

Understanding Variation in Managers' Ambidexterity: Investigating Direct and Interaction Effects of Formal Structural and Personal Coordination Mechanisms

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Abstract

Previous research focuses on firm and business unit level ambidexterity. Therefore, conceptual and empirically validated understanding about ambidexterity at the individual level of analysis is very scarce. This paper addresses this gap in the literature by investigating managers' ambidexterity, delivering three contributions to theory and empirical research on ambidexterity: first, by proposing three related characteristics of ambidextrous managers; second, by developing a model and associated hypotheses on both the direct and interaction effects of formal structural and personal coordination mechanisms on managers' ambidexterity; and third, by testing the hypotheses based on a sample of 716 business unit level and operational level managers.

Findings regarding the formal structural mechanisms indicate that a manager's decision-making authority positively relates to this manager's ambidexterity, whereas formalization of a manager's tasks has no significant relationship with this manager's ambidexterity. Regarding the personal coordination mechanisms, findings indicate that both the participation of a manager in cross-functional interfaces and the connectedness of a manager to other organization members positively relate to this manager's ambidexterity. Furthermore, results show positive interaction effects between the formal structural and personal coordination mechanisms on managers' ambidexterity. The paper's theoretical contributions and empirical results increase our understanding about managers' ambidexterity and about how different types and combinations of coordination mechanisms relate to variation in managers' ambidexterity.

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