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The evolution of strategic management research: Recent trends and current directions[☆]



Luis Ángel Guerras-Martín^{a,*}, Anoop Madhok^b, Ángeles Montoro-Sánchez^c

^a Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Spain

^b Schulich School of Business, York University, Canada

^c Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain

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Abstract Strategic management is a relatively youthful discipline that has steadily matured over the past fifty years. The field has become consolidated over this period, while simultaneously expanding the range of topics analyzed and research methodologies used. Different theories and approaches, addressing different research topics, have been developed to explain the reasons underlying firms' competitive advantage and success. In this paper, we posit the existence of two pendulums in constant motion that, on the one hand, reflect the tension that has historically existed between the focus on internal firm factors and external environmental attributes respectively and, on the other hand, the tension between a more macro level of analysis, i.e., the firm and its environment, and a more micro level one, i.e., individuals and their relations within the firm. The frontier of research in strategic management is shaped by the simultaneous movement of both pendulums.

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Introduction: trends in strategic management research

Strategic management is a youthful discipline. Its origins date back to the 1960s, with its roots to be found mainly in the seminal publications by Chandler (1962), Ansoff (1965)

and Andrews (1971). Since then, it has evolved significantly, becoming an ever more mature and consolidated field within the realm of management.

The discipline's progress toward maturity has been accompanied by several factors. First, there has been a marked increase in the range of topics addressed (Hoskisson et al., 1999). The study of "best practices" in the 1960s has given way to an analysis of such varied topics as internationalization, cooperation between firms, strategies and competition in the markets for products and factors, strategic leadership, and the relationship between a firm's strategy and its corporate social responsibility, to mention just a few.

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* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: luisangel.guerras@urjc.es
(L.Á. Guerras-Martín).

Second, there has been significant growth in the range of research methods used, with these becoming steadily more sophisticated (Hoskisson et al., 1999; Ketchen et al., 2008). In-depth case studies have been largely replaced by the use of quantitative tools based on complex econometric techniques, multilevel analysis and, more recently, hybrid methodologies, whereby a single study combines quantitative and qualitative techniques, with each being adapted to the nature of the problem to be analyzed (Molina-Azorín, 2012).

Third, a further indicator of the discipline's growing maturity is the increasing consensus regarding certain basic notions, such as the definition or concept of strategy or strategic management. Ronda-Pupo and Guerras-Martín (2012) reveal how consensus around the concept of strategy has been building up and spreading over time in a slow but inexorable manner. Although the diversity of definitions continues to be a common feature of our discipline, more aspects of the concept have become part of the core of the definition over the years or drawn closer to it. It is both surprising and noteworthy to discover how major aspects of the concepts of strategy and strategic management are so similar in the two studies conducted in different contexts and with differing methodologies. Using implicit and explicit definitions from a set of scholars, Nag et al. (2007) identify seven key components of the concept of strategic management: performance, firms, strategic initiatives, environment, internal organization, managers/owners and resources. Although they employed a different approach based on co-word analysis, the same components feature among the more relevant items underlying the concept of strategy in the research by Ronda-Pupo and Guerras-Martín (2012).

Fourth, and finally, the academic community interested in strategy research has been growing steadily, not just in terms of the number of scholars dedicated to this field but also their international nature as well as the linkages among them. If we take our yardstick to be the publication *Strategic Management Journal* (SMJ), we can see how cooperation has been increasing between scholars from both an inter-institutional as well as an international perspective (Ronda-Pupo and Guerras-Martín, 2010; Guerras-Martín and Ronda-Pupo, 2013). Furthermore, the Strategic Management Society currently has almost 3000 members from more than 80 countries.

Over the course of its development, strategic management has steadily accumulated a reasonably large corpus of knowledge, both of a theoretical and an empirical and methodological nature. Accordingly, there has been a need every so often to define the discipline's state-of-the-art and its direction at that moment. This has been reflected in three different ways. First, there are numerous works that have reflected upon the discipline itself, through books, papers, dedicated issues of journals or specific handbooks on the subject. As examples, we may mention the books by Fredrickson (1990), Rumelt et al. (1994), and Pettigrew et al. (2002a).

Second, there has been an upsurge of dedicated issues of journals that have sought to explore the frontiers of knowledge in the field and its links to other disciplines. The journal SMJ, for example, has published special issues on such relevant topics as networks and alliances,

organizational capabilities, entrepreneurship, global strategy, strategic process, resource-based view (RBV), evolutionary approaches, technological competences, strategy and economics and the psychological foundations of strategic management, among others (Guerras-Martín and Ronda-Pupo, 2013).

Third, recent years have witnessed the emergence of a line of research that uses scientometric techniques to discover and analyze the intellectual structure of strategic management and its evolution. We thus encounter research that analyzes the concept of strategy or strategic management (Nag et al., 2007; Ronda-Pupo and Guerras-Martín, 2012), the more salient lines and topics of research (Furrer et al., 2008), the intellectual structure and the more influential papers and authors (Ramos-Rodríguez and Ruiz-Navarro, 2004; Nerur et al., 2008; Furrer et al., 2008), the foremost journals and their profiles (Azar and Brock, 2008; García-Merino and Santos-Álvarez, 2009), or the structure and development of the international academic community (Ronda-Pupo and Guerras-Martín, 2010).

These instances of research that use scientometric tools do not replace the works that review and reflect upon the discipline, but instead complement them appropriately. By introducing quantitative techniques, they allow identifying and measuring specific variables related to the discipline and its development, thereby facilitating an objective approach to the analysis of such variables. Moreover, they permit the discovery of relationships between researchers and topics that are not obvious at first glance, such as the intellectual structure or the key terms that encapsulate myriad definitions of a concept.

Based on the above, our objective in this paper is to analyze past and current trends in strategic management research, a field characterized by assorted and manifold aspects of relevance. We pull together the various and diverse theoretical perspectives informing this research through utilizing the image of a double pendulum swinging in unison. This involves identifying and analyzing the tension between the internal and external domains of strategic management research as well as the tension between the macro and micro levels of analysis. Following this, we present the works included in this monograph, which seek to describe and explore some of the research frontiers.

The evolution of strategic management research: the dual pendulum

Strategic management has been regarded as a fundamental issue that explains the success or failure of firms (Rumelt et al., 1994). This entails discovering why certain firms are successful while others are not; in other words, identifying the factors of success. Although this core motivation is shared by all the researchers in this field, the path to be pursued is not quite so clear. This is so because, among other reasons, the eclectic and multidisciplinary nature of strategic management (Hoskisson et al., 1999) attracts the interests of researchers from different disciplines: economics, organizational theory, sociology, psychology, management, etc. As a result, researchers often have different backgrounds, approaches or foci of interest. On top of this, since research into strategy is linked to firm

operations, many tools that are now considered the staples of any analysis have emerged from the firms themselves or from the strategic consultancies that have advised them (Pettigrew et al., 2002b).

This situation has meant that the quest to find the factors of success has focused on different firm aspects and variables of interest. Mintzberg (1990) reminds us of the ancient fable retold in verse by John Godfrey Saxe (19th century US poet), in which each one of the blind men (researchers) sets out to describe the elephant (discipline) solely through touch (approach), whereby each one describes a different part of the animal. They are all correct in their description, yet it is difficult to deduce what the elephant actually looks like from each one of the individual descriptions.

One way of making sense of this diversity of factors is to classify them according to some criterion. Broadly, on the one hand many researchers have tended to focus their attention on a firm's internal factors, such as its strengths and weaknesses. On the other hand, the reasons for success have been sought in the environment's opportunities and threats. An alternative and complementary criterion enables us to organize the research according to the level of analysis adopted. This may involve the firm as a whole – macro level – or specific aspects of it linked to the behavior of its individuals – micro level.

In line with this, one can identify two types of tensions throughout the development of the strategic management field: one between internal and external considerations and the other between macro and micro level considerations. Typically, certain periods have recorded a prevalence of one or the other aspect in the research. This situation can be likened to a dual pendulum, following the metaphor used by Hoskisson et al. (1999), where the focal thrust is on internal or external considerations or on macro or micro level issues. The two pendulums have been moving simultaneously over the course of the discipline's history, and their overall movements have defined the discipline's evolution and its current state. Fig. 1 shows the arrangement of the main approaches and theories involved in strategic management according to these two classification criteria.

The tension between a firm's interior and its environment

For many scholars reflecting upon the discipline, one of the key issues underlying its evolution is the primacy of attention given to internal or external considerations when explaining firm success. Hoskisson et al. (1999) popularized the metaphor of the pendulum and its swings to explain how strategic management has always tended to look for the factors of success either inside or outside a firm. For these authors, the pendulum started in the 1960s, when the focus was on analyzing internal strengths and weaknesses and the aim, therefore, was to look inside successful firms for those factors that underlay and had driven their performance.

In our opinion however, it is not so clear that the attention of the so-called founders of strategy was focused solely on internal considerations. We would contend instead that, during the 1960s and 1970s, more general approaches or frameworks were considered that laid the foundations for subsequent theories. Thus, strategy was seen as the way to

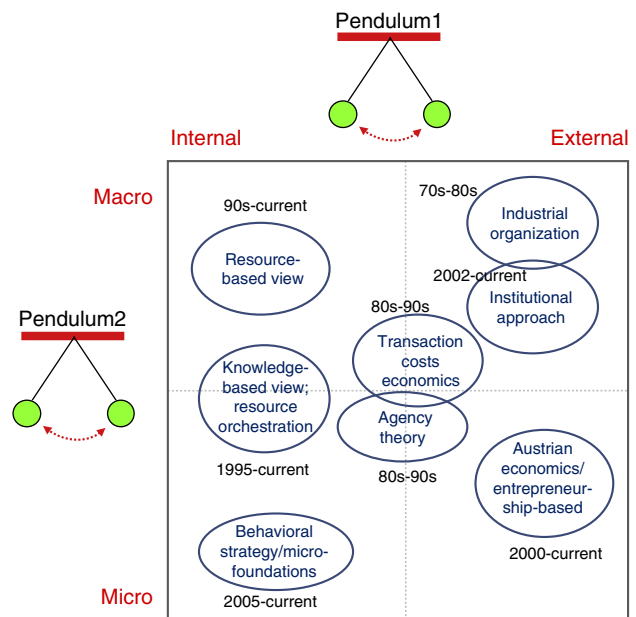


Figure 1 Evolution of strategic management research.

link a firm to the environment in which both the internal and external aspects were important. This was mirrored in the SWOT analysis that investigated both the interior of firms (strengths and weaknesses) and their exterior (opportunities and threats), or in the strategic matrices (BCG growth-share matrix, or McKinsey market attractiveness-business strength) which merged both aspects – firm and industry environment – in a single analytic tool.

Toward the end of the 1970s and in the 1980s, the search for the keys to success gravitated toward the external environment, with research on the industry structure becoming paramount (Porter, 1980). The economics of organizations, through the contributions made by agency theory (Jensen and Meckling, 1976) and transactions cost theory (Williamson, 1975, 1985), shifted the pendulum toward more of a middle position that addressed both the internal and external aspects in the search for success. Finally, the appearance and rise of the resource-based view (RBV), stimulated by the works of Wernerfelt (1984) and Barney (1991), once again swung the pendulum into the interior of firms, to some extent going back to the beginning.

Although the pendulum metaphor is highly illustrative of the development of strategic management, with its focus on certain groups of factors that explain the success of firms, its strict application would be somewhat simplistic. It is one thing to reduce a research analysis to internal or external factors, for reasons of purpose or methodology, and it is another and very different matter to assume that the reality consists solely of one or the other. Clearly, both aspects are important. For instance, although it is important to choose an appropriate industry, with the industry's appeal being undoubtedly an explanatory factor of success, yet the availability of valuable resources that set a firm apart from its competitors and which it can use to build a sustainable competitive advantage is no less important.

Although it is true that research in strategy has paid more attention in recent years to internal rather than external factors, the latter have not in any way disappeared from

priority lines of research. Furrer et al. (2008) show how, over 26 years of research into strategy (1980–2005), the research stream linked to resources has been growing on a slow but steady basis. Whereas over the 1980–1985 period it accounted for only 9% of the papers published, over the 2001–2005 period it amounted to a significant 38.3%, placing it second in the list of the 26 lines analyzed and behind only the field of performance. In turn, although the analysis of the environment in general and its influence on strategy falls from 33% to 22.7% in the periods considered, the industry analysis remains stable with around 11.4% of the papers published on strategy. Nonetheless, the sum of the two constitutes a significant 34.1% of the papers; in other words, it continues to be a major topic.

The above data show that although the importance of internal factors and the RBV has grown in presence and magnitude, the focus on external factors, though declining slightly, has maintained a significant position in the research into strategic management. Many researchers of strategy have for some time wondered whether the resource-based view or paradigm has been exhausted, and whether the pendulum will once again swing to the outside of firms or whether it will remain much longer on the internal side. In our opinion, and based on the aforementioned and other similar data, research will not turn its attention away from either internal or external factors. What may be happening is that research in strategy is exploring new topics and approaches both in the external sphere and within firms themselves.

Proof of this is to be found in the fact that although the more traditional approach of industrial organization has been fading, recent years have seen the growing significance of approaches that stress the importance of external considerations. Such is the case of the institutional approach, whose analysis of the factors of success considers certain explanatory variables related to a firm's institutional environment (Peng, 2002; Peng et al., 2009). This approach extends the industry's traditional analysis by introducing new environmental variables, such as the laws, traditions or culture of a region or country, in order to understand the relationship between the environment and strategy. Furthermore, certain recent trends in the RBV seek to extend this approach to include environmental elements – “the demand side” (Adner and Zemsky, 2006; Priem et al., 2012).

On the external side of Fig. 1, a different perspective has been gathering steam that is rooted more in Austrian economics-based notions of entrepreneurship (Kirzner, 1997; Jacobson, 1992). This latter perspective pictures markets as a process in constant transformation due to the behavior of individual firms. Here, restrictions on firm behavior are not so much due to objective external constraints as to the absence of entrepreneurial knowledge, which can be overcome by direct market participation. As a result, firms must engage in entrepreneurial action aimed at the discovery of profit opportunities which are unknown a priori. Firm agency and competitive agility therefore become much more central to this perspective, with the focal lens of competitiveness shifting from advantage to opportunities. Together, these developments underlie the notion of strategic entrepreneurship (Ireland et al., 2003), which combines entrepreneurship – opportunity-seeking behavior – with strategic management, i.e.,

advantage-seeking behavior. Hence the reason we call this approach the “Austrian entrepreneurship-based view”.

Within the internal side, other approaches have appeared alongside the RBV that also highlight internal aspects of the firm, such as dynamic capabilities (Teece et al., 1997), the knowledge-based view (Nonaka, 1994; Grant, 1996) or the more recent resource orchestration approach (Sirmon et al., 2011). Likewise, the approaches that focus on individual or group behavior – behavioral strategy – maintain a close relationship with the RBV, but are now looking for the factors of success at a different level of analysis within the firm (Powell et al., 2011).

The tension between macro and micro levels

Although it has been less developed in the literature, we can also identify a kind of pendulum between a macro or firm level of analysis and a micro level of analysis more closely related to group and/or individual behavior within the firm. Although it is generally accepted that the object of analysis in strategic management is the firm as a whole, be it multi-business, multi-market or multinational (Rumelt et al., 1994), the factors of success may be rooted at both the micro and macro levels. Yet it would be accurate to say that the latter have prevailed over the former in research to date.

In a similar vein to the internal–external pendulum, in the early 1960s and 1970s we come across major contributions within both the macro and micro domains. The founders of the strategy field analyzed the success of a firm as a whole, and approached the firm itself as the principal unit of analysis. Such is the case, for example, in the work of Chandler (1962) or Ansoff (1965). Others, rooted more in organizational theory, who made significant contributions at a more macro level include the work of Burns and Stalker (1961) and Lawrence and Lorsch (1967), among others. At the same time, major contributions from the sphere of organizational theory and behavior, such as the work of Cyert and March (1963) and March and Simon (1958), clearly at the micro level, already stand out in this first period and emerged as highly influential at the dawn of the discipline. Equally relevant is the attention paid to firm management through the seminal contributions made by, for example, Barnard (1938) or Selznick (1957), who exerted a considerable influence in these early years.

We may therefore contend that approaches or frameworks that analyze both the macro and the micro levels coexisted at this initial stage. From the 1980s onwards, the huge importance garnered by research in industrial economics shifted the focus of attention on to macro aspects, particularly the structure of industry. This dominance of external and macro aspects led to a steady decline in the influence of both micro and macro organizational approaches, as reported by Ramos-Rodríguez and Ruiz-Navarro (2004) in their study on the discipline's evolution.

As in the case of the internal–external pendulum, the 1980s witnessed the appearance of the economics of organizations such as agency theory and transaction cost economics. These perspectives were located more toward the midway point on the macro-micro pendulum, as they

opened the corporate black box to analyze the contractual relationship between actors in the case of agency theory, or the relationships between firms and markets in the case of transaction cost economics.

The early 1990s saw the powerful emergence of the RBV that swung the momentum of the pendulum back toward a more macro approach in strategic management. The possession of strategically valuable resources and capabilities is the fundamental source of a firm's competitive advantage. Yet although this approach continues to be present, it is now considered insufficient for advantage since it is not enough to know that strategic resources permit creating and sustaining a competitive advantage; the more important issue is to understand how.

Accordingly, the mid 1990s onwards see the appearance of approaches closely linked to the RBV, albeit at a lower level of analysis. Such is the case of the knowledge-based view that emphasizes the creation of intangible knowledge in a firm based on people and the relationships between them (Nonaka, 1994; Grant, 1996), or that of dynamic capabilities that deals with how to renew and improve resources on an ongoing basis to enable a firm to adapt to its environment (Teece et al., 1997; Wang and Ahmed, 2007). Along a different path, yet heading in the same direction, the approach that we might refer to as "resource orchestration" addresses the issue of how to create valuable capabilities and resources through the actions undertaken by a firm's own management, thereby seeking to analyze the black box of the simple possession of resources and highlight the importance of their creation and management (Sirmon et al., 2007, 2011).

More recently, the line of research on microfoundations and behavioral strategy places emphasis on the individual level in order to analyze the behaviors that have an impact on strategy (Felin and Foss, 2005; Powell et al., 2011). The aim is to apply the knowledge of behavioral sciences, basically psychology and organizational behavior, to the issues of concern to strategic management. The overall purpose is to address and analyze strategy through realistic assumptions of human cognition, emotions and social behavior (Powell et al., 2011). These considerations connect with the RBV to the extent that they seek to analyze, among other aspects, why firms differ from one another (assumption of heterogeneity) or how organizational competencies and capabilities can be built up or generated on the basis of individual human resources. This approach, therefore, lays stress on a firm's internal aspects while focusing attention on the influence of the individual level in firm success. Furthermore, it connects with the organizational approaches of the 1960s put forward by forerunners such as Cyert, March and Simon, whose contributions, as we have already stated, were highly influential in the discipline's infancy.

On the right-hand side of the matrix in Fig. 1, we can see the shift in movement of the pendulum from the macro level of industrial organization toward a more micro level. Through the contributions made by the Austrian economists such as Kirzner (1973), which Jacobson (1992) terms the Austrian school of strategy, the emphasis shifts from the more macro level of the market or industry toward the more micro level of opportunities and firms' actions. Whereas in the industrial organization and institutional approaches the context is mostly taken as a given, in the Austrian economics

approach the opportunities available are determined by the firms themselves through their actions and discoveries, irrespective of the industry and institutional context. Since market evolution is difficult to predict in advance, business opportunities are transient and need to be uncovered or generated by economic agents. As a result, the alert firm proactively engages in initiatives aimed at the discovery and the development of opportunities where existing competition is relatively limited or the value proposition is innovative and unique.

As the Austrian school of strategy underscores the importance of an entrepreneurial and action orientation within the firm, this approach begins to share a more micro-level perspective of strategy and firm behavior with microfoundations and behavioral strategy. To elaborate further, one would expect entrepreneurial and action orientation to be reflected in a firm's business model, or 'way of doing things', enabled by systems of activities and governance that emphasize quick decision-making, coordination and fast mobilization of efforts and resources (Doz and Kosonen, 2010). The role of the top management team in creating such an orientation would obviously be quite central here. To some extent then, even though the starting point of the Austrian school and microfoundations literature may differ, with the latter based more on cognition and behavioral strategy and the former more on Austrian economics, the two end up both complementing and reinforcing one another at the micro level.

To sum up, the two pendulums operate simultaneously and are in continuous movement, and at times even overlap one another. Consequently, we now encounter fully valid approaches that focus their attention both at macro level and at micro level, and within both the internal and external domains. To put it another way, research into strategic management has evolved toward a greater complexity of the issues addressed and approaches adopted. This means that one might expect a greater capacity for analysis of the complex issues it seeks to tackle, without focusing exclusively on one type of problem or one type of approach.

About the monograph

Bearing in mind the different contributions included in the special issue, its own title and that of this paper refers to the frontiers of research in strategic management. Indeed, it may be posited that, in one way or another, the works included here seek to explore that frontier.

First, drawing upon the reflections made in the previous section, we encounter three works that review the literature and analyze the issues from three distinct perspectives: external-macro (institutional approach), external-micro (action-based perspective) and internal-micro (microfoundations approach). Second, the frontier of strategy research is explored by addressing topics of special significance and growing interest in recent years. Such is the case with research into (a) multinational enterprises (MNEs) and the global context in which an ever-growing number of firms now operate; and (b) the relationship between a firm and its environment with respect to consideration of its social responsibility and the impact the firm has on the natural environment. Third, as noted earlier, recent years have

seen a successful exploration and application of bibliometric techniques for analyzing the discipline of strategic management. Extending this from a methodological point of view, it is important to provide alternatives for the measurement of complex variables that allow progress to be made in empirical research. Two of the articles address this important frontier issue in the MNE and the institutional contexts.

One of the foremost aspects of strategy research, partially responsible for the emergence and development of different theoretical approaches over the last few decades, has been the search for sources and reasons underlying firms' competitive advantage. Broadly speaking, extant frameworks that revolve around the sustainability of competitive advantage attribute a firm's superior performance to its positioning in the industry's structure and/or the possession of critical resources. Yet the logic implicit in these perspectives may well be out of tune with the current environment, characterized by more dynamic and complex behavior manifested by markets and firms, where competitive advantages are rendered obsolete faster than ever. The paper by [Madhok and Marques \(2014\)](#) proffers an alternative theoretical perspective to explain a firm's competitive behavior based on action. This approach revolves around a logic of action and stresses an entrepreneurial approach and firms' agility as the basis of their competitiveness. Such an action-based logic not only shifts the focus of attention away from industry position or the possession of resources as the singular explanation for a firm's competitiveness, but also provides new possibilities for analyzing how firms with fewer advantages can compete with already established firms.

Recent years have seen the emergence of a line of research in strategic management that focuses on an analysis of its microfoundations. This line highlights the need to consider aspects related to the actions of individuals and their interactions as independent variables underlying firm performance. The paper by [Molina-Azorin \(2014\)](#) conducts a systematic review of the existing literature on microfoundations, indicating their usefulness and main characteristics. It contributes to the literature by identifying the main areas of study, the benefits, opportunities and potential of the research stream in advancing the field of strategy, as well as certain limitations and challenges that need to be overcome. Furthermore, it analyzes the way in which micro and macro aspects may be integrated within strategy research, an issue of great interest and relevance for the progress of research in management and the study of organizations. To do so, it considers possible methodologies which may favor that integration and examines works that use a multilevel approach. These issues are analyzed mainly within the framework of the RBV, as the study of microfoundations seeks explanations for the heterogeneity of firms based on the differences between individuals.

Third, the paper by [Garrido et al. \(2014\)](#) analyzes the role played by institutions in answering questions of interest for strategic management from an institutional perspective. One of the main challenges that this perspective faces is to develop metrics that capture the institutional dimension more accurately. Their paper makes a major contribution in this regard by providing a detailed analysis of the main metrics used in strategic management research from the institutional perspective. The authors first review the main areas where institutional theory has been

most widely developed and applied, such as diversification, foreign direct investment or modes of entry into foreign markets, and corporate governance, and then zero in on how this has been done, especially as regards the incorporation of the role of institutions within the empirical framework of the analyses. Their article therefore provides a guide that may serve as a reference for researchers when incorporating the institutional dimension into their empirical studies.

Fourth, one of the prominent emerging topics of strategic management research in recent years is corporate social responsibility. The paper by [Gallardo-Vázquez and Sánchez-Hernández \(2014\)](#) analyzes the extent to which the information on social responsibility in the hands of the managers of small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) informs a positive predisposition toward the performance of responsible actions toward the natural environment. In particular, they verify whether there is a relationship between the components of the environmental responsibility of these firms, depending on whether the actions are more or less closely linked to their reporting. Curiously enough, SMEs are an important group for examining whether the more responsible firms are the ones that do the most reporting. This is because the responsible behavior of such firms tends to be driven more by the will of their managers rather than by image, and they tend to focus on internal stakeholders because they find it difficult to manifest their responsibility externally, especially in terms of environmental issues. Thus, within the empirical context of a Spanish region, Extremadura, the results of this study confirm that the greater the concern for gathering and receiving information on social responsibility, the greater the voluntary disposition toward responsible environmental management and the greater the importance attributed to actually disseminating the corporate responsibility practiced. Consequently, the efforts made by firm management, public authorities and business organizations in information, awareness or training in social responsibility have a positive effect on the attitude they manifest toward the environment. As can be seen, this approach suggests that the institutional context has a major influence on firms' strategic initiatives.

The fifth and last paper, by [Dabic et al. \(2014\)](#), reviews the research on MNEs and the application of strategic management approaches. For a long period, the research on the strategy of MNEs was rooted in internationalization theory. Based on transaction cost logic, it has difficulty in explaining how MNEs can build their competitive advantage. Developments in agency theory, the RBV, the knowledge-based approach and game theory have sought to complement and extend the explanations for the decisions, behavior and performance of these firms. As a result, there has been considerable dispersion and fragmentation in this line of research. The authors delve further into an understanding of how strategic thinking has impacted upon research into the strategy of MNEs. Following a review of the content of over a thousand papers published between 1975 and 2012, their paper maps the intellectual structure and its changes, concluding that the link between human capital and knowledge is essential for explaining how MNEs develop their strategies. The authors posit that this provides support for co-evolutionary theory, which involves the simultaneous development of arguments from different theories according to the research's objectives and context. This theory is

a promising line of research under the approaches based on resources and knowledge. Strategy's contextual dependence suggests that different contexts require diverse approaches. This paper therefore concludes by suggesting that future lines of research should combine arguments from the various schools of strategic thinking.

Conclusion and final reflections

Strategic management is a relatively young discipline that has been evolving on the back of numerous contributions from different fields in social sciences. Developments over the past few decades testify to the discipline's evolution and maturity, as it now enjoys a great capacity for analysis, as well as a greater array of theories, topics analyzed, and methodologies to do so. The metaphor of the pendulum that has been used to observe how the focus of attention has swung from the internal to the external domains and then back again to the internal one may be extended in two ways to better capture the discipline's evolution. First, besides the internal-external pendulum, a second pendulum is operational that swings between a macro and micro level approach toward key issues in strategic management. Second, these two pendulums are not currently at either end of the swing but are instead moving constantly and simultaneously.

Both the dimensions are present in past research on strategic management, and both are relevant today. This joint movement of the dual pendulum reflects the great complexity of strategic management as an academic discipline. In extending its capacity to understand and analyze the issues that it seeks to address, as well as to provide theories and tools for a deeper understanding of the issues, strategic management research needs to focus at the intersection of both the pendulums and the tensions this creates, since this is where the research frontier lies.

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