

The Impact of Business Environmental Changes on the Adoption of a Strategic Pivot: A Case Study of Zar Industrial Group

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E d i t o r	R e v i e w e r s
Davood Feiz  Affiliation: Professor of Management Department, Semnan University, Iran feiz1353@semnan.ac.ir	Reviewer 1: Marco Yamba-Yugsi  Unidad Académica de Posgrado, Universidad Católica de Cuenca, Azuay 010101, Ecuador Email: marco.yamba@ucacue.edu.ec Reviewer 2: Abbas Monavarian  Professor, Management Department, Tehran University, Tehran, Iran. Email: amonavar@ut.ac.ir

1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

The manuscript uses the terms “strategic pivot,” “strategic turnaround,” and “strategic change” in several sections, although these concepts are not necessarily interchangeable. For example, the findings initially refer to “the adoption of strategic turnaround,” whereas the title and later sections use “strategic pivot.” The authors should provide clear conceptual definitions in the introduction and consistently use one central term throughout the manuscript. If strategic turnaround and strategic pivot are treated as distinct concepts, the relationship between them should be theoretically explained and reflected in the coding framework.

The introduction states that “A pivot generally refers to a substantive change in a firm’s strategic direction while preserving selected elements of its existing resources, knowledge, vision, or organizational identity.” This definition is useful, but the manuscript should more explicitly distinguish a pivot from incremental adaptation, strategic renewal, restructuring, diversification, retrenchment, and organizational turnaround. Several findings, such as cost reduction, short-term contracting,

supplier diversification, and reductions in development plans, may represent operational adaptation rather than a strategic pivot. The authors should establish explicit analytical criteria for determining when an observed response qualifies as a pivot.

The final paragraph of the introduction states that the study aims “to develop a grounded conceptual model explaining the drivers, mechanisms, responses, and organizational capabilities involved in this process.” However, the introduction does not clearly articulate a specific research gap showing why existing theories are insufficient for explaining strategic pivoting in large industrial holding companies. The authors should strengthen the gap statement by explaining whether previous studies have neglected mature firms, emerging-economy contexts, sanctions, inflationary environments, supply-chain dependence, or multi-subsidiary governance structures. This would provide a stronger justification for the study and clarify its theoretical relevance.

The trustworthiness procedures require substantial development. The manuscript currently refers to “face validity,” participant clarification, documentation, and constant comparison. In qualitative research, trustworthiness is more appropriately evaluated through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. The authors should reorganize this section accordingly and report procedures such as member checking, peer debriefing, external auditing, negative-case analysis, triangulation, reflexive journaling, maintenance of an audit trail, and provision of thick contextual description. The term “face validity” is more commonly associated with instrument assessment and does not adequately represent the trustworthiness of grounded theory findings.

The methods section does not include an ethics subsection. Because the study involved interviews with identifiable organizational managers and academic experts, the authors should report the name of the approving ethics committee, approval code, informed-consent procedure, confidentiality protections, voluntary participation, right to withdraw, and secure storage of recordings and transcripts. Given that the study concerns a specific named organization, the authors should also explain how commercially sensitive information and participants’ identities were protected, particularly when reporting strategic, financial, and operational vulnerabilities.

The analysis section states that “The interview data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis within the coding procedures of grounded theory.” This combination creates methodological ambiguity because qualitative content analysis and grounded theory have different objectives, epistemological assumptions, and analytical procedures. The authors should select and consistently describe the primary analytical method. If grounded theory was used, the analysis should emphasize constant comparison, theoretical coding, category properties and dimensions, memo writing, and integration around a core category. If qualitative content analysis was used, the claim of grounded theory model development should be reconsidered.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the new document.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

In the methods section, the sentence “This study employed an applied qualitative research design based on the grounded theory approach” requires greater methodological specificity. The authors should identify whether they followed the systematic grounded theory approach of Strauss and Corbin, the constructivist approach of Charmaz, or another grounded theory tradition. The use of open, axial, and selective coding suggests a systematic Straussian approach, but this should be explicitly stated and supported with an appropriate methodological reference. The selected tradition should also guide the presentation of theoretical sampling, memo writing, constant comparison, category development, and model construction.

The manuscript describes the study as “applied qualitative research” and, in the original methodological description, as both “qualitative and fundamental in terms of nature.” These classifications are conceptually inconsistent. Applied research aims to address a practical organizational problem, whereas fundamental research primarily seeks general theoretical development. The authors should revise the methodological classification and explain whether the study is an applied grounded theory investigation, an instrumental case study using grounded theory procedures, or a theory-building qualitative study conducted within an applied organizational context.

The participant description indicates that “The study population comprised two groups of knowledgeable participants,” including Zar Industrial Group managers and university faculty members. However, the demographic information reports only specialization and years of experience and does not indicate how many participants were organizational managers and how many were academics. The authors should report participants’ organizational role, managerial level, academic rank where applicable, area of responsibility, and relationship to Zar Industrial Group. These details are necessary for assessing whether the sample adequately represented both practical and academic perspectives.

The inclusion criteria are described broadly as “having relevant managerial, professional, teaching, or research experience” and “possessing adequate knowledge” of the phenomenon. These criteria remain subjective and insufficiently operationalized. The authors should specify the minimum years of experience required, the types of strategic decisions in which organizational participants had been involved, and the academic qualifications or publication history expected from faculty participants. More transparent eligibility criteria would improve the credibility and reproducibility of the sampling process.

The manuscript states that “Participants were recruited through purposive sampling,” while also reporting that sampling continued until theoretical saturation. In grounded theory, purposive sampling may be appropriate initially, but theoretical sampling should subsequently guide the selection of participants and interview topics according to emerging categories. The authors should clarify whether theoretical sampling actually occurred, provide examples of how preliminary findings influenced later participant recruitment, and explain whether certain participants were deliberately selected to elaborate underdeveloped categories.

The claim that “Theoretical saturation was reached after interviewing 12 participants” requires stronger empirical justification. The authors should describe how saturation was assessed, which categories were considered saturated, whether code saturation and meaning saturation were distinguished, and how many interviews produced no substantively new information. A saturation table or narrative showing the emergence of categories across interviews would strengthen this claim. Merely stating that no new concepts emerged after the twelfth interview is insufficient without an explicit decision rule or documented analytical evidence.

The data collection section states that the main instrument was “a researcher-developed semi-structured interview protocol,” but the actual core interview questions are not provided. The authors should include the main interview questions and representative probing questions in the manuscript or as a supplementary file. They should also explain whether the protocol was pilot-tested, how many experts evaluated it, what revisions were made, and whether interviews were conducted face-to-face or online. Information regarding interview duration, location, recording method, interviewer qualifications, and language of the interviews should also be added.

The manuscript reports that “Following each interview, the collected data were reviewed and transcribed in full,” but it does not explain how transcription accuracy was verified. The authors should specify whether transcripts were checked against recordings, whether pauses or non-verbal expressions were included, and whether participants reviewed their transcripts or only the researcher’s interpretations. If interviews were conducted in Persian and the manuscript was prepared in English, the translation procedure for participant statements, codes, and quotations should also be described to ensure semantic equivalence.

Authors revised the manuscript and uploaded the new document.

2. Revised

Editor’s decision after revisions: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.