and Innovation	49
5.5.2	Theme 6: Human Capital and Skills Development	52
5.5.3	Theme 7: Financial Sustainability.....	55
5.5.4	Theme 8: Market Responsiveness and Consumer-Centric Strategies	58
5.6	Chapter Summary.....	61
Chapter 6	Discussion of Findings.....	63
6.1	Introduction.....	63
6.2	Theme 1: The Leadership Competency.....	63
6.3	Theme 2: Decision-Making	65
6.4	Theme 3: Technological Adaptation and Innovation	67
6.5	Theme 4: Human Capital and Skills Development.....	69
6.6	Theme 5: Market Responsiveness and Consumer-Centric Strategies....	72
6.7	Differences Between Findings and Literature	74
6.8	Chapter Summary.....	75

Chapter 7	Conclusion and Recommendations	77
7.1	Introduction	77
7.2	Study Overview	77
7.3	Methodology Overview	78
7.4	Main Findings	79
7.4.1	Empirical Findings	79
7.4.2	Competencies for Strategic Agility	80
7.5	Dynamic Capabilities Lens	81
7.5.1	Leadership Competence as a Dynamic Capability for Sensing and Shaping Opportunities	81
7.5.2	Decisive Decision-Making as an Enabling Capability of Seizing Opportunities	82
7.5.3	Dynamics Capabilities' Reconfiguration Capabilities: Technological Adaptation and Innovation	82
7.5.4	Human Capital and Skills Development as Dynamic Learning Capabilities	83
7.5.5	Market Responsiveness and Consumer-Centricity as the Sensing and Seizing Capabilities of the Firm	83
7.5.6	Strategic Agility as a Source for Performance in the Case of the South African Market	84
7.5.7	Dynamic Capabilities Summary	84
	Addressing the Challenges of Environmental Volatility: Organisations must navigate uncertainties by promptly adjusting their resource configurations and adapting their strategies to maintain resilience.	84
	Improve Competitive Position	84
	Achieve Sustainability of Performance Over Time	84
7.6	Recommendations	85
7.7	Areas for Future Research	87
7.8	Study Limitations	87

7.9 Study Conclusion.....	88
References.....	90
List of Appendices	100
Appendix A: Informed Consent Form.....	101
Appendix B: Instrument (Interview Guide).....	102
Appendix C: Ethics Approval	104
Appendix D: List of Codes.....	105

List of Tables

Table 5.1: Profile of Participants.....	36
---	----

List of Figures

Figure 2.1: Dynamic Capabilities and their interaction with Strategy	9
Figure 2.2: Strategic Agility Framework.....	13

List of Acronyms

BSC	balanced scorecard
COO	Chief Operating Officer
ERP	enterprise resource planning
FMCG	fast moving consumer goods
MNEs	multinational enterprises
OP	organisational performance
PESTEL	political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal
ROA	return on assets
ROI	return on investment
RQ	Research Questions
SBSC	sustainability balanced scorecard

Chapter 1 Problem Statement

1.1 Introduction

Worldwide, firms are in a dilemma of maintaining positive business performance, and leaders are finding it increasingly difficult to achieve business performance targets due to changes in the business environment and intense competition (Arokodare, 2020). Firms are seemingly uncertain about what strategies to use in addressing these challenges (Arokodare, 2020), and this phenomenon cuts across developed, emerging, and developing countries due to poor strategic agility and inadequate response to microeconomic and macroeconomic factors (Arokodare, 2020; Zafari, 2017). In developing countries such as Nigeria and South Africa, the response to local and global changes is delayed by environmental factors such as political interference, lack of transparency, regulatory uncertainty and policy instability, and poor infrastructure and facilities (Arokodare, 2020). Strategic Agility is difficult to solve for corporate leaders and executive teams who are still oriented to static environments (Nurjamana et al., 2021).

Chapter 1 begins by outlining the problem statement, research problem, objectives, and purpose statement. Next, it outlines the study's research questions, research setting, and research contributions. Finally, key concepts are defined, and the chapter concludes by sharing the proposal outline.

1.2 Research Problem

The research problem was to understand how strategic agility is an enabler of firm performance in the ever-changing business environment of an emerging economy like South Africa. This involves exploring the concept of strategic agility, its relevance in the South African context, and how organisations can develop and implement agile strategies to navigate complex and uncertain market conditions (Prange & Hennig, 2019). The problem is significant because South Africa's business environment is characterised by rapid changes in political, economic, social, technological,

environmental, and legal (PESTEL) factors, which pose challenges and opportunities for organisations (Tsilionis & Wautelet, 2022).

1.3 Research Objectives

The research aim was to investigate strategic agility competencies that enable firm performance from a South African perspective. The research further explored how the dynamic capabilities theory interacts with the two constructs. This study sought to contribute to business leadership by making recommendations on the requisite competencies gained from insights of interview participants who narrated their experiences about the contextual factors, the drivers and barriers, and how organisations can overcome the barriers to improve firm performance.

1.4 Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research was to investigate the role of strategic agility in enabling organisational success in South Africa's dynamic business environment (Prange & Hennig, 2019). The study aimed to provide insights into how organisations can develop and implement agile strategies to adapt to changing market conditions, seize opportunities, and mitigate risks (Mahadevan et al., 2019). By understanding the drivers, barriers, and outcomes of strategic agility, the research sought to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on agile strategy (Tsilionis & Wautelet, 2022) and provide practical recommendations for organisations operating in South Africa to overcome the barriers so as to improve firm performance (Birkinshaw, 2018; Doz & Kosonen, 2010).

1.5 Research Questions

The research questions for this study are as follows:

RQ1: What contextual factors unique to developing countries like South Africa affect the relationship between strategic agility and firm performance?

RQ2: What are the drivers and barriers of strategic agility in the South African context?

RQ3: How can organisations overcome these barriers to improve firm performance?

1.6 Research Setting

Intense competition and changes in the business environment make achieving business performance targets increasingly difficult (Arokodare, 2020). In African countries, environmental factors such as political interference, lack of transparency, regulatory uncertainty and policy instability, and poor infrastructure and facilities (Arokodare, 2020) further delay the rate of response to the adverse effects of these changes. The research investigated strategic agility's role in enabling business performance and success in South African businesses.

1.7 Research Contributions

1.7.1 Academic Contribution

This research answers a call from the literature and responds to the literature gaps identified in the literature review (de Diego & Almodóvar, 2022; Haider et al., 2021; Kiilu et al., 2023). Strategic agility, a notion whose boundaries and purview remain ambiguously defined, is regarded as a critical component in a company's pursuit of competitive advantage and was identified as an area for future research with respect to firm competitiveness and performance (de Diego & Almodóvar, 2022). Literature calls for a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between strategic agility, organisational culture, and structure as it pertains to firm performance (Kiilu et al., 2023). In addition, scholars have been encouraged to improve their understanding of the practical application of strategic agility by Walter (2020), who

calls for qualitative research that might yield significant insights and relationships. Walter (2020) also confirmed that there is not enough research examining the obstacles to strategic agility. The outcomes of the research assist in contributing to the contextual understanding of strategic agility and how it enables firm performance in a developing country context (Haider et al., 2021; Walter, 2020).

1.7.2 Business Contribution

Strategically agile businesses can more rapidly respond to market desires/changes, which should enable them to outperform their competitors due to their increased ability to change their market focus, product mix, key resources, and business models (Alhosseiny, 2023; Çakmak, 2023; Shams et al., 2020). In this way, strategic agility is a source of competitive advantage (de Diego & Almodóvar, 2022; Nurjaman et al., 2021). Insights from interviews inform recommendations that can assist South African businesses in understanding strategic agility in their local context and inform executive managers responsible for strategic, agile action and functional managers, who are tasked with implementing the objectives of the organisation around change.

1.8 Definition of Key Constructs

The theoretical lens for this research is dynamic capabilities. Dynamic capabilities are defined as the firm's processes that utilise resources—specifically the processes for integrating, reconfiguring, acquiring, and releasing resources—to adapt to and even instigate market changes (Kiilu et al., 2023; Teece et al., 1997). Dynamic capabilities reflect an organisation's ability to achieve new and innovative forms of competitive advantage given path dependencies and market positions (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000).

The first construct is strategic agility, which is defined as a multidimensional concept that is crucial for firms' long-term success and survival (Arokodare, 2020). It involves detecting and seizing market opportunities with speed, continuously adjusting strategic direction, and developing innovative ways to create value (Clauss et al.,

2020). In today's turbulent and competitive environment, it is a key determinant of organisational success (Nurjamana et al., 2021). For multinational enterprises (MNEs), strategic agility is particularly important, requiring a deep understanding of and the development of key dynamic capabilities (Shams et al., 2020).

The second construct is firm performance. Firm performance is a multifaceted concept that encompasses various dimensions of a company's success and effectiveness in achieving its objectives (Lungu, 2020). It is often measured through a combination of financial, economic, and operational metrics and can be influenced by numerous internal and external factors (Wang et al., 2020).

1.9 Outline of the Report

Chapter 1 outlined the problem statement and unpacked the research problem, objectives, and purpose statement. Next, it outlines the research questions, research setting, and research contributions. Finally, key concepts are defined, and the document outline is shared.

Chapter 2 contains the literature review and begins with the theoretical perspective of the study before delving into Strategic Agility and Firm Performance. Finally, the research questions are presented.

Chapter 3 outlines the study's RQs, both primary and secondary.

Chapter 4 contains the research design and methodological decisions for this study. It begins with outlining the research onion (i.e., philosophy, research design, purpose, approach, choice, strategy and time horizon). Thereafter, it explores the data collection and analysis techniques that were used in this study (i.e., population, unit of analysis, sampling method and size, measurement instrument, data gathering process, and analysis approach). Finally, the chapter presents the limitations, applicable quality controls and ethical implications.

Chapter 5 presents the findings of the study, where participants discussed strategic agility, its relationship to firm performance, and its factors, including leadership competencies, decision-making, external environmental challenges, regulatory

compliance, technological adaptation, human capital, financial sustainability, and market responsiveness.

Chapter 6 contains the discussion findings and discusses various themes, including leadership competency, decision-making, technological adaptation, human capital and skills development, market responsiveness, and consumer-centric strategies, comparing findings with literature.

Chapter 7 presents the study's conclusion and recommendations. It discusses leadership competence, decision-making, human capital, market responsiveness, and strategic agility in the South African market. It suggests addressing environmental volatility, improving competitiveness, and achieving sustainability before concluding on areas for future research and study limitations.

Chapter 2 Literature review

2.1 Introduction

A literature review is suitable for identifying competencies, enablers and drivers of agility (Podsakoff et al., 2016; Walter, 2020). The literature review explores existing research on strategic agility, focusing on its definition, dimensions, antecedents, and outcomes (Walter, 2020). It also examines the relevance of strategic agility in the context of the South African business environment, considering factors such as political instability, economic volatility, social diversity, technological innovation, environmental sustainability, and legal compliance (Prange & Hennig, 2019). The review identifies gaps in the literature and highlights the need for empirical research to understand the role of strategic agility in enabling organisational success in South Africa (Birkinshaw, 2018; Doz & Kosonen, 2010).

Agile organisations remain nimble by balancing capabilities such as resource allocation and deployment of dynamic capabilities dynamically over time (Nurjamana et al., 2021). However, limited information is currently available on the extent to which organisational knowledge management capabilities could affect strategic agility (Shams et al., 2020). Research focus can be directed at analysing the mechanisms developed by management to promote strategic agility within their organisations (Ferraris et al., 2018; Shams et al., 2020).

The chapter begins by introducing the study's theoretical framework, followed by an exploration of Strategic Agility and Firm Performance. Lastly, the research questions are introduced.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theory of dynamic capabilities is a crucial framework in strategic management as it explains how firms can adapt to quickly changing environments to maintain a competitive advantage (Teece, 2018). This literature review explores the dynamic capabilities framework, synthesising its definitions, current scholarly debates,

established knowledge, knowledge gaps, and its interconnection with strategic agility and firm performance.

Dynamic capabilities are the firm's processes that utilise resources—specifically the processes for integrating, reconfiguring, acquiring, and releasing resources—to adapt to and even instigate market changes (Kiilu et al., 2023; Teece et al., 1997). Dynamic capabilities thus reflect an organisation's ability to achieve new and innovative forms of competitive advantage given path dependencies and market positions (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000).

Research has shown that dynamic capabilities enable the organisation to identify and exploit opportunities in a way that considers context and history (Kiilu et al., 2023; Teece et al., 1997). Dynamic capabilities allow firms to adjust their resource base in line with changing environments, thereby sustaining competitiveness and, as such, can lead to superior performance, particularly in industries characterised by rapid technological changes (Helfat & Peteraf, 2015). Despite extensive theoretical development, empirical research on dynamic capabilities remains fragmented, rendering a notable gap in understanding how dynamic capabilities manifest in different organisational and cultural contexts, particularly in non-Western settings (Wang et al., 2020). Additionally, the mechanisms through which dynamic capabilities specifically contribute to sustained competitive advantage need clearer articulation and testing (Kiilu et al., 2023).

According to Teece (2018), the dynamic capabilities framework (Figure 2.1) can be used to sense opportunities in the environment, seize them through capabilities embedded in the business model and transform them to propel the firm towards its desired goals.

The dynamic capabilities framework is robust in explaining how firms can maintain competitive advantage through agility and adaptation in dynamic markets. It is particularly relevant in explaining firm success in high-velocity markets, where the ability to rapidly deploy and redeploy resources is crucial (Teece, 2018). However, dynamic capabilities' broad and often abstract nature has led to criticisms regarding their distinctiveness and measurability. Scholars like Williamson (1999), later echoed by Teece (2018), argue that dynamic capabilities might be an unnecessary addition to the theory of the firm if they restate the need for firms to adapt to changing environments without providing additional explanatory power.

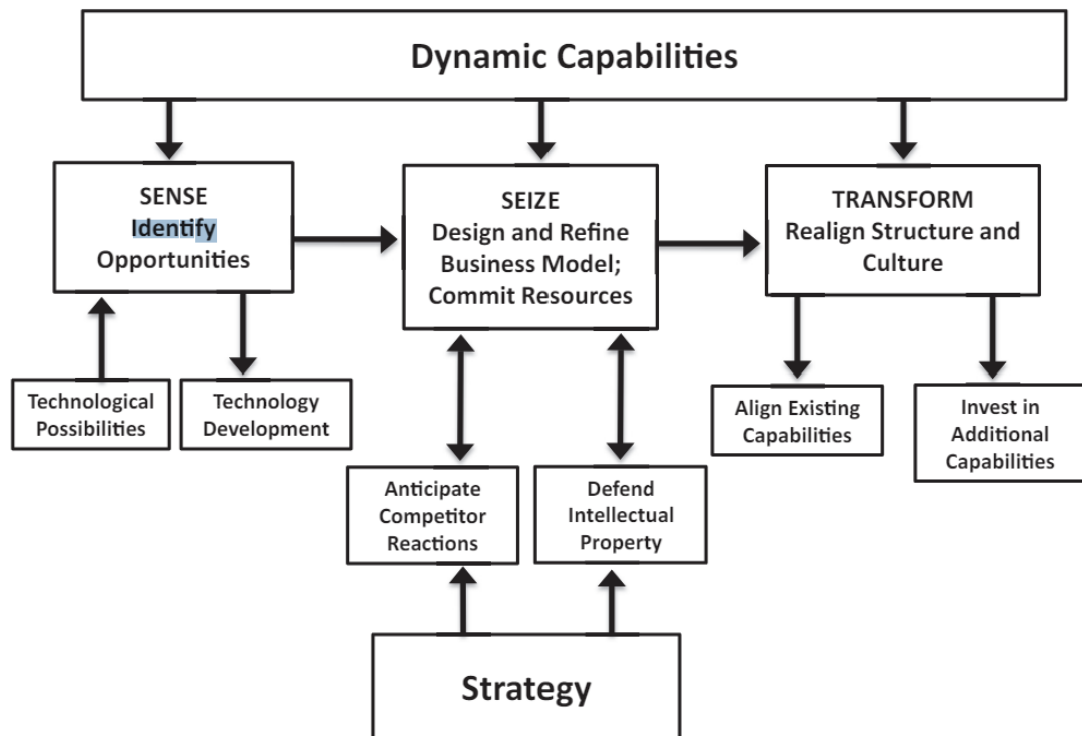


Figure 2.1: Dynamic Capabilities and their interaction with Strategy

Source: (Teece, 2018, p. 44).

Dynamic capabilities underpin strategic agility, enabling organisations to respond swiftly and effectively to emerging threats and opportunities (Teece, 2018). This responsiveness is achieved by aligning a firm's resources and capabilities with its external environment, thereby enhancing performance. The synthesis of dynamic capabilities and strategic agility provides a comprehensive framework that includes anticipation of market trends, rapid strategic decision-making, and the efficient reconfiguration of organisational resources (Zulkifli, 2022).

The theory of dynamic capabilities remains a vital construct in understanding how firms can sustain competitive advantages in rapidly changing environments (de Diego & Almodóvar, 2022). While significant strides have been made in conceptualising and applying this framework, future research should focus on developing robust methods for its measurement and operationalisation and on exploring its applicability across diverse contexts (Haider et al., 2021; Walter, 2020).

With a particular focus on retail businesses, Solem et al., (2023) emphasised the role of dynamic capabilities in achieving omni-channel retailing. They identified the

integration of Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems, optimisation of customer experiences, and achieving collaboration of business units as key capabilities (Solem et al., 2023).

Furthermore, Eriksson et al., (2022) explored the transformation of omni-channel logistics in grocery retail identifying key enablers namely; investment, decision-making, governance, and co-specialisation. These enablers illustrate how dynamic capabilities enable the reconfiguration of logistics, ensuring effective and integrated operations across various channels (Eriksson et al., 2022).

Additionally, contextual factors such as market turbulence, digitalisation, and customer behaviour significantly affect the implementation of dynamic capabilities. Patricia (2023) emphasises the essential roles of sustainability, innovation, and dynamic factors for multi-finance companies navigating turbulent markets. These capabilities are vital for resource reconfiguration, allowing companies to maintain competitiveness and adapt to the evolving expectations of customers (Patricia, 2023).

Eriksson et al. (2022) emphasised the role of dynamic capabilities in achieving efficient logistical operations, which are in turn critical for meeting customer demands in the retail sector. Adaptability of logistical processes led to cost efficiency and with enhanced service delivery, contributing to overall firm performance (Eriksson et al., 2022). Patricia (2023) notes that in turbulent markets, the ability to speedily sense and seize opportunities through dynamic capabilities allows firms to innovate and sustain a competitive advantage.

The dynamic capabilities framework plays an important role in the transformation of retail businesses and achieving improved firm performance. Through enabling firms to sense contextual changes and adapt to them by integrating new technologies to optimise operations, retail businesses can meet customer expectations while maintaining a competitive edge. Literature underscored the importance of integrating dynamic capabilities across various retail contexts, from omni-channel logistics to resilient and innovative in times of crises.

2.2 Strategic Agility

Strategic agility is broadly defined as the ability of an organisation to renew itself, adapt, change quickly, and succeed in a rapidly changing, ambiguous, turbulent environment (Doz & Kosonen, 2010). Strategic agility comprises three core capacities: strategic sensitivity (sharpness in perception and attention to strategic challenges), leadership unity (ability to make fast decisions without being encumbered by internal conflicts), and resource fluidity (the internal capability to reconfigure business systems and redeploy resources rapidly) (Zulkifli, 2022).

The impact of strategic agility on organisational performance remains a point of contention among scholars. Kiilu et al. (2023) highlight that while strategic agility is correlated with enhanced organisational effectiveness, the specific mechanisms through which strategic agility influences performance are still not well-defined and empirically supported. The relationship is often seen as complex and influenced by various moderators, such as environmental turbulence and organisational culture. The scholarly debate on strategic agility revolves around its impact on organisational performance and the mechanisms through which it influences adaptability and responsiveness. Researchers argue that strategic agility is critical for firms facing volatile environments, enabling them to predict and respond to threats and opportunities more effectively (Haider et al., 2021). However, there is an ongoing discussion regarding the dimensions of strategic agility, including whether aspects like digital transformation or innovative capabilities are inherent components or consequences of strategic agility (Alhosseiny, 2023).

According to Alhosseiny (2023), strategic agility integrates concepts from strategic planning and thinking, suggesting a broader interpretation that encompasses the capacity to react quickly and anticipate changes effectively. This broad definition poses challenges for measurement, as it spans multiple dimensions of organisational behaviour and strategy. Kiilu et al. (2023) discuss the difficulties in achieving a consensus on defining strategic agility, noting that its dimensions—such as the ability to sense opportunities, make decisions rapidly, and reconfigure resources—are often conceptualised and measured differently across studies. This lack of standardisation leads to difficulties in comparing research findings and drawing generalisable conclusions about the effects of strategic agility.

There is also debate about how strategic agility aligns with and supports other organisational processes and capabilities. Some scholars argue that strategic agility should be seen as part of a broader system of dynamic capabilities, which includes but is not limited to agility (Kiilu et al., 2023). Others see it as a distinct capability requiring specific conditions to flourish, such as a particular organisational culture or leadership style. Others emphasise the role of technological infrastructure and IT capabilities as foundational to strategic agility, enabling rapid data processing and information dissemination that supports agile decision-making (Kiilu et al., 2023).

Strategic agility is known to facilitate superior organisational outcomes by allowing firms to navigate the complexities of global competition and technological change. Firms with high strategic agility can quickly anticipate market shifts and reconfigure their operational strategies to maintain competitive advantage. Research has shown that strategic agility enhances performance by fostering innovation, speed, and adaptiveness (Haider et al., 2021). Organisations that exhibit flexibility, quick response to market changes, and the ability to reconfigure resources tend to perform better than less agile ones (Clauss et al., 2020).

Strategic agility is widely accepted as beneficial, enhancing a firm's responsiveness to external changes and its ability to innovate and maintain competitive advantage. It aligns resources with current opportunities and ensures quick decision-making, which is crucial for sustaining growth and performance in uncertain environments (Zulkifli, 2022). On the other hand, the focus on rapid adaptation may lead organisations to overlook the importance of long-term strategic planning and sustainability. The emphasis on agility could potentially undermine the stability and predictability necessary for long-term investments and could lead to a misallocation of resources in pursuit of short-term gains (Moleiro Martins et al., 2021).

Figure 2.2 shows the strategic agility framework and how it can contribute to driving organisational performance (Zulkifli, 2022).

Despite extensive research, several gaps remain in the literature on strategic agility. Empirical studies reviewed indicate reliance on financial performance measurement metrics over the broader approach as advanced by a balanced scorecard (BSC) (Kiilu et al., 2023).



Figure 2.2: Strategic Agility Framework

Source: (Zulkifli, 2022, p. 308).

Strategic agility remains a vital organisational capability in today's fast-paced business environment. While it enables firms to respond swiftly and effectively to changes, it also poses challenges related to sustaining long-term strategic goals. Future research should aim to balance agility with stability, exploring how firms can maintain a dynamic equilibrium that supports both immediate responsiveness and sustained growth. The interaction between strategic agility and other strategic frameworks, like dynamic capabilities, resource-based views, and market orientation, remains underexplored (Aujirapongpan et al., 2020). Understanding these interactions could provide deeper insights into formulating robust strategic management practices (Aujirapongpan et al., 2020).

2.2.1 Strategic Agility Competencies

Literature has generally identified some key competencies required in developing strategic agility as entailing the constructs below.

2.2.1.1 Strategic Sensitivity

Strategic sensitivity is described as the organisation's ability to monitor the external environment and make timely decisions based on this. This specific ability also encompasses big picture orientation, and the understanding of evolving technologies and changes in the competition landscape (Doz & Kosonen, 2010). Management

plays a leading role in encouraging strategic sensitivity. They do this by disseminating key information around the company and encouraging scanning of the environment (Nejatian et al., 2019).

2.2.1.2 Resource Fluidity

This refers to the ability of the organisation to respond by quickly altering its resources to specific opportunities or threats (Christofi et al., 2024). The resources may be in the form of human capital, finances, or technical resources. This flexibility with which resources are adjusted gives the organisation the ability to change and adopt to the constantly changing markets (Doz & Kosonen, 2010; Christofi et al., 2024). Targeting an organisation's enterprise architecture or operations can be an advantage, as it connects business processes with IT, enhancing the organisation's capability to change the way its operational resources are deployed (Hazen et al., 2017).

2.2.1.3 Commitment of the Collective

The collective commitment focuses on the integration and commitment of the leadership team in contributing towards the expeditious formulation and execution of the strategic actions (Doz & Kosonen, 2010). It requires the leaders to rise beyond personal goals, unifying their strategic purposes and their trust in each other. This kind of unity is essential to prevent stagnation during the decision-making process and enable speedy implementation of strategic goals (Doz & Kosonen, 2010; Christofi et al., 2024). Additionally, this competence is developed by leadership styles that support openness, shared responsibility, and emphasis on group performance rather than individual performance (Wong et al., 2003).

2.2.1.4 Capacity to Innovate

Within an organisation, innovation capacity can be described as the ability to introduce and implement new concepts and methods, and products to compete. As Ravichandran (2018) aptly observes, 'innovation' is powerful in unlocking strategic agility, particularly for its role in enabling firms to effectively utilise their digital platforms in response to the market and the changes in technology within the shortest time possible. Organisations that have strong innovative capacities are in good

broker positions to foresee changes and be the first to provide new products that will fit the requirements that are coming up.

2.2.1.5 Knowledge Management

When efficiently organised, knowledge management is essential to ensuring strategic agility within the organisation's framework (Widjajani & Nurjaman, 2020). As a practice or a process, this knowledge aspect includes managing the generation and sharing and applying. Widjajani & Nurjaman (2020) also note that this competency includes not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the dismantling of practices through unlearning. According to Knowledge management further improves strategic sensitivity because it provides the organisation with mechanisms that enable them to change in order to conform to changes in the environment.

2.2.1.6 Talent Management

Christofi et al., (2024) refers to dynamic talent management as focusing on engaging and deploying manpower resources towards the realisation of strategic objectives of an organisation. This primarily involves developing a workforce that is multidisciplinary, flexible and responsive to reallocation of roles due to the demands of the employees' multi-service functions (Christofi et al., 2024). Human Resource management practices that are aligned to dynamic talent management are supporting a culture of learning and enhancing flexibility, multi-tasking, and innovation in performance management.

2.2.1.7 Leadership and vision

One of the core aspects of strategic agility is unity of leadership around the organisation's vision. The leadership team is required to possess a shared vision and to make high stakes decisions that together push the organisation to its stated objectives (Doz & Kosonen, 2010). Leadership vision is imperative in motivating and leading the organization in times of uncertainty and change, so that every member of the organization is focused on the strategic goals of the organization (Wong et al., 2003).

2.3 Firm Performance

Firm performance or organisational performance (OP) is a complex and multidimensional concept (Kiilu et al., 2023). It involves various indicators, including financial metrics such as profitability and return on investment (ROI) and nonfinancial metrics like customer satisfaction, market share, and operational efficiency (Kiilu et al., 2023). Firm performance encompasses more than just financial metrics, including innovation rates, market share, customer loyalty, and operational efficiency. These aspects are influenced by a firm's ability to adapt to changes and capitalise on new market opportunities (Zulganef et al., 2022). Strategic agility is defined as the ability of an organisation to swiftly reconfigure its strategies, resources, and core operations in response to external market dynamics (Birkinshaw, 2018; Doz & Kosonen, 2010). The conceptual framework for this review ties strategic agility to firm performance, hypothesising that agility enables firms to better capitalise on emerging opportunities and navigate threats in volatile markets.

The scholarly debate centres around the extent to which firm performance is enabled or enhanced by strategic agility. While some researchers argue that strategic agility provides a clear pathway to improved performance by enabling quicker responsiveness to market changes (Alhosseiny, 2023), others suggest that the relationship is moderated by factors such as organisational culture, market conditions, and the firm's strategic orientation (Kiilu et al., 2023). Studies on the OP construct show a preference for return on assets (ROA) or ROI as financial metrics that are more easily attained (Jaleha & Machuki, 2018) (Kiilu et al., 2023). Financial indicators on asset growth and ROI were used in the Nurjaman et al. (2021) study on the contribution of strategic agility to the business performance of logistics service providers in Indonesia, an emerging economy (Kiilu et al., 2023).

Empirical studies reviewed indicate reliance on financial performance measurement metrics over the broader approach as advanced by a balanced scorecard (BSC) (Kiilu et al., 2023). Other scholars have debated that financial performance indicators alone are an inadequate measure of performance and advocate for calls for a variety of performance indicators of a financial and nonfinancial nature that can be incorporated in a sustainability balanced scorecard (SBSC) (Jaleha & Machuki, 2018; Jassem et al., 2022; Kiilu et al., 2023).

Research indicates that strategic agility enhances a firm's responsiveness to market changes, which is particularly crucial in developing economies where market conditions can change rapidly due to economic instability and regulatory shifts (Çakmak, 2023). Firms with robust dynamic capabilities are better equipped to adapt to environmental changes, thereby sustaining their performance even in adverse conditions (Lungu, 2020). These capabilities facilitate strategic foresight and continuous realignment of business processes with market realities (Lungu, 2020).

The impact of strategic agility on firm performance can be significantly influenced by organisational culture. Cultures that emphasise innovation, flexibility, and external orientation tend to enhance the benefits of strategic agility (Kiilu et al., 2023). In the digital age, integrating and leveraging technology is a critical component of strategic agility. Firms in developing economies that effectively use technology to enhance agility often achieve superior performance outcomes (Alhosseiny, 2023).

Further exploration of literature revealed some contributors to improved firm performance in retail businesses to include a number of factors such as adapting business models, digitisation, omni-channel retailing and sustainable business practice.

Retailers who are strategically agile can continuously adapt their business models in response to external environment pressures. According to Sorescu et al. (2011), innovations in retail business models involve reconfiguring activities, reorganizing the type of activities, and changing the level of participation by actors. This agility allows retailers to enhance value creation and capture, thus improving overall performance. Such innovations are crucial in environments characterized by rapid technological advancements and shifting consumer preferences (Sorescu et al., 2011).

Haas (2019) emphasises the development of a retail business model that captures the industry's complexity and dynamic nature. Included in the model are elements such as value propositions and customer engagement, which are crucial for retailers' competitiveness. The ability to innovate and adapt these models in response to digital trends highlights the role of strategic agility in sustaining performance (Haas, 2019).

Digital transformation has enhanced business model innovation in the retail industry. Digitalisation has influenced many dimensions of retail business models (Mostaghel et al., 2022). Integrating tools like big data analytics, artificial intelligence, and blockchain into retail businesses streamlines operations while enhancing customer experience (Mostaghel et al., 2022).

A study conducted by Zhang & Chiang (2019), on the Chinese retail market has identified how digital transformation has led to the adoption of innovative practices, such as live broadcasting and precision marketing. These strategies empower retailers to respond promptly to consumer demands, thereby demonstrating the agility that is essential for success in a highly competitive environment (Zhang & Chiang, 2024).

Omni-channel retailing has marked a substantial change in retail strategies and has been motivated by the need to deliver seamless customer experiences across various channels (Jocevski et al., 2019). Successful omni-channel strategies require retailers to unify their online and offline operations, ensuring a consistent experience for customers (Jocevski et al., 2019).

Bilinska-Reformat et al. (2019) examine the integration of sustainable practices within business models as a means to enhance long-term performance. Retailers that implement sustainable practices can distinguish themselves in the marketplace, comply with regulatory mandates, and respond effectively to the increasing consumer demand for environmentally responsible products (Bilinska-Reformat et al., 2019).

Moreover, integrating sustainability into business models helps retailers build resilient operations that can adapt to environmental and social changes. This adaptability is a hallmark of strategic agility, enabling firms to manage risks and seize new opportunities in the market.

Strategic agility serves as a vital contributor to firm performance within the retail sector. By promoting continuous innovation in business models, capitalising on digital transformation, adopting omni-channel strategies, and integrating sustainability measures, retail organisations can adeptly manoeuvre through the complexities of the dynamic market environment. Literature points to the critical role of strategic agility in enhancing operational efficiency, increasing customer

satisfaction, and fortifying the competitive advantage, ultimately leading to improved overall firm performance.

Despite extensive research, several gaps remain. More empirical studies are needed to focus on developing economies to better understand how contextual factors unique to these markets affect the relationship between strategic agility and firm performance (Walter, 2020). While strategic agility is largely viewed positively, its application has challenges and limitations (Haider et al., 2021). Overemphasis on agility can lead to neglect of long-term strategic planning and may result in frequent strategic shifts that disrupt organisational stability and coherence (Birkinshaw, 2018; Doz & Kosonen, 2010). In resource-constrained environments typical of developing economies, the rapid implementation of strategic changes may not always be feasible (de Diego & Almodóvar, 2022).

2.4 Research Gap

In response to the literature review's identification of literature gaps by de Diego and Almodóvar (2022), Haider et al. (2021), Kiilu et al. (2023), Walter (2020), this study addresses a call from the literature. Strategic agility, an abstract concept with uncertain parameters, is considered a pivotal element in an organisation's quest for a competitive edge, and it has been designated as a subject that warrants further investigation in the context of firm performance and competitiveness (de Diego & Almodóvar, 2022). The scholarly literature emphasises the need for a more holistic comprehension of the relationship between organisational culture, structure, strategic agility, and firm performance (Kiilu et al., 2023).

The findings of the study aid in expanding the contextual comprehension of strategic agility and its role in facilitating the performance of organisations in the context of developing countries (Haider et al., 2021; Walter, 2020). Additionally, Walter (2020) calls for researchers to improve their understanding of implementing strategic agility, saying further qualitative enquiries have the potential to uncover insights and relationships, with only a few studies examining obstacles to strategic agility. In addition, empirical research is often limited to specific industries or regions, calling for broader studies that apply across different contexts (Walter, 2020). The role of

technology in enabling or enhancing strategic agility also requires further exploration, particularly in how digital tools and platforms can be leveraged to enhance agility (de Diego & Almodóvar, 2022).

The research questions for this study are as follows:

Primary research question:

What is the role of strategic agility and its competencies in contributing to sustained organisational performance (Birkinshaw, 2018; de Diego & Almodóvar, 2022; Doz & Kosonen, 2010; Haider et al., 2021; Kiilu et al., 2023)

Secondary research questions:

Walter (2020) stated that more empirical studies are needed to focus on developing economies to better understand how contextual factors unique to these markets affect the relationship between strategic agility and firm performance. As such, the secondary research questions seek to understand the two constructs from a South African perspective.

RQ1: What contextual factors unique to developing countries like South Africa affect the relationship between strategic agility and firm performance?

RQ2: What are the drivers and barriers of strategic agility in the South African context?

RQ3: How can organisations overcome these barriers to improve firm performance?

2.5 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the scholarly debate regarding strategic agility by providing a nuanced understanding of its enabling competencies in the context of the South African wholesale and retail sector.

Focus on Developing Countries: The research addresses a significant gap in the literature by examining strategic agility within a developing economy like RSA

(Maina, 2022; Pike-Bowles et al., 2024). Previous studies often concentrated on developed nations, neglecting the unique challenges and opportunities presented by developing markets.

Contextual Factors: The study emphasises the importance of considering contextual factors unique to developing economies like RSA (Wairimu, 2023). It investigates how factors like political interference, lack of transparency, regulatory uncertainty, policy instability, and poor infrastructure impact strategic agility and firm performance (Teke, 2022).

Dynamic Capabilities Framework: The study reinforces the significance of dynamic capabilities, a key theoretical framework for understanding how firms achieve strategic agility. It examines how specific competencies identified through interviews align with the dynamic capabilities framework's three core activities of sensing, seizing and transforming opportunities.

Practical Implications: The research provides practical insights and recommendations for organisations operating within the South African retail sector. It identifies key competencies like leadership, decision-making, technological adaption, human capital development and customer-centricity as essential for fostering strategic agility (Haider et al., 2021; Walter, 2020).

This study contributes to the scholarly debate by providing empirical evidence for the importance of contextual factors, dynamic capabilities, and specific competencies in achieving strategic agility in the South African retail sector. It offers a valuable lens for understanding this phenomenon in a developing economy and provides actionable insights for practitioners.

2.6 Chapter Summary

This literature review explores strategic agility, its definition, dimensions, antecedents, and outcomes in the context of the South African business environment. It highlights the need for empirical research to understand its role in enabling organisational success in South Africa. Agile organisations balance capabilities like resource allocation and dynamic capabilities dynamically over time.

The dynamic capabilities framework is crucial in strategic management, allowing firms to adapt to rapidly changing environments and maintain a competitive advantage. However, empirical research on dynamic capabilities remains fragmented, particularly in non-Western settings. The review aims to develop robust methods for measuring and operationalising strategic agility and explore its applicability across diverse contexts.

Strategic agility is the ability of an organisation to adapt, change quickly, and succeed in a rapidly changing environment. It comprises three core capacities: strategic sensitivity, leadership unity, and resource fluidity. While strategic agility is correlated with enhanced organisational effectiveness, the specific mechanisms through which it influences performance are not well-defined and empirically supported. The relationship is complex and influenced by various moderators, such as environmental turbulence and organisational culture. Competencies for strategic agility include environmental sensitivity, resource fluidity, innovative capacity, and knowledge and talent management among others. Strategic agility is known to facilitate superior organisational outcomes by allowing firms to navigate global competition and technological change. However, the focus on rapid adaptation may lead to overlooking the importance of long-term strategic planning and sustainability. Future research should aim to balance agility with stability, exploring how firms can maintain a dynamic equilibrium that supports immediate responsiveness and sustained growth.

Firm performance is a complex concept that includes financial and nonfinancial metrics. Strategic agility is the ability of an organisation to quickly reconfigure its strategies, resources, and core operations in response to external market dynamics. This concept is crucial for firms to capitalise on emerging opportunities and navigate threats in volatile markets. However, the relationship between strategic agility and firm performance is moderated by factors such as organisational culture, market conditions, and the firm's strategic orientation. Firms with robust dynamic capabilities are better equipped to adapt to environmental changes and sustain performance even in adverse conditions. Further these firms can innovate their business models, streamline operations and enhance customer experience. Organisational culture, particularly in the digital age, can significantly influence the impact of strategic agility. This study addresses literature gaps by addressing the need for more empirical

studies focusing on developing economies and exploring the role of technology in enhancing strategic agility.

Chapter 3 Research Questions

3.1 Introduction

This research paper delves into the competencies that enable strategic agility and their contribution to sustained firm performance. The global business landscape is constantly evolving, with firms struggling to maintain positive performance due to changes in the environment and intense competition (Shahul Hameed et al., 2022). This issue affects developed, emerging, and developing countries, particularly in developing countries, where responses to local and global changes are delayed by environmental factors such as political interference, lack of transparency, regulatory uncertainty, policy instability, and poor infrastructure (Maina, 2022; Pike-Bowles et al., 2024). The study setting is South Africa, a developing country with a unique business landscape. The research context is significant because South Africa's business environment is characterised by intense competition, rapid changes, and specific challenges such as political interference, lack of transparency, regulatory uncertainty, policy instability, and poor infrastructure (Ngomane, 2023). These factors can delay the rate of response to adverse effects of changes, making strategic agility particularly crucial for success in the South African context (Haider et al., 2021; Walter, 2020). As such, this chapter outlines the study's research questions.

3.2 Research Questions

In response to the literature review's identification of literature gaps by de Diego and Almodóvar (2022), Haider et al. (2021), Kiilu et al. (2023), Walter (2020), this study addresses a call from the literature. Strategic agility, an abstract concept with uncertain parameters, is considered a pivotal element in an organisation's quest for a competitive edge, and it has been designated as a subject that warrants further investigation in the context of firm performance and competitiveness (de Diego & Almodóvar, 2022). The scholarly literature emphasises the need for a more holistic comprehension of the relationship between organisational culture, structure, strategic agility, and firm performance (Kiilu et al., 2023).

The findings of the study aid in expanding the contextual comprehension of strategic agility and its role in facilitating the performance of organisations in the context of developing countries (Haider et al., 2021; Walter, 2020). Additionally, Walter (2020) calls for researchers to improve their understanding of implementing strategic agility, saying further qualitative enquiries have the potential to uncover insights and relationships, with only a few studies examining obstacles to strategic agility. In addition, empirical research is often limited to specific industries or regions, calling for broader studies that apply across different contexts (Walter, 2020). The role of technology in enabling or enhancing strategic agility also requires further exploration, particularly in how digital tools and platforms can be leveraged to enhance agility (Bai, 2023; de Diego & Almodóvar, 2022; Khraim, 2022; Panda, 2022; Wamba, 2022).

The research questions for this study are outlined below.

3.2.1 Primary Research Question

What organisational capabilities enable strategic agility and contribute to sustained organisational performance (Birkinshaw, 2018; de Diego & Almodóvar, 2022; Doz & Kosonen, 2010; Haider et al., 2021; Kiilu et al., 2023).

3.2.2 Secondary Research Questions

Walter (2020) stated that more empirical studies are needed to focus on developing economies to better understand how contextual factors unique to these markets affect the relationship between strategic agility and firm performance. As such, the secondary research questions seek to understand the two constructs from a South African perspective.

RQ1: What contextual factors unique to the South African wholesale and retail sector affect the relationship between strategic agility and firm performance?

RQ2: What are the drivers and barriers of strategic agility in the South African wholesale and retail sector context?

RQ3: How can organisations overcome these barriers to improve firm performance?

3.3 Chapter Summary

This study addresses literature gaps on strategic agility, a crucial element in an organisation's competitiveness. It highlights the need for a holistic understanding of the relationship between organisational culture, structure, strategic agility, and firm performance. The findings help expand contextual understanding of strategic agility in developing countries. Walter (2020) calls for researchers to improve their understanding of implementing strategic agility, as only a few studies have examined the obstacles to it. The role of technology in enabling or enhancing strategic agility also requires further exploration. The research questions include identifying organisational capabilities that enable strategic agility and contribute to sustained performance, as well as understanding contextual factors unique to the South African wholesale and retail sector.

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The methodology chosen for this research was qualitative and based on an interpretivist philosophy. The methodology involved the collection of non-numeric data from participants about their lived experiences in developing and implementing agile strategies and how these contributed to firm performance. Implementing this research methodology assisted in carrying out the research to address the research questions and make meaningful recommendations to benefit senior managers and executives in the South African wholesale and retail sector and contribute towards answering a call to research knowledge gaps.

Chapter 4 begins with outlining the research onion (i.e., philosophy, research design, purpose, approach, choice, strategy and time horizon). Thereafter, it explores the data collection and analysis techniques that were used in this study (i.e., population, unit of analysis, sampling method and size, measurement instrument, data gathering process, and analysis approach). Finally, the chapter presents the limitations, applicable quality controls and ethical implications.

4.2 Research Design

4.2.1 Purpose of Research Design

The purpose of the research design was to explore the competencies for strategic agility in achieving sustained organisational success in the South African dynamic business environment (Prange & Hennig, 2019) of the wholesale and retail sector. The design allowed for an in-depth investigation of the concept, dimensions, antecedents, and outcomes of strategic agility, as well as its relevance in the South African context (De Diego & Almodóvar, 2022; Haider et al., 2021; Kiilu et al., 2023).

4.2.2 Research Philosophy

The research interpretivist philosophy also allowed the researcher to apply inductive reasoning, which included developing theories or explanations based on the patterns and themes that emerged from the data analysis (Walter, 2020). This philosophy was appropriate for the study because it aligned with the research problem and purpose statement, which sought to understand the competencies that managers, leaders and their organisations can develop and implement agile strategies to navigate the complex and uncertain market conditions of the wholesale and retail sector in South Africa (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Brough, 2019).

4.2.3 Choice of Research Design

The research design was grounded in an interpretivist philosophy, which emphasised the contextual application of knowledge to solve real-world problems (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Zukauskas et al., 2018).

4.2.4 Strategy

The strategy for this study was to conduct semi-structured interviews with senior managers and executives in the South African wholesale and retail sector. This strategy was appropriate for the study because it allowed for a flexible and open-ended exploration of the research questions within a set theme and the opportunity to gather rich and detailed data on the drivers, barriers, and outcomes of strategic agility (Brough, 2019). The questions were posed to the top management personnel in the wholesale and retail sector and also to people in middle management. Comparing the data collected from top management to middle management and also to insights from the literature review allowed for the extraction of well-balanced insights (Saunders & Lewis, 2017).

4.2.5 Approach Selected

The approach selected for this study is an inductive qualitative approach, which involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data to gain insights into the role of strategic agility in enabling organisational success (Azungah, 2018; Ghauri et al., 2020) in South Africa. Walter (2020) recommended this approach as an appropriate one to explore the implementation of strategic agility and to better understand its implementation and barriers. This theory-building approach was appropriate for the study because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the research questions, as well as the context-specific factors that influence the development and implementation of agile strategies (De Diego & Almodóvar, 2022; Haider et al., 2021; Kiilu et al., 2023; Young, 2019).

4.2.6 Methodological Choices

Generic qualitative was the preferred research method, and it was chosen from among other mono-method approaches to research strategy such as ethnography, narrative, case study, or action research, as it allowed the interviewees to share their individual insights and experiences when responding to the research questions (Neubauer et al., 2019). The methodological choices for this study included semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in wholesale and retail organisations in South Africa. This method was appropriate for the study because it allowed for flexible and open-ended exploration of the research questions and gave an opportunity to gather rich and detailed data on the drivers, barriers, and outcomes of strategic agility (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

4.2.7 Time Horizon

The time horizon for this study was cross-sectional, meaning that data was collected at a single point in time (Walter, 2020). This approach was appropriate for the study because it allowed for a snapshot of the current state of strategic agility (De Diego & Almodóvar, 2022; Haider et al., 2021; Kiilu et al., 2023) in South African

organisations, as well as the opportunity to explore how this state has evolved over time.

4.3 Population

The population for this study comprised senior managers and executives in organisations operating in the wholesale and retail sectors within South Africa (Helfat & Peteraf, 2015; Teece, 2018). Like other industries, the wholesale and retail sectors are affected by changes in the external environment of the organisations. As such, the choice of this population aligned with the research problem, purpose statement, and literature review, as the study aims to investigate the competencies for strategic agility in the wholesale and retail sector that enable sustained firm performance (Ghauri et al., 2020) The participants interviewed are based in Gauteng, but some have a footprint across the country and as such their insights we not limited to the geographic location but to the sector.

4.4 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this study is the participant or interviewee. Each participant from an organisation operating within the wholesale and retail sector was considered as a separate unit of analysis. This allowed for a detailed examination of how strategic agility is developed, implemented, and experienced within different levels and organisational contexts (De Diego & Almodóvar, 2022; Haider et al., 2021; Kiilu et al., 2023). This approach was consistent with the research problem and purpose statement, which focuses on understanding the competencies for strategic agility at the managerial or organisational (Walter, 2020) level in the South African wholesale and retail sector.

4.5 Sampling Method and Size

The sampling method chosen for this study was a non-probability method suited for qualitative research. This method was implemented through purposive sampling, also known as judgmental or selective sampling. This approach involved selecting participants based on their specific characteristics or expertise relevant to the research topic (Walter, 2020). In this case, participants were selected based on their seniority in the organisation and their experience in strategy implementation. The sample size was aimed at interviewing 15 participants (Saunders & Lewis, 2017). However, only 9 participants were interviewed even though allowance was also made for the sample size to be determined through saturation (Walter, 2020), where data collection continues until no new information or themes emerge from the interviews. However, saturation was highly unlikely in this form of research; as such, the study was aiming for information adequacy instead (Hennick & Kaiser, 2022). This sampling method and size are appropriate for the study as they allow for a targeted selection of participants with relevant experiences of strategic agility in the South African context (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

4.6 Measurement Instrument

The measurement instrument for this study consisted of semi-structured interviews, as shown in Appendix B. The interview guide was developed based on the research questions and relevant literature (Walter, 2020). This guide included open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses from participants regarding their experiences, perceptions, and practices related to strategic agility (Brough, 2019). The guide was presented to the Gibs Research Ethics Committee to ensure that no harm was caused to participants by answering the questions. See the ethics clearance obtained in Appendix C. Further to this, the interview guide was piloted with two participants who were able to respond conversantly to all the questions posed to them.

4.7 Data Gathering Process

The data-gathering process started with a literature review of high-quality, relevant papers in peer-reviewed academic journals (Saunders & Lewis, 2017). Data gathering also involved conducting semi-structured interviews with senior and executive managers of organisations in the wholesale and retail sectors. Interviews were conducted either in person through meetings or remotely through media, depending on participant preferences and logistical considerations. Each Interview was audio-recorded, with consent from the interviewee and transcribed verbatim using transcribing software and edited manually by the researcher to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). This data-gathering process allowed for in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives and experiences related to key competencies for strategic agility in the South African wholesale and retail sector (Ghauri et al., 2020).

4.8 Analysis Approach

The analysis approach for this study involved thematic analysis, a qualitative method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data (Lester et al., 2020). The themes identified in the literature review were compared to the outcomes of secondary data collected (Podsakoff et al., 2016; Walter, 2020). From the researcher's interview notes where keywords or themes were noted during the interviews, a comparison was made with transcripts to systematically code and analyse to identify quotations of recurring themes and patterns related to competencies of strategic agility (Walter, 2020) in South African organisations. These themes were then organised into a coherent framework that captures the key dimensions, antecedents, outcomes, drivers, and barriers of strategic agility (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). The thematic analysis allowed for a rigorous and systematic approach to analysing qualitative data and ensured that findings were grounded in the participants' perspectives and experiences (De Diego & Almodóvar, 2022; Haider et al., 2021; Kiilu et al., 2023).

Six steps followed in the thematic analysis, are namely (Braun & Clark, 2006):

- Step 1: The researcher familiarised himself with the data.
- Step 2: The researcher generated initial codes paired with supporting participant quotes.
- Step 3: The researcher identified repetitive patterns, sub-themes and themes from the notes taken during the interviews.
- Step 4: The researcher assessed and scrutinised the sub-themes and themes.
- Step 5: The researcher finalised and defined themes and supported through quotations (see Appendix E)
- Step 6: The researcher then wrote a detailed chapter 5 of this report.

4.9 Limitations and delimitations

Several limitations are associated with the selected research methodology. Firstly, semi-structured interviews may introduce interviewer or social desirability bias, wherein participants provide responses they perceive as socially acceptable. Participants were assured that there were no wrong answers and that their honest reflections were what the study needed to be a success. Secondly, the purposive sampling method may limit the generalisability of the findings to other organisational contexts or industry sectors. Fortunately, this is a theory-building study, and generalisability is not the goal of such analyses, which aim to unearth new understandings and relationships.

Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce recall bias or memory distortion, particularly regarding past events or experiences. This was mitigated through the appropriateness and size of the sample. Despite these limitations, the research methodology provided a robust framework for investigating the competencies for strategic agility in achieving sustained organisational performance in the South African wholesale and retail sector (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

4.10 Quality Controls

Several quality control measures were implemented to ensure the rigour and trustworthiness of the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Wood et al., 2020). Other control measures included providing participants with written questions before the interview so that they could prepare themselves and give the most informed responses during the interviews (Tracy, 2010). Further, participants were encouraged to submit additional information that they may have missed during the formal interviews to ensure and validate the accuracy of the data (Saunders & Lewis, 2017). Additionally, peer debriefing was conducted by the researcher to enhance the credibility and validity of the findings (Morse, 2015). These quality control measures help mitigate potential biases and ensure the integrity of the research process (Morse, 2015; Tracy, 2010).

4.11 Ethical Implications

From the inception of the research process, the researcher has committed to upholding a high ethical code of conduct throughout the research process up to the reporting of the findings (Saunders & Lewis, 2017). Throughout the research process, care was taken to ensure that no harm was caused to any of the human participants involved in this research (Arifin, 2018). The researcher first attained approval from the ethics committee to proceed with the research and then proceeded to collect data. Additionally, informed consent was secured from all participants, who were urged to sign the consent form and verbalise their consent during the interview recording for their participation in the semi-structured interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The researcher strictly adhered to GIBS and the University of Pretoria's research ethics guidelines, the legal precepts from the Protection of Personal Information (POPI) Act and committed to ensuring the confidentiality of the participants and further anonymised any personal information shared during the interviews (Brough, 2019). Data in the form of audio recordings and transcripts was stored in a secure online database, and only the researcher and supervisor had access to it (Ghauri et

al., 2020). Data with identifying information removed will be stored for five years and deleted thereafter (Arifin, 2018).

4.12 Chapter Summary

This research used a qualitative approach based on an interpretivist philosophy to explore the competencies for strategic agility enabling firm performance in South Africa's dynamic wholesale and retail business environment. The research design was grounded in an interpretivist philosophy, focusing on the contextual application of knowledge to solve real-world problems. The chosen qualitative approach involved semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in South African organisations. The study's strategy was to collect rich and detailed data on strategic agility drivers, barriers, and outcomes. The time horizon was cross-sectional, allowing for a snapshot of the current state of strategic agility in South African organisations. The unit of analysis was the participant or interviewee, allowing for a detailed examination of how strategic agility is developed, implemented, and experienced within different organisational contexts.

This study used purposive sampling, a non-probability method, to select participants with relevant experiences of strategic agility in South African organisations. The targeted sample size was 15 participants, yet only 9 participants were willing and available to participate in the study. The measurement instrument was the semi-structured interview guide, which incorporated existing frameworks for assessing strategic agility. The data-gathering process involved a literature review and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. Thematic analysis identified and analysed patterns within the data, comparing them to research notes. The study has limitations, such as potential interviewer bias and generalisability of findings to other contexts or industry sectors. Quality control measures included providing participants with written questions, summaries, and post-interview debriefing consultation. The researcher upheld and remains committed to upholding a high ethical code of conduct, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of participants. The data was stored securely online, with only the researcher and supervisor having access.

Chapter 5 Presentation of Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents integrated insights gathered from the participant's responses to semi-structured interview questions that were posed during the process of collecting data. A thematic analysis of industry leader interviews resulted in the identification of eight key themes: Leadership Competencies, Technological Adaptation, Decision-Making under Pressure, Human Capital Development, Financial Sustainability, Market Responsiveness, External Environmental Challenges, and Regulatory and Compliance Challenges. Each theme includes quotations from participants to illustrate practical applications and contextual challenges.

5.2 Participant Profile

The sample included individuals with various experiences in the wholesale industry, including strategy executive, managing director, operations executive, a biscuit manufacturing company, manager, fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) and perishable goods owner, strategy specialist, seasoned Chief Operating Officer (COO), senior manager, and director; see Table 5.1. Each person brings a unique perspective and experience in strategy formulation, monitoring, evaluation, and operationalising strategies within the wholesale environment.

Table 5.1: Profile of Participants

Name	Brief
Participant 1	A strategy executive with 10 years of experience currently working for a state-owned enterprise operating in the wholesale environment.
Participant 2	A managing director and founder of a wholesale and retail business operating in Gauteng with 25 years of experience as owner/director.

Name	Brief
Participant 3	Operations Executive with 22 years of experience in wholesale occupying various senior management and executive roles
Participant 4	Managing Director and founder of a biscuit manufacturing company that has integrated across the value chain to run wholesale shops for their products.
Participant 5	Manager with 24 years of experience in wholesale and retail management, with experience ranging from managing family-owned retail stores to managing a chain of stores.
Participant 6	Owner and founder of wholesale for FMCG and perishable goods.
Participant 7	Strategy specialist with 10 years of experience in strategy formulation, monitoring, and evaluation. One year experience in the wholesale environment.
Participant 8	A seasoned COO with 40 years of experience in wholesale, having joined the industry as a teenager doing blue-collar jobs and growing up to the C-suite.
Participant 9	Senior Manager with 20 years of experience in interpreting and operationalising strategy within the wholesale environment.
Participant 10 *Withdraw	Director of a wholesale business that has invested in processing, logistics, and export of fresh produce.

Source: Author's own.

5.3 Participants' Insights on Strategic Agility and Its Relation to Firm Performance

This section explores participants' perceptions of strategic agility and their understanding of how it influences firm performance in the South African wholesale and retail sector.

5.3.1 Theme 1: Leadership Competencies

The participants from the interviews identified leadership as one of the significant competencies endowed within the employees, which complemented strategic agility. Many of them pointed out its usefulness in working through the challenges brought by the wholesale and retail industry in the South African context. While several similarities in the perception of leadership emerged, some differences were noted, showing that participants had distinct perspectives, experiences and leadership styles.

For example, Participant 3 suggested that leadership is not only about management since there is more to it, such as:

"Leading the team, motivating them, and supporting the team in making strategic decisions" (Participant 3, Interview, 2024).

This view implies that leadership is not restricted to directing and controlling teams' operations but rather directing and providing the necessary guidance to teams in being proactive in the face of changing environments. In the same vein, Participant 8 also highlighted the focus of leadership on the motivation of those concerned when they stated:

"Leadership is about preparing the workforce for anticipated changes and making sure the team is motivated to adapt" (Participant 8, Interview, 2024).

Both participants concur when it comes to motivating the team as an important aspect of leadership, but the difference is that there is more focus on strategic decision-making by Participant 3 and more on preparation of the affected employees for future challenges by Participant 8.

Leadership was further cited as important in fostering a culture of adaptability, which includes:

"Creating an environment where everyone feels empowered to contribute to problem-solving and innovation" (Participant 7, Interview, 2024).

This aspect is consistent with the moderating the views of Participant 3 in regard to motivating the team to accomplish the goals but sticks out to capture the other aspect of leadership, which is empowerment. Where instead of a top-down approach, team members are empowered to take initiative and innovate.

On the other hand, Participant 4 offered the varied perspective that accountability is a critical feature of leadership, claiming that:

'Being a leader means taking responsibility and ensuring that the team knows the purpose of their work' (Participant 4 Interview, 2024).

Although both Participant 7 and Participant 4 regard leadership as something that involves working with the team, Participant 7 seems to be more focused on empowerment, while Participant 4 is more on accountability. Their views reconcile however in that where freedom and space is granted to the team to innovate, the team has to account for their use of that freedom, time and resources.

Moreover, the participants had similar views regarding the transformational aspect of leadership within the organisation. Participant 1 spoke of his experience with transformation processes where they emphasised that it is one of his tasks to:

'Drive all transformation and organisational development initiatives' (Participant 1 Interview, 2024).

Such emphasis on transformation provides evidence that strategic leadership in the context of Retail in South Africa is firmly anchored on being transformational so as to ensure the survival of the business. Again, Participant 7 spoke about the changes leaders must implement by stressing the importance of leadership when it comes to transformation with the technological change of focus. Participant 7 stated:

'Leaders need to be at the forefront of technological changes, at the same time making sure that the team can apply the changes' (Participant 7 Interview, 2024).

While both Participant 1 and Participant 7 work around transformation, Participant 1 is more concerned with the wider aspects of organisational change, while Participant 7 highlights the need for technology adoption in the transformation process. It is to be noted as stated by Participant 7 and Participant 9 that technological advancements are the leading driver of change within wholesale and retail organisation. As such leaders should lead technological transformation in their organisations.

Participant 8 emphasised the element of leadership in crisis situations, in particular during the COVID-19 crisis, in the following way:

"It became important on our part to be agile in still providing the required services to farmers, buyers, and agents despite the disruptions"
(Participant 8, Interview, 2024).

Aisha ever so boldly stressed that they viewed crisis management as an imperative, stating that:

"In crises, it is important for the leaders to be able to make quick decisions in order to ensure the business activities are continued" (Participant 4, Interview, 2024).

Though these two comments are from different people from different contexts, however, both Participant 8 and Participant 4 believe that the time and place warrant greater emphasis on agility. Having said that, Participant 4 takes the challenge of agility further by focusing on the decisions, whereas Participant 8 focused ensuring continued service provision.

According to Participant 3, the leadership competence should ensure appropriate engagement of all the relevant stakeholders. The participant explained how his duties included the interpretation of strategic goals as well as his responsibility to ensure that the goals were internally and externally appropriate to stakeholders such as the shareholders and, indeed, the community (Participant 3, Interview, 2024).

Participant 1 also put forward the need for engagement of stakeholders, which they articulated as the engagement of external partners in the building of trust. Participant 1 observed that:

"Leaders need to make sure of their involvement in giving information to the stakeholders as this builds trust and smoother collaboration"
(Participant 1, Interview, 2024).

Both Participant 3 and Participant 1 agree on the need to adequately engage stakeholders in the activities of the organisation. However, in their appreciation, Participant 3 looks at it from a perspective of communicating the strategic direction, while Participant 1 looks at it from the angle of trust and collaboration.

Another important view on engagement was derived from Participant 9, whose focus was on engaging internally with operational staff. Participant 9 stated:

"As a middle line manager part of my role involved interpreting strategy to my department. My main role is to operationalise the strategy."

(Participant 9, Interview, 2024)

There were indeed some similarities and differences in the perceptions of the participants in relation to the role of leadership around the development of skills and the role of continuous improvement. This view differs from that of participant 2 whose engagement is usually directed at constantly informing his silent partner about key developments within the business.

Participant 8 stated that:

"Leadership is about equipping the workforce in advance and also ensuring that the workforce is ready to be motivated to change"

(Participant 8, Interview, 2024).

This active concept of leadership demonstrates that leaders must care for human resources in order to equip their teams for future market needs. Participant 2 added that:

"I think training and development both continuously and engaging in various levels of competitions is very important" (Participant 2, Interview, 2024).

Whereas both Participant 8 and Participant 2 attest to the necessity of advancing the employees, Participant 2's emphasis is more on continuous progression and learning programs than Participant 8's on motivation and changing the team's core values.

5.3.2 Theme 2: Decision-Making

Making decisions is a critical function in any leadership role, as it significantly influences the success of teams and entire organisations. Based on the data collected from transcripts, several considerations regarding variations in decision-making functions, policies, and practices can be highlighted. This analysis explores factors such as decisiveness, group decision-making processes, the balance between intuition and data-driven approaches, cultural influences, and other challenges leaders and organisations may face when engaging in decision-making processes.

A prominent theme led by Participant 6 was the speed with which decisions need to be made. Participant 8 referred to this as decisiveness stating that while analysis should be done before making decisions, you cannot halt operations and keep customers waiting while engaged in analysis, decisions must be made after a fair amount of analysis. He stated:

"You cannot decide to adopt technology and then only implement after three years"
(Participant 8, Interview, 2024).

Participant 9 highlighted the value of collaborative decision-making. Many leaders took the line that it is imperative that they also involve their team members in decision-making. Participant 9, remarked:

"When the team is engaged in decision-making, they are more likely to accept the outcomes." (Participant 9, Interview, 2024).

This underscores the idea that, when implemented effectively, inclusion can substantially enhance the accountability and commitment of team members to the final decision. Collaborative decision-making is frequently reported to elevate team morale and harness diverse perspectives to develop superior solutions. However, the methods of inclusion can differ among practitioners. Some leaders proactively

solicit input from every team member, while others strategically engage only a select group for a more focused approach. Conversely, several leaders adopt a more directive style of decision-making, wherein a single individual makes the decision or a small number of leaders share that responsibility.

Participant 3 said:

*"In life-and-death situations, one has to act fast, during Covid 19, I suspended the consultative approach and took decisions myself."
(Participant 3, Interview, 2024).*

Focusing on clinical decisiveness suggests that certain situations, especially complex ones, require quick action. However, this emphasis can lead to tension, particularly when group members feel excluded from the decision-making process. The contrast between two approaches—participation and subordination—highlights a broader question about the context in which a leader operates and how they make their decisions.

An important aspect that emerged was the relationship between relying on one's instincts and using objective data to achieve desired outcomes. Participants experienced the challenge of deciding whether to trust their instincts or to rely solely on data during the decision-making process. Participant 2 said,

"I sometimes have to take decisive actions, but I ensure that there is a documented evidence for my partner to follow through." (Participant 2, Interview, 2024).

Decision-making patterns evidence that the decision-makers are rational and intelligent beings, but some function on a higher level than others. Some leaders did say that insight could be contained in data, but others said more weight is put on context and people. This viewpoint expresses an overlapping between leaders who appreciate the idea that data cannot be everything, implying that the best decision is usually the one derived from the synthesis of various forms of adequate information.

Asserting the organisational culture facilitates the understanding of the decision-making mechanisms. Participant 5 stated that decision-making should not cripple innovation and new ways of doing things. Their organisation is continuously looking

at better ways of doing things and considers failure points as opportunities for learning and improvement.

Therefore, these differences help illustrate the potential implications of organisational culture in terms of how leaders are enabled and restrained in team decision-making and what types of decisions are made.

Participants described a debilitating fear stemming from indecisiveness or excessive analysis of options, which can overwhelm leaders when considering their choices. Participant 6 referred to this phenomenon as "analysis paralysis." Some participants suggested that encouraging individuals to embrace failure could help reduce this fear, enabling leaders to make rational decisions without the pressure of striving for perfection. This insight highlights the necessity for leaders to manage their emotions while addressing decision-making challenges.

The process of decision-making encompasses a range of factors, including the distinction between collaborative and authoritative decision-making styles, as well as the influence of organisational culture on the leadership challenges that arise. There is a shared understanding of the necessity for inclusive practices and the integration of diverse perspectives; however, the manifestation of these principles can vary significantly among different leaders. As one participant summarised it,

"A good decision does not necessarily come from good individual choices, but rather how a lot of people were engaged in the process". (Participant 5, Interview, 2024).

This statement highlights that decision-making in leadership is a complex process. It is essential to consider the context when determining an effective approach. Ultimately, being aware of these factors can help leaders make informed decisions and foster environments that promote better outcomes for their teams and organisations.

5.4 Contextual Factors Affecting Strategic Agility

This section explores the contextual factors in South Africa that affect the agility of wholesale and retail businesses, including energy instability, regulatory constraints, and political changes.

5.4.1 Theme 3: External Environmental Challenges

In addressing the challenges presented by the external environment, interview participants identified various factors that influence their businesses within the South African wholesale and retail sector. Participants provided insights into how their organisations navigate these adverse conditions, revealing both notable similarities and differences in their approaches and viewpoints.

As per Participant 3,

"The regulatory environment can be very challenging. Compliance requirements often slow down our operations, and we need to allocate significant resources just to meet these regulations" (Participant 3, Interview, 2024).

A similar trend was emphasised by Participant 8, who argued that,

"Government policies can be unpredictable, and we have to constantly adapt to new regulations, which can be costly and time-consuming." (Participant 8, Interview, 2024).

Both participants concurred that regulation remains a challenge and a great bottleneck. Participant 3's position however gives consideration to how such resources are allocated, whilst Participant 8 takes cognisance of the volatility of government policy in particular.

Participant 7 however provided a different take by commenting on the state of the economy, claiming that the politics of the day affects the economy as well as the country's selling position, which is unwarranted:

"Political instability affects not only our supply chain but also consumer confidence. People's unwillingness to spend understandably translates into a hit on our sales" (Participant 7, Interview, 2024).

This perspective indicates the far-reaching ramifications of a politically unstable environment on the economy. What seems interesting about this description of consumer behaviour is that it also indicates that political factors affect both demand and supply in the marketplace.

Participant 2 addressed the issues that stem from the underdevelopment of the infrastructure, giving specific reference to blackouts. they mentioned,

"Load shedding is a constant challenge for us. It hampers our activities and raises our costs since we have to adopt measures that provide standby power" (Participant, Interview, 2024).

Participant mentions about the attack of weather or infrastructure on firms that cannot selectively focus on one single figure. Participant 4 agreed with this saying:

"It is impossible to foresee events because of unreliable infrastructure. All prompting events ought to be kept on standby just for operations to go as planned" (Participant 4, Interview, 2024).

Participant 2 and Participant 4 both highlighted the focus on the infrastructure element, noting operational disruption and the impact of increased operational costs.

Participant 1 paid attention to the economic risks facing the industry, particularly with regard to the shifting currency rates.

"The exchange rate fluctuations affect our import costs, and subsequently our pricing policy; thus, in managing these risks, one has to be careful how we do so" (Participant 1, Interview, 2024).

Such a viewpoint also highlights the economic risks of doing business in an open market economy. During the interview, Participant 3 also pointed out several economic problems faced by the business, such as how high inflation rates have constrained their ability to be competitive in the market (Participant 3, Interview, 2024).

The impact of the high prices faced by the sector is further compounded by the scourge of high unemployment in South Africa as Participant 6 pointed out:

"High unemployment results in the fact that most of our would-be customers cannot or do not want to buy. This is affecting our sales and compels us to think of changing the product mix to a cheaper market"
(Participant 6, Interview, 2024).

This position was supported by Participant 2 by adding that:

"The key to keeping our clientele has been in providing low-priced products" (Participant 2, Interview, 2024).

The affordable prices of products is increasingly becoming a determining factor of securing customer loyalty a concern about affordability as a means to retain clients.

5.4.2 Theme 4: Regulatory and Compliance Challenges

The interview demonstrated that regulatory and policy concerns represent significant challenges for participants, impacting their operations within the South African wholesale and retail market. Participants identified various compliance-related challenges noting similarities and differences in their approaches to addressing these issues.

Participant 3 stated that compliance can be a complex area to manage:

"There are a lot of standards, and it requires a lot of time and resources to ensure that we are able to meet all the requirements. There is always the challenge of how to be at par with new regulations" (Participant 3, Interview, 2024).

This statement highlights the nature of compliance that Participant 3 believes to be an administrative burden and heavy in terms of time and finances. Participant 8 expressed the same sentiment when they said the compliance effort is capital and resource-intensive, where they stated that:

"We have a whole team concerned with compliance, and even then, it is very difficult to manage such a policy because of frequent changes"
(Participant 8, Interview, 2024).

All of the participants are fully aware that regulatory compliance requires a lot of resources. While Participant 3 dedicates his attention to the requirements, intricacy, and particulars, Participant 8 does to compliance management and its personnel.

Thando offered a different perspective by looking at how compliance affects how businesses operate. They explained further:

"Compliance can be constraining. It most times curtails our capacity to quickly react to certain situations in the market owing to the number of compliance checks that we have to meet" (Participant 7, Interview, 2024).

Participant 7's observation illustrates the impact of regulatory compliance on business operations in that the inflexibility of compliance measures is likely to hinder speed in meeting market requirements. This is unlike Participant 3 and Participant 8, who are more concerned with resource implications.

Participant 1 pointed out the costs involved in compliance with regulations, especially for small businesses. they argued,

"The challenge is the cost of compliance because it is too high. And for small companies who do not have resources like large organisations, it's a challenge as well. It creates an uneven playing field" (Participant 1, Interview, 2024).

Participant 1's view in the Interview raised one of the most uneven aspects of the sector, where compliance costs are a struggle for smaller firms to bear. Participant 4 reiterated similar ideas, stressing that:

"Compliance is costly, and it means that we have to cut money from other areas which are crucial, such as allocating funds in innovations and developing employees" (Participant 4, Interview, 2024).

Participant 1 and Participant 4 have both noted the expense compliance creates, but there's a striking difference in how the two approach the problem. Participant 1

speaks of the burden on small firms, while Participant 4 addresses how the opportunity cost of the shifted allocation of resources.

This viewpoint emphasises the challenges in ensuring compliance with the requirements imposed by various bodies, which may result in the agency practising inefficiency as a result of being confused.

Participant 3 underscored why it is crucial to stay updated with regulatory changes, noting,

"One of the biggest challenges is keeping up with new regulations as they come in. If we miss something, it can have serious consequences for the business" (Participant 3, Interview, 2024).

Participant 9, however, noted that while there are stringent and sometimes overarching regulations, they are intended to protect consumers as retailers deal mainly in fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG). He pointed out that compliance itself becomes a selling point to consumers who are increasingly aware of their rights and health conscious. This point was echoed by Participant 8, who said their mission was to be a clean, safe, and smart wholesale hub.

5.5 Competencies and Barriers to Strategic Agility

This section identifies the competencies essential for strategic agility, as well as the main barriers encountered by wholesale and retail organisations in South Africa.

5.5.1 Theme 5: Technological Adaptation and Innovation

Technological adaptation and innovation are paramount for maintaining competitiveness in the digital era. Participants underscored the significance of adopting digital systems, employing data analytics, and investigating alternative energy solutions to ensure continuity and operational efficiency.

The theme of adaptation and innovation emerged as a central topic of discussion among the interviewees, who elaborated on the necessity of embracing new technological advancements and promoting innovation to remain competitive within the South African wholesale and retail sector. Furthermore, participants identified both similarities and differences in their approaches to technology and innovation across their respective organisations.

Participant 3 advanced with the argument regarding the importance of technology adaptation by asserting that,

"I think it is important for us to invest in the recent technology; otherwise, we are going to lose the game" (Participant 3, Interview, 2024).

Participant 3's outlook in advancing his firm's objectives of getting the newest technologies indicates a tendency to be ahead of competitors. Participant 9 also pointed out measures aimed at technological advancement and integration,

"While there is room for technological adaptation, we have made strides and are conducting virtual sales on our online platform but wish to be leaders in the use of technology." (Participant 9, Interview, 2024).

Two of the participants recognise the importance of technology in enhancing market competition. However, Participant 3 is more focused on staying ahead of technological innovations, while Participant 9 is concentrating on utilising existing technology to improve business practices.

Participant 4 on the other hand, showed some focus on the type of technology available and its suitability for the organisation by stating,

"Technology plays a central role in our operations in so far as it meets our specific needs. The tools that we use are adapted to the needs and challenges that we have" (Participant 4, Interview, 2024).

This perspective seems to emphasise the need to tailor technology to operations, while Participant 3 focuses on using the newest technology available in the market. This implies that while some participants possess a more future-oriented view with regard to technology, others point out the need for adaptation of such technologies within a certain environment or ecosystem.

Participant 5 further explained how their organisation had adopted new technologies but added that these technologies had facilitated changes in the organisation's key areas. They stated,

"New technologies we adopted contributed to innovation in our product types and changes in procedures. It's not about technology for catching up; it's technology for forging ahead" (Participant 5, Interview, 2024).

Participant 4, who related,

"Innovation is vital, and technology enables us to bring up new things for our clients" (Participant 4, Interview, 2024).

Participants seemed to regard technology as an enabler of innovativeness because it enabled their organisations to be competitive not only in terms of survival within the industry but also in being pioneers and unique.

Participant 7 also stressed the need to train their employees in order to be able to use the new technologies efficiently.

"Our employees should also be trained so as to work optimally with the technology that we have" (Participant 7, Interview, 2024).

This position on the ability to adapt to technology is linked to developing human capital implies that the skills of the employees determine the success of the efforts made in raising technology. Participant 2 further explained:

"There is no point in acquiring technology that people cannot use. It is important for us to make sure staff members are trained and confident about implementing new systems" (Participant 2, Interview, 2024).

The necessity of training employees and was also linked to retraining employees to ensure that technological acumen is not lost through the human resource turnover process.

Participant 8 addressed the financial consequences of technological evolution, stating,

'Investing in technology is quite an important thing, and we have to ensure that the return on investment outweighs the cost' (Participant 8, Interview, 2024).

A concern of this nature was also raised by Participant 3, who said,

'Yes, indeed, we need to balance between the merits and demerits of the technology we wish to acquire, especially in the context of developing nations' (Participant 8, Interview, 2024).

Both participants appreciate the funding gap that comes with a technological investment, which has, in most cases, been an afterthought considering that such investments should be aimed at enhancing the firm's profitability. Concerns about technological cost are conceded more than the contribution of the technology to the organisation's competitiveness. Attention is drawn away from the lack of financial resources, and acute stress is placed on the importance of being technologically advanced.

Insights on technological adaptation and innovation thus aims to add value, increasing the bargaining power and market position of the firms in the South African wholesale and retail sector and illustrates how, in the modern era, technological advancement and innovativeness are prerequisites for survival.

5.5.2 Theme 6: Human Capital and Skills Development

Participants underscored the importance of cultivating an agile and skilled workforce as a fundamental requirement for achieving strategic agility. They consistently identified training, leadership development, and up-skilling as critical competencies necessary for sustaining a competitive edge in the marketplace.

The topic of human capital development emerged as a significant theme during the interviews, with participants offering a diverse array of insights regarding workforce skills, training programs, and employee motivation within the South African wholesale and retail sector. Participants identified both commonalities and variations in their approaches to fostering these factors, which are essential for enhancing competency acquisition within their respective organisations.

Participant 3 accentuated the concept of skills development on a continuous basis by stating that,

"Our employees need to keep improving their skills in order to be able to compete. We always make sure that they undergo training so that they can cope with the demands of the future" (Participant 3, Interview, 2024).

For Participant 3, the concern was about the relevance of the skills possessed by employees in the context of the current workforce and future workforce requirements. In the same manner, Participant 8 raised concern on the issue of training and said that

"The training of employees is not an option if staying relevant in the market is the focus. It is a must" (Participant 8, Interview, 2024).

They are of the same opinion that as far as the competitiveness of an organisation is concerned, the training of employees has to be done regularly. However, Participant 3's view stresses a focus on deliberate enhancement whilst Participant 8 supports relevancy in a progressing market.

Participant 1 acknowledged the role that the South African government has taken in investing in industry-specific human capital development programs through SETA-based education programs. The participant stated that the SETA program helped her to network with peers in the industry. She further provided view in relation to employee empowerment saying:

"Developing human capital is also about allowing employees to have the ability to take responsibility for their positions" (Participant 1, Interview, 2024).

Participant 1's perspective further suggested that empowerment is a pivotal part of human capital development, and therefore, training should occur to provide a free space for employees to use their skills.

This approach stands in contrast to Participant 3 and Participant 8, who argue more strongly for adherence to a planned training regimen. Participant 1 is of the opinion that giving employees chances to make decisions makes them more active and broadens their teams' productivity.

Participant 2 raised concerns about the position of mentorship in human capital development, saying,

"There are mentorship programs which are important in codifying the experience of old employees to the young ones. It's not only a planned course; it's also learning from people who have been through such hardships before" (Participant 2, Interview, 2024).

This perspective emphasises the role of more flexible approaches to learning and knowledge transfers to increase the volume of human capital. Participant 4 also highlighted on the role of mentorship adding that:

"Mentorship, however, fills the gap between the two. For instance, most young workers, I mean new employees, need to know how to do this work" (Participant 4, Interview, 2024).

Both Participant 2 and Participant 4 agreed upon the significance of mentoring as a topic. However, for Participant 2, the practical focus lies on the transfer of knowledge, whereas for Participant 4, it is on knowing how to apply knowledge within the context.

A lesson came out clearly from Participant 9: aligning employee skills with the organisational objectives is quite critical.

"We always emphasise that our training interventions are in sync with our strategic goals. It is not only a matter of upskilling, but all competencies are aligned to the overarching vision" (Participant 9, Interview, 2024).

Participant 9 emphasises the synchronisation of human capital evolution and business strategy, confirming that all training investments will yield positive results for the firm. This seems to contrast with Participant 6's view that all skills must be improved continuously, though these statements are not connected to the firm's strategy.

"To improve communication over time, you simply keep improving your communication skills. It's a skills focus. There is no mention of strategic objectives. In fact, there are no objectives other than motivation to improve communication." (Participant 6, Interview, 2024).

Processes are considered sufficient; therefore, the performance is gradually improved.

Participant 5 highlighted motivation as a part of human capital development when they said,

'Training is important, but without motivation, the skills we teach won't translate into better performance. It is true that we ensure that our employees are motivated enough to use what they are instructed to do
(Participant 5, Interview, 2024).

The premise of this discussion is that by prioritizing motivation within organizations, the development of skills and subsequent training initiatives are likely to produce positive outcomes for both employees and the organization as a whole. This perspective aligns with the statement made by Participant 7,

'You start with recognition of good work, then reward, and there is a lot more to motivating employees, and that will grow them.' (Participant 7, Interview, 2024).

Lack of finance was also indicated as a barrier to human capital development. Participant 8 remarked,

"Finding the budgetary accommodation for training programs poses one of the greatest obstacles with small resources" (Participant 8, Interview, 2024).

Participant 9 also alluded to this practical limitation and remarked,

"We need to be innovative in our training programmes because the budget constraints do not allow us to always use external programmes"
(Participant 9, Interview, 2024).

Both participants recognise the issue of financial constraints, whether through conscious practices or simple acknowledgement. However, Participant 9 emphasised the importance of being creative in finding solutions to these challenges, offering an innovative perspective on human capital development. It was noted that while other participants acknowledged the role of government-funded SETA training programs, retailers who are owner managed were largely unaware of the SETA programs.

5.5.3 Theme 7: Financial Sustainability

The theme of financial self-sufficiency and productive resource management was well articulated across the interviews, with participants showing diverse perspectives on how these aspects are crucial for active performance within the wholesale and retailing industry in South Africa. Some of the participants had similar sentiments regarding the challenges and strategies of financial management, while differences were also noted regarding the approaches to achieving financial sustainability.

Participant 3 noted that budgeting is inseparable from strategy as it is also a key factor, recalling that:

"We make sure that we spend within the perimeters given by the city, and we also have a responsibility of reporting to the different stakeholders, including shareholders and the board" (Participant 3, Interview, 2024).

So, this is how they try to prudently manage budgetary allocations to ensure that resources are well deployed in support of the organisation's strategic initiatives. In the same manner, Participant 8 pointed out the issue of priority funding of the operational areas when resources are extremely low and the organisation is in a crisis. They noted:

"We had to be very agile in still providing the required services to the farmers, to the buyers and the agents despite the disruption which called for optimal resource management" (Participant 8, Interview, 2024).

Both participants forewarned the importance of financial planning in ensuring stability in the organisation, especially in the face of external turbulence.

Participant 5, had a more accentuating view, which was about the flexibility required in allocating and utilising financial resources. they argued,

"it is not only the budgeting that is a problem but also the possibility of reallocating budgets when people's priorities change. This sort of flexibility is what keeps us above water" (Participant 5, Interview, 2024).

This observation raises some critical issues regarding the adaptability of financial management, which is even more important as it argues that (financial) sustainability is not merely about budgeting but about the ability to make strategic shifts when the situation dictates. While Participant 3 and Participant 8 pay more attention to the strategic linkage and budget compliance, in the case of Thando, they raise the issue

of volatile cuts and reallocation and argue how the business priorities are changing to warrant such actions.

Participant 3, perceives a particular investment focus that concentrates on achieving a financial return through the successful execution of a defined set of strategic spending objectives.

Another crucial observation also came from Participant 6, who stressed the role of community stakeholders in the management of resources. They stated that:

"It is not only strong internal resources that guarantee the financial sustainability of an organisation; financial resources can be mobilised by maintaining good relations with the stakeholders of the organisation during difficult events" (Participant 6, Interview, 2024).

This is in support of what Participant 1 pointed out in relation to enhancing confidence with the external constituency so that during trying times when financial support is scarce, the partners will continue supporting the organisation. Participant 1 stated that:

"And when there are unavoidable financial pressures, by managing stakeholder engagement, we can develop a chain of sympathetic voices which can help" (Participant 1, Interview, 2024).

They both refer to the relevance of external dependence in the quest for financial viability, which adds to the internal budgeting and other resources deploying mechanisms mentioned by the other participants.

Participant 4 provided a point of view with respect to cost optimisation as one of the techniques for managing resources. The participant shared,

"We focus on economising all of the direct costs as a pertinent matter, especially at the time when resources are scarce. This involves looking at every aspect of our operations and finding ways through which resources can be optimised" (Participant 4, Interview, 2024).

Talking about financial sustainability, Participant 3 connected it to the management of infrastructure, noting the effects of managing older facilities and remaining solvent. The participant stated,

"Yes, we have to see that the infrastructure is maintained, and in some cases, this is even going out for funding because the city does not offer enough" (Participant 3, Interview 2024).

This indicates a certain level of commitment that ensures that all the required facilities de facto are actively in use, and if in use, perhaps more than required support may be looked for. This kind of forward-thinking is supported by Participant 8, who said that it was important:

"to look for other sources of funding so as to be able to meet the needs in infrastructure" (Participant 8, Interview, 2024).

Both claim that cross-border financing is high for the construction of additional infrastructure. However, Participant 3 is more focused on funding existing assets, while Participant 8 is interested in the possibility of funding new assets.

5.5.4 Theme 8: Market Responsiveness and Consumer-Centric Strategies

Participants in the interviews focused on the theme of market responsiveness and customer-centric strategising. They appreciated the need to increase competitiveness through understanding and addressing customers' needs in the South African wholesale and retail environment. Participants shared their experiences with regard to how their companies respond to internal pressures and changes in the market regarding customers' satisfaction, identifying the similarities and differences in their responses.

Participant 3 stressed the need for customer closeness when they said that:

"We have to figure out what our customers want and adjust our portfolio as per that. It's a matter of listening to them and being flexible..." (Participant 3, Interview, 2024).

Participant 3's statement appreciates the role of customers in enhancing the company's product and even its strategic direction. In the same vein, Participant 8 said:

"I think that our great asset is our ability to respond quite rapidly to what our customers tell us. We try to make changes which a customer informs us about" (Participant 8, Interview, 2024).

Both participants concur that the most vital element in ensuring competitiveness is customer feedback orientation, with Participant 3 placing more emphasis on the ability to be flexible and Participant 8 on the ability to react quickly.

Participant 7 offered a different view by stressing the need to personify the customer instead of just the problem. In his own words, this means:

"It's not sufficient to wait for customer feedback. It is also necessary to speculate on what they might seek in the future and have the solutions ready even before the questions are asked" (Participant 7, Interview, 2024).

This adds a different dimension to domestic market responsiveness in the sense that it encourages firms to reconfigure their strategies so that they are not just responding to existing needs but rather predicting other needs. On the other hand, Participant 3 and Participant 8 try to respond to what customers have commented; Thando believes that customers have to be foreseen.

Participant 5 emphasised the use of extra tools aimed at boosting customer engagement. According to her,

"We use data analytics to understand customer behaviour and preferences, which helps us tailor our offerings to their needs" (Participant 5, Interview, 2024).

Participant 5's perspective also seems to be supported by technology, which allows them to capture the customers more effectively and in greater detail. Participant 4 shared the same impression and elaborated that,

"Digital platforms have allowed us to interact with our customers in real-time, which makes it easier to deal with their issues and offer them the necessary solutions" (Participant 4, Interview, 2024).

Both Participant 5 and Participant 4 perceive the importance of using technology in order to engage with customers better. However, Participant 5 is more concerned

about data analytics, while Participant 4 regards contact with customers through real-time communication.

Participant 1 stressed that customer-centric strategies should be in line with the company vision. they noted,

"Our customer-focused initiatives do not only seek to make sales but also to develop and sustain relations that are compatible with the character and ambitions of the company" (Participant 1, Interview, 2024).

It is evident from Participant 1's perspective that market responsiveness is only a subset of the strategic objective or vision of the company, which is relationship-oriented rather than transactional. Participant 3 also dwelled on the aspect of building relations when they said,

"Our goal is to develop some loyal customers who will be looking for more things beyond the product, like after-sales services and social activities" (Participant 3, Interview, 2024).

Both Nomsa and Aisha hold similar views with regard to customer-focused strategies that relate to building connections with customers; Participant 1 states that it should be in line with the company's principles, and Participant 3 states that they should have value-adding activities.

Participant 2 the need to be quick in response to market opportunities:

"The market can change quickly, and if we are not in a position to change, we may lose our clients to faster competitors" (Participant 2, Interview, 2024).

Such a concern about being so agile was also raised by Participant 8, who spoke of the ability to change on account of customers' behaviour:

"Flexibility and ability to revise plans is what keeps one ahead of the competitors" (Participant 8, Interview, 2024).

Both have seen the advantages associated with change as being essential for the organisation to be able to act in the global economic environment. However, Bongani

seems to focus on the danger of paralysis, while Participant 8 stresses the superiority conferred by flexibility.

Thando also addressed the issue of customer-centric strategies in light of a lack of resources. they said,

'We do aspire to be responsive to our customers, but resources are thin, which puts us in a position where we must make tough decisions regarding which feedback we prioritise' (Participant 7, Interview, 2024).

This pragmatic challenge was echoed by Bongani, who retorted,

'It's a balancing act between what we want to do for our customers and what they expect us to do with the limited resources we have' (Participant 8, Interview, 2024).

As both Participant 7 and Participant 8 indicate, the challenge of implementing customer-centric strategies becomes even more pronounced in resource-constrained environments, which gives rise to the need for prioritisation and trade-offs.

5.6 Chapter Summary

Insights from participants highlighted key themes where participants suggest that leadership is a critical skill to be possessed in order to enhance the strategic agility of the South African wholesale and retail industry. Under the leadership competency, participants mentioned factors such as motivation, transformation, crisis management, stakeholder engagement, strategic visioning, technology integration, accountability orientation, and capacity building. With the above skill set identified as key success factors, these capabilities assist companies in being strategically agile and remaining competitive. They are useful for organisational performance within an agile environment.

Additionally, participants showed that regulatory and compliance issues are complex and are of considerable concern concerning the South African wholesale and retail

sector. The cost and complexity of the compliance, regulation and administrative problems and the coordination of several regulatory agencies were key concerns.

Technological advancement and Innovation included embracing new tools, digitising, and developing the personnel to use such resources. Participants mentioned focusing on the personalisation of solutions, the cost factor, and the speed of change as key concepts that managers must focus on in managing the processes of technology adaptation and technology development to improve the functioning of organisations in a volatile environment.

Managing and developing human capital in the wholesale and retail trades in South Africa is not a simple process; it involves an integrated approach with initiatives such as training and education, mentoring, empowerment, motivation and strategic alignment.

Participants further revealed that ensuring financial sustainability and resource management are complex, and they encompass operational planning in terms of budgeting and cost management/containment, as well as versatility, investment in technology, stakeholder participation, and active management of values.

With a dynamic external environment and changing market demands, crafting customer-centred strategies is key to South African wholesale and retail market competitiveness. Understanding customer relations management, technology applications for business relations, long-term customers and responding to changing markets should be key considerations when considering customer preferences.

Other key factors in the wholesale and retail environment in South Africa include the cost of doing business and the cost of complying with regulations, lack of development and stability, depressed economy, and sociological aspects, including the level of unemployment in society. Participants identified these challenges as further compounding to the volatile market nature of dealing with outer factors while ensuring that the business and its growth remain constant.

Chapter 6 Discussion of Findings

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of literature and interview outcomes to determine the competencies for strategic agility that enhance firm performance in the South African wholesale and retail sector. Drawing on qualitative research data from insights from executives and senior managers in the South African wholesale and retail businesses and integrating relevant academic literature. The themes drawn from the semi-structured interviews identified leadership, decision-making, technology adaptation and Innovation, human capital development, customer centricity, risk management and financial management skills. Each identified theme is organisational capability, which is analysed in-depth and reviewed in relation to theoretical frameworks and previous research to create a nuanced understanding of the dynamic capabilities necessary in this sector.

6.2 Theme 1: The Leadership Competency

The theme of leadership competence stood out in all the interviews as the participants were keen to mention how their leaders played an active role in cultivating strategic agility within their organisations. One of the participants, Participant 3 instance, said:

"a true leader identifies potential risks early and has a strategy to address them, which helps the team feel secure". (Participant 3, Interview, 2024).

From this perspective, Haas (2019) can be supported by claims that every leader should always be prepared to manage a challenging situation across all industries. However, it is more about retail because this field is always in a rush due to constant changes in market dynamics. Leadership encompasses much more than simply making decisions; it involves a willingness and capability to steer teams through turbulent times towards encouraging firm performance.

Gao (2016) acknowledges the need to exercise leadership authority with a set of skills, including effective decision-making and capacity for change, in order to enable

corporations to outgrow external forces. The participants in the interviews were supportive, indicating that it is important to make rapid changes in critical areas, such as backup strategies, in times of distress such as COVID-19. However, whereas Gao (2016) places more emphasis on decision-making, the interviewees also highlighted other concerns, namely that leadership is about emotional intelligence and empowering the team. For example, Participant 3 explained that such leaders are critical because they could help "navigate difficult problems and provide the needed encouragement when times are tough", which further substantiates Gao's (2016) priority on decision-making rather than a broader context of operations management.

A third point of convergence on leadership centres this conception on a manager's interface with their subordinate. Participant 8 commented that;

"Agility does not just need any leader but a leader that has the right information, makes timely decisions, and the leader should be able to stand the pressure." (Participant 8, Interview, 2024).

Again, this illustrates an aspect of leadership that cuts across organisational performance, as leadership cannot be described in absolute terms but as one that integrates different perspectives. According to Haas (2019), active leaders of retailers should also switch managerial approaches focusing on the challenges experienced at a certain moment, like loss of electricity vents, for example. But here is another difference, which brings emphasises the direction of leadership. More specifically, it is how societal leadership influences emotional decisions and inspires performance achievement. This is the prime reason why Haas (2019) does not look at issues from these angles.

In concluding this chapter, the study further ascertains the fact that organisational leadership is significant in strategy. Per the interviews, this type of leadership goes beyond the speed of response or even set targets; it is a change that occurs between the ever-dynamic forces of the market, including emotions and team encouragement. This relationship approach furthers the literature's more process-oriented views and suggests that leadership in Africa's retail industries rests upon the operational and relational levels of both the firm's and the actor's perspectives.

6.3 Theme 2: Decision-Making

In the course of the interviews, the theme of decisiveness (often termed the ability to make agile decisions) stood out. It was considered a key factor in enhancing strategic agility in dynamic settings. For instance, Participant 8 asserted that

"Quick decision-making is vital in averting losses and seizing sudden opportunities" (Participant 8, Interview, 2024).

This was particularly for responding to unpredictable disturbances such as load shedding. This goes hand in hand with the position of Gao (2016), who argues that quick decision-making is critical for competitive advantage in an ever-changing and challenging business environment. Some of the participants went further to state that it is critical to make quick and well-informed decisions in order to limit the risk of losses and take advantage of opportunities. This consequently helps in enhancing the performance of the firm.

In the same manner, Haas (2019) appears to argue that in the retail landscape, decisiveness is an important capability that facilitates adaptability, especially in times of stress. The participants confirmed this assertion when they attributed the successful continuation of their firms' business operations in the midst of innumerable threats to timely firm response during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, Haas (2019) locates decision-making as part of the general operational agility of the organisation, but the interviewees underscored the need for decisiveness, which they did to the immediate crisis at hand, especially to regional such as supply chain shortages or resources.

Yet another alignment between the interviews and literature is seen in regard to decisiveness as a component of wider strategic competence. Zheng (2018) embeds decision-making into platform-based business models and argues that when leaders are firm, agility is shown during the adoption and amalgamation of digital solutions. On the same line, interviewees pointed out that decision-making was an important matter in the process of adjusting to the digital environment. For instance, Participant 5 explained,

"Decisive leadership was crucial when we introduced digital tools in order to be more effective in processes and customer service" (Participant 5, Interview, 2024).

Participant 5 thus makes a direct correlation between effective decision-making and the actual execution of the digital strategies.

One critical difference, though, is the view that decision-making as a competency entails other factors or is not limited only to decision-making. Haas (2019) and Gao (2016) seem to consider decision-making efficiency as an aftermath or a reaction to operating and market problems, whereas interviewees noted that decision-making encompasses a more holistic view in that it allows firms to anticipate changes and position themselves strategically before there are problems. To this, Participant 3 said

"Being proactive in decision making to us helps in twinning problems with cost implications by not having to be reactive". (Participant 3, Interview, 2024).

This is rather an anticipative view that is in tandem with what is proposed to be the missing link in literature and complements the characteristic reactive decision-making strategies.

Moreover, the interviews made it possible to consider the issue of decision-making and involvement of the teams from a rather different angle. In a similar point, Participant 4 stated,

"In our organisation, effective decision-making entails the contribution of several team members so that decisions are not one-sided" (Participant 4, Interview, 2024).

This is at odds with the trend identified in the literature regarding decisiveness being primarily unique to the individual or executive. There may be, however, challenges concerning team decision-making that are embedded within a leadership construct that is common within African retail environments where decision-making is a team effort and enhances the resilience of the firm and its ability to respond to changes.

Overall, while both the interviews and the literature confirm that decisiveness needs to be part and parcel of a strategic, agile organisation, the interviews raised the issue of decision-making into further dimensions, such as proactive or collaborative decision-making. This extends the existing literature, acknowledging that in the South African wholesale and retail sector, decision-making for agility entails quick decision-making and anticipation of decisions as well as team integration for enhancement of firm performance.

6.4 Theme 3: Technological Adaptation and Innovation

Another critical competency that emerged among the interviewees was technological adaptation and innovation. More so, the interviewees highlighted these skills as essential towards competitiveness and strategic agility. Participant 3 says,

"We need to start thinking along the lines of digital platforms to stay ahead." (Participant 3, Interview, 2024).

In tandem with this view is Zheng's (2018) standpoint, which argues that business strategies based on platforms are fundamental in contemporary retail and further assist in quick response to consumer needs and the digitisation of processes. It also appears that both resources share the common opinion that it is not enough for firms to just adapt their technology, but it is a necessity for them to be able to adjust in response to changing market conditions since this will improve the overall performance of the firm.

Likewise, Haas (2019) indicates the importance of the integration of digital technologies and tools, as well as data analytics, into retail business models as a part of the processes of business model innovations that improve business processes and customer interaction. Participants were not shy to support this opinion, as Participant 4 said,

"Technology has enabled us to make quicker, more informed decisions based on real-time data" (Participant 4, Interview, 2024).

The above operational view of technology further substantiates the research carried out by Haas (2019) since technology is no longer limited to customer relations only but infiltrates other parts, including decision-making and strategic thinking that embodies business flexibility.

Gao (2016), stressing the dependence on the transformation of customer participation towards innovative technology and enhancement of chain management processes, narrates the comparative integration in the two key areas of focus as well. Such opinions were confirmed by Participant 8, who said:

'...our technological advancement enabled us to cope with the supply chain and changes in the preferences of customers fairly swiftly' (Participant 8, Interview, 2024).

Close to explaining what they (Gao 2016) mean whereby, they proceed to discuss the Era of Internet Plus, where they explain that retailers now need all types of marketing to provide the same value to consumers irrespective of which channel the consumer chooses to purchase. The participants noted omnichannel integration to be important. However, such approaches have not been emphasised, which can show a possible difference between the technological focus of African retailers and the global trend.

Further supporting the need for technological adoption, (Jocevski et al., 2019) portray, in particular, improvements in infrastructure, such as real-time data systems and automated management inventories, as key in enabling retailers to respond quickly to changing circumstances. Participant 5's comment also supports this:

"Digital inventory systems have been vital in resolving the challenges related to our supply chain management in unstable conditions"
(Participant 5, Interview, 2024).

However, this was not the case for Jocevski et al. (2019), as they emphasised operational performance measures, but the participants acknowledged the innovative aspect of technological change on the people, which means that in the African retail environment, technology helps to increase the level of engagement and teamwork of the people, which is not explained in the literature as much.

It is in this context that the authors emphasise technological adaptation and external collaboration. Sorescu et al. (2011) argue that the process of implementing new technologies includes not only the change of internal processes but also the joining of external companies providing digital solutions and e-commerce platforms. This position is absent in the answers of the participants during interviews, who talk about the process of digital transformation as self-initiated changes within the organisation, probably a different case from that of local African retail strategies where engaging with major tech companies is impossible due to the market or strategic focus on their own internal resources.

In addition, according to Viswanadham (2018), the need for the platform economy to provide unified branding experiences is where the importance of digital enhancement comes in, as it enhances customer value propositions. The interviewees, however, were more concerned with the use of technology for business process improvement and business decision-making speed rather than developing new technology for

customer use. This indicates a more process-oriented approach to technological integration in African retail, where technological applications directly to the customer may take second place in the strengthening of internal capacities.

In general, both the interviews and the readings emphasise the role of technology in the development of strategic adaptability and improvement of business performance. However, against the background of the literature focusing on external relations and customer-oriented tools, the interview participants from the retail sector in Africa stress that internal operational productivity and employee engagement are the most important outcomes of technological adaptation. This different view indicates that even if international best practices guide local strategies, African retail sectors will prioritise the use of technology for internal processes, such as improving supply chain flexibility and coordination over customer engagement strategies.

6.5 Theme 4: Human Capital and Skills Development

The interview study participants highlighted human capital and skills development as important competencies, with one of them pointing out that talent development is an essential factor in the achievement of strategic agility and superior firm performance. One of them, Participant 3, observed,

*"However, continuous training and upskilling are more necessary in order to cope with the stiffness of the market and achieve greater efficiency."
(Participant 3, Interview, 2024).*

This also supports Zheng (2018), who, in his research, notes that market retailers operating within platform-based models rely on skilled personnel for decoding the intricacies of systems integration, implying that training and skill development are quintessential for agility in the face of increasing digitalisation. Both of these sources demonstrate the need for systematic education and training of employees to remain competitive in the market and increase the firm's flexibility in rapidly changing environments.

Haas (2019) makes assurance on how human capital is essential in the retailing business by stating the need for skills development in making decisions and operational performance. Some of those interviewed shared this view by noting that

their companies constantly endow their employees with leadership skills in order to enhance their decision-making skills. This is consistent with what Haas (2019) argues: the increase of employee skills towards democratisation of the enterprise and efficiency, especially in fast markets. However, whereas Haas refers to a targeted program for the provision of digital skills, the interviewees tended to Caleb Masengeri's comments about leadership and my soft skills more broadly as I developed them in Africa's retail industry.

There is also patient skills enhancement through adaption in Gao's (2016) work, who argues that human resources are crucial in bridging the retail's digital developments and market changes. This is in line with what Participant 8 said that:

"We constantly reskill our employees, so they should always operate efficiently with new technologies and systems." (Participant 8, Interview, 2024).

The responses confirm Gao's (2016) propositions regarding the strategic alignment that the organisation creates with the experience of learning new abilities and keeping pace with technology. This common focus underscores the relationship that does exist between the practical lessons and theoretical frameworks of skills adaptability.

On the other hand, there is an interesting approach to developing talent. For instance, Jocevski et al. (2019) recommend technical skills training for data-driven decision-making, while most participants suggested that they practice and learn on the job or have mentors or some other types of learning. Participant 5 described in the following manner:

"I really appreciate how we ask our new hires to be paired up with seasoned veterans in the industry to learn how to think and how to problem solve". (Participant 5, Interview, 2024).

The participant emphasised interpersonal skill development at the expense of more formal training. This disparity doesn't mean that structured training is not valued from a theoretical perspective. However, practical lessons can be drawn from the African context of retail that allow and encourage relationship-based learning that will encourage a collaborative environment.

In addition, Gao (2016) points out that attentive staff and continuous learning promote innovation processes in retail spaces. The participants, who are the employees of the companies, have also noted that creativity-focused skill development programs enable employees to deliver new ideas, which in turn help companies improve customer relations. Nevertheless, Gao (2016) mostly covers the issue of structured, purposeful innovation programs, while interviewees mentioned informal discussions and joint projects in teams as effective sources of innovative thinking. This difference suggests that in formalised literature, it may be clear that the emphasis is placed on formalised innovation initiatives where processes are clearly stated, but in African retailers' case, they are more organic driven.

Finally, Viswanadham (2018) describes human capital in terms of global supply chain agility and indicates that the presence of a skilled workforce increases a company's capacity to react to external disturbances. The interviewees shared somewhat similar coherences, especially Participant 4, who stated,

"Trained staff ensure that we can quickly change course whenever there are supply chain disruptions because they are able to respond to unexpected issues." (Participant 5, Interview, 2024).

However, while Viswanadham (2018) recommends heavy reliance on external training programs, interviewees preferred on-the-job and cross-functional training. This indicates that while external courses provide some specific skills, local companies may prefer internal training in order to foster an agile and cohesive workforce that supports the strategic objectives of the company.

Participant 1 further noted the role played by the South African government in funding education training and development through the wholesale and retail SETA, stating that it not only alleviates funding commitments for companies operating in the sector but provides a platform for peers to network during the training programs.

In general, both the interview data and the literature agree that human capital and skills development are essential for attaining strategic agility, which improves the performance of the firm. However, while the Structuring of the academic perspective focuses on the provision of external normalising training for technical competencies, the interviewees of the African retail companies show interest in internal approaches of relational learning that deliver both technical and interpersonal skills. Such a balanced approach indicates that skills development in the retail settings in Africa is

embraced not only for its capability to increase organisational agility but as a tool for constructing adaptable and resilient teams as well.

6.6 Theme 5: Market Responsiveness and Consumer-Centric Strategies

The interviewees pointed out the importance of being oriented towards the market and consumer needs as a fundamental capability necessary to sustain strategic agility and ensure the competitiveness of the firm over time.

"Our focus has always been responding to the customer quickly as to ensure relevance and competition" (Participant 3, Interview, 2024).

This strategy resonates well with Gao's position (2016), stating that in the age of Internet+, where consumers have access to a lot of information and platforms, it is essential to embrace the customers. Also, the responses from the interviewees and Gao's (2016) analysis seem to stress the fact that ignoring or failing to understand customers' requirements or fast-changing conditions is detrimental to maintaining customer trust and competitiveness within a dynamic business framework.

Haas (2019), for example, observes the need for consumer focus in a retail institution and argues that a firm's capacity to bring its processes in sync with emerging purchaser's needs makes it more agile and adaptable. Such opinions were reiterated by interviewees who repeatedly stated that their firm's strategy revolves around offering tailor-made services and satisfying consumers' demands. For example, Participant 4 remarked that

"By modifying our offers according to direct customer opinions, we enable ourselves to cater to their needs effectively." (Participant 4, Interview, 2024).

This view reinforces the stance taken by Haas (2019), who considers customer feedback effective in accumulating strategic knowledge and points out that active and responsive firms can easily modify their business models to suit the consumers' preferences, improving their agility and effectiveness.

Another aspect of convergence in this case is adaptation through the use of data, and in this regard, Zheng's (2018) work on platform-based business models is referred to. In Zheng's view, firms are increasingly using digital instruments, thereby improving their ability to track changes in the preferences of consumers. This is corroborated by the interview data, where a number of the participants stated that they were able to analyse consumer behaviour and preferences through the use of data analytics. Participant 8 asserted,

"With data analytics, we're able to be one step ahead of trends and know what the customers want and when they want it." (Participant 8, Interview, 2024).

Such anticipation of the trends is in line with what Zheng (2018) stated, that being technologically responsive to the market is fundamental in retailing. It allows companies to shift and respond to changes in the consumers at the highest level of accuracy.

The participants identified a key distinction, however — the extent of the emphasis on consumer-centricity differs between traditional and digital retail models. As Viswanadham (2018) states, the integration of digital technologies transformed the notion of a consumer-centric approach in the global supply chain through hyper-personalisation; the participants indicated that their strategies were in the direction of general consumer engagement instead of instructive-oriented digital audience engagement. One of the interviewees replied that:

"We emphasise customer engagement through our major channels but still have not gone completely into the digital personalisation domain." (Participant 5, Interview, 2024).

The implication is that while the literature portrays digital consumerisation as a distinct form of consumer-centricity, its implementation may depend on the circumstances, with the African retail context favouring a more integrated approach to the brick-and-mortar and digital space rather than a fully customisable one.

In an interesting turn, collaborative responsiveness was also recurring among interviewees, and it was mentioned less in the literature. For instance, Jocevski et al. (2019) discuss market responsiveness as a result of internal processes and strategic initiatives with little external mention. However, participants, such as Participant 3's

feedback emphasised that supplier and other stakeholders' partnerships play an important role in helping the firm respond to the market trends in due course.

This points towards a distinctive feature of African retailers where one strategy is to rely on stakeholders' collaboration to enhance market responsiveness, which seems to complement but has not been accentuated in the theoretical discourse on the centrality of African retailers.

Last, Gao (2016) draws attention to the fact that adding consumer centricity brings about other dimensions in the formulation of omnichannel strategies, which facilitates easy interaction with users across different platforms. At the same time, some participants whose comments alluded to the amount of adjustability that simply regards the direction of the consumer across digital and physical channels and other participants concentrated more on flexibility in the product offering and service quality and not so much on multi-channel integration. Such contrast makes the case for an operative adjustment in African retail, which makes use of the aggravated modes of integration. In Africa, NM strategies will still work, and one does not need an excessive and complicated omnichannel one.

The findings from the interviews and the existing literature review suggest that to achieve strategic agility; the organisation requires both market responsiveness and consumer-centric. But, while literature may stress functional frameworks of digital personalisation and structured responsiveness, the interviews point to a more context-sensitive angle regarding African retail, namely that of a combination of relational stickiness and widespread customer and partnership endeavours. This broader view implies that greater performance results in African firms going very deep into digital integration but instead opting for consumer-orientated changes that are practical in order to remain agile.

6.7 Differences Between Findings and Literature

Interviews and theoretical literature differ in how strategic agility is understood. Zheng (2018) explained that it is based on scorable beliefs. As per Zheng (2018),

action and decision-making structures are important factors in considering an agile business. Some participants claimed the importance of adopting digital platforms. Yet, the discussions revolved around interpersonal competencies instead. Leadership, for instance, according to Participant 4, means:

'To look for opportunities where several interests are in balance adding value and progress' (Participant 4, Interview, 2024).

Thus indicating the importance placed on relationships, not just organisational structures. So here is a discrepancy. The literature, on the one hand, considers agility to be driven by processes and technologies. On the other hand, interviewees emphasised motivation and relationships within the processes as determinants of agility.

In South Africa's wholesale and retail sub-sector, the investigation of South African industry practitioners' perspectives has contributed to a more comprehensive overview of the competencies, enabling them to meet distinctive challenges of creating, developing and utilising dynamic capabilities. Apart from confirming some empirical studies, the current analysis helps to expand the theoretical understanding of strategic agility and fills in the gaps in knowledge particularly useful for its practitioners and academics.

6.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter analyses literature and interviews to identify competencies for strategic agility in the South African wholesale and retail sector. The themes identified include leadership, decision-making, technology adaptation, innovation, human capital development, customer centricity, risk management, and financial management skills. Leadership competence is crucial for cultivating strategic agility within organisations, as it involves identifying potential risks early, addressing them, and providing support during challenging times. The study also emphasises the importance of emotional intelligence and empowering the team, as well as the role of societal leadership in influencing emotions, decisions, and performance achievement.

The interviews highlighted the importance of decisiveness in enhancing strategic agility in dynamic settings, particularly in responding to unpredictable disturbances like load shedding. This is crucial for competitive advantage and limiting losses. Decision-making is also seen as a component of wider strategic competence, particularly in the retail landscape. However, the interviews also highlighted the need for proactive or collaborative decision-making involving multiple team members to avoid one-sided decisions. This approach complements reactive decision-making strategies and enhances firm resilience and responsiveness to changes. Decisiveness is essential for strategic agility in the South African wholesale and retail sector.

The interviewees highlighted the importance of technological adaptation and innovation in the retail sector in Africa. They emphasised the need for firms to adapt their technology to changing market conditions and improve overall performance. They also highlighted the integration of digital technologies and tools, as well as data analytics, into retail business models. They also highlighted the need for omnichannel integration and the innovative aspect of technological change in the African retail environment. However, they also noted that implementing new technologies often involves self-initiated organisational changes rather than external collaboration. The interviewees also highlighted the importance of internal operational productivity and employee engagement in technological adaptation.

The interview study highlights the importance of human capital and skills development in achieving strategic agility and superior firm performance. Continuous training and upskilling are necessary to cope with market stiffness and achieve greater efficiency. Human resources are crucial in bridging retail's digital developments and market changes, and their development is essential for strategic alignment. Interpersonal skill development is preferred over formal training, which encourages a collaborative environment. Creativity-focused skill development programs enable employees to deliver new ideas, improving customer relations. In retail, a skilled workforce increases a company's capacity to react to external disturbances. While external training programs provide specific skills, internal approaches to relational learning are preferred. This balanced approach to skills development in African retail settings is embraced for its ability to increase organisational agility and construct adaptable and resilient teams.

Chapter 7 Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

The study aimed to investigate the concept of strategic agility, its relevance in the South African context, and how organisations can develop and implement agile strategies to navigate complex and uncertain market conditions.

The research questions were: RQ1: What contextual factors unique to developing countries like South Africa affect the relationship between strategic agility and firm performance? RQ2: What are the drivers and barriers of strategic agility in the South African context? RQ3: How can organisations overcome these barriers to improve firm performance?

The research setting was South Africa's wholesale and retail sector, where intense competition and changes in the business environment make achieving business performance targets increasingly difficult. Environmental factors such as political interference, lack of transparency, regulatory uncertainty, policy instability, and poor infrastructure further delay the rate of response to the adverse effects of these changes.

Strategic agility is a critical component in a company's pursuit of competitive advantage, as it allows businesses to quickly respond to market desires and changes, outperforming competitors. Key constructs for this research include strategic agility, which involves detecting and seizing market opportunities with speed, continuously adjusting strategic direction, developing innovative ways to create value, and firm performance, which encompasses various dimensions of a company's success and effectiveness in achieving its objectives.

7.2 Study Overview

This study delves into the phenomenon of strategic agility and its contribution to firm performance, particularly within the South African wholesale and retail sector. Prior to this study, the research on strategic agility was limited to some key areas. While it was broadly recognised as a crucial element for organisational competitiveness, the

specific mechanisms by which it influences performance remained unclear. Research often focuses on developed economies, with limited empirical studies in developing countries like South Africa. Furthermore, the role of technology in enabling or enhancing strategic agility required further exploration, particularly in how digital tools and platforms could be leveraged to improve agility,

This study addresses these gaps by examining strategic agility in the South African wholesale and retail sector context. The research specifically explored:

Contextual factors unique to South Africa: The study investigated how factors like political interference, regulatory uncertainty and poor infrastructure influence the relationship between strategic agility and firm performance.

Drivers and barriers of strategic agility in South Africa: The research identifies the key drivers and barriers to implementing agile strategies in the South African context.

Overcoming barriers to improve firm performance: The study explores how organisations can address these barriers to enhance their strategic agility and ultimately improve their performance.

By focusing on these areas, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of strategic agility and its relevance in the South African context.

7.3 Methodology Overview

This research employed a qualitative approach grounded in an interpretivist philosophy. The research questions were answered through semi-structured interviews with key South African wholesale and retail stakeholders. Specifically, the study used the following methodology:

Data Collection: Semi-structured interviews with ten senior managers and executives in the South African wholesale and retail sector.

Sampling: Purposive sampling was used to select participants with relevant experiences of strategic agility in organisations in the South African wholesale and retail sector.

Measurement Instrument: A semi-structured interview guide that incorporated existing frameworks for assessing strategic agility was used.

Data Analysis: Thematic analysis was used to identify and analyse patterns in the data. This involved comparing themes identified in the literature review with interview transcripts.

The study sought to collect rich and detailed data on strategic agility drivers, barriers and outcomes. This qualitative approach, with its focus on in-depth exploration and understanding of participants' perspectives, allowed the researcher to address the research questions and provide practical recommendations for organisations operating in the South African context.

7.4 Main Findings

In the context of South African wholesale and retail business, dynamic capabilities, which refer to a firm's capacity to integrate, build, and recombine internal and external resources in order to respond to emerging opportunities and environmental threats (Teece, 2007), are strategically important in achieving strategic agility. Furthermore, consistent with dynamic capabilities, each of the identified competencies will allow firms to effectively adapt to changes in the market, resources, and customers and thus improve performance.

7.4.1 Empirical Findings

The study highlights the importance of market responsiveness and consumer-centric strategies in sustaining strategic agility and ensuring a firm's competitiveness. The interviewees emphasise the need for firms to adapt their business models to suit consumer preferences, focusing on tailor-made services and satisfying customer demands. Data analytics is also used to analyse consumer behaviour and preferences, allowing firms to anticipate trends and respond accurately. However, the emphasis on consumer-centricity differs between traditional and digital retail models, with African retailers favouring a more integrated approach to the brick-and-mortar and digital space. Collaborative responsiveness is also emphasised, with

partnerships between suppliers and other stakeholders playing a crucial role in responding to market trends. The findings suggest that for African firms to achieve strategic agility, they need both market responsiveness and consumer-centric. The study also highlights the discrepancy between the literature and interviews, with the literature focusing on action and decision-making structures and interviewees emphasising motivation and relationships within processes.

7.4.2 Competencies for Strategic Agility

The study, through interviews with senior managers and executives in the South African wholesale and retail sector, identifies a set of competencies that contributes to strategic agility:

Leadership Competency: Effective leadership plays a crucial role in cultivating strategic agility (Pike-Bowles et al., 2024). Participants emphasised leaders who anticipate and mitigate risks, provide team support, and motivate employees to adapt.

Decisive Decision Making: The study found that speedy and high-quality decision-making, particularly during crises, is essential for seizing opportunities (Maina, 2022).

Technological Adaption and Innovation: Participants highlighted the importance of embracing digital systems, utilising data analytics, and exploring new technologies to enhance agility and efficiency (Bai, 2023; Khraim, 2022; Wamba, 2022).

Human Capital Development: Investing in continuous training and upskilling programs for employees is crucial for cultivating adaptability and innovation within organisations (Ngomane, 2023; Wairimu, 2023).

Customer-Centricity: Retailers recognised the need to adapt their business models to meet evolving customer needs and preferences, emphasising personalised services and customer satisfaction (Ngomane, 2023; Teke, 2022; Wairimu, 2023).

Interpreting these findings through the lens of the dynamic capabilities framework, these competencies enable organisations to sense, seize and transform in response to dynamic market conditions:

Sensing Opportunities: Leadership and market responsiveness enable organisations to identify emerging trends and potential threats (Panda, 2022).

Seizing Opportunities: Decisive decision-making processes and a consumer-centric approach allow organisations to take advantage of opportunities quickly and effectively (Maina, 2022; Shahul Hameed et al., 2022).

Transforming: Technological adaption and innovation, combined with human capital development, empower organisations to restructure their operations, resources and strategies to remain competitive (Bai, 2023; Khraim, 2022; Wamba, 2022).

These competencies are vital for South African wholesale and retail sector firms to navigate the challenges of a rapidly changing market and achieve sustainable performance.

7.5 Dynamic Capabilities Lens

7.5.1 Leadership Competence as a Dynamic Capability for Sensing and Shaping Opportunities

The dynamic capabilities framework highlights that effective leadership plays a crucial role in enabling companies to identify opportunities and threats, which is essential for maintaining agility in uncertain environments. South African retailers have encountered controversy by leaving gaps that other retailers have successfully exploited for profit. Retail leaders in South Africa have recognized this as a proactive leadership trait, aligning with Teece's (2007) perspective that firms must actively monitor and sense market dynamics.

As a result, leadership competency in South African retail firms is vital for implementing necessary strategic changes to stay competitive in volatile markets. This is achieved through strategic foresight and team motivation (Haas, 2019). Leadership agility allows these firms to navigate adverse effects while also enhancing long-term performance, particularly in the face of market shocks and growth opportunities.

7.5.2 Decisive Decision-Making as an Enabling Capability of Seizing Opportunities

Decision-making serves as a crucial capability for firms, allowing them to effectively respond to recognised opportunities. The interviewees were unanimous in highlighting the necessity for rapid and high-quality decision-making, particularly in times of crisis. As Teece (2007) points out, successfully 'seizing opportunities' hinges on timely and effective actions. In the South African retail industry, where unpredictable factors such as load shedding and supply chain constraints frequently arise, the ability to make swift decisions is vital to avoid disruptions in service delivery (Gao, 2016). By prioritising quick decision-making, businesses can enhance their operational responsiveness, seize emerging opportunities, and ultimately improve their strategic flexibility and overall performance.

7.5.3 Dynamics Capabilities' Reconfiguration Capabilities: Technological Adaptation and Innovation

Technological adaptation empowers companies to reconfigure their processes and enhance their capabilities, enabling them to respond more effectively and efficiently to changes in their external environment. Within the framework of dynamic capabilities, technological adaptation facilitates adjustments to sudden shifts, particularly prevalent in the retail sector, where the integration of digital technology has become crucial for customer interactions and supply chain management (Zheng, 2018). Several South African retailers have discovered that digital technologies enable them to track consumer behavior and supply chain dynamics in real-time, allowing them to respond more swiftly to market demands (Viswanadham, 2018). By adopting technology, South African firms can establish proactive systems that improve operational efficiency, thereby positioning themselves for competitiveness in the market through sustained performance.

7.5.4 Human Capital and Skills Development as Dynamic Learning Capabilities

Human capital, characterised by the proactive utilisation of skills, aligns with the notion of dynamic capabilities, as it cultivates the essential knowledge within an organisation necessary for developing adaptive strategies. Participants in the study emphasised that ongoing skills training and employee development empower teams to effectively navigate technological advancements and market fluctuations. As Teece (2007) points out, this adaptive capacity is vital for acquiring new knowledge that fuels innovation, which is increasingly crucial in the fast-paced retail sector. In the South African retail industry, where skilled personnel are fundamental to operational support and customer service, a strong emphasis on human capital enables firms to endure challenges and generate value, thereby enhancing their agility and overall performance (Jocevski et al., 2019)..

7.5.5 Market Responsiveness and Consumer-Centricity as the Sensing and Seizing Capabilities of the Firm

The concept of market responsiveness and consumer-centricity is crucial for firms aiming to identify and capitalise on evolving competitive opportunities driven by customer needs. In a consumer-driven market, this approach is particularly significant. Participants in the South African retail sector have underscored the importance of producing and customising products and services to meet consumer demands. Gao (2016) argues that this focus on consumer-centricity serves as a foundation for developing responsive business strategies.

To enhance their offerings, companies frequently employ customer surveys and conduct market analyses, enabling them to quickly refine their products or services, improve client retention, and strengthen their competitive positioning. From the perspective of dynamic capabilities, market responsiveness also enhances a firm's ability to adapt to shifts in consumer buying patterns while effectively organising its resources. This adaptability is essential for sustaining performance in a highly competitive retail landscape (Haas, 2019).

7.5.6 Strategic Agility as a Source for Performance in the Case of the South African Market

The integration of these competencies within the framework of dynamic capabilities demonstrates how strategic agility can enhance firm performance in the wholesale and retail sectors of South Africa. Companies leverage this framework to sense opportunities, seize them, and adapt effectively to a changing environment. South African firms cultivate a self-sustaining approach that enables their survival amid disruptions, economic fluctuations, and shifts in consumer behaviour. This model of adaptive leadership prioritises effective decision-making, technological innovation, skills development, and responsiveness to customer needs.

7.5.7 Dynamic Capabilities Summary

To summarise, South African wholesale and retail firms gain their strategic agility with the support of dynamic capabilities that enable them to:

Addressing the Challenges of Environmental Volatility: Organisations must navigate uncertainties by promptly adjusting their resource configurations and adapting their strategies to maintain resilience.

Improve Competitive Position: The timely recognition of consumer expectations and industry developments allows firms to combat segmentation and maintain loyalty.

Achieve Sustainability of Performance Over Time: Customer satisfaction, together with improvements and efficiency of operations, provides a competitive edge to firms in a saturated environment.

The aspect of aligning competencies with dynamic capabilities further indicates that strategic agility is especially important for achieving firm performance in the South African retail industry. In so doing, it can be said that the companies are able to leverage their competencies in relation to market opportunities and external threats, thereby enhancing both resilience and growth in the changing market conditions.

7.6 Recommendations

Based on the research findings, below are practically implementable recommendations for various actors in the South African wholesale and retail sector ecosystem.

For Retailers:

- *Invest in leadership development programs that foster strategic foresight, risk identification, and team motivation.* Effective leadership is a key driver of strategic agility. By equipping leaders with the necessary skills to anticipate change, identify and mitigate risks, and motivate their teams, retailers can enhance their ability to adapt to market shifts and maintain a competitive edge (Shahul Hammeed et al., 2022).
- *Implement decision-making processes that emphasise speed, collaboration and inclusivity, particularly in crises.* Quick and well-informed decision-making is crucial for seizing opportunities and limiting losses in a volatile environment (Panda, 2022). Incorporating collaborative decision-making enables diverse perspectives and reduces the risk of one-sided decisions (Wairimu, 2023).
- *Embrace technological adaptation and innovation by adopting digital systems, leveraging data analytics and exploring omnichannel strategies.* Technology is crucial in enhancing strategic agility (Khraim, 2022; Wamba, 2022). By integrating digital technologies, retailers can improve operational efficiency, gain valuable insights from data, and create seamless customer experiences across multiple channels (Bai, 2023).
- *Prioritise human capital development through continuous training and upskilling programs. Focus on fostering interpersonal skills and creativity.* A skilled and adaptable workforce is essential for successful strategic agility; by investing in human capital development, retailers can ensure their employees are equipped to navigate changing market dynamics and drive innovation (Ngomane, 2023; Teke, 2022).
- *Embrace a consumer-centric approach by tailoring products and services to meet evolving customer needs and preferences.* Understanding and responding to consumer demands is paramount in retail (Wairimu, 2023). By focusing on customer-centricity, retailers can build stronger relationships, increase loyalty and drive sales (Ngomane, 2023; Teke, 2022).

Policymakers: *Streamline regulatory frameworks to minimise compliance burdens and encourage agility among retailers.* Overly complex regulations can hinder a firm's ability to respond quickly to market changes (Maina, 2022). By simplifying the regulatory process, policymakers can create an environment that fosters greater agility and competitiveness (Pike-Bowles et al., 2024).

Government: *Invest in infrastructure development to enhance connectivity and access to essential services.* A robust infrastructure is crucial for supporting the smooth operation of businesses, especially in the retail sector. By investing in transportation, energy and digital infrastructure, the government can create a more enabling environment for retailers (Ngomane, 2023).

Financial Institutions: *Develop innovative financial products and services to support retailers' growth and adaptation.* Financial support is essential for retailers to implement agile strategies and navigate financial risks (Panda, 2022). By offering flexible loan options, investment opportunities and risk management tools, financial institutions can help retailers achieve sustainable growth (Maina, 2022).

Industry Associations: *Facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration among retailers to enable collective learning and innovation.* Collaboration and knowledge sharing can accelerate the development and implementation of agile strategies (Bai, 2023). By fostering partnerships and networks, industry associations can help retailers tap into collective expertise and overcome common challenges (Teke, 2022).

Technology Providers: *Develop tailored technology solutions that address the specific needs and challenges of the South African wholesale and retail sector.* Technology providers can play a significant role in enabling retail agility by creating solutions that are relevant to local contexts. By understanding the unique challenges South African wholesalers and retailers face, technology providers can develop customised solutions that enhance efficiency, data analysis and customer engagement (Bai, 2023; Khraim, 2022; Wamba, 2022).

7.7 Areas for Future Research

Long-Term Impact of Agility: While the study focuses on the benefits of agility, further research is needed to understand the long-term impact on firm performance and how to balance agility with long-term strategic planning and sustainability (Pike-Bowles et al., 2024).

Technology's Role: The study emphasises the importance of technology, but further exploration is required to examine the role of digital tools and platforms in enhancing agility within the South African context (Bai, 2023; Khraim, 2022; Wamba, 2022).

Measuring Agility: The study uses qualitative approaches; more empirical research is needed to develop robust methods for measuring and operationalising strategic agility in developing economies (Ngomane, 2023; Wairimku, 2023).

Cross-Sector Comparison: A comparative study across different sectors within the South African economy could provide further insights into the applicability and effectiveness of the identified competencies (Maina, 2022; Panda, 2022).

7.8 Study Limitations

This study, while offering valuable insights into strategic agility in the South African wholesale and retail sector, has limitations that must be considered when applying its findings to real-world decision-making:

Small Sample Size: The study relies on interviews with just 9 participants. This small sample size limits the generalisability of the findings to other organisations within the sector or even other sectors in South Africa (Lester et al., 2020).

Purposive Sampling: The study used purposive sampling, selecting participants based on their perceived expertise in strategic agility. This may introduce bias as the sample might not be as representative of the broader range of perspectives and experiences within the sector (Aspers & Corte, 2019).

Self-Reported Data: The study relies on self-reported data from participants, which can be influenced by social desirability or recall bias (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). Participants may have overestimated their organisation's agility or selectively remembered events that support their claims.

Focus on a Single Country: This study focuses solely on South Africa. While contextual factors in a developing country are addressed, the findings may not be directly transferable to other countries, even within the context of the developing country or the African continent (Azungah, 2018).

Lack of Quantitative Data: This study is entirely qualitative, relying on thematic analysis of interview transcripts. This approach could be augmented with quantitative data to provide statistical evidence to support the conclusions (Wood et al., 2020).

These limitations suggest caution when using the study's findings as the sole basis for decision-making. The findings serve as a valuable starting point for further exploration and investigation and should be complemented by additional research and context-specific analysis.

7.9 Study Conclusion

This study explores strategic agility in the South African context, focusing on its relevance in the context of the South African wholesale and retail sector. The research investigates contextual factors unique to South Africa, drivers and barriers to implementing agile strategies, and how organisations can overcome these barriers to improve firm performance. The study employs a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, to provide a deeper understanding of strategic agility and its relevance in the South African context. The findings can help organisations navigate complex and uncertain market conditions and improve their performance.

The study reveals that dynamic capabilities are crucial for achieving strategic agility for South African wholesale and retail businesses. These competencies include market responsiveness, consumer-centric strategies, data analytics, and collaborative responsiveness. Effective leadership, decisive decision-making,

technological adaptation, human capital development, and customer-centricity are essential for spotting opportunities, seizing opportunities, and transforming in response to dynamic market conditions. These competencies enable firms to adapt to market changes, resources, and customers, improving performance and coping with adverse effects. The study also highlights the importance of human capital development in fostering adaptability and innovation within organisations.

In the South African retail industry, decisive decision-making is crucial for firms to seize opportunities and improve strategic flexibility. Technological adaptation and innovation are essential for companies to adapt to external changes, such as integrating digital technology in customer interactions and supply chain management. Human capital and skills development are also dynamic learning capabilities, enabling firms to learn new knowledge and innovate. Market responsiveness and consumer-centricity help firms sense and seize competitive opportunities arising from customer needs. Strategic agility is a source of performance in the South African market, enabling firms to adapt to environmental volatility, improve their competitive position, and achieve performance sustainability over time. Aligning competencies with dynamic capabilities enhances resilience and growth in the changing market conditions.

The research suggests several recommendations for the South African wholesale and retail sector ecosystem. Retailers should invest in leadership development programs to foster strategic foresight, risk identification, and team motivation. Decision-making processes should be speedy, collaborative, and inclusive, especially in crises. Technology adoption and innovation should be embraced through digital systems, data analytics, and omni-channel strategies. Human capital development should be prioritised through continuous training and upskilling programs. A consumer-centric approach should be adopted, and policymakers should streamline regulatory frameworks to encourage agility. Government investment in infrastructure development is crucial for supporting businesses. Financial institutions should develop innovative products and services to support retailers' growth. Industry associations should facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration among retailers. Technology providers should develop tailored solutions that address local challenges. However, the study has limitations, such as a small sample size, purposive sampling, self-reported data, and a focus on a single country.

References

- Alhosseiny, H. M. (2023). The impact of strategic planning, strategic thinking, and strategic agility on competitive advantage: Literature review. *Academy of Strategic Management Journal*, 22(S2), 1–14.
- Arifin, S.R.M. (2018). Ethical considerations in qualitative study. *International Journal of Care Scholars*, 1(2), 30–33. <https://doi.org/10.31436/ijcs.v1i2.82>
- Arokodare, M. A. (2020). Strategic agility: Achieving superior organisational performance through strategic foresight. *Global Journal of Management and Business Research*, 20(A3), 7–16.
<https://gjmr.com/index.php/gjmr/article/view/1425>
- Aspers, P., & Corte, U. (2019). What is qualitative in qualitative research? *Qualitative Sociology*, 42(1), 139–160. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-019-9413-7>
- Aujirapongpan, S., Ru-Zhe, J., & Jutidharabongse, J. (2020). Strategic intuition capability toward the performance of entrepreneurs: Evidence from Thailand. *Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business*, 7(6), 465–473.
<https://doi.org/10.13106/jafeb.2020>
- Azungah, T. (2018). Qualitative research: deductive and inductive approaches to data analysis. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 18(4), 383–400.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-D-18-00035>
- Bai, B. (2023). Acquiring supply chain agility through information technology capability: the role of demand forecasting in retail industry. *Kybernetes*, 52(10), 4712–4730. <https://doi.org/10.1108/K-09-2021-0853>
- Barrett, D., & Twycross, A. (2018). Data collection in qualitative research. *Evidenced Based Nursing*, 22(3), 63–64. <https://doi.org/10.1136/eb-2018-102939>

- Bilińska-Reformat, K., Kucharska, B., & Twardzik, M. (2019). Sustainable development concept and creation of innovative business models by retail chains. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 47(1), 2-18. www.emeraldinsight.com/0959-0552.htm
- Birkinshaw, J. (2018). Becoming agile: How the SECI model of knowledge creation can help. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 59(4), 53–58.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Brough, P. (2019). *Advanced research methods for applied psychology. Design, analysis, and reporting*. 1st ed. New York: Routledge.
- Çakmak, Z. (2023). Adapting to Environmental Change: The Importance of Organisational Agility in the Business Landscape. *Florya Chronicles of Political Economy*, 9(1), 42–53. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/fcpe/issue/76881/1279251>
- Clauss, T., Abebe, M., Tangpong, C., & Hock, M. (2020). Strategic agility, business model innovation, and firm performance: An empirical investigation. *Engineering Management Journal*, 68(3), 767–784. <https://doi.org/10.1109/TEM.2019.2910381>
- Creswell, J.W., & Poth, C.N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Christofi, K., Chourides, P., & Papageorgiou, G. (2024). Cultivating strategic agility – An empirical investigation into best practice. *Global Business and Organizational Excellence* (43), 89–105 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/joe.22241>
- de Diego, E., & Almodóvar, P. (2022). Mapping research trends on strategic agility over the past 25 years: insights from a bibliometric approach. *European Journal of Management and Business Economics*, 31(2), 219–238. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJMBE-05-2021-0160>

- Doz, Y. L., & Kosonen, M. (2010). Embedding strategic agility: A leadership agenda for accelerating business model renewal. *Long Range Planning*, 43(2-3), 370–382. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2009.07.006>
- Eisenhardt, K. M., & Martin, J. A. (2000). Dynamic capabilities: what are they? *Strategic Management Journal*, 21(10-11), 1105–1121. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-0266\(200010/11\)21:10/11%3C1105::AID-SMJ133%3E3.0.CO;2-E](https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-0266(200010/11)21:10/11%3C1105::AID-SMJ133%3E3.0.CO;2-E)
- Eriksson, E., Norrman, A., & Kembro, J. (2022). Understanding the transformation toward omnichannel logistics in grocery retail: A dynamic capabilities perspective. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 50(8/9), 1095-1128.
- Ferraris, A., Santoro, G., Scuotto, V., (2018). Dual relational embeddedness and knowledge transfer in European multinational corporations and subsidiaries. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 24(3), 519–533. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JKM-09-2017-0407>
- Gao, J. (2016). The innovation trend research of retail business model in the Internet+ age. Atlantis Press.
- Ghuri, P., Gronhaug, K., & Strange, R. (2020). *Research methods in business studies*. 5th ed. Singapore: Cambridge University Press.
- Haas, Y. (2019). Developing a generic retail business model – a qualitative comparative study. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 47(10), 1029-1056. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJRDM-10-2018-0234>
- Haider, S. A., Tehseen, S., Khan, S., Mata, M. N., Martins, J. M., & Abreu, A. (2021). A literature review on agility: Is there a need to develop a new instrument? *International Journal of Entrepreneurship*, 25(4). <http://hdl.handle.net/10400.15/3502>
- Hazen, B. T., Bradley, R. V., Bell, J. E., In, J. & Byrd, T. A. (2017). Enterprise architecture: A competence-based approach to achieving agility and firm performance. *International Journal of Production Economics*. 193, 566–577

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S092552731730275X?via%3Dihub>

- Helfat, C. E., & Peteraf, M. A. (2015). Managerial cognitive capabilities and the microfoundations of dynamic capabilities. *Strategic Management Journal*, 36(6), 831–850. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.2247>
- Hennink, M., & Kaiser, B. N. (2022). Sample sizes for saturation in qualitative research: A systematic review of empirical tests. *Social Science & Medicine*, 292, 114523. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114523>
- Jaleha, A. A., & Machuki, V. N. (2018). Strategic leadership and organisational performance: A critical review of literature. *European Scientific Journal*, 14(35), 124–149. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Alex-Jaleha/publication/330435551_Strategic_Leadership_and_Organisational_Performance_A_Critical_Review_of_Literature/links/5e143b9792851c8364b5f8cf/Strategic-Leadership-and-Organisational-Performance-A-Critical-Review-of-Literature.pdf
- Jassem, S., Zakaria, Z. and Che Azmi, A. (2022), "Sustainability balanced scorecard architecture and environmental performance outcomes: a systematic review", *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, Vol. 71 No. 5, pp. 1728-1760. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPPM-12-2019-0582>
- Jocevski, M., Arvidsson, N., Miragliotta, G., Ghezzi, A. and Mangiaracina, R. (2019), "Transitions towards omni-channel retailing strategies: a business model perspective", *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, Vol. 47 No. 2, pp. 78-93. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJRDM-08-2018-0176>
- Khraim, H. (2022). The influence of technological innovative capabilities on firm performance: Moderating effect of strategic agility. *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, 20(2), 459–470. [http://dx.doi.org/10.21511/ppm.20\(2\).2022.38](http://dx.doi.org/10.21511/ppm.20(2).2022.38)
- Kiilu, P. M., Machuki, V. N., & Aosa, E. (2023). Strategic agility and organisational performance: A critical review of literature. *DBA Africa Management Review*, 13(1), 20–44. <https://uonjournals.uonbi.ac.ke/ojs/index.php/DBAAMR/article/view/1710>

- Lester, J. N., Cho, Y., & Lochmiller, C. R. (2020). Learning to do qualitative data analysis: a starting point. *Human Resource Development Review*, 19(1), 94–106. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484320903890>
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1986). But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation *New Directions for Program Evaluation* (pp. 73–84): Wiley Subscription Services, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ev.1427>
- Linneberg, M. S., & Korsgaard, S. (2019). Coding qualitative data: a synthesis guiding the novice. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 19(3), 259–270. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-12-2018-0012>
- Lungu, M. F. (2020). The influence of strategic agility on firm performance. In *Proceedings of the International Conference on Business Excellence* (Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 102–110). <https://sciendo.com/pdf/10.2478/picbe-2020-0011>
- Mahadevan, D., Paquette, C., Rashid, N., & Ustinov, E. (2019). *Building agile capabilities: The fuel to power your agile 'body'*. McKinsey & Company Organisation Practice. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organisational-performance/our-insights/building-agile-capabilities-the-fuel-to-power-your-agile-body>
- Maina, M. M. (2022). *The Influence of Strategic Agility on Competitive Advantage of Insurance Firms in Kenya*. Master's dissertation from the University of Nairobi. <http://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/bitstream/handle/11295/162561/MAINA%20The%20Influence%20of%20Strategic%20Agility%20on%20Competitive%20Advantage%20of%20Insurance%20Firms%20in%20Kenya.pdf?sequence=1>
- Morse, J. M. (2015). Critical analysis of strategies for determining rigour in qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Health Research*, 25(9), 1212–1222. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315588501>
- Mostaghel, R., Oghazi, P., Parida, V., & Sohrabpour, V. (2022). Digitalization driven retail business model innovation: Evaluation of past and avenues for future research trends. *Journal of Business Research*, 146, 134-145. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296322003095?via%3Dihub>

- Nejatian, M., Zarei, H., Ghatari, A. R., Azar A. & Khadivar, A. (2019). Paving the path toward strategic agility: A methodological perspective and an empirical investigation. *Journal of Enterprise Information Management*.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333678059_Paving_the_Path_toward_Strategic_Agility_A_Methodological_Perspective_and_an_Empirical_Investigation
- Neubauer, B. E., Witkop, C. T., & Varpio, L. (2019). How phenomenology can help us learn from the experiences of others. *Perspectives on Medical Education*, 8(2), 90–97. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40037-019-0509-2>
- Ngomane, S. R. (2023). *Supply chain strategy, flexibility and performance in the Gauteng fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry*. Master's dissertation from the Vaal University of Technology.
<http://digiresearch.vut.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10352/686/NGOMANE,%20Sikhulile%20Rhine%20-%2020214030776%20-%20Logistics.pdf?sequence=1>
- Nurjaman, R., Rahayu, A., Wibowo, L., & Widjajani, W. (2021). The role of strategic agility towards the firm performance of logistics service providers in Indonesia. *Management Science Letters*, 11(3), 965–974.
http://growingscience.com/msl/Vol11/msl_2020_349.pdf
- Panda, S. (2022). Strategic IT-business alignment capability and organizational performance: roles of organizational agility and environmental factors. *Journal of Asia Business Studies*, 16(1), 25–52. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JABS-09-2020-0371>
- Patricia, M. C. (2023). Sustainable retail financing in turbulent and difficult market conditions: A dynamic capability perspective. *Journal of Management and Entrepreneurship Research*, 4(1), 17-29.
- Pike-Bowles, A. P., Townes, J., & Chinyamurindi, W. (2024). The role of strategic flexibility and dynamic capabilities on family business performance. *Southern African Journal of Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management*, 16(1), 767. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-sajesbm_v16_n1_a767

- Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2016). Recommendations for creating better concept definitions in the organisational, behavioral, and social sciences. *Organisational Research Methods*, 19(2), 159–203.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428115624965>
- Prange, C., & Hennig, A. (2019). From Strategic Planning to Strategic Agility Patterns. *Journal of Creating Value*, 5(2), 111–123.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2394964319867778>
- Ravichandran, T. (2018). Exploring the relationships between IT competence, innovation capacity and organizational agility. *Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, 27, 22–42 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jsis.2017.07.002>
- Saunders, M. N. K., & Lewis, P. (2017). *Research Methods for Business Students*. Pearson Education.
- Shahul Hameed, N. S., Salamzadeh, Y., Abdul Rahim, N. F., & Salamzadeh, A. (2022). The impact of business process reengineering on organizational performance during the coronavirus pandemic: moderating role of strategic thinking. *Foresight*, 24(5), 637–655. <https://doi.org/10.1108/FS-02-2021-0036>
- Shams, R., Vrontis, D., Belyaeva, Z., Ferraris, A., & Czinkota, M. R. (2020). Strategic agility in international business: A conceptual framework for "agile" multinationals. *Journal of International Management*, 27(1), 100737.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intman.2020.100737>
- Solem, B. A., Fredriksen, J. I., & Sorebo, O. (2023). Dynamic capabilities in the realization of omnichannel retailing. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 51(1), 21-38.
<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/IJRDM-12-2021-0599/full/html>
- Sorescu, A., Frambach, R. T., Singh, J., Rangaswamy, A., & Bridges, C. (2011). Innovations in retail business models. *Journal of Retailing*, 87(S1), S3-S16.
<https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0022435911000340>

- Stadler, C., Helfat, C. E., & Verona, G. (2013). The impact of dynamic capabilities on resource access and development. *Organisation Science*, 24(6), 1782–1804. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1120.0810>
- Teece, D. J. (2018). Business models and dynamic capabilities. *Long Range Planning*, 51(1), 40–49. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2017.06.007>
- Teece, D. J., Pisano, G., & Shuen, A. (1997). Dynamic capabilities and strategic management. *Strategic Management Journal*, 18(7), 509–533. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1097-0266\(199708\)18:7%3C509::AID-SMJ882%3E3.0.CO;2-Z](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-0266(199708)18:7%3C509::AID-SMJ882%3E3.0.CO;2-Z)
- Teece, D., Peteraf, M., & Leih, S. (2016). Dynamic capabilities and organisational agility: Risk, uncertainty, and strategy in the innovation economy. *California Management Review*, 58(4), 13–35. <https://doi.org/10.1525/cmcr.2016.58.4.13>
- Teke, A. (2022). *An Index for Measuring Corporate Strategy and Supply Chain Performance in the Clothing Retail Sector*. Master's dissertation from the University of Johannesburg. <http://hdl.handle.net/102000/0002>
- Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight "big-tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837–851. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121>
- Tsilionis, K., & Wautelet, Y. (2022). A model-driven framework to support strategic agility: Value-added perspective. *Information and Software Technology*, 141, 106734. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infsof.2021.106734>
- Viswanadham, N. (2018). Global logistics and supply chain strategies for the 2020s. *International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management*, 48(9), 915–936. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-95764-3>
- Wairimu, D. M. (2023). *Relationship between Dynamic Supply Chain Capabilities and Resilience of Retail Chain of Stores in Kenya*. Doctoral dissertation from Jomo Kenyatta University. <http://ir.jkuat.ac.ke/bitstream/handle/123456789/6196/Wairimu%2C%20Desmond%20Mwangi%2C%20PhD%20SCM%2C%202023.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

- Walter, A. T. (2020). Organisational agility: ill-defined and somewhat confusing? A systematic literature review and conceptualization. *Management Review Quarterly*, 71(2), 343–391. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-020-00186-6>
- Wamba, S. F. (2022). Impact of artificial intelligence assimilation on firm performance: The mediating effects of organizational agility and customer agility. *International Journal of Information Management*, 67, 102544. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2022.102544>
- Wang, C. L., He, J., & Mahoney, J. T. (2021). Firm-specific knowledge resources and competitive advantage: The roles of economic- and relationship-based employee governance mechanisms. *Strategic Management Journal*, 30(12), 1265–1285. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.787>
- Widjajani, & Nurjaman, R. (2020). The Framework of Strategic Agility in Small and Medium Enterprise. *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*. <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1742-6596/1477/5/052034/pdf>
- Williamson, O. E. (1999). Strategy research: governance and competence perspectives. *Strategic Management Journal*, 20(12), 1087–1108. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1097-0266\(199912\)20:12%3C1087::AID-SMJ71%3E3.0.CO;2-Z](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-0266(199912)20:12%3C1087::AID-SMJ71%3E3.0.CO;2-Z)
- Wong, L., Gerras, S., Kidd, W., Pricone, R. and Swengros, R. (2003). Strategic leadership competencies. *Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College*. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11719>
- Wood, L. M., Sebar, B., & Vecchio, N. (2020). Application of rigour and credibility in qualitative document analysis: lessons learnt from a case study. *The Qualitative Report*, 25(2), 456–470. <https://research-epository.griffith.edu.au/bitstream/handle/10072/394518/Wood382374-Published.pdf?sequence=5>
- Young, M. (2019). The spectrum of inductive and deductive research approaches using quantitative and qualitative data. *Academic Medicine*, 95(1), 1122. <https://doi.org/10.1097/ACM.0000000000003101>

- Zafari, H. (2017). *Marketing strategies to enhance profitability among international oil and gas service companies*. Walden University.
- Zhang, H., & Chiang, J. M. H. (2024). Influencing factors of business model innovation of China's retail industry. *International Journal of Global Business*, 17(2), 7-22.
<https://www.proquest.com/openview/53c25e282a9d20cd390fe8bee0b921a1/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=2032032>
- Zheng, B. (2018). Research on the platform-based retail business model innovation. *China Finance and Economic Review*.
- Zukauskas, P., Vveinhardt, J., & Andriukaitiene, R. (2018). Philosophy and paradigm of scientific research. *Management Culture and Corporate Social Responsibility*, 1(1), 121–139. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.70628>
- Zulganef, Z., Pratminingsih, S. A., & Rianawati, A. (2022). Leveraging strategic intuition to reach firm performance: the role of entrepreneurial agility and environmental dynamism. *Jurnal Siasat Bisnis*, 27(1), 49–60.
<https://doi.org/10.20885/jsb.vol27.iss1.art4>
- Zulkifli, M. (2022). A Strategic Agility Framework: Critical Review on Competitive Dynamics of Oil & Gas Sector in Indonesia. *International Journal of Business, Economics and Law*, 26(1), 300–311. https://ijbel.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/IJBEL26.ISU1_281.pdf

List of Appendices

APPENDIX A	Informed consent Form
APPENDIX B	Instrument (Interview Guide)
APPENDIX B	Ethics Approval
APPENDIX C	List of Codes

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form



Dear Interviewee

RE: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

I am currently a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science and completing my research in partial fulfilment of an MBA.

I am conducting research on Competencies for strategic agility that enable sustained firm performance and am trying to find out from personal experiences of senior managers and executives in the South African wholesale and retail sector. Our interview is expected to last about an hour and will help us understand which competencies for strategic agility are considered by South African senior managers and executives in the wholesale and retail sector as enablers of sustained firm performance.

Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. All data will be reported without identifiers. If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

Researcher name: Mqhele Mlotshwa

Email: mqmlotshwa@gmail.com

Researcher's Phone: +2781 278 6791

Research Supervisor Name: Prof Johan Olivier

Email: Olivierjo@gibs.co.za

Supervisor's Phone: +2783 452 5539

Signature of participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B: Instrument (Interview Guide)

Introduction: Brief introduction of the interviewer and the study's purpose. Assure confidentiality and request consent to record the interview for research purposes in accordance with the University of Pretoria research rules. Also sign the consent form.

About The Participant:

Can you tell me key roles you have occupied in the wholesale and retail businesses?

How many years of work experience do you have at a strategic level?

Understanding of Strategic Agility

Can you describe how strategic agility is reflected in your organisational practices?

Strategic Agility and Organizational Performance

Can you give examples where strategic agility has notably influenced firm performance based on your experience?

Contextual Factors Affecting Strategic Agility (RQ1)

What unique factors in the South African wholesale and retail business affect the ability of businesses to remain agile?

How do these factors specifically impact strategic decision-making and agility in your organisation?

Competencies and Barriers of Strategic Agility (RQ2)

In your experience, what are the main competencies necessary for strategic agility?

What barriers have you encountered in trying to implement strategic agility practices?

Overcoming Barriers to Improve Performance (RQ3)

What strategies have you employed to overcome these barriers to strategic agility?

What lessons have you learned from trying to enhance strategic agility in the wholesale and retail businesses?

Future Perspectives

Looking forward, how do you see the concept of strategic agility evolving within wholesale and retail businesses in South Africa?

Closing Questions

Is there anything else you'd like to add that we haven't covered, which you think is important to understanding strategic agility in the context of South Africa?

Closing

Thank the interviewee for their time and insights.

Explain the next steps and how the information will be used.

Provide contact information for any follow-up questions or additional comments they might have after the interview.

Appendix C: Ethics Approval

**Gordon Institute
of Business Science**
University of Pretoria

**Ethical Clearance
Approved**

Dear Mqhele Mlotshwa,

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.

You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.

We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

[Ethical Clearance Form](#)

Kind Regards

This email has been sent from an unmonitored email account. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the GIBS Research Admin team.

The detailed ethics approval will be uploaded separately with the research submission to Gibs.

Appendix D: List of Codes

1.	Understanding of strategic agility and organisational performance	Dynamic, continuous change, PESTEL analysis, threats, pro-activeness, opportunities, risk management, decisiveness, growth, market share, profitability, customer retention, customer satisfaction
RQ1	Contextual Factors	Regulation, resources, capital, technology adoption, big data analytics, inequality, unemployment, crime, affordability, logistics, supply chain disruptions
RQ2	Competencies & Barriers	Leadership competency, innovation, risk management, decision-making, decisiveness, implementation, customer knowledge, human capital, mentoring, change management, customer centricity, product innovation, collaboration
RQ3	Improve Performance	Product availability, cost management, customer satisfaction, profitability, logistics, flexible supply chains
2	Future Perspectives	Innovation and tech, self-check-out, virtual shopping, supply chain integration, product skimming, smaller packaging, narrow product lines