



# Strategic Flexibility and Corporate Resilience of Food and Beverage Firms in Rivers State

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between strategic flexibility and corporate resilience of food and beverage firms in Rivers State. The study used a cross-sectional research design. This study's population consisted of all Rivers State food and beverage businesses. There are seventeen (17) registered food and beverage businesses in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria, according to a survey conducted by the Manufacturing Association of Nigeria (MAN) Rivers State branch. 115 managers from three distinct food and beverage companies plant managers, depot managers, trade managers, and commercial managers made up the population. Using the Taro Yamane sample size determination formula, an 89-person sample was chosen. Spearman Rank Order Correlation Co-efficient was used to analyze and test the formulated hypotheses. Results showed that strategic flexibility correlates more significantly to corporate resilience in relation to other variables under-studied. In conclusion, strategic flexibility in terms of operational flexibility and human resource flexibility is a key factor in organization that is relevant in boosting the firm's resilience. It was recommended that the management of the food and beverages firms should inculcate flexibility in their operation as such will help enhance the firm's resilience.

**Key words:** Strategic Flexibility, Corporate Resilience, Operational Flexibility, Human Resource Flexibility, Agility, Adaptive capability

## Introduction

Businesses have developed and renewed their capacities to achieve sustainable success as a result of the volatile and competitive business environment. Strategic leadership and flexibility are organizational traits that can help businesses fully utilize their essential resources to produce long-term success. Due to shifting consumer tastes and preferences, fierce rivalry, globalization, and advanced technology, the business environment has grown more complex. Therefore, businesses must be quick and adaptable to successfully traverse this dynamic commercial climate (Nwachukwu, Hieu, Chladkova and Fadeyi, 2019; Brozovic, 2018). The food and beverage industry is a major contributor to the Nigerian economy, estimated to contribute more than 10% to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and billions of dollars in taxes. It might be argued that strategic flexibility is a dynamic capacity that allows a company to choose and modify its strategic actions and effectively allocate resources (Ahmadi and Osman, 2017). To deal with environmental volatility and change, firms must adopt a flexible approach to strategic decision-making. Firms that are proactive can assess their surroundings and take advantage of outside opportunities before rival companies. By being strategically adaptable, businesses may maximize their learning and innovation processes and quickly change with the environment.

However, existing literature emphasizes the significance of strategic flexibility in several situations, such as modular product design (Sanchez, 1995), organizational structures, and others (Schilling and Steensma, 2001). According to other studies, strategic adaptability and business performance in dynamic contexts are related (Combe et al., 2012; Sushil, 2015; Nandakumar et al., 2014). These studies focused on a variety of topics, including financial performance

(Combe et al., 2012; Verd'u-Jover et al., 2014); competitive advantage (Nandakumar et al., 2014); product innovation outputs (Li et al., 2010); innovation performance (Tamayo-Torres et al., 2010).

Resilience, which is a network of components both inside and external to the organization, is what allows the organization to survive. Organizations with a high capacity for resilience to endure the impermanent character of the commercial environment have prospered over time. A resilient business can anticipate, prepare for, and respond to unforeseen circumstances, giving them an advantage over rivals in the marketplace. Any business that lacks resilience may not be able to recover from unforeseen disruptions or quickly enough to meet rapid changes in customer demand or regulatory requirements. Consistent with the above statement, Onyokoko and Onuoha (2021) argued that only this is true. Resilient businesses are most likely to persist in highly competitive industries. Annarelli and Nonino (2016) postulated that the lack of corporate resilience makes it very difficult for businesses to operate efficiently when faced with high levels of competitiveness and uncertainty in the industry. Similarly, according to Rexhepi and Modenesi (2016), organizational resilience is an organization's ability to cope with catastrophes as well as its capability to respond to unexpected disruptions. In line with the succeeding statements, resilient organizations gain advantage through enhanced internal and external adaptation.

Several major challenges facing smooth operations were identified resulting in food and beverage manufacturers suffering from significant financial burdens, low revenues and high employee turnover. The corporate environment may be beyond the organization's control, but the organization's actions and actions are considered its own responsibility. Therefore, food and beverage manufacturers are expected to be willing to be strategically flexible in their business, service and market involvement. Over the years, several empirical studies have been conducted by academics to explore ways to improve strategic flexibility and corporate resilience (Osita-Ejikeme, & Amah, 2022; Sylva & Umoh, 2018; Corrales-Estrada et al, 2021; Akpan, Johnny, & Sylva, 2019). Despite the work done by scholars, there is still a shortage of work that explores how strategic flexibility relates with corporate resilience in food and beverage firms in Rivers State.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The specific objectives are to examine the relationship between:

1. Operational flexibility and corporate resilience.
2. Human reference and corporate resilience.

### **Research Hypotheses**

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between operational flexibility and agility of food and beverage firms in Rivers State

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant relationship between operational flexibility and adaptive capability of food and beverage firms in Rivers State

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant relationship between human resource flexibility and agility of food and beverage firms in Rivers State

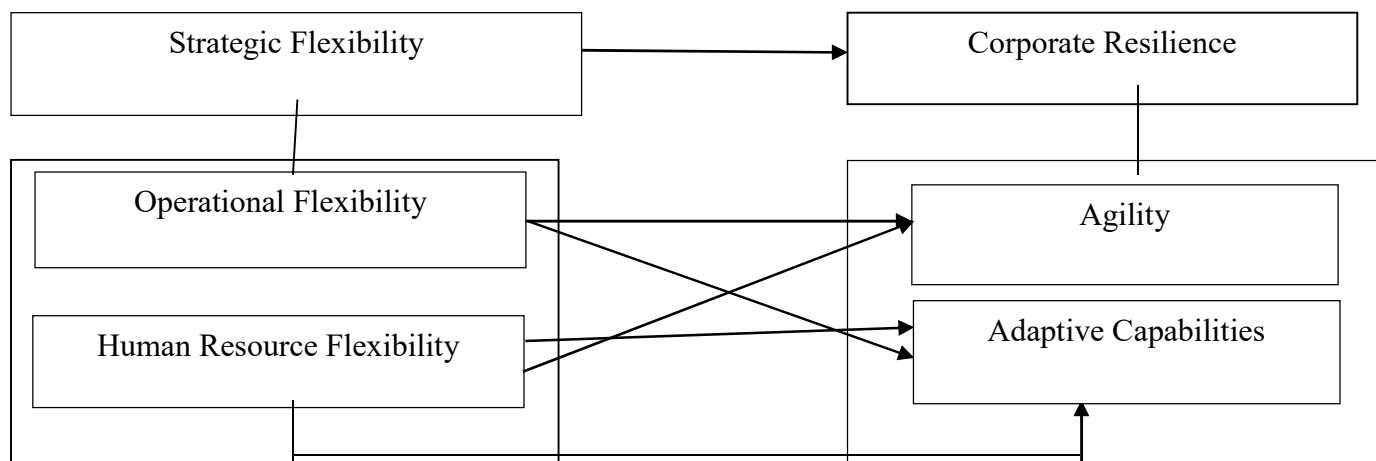
H<sub>04</sub>: There is no significant relationship between human resource flexibility and adaptive capability of food and beverage firms in Rivers State

### **Review of Related Literature**

This study was based on the contingency theory of leadership and organizational structure proposed by Fiedler (1964). This was the earliest and most extensive study. This theory postulated that group performance rest on the psychological orientation of the leader and several circumstantial variables such as the size of the organization, the

technology used, leadership style, and adaptation to changes in strategy (Flinsch-Rodriguez, 2017). The underlying assumption on which the concept is built is that no single type of organizational structure fits all organizations equally (Islam & Hu, 2012). Instead, the best sequence of action for organizational performance depends on prevailing internal and external circumstances. In other words, this theory postulates that organizational performance is the contingency of the fit or agreement between two or more variables (Donaldson, 2001). This theory is more concerned with functionalist views of organizational structure (Reid & Smith, 2000; Woods, 2009). In summary, this theory fundamentally consists of accidental variables (situational characteristics), response variables (organizational or managerial actions required to adapt to changing circumstances), and performance variables (influencing We have focused on certain aspects of performance that are likely fit between accidental variables, and measures of response variables to local conditions).

### Operational framework



**Fig. 1.1:** Operational Framework of Strategic Flexibility and Corporate Resilience

**Source:** Dimensions of Strategic Flexibility Adapted from Beach, Mahlemann, Price, Patterson and Sharp (2000), and Measures of Corporate Resilience adapted from Annarelli, Battistella and Nonino (2019).

### Strategic Flexibility

Strategic flexibility enables companies to anticipate and respond to important changes in the environment (Grewal & Tansuhaj, 2001), eliminate organizational inertia, and stimulate creativity and innovation (Zhou & Wu, 2010). Strategic flexibility can therefore affect a company's performance. Strategic flexibility refers to an organization's ability to recognize environmental dynamics and rapidly procure resources to launch new operations in response to those dynamics (Dehghan-Dehnavi & Nadafi, 2010). Strategic flexibility refers to an organization's ability to respond to uncertainty with the information and capabilities it possesses while pursuing goals through continuous development (Eryesil, Esmen & Beduk, 2015). It is a company's ability to adapt to the many demands imposed by a dynamic competitive landscape.

According to Shimizu and Hitt (2004), strategic flexibility means recognizing significant changes in the external environment, quickly allocating resources to new courses of action, and responding quickly when suspending or reversing commitments of such resources. It is a solid capability to respond to a strategically flexible company can model, shape, and change its environment to gain and maintain competitive advantage (Brozovic, 2018). Strategically flexible firms take strategic actions and acclimatize to changes in their external and internal business environment (Nadkarni and Narayanan, 2007). Strategic flexibility describes a range of strategic actions and the

speed at which firms can take advantage of these strategic options (Sushil, 2012; Nadkarni and Narayanan, 2007). Businesses need flexibility of actions and flexibility of assets to remain competitive and achieve their strategic goals.

### **Operational Flexibility**

An organization's capacity to react either pro-actively or defensively to business environment uncertainty is referred to as operational flexibility. According to Stevenson & Spring (2007), this capability entails a sum of variables whose significance varies depending on the context. According to Golden & Powell (2000), operational flexibility in the subunit is centered internally, on the participants and resources required to deal with changes that frequently cause brief shifts in the subunit's activity level. Integrative processes that permit the response to a large number of operating variables (such as scheduling, sequencing, and planning) are compatible with operational flexibility. An organization's capability to adjust to change is referred to as operational flexibility. The current structures or aims of the organization serve as the foundation for routine management or operational flexibility. According to manufacturing-based research (Dubey et al., 2019; Srinivasan and Swink, 2018), businesses need to operate more flexibly in order to effectively respond to volatile and dynamic markets.

### **Human Resource Flexibility**

There are two dimensions of HR flexibility: Flexibility in coordination and resource availability (Way et al., 2015). According to Sanchez & Heene (1997), resource flexibility is the degree to which an organization's resource can be utilized in a diversity of contexts and for various purposes. Two aspects of resource flexibility are as follows: resource flexibility in employee skills and behaviors that assist employees in amending to new work roles, as well as resource flexibility in HR practices that assist in the development of and reward for such behavioral and skill flexibility (Wright & Snell, 1998). On the other hand, coordination flexibility refers to an organization's capacity to acquire and utilize resources promptly to achieve its strategic objectives (Sanchez & Heene, 1997). Two aspects of coordination flexibility exist: coordination flexibility in HR practices (i.e., adaptability of HR practices) and coordination flexibility in employee skills and behaviors (i.e., assignability of employees with skill and behavioral flexibility to new work roles). As a result, employees may view HR flexibility as a resource (Way et al., 2018) from which they can build their collections of resources to provide customer service (Luu, 2016), such as by creating jobs (Luu, 2019).

### **Corporate Resilience**

The term "resilience" as a formal organizational framework is still relatively new. Although its academic use is increasing. As you plan for potential hurdles such as costs, commitments, and cultural change, remember that you need to be prepared to face them all. It should consist of all the core elements necessary for effective and efficient business management that is aware of the ongoing risks and vulnerabilities that exist (Stephenson et al. 2010). The concept of resilience is, in some ways, very simple. In other words, achieving the organization's fundamental goals regardless of the adversity that may come before or after it. The concepts of awareness, cognition, communication, response, recovery, and the desire and ability to adapt to changing environments are all traits often associated with the concept of resilience (McAslan 2010). A resilient organization can survive disruptions and stressors by resisting and adapting to them. Make basic services available in the face of disruption and recover when the disruption is over (Practical Action 2010). The resilience of firms to corrections and rebounds is best illustrated by groups of firms that exhibit not only exceptional recoveries but also transformative behavior (Maguire & Cartwright 2008). In this framework, resilience can be defined as the ability to "return the system to its pre-incident state." As your organization returns to its pre-incident state, it will be subject to the following disruptions: When resilience is considered in terms of renewal, regeneration and restructuring, we are talking about transformation-based resilience (Folke 2006).

### **Agility**

A company's agility, according to Van Oosterhout, Waarts, and Van Hillegersberg (2006), enables it to rapidly alter its operations and procedures in addition to the usual flexibility required to manage unexpected internal and

external shifts. According to Sambamurthy, Bharadwaj, and Grover (2003), agility is a company's capacity to identify opportunities and threats, gather the resources and expertise necessary to launch an effective response, estimate its benefits and risks, and take competitively quick action. Agility, according to Worley, Williams, and Lawler (2014), is an organization's capacity for swift, effective, and long-lasting change. It can be used again and again in an organization. The ability to adapt to unanticipated (or unanticipated) changes in proactive and responsive business and customer needs and opportunities in a timely, effective, and accurate manner without sacrificing the quality or cost of the product or process is referred to as agility. The variety of approaches taken to achieve success is referred to as agility.

### **Adaptive Capabilities**

The term "adaptable capability" (AC) refers to a company's capacity to recognize and take advantage of fresh market possibilities (Wang & Ahmed, 2007). According to Staber and Sydow (2002), adaptive capacity includes more than just identifying and reengineering the market need and utilizing the company's resources. It also includes taking advantage of the need in the market and utilizing existing resources. According to Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004), a review of previous studies reveals that adaptive capability is quick and effective at reconfiguring, coordinating, recombining, and allocating resources to address market fluctuations. A latent trait of individuals, communities, as well as social-ecological systems is a trait known as "adaptive capacity," which is acquired by responding to a crisis or chance (Engle, 2011). A social-ecological system, group, or individual with a high capacity for adaptation is more resilient and better able to maintain a preferred state or negotiate a positive shift (Folke, 2006). Gupta et al., (2010) from a sociocultural point of view, defined adaptive capability as the qualities of social actors' institutions that enable them to respond

### **Empirical Review**

It is possible to predict, to a large extent, manufacturing companies' rapid, continuous, and systematic evolutionary adaptation in addition to their entrepreneurial innovation aimed at gaining and maintaining a competitive advantage by using their capacity to change their technology and consumer orientation dynamically as a result of environmental requirements (Onyokoko & Needorn, 2021). However, it appears that adaptability encompasses much more than strategy implementation (Baba & Nwuche, 2021). As the environment changes, opportunities may appear out of the blue, necessitating a list of responses that were ignored previously because they were irrelevant to the current requests. According to Stohr & Muehlen (2008), in such instances, operational flexibility is required to modify existing procedures to respond to non-transient environmental changes.

Pradhan, Kumari, and Kumar (2017) conducted a case study on an HR consulting firm to investigate the effects of HR flexibility on company efficiency. They also looked at the indirect connection between organizational success and HR flexibility, including organizational citizenship behavior. Using survey data gathered from 350 randomly selected executive respondents from various manufacturing industries of public sector organizations in India, the study demonstrated a significant effect of HR flexibility on organizational effectiveness. According to the study's findings, the relationship between HR flexibility and business efficiency is directly and significantly influenced by organizational citizenship, or "citizenship." Companies that want their management to have a positive impact on individuals and society in order to improve business efficiency will face significant consequences from the results. The study also says that HR flexibility is necessary for any business to be able to quickly respond to global business needs. Utilizing HR flexibility, businesses are under pressure to maximize profits at the lowest possible cost to their HR departments.

In the context of the organization, Kaehler, Busatto, Becker, Hansen, and Santos (2014) looked into the connection between strategic orientations and adaptable capabilities. An empirical survey of 160 employees was carried out at a company that provides marine services in Brazil. The findings indicate that adaptability abilities are positively correlated with all strategic orientation characteristics. According to the findings, a company's adaptability is influenced by its strategic guidelines, and respondents' perceptions of the company's dynamic potential are

correlated with the adaptability of their business organization. A study was done by Alibakhshi and Mahmoudi (2016) to see if there were any connections between these factors, the flexibility rate for human resources, and a number of performance indices at Tehran Medical Sciences University hospitals. In 2015, this section-specific research was used to gather information for a descriptive paper. 318 people from Tehran Medical Sciences University's hospital patients were selected through stratified random sampling and assigned to a particular statistical group. To calculate toll-collecting revenues, the data set consisted of the flexibility Wright & Snell human resource questionnaire and the hospital performance index. The software SPSS 18, which makes use of linear regression analysis and descriptive statistical indices, was used to conduct a statistical study. With a score of 4.16, it was demonstrated that the flexibility of the resources (human resources) was excellent. The average total flexibility decreased by 0.64 units for each additional unit of circulation area due to the significant connection between total flexibility and the bed circulation index (p-value 0.05). Staff resources at Tehran Medical Sciences University Hospitals were found to be highly adaptable, which suggested that human resource management policies aimed at improving hospitals' performance and status should be considered by governments and policymakers.

### Methodology

The study used a cross-sectional research design. Using a self-administered, structured questionnaire, primary data were gathered. The study adopted a cross-sectional research design. This study's population entailed all Rivers State food and beverage businesses. There are seventeen (17) registered food and beverage businesses in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria, according to a survey conducted by the Manufacturing Association of Nigeria (MAN) Rivers State branch. 115 managers from three distinct food and beverage companies plant managers, depot managers, trade managers, and commercial managers made up the population. Using the Taro Yamane sample size determination formula, an 89-person sample was chosen. Spearman Rank Order Correlation Co-efficient was used to analyze and test the formulated hypotheses.

### Data Analysis and Result

In this section, we present and analyse empirical data which has been collected through questionnaire survey. We also look at the reliability of measures. After that, the calculation of the correlation between measures of ease-of retrieval and automatic input in judgment are presented and analysed, this will follow the presentation and analysis of hypothesis testing which determined whether the hypotheses for this study is accepted or rejected.

**Table 1 Correlation Between Operational Flexibility and Measures of Corporate Resilience**

			operational flexibility	Agility	Adaptive capability
Spearman's rho	operational flexibility	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.970**	.988**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	89	89	89
	Agility	Correlation Coefficient	.970**	1.000	.968**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	89	89	89
	Adaptive capability	Correlation Coefficient	.988**	.968**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	89	89	89

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The test of hypothesis one, as shown in the table above, the SPSS output reveals that Significant level (Sig) = 0.000 which implies that (Sig<0.01) while Spearman Correlation coefficient (rho) = (0.970, 0.988) also indicates that operational flexibility has strong and positive correlation with corporate resilience. We therefore reject the Null hypotheses and accept the alternative hypotheses which state that there is a significant relationship between operational flexibility and corporate resilience of food and beverage firms in Rivers State.

**Table 2 Correlation between human resource flexibility and corporate resilience**

			human resource flexibility	Agility	Adaptive capability
Spearman's rho	human resource flexibility	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.991**	.964**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	89	89	89
	Agility	Correlation Coefficient	.991**	1.000	.968**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	89	89	89
	Adaptive capability	Correlation Coefficient	.964**	.968**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	89	89	89

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The test of hypothesis two, as shown in the Table above, the SPSS output reveals that Significant level (Sig) = 0.000 which implies that (Sig<0.01) while Spearman Correlation coefficient (rho) = (0.991, 0.964) also indicates that human resource flexibility has strong and positive correlation with corporate resilience. We therefore reject the Null hypotheses and accept the alternative hypotheses which state that there is a significant relationship between human resource flexibility and corporate resilience of food and beverage firms in Rivers State.

#### **Discussion of Findings**

Based on the results generated via all the hypotheses, it showed that there exist a significant and positive correlation between the variables under study since their correlations from the SPSS table were 0.970, 0.988, 0.991 and 0.964 for the hypotheses in hypothesis one, two, three and four respectively. From the result, it was apparent that all the dimensions of strategic flexibility had positive correlation with corporate resilience of food and beverage firms in Rivers State. It is worth noted that these positive correlations cut across all the measures attributed to the variables which are found to be at different levels. Thus:

The first and second hypothesis indicated that operational flexibility has a positive linear notable correlation with corporate resilience based on the P-value less than 0.05 (P-value = 0.000 <0.05) which implies that both variables have direct positive relationship which moves in the same positive direction. The third and fourth hypothesis showed that human resource flexibility has a positive linear notable correlation with corporate resilience based on the P-value less than 0.05 (P-value = 0.000 <0.05) which implies that both variables have direct positive relationship which moves in the same positive direction. The findings conforms to the findings of Pradhan, Kumari, and Kumar (2017) and Kaehler, Busatto, Becker, Hansen, and Santos (2014) as the both studies investigated the relationship between HR flexibility on company efficiency and strategic orientations and adaptable capabilities respectively.

#### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The empirical findings of this study demonstrate that the model's employed dimensions of strategic flexibility significantly improved the adaptive capability and agility of corporate resilience. Human resource flexibility and



operational flexibility, on the other hand, have less of an effect on the target variable, while strategic flexibility has more power to explain agility. The main theoretical implication of this work is that different levels of corporate resilience require varying degrees of strategic flexibility in a competitive business environment. As a result, the study's findings indicate that practitioners, managers, supervisors, and unit heads must comprehend how to cultivate the appropriate structural and human resource flexibility to boost corporate resilience. The study also makes it abundantly clear that practitioners must incorporate a structural flexibility strategy as a crucial catalyst for corporate resilience, particularly in turbulent times. Therefore, in order for practitioners to perform well, they ought to also be aware of the requirement for flexibility in human resources in a competitive business environment. Conclusively, strategic flexibility in terms of operational flexibility and human resource flexibility is a key factor in organization that is relevant in boosting the firm's resilience. In view of our findings, we recommend that;

- i. The management of the food and beverages firms should inculcate flexibility in their operation as such will help enhance the firm's resilience.
- ii. Competitive market strategies should be industrialized by food and beverage firm through emphasizing business agility, sensing and responding capabilities, and the ability to quickly identify new market opportunities.
- iii. Processes for managing human resources should be improved in food and beverage firms so that
- iv. they can offer customers more products at a lower cost and then enhance the firms resilience.
- v. The human resource of the organization should display both skills and behavioural flexibility as such will help enhance the firm's resilience.

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