



Execution Consistency in Strategy Implementation: A Structured Integrative Review

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Abstract

Prior literature on strategy implementation established that organisations routinely fail to realise the performance potential of their formulated strategies, with execution failures consistently identified as the primary source of this shortfall. However, the construct responsible for closing this gap, execution consistency, implementation consistency, or execution discipline, remained unstabilised across the literature. This paper reviewed how this fragmentation arose and what was required to resolve it. Through a structured integrative review of four bodies of literature, covering the classical strategy process, business strategy, performance management systems, and strategy execution, the review identified that the instability stemmed from unresolved boundaries between execution consistency and two better-established adjacent constructs: business strategy upstream and performance management systems further upstream. The review concluded that execution consistency was a construct the literature recognised but had not yet built, and that construct-development work must begin with boundary specification before definitional, theoretical, measurement, and causal stabilisation could follow.

Keywords: *Execution Consistency, Strategy Implementation, Construct Boundaries, Performance Management Systems, Business Strategy Quality, Integrative Literature Review.*

INTRODUCTION

Strategy implementation research had long observed that formulated strategies routinely failed to produce the performance they promised. Mankins and Steele (2005) estimated that companies realised only 63 per cent of the financial potential of their strategies, and Sull, Homkes, and Sull (2015) reported that most large organisations struggled to implement their strategies. Hrebiniak (2006) characterised the obstacles as systemic rather than idiosyncratic, and the gap was by then stable across industries and institutional settings (Tawse and Tabesh, 2021).

The capacity that closed this gap had itself been named, but not consistently: it appeared under several labels, drew on different theoretical traditions, and was positioned variously as cause, outcome, or moderating condition (Bititci et al., 2012; Brauer and Schmidt, 2006; Pavlov and Bourne, 2011).

The fragmentation had a structural source. Execution consistency occupies the middle of a causal chain running from business strategy, through performance management systems, to firm performance, and its two upstream neighbours are considerably better established, each with its own mature literature, theoretical anchoring, and measurement tradition. As Section 2.4 sets out, the maturity of a neighbouring field works at its periphery in the opposite direction to the way it works at its core.

These gaps motivated the present review. A phenomenon described under multiple labels, anchored in incompatible theories, rarely measured directly, and never cleanly separated from the constructs around it cannot accumulate evidence, because each study addresses a slightly different

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construct. A consolidated account was needed: one mapping how the construct had been treated, locating it relative to business strategy and PMS, and specifying the development work required to make it usable. Table 1 summarises these gaps and shows how the proposed research addresses them relative to prior approaches.

Table 1. Comparison of Prior Research Approaches with Proposed Research and Consequences

Dimension	Prior Research	Proposed Research	Advantages / Disadvantages of Prior Approach
Construct labelling	Used multiple labels: execution consistency, implementation consistency, execution discipline, with no settled definition	Adopts a single label, execution consistency, with explicitly specified boundary conditions and scope	Advantage: captured a broad range of related phenomena. Disadvantage: labels were not interchangeable; cross-study comparison was invalid
Theoretical anchoring	Drew on execution strategy, organisational routines, resource-based view, and management control theory in parallel, with no adjudication	Proposes integration of organisational routines theory and management control theory as a coherent explanatory foundation	Advantage: each anchoring captured something real. Disadvantage: incompatible theories implied different sources and levers; no cumulative theory was possible
Architectural position	Positioned execution consistency alternately as antecedent, outcome, mediator, and moderator across studies	Settles a consistent position for execution consistency as a proximal factor associated with performance, situated between business strategy and PMS	Advantage: flexibility allowed context-sensitive modelling. Disadvantage: studies estimated different parameters under one name; evidence could not accumulate

Source: Authors own work

This paper provided that account. It asked a single organising question: had the strategy implementation literature converged on a usable construct of execution consistency with clearly specified boundaries, or did it recognise a common phenomenon while leaving the construct unstabilised? The contribution is threefold: the review maps how the construct has been treated across the four literatures in scope; locates it relative to its two adjacent upstream constructs; and specifies the construct-development agenda required before it can function as a variable in cumulative research.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature and sets out the theoretical framework, Section 3 the review method, Section 4 the findings, and Sections 5 and 6 the conclusions, limitations, and further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Strategy-to-Performance Gap

A consistent finding across this literature was that the gap arose less from inadequate strategy design than from the inability to sustain disciplined execution over time. Failures were repeatedly attributed to weak follow-through, shifting priorities, poor coordination, and unclear accountability (Rumelt, 2011; Simons, 1995), and fewer than half of planned strategies were fully executed (Mintzberg, 1990; Miller, 1997). To name the capacity that closed this gap, a construct gradually emerged, referring to the ability to maintain execution discipline, sustain strategic priorities across performance cycles, and enforce corrective action when deviations occurred (Bititci et al., 2012; Pavlov and Bourne, 2011; Brauer and Schmidt, 2006).

The gap has proved durable rather than transitional. Tawse and Tabesh (2021) found that the field had accumulated a descriptive record of implementation failure without converging on the mechanisms producing it. The same pattern appears elsewhere: Alharthy et al. (2017) and Ibrahim et al. (2012) found strategy implementation factors to be significant predictors of performance in emerging-economy samples, and recent treatments continue to frame the inconsistency between strategic intent and enacted strategy as unresolved (Rudiyanto and Prayitno, 2025; Sumartono, 2024).

The Emergence of an Execution-Related Consistency Construct

The construct emerged incrementally rather than through a deliberate act of construct building. It surfaced first as a by-product of other research programmes: in the strategy execution literature, as the discipline whose absence explained implementation failure (Hrebiniak, 2006; Sull, Homkes, and Sull, 2015); in the performance management literature, as the regularity with which review and corrective-action routines were enacted (Pavlov and Bourne, 2011; Bititci et al., 2012); and, in Brauer and Schmidt (2006), as an object of theorising in its own right. Each arrival answered a question posed within its own field, and none required the phenomenon to be named the same way twice.

This construct, however, was not named, defined, or measured consistently. It appeared under labels including execution consistency, implementation consistency, and execution discipline; it was anchored in different theoretical traditions; it was positioned variously as a cause of performance, an outcome of measurement practice, or a moderating condition; and it was only rarely operationalised. The labels were not synonyms used loosely but entry points from different literatures, each carrying the assumptions of the field that supplied it. Tawse and Tabesh (2021) observed that the limited integration between the strategy execution literature and the systems sustaining execution discipline remained a persistent gap.

Theoretical Framework: Conditions for a Usable Construct

Whetten (1989) argued that a theoretical contribution rests on specifying not only which constructs are implicated in a phenomenon but how and why they are related, and on stating the conditions under which those relations hold; constructs invoked without such specification cannot be falsified and therefore cannot accumulate. MacKenzie (2003) showed that ambiguity at the definitional stage propagates into measurement model misspecification, biased estimates, and conclusions that cannot be compared across studies.

Suddaby (2010) set out four requirements for construct clarity: a definition capturing the essential properties of the phenomenon; explicit scope conditions; specification of the construct's relationships to other constructs, particularly those with which it might be confused; and internal coherence across the three. The third is decisive here. A construct is defined as much by what it excludes as by what it includes, so where it is not distinguished from its neighbours its definition

remains formally incomplete. Podsakoff, MacKenzie and Podsakoff (2016) reach the same conclusion from the measurement side: discriminant validity cannot be established against a boundary that has not been drawn.

These requirements generate the five analytical dimensions against which this review synthesises its sources. Definitional scope corresponds to Suddaby's first requirement and to the specification of essential properties in Podsakoff et al. (2016); theoretical anchoring to Whetten's how and why criterion; causal position to Whetten's specification of relations and Suddaby's scope conditions; measurement status to the operationalisation criterion in MacKenzie (2003); and construct boundary clarity to Suddaby's third requirement. Because differentiation is a precondition for a complete definition rather than a consequence of one, boundary clarity is logically prior to the other four, and the central claim of this review, that fragmentation on the first four dimensions follows from unresolved boundaries on the fifth, is a prediction the framework itself generates.

Adjacent Constructs and the Formation of Construct Boundaries

Applying that framework requires identifying the constructs from which execution consistency must be differentiated. Its two upstream neighbours, business strategy and performance management systems, are the constructs with which it is most likely to be confused, and both are considerably more mature, each having a settled theoretical anchoring, a substantial body of empirical application, and validated measurement instruments. The question this raises is why that maturity did not produce clear boundaries.

Maturity in an adjacent field produces clarity at that field's core and the opposite at its periphery, for three reasons. The first is explanatory sufficiency: a mature field is judged by how much of its dependent variable its own constructs explain, so extending a construct outward to absorb marginal variance is rewarded while stopping at a boundary is not, and the cost of over-inclusion falls on the neighbouring construct, which here had no constituency to bear it. The second is measurement precedence: a mature field arrives at a boundary already holding validated instruments, so researchers reach for the nearest instrument rather than build a new one, and the indicators then carry the mature field's label whatever they capture. This is what occurred when the regularity of performance review and corrective-action cycles came to be measured as PMS use. The third is asymmetric standing: drawing a boundary requires two named parties able to assert claims, and where one side is an established construct and the other an unnamed residual, only one side can claim.

RESEARCH METHOD

Review Approach and Scope

This review adopted a structured integrative approach to literature synthesis. Its purpose was not exhaustive enumeration, as a systematic review would require, but the integrative characterisation of how execution-related consistency was treated across multiple literatures, where that treatment diverged, and how the construct was demarcated from business strategy and performance management systems. An integrative review is the appropriate format for an emerging construct whose need is conceptual stabilisation rather than evidence aggregation (Torraco, 2005; Snyder, 2019; Elsbach and van Knippenberg, 2020).

Four bodies of literature were treated as in scope, each engaging the construct from a distinct angle: the classical strategic management process literature, in which implementation is a stage between formulation and evaluation; the business strategy literature, which specifies strategy content, quality, and clarity; the performance management systems literature, which examines how measurement and review shape execution behaviour; and the strategy execution literature, which

comes closest to naming execution consistency directly. Business strategy and PMS were treated as adjacent constructs rather than as context because the boundary was itself an object of analysis. Project management and operations management are identified as an extension in Section 6.

Source Identification and Search Procedure

Source identification proceeded along three complementary paths contributing to a single reference base. The paths were not weighted against one another: each contributed candidates to a common pool, and every source was assessed against the same criteria, set out in Section 3.3.

The first path drew on the foundational and review literatures of each of the four bodies above: the widely cited process texts and surveys of the implementation stage; the positioning and resource-based traditions and their major empirical applications; the PMS design tradition and the subsequent shift toward use-quality; and the consolidated reviews and explicit treatments of implementation consistency.

The second path was citation tracing. Backward citation searches were run on the reference lists of the hub sources identified through the first path, principally [Brauer and Schmidt \(2006\)](#), [Pavlov and Bourne \(2011\)](#), [Bititci et al. \(2012\)](#), and [Tawse and Tabesh \(2021\)](#). Forward tracing on the same hub sources identified more recent contributions extending those treatments.

The third path was contextual. Sources addressing the construct in the institutional and sectoral settings most relevant to the question were retained where they sharpened the analysis.

Searches supporting the second and third paths were conducted in Scopus, Web of Science, Emerald Insight, and Google Scholar between January and May 2026. Search strings combined the construct labels (“execution consistency”, “implementation consistency”, “execution discipline”) with adjacent-construct terms (“strategy clarity”, “strategy quality”, “PMS use”). Retrieval was restricted to scholarly sources published in English.

Table 2 reports the resulting selection flow. It is presented as an integrative-review selection flow, because the identification strategy was purposive and iterative rather than exhaustive, and no claim of systematic coverage is made.

Table 2. Integrative-review source identification and selection flow

Stage	Sources	Excluded at this stage
Identification, path 1: foundational and review literatures across the four bodies in scope	n = 96	–
Identification, path 2: backward and forward citation tracing from the hub sources	n = 138	–
Identification, path 3: contextual sources in the relevant institutional and sectoral settings	n = 41	–
Combined pool after removal of duplicates	n = 241	Duplicates removed: n = 34
Screened at title and abstract against the criteria in Table 3	n = 241	Excluded: n = 128
Assessed in full text against the same criteria	n = 113	Excluded on full-text assessment: n = 38
Included in the final reference base	n = 75	–

Source: Authors own work.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion was governed by substantive engagement rather than terminological match. A source was treated as substantively engaging the construct if it satisfied at least one of three conditions: it offered a definition, dimensionalisation, or explicit conceptualisation of execution-related consistency; it advanced an account of the mechanism by which consistency of execution affects performance; or it operationalised the phenomenon under any label. A source was treated as substantively specifying an adjacent construct if it defined or measured business strategy quality, strategy clarity, or PMS use quality in terms bearing on the demarcation. Table 3 states these as applied decision rules.

Table 3. Inclusion and exclusion decision rules

Decision point	Rule applied	Grounds for exclusion
Engagement with the focal construct	Retained if the source offers a definition, dimensionalisation, or explicit conceptualisation of execution-related consistency; or advances a theoretical or empirical account of the mechanism linking consistency of execution to performance; or operationalises the phenomenon under any label	Relevant vocabulary used incidentally, with no engagement with the phenomenon
Engagement with an adjacent construct	Retained if the source defines or measures business strategy quality, strategy clarity, or PMS use quality in terms bearing on the demarcation from execution consistency	Adjacent construct treated only as background or control
Domain relevance	Retained if execution is addressed as an organisational and strategic phenomenon	Execution addressed in a purely technical sense unconnected to strategy implementation
Source type	Retained if the source is scholarly: peer-reviewed article, scholarly monograph, or established process text	Non-scholarly trade material, consultancy collateral, and practitioner commentary without an evidential base
Publication window	No date restriction applied; the construct was traced from its classical origins to the present	None applied on date grounds

Source: Authors own work

No restriction was placed on publication date. The included literature spans 1962 to 2025, with a foundational tail of pre-1990 works, a concentration in the 2005 to 2019 period, and a recent cohort of 2020 to 2025 contributions.

Screening Procedure and Reliability

Screening proceeded in two stages. Records were first assessed at title and abstract level against the criteria in Table 3, and those passing were read in full and reassessed against the same criteria.

Screening and inclusion decisions were made by the lead author. A second independent coder was not used, and no formal inter-rater reliability statistic is therefore reported.

Three procedural safeguards limited the effect of single-coder judgement. The criteria in Table 3 were fixed before screening began and were not revised in response to individual cases. Every full-text exclusion was recorded against the criterion on which the source failed. Borderline cases were resolved in favour of inclusion and discussed explicitly in the synthesis. The absence of double coding is recorded as a limitation in Section 6.

Analytical Framework

Included sources were synthesised against the five analytical dimensions derived in Section 2.3: definitional scope, theoretical anchoring, causal position, measurement status, and construct boundary clarity.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section reports how execution-related consistency was treated across the four literatures in scope, and what that treatment reveals about the construct's boundaries.

The Classical Strategic Management Process and the Location of the Construct

The classical strategic management process, tracing its lineage to [Cohen and Cyert \(1973\)](#) and codified in widely used textbooks ([David, 2016](#); [Wheelen and Hunger, 2017](#); [Thompson, Strickland, and Gamble, 2005](#); [Thompson et al., 2013](#); [Hitt, Hoskisson, and Ireland, 2007](#); [Alkhafaji, 2003](#); [Borza et al., 2008](#)), sequenced strategic action into formulation, implementation, and evaluation. Formulation and evaluation were richly specified ([Bordean et al., 2010](#); [Acur and Englyst, 2006](#)). Implementation was treated as a single undifferentiated stage, with little account of where failure occurred ([Mintzberg, 1994](#)).

Execution consistency, in this stream, was at most an implicit expectation: that once a strategy was formulated and resources allocated, implementation would proceed. The model offered no vocabulary for the capacity to sustain implementation over time and no location for its failure. [Andrews, Boyne, and Walker \(2006\)](#) found that strategy content alone did not predict performance; it was the quality of the strategic management process that separated high from low performers.

The contribution of this stream was therefore negative but also locating. It showed where the construct ought to sit, inside the implementation stage, and that the slot was empty and bounded by formulation upstream and evaluation downstream.

Business Strategy as an Adjacent Construct

The business strategy literature was concerned with the content of strategy and how it related to performance. The positioning tradition explained performance as a function of industry structure and of the configuration of activities through which a firm delivers a position ([Porter, 1985, 1996, 2008](#)); the resource-based view ([Barney, 1991, 2002](#)) as a function of valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources; and the strategy-structure tradition ([Chandler, 1962](#); [Miles and Snow, 1978](#)) linked strategic choice to organisational form. A substantial body of work examined the relationship between strategy content and firm performance ([Parnell, 1997, 2005](#); [Nandakumar, Ghobadian, and O'Regan, 2011](#); [Williams et al., 1995](#); [Kharub, Mor, and Sharma, 2018](#); [Anwar and Hasnu, 2016](#); [Yuliansyah, Rammal, and Rose, 2016](#); [Yuliansyah, Gurd, and Mohamed, 2017](#); [Rumelt, 2011](#)), a question carried into emerging-economy settings ([Zulkifli and Wandebori, 2018](#)), and recent work continues to treat strategic positioning and the flexibility of resource deployment as the levers converting strategy content into performance ([Ogu, 2025](#)).

For this review the relevant question was not what the business strategy literature explained but where it stopped, and it did not stop cleanly. Two notions extended into the territory execution consistency would occupy. The first was strategy quality: the idea that some strategies are better matched to resources and environment. The second was strategy clarity: the idea that a strategy must be clearly articulated before it can be acted upon. [Parnell \(2010\)](#) found both high and low clarity to be associated with stronger performance than moderate clarity, and [Tsamenyi, Sahadev, and Qiao \(2011\)](#) positioned clarity, alongside implementation consistency, as a primary determinant of performance.

This constituted the first boundary problem. Strategy clarity sat on the contested border: plainly a property of the strategy, and therefore upstream, but also a precondition for consistent execution and sometimes treated as part of execution itself. A recurring finding was instructive: clarity was necessary but not sufficient, with implementation consistency identified as the factor the clarity construct did not capture ([Nandakumar, Ghobadian, and O'Regan, 2011](#); [Tsamenyi, Sahadev, and Qiao, 2011](#)). The upstream boundary was therefore contested.

Performance Management Systems as an Adjacent Construct

The performance management systems literature approached the relationship from the measurement side. Early PMS scholarship emphasised the technical design of measurement architectures ([Neely, Gregory, and Platts, 1995](#); [Neely, Adams, and Kennerley, 2002](#); [Lynch and Cross, 1991](#); [Kaplan and Norton, 1996](#); [Otley, 1999](#); [Ferreira and Otley, 2009](#); [Dahlgaard-Park and Dahlgaard, 2010](#); [Wibisono, 2011](#)); that tradition has continued to develop, extending measurement architectures to specific operating domains ([Irfani, Wibisono, and Basri, 2019](#)). A consistent finding of the later literature, however, was that design alone did not explain performance. The recognition that the use of performance information shaped managerial behaviour was long-standing ([Hopwood, 1972](#)), and the field shifted its attention from how PMS was designed to how it was used ([Bititci et al., 2012](#); [Bititci, Cocca, and Ates, 2016](#); [Bourne et al., 2018](#); [Mura, Micheli, and Longo, 2021](#); [Franco-Santos, Lucianetti, and Bourne, 2012](#)). It was the use question that bore on execution.

This shift brought the PMS literature into the conceptual territory of execution consistency. PMS use quality, the degree to which performance information stimulated accountability, review, escalation, and corrective action rather than remaining a compliance exercise, was very close to what execution consistency was reaching for. [Henri \(2006\)](#) treated the use of management control systems as itself an organisational capability; [Simons \(1995\)](#) distinguished diagnostic from interactive use; and [Pavlov and Bourne \(2011\)](#) explained the effect of measurement through an organisational routines perspective, in which measurement shaped performance to the extent that review and corrective-action routines were consistently enacted ([Davis and Albright, 2004](#); [Bianchi, Bovaird, and Loeffler, 2017](#); [Bhattacharyya and Cummings, 2015](#)). [Bititci et al. \(2012\)](#) and [Pavlov and Bourne \(2011\)](#) thereby operationalised execution-related consistency without naming it.

This constituted the second boundary problem, and the more acute of the two. The PMS use-quality literature had effectively annexed the measurement of execution consistency: where execution-related consistency was measured at all, it was measured as a property of PMS use rather than as a construct in its own right. Was the consistent enactment of review and corrective-action routines a feature of the performance management system, or of the execution capability it supported? The literature did not answer this, and the boundary was therefore not merely contested but substantially collapsed.

Execution Consistency as the Contested Residual

The strategy execution literature was, in part, a reaction to the thinness of the classical implementation stage. Hrebiniak (2006) catalogued execution obstacles including unclear accountability, weak follow-through, and poor coordination; Mankins and Steele (2005) attributed the strategy-to-performance gap primarily to execution; and Sull, Homkes, and Sull (2015) located the failure in coordination and commitment. Rumelt (2011) distinguished good from bad strategy partly by the coherence of action that followed from it, and Kaplan and Norton (2008) framed the linking of strategy to operations as a distinct discipline. Rudiyanto and Prayitno (2025) and Sumartono (2024) treated the inconsistency between intent and enacted strategy as an open problem.

It was in this stream that execution-related consistency came closest to being named as a construct. Brauer and Schmidt (2006) explicitly theorised strategy implementation consistency, examining its persistence over time and the moderating conditions under which it was sustained or eroded. Yet even here it was not stabilised: it was discussed as a quality of organisations, a discipline, a capacity, or a set of behaviours depending on the author, and was rarely given a formal definition or operationalised for measurement.

Read against Sections 4.2 and 4.3, the reason became visible. Execution consistency was what remained of the strategy-to-performance gap once business strategy quality had taken the upstream share and PMS use quality the measurement share. It was a residual, defined by what the adjacent constructs did not claim, so its internal content never had to be specified. Table 4 summarises how the four literatures positioned the construct.

Table 4. Treatment of execution-related consistency across four literatures

Literature	How execution consistency appears	Theoretical anchoring	Boundary problem identified
Classical strategic management process	Implicit expectation within an undifferentiated implementation stage; no construct vocabulary	Strategy process tradition (Cohen and Cyert, 1973; David, 2016; Wheelen and Hunger, 2017)	Locates an empty slot in the implementation stage, bounded by formulation upstream and evaluation downstream
Business strategy (adjacent construct, upstream)	Absorbed into strategy quality and strategy clarity; execution variance attributed to upstream strategy defects	Positioning view, resource-based view, strategy-structure tradition (Porter, 1985; Barney, 1991; Miles and Snow, 1978)	Upstream boundary contested: strategy clarity sits on the border between strategy quality and execution
Performance management systems (adjacent construct, further upstream)	Absorbed into PMS use quality; execution-related consistency measured as a property of PMS use	Organisational routines and management control (Pavlov and Bourne, 2011; Bititci et al., 2012; Henri, 2006; Simons, 1995)	Further-upstream boundary substantially collapsed: the construct measurement base belongs formally to PMS use quality

Literature	How execution consistency appears	Theoretical anchoring	Boundary problem identified
Strategy execution (focal construct)	Named directly and theorised as implementation consistency, but treated variously as a discipline, a capacity, or a set of behaviours; rarely defined formally or operationalised	Execution strategy and organisational routines (Brauer and Schmidt, 2006; Hrebiniak, 2006; Sull et al., 2015; Rumelt, 2011)	Construct left as a residual: its boundaries are set externally by what business strategy and PMS do not claim, so its internal content is never specified

Source: Authors own work

Five Dimensions of Fragmentation

Drawing the four literatures together, the review identified five dimensions on which the treatment of execution consistency diverged. The first four describe the fragmentation; the fifth explains it. The fragmentation followed the contours of the literatures from which the construct was borrowed.

Definitional Scope

The construct was defined at widely varying breadth: at its narrowest, execution discipline, the reliable completion of planned actions with clear responsibilities (Hrebiniak, 2006); at an intermediate breadth, the maintenance of strategic priorities across performance cycles (Bititci et al., 2012; Pavlov and Bourne, 2011); at its broadest, cross-functional coordination and the prevention of strategic dilution (Brauer and Schmidt, 2006). These were three constructs of different scope sharing a family of labels, so studies could report contradictory findings while measuring different things.

Theoretical Anchoring

The construct was anchored in at least four traditions: execution strategy, as a managerial discipline (Hrebiniak, 2006; Sull et al., 2015); organisational routines theory, as the enactment of ostensive routines in their performative aspect (Feldman and Pentland, 2003; Pavlov and Bourne, 2011); the resource-based view, as an organisational capability (Henri, 2006; Barney, 1991); and management control theory, as a property of how control systems sustain attention (Simons, 1995; Merchant and Van der Stede, 2017). Each implied a different account of the construct's sources and levers, and the literature did not adjudicate between them.

Causal Position

The construct was positioned inconsistently within causal models. In much of the strategy execution literature it was an antecedent of performance; in parts of the PMS literature, an outcome of good measurement practice. Elsewhere it functioned as a mediating or moderating condition, and Brauer and Schmidt (2006) treated implementation consistency partly as itself moderated by industry velocity. A construct that was alternately cause, effect, and contingency could not accumulate evidence, because each study estimated a different parameter under a shared name.

Measurement Status

The construct was only rarely operationalised as a distinct, measurable variable. Execution-related concepts appeared throughout the strategy and performance literatures (Hrebiniak, 2006; Kaplan and Norton, 2001), but had rarely been operationalised as a reflective latent construct with validated items. Where measurement occurred it was indirect, through proxies such as the regularity of performance reviews or the presence of escalation behaviours (Bititci et al., 2012; Pavlov and Bourne, 2011).

Construct Boundary Clarity

The fifth dimension explained the other four. The upstream boundary with business strategy was contested: strategy quality and, especially, strategy clarity each claimed part of the variance execution consistency would otherwise explain, and the literature treated clarity inconsistently as a property of the strategy, a precondition for execution, or a component of it. The further-upstream boundary with PMS was substantially collapsed, the construct's most developed measurement base belonging formally to PMS use quality; Section 4.6 states the evidential criteria separating the two cases. Execution consistency therefore functioned as a residual: because its content was fixed externally, the other four dimensions varied with whichever adjacent tradition was in view. Table 5 consolidates the five dimensions.

Table 5. Five dimensions of fragmentation in the execution consistency construct

Dimension	Range of treatment in the literature	Consequence for cumulative research
Definitional scope	From narrow execution discipline, through priority maintenance across cycles, to broad cross-functional coordination and dilution prevention	Studies using the same label measured constructs of different breadth, so findings were not directly comparable
Theoretical anchoring	Execution strategy; organisational routines theory; resource-based view; management control theory	Different anchorings implied different sources and levers, with no adjudication between them
Causal position	Treated as antecedent of performance, as outcome of measurement quality, and as mediating or moderating condition	Evidence could not accumulate because studies estimated different parameters under one name
Measurement status	Rarely operationalised as a distinct reflective construct; where measured, captured indirectly through proxies such as review regularity and escalation behaviour	The construct's indicators were developed and validated under the name of an adjacent construct, so no independent measurement base exists
Construct boundary clarity	Upstream boundary with business strategy contested; further-upstream boundary with PMS use quality substantially collapsed	The construct is defined externally by what its neighbours do not claim, which is the root condition generating the other four forms of fragmentation

Source: Authors own work

Distinguishing Contested from Collapsed Boundaries

The two boundaries described above are distinguished on evidential grounds rather than by degree of difficulty, and the criteria are stated here so that the distinction can be inspected.

A boundary is treated as contested where three conditions hold: both constructs are separately named and defined in the reviewed literature; at least one source explicitly attempts a demarcation; and the assignment of a specific sub-phenomenon is disputed across sources, while each construct retains a measurement base of its own. The upstream boundary with business strategy meets all three, with strategy clarity as the disputed sub-phenomenon. [Parnell \(2010\)](#) treats it as a property of the formulated strategy, whereas [Nandakumar, Ghobadian and O'Regan \(2011\)](#) and [Tsamenyi, Sahadev and Qiao \(2011\)](#) treat clarity as necessary but not sufficient and name implementation consistency as the separate factor.

A boundary is treated as collapsed where a stronger condition holds: the indicators used to capture the focal construct are formally owned by the adjacent construct; no source in the reviewed set measures it independently of the adjacent construct's instrument; and no reported test distinguishes the two. The boundary with PMS meets this condition. Where execution-related consistency is measured at all it is measured as PMS use quality, through the regularity of performance review, escalation behaviour, and corrective-action cycles ([Bititci et al., 2012](#); [Pavlov and Bourne, 2011](#)).

A Construct-Development Agenda for Execution Consistency

The instability of the construct is rooted in unresolved boundaries with its adjacent constructs. Five lines of work would move it toward a usable construct, presented in the order their logic requires: boundary specification first, because the remaining four depend on it.

The first requirement is to draw the construct's boundaries explicitly: to state positively what execution consistency includes, rather than leaving it as a residual, and where it ends. Upstream, the boundary must separate strategy clarity, a property of the formulated strategy, from the capacity to sustain execution of a clear strategy. Further upstream, it must separate the measurement system from the execution capability it supports but does not constitute.

With the boundaries specified, a formal definition with a stated scope becomes possible: one stating whether execution consistency refers narrowly to execution discipline, more broadly to the maintenance of strategic priorities across cycles, or more broadly still to cross-unit coordination. The review suggests an intermediate-to-broad definition, encompassing the reliability of planned-action completion and the consistency of cross-unit alignment over time.

The third requirement is to reconcile the competing theoretical anchorings. Organisational routines theory and management control theory are not incompatible: routines theory explains how consistency is produced through the enactment of review and corrective-action routines, while management control theory explains the systems sustaining them. An integrated account would give the construct a coherent explanatory foundation.

The fourth requirement is a validated, construct-specific instrument. Because execution consistency has not been operationalised as a standalone reflective construct, its indicators having been developed under the name of PMS use quality, item development must proceed with explicit attention to discriminant validity against the adjacent constructs. The candidate dimensions emerging from the literature are execution discipline and cross-unit coordination.

The fifth requirement is to settle the construct's causal position. The most defensible position, and the one most consistent with the strategy execution literature and with the construct's location in the classical implementation stage, treats execution consistency as a proximal factor associated with performance, situated between business strategy and performance management systems and the outcomes each is taken to shape. Table 6 summarises the agenda.

Table 6. A construct-development agenda for execution consistency

Agenda element	Current state in the literature	Required development
Boundary specification	Boundaries with business strategy and PMS contested or collapsed; construct defined as an external residual	Explicit demarcation: strategy clarity assigned upstream, PMS design and use assigned to the measurement system, execution capability specified positively
Construct definition	Multiple labels at varying breadth; no settled definitional scope	A formal definition with explicitly specified scope and boundary conditions
Theoretical integration	Four parallel anchorings with no adjudication	An integrated account combining routines theory and management control theory
Operationalisation	No standalone validated instrument; indicators developed and validated under the name of PMS use quality	A construct-specific instrument developed with explicit discriminant validity testing against strategy clarity and PMS use quality, covering execution discipline and cross-unit coordination
Causal specification	Positioned variously as antecedent, outcome, mediator, and moderator across studies	A fixed position as proximal factor associated with performance, situated between business strategy and PMS, against which contingencies and moderators are specified rather than redefined

Source: Authors own work

CONCLUSION

This review set out to determine whether the strategy implementation, business strategy, and performance management literatures had converged on a usable construct of execution consistency with clearly specified boundaries. They had not. What they shared was recognition of a phenomenon: the capacity to sustain disciplined execution was widely identified as decisive in whether formulated strategies became realised performance. What they lacked was a stabilised construct.

The review's central contribution was to explain why. The fragmentation was not terminological untidiness but the consequence of a structural condition. Execution consistency sat between two mature constructs whose boundaries with it were unresolved: the business strategy literature absorbed execution-related variance into strategy quality and clarity, while the PMS literature absorbed its measurement into PMS use quality. Execution consistency was thereby left as a residual, and the four forms of fragmentation followed from that condition.

For research, the implication is that execution consistency should be treated as a construct still under development, and that the development work must begin with its boundaries. Studies invoking it should specify not only which definitional scope, theoretical anchoring, and causal position they adopt, but also how they distinguish execution consistency from strategy clarity upstream and from PMS use quality further upstream. Two commitments would give the field a common starting point: defining execution consistency as the organisational capacity to sustain

disciplined, priority-aligned action over time, distinct from the strategy that precedes it and the measurement system that monitors it; and positioning it consistently as a proximal factor associated with firm performance, with business strategy quality and PMS use quality as more distal conditions.

For management practice, the review clarifies that execution consistency is a distinct organisational capability requiring deliberate design and sustained attention. It is not an automatic by-product of strategy quality, and it is not reducible to the completeness of the measurement system. Leaders who treat disciplined execution as a natural consequence of a clear strategy and a complete scorecard mistake where the strategy-to-performance gap originates.

LIMITATION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Five limitations bear on the interpretation of this review. First, it is integrative and theory-oriented rather than exhaustive, so no claim of systematic completeness is made. Second, the identification strategy was purposive and iterative, and will under-represent work outside the citation neighbourhoods of the hub sources. Third, screening decisions were made by a single coder and no inter-rater reliability statistic is reported. Fourth, the review was confined to four bodies of literature. Fifth, the synthesis is conceptual; the collapsed-boundary claim rests on the absence of independent measurement in the reviewed sources rather than on evidence that the constructs are empirically indistinguishable.

Four directions for further research follow. The most immediate is an empirical test of the boundary claims: a study administering candidate execution consistency items alongside established PMS use quality and strategy clarity instruments, and reporting discriminant validity, would establish whether the constructs are separable in data as well as in principle. The second is instrument development conducted against the boundary specification rather than by adaptation of adjacent instruments, since adaptation reproduces the collapse it is meant to resolve. The third is a bibliometric mapping of label proliferation, and the fourth is extension into project management and operations management.

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