

# THE INFLUENCE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP, CORPORATE DYNAMIC CAPACITY, ORGANIZATIONAL INNOVATION ENVIRONMENT ON CORPORATE INNOVATION PERFORMANCE IN CHINESE SMEs

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the pivotal factors influencing innovation performance in Chinese Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Focusing on the roles of entrepreneurship, dynamic capabilities, and the organizational innovation environment, the research unveils how these elements interrelate to shape innovation outcomes. Drawing from qualitative and quantitative data, the findings underscore that SMEs with a robust entrepreneurial spirit, characterized by risk-taking, proactive initiatives, and novelty, tend to have superior innovation performance. Additionally, firms with strong dynamic capabilities, specifically the ability to sense market shifts and adeptly reconfigure resources, emerge as frontrunners in innovation. Furthermore, an innovation-conducive organizational environment, accentuated by psychological ownership among employees and inclusive leadership, was found to significantly boost innovative behavior. The study adds depth to the understanding of the innovation landscape in Chinese SMEs and offers insights for SME development strategies in the context of China's burgeoning entrepreneurial ecosystem.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship, Dynamic Capacity, Innovation Environment, Innovation Performance, SMEs

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## INTRODUCTION

The contemporary era of globalization and information technology has initiated a profound transformation in the world's economic systems (Skare & Soriano, 2021). The focal point of this transformation is increasingly shifting towards small and medium enterprises (SMEs) due to their flexible nature, dynamism, and innovative capabilities. In China, SMEs are recognized as significant contributors to the national economy, employment, technological innovation, and social stability (Jia et al., 2020). As Sun et al (2023) describes, in 2023, SMEs in China accounted for more than 90% of all enterprises, contributing around 60% to the GDP and providing more than 80% of urban employment.

Despite these contributions, Chinese SMEs face several challenges that hinder their growth and innovative performance. These challenges include lack of access to financing, limited managerial skills, technological backwardness, and an unfavorable business environment (Fan, 2019). To survive and thrive in the highly competitive business world, it is crucial for these SMEs to enhance their innovative capabilities, a process closely tied to factors such as entrepreneurship, corporate dynamic capacity, and the organizational innovation environment. As Olanrewaju (2020) illustrates, entrepreneurship embodies the process of discovering, evaluating, and exploiting opportunities, thereby creating goods and services that were not previously available. Research suggests a positive correlation between entrepreneurship and innovation. The entrepreneurial mindset encourages risk-taking, proactive initiatives, and competitive aggressiveness, thus stimulating innovative behavior. However, entrepreneurship's influence on the innovation performance of Chinese SMEs has not been comprehensively examined, presenting a gap that this research intends to fill.

As Bocken and Geradts (2020) noted, corporate dynamic capability refers to an organization's ability to purposefully create, extend, or modify its resource base to address rapidly changing environments. It involves sensing opportunities and threats, seizing opportunities, and reconfiguring the firm's resource base. In the context of Chinese SMEs, the importance of dynamic capabilities is magnified due to the turbulent and competitive business landscape. Understanding how dynamic capabilities influence innovation performance can offer insights for SMEs to better navigate the business environment and enhance their competitive advantage. Based on Hou et al. (2019), the organizational innovation environment encompasses the organizational culture, structure, processes, and leadership that support and promote innovation. The innovation environment can significantly impact an organization's ability to generate, select, implement, and disseminate innovative ideas. In the Chinese context, where hierarchical structures are traditionally prevalent, fostering an organizational innovation environment that promotes creativity and allows the free flow of ideas can be a challenging task. Thus, understanding the role of the organizational innovation environment in promoting innovation performance in Chinese SMEs is crucial.

Innovation performance is a measure of the outcomes of an organization's innovation activities, such as the introduction of new products, services, processes, or business models (Hameed et al., 2021). It is increasingly recognized as a critical determinant of the competitive advantage of firms. For Chinese SMEs, enhancing innovation performance is not merely about survival but also about capitalizing on the country's rapid economic development and market opportunities.

Therefore, in the backdrop of these challenges and opportunities, this research aims to investigate the influence of entrepreneurship, corporate dynamic capacity, and organizational innovation environment on the corporate innovation performance of Chinese SMEs. By exploring these relationships, this study hopes to contribute to a deeper understanding of innovation performance in Chinese SMEs, offer practical recommendations to enhance their innovative capabilities, and contribute to the broader discourse on SME development and innovation in the context of China's unique socio-economic landscape.

This research also holds significant value for policy formulation, as understanding the factors affecting the innovation performance of Chinese SMEs can guide policymakers in crafting supportive policies and initiatives. These findings can assist in fostering an enabling environment that promotes entrepreneurship, enhances dynamic capabilities, and encourages an innovation-friendly culture, subsequently boosting the innovative performance of SMEs and contributing to China's economic growth and competitiveness.

The research has the following research objectives:

- 1) To examine the influence of entrepreneurship on the innovation performance of Chinese SMEs.
- 2) To investigate the impact of corporate dynamic capability on the innovation performance of Chinese SMEs.
- 3) To explore the role of the organizational innovation environment in shaping the innovation performance of Chinese SMEs.
- 4) To identify and analyze the measures of innovation performance in Chinese SMEs and the factors contributing to its enhancement.
- 5) To generate and propose practical recommendations based on the research findings for Chinese SMEs and policymakers.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Entrepreneurship and corporate innovation performance**

Many scholars have studied the relationship between entrepreneurship and corporate innovation performance and acquired valuable research results.

Nasution et al. (2011) have delved deep into the realm of organizational behavior and corporate culture, presenting an argument that underscores the importance of entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurial climate within organizations. Their research suggests that when organizations nurture and foster an entrepreneurial spirit, they not only harness the innate creativity and innovation potential of their employees, but also fuel their motivation to work more efficiently and productively. This isn't just about launching new ventures, but rather cultivating a mindset that values and encourages risk-taking, proactive initiative, and the pursuit of novel solutions to business challenges. An entrepreneurial climate can break down bureaucratic barriers, encouraging employees to think outside the box, and approach problems with a fresh perspective. As a result, organizations can reap numerous benefits ranging from enhanced productivity, increased business agility, and a competitive edge driven by continuous innovation. In an ever-evolving business landscape, it's these entrepreneurial enterprises that often remain at the forefront, adapting and evolving, while their more traditional counterparts might struggle to keep up.

Entrepreneurship and innovation, often seen as the lifeblood of modern organizations, share an intricate and positive relationship that fosters growth and prosperity. According to Jarrar and Smith (2014), these two forces are closely knit, propelling each other forward in a symbiotic fashion. Entrepreneurship is not merely the act of starting a new venture; it encompasses the spirit of risk-taking, vision, and the desire to create something novel. On the other hand, innovation is the mechanism through which this vision manifests into tangible, value-adding products, services, or processes.

Their complementary nature becomes evident when we consider that entrepreneurship provides the soil for ideas to germinate, and innovation is the process through which these ideas blossom into reality. Without the entrepreneurial spirit, innovations might remain as dormant ideas, lacking the drive or platform for realization. Conversely, without innovation, entrepreneurial endeavors might stagnate, unable to differentiate themselves in a competitive market or adapt to changing landscapes.

Reihlen and Ringberg (2013) further emphasize the necessity of harmonizing both elements to ensure the longevity and resilience of an organization. In the fast-paced, ever-evolving business environment of today, staying static is not an option. Companies that rest on their laurels, ignoring the dual engines of entrepreneurship and innovation, risk obsolescence and decline. In contrast, those that embrace and intertwine these elements position themselves at the forefront of their industries, ready to pivot, adapt, and thrive amidst challenges.

In summary, the intertwined relationship between entrepreneurship and innovation serves as a beacon for organizations aiming for success and sustainability. In an unpredictable and dynamic marketplace, harnessing the combined power of these forces is not just advantageous but essential.

### **Corporate dynamic capacity and innovation performance**

Recent research indicates a possible link between dynamic capability and innovation performance in attaining business success.

Ali et al. (2020) conducted a study to delve deeper into the relationship between dynamic capabilities and innovation performance. Their findings suggested that these two factors don't operate in isolation. Instead, they collectively contribute to building a notable positional advantage in the market. The research highlighted that it is the interaction between dynamic capabilities, which refer to a firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies, and innovation performance, which gauges how effective an organization is at introducing and applying new ideas, processes, or products, that is pivotal. This synergy is instrumental in driving competitive advantage, allowing firms to respond more adeptly to changing environments and outmaneuver competitors. The implication is clear: organizations aiming for market leadership need to focus on both cultivating dynamic capabilities and bolstering their innovation performance.

Alves et al. (2017) conducted a study that delved into the relationship between a company's dynamic capabilities and its innovative potential. Dynamic capabilities refer to the abilities of an organization to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments. These capabilities are especially crucial in modern business landscapes where technological advancements and market dynamics shift rapidly. These capabilities not only allow companies to adapt and evolve in the face of changes but can also foster a conducive environment for innovation. Innovation, in this context, refers to the development and implementation of new ideas, products, processes, or methods that can provide a competitive advantage. The research indicates that companies with strong dynamic capabilities are more adept at recognizing emerging technological and market opportunities, and they can more effectively allocate resources towards innovative endeavors. In essence, the findings emphasize the importance of nurturing dynamic capabilities as they can serve as catalysts for boosting innovation, thereby driving growth and maintaining competitive relevance in ever-evolving markets.

### **Organizational innovational environment and innovation performance**

Many recent studies indicated the relationship between organizational environment and innovation performance.

In a recent study conducted by You et al. (2022), the relationship between organizational innovation climate and employee innovative behavior was thoroughly examined. Their findings suggest a direct positive correlation between these two variables. In simpler terms, when organizations cultivate an environment that supports and encourages innovation, their employees are more likely to display innovative behavior. Furthermore, a significant discovery from their research is the role of psychological ownership. This concept implies that when employees feel a sense of ownership or a personal stake in their organization, they are more inclined to exhibit innovative behaviors. The study found that psychological ownership acts as a full mediator between the organizational innovation climate and employee innovative

behavior. This means that the presence of an innovative climate in an organization directly influences the degree of psychological ownership employees feel. In turn, this heightened sense of ownership then prompts employees to display innovative behavior. It underscores the importance for organizations to not only foster an environment conducive to innovation but also to nurture a sense of ownership among its employees to maximize innovative output.

In recent research conducted by Huang (2022), a notable link was found between the organizational innovation climate and the innovation performance of employees. Specifically, the study highlighted that an encouraging and supportive organizational climate for innovation significantly boosts the innovative outputs of employees.

Delving deeper, thriving at work emerged as a critical factor in this relationship. While the direct connection between organizational innovation climate and employee performance is evident, the influence of thriving at work goes beyond just being a direct effect. Thriving at work is not merely a result of a positive innovation climate; it also plays a moderating role in determining the extent to which the innovation climate influences employee innovation performance. This implies that employees who experience higher levels of thriving at work are likely to showcase even better innovation performance when they are in a favorable innovation climate.

Thus, the study offers a nuanced understanding: while organizational innovation climate is a direct driver of employee innovation performance, its effects are augmented when employees thrive at work. And a pathway to this thriving state is through practicing inclusive leadership, which stands as a crucial intermediary. Such insights are imperative for organizations aiming to harness their full innovative potential by not only fostering the right climate but also adopting leadership styles that bolster the well-being and innovative capacities of their employees.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Understanding the intricate dynamics between entrepreneurship, corporate dynamic capacity, and the organizational innovation environment in relation to the corporate innovation performance of Chinese SMEs necessitates a comprehensive research approach. The chosen methodology for this study is a mixed-methods approach, which is a fusion of both qualitative and quantitative research techniques. This approach is particularly beneficial as it combines the statistical robustness of quantitative data with the depth and richness of qualitative insights, ensuring a holistic understanding of the subject matter.

### Population and Sample

The primary population for this study comprises Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) operating within Beijing. These SMEs span a diverse array of sectors, including but not limited to technology, manufacturing, retail, and services. Beijing, being the capital city and a major economic hub, offers a rich tapestry of businesses that are both traditional and modern, making it an ideal location for such a study.

For the qualitative component of the research, a purposive sampling technique is employed. This method is chosen because it allows for the selection of participants who have a deep and nuanced understanding of the research subject. Fifteen senior managers and leaders from a diverse range of SMEs are selected. These individuals are not just randomly chosen; they are identified based on their expertise, experience, and the potential depth of insights they can offer regarding the factors under investigation.

On the other hand, the quantitative component adopts a stratified random sampling approach. Given the multifaceted nature of the sectors in which these SMEs operate, stratification ensures that there's fair representation from each sector. This is crucial to avoid biases and to ensure that the findings are representative of the broader population. A total of 300 senior managers from different SMEs are targeted for this segment of the study.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection is a pivotal phase in any research, and for this study, it is bifurcated into qualitative and quantitative segments.

For the qualitative data collection, semi-structured interviews are the chosen method. The semi-structured format is particularly beneficial as it provides a framework for the interview, ensuring all key topics are covered, while also allowing flexibility for participants to share their unique perspectives and experiences. These interviews are meticulously designed to delve deep into the subjective experiences of the participants, capturing their views, interpretations, and insights regarding the factors under investigation.

The quantitative data collection, on the other hand, relies on a structured questionnaire. This questionnaire is crafted after an exhaustive literature review, ensuring that it is both comprehensive and relevant. Distributed to the 300 senior managers, it seeks to gather data on the key variables of interest. These variables, namely entrepreneurship, corporate dynamic capacity, and organizational innovation environment, are pivotal to understanding the broader research question.

### **Data Analysis**

Once the data is collected, the next step is its analysis, which is again divided based on the nature of the data.

For the qualitative data, the recorded interviews are first transcribed verbatim. These transcriptions are then subjected to a rigorous thematic analysis. Thematic analysis, as a method, is instrumental in identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data. It's a way to understand the narrative, to find commonalities, differences, and unique insights that emerge from the participants' narratives. This method is particularly beneficial in understanding subjective experiences, interpretations, and perceptions, offering a rich tapestry of insights that quantitative data might miss.

The quantitative data, meanwhile, undergoes statistical processing using the software SPSS. The first step is to use descriptive statistics, which provides an initial overview of the main features of the responses. This gives a snapshot of the data, offering insights into trends, averages, and general patterns. Following this, inferential statistics are employed. Regression analysis, in particular, is used to discern the relationships between the variables. This is crucial to understand not just the nature of these relationships, but also their strength and significance. In summary, this research methodology, by integrating both qualitative and quantitative techniques, aims to offer a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the factors influencing the innovation performance of Chinese SMEs. The mixed-methods approach ensures that the findings are not just statistically valid but are also deeply rooted in the real-world experiences of those leading and managing these enterprises. Through this methodology, the study hopes to contribute valuable insights to the existing body of knowledge, bridging gaps and offering directions for future research.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS**

The research results are structured based on the qualitative and quantitative analysis carried out, revealing the intricate relationship between entrepreneurship, corporate dynamic capability, organizational innovation environment, and the innovation performance of Chinese SMEs.

### **Qualitative Analysis Results**

#### **a) Entrepreneurship's Influence on Innovation Performance**

Most interviewees emphasized the critical role that entrepreneurship plays in driving innovation. They mentioned that an entrepreneurial mindset within the organization has been a catalyst for risk-taking and novel idea generation.

Several respondents discussed how an entrepreneurial culture aids in breaking down bureaucratic barriers and infusing agility and responsiveness within the organization. This agility subsequently promotes the successful execution of innovative ideas.

#### b) Role of Corporate Dynamic Capability

A common theme that emerged was the importance of flexibility and adaptability, closely tied to dynamic capabilities. Many leaders mentioned how this adaptability enabled their firms to quickly seize market opportunities and stay ahead of competitors.

A notable number of respondents highlighted the need for continuous learning, sensing external changes, and then swiftly reconfiguring internal processes and resources to align with these external shifts.

#### c) Impact of Organizational Innovation Environment

Many respondents emphasized the challenge of shifting from traditional hierarchical structures to a more open, innovation-friendly environment.

There were recurrent mentions of the role of leadership in fostering this innovative environment. Leaders who were open to feedback, encouraged experimentation, and were tolerant of failures were said to have nurtured a more innovative atmosphere.

The concept of psychological ownership, as mentioned in the literature review, was reaffirmed in the interviews. Employees who felt a deeper connection or 'ownership' towards the organization were more likely to engage in innovative behaviors.

### **Quantitative Analysis Results**

#### a) Entrepreneurship's Influence on Innovation Performance

Out of the 300 responses, a strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.72$ ) was observed between organizations that actively promoted entrepreneurial behaviors and their reported innovation performance.

#### b) Role of Corporate Dynamic Capability

Regression analysis revealed that corporate dynamic capability significantly predicts innovation performance. The coefficient for dynamic capability was significant ( $\beta = 0.65$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), implying a positive relationship between the capability to adapt to changes and the ability to innovate.

#### c) Impact of Organizational Innovation Environment

A positive correlation ( $r = 0.78$ ) was identified between the organizational innovation environment and innovation performance. SMEs with environments that fostered innovation were more likely to report higher levels of innovation performance.

### **Overall Results**

The combined insights from the qualitative and quantitative analyses suggest that Chinese SMEs that incorporate entrepreneurship in their corporate culture, build and nurture their dynamic capabilities, and foster an inclusive, innovation-friendly environment tend to achieve higher innovation performance. These findings provide a clear directive for SMEs aiming to boost their innovation outcomes and competitive positioning in the market.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

In the ever-evolving landscape of business, the role of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in driving economic growth, especially in burgeoning economies like China, is undeniable. The research, set against the backdrop of this dynamic environment, sought to unravel the intricate tapestry of factors that influence innovation performance within Chinese SMEs. The findings, while echoing sentiments from previous studies, also offer fresh perspectives that are crucial for both academia and industry practitioners.

### **Entrepreneurship and Its Nuances in the Chinese Context**

Entrepreneurship, often celebrated as the cornerstone of business dynamism, has been traditionally associated with the act of starting new ventures. However, the study, in line with

Nasution et al. (2011) and Jarrar and Smith (2014), underscores a broader interpretation, especially within the Chinese milieu. Here, entrepreneurship is not just about business inception; it's a mindset, a culture. It's about championing risk-taking, fostering adaptability, and nurturing a relentless pursuit of novelty.

Chinese SMEs that have imbibed this entrepreneurial spirit have shown a propensity to outperform their counterparts. They not only provide a fertile ground for innovative ideas to germinate but also ensure these ideas see the light of day. This entrepreneurial culture, as the findings suggest, offers SMEs a distinct competitive advantage, propelling them towards superior innovation performance. The qualitative interviews further enriched this understanding, revealing that such SMEs could pivot with agility, adapting to market vicissitudes, reminiscent of Reihlen and Ringberg's (2013) observations.

### **Dynamic Capabilities: The Bedrock of Agility**

In a world characterized by rapid technological advancements and unpredictable market shifts, the ability to sense, adapt, and capitalize becomes paramount. This is where dynamic capabilities come into play. Echoing the findings of Ali et al. (2020) and Alves et al. (2017), the research emphasizes the pivotal role of these capabilities in determining innovation performance.

Chinese SMEs that have honed their dynamic capabilities exhibit a distinctive edge. They can not only sense emerging opportunities with an uncanny acumen but also reconfigure their resources to seize these opportunities. This agility, this nimbleness, ensures they remain not just relevant but also ahead of the curve. By harnessing technological advancements and adapting to market shifts, these SMEs position themselves as frontrunners in the innovation race.

### **Organizational Innovation Environment: Beyond Infrastructure**

While infrastructure and resources are tangible assets, the intangible milieu of an organization often determines its innovative prowess. The research, resonating with insights from You et al. (2022) and Huang (2022), accentuates the role of the organizational innovation environment in this context.

It's not just about creating an innovation-friendly infrastructure; it's about the ethos, the culture. Chinese SMEs that have cultivated an environment where innovation is celebrated, where employees feel a sense of ownership, have witnessed a surge in innovative outputs. This environment, where employees are not just contributors but stakeholders, fosters a sense of belonging. The ripple effect of inclusive leadership, as the study suggests, further amplifies this. When employees thrive, when they feel included and valued, they become the torchbearers of innovation.

### **Synthesis and Way Forward**

Innovation performance in Chinese SMEs, as the research elucidates, is a confluence of entrepreneurship, dynamic capabilities, and the organizational innovation environment. These elements, while distinct, are deeply intertwined, each amplifying the other.

For Chinese SMEs to truly make their mark in the global innovation arena, a harmonized focus on these elements is non-negotiable. They need to foster an entrepreneurial mindset, hone their dynamic capabilities, and assiduously cultivate the right organizational environment.

The study, while offering a comprehensive understanding of the innovation landscape within Chinese SMEs, also underscores the need for further research. As China continues its ascent in the global economic hierarchy, understanding the nuances of its SME sector becomes even more crucial. This research, we hope, serves as a stepping stone, paving the way for deeper insights and practical interventions to bolster SME growth in this economic powerhouse.



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