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# Ambidexterity and Entrepreneurship Studies: A Literature Review and Research Agenda

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# Ambidexterity and Entrepreneurship Studies: A Literature Review and Research Agenda

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## ABSTRACT

Originated by an individual capacity, organizational ambidexterity represents how organizations do two different things equally well (i.e., efficiency and flexibility, adaptability and alignment, integration and responsiveness, or exploration and exploitation). The versatility of the ambidexterity concept allows using it to test multiple research questions from various perspectives. It explains that in the last decades, the research in organizational ambidexterity has been exponentially rising. The authors argued that the proliferation of papers represents a consolidation stage of any phenomenon. Therefore, in this development cycle, the two possibilities maybe its decline or re-focus along new lines.

Although the publication pattern focused on strategic management journals, it does not mean that organizational ambidexterity is only observed in established and mature organizations' strategies. Several entrepreneurial organizations

have been born (e.g., new ventures) or have rejuvenated (i.e., established ventures with an entrepreneurial orientation) by implementing and developing an organizational ambidexterity capacity. This study is motivated by the apparent unrepresentativeness of organizational ambidexterity in entrepreneurship studies. Therefore,

- (a) we look back to the past 15 years of published research by focusing on the contribution of organizational ambidexterity to the fields of management studies and entrepreneurship studies; and
- (b) we look forward to the research in organizational ambidexterity by inspiring the analysis of ambidexterity's role in the current scenarios (social, economic, technological, environmental) in management and entrepreneurship studies.

Based on this review and analysis, we show the underrepresentation of entrepreneurship in the published ambidexterity literature until the last decade (the 2010s). Motivated by this insight, we provoke the discussion about how the concept of ambidexterity, characterized by managing a double tension simultaneously, is a potential ingredient in the entrepreneurial decision-making process of individuals, teams, organizations, and eco-systems agents. We encourage new research lines that help refresh the analysis of ambidexterity in the entrepreneurship field and re-thinking its contribution to the reconciliation process between management, innovation, and entrepreneurship fields. Furthermore, several implications to managers, entrepreneurial organizations, and entrepreneurs emerge from this study. Concretely, we encourage them to consider this approach as a way of thinking to face the current social, economic, and health problems that we are living in due to the COVID-19 pandemic effects.

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# 1

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## Introduction

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Systematic literature reviews are inclusive and provide significant contributions helping to develop theory and research practices in entrepreneurship.

Rauch (2019, p. 5)

### 1.1 The Relevance of This Research

Originated by an individual capacity, organizational ambidexterity represents how organizations do two different things equally well (i.e., efficiency and flexibility, adaptability and alignment, integration and responsiveness, or exploration and exploitation). The versatility of the ambidexterity concept allows using it to test multiple research questions from multiple perspectives. It explains that in the past three decades, the research in organizational ambidexterity has been exponentially rising. Several authors argued that papers' proliferation represents a consolidation stage of any phenomenon (O'Reilly III and Tushman, 2013). Therefore, in this development cycle, the two possibilities could be its decline or re-focus along new lines (Birkinshaw and Gupta, 2013).

The published literature reviews and meta-analysis have provided relevant insights about organizational ambidexterity's conceptualizations,

determinants, and consequences (Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004; Junni *et al.*, 2013; O'Reilly III and Tushman, 2013). However, given its origin and nature, the research domain has primarily focused on strategic management journals. Although this publication pattern, organizational ambidexterity is only observed in strategies implemented by established and mature organizations. Several entrepreneurial organizations have been born (new ventures) or have rejuvenated (established ventures with an entrepreneurial orientation) by implementing and developing an organizational ambidexterity capacity. A provocative discussion is needed regarding (a) the underrepresentation of the entrepreneurship field in ambidexterity research and (b) the ambidexterity's relevance (managing dual tensions simultaneously) in entrepreneurial-decision making processes of individuals, teams, organizations, and multiple eco-systems agents.

## 1.2 Research Objective and Questions

Inspired by the mentioned research gap, this research is conducted to achieve the following two research objectives:

- (a) First, we look back to the past 15 years of published research by focusing on the contribution of organizational ambidexterity to management studies and entrepreneurship studies. It will help us to provide evidence about the underrepresentation of entrepreneurship phenomena in the published literature in the last decade.
- (b) Second, we look forward to promoting and refreshing ambidexterity research by paying more attention to entrepreneurship inspired by the relevant ambidexterity's role in the current scenarios (social, economic, technological, environmental) impacting management, innovation, and entrepreneurship studies.

Based on this review and analysis, we show the underrepresentation of entrepreneurship in the published ambidexterity literature until the last decade (the 2010s). Motivated by this insight, we provoke the discussion about how the concept of ambidexterity, characterized by

managing a double tension simultaneously, is a potential ingredient in the entrepreneurial decision-making process of individuals, teams, organizations, and eco-systems agents. We encourage new research lines that help refresh the analysis of ambidexterity in the entrepreneurship field and re-thinking its contribution to the reconciliation process between management, innovation, and entrepreneurship fields. Furthermore, several implications to managers, entrepreneurial organizations, and entrepreneurs emerge from this study. Concretely, we encourage them to consider this approach as a way of thinking to face the current social, economic, and health problems that we are living in due to the COVID-19 pandemic effects.

### 1.3 Methodological Design

Literature reviews have a critical role in knowledge accumulation by providing unique contributions to theory testing, theory development, identifying research gaps, and suggestions for future research (Rauch, 2019, p. 1). We revised the published articles in academic journals to ensure that this study will be systematic, transparent, and replicable (Jones *et al.*, 2011). Following the standard practices of previous investigations (Birkinshaw and Gupta, 2013; Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004; Junni *et al.*, 2013; O'Reilly III and Tushman, 2008, 2013), the data collection process is as follows:

- First, using the *Web of Science database* due to its more extensive coverage of journals, we searched peer articles published from 2004 to 2019 (both inclusive) in social sciences.<sup>1</sup>
- The screening criteria were the inherent diversity in the keywords: “ambidexterity” or “ambidextrous.” As a result, we identified 1570 publications. Second, adopting recommendations from

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<sup>1</sup>We adopted a similar criteria of period of analysis (15 years) than authors as O'Reilly III and Tushman (2013) and Birkinshaw and Gupta (2013). We also identified a few literature reviews that adopted from five to 15 years of analysis (Adler *et al.*, 2019; Centobelli *et al.*, 2019; García-Lillo *et al.*, 2016; Nosella *et al.*, 2012; Wan *et al.*, 2017; Wu and Wu, 2016). Therefore, to avoid overlapping to these studies and because the presence of entrepreneurship was observed in these period, we paid attention to the last 15 years of research on ambidexterity.

Nabi *et al.* (2017), we selected papers published in the business, business management, and management journals to ensure that the core publications in the field were fully covered. By including the prefix “ambidexter\*” in any section of the paper, we identified 535 publications.

- Third, concerning the criteria of selection, we focused on papers that empirically (qualitative, quantitative or experimental), theoretically (literature review, systematic literature review or meta-analysis), and monographically (sections, symposiums or special issues) included the prefix “ambidexter\*” in the title of the paper. In this stage, we selected 298 publications.<sup>2</sup>
- Fourth, we created a dataset based on the contribution of each paper to ambidexterity during the data analysis. Concretely, we identified the objective, the theoretical and operational definition, the adopted theoretical and methodological approaches, the geographical focus, the main findings, contributions, and the future research line. Then, based on our research objectives, we analyzed each publication.
- Fifth, based on the in-depth analysis per paper, we defined the content’s structure and wrote the monograph.

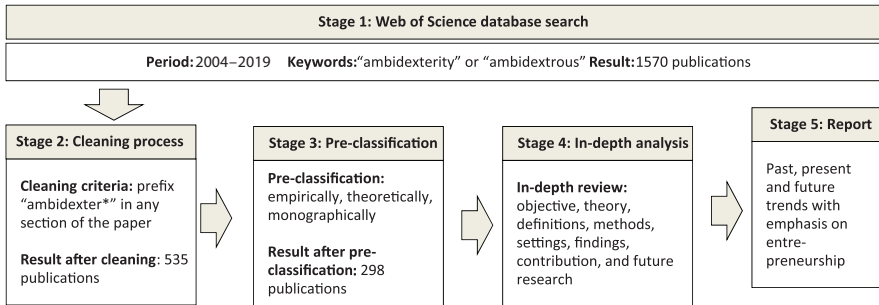
Figure 1.1 summarizes the methodological design of this study previously explained.

## 1.4 Structure

Following this introduction, the structure is as follows: Section 2 describes the theoretical foundations for a better understanding of organizational ambidexterity as the concepts, typologies, determinants, measurements, and implications. Section 3 looks back to the past 15 years of research in organizational ambidexterity. Specifically, we discuss the

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<sup>2</sup>Concretely, we analyzed 23 conceptual studies (Appendix 1), 17 literature review (Appendix 2), six editorials (Appendix 3), 165 quantitative studies (Appendix 4), and 87 qualitative studies (Appendix 5).



**Figure 1.1:** Methodological design.

*Source:* Authors.

research domains, the research methods, the contributions to management, and the entrepreneurship fields. Section 4 looks forward to the research in organizational ambidexterity with emphasis on how it may be useful for new/established entrepreneurial organizations that are facing the “new/current” paradigms in the societal, technological, and economic scenarios. Section 5 discusses the potential (re)conciliation between ambidexterity orientation and entrepreneurial orientation. We conclude by providing insights into the contributions to the academic debate in the entrepreneurship field.

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