

From SWOT to SWOT-R: The Strategic Reversibility Framework

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Abstract. This article revisits SWOT analysis by questioning one of its implicit assumptions: the stability of strategic categories over time. Although SWOT remains one of the most widely used strategic frameworks, existing approaches insufficiently account for the possibility that strategic factors may invert their meaning in volatile environments. Traditional SWOT frameworks tend to treat strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as relatively fixed and directionally stable attributes. However, contemporary environments characterized by volatility, digital acceleration, and reputational instability increasingly expose the reversible nature of strategic positions. Strengths may rapidly become liabilities, weaknesses may generate adaptive advantages, and opportunities may evolve into threats. To address this conceptual limitation, the article adopts a conceptual and theoretical approach grounded in the strategic management literature on environmental turbulence, dynamic capabilities, strategic agility, and temporary advantage. It introduces the concept of strategic reversibility and proposes the SWOT-R framework, an extension of traditional SWOT analysis that incorporates the potential inversion of strategic value over time. Rather than replacing SWOT, SWOT-R reframes it as a dynamic evaluative and decision-support tool better suited to fluid competitive environments. The article contributes theoretically by conceptualizing strategic reversibility as a distinct analytical dimension and by extending SWOT beyond static categorization toward temporal and contextual instability. From a managerial perspective, SWOT-R encourages organizations to anticipate possible strategic reversals, identify hidden vulnerabilities, and evaluate the long-term instability of strategic positions in digitally mediated environments.

Keywords: *SWOT analysis; Strategic reversibility; Dynamic strategy; Competitive advantage; Environmental volatility.*

1. Introduction

Since its introduction in the strategic management literature, SWOT analysis has become one of the most widely used frameworks for organizational diagnosis and strategic planning (Learned et al., 1965; Andrews, 1971; Helms & Nixon, 2010). By classifying internal strengths and weaknesses alongside external opportunities and threats, the framework offers managers a simple structure for evaluating strategic position and supporting decision-making processes. Its intuitive nature, flexibility, and accessibility explain its diffusion far beyond the field of strategic management, including entrepreneurship, public administration, higher education, healthcare, and nonprofit organizations (Gürel & Tat, 2017; Helms & Nixon, 2010). Despite decades of theoretical evolution in strategy research, SWOT analysis remains deeply embedded in both managerial practice and business education.

However, the popularity of SWOT has not prevented persistent criticism regarding its conceptual foundations and analytical limitations. One of the earliest and most influential critiques was formulated by Hill and Westbrook (1997), who argued that SWOT frequently degenerates into long descriptive lists lacking strategic prioritization or actionable insight. Other scholars similarly highlighted problems related to oversimplification, subjectivity, categorization ambiguity, and limited explanatory power (Pickton & Wright, 1998; Valentin, 2001; Gürel & Tat, 2017). In many applications, SWOT analysis tends to classify strategic

elements without sufficiently accounting for their interdependence, evolution, or instability over time (Panagiotou, 2003). As a result, the framework often portrays strategic environments as more stable and predictable than they are.

Indeed, one of the least discussed assumptions underlying traditional SWOT analysis concerns the relative stability of strategic categories themselves. Strengths are generally assumed to remain advantageous, weaknesses detrimental, opportunities favorable, and threats harmful. This classificatory logic implicitly attributes a relatively durable strategic meaning to organizational attributes and environmental conditions. Yet contemporary competitive environments increasingly challenge such stability (D'Aveni, 1994; Teece et al., 1997). Accelerated technological change, digital interconnectivity, platform economies, and reputational volatility continuously reshape the strategic value of organizational resources and positions (Wiggins & Ruefli, 2005; Reeves & Deimler, 2011). In highly dynamic contexts, strategic attributes may rapidly change meaning, sometimes within very short periods of time.

Recent organizational phenomena illustrate this instability particularly well. Brand visibility, traditionally interpreted as a strategic strength, may rapidly become a reputational liability in contexts of online outrage or digital boycott movements (Einwiller et al., 2017). Similarly, organizational rigidity often categorized as a weakness may, under conditions of uncertainty or crisis, contribute to operational consistency and resilience (Staw et al., 1981). Opportunities associated with digital expansion may simultaneously create technological dependence, reputational exposure, and heightened vulnerability to algorithmic shifts (Nambisan et al., 2019). Conversely, constraints and threats have sometimes functioned as catalysts for innovation, adaptation, and organizational renewal (Porter, 1985; Teece, 2007). Such reversals suggest that strategic factors cannot always be understood through stable and unidirectional categorizations.

This observation aligns with broader developments in strategic management theory emphasizing dynamism, adaptability, and environmental turbulence. The dynamic capabilities perspective, for example, stresses the importance of continuously reconfiguring organizational competencies in rapidly changing environments (Teece et al., 1997; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000). Similarly, research on hypercompetition has shown that competitive advantages are increasingly temporary and unstable (D'Aveni, 1994), while contemporary approaches to strategic agility emphasize continuous adaptation rather than static positioning (Doz & Kosonen, 2010). Nevertheless, despite these theoretical advances, the underlying architecture of SWOT analysis has remained largely unchanged. Most extensions of SWOT focus on prioritization tools, quantification methods, or decision matrices rather than questioning the stability of the categories themselves (Kurttila et al., 2000; Helms & Nixon, 2010).

This article argues that one of the major blind spots of traditional SWOT analysis lies precisely in its limited consideration of strategic reversibility. Strategic attributes are not intrinsically positive or negative in permanent ways; rather, their strategic value may invert according to contextual, temporal, technological, or reputational conditions. A strength may become a weakness, an opportunity may evolve into a threat, and a constraint may generate adaptive advantage. The issue, therefore, is not simply environmental change, but the reversible nature of strategic meaning itself.

To address this limitation, the present article introduces the concept of strategic reversibility and proposes the SWOT-R framework. Rather than replacing traditional SWOT analysis, SWOT-R extends it by integrating the possibility that strategic factors may evolve, invert, or destabilize over time. In doing so, the article makes three contributions. First, it identifies the implicit stability assumption embedded in conventional SWOT reasoning. Second, it conceptualizes strategic reversibility as a defining characteristic of contemporary strategic

environments. Third, it proposes SWOT-R as a dynamic extension capable of reframing strategic analysis beyond static categorization.

More specifically, SWOT-R should be understood as a conceptual strategic framework that extends the analytical logic of traditional SWOT analysis through the integration of strategic reversibility. The framework does not propose a quantitative method or a predictive model, but rather a dynamic interpretive approach designed to support strategic diagnosis and managerial decision-making in unstable environments. In this sense, SWOT-R operates both as a theoretical extension of SWOT and as a decision-support framework adapted to contexts characterized by volatility, digital interdependence, and accelerated strategic change.

2. The stability assumption of SWOT

The enduring success of SWOT analysis largely stems from its simplicity. By organizing strategic diagnosis into four categories, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, the framework provides managers with an accessible and operational representation of organizational reality (Andrews, 1971; Helms & Nixon, 2010). Its appeal resides precisely in its ability to reduce strategic complexity into identifiable and actionable dimensions. Yet this simplification also constitutes one of its most important theoretical limitations. Beneath its apparent neutrality, SWOT analysis relies on a relatively stable understanding of strategic attributes and environmental conditions.

Traditional SWOT reasoning implicitly assumes that strategic factors possess a certain continuity over time. Strengths are generally interpreted as enduring sources of advantage, weaknesses as relatively persistent internal limitations, opportunities as favorable external developments, and threats as negative environmental pressures (Pickton & Wright, 1998; Panagiotou, 2003). Although the framework acknowledges environmental scanning and contextual analysis, it nevertheless tends to treat strategic categories as sufficiently stable to support coherent classification and strategic planning. In practice, SWOT analysis often functions as a static snapshot of organizational reality.

This static orientation has been noted, directly or indirectly, in several critiques of the framework. Hill and Westbrook (1997), for instance, argued that SWOT frequently generates descriptive inventories disconnected from strategic dynamism and decision-making complexity. Similarly, Valentin (2001) criticized the tendency of SWOT to oversimplify strategic phenomena by assigning fixed labels to organizational attributes whose strategic value may vary considerably depending on context. More broadly, strategy scholars have increasingly questioned static representations of competitive advantage in environments characterized by discontinuity, turbulence, and accelerated change (D'Aveni, 1994; Teece et al., 1997).

The stability assumption embedded in SWOT analysis can be understood through three underlying tendencies: durability, directionality, and categorical separation.

First, SWOT analysis tends to assume the durability of strategic value. Organizational resources classified as strengths are generally expected to remain beneficial over relatively long periods. This assumption reflected the strategic environments in which SWOT originally emerged, where competitive advantages were often more stable and industry boundaries more predictable (Learned et al., 1965). However, contemporary markets increasingly challenge this durability. Competitive advantages now erode more rapidly due to technological disruption, digital innovation, shortened product life cycles, and changing consumer expectations (Wiggins & Ruefli, 2005). As D'Aveni (1994) argued in his work on hypercompetition, firms increasingly operate in environments where advantages are temporary rather than sustainable.

Several recent examples illustrate this phenomenon. The extensive physical retail infrastructure once considered a major strength for large distribution companies became a strategic burden with the acceleration of e-commerce and digital consumption. Similarly, media organizations whose strength relied on traditional advertising dominance experienced rapid destabilization following the rise of digital platforms and algorithmic advertising systems. Even technological leadership may become fragile when innovation cycles accelerate beyond organizational adaptation capacities (Reeves & Deimler, 2011).

Second, SWOT analysis assumes a relatively stable directionality of strategic meaning. Strengths are interpreted positively, weaknesses negatively, opportunities favorably, and threats unfavorably. Yet contemporary strategic environments increasingly reveal the ambivalent and reversible nature of such classifications. Strategic attributes do not possess intrinsic value independent of context; rather, their strategic meaning evolves according to environmental conditions, stakeholder perceptions, technological transformations, and temporal dynamics.

Brand visibility offers a particularly illustrative example. Traditionally, strong visibility and public exposure constitute major strategic assets associated with awareness, legitimacy, and market power. However, in highly interconnected digital environments, visibility may simultaneously increase vulnerability to reputational crises, online outrage, activist mobilization, and viral backlash (Einwiller et al., 2017). Social media amplification has intensified the speed at which public perception may reverse. The same visibility that once generated competitive advantage may suddenly become a source of reputational fragility.

Conversely, characteristics traditionally interpreted as weaknesses may generate unexpected strategic advantages. Smaller organizational size, often perceived as a limitation compared to large corporations, may enhance agility, adaptability, and responsiveness during periods of disruption. Family firms sometimes illustrate similar dynamics. Organizational conservatism or centralized governance structures frequently criticized as rigidities may, under crisis conditions, facilitate rapid coordination and operational resilience (Staw et al., 1981). During periods of uncertainty, strategic restraint and structural discipline may become stabilizing forces rather than disadvantages.

Third, SWOT analysis tends to reinforce categorical separation between internal and external dimensions. Strengths and weaknesses are generally treated as internal organizational attributes, while opportunities and threats are interpreted as external environmental conditions (Helms & Nixon, 2010). Yet in practice, the boundaries between internal and external factors are increasingly blurred. Digital ecosystems, platform economies, stakeholder networks, and algorithmic infrastructures continuously interact with organizational resources and capabilities in ways that destabilize clear distinctions between inside and outside environments (Nambisan et al., 2019).

For example, digital reputation cannot be understood solely as an internal organizational asset or an external environmental condition. It emerges from ongoing interactions between organizational actions, user-generated content, platform algorithms, media circulation, and stakeholder reactions. Similarly, technological opportunities often generate simultaneous dependencies on external platforms, infrastructures, and ecosystems. In such contexts, opportunities may rapidly evolve into strategic vulnerabilities.

These developments reflect broader transformations in strategic management theory itself. The rise of the dynamic capabilities' perspective shifted attention away from static resource possession toward continuous adaptation, integration, and reconfiguration of competencies (Teece et al., 1997; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000). Likewise, strategic agility research emphasizes responsiveness, flexibility, and continuous strategic renewal in volatile environments (Doz &

Kosonen, 2010). Contemporary organizations increasingly operate within environments characterized not only by uncertainty, but also by instability in the strategic meaning of organizational attributes themselves.

Nevertheless, despite these theoretical evolutions, the underlying architecture of SWOT analysis remains largely anchored in a classificatory logic of strategic stability. Most adaptations of SWOT focus on methodological refinement, prioritization tools, or quantitative extensions rather than reconsidering the temporal instability of the categories themselves (Kurttila et al., 2000; Gürel & Tat, 2017). As a result, SWOT analysis continues to offer valuable descriptive insights while remaining limited in its capacity to capture the reversible dynamics of contemporary strategic environments.

The problem, therefore, is not that SWOT analysis is irrelevant, but that it insufficiently accounts for the possibility that strategic value may invert over time. In increasingly volatile contexts, strengths may become liabilities, opportunities may create dependencies, and constraints may stimulate innovation. Strategic categories cannot always be understood as fixed positions; they must also be interpreted through their potential reversibility. It is precisely this overlooked dimension that the notion of strategic reversibility seeks to address.

3. Introduction of strategic reversibility

The limitations of SWOT analysis do not stem solely from its tendency toward simplification or categorization. More fundamentally, they emerge from the assumption that strategic attributes possess relatively stable meanings over time. Yet in increasingly volatile environments, strategic value cannot always be understood as fixed, linear, or durable. Organizational attributes continuously evolve in relation to technological shifts, institutional transformations, market expectations, stakeholder reactions, and reputational dynamics. Under such conditions, strategic factors may reverse their strategic meaning, sometimes gradually and sometimes abruptly. This article conceptualizes this phenomenon as strategic reversibility.

Strategic reversibility refers to the possibility that the strategic value of organizational attributes, resources, capabilities, or environmental conditions may invert over time according to changing contextual circumstances. A factor initially perceived as beneficial may become detrimental, while a perceived weakness or constraint may generate adaptive advantage. In this sense, strategic reversibility extends existing perspectives on temporary advantage, dynamic capabilities, and strategic agility by emphasizing not only environmental instability, but also the instability of strategic meaning itself (D'Aveni, 1994; Teece et al., 1997; Doz & Kosonen, 2010). The concept involves a temporal dimension linked to the evolution of strategic value over time, a contextual dimension related to changing environmental conditions, and an interpretive dimension associated with the evolving perceptions of managers and stakeholders. Strategic reversibility therefore challenges the assumption that strategic categories maintain stable directional meanings across time and contexts.

Importantly, reversibility does not simply refer to environmental change. Strategy scholars have long acknowledged that competitive environments evolve continuously (Ansoff, 1965; Teece et al., 1997). The notion of reversibility goes further by suggesting that the strategic interpretation of organizational attributes may itself transform. The issue is not only that environments change, but that what organizations interpret as valuable, threatening, advantageous, or limiting may also reverse in meaning.

This distinction is important because traditional strategic analysis often treats strategic value as relatively inherent to the attribute itself. Strong brand visibility, large organizational size, technological dominance, or operational standardization are frequently interpreted as stable

sources of competitive advantage. However, contemporary competitive environments increasingly demonstrate that strategic value is relational, contextual, and temporally unstable (D'Aveni, 1994; Reeves & Deimler, 2011).

Digital environments provide particularly strong illustrations of such reversibility. Social media visibility, for instance, simultaneously generates exposure and vulnerability. High visibility may strengthen legitimacy, influence, and market reach, while also intensifying reputational risk. The same digital amplification mechanisms that create viral success may also accelerate public backlash, boycott campaigns, or reputational crises (Einwiller et al., 2017). In this context, visibility cannot be interpreted exclusively as a strength; it also contains the potential conditions of its own reversal.

Several recent corporate controversies illustrate this dynamic. Brands that heavily invested in visibility-oriented digital strategies have occasionally experienced situations in which their public exposure amplified reputational damage rather than competitive advantage. In highly interconnected digital ecosystems, organizational visibility increases not only consumer attention but also public scrutiny, stakeholder activism, and algorithmic circulation of criticism. As a result, strategic assets may become strategic liabilities under changing reputational conditions.

Reversibility also appears in organizational structures and capabilities. For decades, large organizational size was widely associated with economies of scale, market dominance, bargaining power, and resource accumulation (Chandler, 1990). However, increasing environmental turbulence has often transformed size into a source of rigidity, slower adaptation, and bureaucratic inertia (D'Aveni, 1994). Conversely, smaller firms traditionally perceived as disadvantaged may benefit from agility, rapid experimentation, and adaptive responsiveness during periods of disruption. What appears as weakness in stable environments may become an advantage in unstable ones.

The COVID-19 crisis revealed similar reversals across industries. Organizations operating with highly optimized global supply chains initially benefited from efficiency and cost reduction strategies. Yet during the crisis, these same characteristics sometimes generated severe vulnerabilities due to excessive dependence on international logistical networks. In contrast, organizations maintaining redundant resources, local sourcing practices, or operational slack often criticized under efficiency-oriented models, occasionally demonstrated stronger resilience capacities. Strategic efficiency itself became partially reversible under crisis conditions.

Technological innovation also illustrates the unstable nature of strategic value. Technological leadership is generally interpreted as a major strength because it enhances differentiation, innovation capacity, and competitive positioning. Nevertheless, technological dominance may simultaneously generate dependence on existing systems, path dependency, and organizational overconfidence (Leonard-Barton, 1992). Firms strongly attached to successful technological models sometimes struggle to adapt when disruptive innovations emerge. Established competencies may then constrain strategic renewal rather than support it.

Kodak is frequently mobilized in strategy literature as an example of this phenomenon. The company's historical mastery of analog photography represented a major competitive strength for decades. Yet the same organizational expertise, routines, and strategic orientation contributed to difficulties in adapting to digital transformation. What once generated dominance progressively limited organizational adaptation. The strategic issue was not the absence of competence, but the reversal of the strategic value attached to existing competence structures.

Importantly, reversibility does not concern only strengths becoming weaknesses. Weaknesses themselves may generate strategic opportunities. Constraints often stimulate innovation,

improvisation, and creative adaptation (Porter, 1985). Resource scarcity may encourage entrepreneurial flexibility, experimentation, and organizational learning. Similarly, external threats may trigger strategic renewal processes that would otherwise not occur. Research on threat-rigidity effects demonstrates that threats can produce defensive rigidity under some conditions (Staw et al., 1981), but other studies show that crises may also accelerate innovation and strategic transformation (Wenzel et al., 2021).

Strategic reversibility therefore suggests that strategic attributes contain latent alternative strategic meanings that may emerge depending on contextual evolution. Organizational factors should not be interpreted solely according to their present value, but also according to their potential future inversion.

This perspective aligns with broader developments in strategic management theory emphasizing dynamism and temporary advantage. The dynamic capabilities perspective argues that firms must continuously renew and reconfigure competencies in rapidly changing environments (Teece et al., 1997; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000). Similarly, hypercompetition theory stresses the erosion speed of competitive advantages in unstable markets (D'Aveni, 1994). More recently, strategic agility research highlighted the importance of continuous adaptation, flexibility, and responsiveness (Doz & Kosonen, 2010). However, while these approaches recognize instability in competitive environments, they rarely conceptualize the reversible nature of strategic meaning itself.

Strategic reversibility extends these perspectives by shifting attention from environmental instability alone toward the instability of strategic interpretation. Competitive advantages are not only temporary because environments change; they are temporary because the meaning attached to organizational attributes may itself evolve or invert.

Three characteristics help clarify the nature of strategic reversibility. First, reversibility is temporal. Strategic value evolves across time horizons. A factor generating immediate advantage may create long-term vulnerability, while short-term constraints may support future adaptation. Strategic analysis therefore requires temporal sensitivity rather than static categorization.

Second, reversibility is contextual. Strategic attributes do not possess universal value independent of environmental conditions. Their strategic meaning depends on institutional, technological, cultural, reputational, and competitive contexts. The same organizational characteristic may simultaneously function as strength or weakness depending on situational conditions.

Third, reversibility is amplified by contemporary digital environments. Platform economies, algorithmic visibility, stakeholder interconnectedness, and accelerated information circulation intensify the speed at which strategic reversals occur (Nambisan et al., 2019). Digital infrastructures not only increase environmental volatility but also magnify reputational and strategic instability.

At this stage, it is important to distinguish strategic reversibility from related concepts frequently associated with unstable environments. Environmental volatility refers to the speed, unpredictability, and turbulence of external change affecting organizations (D'Aveni, 1994). Strategic instability refers to the fragility or temporary nature of competitive positions and organizational advantages within such environments (Wiggins & Ruefli, 2005). Strategic reversibility, by contrast, refers specifically to the potential inversion of the strategic meaning attached to organizational attributes, resources, or environmental conditions. In other words, environmental volatility describes unstable contexts, strategic instability describes unstable

strategic positions, whereas strategic reversibility describes the possible transformation of strategic value itself.

4. The SWOT-R framework

The concept of strategic reversibility does not imply that traditional SWOT analysis should be abandoned. Despite its limitations, SWOT remains one of the most accessible and widely used tools for structuring strategic reflection (Helms & Nixon, 2010). Its enduring relevance lies in its simplicity and its capacity to synthesize complex organizational realities into intelligible strategic categories. The issue, therefore, is not the existence of SWOT itself, but the relative stability embedded in its interpretive logic. In this sense, SWOT-R should not be understood as merely a dynamic version of traditional SWOT analysis. Existing dynamic approaches generally acknowledge that environments evolve and that strategic factors require periodic reassessment. However, they largely preserve the assumption that strategic categories themselves retain stable directional meanings. The originality of SWOT-R lies in its focus on the potential inversion of strategic value itself. The framework therefore shifts strategic analysis from environmental evolution alone toward the reversibility of strategic interpretation, emphasizing that strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats may progressively exchange strategic meanings under changing contextual conditions. In increasingly volatile environments, identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats is no longer sufficient if organizations fail to evaluate how these factors may evolve, destabilize, or reverse over time.

It is within this perspective that the SWOT-R framework is proposed. SWOT-R extends traditional SWOT analysis by integrating the principle of strategic reversibility into strategic diagnosis. Rather than treating strategic categories as fixed positions, the framework encourages organizations to evaluate the potential instability of strategic value across temporal and contextual conditions. In other words, SWOT-R does not simply ask whether a factor constitutes a strength, weakness, opportunity, or threat at a given moment; it also asks under what conditions this strategic meaning could invert.

The addition of reversibility introduces a dynamic layer into SWOT analysis. Strategic evaluation becomes less focused on static classification and more oriented toward the evolution of strategic meaning. This shift is particularly important in environments characterized by accelerated technological change, reputational volatility, digital interdependence, and institutional uncertainty (D'Aveni, 1994; Reeves & Deimler, 2011). In such contexts, strategic positions are increasingly temporary, relational, and unstable.

Importantly, SWOT-R should not be interpreted as a replacement for SWOT, but rather as an extension designed to preserve the framework's analytical clarity while addressing one of its major blind spots. The objective is not to complicate SWOT analysis excessively, but to enrich it by incorporating temporal and contextual sensitivity into strategic interpretation.

The framework therefore operates through two complementary analytical stages. The first stage corresponds to conventional SWOT identification. Organizations continue to identify internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats according to existing strategic diagnosis practices (Andrews, 1971; Pickton & Wright, 1998). At this level, SWOT-R preserves the descriptive and structuring function that explains the popularity of SWOT analysis in managerial contexts.

The second stage introduces reversibility evaluation. Once strategic factors are identified, organizations assess the extent to which these factors may potentially invert their strategic value

over time. This second layer transforms SWOT analysis from a static inventory into a dynamic evaluative process.

For example, a company identifying strong digital visibility as a strategic strength would not stop at recognizing its immediate marketing value. Under a SWOT-R logic, the organization would additionally evaluate the potential vulnerabilities associated with this visibility: reputational exposure, algorithmic dependence, stakeholder scrutiny, or viral backlash. Similarly, a technological opportunity would also be examined in terms of possible future dependencies, switching costs, or exposure to platform instability.

The reversibility lens therefore introduces strategic questioning that traditional SWOT analysis often overlooks. Instead of asking only: What are our strengths? What are our weaknesses? What opportunities exist? What threats should be avoided? SWOT-R additionally asks: Under what conditions could this strength become a liability? Could this weakness generate adaptive advantage? What hidden vulnerabilities accompany this opportunity? Might this threat stimulate innovation or renewal. These questions do not eliminate traditional strategic analysis; rather, they deepen it by recognizing the unstable nature of strategic value.

Table 1: From SWOT to SWOT-R: Reinterpreting Strategic Categories Through Reversibility

SWOT element	Traditional interpretation	Reversibility lens
Strength	Source of competitive advantage	Potential future rigidity or exposure
Weakness	Internal limitation	Potential source of agility or adaptation
Opportunity	Favorable external condition	Potential future dependency or vulnerability
Threat	External risk	Potential catalyst for innovation or transformation

Beyond the reinterpretation of individual SWOT categories, SWOT-R also differs from earlier SWOT approaches at a broader conceptual level. While traditional and dynamic SWOT models primarily focus on identifying and periodically reassessing strategic factors, SWOT-R introduces the idea that the strategic meaning of these factors may itself become reversible. The following table summarizes the main distinctions between traditional SWOT, dynamic SWOT approaches, and SWOT-R.

Beyond its analytical role, SWOT-R also modifies the temporal orientation of strategic analysis. Traditional SWOT frameworks often support strategic planning through present-oriented categorization. SWOT-R, by contrast, introduces a future-oriented evaluative dimension. Strategic factors are not assessed solely according to their current value, but also according to their potential trajectories of evolution.

This temporal dimension aligns with contemporary perspectives emphasizing strategic agility, adaptability, and continuous renewal (Doz & Kosonen, 2010; Teece, 2007). Organizations increasingly compete in environments where the sustainability of strategic positions cannot be assumed. Consequently, strategic analysis must move beyond the identification of existing advantages toward the anticipation of possible reversals.

The framework also encourages organizations to adopt a more paradoxical understanding of strategic value. In conventional strategic reasoning, strengths and weaknesses are often treated as oppositional categories. Yet empirical reality frequently reveals hybrid situations in which

the same organizational characteristic simultaneously generates both advantage and vulnerability. Digital visibility, organizational size, standardization, innovation capacity, or data accumulation may all function as sources of competitive advantage while simultaneously increasing exposure to instability, dependence, or reputational risk.

Table 2: Comparative evolution from traditional SWOT to SWOT-R

Framework	Core logic	Main characteristic	Limitation	Contribution
Traditional SWOT	Static classification of internal and external factors	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are treated as relatively stable categories	Limited consideration of environmental instability and temporal evolution	Provides a simple and accessible strategic diagnosis tool
Dynamic SWOT approaches	Periodic reassessment of strategic factors in changing environments	Recognizes environmental evolution and strategic adaptation	Continues to assume relatively stable directional meanings of strategic categories	Introduces greater sensitivity to environmental change
SWOT-R	Evaluation of the potential reversibility of strategic value	Strategic categories may invert, evolve, or destabilize over time depending on contextual conditions	Requires continuous interpretive monitoring and anticipatory analysis	Integrates strategic reversibility into SWOT analysis and reframes strategic diagnosis as a dynamic evaluative process

Such paradoxical dynamics are increasingly visible in platform economies and digitally mediated markets. Technological integration, for example, enhances operational efficiency while simultaneously increasing vulnerability to cybersecurity threats, infrastructure dependence, and algorithmic opacity. Similarly, extensive consumer data collection may improve personalization and market intelligence while also generating ethical concerns, regulatory exposure, and reputational risks related to privacy protection. SWOT-R does not seek to resolve these tensions; rather, it provides a framework for recognizing and evaluating them.

Another important contribution of SWOT-R concerns managerial cognition. Traditional SWOT analysis sometimes encourages managers to interpret strategic factors through overly stable and binary classifications. By integrating reversibility, SWOT-R encourages more reflexive strategic thinking. Managers are invited to consider not only what strategic factors represent in the present, but also how their meaning may evolve under changing conditions.

This perspective is particularly relevant in environments characterized by uncertainty and accelerated disruption. Research on organizational adaptation repeatedly demonstrates that firms often struggle not because they lack resources, but because they remain cognitively attached to previously successful strategic interpretations (Leonard-Barton, 1992; Tripsas &

Gavetti, 2000). Strategic reversibility therefore highlights the importance of interpretive flexibility alongside operational capability.

Finally, SWOT-R contributes to ongoing debates regarding the nature of competitive advantage itself. Traditional strategic frameworks frequently assume that advantages can be sustained through resource accumulation, positioning, or capability development (Porter, 1985; Barney, 1991). However, increasingly volatile environments suggest that the durability of advantage may depend less on the possession of stable strengths than on the ability to anticipate and manage their possible reversals. Strategic success increasingly requires not only building advantages, but also recognizing when these advantages risk becoming constraints.

SWOT-R therefore reframes strategic analysis as a dynamic process of evaluating unstable strategic meanings rather than merely classifying stable strategic positions. In doing so, the framework seeks to preserve the accessibility of SWOT analysis while adapting it to environments defined by uncertainty, acceleration, and reversibility.

From a managerial standpoint, SWOT-R encourages organizations to move beyond static strategic inventories toward continuous evaluative monitoring. Managers are invited not only to identify strategic strengths and opportunities, but also to assess the conditions under which these factors may become sources of vulnerability or rigidity. The framework may therefore support more adaptive decision-making processes, particularly in digitally mediated environments characterized by accelerated reputational shifts, technological disruption, and unstable stakeholder expectations. SWOT-R also encourages organizations to integrate anticipatory thinking into strategic diagnosis by evaluating the potential reversibility of current competitive advantages.

5. Conclusion

SWOT analysis has survived decades of theoretical evolution not because of its sophistication, but because of its simplicity. Few strategic frameworks have achieved a comparable level of diffusion across managerial practice, consulting, education, entrepreneurship, and public organizations (Helms & Nixon, 2010). Its enduring appeal lies in its ability to reduce strategic complexity into intelligible categories capable of supporting strategic reflection and organizational diagnosis. Yet the same simplicity that explains its longevity also constitutes one of its principal limitations. By organizing strategic analysis around relatively stable categories, traditional SWOT frameworks tend to underestimate the instability and reversibility of strategic value in contemporary environments.

This article argued that one of the implicit assumptions underlying conventional SWOT analysis is the relative stability of strategic meaning. Strengths are generally expected to remain advantageous, opportunities favorable, and weaknesses detrimental over time. However, increasingly volatile competitive environments challenge this assumption. Digital acceleration, reputational instability, technological disruption, platform dependence, and rapidly evolving stakeholder expectations continuously reshape the strategic meaning of organizational attributes (D'Aveni, 1994; Nambisan et al., 2019). Under such conditions, strategic factors may no longer retain stable directional value. Strengths may become liabilities, opportunities may create vulnerabilities, and constraints may generate adaptive advantage.

To address this limitation, the article introduced the concept of strategic reversibility and proposed the SWOT-R framework as an extension of traditional SWOT analysis. Rather than replacing SWOT, SWOT-R seeks to preserve its analytical accessibility while integrating a dynamic perspective on strategic evaluation. The framework shifts attention away from static classification toward the evolving and potentially reversible nature of strategic value. Strategic

analysis therefore becomes less concerned with identifying fixed positions and more concerned with anticipating possible reversals across temporal and contextual conditions.

The contribution of SWOT-R is both conceptual and managerial. Conceptually, the framework contributes to broader debates regarding environmental instability, temporary advantage, strategic agility, and dynamic capabilities (Teece et al., 1997; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Teece, 2007). Existing strategic management research has long recognized that competitive environments evolve rapidly, and that organizational adaptation is increasingly central to strategic survival. However, less attention has been devoted to the instability of strategic interpretation itself. SWOT-R extends these discussions by suggesting that strategic value is not only temporary because environments change, but also because the meaning attached to organizational attributes may itself evolve or invert.

The framework also contributes to the growing recognition of paradoxical tensions in organizational strategy. Strategic characteristics increasingly contain simultaneous sources of advantage and vulnerability. Digital visibility enhances exposure and influence while amplifying reputational fragility. Technological integration improves efficiency while increasing dependence and cybersecurity exposure. Organizational scale generates market power while potentially reducing agility. Such tensions reveal that strategic attributes cannot always be interpreted through stable binary categories. SWOT-R therefore encourages a more reflexive and dynamic understanding of strategic analysis.

From a managerial perspective, the framework invites organizations to rethink the way strategic diagnosis is conducted. Traditional SWOT analyses often encourage managers to identify strategic positions without sufficiently questioning their durability or reversibility. SWOT-R instead encourages organizations to evaluate the conditions under which strategic factors may invert their value over time. This perspective may help managers anticipate hidden vulnerabilities, identify emerging adaptive opportunities, and avoid excessive attachment to historically successful strategic configurations.

The framework may prove particularly useful in digitally mediated environments characterized by accelerated change and amplified instability. In platform economies and interconnected ecosystems, strategic reversals may occur with increasing speed due to algorithmic amplification, stakeholder mobilization, reputational circulation, and technological disruption (Nambisan et al., 2019). Under such conditions, strategic resilience may depend less on the possession of stable strengths than on the ability to recognize and manage potential reversals before they fully materialize.

At the same time, this article remains conceptual and therefore presents several limitations. First, the SWOT-R framework has not yet been empirically tested across industries or organizational contexts. Future research could explore how reversibility dynamics vary across sectors characterized by different levels of technological turbulence, institutional stability, or reputational exposure. Second, the framework does not propose quantitative indicators for evaluating reversibility intensity or probability. Developing operational measures capable of assessing strategic reversibility constitutes an important avenue for future research. Third, reversibility may itself vary according to temporal horizons, organizational size, or stakeholder configurations, suggesting the need for more contextualized analyses.

Future studies could also examine how organizations detect early signals of strategic reversal, how managerial cognition influences the interpretation of reversibility, and how firms develop capabilities specifically oriented toward anticipating strategic inversion. The relationship between reversibility and organizational resilience, strategic agility, or innovation capacity may likewise offer promising theoretical extensions.

Ultimately, SWOT-R does not seek to invalidate SWOT analysis, but to reinterpret it in light of increasingly unstable strategic environments. In contexts marked by acceleration, uncertainty, and continuous transformation, strategic value can no longer be understood as permanently fixed. Competitive advantage may depend not only on identifying strengths and opportunities, but also on recognizing how and when these factors may reverse. Strategic analysis, therefore, must move beyond static categorization toward a more dynamic understanding of evolving strategic meaning.

6. References

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