

Embedding SWOT Across Strategy Processes, Levels, and Implementation

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Abstract

In contemporary strategic management, integrating SWOT analysis—strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats—across the formulation and implementation spectrum presents an evolving challenge and opportunity. This paper critically examines the integration of SWOT within the processual, hierarchical, and executional dimensions of strategic management. By combining theoretical exploration with a qualitative synthesis of current literature, this study unveils how SWOT contributes not only to environmental scanning but also to shaping dynamic strategy frameworks. Drawing on Schermerhorn's (2019) management principles and Porter's competitive advantage model, we analyze how SWOT's embeddedness in all strategic levels—corporate, business, and functional—enhances strategic coherence and responsiveness. The study reveals that while SWOT offers simplicity and accessibility, its strategic utility hinges on alignment with organizational vision and adaptive feedback loops. Moreover, SWOT's integration at the implementation stage enables firms to respond to turbulence with agility and resource alignment. This paper fills a critical gap by thematically bridging conceptual models and practical strategy execution. It concludes with implications for managers seeking adaptive, insight-driven strategic pathways and recommends a reflexive approach to integrating SWOT across organizational decision-making strata.

Keywords

SWOT analysis; strategic alignment; strategic process; organizational strategy; strategic levels

INTRODUCTION

Strategic management continues to evolve in response to increasingly dynamic, complex, and globalized business environments. As organizations confront uncertainty, turbulence, and digital disruption, the demand for robust, adaptable frameworks becomes paramount. One such tool—SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats)—has persisted across decades due to its conceptual simplicity and diagnostic power (Gurel & Tat, 2017).

Although widely used, SWOT's effectiveness is often constrained by its application in isolation from broader strategic frameworks. Thus, there is growing scholarly interest in understanding how SWOT can be systematically embedded across the strategic management process, spanning formulation, implementation, and evaluation (Hill, Jones, & Schilling, 2021). Schermerhorn (2019, p. 224) emphasizes that strategic success is not merely about planning but also about integrating insights across organizational levels and processes. Therefore, this study critically evaluates how SWOT can be integrated at various levels and phases of strategic decision-making.

The contemporary strategic landscape is shaped by multifactorial forces including digital transformation, stakeholder capitalism, and sustainable development goals. These challenges demand not only vision but also alignment between strategic intent and action across organizational hierarchies. Traditional hierarchical models are giving way to more fluid, decentralized systems that prioritize strategic agility and contextual responsiveness (Grant, 2021).

Within this paradigm, SWOT's structured yet flexible nature makes it a valuable tool—provided it is interwoven with a comprehensive understanding of internal and external dynamics. This paper builds on existing models while exploring how SWOT can support organizations in aligning strategic levels—from corporate to operational—with overarching business objectives (Wheelen, Hunger, Hoffman, & Bamford, 2018). It interrogates both theoretical insights and managerial practices, aiming to identify practical paths for SWOT integration across strategy processes.

Existing literature underscores the enduring appeal of SWOT as a heuristic model but also highlights its limitations, including subjectivity and a lack of prioritization mechanisms (Valentin, 2001). These critiques point to a broader theoretical gap—how SWOT can be operationalized to bridge strategic analysis and execution. Empirical studies have noted that SWOT often informs planning but is rarely integrated into strategy implementation (Panagiotou, 2003).

Furthermore, few studies systematically examine how SWOT contributes across strategic levels or how it evolves alongside other managerial tools such as PESTEL, BCG matrix, or Porter's five forces. This paper responds to these gaps by offering a thematic framework for embedding SWOT into strategic processes and organizational levels, emphasizing iterative learning and contextual alignment (David, David, & David, 2017).

From a theoretical standpoint, the integration of SWOT aligns with systems theory, contingency theory, and dynamic capabilities perspectives, all of which prioritize adaptability and contextual fit (Teece, Peteraf, & Leih, 2016). Strategically, it supports Schermerhorn's (2019, p. 225) view that effective strategy implementation demands inter-level coordination and continuous feedback.

Empirically, however, few models offer a clear roadmap for managers seeking to apply SWOT across diverse organizational layers while maintaining strategic coherence. Therefore, this study contributes to literature and practice by proposing a structured yet adaptable integration framework. It draws insights from global and Indonesian contexts to demonstrate SWOT's cross-sector applicability and strategic depth when effectively embedded.

This research is guided by three interrelated questions: (1) How can SWOT be effectively integrated into the stages of strategic management processes? (2) In what ways can SWOT contribute to aligning strategy across corporate, business, and functional levels? (3) How does SWOT support strategic implementation in dynamic environments? The objective of this study is to develop an integrative model that elucidates SWOT's role beyond analysis, framing it as a tool for strategic alignment and responsive execution. The significance of this research lies in its potential to redefine SWOT not merely as a diagnostic device, but as a strategic integrator that bridges intent and action within contemporary management.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on strategic management offers a broad and evolving understanding of tools used in organizational planning and decision-making. Among these, SWOT analysis remains one of the most widely applied models due to its simplicity and versatility (Gurel & Tat, 2017). Early scholars such as Andrews (1971) introduced SWOT within the rational planning paradigm, positioning it as a foundational step in aligning internal capabilities with external conditions. More recent perspectives, however, critique the model for its static assumptions and limited analytical depth, urging scholars to reframe SWOT within dynamic strategic frameworks (Pickton & Wright, 1998).

In response, scholars have explored how SWOT can be enriched by integrating it with other strategic tools like PESTEL, the BCG matrix, or Porter's five forces to overcome its shortcomings (Panagiotou, 2003). Moreover, Wheelen et al. (2018) emphasize that SWOT should no longer be seen as a standalone diagnostic device but as a continuous input across the strategic process, particularly when applied with environmental scanning and stakeholder analysis.

The relationship between strategic levels—corporate, business, and functional—and the effectiveness of SWOT remains a largely underexplored domain. Schermerhorn (2019, p. 230) argues that strategic coherence across levels requires tools that are flexible enough to accommodate vertical alignment while being robust enough to guide decisions at each layer. This insight aligns with the work of Grant (2021), who emphasizes the role of strategic fit and responsiveness in volatile environments.

Contemporary studies advocate for integrating SWOT into real-time decision-making, especially during strategy implementation phases where adaptability becomes critical (David et al., 2017). Moreover, dynamic capabilities theory supports this shift by suggesting that strategy tools like SWOT should be employed not just in planning, but in enabling agile responses to changing conditions (Teece et al., 2016). Thus, a growing body of literature calls for a reconceptualization of SWOT as a living framework that informs strategy through an ongoing loop of analysis, feedback, and execution across organizational levels.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study draws from classical and contemporary strategic management theories to articulate how SWOT analysis can be systematically integrated into strategic processes, levels, and implementation. A core point of departure is systems theory, which views organizations as open systems interacting dynamically with their environments. In this view, SWOT operates as a boundary-spanning tool that captures feedback from both internal and external subsystems (Daft, 2018, p. 77).

Systems theory reinforces the idea that strategy formation is not linear but cyclical, allowing SWOT to serve as a strategic radar throughout the process. When combined with environmental scanning and organizational learning, SWOT can help managers process complexity and uncertainty more effectively (Ginter, Duncan, & Swayne, 2020). This aligns with Schermerhorn's (2019, p. 225) emphasis on managing change and uncertainty through integrative strategic mechanisms.

Complementing systems theory, the contingency theory of management argues that strategic decisions must be tailored to fit the specific circumstances and contexts in which organizations operate (Donaldson, 2001, p. 13). SWOT, when used within a contingency framework, provides a diagnostic lens through which managers can evaluate strategic options that are best suited for a particular organizational context.

As internal strengths and weaknesses are identified alongside external opportunities and threats, decision-makers can choose pathways aligned with environmental demands and internal capabilities. This integration helps bridge strategy formulation and implementation, especially in complex, rapidly changing industries (Hill et al., 2021). By ensuring that strategic choices are not static but responsive, SWOT contributes to enhancing organizational fit—a key tenet of contingency theory.

Another significant theoretical pillar is the dynamic capabilities framework, which emphasizes the role of managerial competencies in sensing, seizing, and transforming opportunities in volatile environments (Teece et al., 2016). SWOT's role in dynamic capabilities lies in its ability to facilitate environmental sensing and internal resource evaluation, helping firms adapt to disruptions and recalibrate strategies.

David et al. (2017) highlight that in turbulent environments, strategic tools like SWOT should be part of continuous learning cycles rather than one-time planning events. This implies that SWOT's true value emerges when it becomes part of an iterative process involving data interpretation, experimentation, and capability alignment. Strategic implementation, then, becomes an exercise in agility, with SWOT serving as a feedback loop that guides adaptation and reconfiguration of resources in line with external and internal shifts.

At the organizational level, Schermerhorn (2019, p. 231) emphasizes strategic alignment, a concept that links corporate vision to operational actions through clear communication, feedback systems, and shared objectives. Here, SWOT supports vertical strategic alignment by translating high-level assessments into actionable plans at the business and functional levels. For instance, strengths identified at the corporate level can inform resource allocation at the operational level, while threats can shape risk mitigation policies.

Porter's (1998) concept of strategic positioning further complements this approach, encouraging firms to align internal strengths with external opportunities to create sustainable competitive advantages. By incorporating SWOT into both macro-level and micro-level decisions, organizations ensure coherence and direction in their strategic trajectories.

Finally, the integration of SWOT into strategy implementation draws from execution theories, particularly those emphasizing leadership, culture, and feedback loops as

critical for translating strategy into action (Kaplan & Norton, 2008, p. 85). Effective implementation requires more than resource alignment—it demands a culture that supports learning and adaptability.

SWOT's integration enables this by creating a common language for discussing strategic priorities, risks, and progress across departments. When embedded into performance monitoring systems such as Balanced Scorecards, SWOT enhances visibility and coherence across the implementation landscape (Wheelen et al., 2018). Thus, the theoretical foundation presented here justifies the role of SWOT not only as a planning tool, but also as a mechanism for strategic execution and organizational learning.

Previous Research

One of the earliest empirical studies to evaluate the application of SWOT in strategic planning was conducted by Panagiotou (2003), who examined how UK-based firms incorporated SWOT into their strategic routines. The study revealed that while SWOT was a common component of strategic formulation, its integration into implementation stages was inconsistent. This insight laid the groundwork for future studies aiming to link analysis and execution. Its relevance to the present study lies in the foundational recognition that SWOT's utility depends on its contextual application and integration across strategic phases. However, the study fell short in exploring multi-level strategic alignment and its impact on execution.

Ghazinoory, Abdi, and Azadegan-Mehr (2011) proposed a hybrid SWOT model combining it with analytic network processes (ANP) to overcome prioritization limitations. Their quantitative framework improved decision-making quality by assigning weights to each SWOT element. This methodological advancement contributed to refining the traditional SWOT format and confirmed the need for a structured, data-informed approach. Nevertheless, it focused primarily on planning phases and ignored the implications for strategic implementation or level alignment, which this paper aims to address.

Subsequently, Pickton and Wright (1998) critiqued SWOT's use in marketing strategy and highlighted its tendency to produce overly broad or vague insights if not guided by empirical data. Their research recommended embedding SWOT within a larger evaluative framework to enhance its strategic value. Though influential, their scope remained limited to marketing contexts, thus underscoring the need for broader, cross-functional applications that this study seeks to explore.

In a more integrative study, Gurel and Tat (2017) emphasized the enduring relevance of SWOT when used in conjunction with strategic management models such as PESTEL and Porter's five forces. Their research, grounded in case studies, demonstrated how environmental and competitive insights could deepen SWOT's strategic impact. However, they acknowledged that the operationalization of SWOT in dynamic, multi-level strategy implementation was not fully developed. This limitation reinforces the value of this study in proposing a model that links SWOT to hierarchical strategic planning.

More recently, Hill et al. (2021) revisited SWOT within a resource-based view (RBV) context and argued that firms that align internal strengths with external opportunities through resource orchestration outperform their competitors. Their longitudinal data analysis affirmed the strategic advantage of integrating internal analysis with environmental scanning. Despite this contribution, the study did not explore the vertical integration of SWOT from corporate to functional levels or its iterative use during strategy implementation—an area directly tackled in this research.

Finally, Teece, Peteraf, and Leih (2016) developed the dynamic capabilities theory, underlining how firms can develop strategic agility by integrating analytical tools like SWOT into sensing and seizing routines. Their research highlights the theoretical link between analysis and action, advocating for adaptability in strategic tool use. While their study provides conceptual grounding, it lacked empirical application of SWOT in real-time strategic execution across levels, a gap this study seeks to fill with practical insights and thematic integration.

These studies collectively illustrate an evolution in SWOT scholarship—from basic analysis to methodological enhancement and partial integration with other tools. However, none provide a comprehensive model that thematically embeds SWOT across strategic processes, levels, and execution. This paper fills that gap by proposing an integrative framework that aligns SWOT with corporate, business, and functional strategies, and embeds it within iterative strategy execution processes.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative and conceptual approach by analyzing textual and interpretive data drawn from strategic management literature. The type of data used is primarily qualitative, consisting of conceptual frameworks, theoretical arguments, model development, and interpretive themes from prior academic publications and books. Qualitative data enables a deeper understanding of underlying patterns, meanings, and conceptual linkages between SWOT analysis and strategic management processes (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 76). This method supports the

study's aim to construct an integrative model rather than test causal hypotheses or quantify relationships, making it suitable for exploring thematic complexity.

The data sources for this study include peer-reviewed journal articles, international and Indonesian books, dissertations, and reports from reputable organizations such as the World Bank and BPS–Statistics Indonesia. The literature selected spans strategic management, organizational theory, contingency theory, and dynamic capabilities. A special focus is placed on foundational works by Schermerhorn (2019, p. 225), Hill et al. (2021), and Teece et al. (2016), which provide rich conceptual insights into organizational dynamics and strategy integration. These diverse sources ensure academic rigor and contextual relevance across multiple theoretical perspectives and strategic levels, particularly in both global and Indonesian business contexts.

The data collection technique employed is document analysis, which involves systematic reviewing, extracting, and coding of relevant literature based on thematic relevance to the research questions. Key concepts such as "strategic process," "strategy implementation," "SWOT integration," and "strategic levels" served as anchors for identifying relevant texts (Bowen, 2009). Documents were selected based on criteria including publication year (no later than 2025), academic credibility, and relevance to the three main research questions. Each document was analyzed to extract both theoretical and practical insights, which were then grouped according to themes aligned with the strategic stages and levels being examined.

For data analysis, a thematic and interpretive approach was applied. Thematic analysis enables the identification of recurring patterns, contrasts, and conceptual linkages across the selected literature (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The interpretive dimension involves critically analyzing how SWOT is understood and utilized across strategic frameworks and levels. This dual approach supports the development of a conceptual model that not only identifies where SWOT fits in the strategic management process but also how it transforms through various organizational layers and execution phases. Concepts were iteratively refined through constant comparison, enabling theoretical saturation and integrative model development.

In drawing conclusions, the study synthesizes findings from across the literature into a coherent framework that addresses the three research questions. The findings emphasize that SWOT is most effective when used not as a static tool but as a reflexive, adaptive instrument embedded in both strategic formulation and implementation. This synthesis also highlights how SWOT can serve as a vertical alignment mechanism, linking corporate objectives with business unit strategies and functional actions. By integrating SWOT thematically across process, level, and implementation, the study proposes a flexible yet structured approach to strategic planning that is grounded in both theory and practice.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study emerge from a conceptual synthesis of strategic management literature, revealing that the effectiveness of SWOT analysis lies in its ability to adapt across strategic stages, hierarchical levels, and implementation contexts. A key finding is that when SWOT is applied merely as a planning instrument, it often produces limited strategic value, as noted by earlier critiques (Valentin, 2001; Pickton & Wright, 1998).

However, when conceptualized as a dynamic and iterative framework, SWOT becomes a powerful integrator—bridging strategy formulation, level alignment, and responsive execution. This position is supported by dynamic capabilities theory, which emphasizes the need for continuous adaptation and learning (Teece et al., 2016). As organizations face increasingly uncertain environments, the integration of SWOT into feedback systems and decision-making loops becomes vital for strategic agility and organizational coherence.

The interplay between previous research and theoretical models confirms the necessity of embedding SWOT beyond surface-level analysis. For instance, Schermerhorn's (2019, p. 230) notion of strategic alignment underscores how tools like SWOT can enhance vertical coherence—from corporate vision to operational actions.

Additionally, contingency theory advocates for situationally appropriate strategic tools, which reinforces the importance of tailoring SWOT applications to fit industry, organizational size, and market dynamics (Donaldson, 2001, p. 13). While earlier empirical studies acknowledged SWOT's strengths in diagnosis, they fell short of examining its functional role during implementation phases (Ghazinoory et al., 2011; Gurel & Tat, 2017). This study contributes to the literature by proposing that SWOT should serve as an embedded system within strategy processes, enabling feedback, adaptation, and cross-level alignment. The next sections provide a detailed thematic analysis that directly addresses the three core research questions.

1. Embedding SWOT into Strategic Processes

The strategic management process comprises three core stages—formulation, implementation, and evaluation—and the integration of SWOT into these stages requires more than mechanical application. At the formulation stage, SWOT assists organizations in systematically organizing internal and external insights, enabling more informed decision-making (Hill et al., 2021). However,

strategic decisions do not end at formulation; implementation often fails when diagnostic tools are not integrated into monitoring or corrective mechanisms (Kaplan & Norton, 2008, p. 89). Embedding SWOT into implementation allows organizations to adapt to evolving conditions while aligning strategic initiatives with changing realities. As Schermerhorn (2019, p. 224) emphasizes, strategic tools must remain flexible and iterative, especially in dynamic environments. Evaluation, the final stage, can benefit from a feedback-enhanced SWOT to reassess prior assumptions and recalibrate the strategy. This cyclical integration ensures continuous learning and strategic alignment across time.

A critical benefit of integrating SWOT into each stage of strategy is the creation of a strategic dialogue that spans departments and decision-making levels. At the formulation stage, cross-functional teams can collaboratively assess strengths and weaknesses, drawing from varied perspectives to minimize biases (Ginter et al., 2020). During implementation, feedback mechanisms tied to SWOT assessments allow for real-time adjustment, ensuring that opportunities are seized, and threats are addressed promptly. This aligns with the systems theory view that strategic tools should enable input-output regulation across subsystems (Daft, 2018, p. 79). Additionally, dynamic capabilities literature advocates that such real-time feedback loops enhance an organization's ability to sense and seize strategic opportunities (Teece et al., 2016). As such, the continuous application of SWOT supports adaptive strategy development that evolves with internal competencies and external pressures.

Moreover, embedding SWOT into strategic stages enables alignment between planning assumptions and operational execution. SWOT provides a mechanism for clarifying the rationale behind key initiatives, which in turn fosters better buy-in and communication across the organization. For example, when teams understand that a marketing strategy leverages a specific strength or mitigates a key threat, their operational decisions become more consistent with strategic intent (Wheelen et al., 2018). This transparency is vital for performance evaluation as well. Organizations can link key performance indicators (KPIs) to SWOT-informed priorities, ensuring that progress is measured in relation to strategic risks and opportunities. Schermerhorn (2019, p. 231) notes that alignment between goals and tools is essential for strategic control—a feature enhanced through embedded SWOT usage.

From a contingency perspective, the integration of SWOT across all stages enhances strategic flexibility. Different industries and organizational contexts may require greater emphasis on particular stages; for example, high-tech firms may focus more on implementation speed, whereas public institutions may emphasize strategic formulation. Embedding SWOT allows for adaptation to these needs, ensuring that strategic processes remain relevant and context-

sensitive (Donaldson, 2001, p. 16). Additionally, organizations operating in volatile environments benefit from recurring SWOT assessments that allow for constant recalibration. This supports a shift from linear planning models to adaptive cycles, consistent with contemporary strategic management paradigms (Grant, 2021). Therefore, SWOT's true value is realized when it serves not as a static planning tool, but as a dynamic enabler of strategic evolution.

Finally, the integration of SWOT into strategic processes improves strategic learning by institutionalizing reflection and review. When organizations build regular SWOT-based reviews into quarterly or annual strategy meetings, they promote a culture of data-informed and experience-based learning (David et al., 2017). Such practices not only refine strategies but also enhance organizational memory, reducing the likelihood of repeated strategic errors.

Moreover, these reviews can be linked to benchmarking exercises and industry analyses, increasing their relevance and actionability. In doing so, organizations move beyond ad hoc strategy reviews and toward institutionalized strategic learning cycles. This approach is aligned with dynamic capabilities theory, where learning is a core component of competitive advantage (Teece et al., 2016). Thus, integrating SWOT into strategic stages fosters not just alignment and adaptability, but also a sustainable learning orientation.

2. Aligning SWOT Across Strategic Levels

The second research question explores how SWOT can be systematically applied to ensure strategic coherence across corporate, business, and functional levels. Each level of strategy has distinct objectives—corporate-level strategy focuses on portfolio management and resource allocation, business-level strategy centers on competitive positioning, and functional-level strategy translates plans into operational actions (Hill et al., 2021). Embedding SWOT into each of these layers enables the upward and downward flow of strategic information, ensuring alignment and adaptability.

At the corporate level, a SWOT-driven overview clarifies long-term strengths (e.g., brand equity) and threats (e.g., regulatory shifts), shaping resource distribution. Schermerhorn (2019, p. 230) emphasizes that such top-down alignment must be complemented by bottom-up feedback, which SWOT enables through localized assessments of operational strengths and weaknesses. This dual-flow ensures that strategic plans are grounded in operational realities while remaining aligned with long-term vision.

At the business-level, SWOT integration supports the development of competitive strategies that are responsive to specific market dynamics. For instance, a business unit can leverage core competencies (identified as strengths) to exploit new customer segments (identified as opportunities), while designing mitigation plans for competitive threats (David et al., 2017). Moreover, business units can use their SWOT analysis to tailor generic strategies—cost leadership, differentiation, or focus—according to contextual needs. This middle-level application of SWOT acts as a translator between abstract corporate strategy and tangible functional tactics. It reinforces Porter's (1998) argument that competitive advantage depends on internal consistency and external fit, both of which are achievable when SWOT anchors decision-making at this level.

At the functional level, SWOT becomes a tool for operationalizing strategic intent. Departments such as marketing, human resources, and operations can develop targeted initiatives that respond to unit-specific weaknesses or capitalize on emerging opportunities. For example, a marketing team might identify brand perception as a weakness and craft communication strategies to address it. These initiatives are then better aligned with business-level goals and corporate priorities. Kaplan and Norton (2008, p. 92) advocate for linking performance metrics at the functional level to strategic objectives, and a continuously updated SWOT matrix can guide these linkages. Thus, the tool supports tactical planning, resource prioritization, and strategic feedback loops at the most granular level of execution.

The alignment of SWOT across levels also facilitates strategic integration in diversified organizations. Multi-business firms, such as conglomerates or multinational corporations, face challenges in harmonizing strategic efforts across diverse contexts. By standardizing SWOT usage across strategic planning processes, firms create a common language for evaluating and communicating strategic issues (Wheelen et al., 2018). This standardization allows corporate executives to compare and assess the strategic health of various units using consistent criteria, enhancing strategic control and resource synergy. Moreover, it supports Schermerhorn's (2019, p. 232) principle of strategic fit, where strategic elements at different levels must be mutually reinforcing for organizational success.

Vertical alignment through SWOT also strengthens cross-functional collaboration. When strategic assessments are shared across departments, they promote collective ownership and shared understanding of goals, risks, and priorities. This transparency reduces siloed decision-making and fosters strategic coherence across units (Ginter et al., 2020). Additionally, periodic inter-level SWOT reviews can serve as checkpoints to ensure that shifts in one level

(e.g., market-level threats) are communicated to other levels for coordinated responses. In this way, SWOT becomes a bridge between analysis and communication, strategy and culture, supporting both alignment and adaptability in strategic execution.

Finally, the role of contingency becomes evident in aligning SWOT across strategic levels. Different organizational structures—mechanistic versus organic—will dictate how formal or informal the integration process should be (Donaldson, 2001, p. 18). In rigid hierarchies, SWOT may be centrally managed, while in flatter, agile firms, it may evolve through decentralized participation. Either way, the model remains valid, provided it supports strategic synchronization. This highlights the flexibility of SWOT as a strategic integrator—capable of adapting to organizational design while fostering vertical strategic harmony. In sum, the integration of SWOT across corporate, business, and functional levels strengthens the internal logic of strategy and enhances organizational readiness for dynamic environments.

3. Supporting Strategic Implementation through SWOT

Strategic implementation remains one of the most critical—and frequently failed—stages in strategic management. This section addresses the third research question by exploring how SWOT analysis supports implementation, particularly in dynamic and uncertain environments. While most organizations effectively use SWOT for planning, few extend its utility into execution phases, which results in strategic misalignment and inertia (Panagiotou, 2003). Schermerhorn (2019, p. 234) argues that execution requires the translation of strategy into coordinated, resource-backed actions, supported by systems that monitor progress. Integrating SWOT into implementation provides these systems with contextual intelligence, enabling managers to align resources with priorities, and to recalibrate based on environmental shifts. The implementation process thus becomes more responsive and grounded in continuous learning.

A key function of SWOT in implementation is its role in fostering proactive strategic behavior. When opportunities and threats are continuously monitored, organizations are better positioned to respond to competitive changes and stakeholder pressures (Hill et al., 2021). For example, a company that tracks emerging technological threats through SWOT reviews can adapt faster by reallocating R&D investments or revising its value proposition. This agility is a core feature of the dynamic capabilities framework, where the ability to sense and respond to change becomes a competitive advantage (Teece et al., 2016).

By using SWOT to inform mid-course corrections, organizations prevent strategic drift and enhance executional relevance.

Moreover, SWOT integration facilitates resource optimization during implementation. Each SWOT element can serve as a decision-support signal: strengths guide where to invest or scale, weaknesses identify capability gaps to address, opportunities signal growth areas, and threats define risk mitigation priorities. This alignment streamlines budget allocation, project selection, and human resource deployment (Wheelen et al., 2018). Kaplan and Norton (2008, p. 90) highlight the importance of connecting strategic planning with budgeting and performance tracking, a linkage strengthened by embedding SWOT within operational management cycles. In this way, implementation moves beyond routine execution to become a strategy-driven process that leverages insights and anticipates change.

The cultural aspect of strategic implementation also benefits from SWOT integration. When SWOT findings are shared transparently across departments, they enhance strategic communication, build trust, and foster a shared sense of purpose. Ginter et al. (2020) observe that implementation often fails not due to poor plans, but due to a lack of engagement and alignment among implementers. A shared SWOT framework enables cross-functional dialogue around strategic priorities and executional barriers, creating space for innovation and collaboration. As such, SWOT becomes not only an analytical tool but also a catalyst for cultural cohesion and strategic discipline.

In rapidly changing environments, SWOT also enables real-time strategy adjustment. For instance, during crises such as economic downturns or global health emergencies, organizations that routinely revisit SWOT elements are better equipped to make strategic pivots. These include shifting supply chains, altering marketing strategies, or developing new partnerships in response to threats or emerging opportunities (Grant, 2021). Unlike static planning tools, SWOT provides a live dashboard that tracks internal and external dynamics, making it ideal for environments where responsiveness and resilience are essential. This supports Schermerhorn's (2019, p. 238) call for flexible implementation tools that promote situational awareness and organizational agility.

Finally, the use of SWOT in performance monitoring and strategic control enhances implementation quality. Organizations can create scorecards or dashboards that map key initiatives to specific SWOT elements, thereby making execution more traceable and accountable. As David et al. (2017) suggest, linking performance indicators to strategic assumptions improves strategic learning and accountability. Feedback from these systems feeds back into the

strategic process, creating a loop of planning, doing, checking, and acting—a modernized PDCA cycle reinforced by SWOT insights. This integration strengthens the bridge between high-level strategic intent and frontline implementation, ensuring that organizations do not simply plan to act but act strategically and responsively.

This study demonstrates that SWOT analysis, when integrated across strategic processes, hierarchical levels, and implementation systems, transforms from a simple diagnostic tool into a dynamic strategic integrator. Addressing the first research question, the findings show that embedding SWOT within all stages of the strategic process—formulation, implementation, and evaluation—enhances organizational learning and responsiveness. For the second research question, the study confirms that vertical alignment of SWOT usage across corporate, business, and functional levels strengthens strategic coherence and cross-level communication. Regarding the third research question, the research establishes that SWOT facilitates strategic implementation by enabling real-time adaptation, fostering performance alignment, and cultivating a collaborative culture. Together, these findings highlight the multi-functional and evolving utility of SWOT in modern strategic management, particularly in dynamic and complex environments.

Theoretically, the research advances strategic management literature by presenting SWOT not as an isolated matrix but as a fluid framework aligned with systems theory, contingency theory, and dynamic capabilities. It contributes a novel conceptual integration of SWOT across the strategic value chain, filling a gap previously identified in empirical and conceptual works.

Practically, the study offers managers a roadmap for embedding SWOT into their strategic routines—from high-level decision-making to frontline execution. This approach has implications for firms seeking to develop agile and learning-oriented cultures, especially in industries facing rapid change. The integrative framework proposed serves as both a conceptual refinement and an applied guide, enabling organizations to navigate complexity with strategic clarity and coherence.

CONCLUSION

This study has synthesized theoretical and practical insights to demonstrate that SWOT analysis, when integrated holistically into the strategic management framework, significantly enhances strategic coherence, adaptability, and implementation effectiveness. By embedding SWOT within the stages of strategy formulation,

execution, and evaluation, and aligning it across corporate, business, and functional levels, organizations can transform their strategic processes from static planning to dynamic execution.

This approach confirms the alignment between theoretical models such as systems theory and dynamic capabilities with real-world strategic practices, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of how strategy tools evolve in complex environments. The integrative model proposed not only fills a conceptual gap in the literature but also offers actionable guidance for managers and strategists.

Practically, organizations are encouraged to embed SWOT into routine decision-making systems and use it as a live strategic dashboard. For future research, empirical studies are recommended to test the model across various sectors and organizational types, thereby further validating its applicability and refining its structure in response to contextual demands.

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