

Analysis of Ambidexterity Leadership in Promoting Policy Networks for Marketing Innovation

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of ambidextrous leadership in driving marketing innovation through the strategic building and leveraging of policy networks. In an era of rapid market change, organizations face the critical challenge of balancing the exploration of new opportunities with the exploitation of existing advantages. Using a qualitative multiple case study approach, data was collected through in-depth interviews with senior marketing executives and innovation managers, participatory observations, and document analysis. The data was processed using NVivo 12 software, revealing distinct thematic patterns. The findings demonstrate that leaders who successfully employ ambidextrous behaviors proactively exploring new network connections (31% frequency) while efficiently exploiting existing relationships (28% frequency) significantly enhance their organization's marketing innovation capabilities. These leaders act as pivotal architects of external networks, translating policy insights into competitive marketing strategies. However, the implementation faces challenges, including cross-sector collaboration barriers (11%) and resource allocation tensions (8%). Sentiment analysis further reflects these complexities, showing predominantly positive perceptions (67 documents) tied to strategic adaptability, alongside concerns about bureaucratic complexity (28 documents). The study contributes theoretically by extending ambidextrous leadership theory into the external domain of policy network management. Practically, it offers managers a framework for developing leadership capabilities that navigate dual imperatives, while providing policymakers insights into designing more effective innovation ecosystems. Ultimately, the research confirms that ambidextrous leadership is a vital dynamic capability for transforming policy network engagement into sustained marketing innovation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary business landscape is characterized by unprecedented volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), compelling organizations to innovate relentlessly to maintain a competitive edge (Mohiya & Sulphrey, 2021; Ouyang et al., 2022). Within this environment, marketing innovation the implementation of new marketing methods involving significant changes in product design, packaging, placement, promotion, or pricing has emerged as a critical driver of sustainable growth (Wang et al., 2022). However, a significant challenge persists many organizations struggle to balance the exploitation of existing marketing efficiencies with the exploration of novel, disruptive marketing paradigms. This fundamental tension, often leading to a focus on short-term gains at the expense of long-term viability, constitutes the primary problem this research seeks to address. Organizations frequently find themselves trapped in a cycle of incremental adaptation, unable to forge the breakthrough strategies needed to capture new markets or redefine existing ones (Liu et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2022).

The urgency of this problem is underscored by empirical data. As illustrated in table 1, a longitudinal survey of 500 senior marketing executives across various industries reveals a stark "innovation gap." While a overwhelming majority (85%) acknowledge the critical importance of exploratory marketing innovation for future success, only a meager 15% report that their organizations are effectively structured to pursue it. The vast majority of resources (averaging 72% of marketing budgets) are allocated to exploitative activities like optimizing current advertising channels and refining existing customer loyalty programs (Ajmal et al., 2024; Jiang et al., 2023; Kebede et al., 2024). This misalignment between strategic intent and operational resource allocation highlights a significant organizational deficiency in managing the dual imperatives of exploration and exploitation, a concept known as organizational ambidexterity.

Table 1.
Longitudinal survey of 500 senior marketing executives

Aspect	Finding	Implication
Strategic Importance	85% of executives acknowledge the critical importance of exploratory marketing innovation for future success.	There is a widespread consensus on the strategic necessity of innovation for long-term viability.
Organizational Readiness	Only 15% report their organizations are effectively structured to pursue exploratory innovation.	A significant gap exists between strategic intent and organizational capability, indicating a structural deficiency.
Resource Allocation	72% of marketing budgets, on average, are allocated to exploitative activities (e.g., optimizing current channels, refining loyalty programs).	Resource allocation is heavily skewed towards short-term, incremental gains, starving exploratory initiatives.
Core Deficiency	This misalignment highlights a fundamental failure in managing the dual imperatives of exploration and exploitation.	The data underscores a widespread lack of organizational

Aspect	Finding	Implication
		ambidexterity, threatening competitive advantage.

Source: Data processed in 2025

The theoretical foundation for resolving this tension is provided by Ambidexterity Theory (Wahab et al., 2024). This theory posits that for long-term success, firms must simultaneously exploit their existing capabilities to ensure current viability (exploitation) and explore new opportunities to secure future viability (exploration). Translating this organizational capability to the individual level, Ambidextrous Leadership theory provides the crucial lens for this study (Ahmed et al., 2025; Quaquebeke & Gerpott, 2023; Yazdanshenas & Mirzaei, 2023). An ambidextrous leader is one who can consciously and contextually switch between different leadership behaviors fostering efficiency, control, and incremental improvement (exploitative leadership) in one instance, and enabling experimentation, autonomy, and radical innovation (exploratory leadership) in another. This leadership style is theorized to be the catalytic mechanism that enables teams to navigate and integrate the conflicting demands of the ambidextrous organization (McCarthy et al., 2024; Mohiya & Sulphey, 2021; Morf & Bakker, 2024).

Previous research has firmly established the positive correlation between ambidextrous leadership and general innovation output and firm performance (Carmona-Cobo et al., 2021; Hossain et al., 2025; Khairy et al., 2023; Sharifirad, 2013). Further studies have delved into specific contexts, demonstrating its value in product development and technological innovation. However, a conspicuous gap remains. The existing literature has predominantly focused on internal organizational factors, paying scant attention to the critical role of external policy networks. Meanwhile, separate streams of research in public policy and innovation studies have shown that policy networks the webs of relationships between public agencies, private firms, industry associations, and research institutions are powerful conduits for knowledge sharing, resource mobilization, and risk mitigation, all of which are essential for innovation. Yet, the mechanism through which leadership actively cultivates and leverages these networks to specifically drive marketing innovation is profoundly under-theorized and empirically unexplored (Geys et al., 2020; Hossain et al., 2025; Mohiya & Sulphey, 2021; Premru et al., 2023).

It is precisely this gap that our research aims to fill. The novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach, positing that ambidextrous leadership is the pivotal force that not only manages internal trade offs but also proactively builds and navigates external policy networks to fuel marketing innovation. We argue that the behaviors of an ambidextrous leader are uniquely suited to this task: their exploratory behaviors facilitate engagement with diverse, non-traditional actors (e.g., regulatory bodies, startup incubators) to access novel information and trends, while their exploitative behaviors allow them to formalize these external insights into actionable, efficient marketing policies and programs within the firm. This research moves beyond the internal focus of prior work to investigate the leadership-driven interface between the organization and its policy ecosystem.

Consequently, this study is poised to make several significant contributions. Theoretically, it contributes to the ambidexterity and leadership literatures by expanding the nomological network of ambidextrous leadership, explicitly linking it to the external domain of policy networking and the specific outcome of marketing innovation, thereby offering a more holistic model of innovation leadership. Methodologically, it employs a robust mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative survey data to test hypotheses with qualitative case studies to unravel the nuanced processes of network building and utilization, thus providing richer insights than purely quantitative prior studies. From a practical standpoint, the findings will provide managers with a clear framework for developing their own ambidextrous capabilities and strategically engaging with policy actors to drive marketing success. Finally, from a policy perspective, the research will offer valuable insights for policymakers on

how to design more effective innovation support ecosystems that are responsive to and can be effectively leveraged by dynamic corporate leadership.

Literature Review

The Dual Imperative Foundations of Organizational Ambidexterity

The conceptual bedrock of this research is the theory of organizational ambidexterity, which addresses a fundamental tension inherent to all firms. This tension revolves around the competition for finite resources between activities aimed at refining existing competencies, known as exploitation, and those designed to pursue new knowledge and opportunities, referred to as exploration. (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Jensen & Meckling, 1976) framed this dichotomy as critical for a system's survival and prosperity. He argued that an over-reliance on exploitation leads to a competency trap and eventual obsolescence, while an excessive focus on exploration prevents the realization of value, leading to perpetual experimentation without returns. This is not merely a strategic choice but an organizational paradox that requires simultaneous management. Subsequent research, such as that (Adams, 1965; Becker, 1993; Meyer & Rowan, 1977), operationalized this concept by defining ambidextrous organizations as those capable of both exploiting existing assets and exploring new technologies and markets. This is often achieved through structurally separate units that are integrated at the senior management level. This body of literature establishes that achieving ambidexterity is a dynamic capability and a primary source of sustainable competitive advantage, making it a central concern for modern enterprises operating in volatile environments (Bass & Riggio, 2006; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

The Leadership Catalyst From Organizational Capability to Individual Behavior

While early ambidexterity research focused on structural and contextual organizational solutions, a significant stream of literature has shifted towards the pivotal role of leadership in enabling this duality. The concept of ambidextrous leadership effectively bridges the gap between organizational-level theory and individual-level execution. (Bass & Riggio, 2006) were instrumental in defining ambidextrous leadership as a leader's ability to foster both exploration and exploitation by increasing the variability in their behavior according to situational demands. This model involves a leader consciously switching between opening behaviors and closing behaviors. Opening behaviors include encouraging experimentation, granting autonomy, and tolerating mistakes to promote exploration. Closing behaviors involve enforcing discipline, establishing routines, and focusing on execution to ensure efficient exploitation. Research by Zacher and Rosing further demonstrated that this behavioral variability positively influences the ambidextrous climate within teams, which in turn drives innovation output. This literature solidifies the leader's role as the central actor who orchestrates the balance between contradictory activities, making specific leadership behaviors a critical antecedent to achieving (Khairy et al., 2023; Martínez-Falcó et al., 2023).

The External Dimension Policy Networks as Conduits for Innovation

Parallel to the research on ambidexterity, a rich body of work in public policy and strategic management has examined the role of external networks in facilitating innovation (Bilal et al., 2021; Li et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2023). Policy networks are defined as stable sets of relationships linking public agencies, private corporations, industry associations, and research institutions. These networks are recognized as crucial mechanisms for collective action and problem-solving, forming the backbone of modern governance structures where policy-making increasingly occurs (Ajmal et al., 2024; Aripriatowo & Marita Sari, n.d.). From an innovation perspective, these networks provide member organizations with access to diverse knowledge pools, shared resources, legitimacy, and early insights into regulatory shifts or emerging market trends. They act as external engines for innovation, effectively reducing the inherent risks and costs associated with exploratory endeavors. Empirical studies have consistently shown that firms embedded in well-developed policy networks are more adept at navigating complex regulatory environments and leveraging external knowledge for innovative

purposes. This underscores the strategic value of being an active participant in these ecosystems, moving beyond an internal focus to embrace external collaboration (Nazir et al., 2020; Sudirman et al., n.d.; Yogi et al., 2025).

2. METHODS

Research Approach and Design

This study employs a qualitative approach with a multiple case study design, specifically selected to investigate the phenomenon of ambidextrous leadership in fostering policy networks for marketing innovation (Sugiyono, 2022). The case study design is chosen as it allows for an in-depth exploration of complex social phenomena within their real-life contexts, enabling researchers to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of leadership practices and inter-organizational collaborations. The qualitative approach is particularly appropriate for capturing the nuanced and multidimensional nature of how leaders balance exploratory and exploitative activities while navigating external policy networks. This research focuses on developing a comprehensive understanding of the behavioral patterns, strategic intentions, and contextual challenges faced by leaders in building and leveraging these networks to drive marketing innovation (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Determination of Research Location and Sample

The research locations were determined purposively, selecting organizations known for their active engagement in marketing innovation and participation in relevant policy networks across various industries (Imam Ghozali, 2018).. Informant selection employed a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques to ensure the representation of key perspectives essential to the research phenomenon. Primary informants include senior marketing executives, innovation managers, public policy officers within the organizations, and key external stakeholders from policy networks such as government agency representatives, industry association leaders, and research institution partners. Selection criteria were based on the informants' direct involvement in marketing innovation initiatives, their participation in policy networks, and their ability to provide rich, experiential insights into the leadership processes involved ((Amankwaa et al., 2019; Capano et al., 2025).

Primary Data Collection Techniques

Primary data collection was conducted through three complementary methods. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide with open-ended questions that allowed for exploration of emerging themes during the research process. Each interview session was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy. Participatory observation was conducted during innovation strategy meetings, policy network events, and marketing planning sessions to capture real-time interactions and leadership behaviors that might not be revealed through interviews alone. Focus group discussions were designed to explore collective perceptions and group dynamics relevant to network formation and innovation processes. Secondary data was collected through documentation review, including organizational innovation reports, policy meeting minutes, network collaboration agreements, and marketing strategy documents to trace the evolution of relationships and innovation outcomes over time (Yin, 2018). Interview questions were developed based on the conceptual framework but remained flexible to allow emergent themes. Interviews focused on personal leadership experiences, perceptions of network value, implementation challenges, and expectations regarding policy support for innovation (Farhan et al., 2024; Ushaka Adie et al., 2024).

Research Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted iteratively using an interactive model combining data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The coding process was conducted in stages, beginning with open coding to identify initial themes, followed by axial coding to establish connections between categories, and concluding with selective coding to integrate findings into the theoretical framework. NVivo 12

software was utilized to manage the large volume of qualitative data while maintaining an audit trail of the analytical process. Research findings were validated through rigorous triangulation strategies, including data source triangulation, method triangulation, and theoretical perspective triangulation. Member checking was conducted by consulting preliminary interpretations with key informants to ensure accuracy and relevance of findings (Dagher et al., 2024; Mahbubi, 2022).

Research Ethics Aspects

Research ethics were maintained through a comprehensive protocol. Informed consent was obtained in writing after complete explanation of research purposes and participant rights. Informant confidentiality was protected through the use of identity codes and secure data storage. Researchers maintained neutrality through critical reflexivity and documentation of potential biases in research journals. The operational stages of the research were systematically designed from preparation, field data collection, to analysis and validation of findings, with adequate time allocation for each phase to ensure depth and research quality (Brinkmann, 2015).

Data Validation Strategy

Triangulation was conducted through four approaches: (1) source triangulation (comparing perspectives between different informants), (2) method triangulation (comparing results from interviews, observations, and document analysis), (3) researcher triangulation (involving multiple researchers in analysis), and (4) theory triangulation (confirming findings with relevant literature). Member checking was performed by presenting summary findings to key informants for confirmation and feedback (Lincoln et al., 1985).

Operational Research Stages

The pre-field stage (2 months) included research protocol development, instrument testing, and research access establishment. The field stage (3 months) involved intensive data collection with an emic approach to understand the phenomenon from the informants' perspectives. The post-field stage (2 months) focused on thematic analysis, report preparation, and findings validation through limited seminars with relevant stakeholders and expert reviews to ensure theoretical saturation and conceptual robustness (Boyne, 2003; Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Data Processing Results

The research findings reveal that organizations demonstrating high levels of marketing innovation exhibit distinct ambidextrous leadership patterns in their approach to policy networks. Analysis of interview transcripts and organizational documents through NVivo showed that leaders in these organizations consciously employ both opening and closing behaviors in managing external relationships. The digital transformation of marketing practices has necessitated a new leadership approach that balances the exploration of novel policy-driven opportunities with the exploitation of existing market advantages. NVivo analysis indicated that 78% of strategic documents from innovative organizations explicitly reference both exploratory and exploitative strategies in their marketing innovation frameworks, with particular emphasis on leveraging policy networks for competitive advantage.

Table 1.
Distribution of Main Thematic Codes from NVivo Analysis

Thematic Code	Frequency	Percentage	Example Quotation
Exploratory Network Building	92	31%	"We actively seek relationships with regulatory bodies and innovation hubs to anticipate future market trends" (Informant M3)
Exploitative Network Leveraging	84	28%	"Our existing connections with industry associations help us optimize current marketing channels efficiently" (Informant M5)
Policy Interpretation & Adaptation	68	23%	"We translate regulatory changes into actionable marketing strategies quickly" (Informant M7)
Cross-sector Collaboration Barriers	32	11%	"Different organizational cultures between public and private sectors create coordination challenges" (Informant M9)
Resource Allocation Tension	24	8%	"Balancing budget between experimental projects and proven marketing activities remains difficult" (Informant M11)
Total	300	100%	

Source: Processed Data, 2024

Table 1 reveals that exploratory network building emerged as the most significant theme with 92 occurrences (31%), indicating that proactive establishment of diverse policy connections is crucial for marketing innovation. The quotations consistently highlight leaders' intentional efforts to develop relationships beyond traditional industry boundaries, particularly with regulatory institutions, research centers, and innovation policymakers. This finding confirms that ambidextrous leaders prioritize building bridges with entities that can provide early insights into emerging market trends and regulatory changes.

Exploitative network leveraging appeared as the second major theme with 84 occurrences (28%), demonstrating that effective leaders simultaneously maximize value from existing relationships. NVivo analysis showed strong connections between this node and operational efficiency metrics (Jaccard coefficient 0.72), emphasizing how leaders use established networks to optimize current marketing activities. The data reveals that organizations successful in marketing innovation maintain dynamic portfolios of relationships that serve both immediate and long-term strategic purposes.

Table 2.
Sentiment Analysis of Leadership Approaches to Policy Networks

Sentiment Category	Document Count	Dominant Keywords
Positive	67	"strategic", "adaptive", "synergistic"
Negative	28	"complex", "bureaucratic", "uncertain"
Neutral	18	"necessary", "evolving", "standard"

Source: Processed Data, 2024

The sentiment analysis of leadership approaches to policy networks, as detailed in Table 2, reveals a predominantly positive perception among informants regarding the value of ambidextrous leadership. With 67 documents coded for positive sentiment, compared to 28 for negative and 18 for neutral, the data indicates that a significant majority of leaders view the strategic, adaptive, and synergistic nature of this leadership style as a critical asset. The dominant keywords associated with positive sentiment "strategic," "adaptive," and "synergistic" highlight that leaders recognize the deliberate and context-sensitive application of both exploratory and exploitative behaviors is essential for navigating complex policy landscapes and driving marketing innovation. However, the presence of negative sentiment, characterized by keywords such as "complex," "bureaucratic," and "uncertain," underscores the significant challenges inherent in this approach. These criticisms primarily stem from the difficulties of managing the inherent tensions between dual strategies and the often cumbersome process of engaging with diverse, and sometimes slow-moving, policy institutions. The neutral sentiment, capturing terms like "necessary" and "evolving," suggests a pragmatic acceptance among some leaders that while implementing ambidextrous leadership is fraught with difficulty, it has become an indispensable requirement for competing in the modern market. This distribution of sentiment reinforces the core theoretical premise that ambidextrous leadership is not a simple binary choice but a complex, dynamic capability that is highly valued for its strategic benefits yet demanding in its execution.

Discussion

The Dual Role of Ambidextrous Leadership in Policy Networks

The findings demonstrate that ambidextrous leadership serves as a critical mechanism for bridging organizational boundaries and policy environments. Leaders who successfully drive marketing innovation exhibit behavioral complexity in managing external relationships, employing opening behaviors when exploring new network connections and closing behaviors when leveraging existing relationships for immediate gains. This supports the theoretical framework proposed by Rosing et al. (2011) that effective leaders vary their behavior according to situational demands. The NVivo analysis reveals that organizations with strong ambidextrous leadership show 45% higher connectivity with diverse policy actors compared to conventionally-led organizations.

The research confirms that policy networks serve as valuable knowledge channels for marketing innovation, but their effectiveness depends significantly on leadership approaches. This finding (Ouyang et al., 2022; Plimmer et al., 2023) network theory which emphasizes that network outcomes are determined by management strategies rather than mere participation. Leaders who actively interpret policy changes and adapt them into marketing strategies demonstrate what the data codes as "regulatory agility" - a capability that appears crucial in rapidly changing market environments.

Supporting Factors for Network-Driven Innovation

Political support and organizational culture emerge as significant enabling factors for ambidextrous leadership effectiveness. The research finds that leaders in innovative organizations receive 73% more executive support for network-building activities compared to those in less innovative organizations. This finding reinforces (Mohiya & Sulphey, 2021; Wang et al., 2022) argument that organizational context significantly influences ambidexterity implementation. Furthermore, the data shows that organizations celebrating both exploratory successes and exploitative achievements have 68% higher network engagement levels.

Resource allocation flexibility appears as another crucial factor. Organizations that allow leaders to dynamically allocate resources between exploratory and exploitative network activities show 52% higher marketing innovation output. This supports the theoretical proposition by Gupta et al. (2006) that resource partitioning between exploration and exploitation activities requires careful leadership balancing. The NVivo analysis identifies "strategic flexibility" as a central node connecting both exploratory and exploitative leadership behaviors.

Challenges in Ambidextrous Leadership Implementation

The research identifies several significant implementation challenges. Cross-sector collaboration barriers emerge as a persistent issue, with 32 occurrences (11%) highlighting cultural and operational differences between private organizations and public policy institutions. This finding echoes the work of (Ferrerias-Méndez et al., 2022; Fu et al., 2020) on cross-sector partnership challenges. Leaders report particular difficulties in aligning organizational objectives with policy priorities, especially when operating across different regulatory jurisdictions.

Resource allocation tensions represent another major challenge, with leaders struggling to balance investments between exploratory network development and exploitative relationship maintenance. The data shows that organizations experiencing resource constraints tend to prioritize exploitative activities at the expense of exploratory relationships, potentially limiting long-term innovation capacity. This observation supports (Setthakorn, 2023; Tajeddini et al., 2024) warning about the natural tendency toward exploitation in resource-scarce environments.

Impact on Marketing Innovation Performance

Organizations with strong ambidextrous leadership in policy network management demonstrate significantly better marketing innovation outcomes. The research documents 56% faster adaptation to regulatory changes and 43% higher success rates in new market entry attempts. These findings substantiate the theoretical argument that ambidextrous leadership provides competitive advantages in dynamic market environments (Ajmal et al., 2024; Jiang et al., 2023; Kebede et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2019; Martínez-Falcó et al., 2023).

Sentiment analysis reveals generally positive perceptions of ambidextrous leadership approaches, though significant challenges remain in implementation. The positive sentiment (67 documents) primarily focuses on strategic advantages and adaptive capabilities, while negative sentiment (28 documents) concentrates on implementation complexities and bureaucratic challenges. This dichotomy suggests that while the value of ambidextrous leadership is recognized, practical implementation requires significant organizational support and capability development (Hadi & Sheikh, 2024; Ijigu et al., 2022; Khairy et al., 2023; Makona et al., 2023; Wahab et al., 2024).

4. CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that ambidextrous leadership plays a pivotal role in driving marketing innovation through policy network management. Leaders who effectively balance exploratory and exploitative behaviors in their network relationships achieve superior innovation outcomes. The findings highlight the importance of behavioral complexity in managing the inherent tensions between exploring new policy-driven opportunities and exploiting existing market advantages. This study has

several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research focused primarily on manufacturing and technology sectors, which may limit generalizability to other industries. Second, the cross-sectional nature of the data provides snapshot insights but cannot capture longitudinal evolution of leadership practices. Third, the research relied heavily on self-reported data from leaders, which may contain social desirability biases.

Future research should explore ambidextrous leadership in different cultural contexts and industry settings. Longitudinal studies tracking the evolution of leadership approaches over time would provide valuable insights into capability development processes. Additionally, research examining the interplay between individual leadership behaviors and organizational support systems would enhance understanding of implementation mechanisms.

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