



# European Research on Management and Business Economics

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## Assessing the origins, evolution and prospects of the literature on dynamic capabilities: A bibliometric analysis

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 17 January 2017

Received in revised form 12 June 2017

Accepted 14 June 2017

Available online xxx

#### JEL classification:

M0

M1

M2

#### Keywords:

Dynamic capabilities

Bibliometric analysis

Web of Science

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to serve as orientation and guidance to academics that are starting or currently developing their research within the field of dynamic capabilities, in order to enhance their knowledge about which are the key scientific journals, authors and articles shaping this topic. This paper presents a bibliometric analysis on dynamic capabilities, making use of the Web of Science database to perform it. This analysis comprises fundamental issues such as (i) the number of studies published per year, (ii) the countries with the highest rate of productivity, (iii) the most prolific and influential authors, (iv) assessment of studies citing dynamic capabilities, and (v) the most productive journals on dynamic capabilities and recent studies on this topic. Results reveal an exponential growth in the number of publications on dynamic capabilities for the 2000–2012 period. Although, since 2012 this growth has decelerated, the number of publications on this topic remains noteworthy. This study brings useful information for those academics and practitioners attempting to analyze and deepen within this particular field of research, at the same time that provides some insights concerning the future development and progress of the dynamic capabilities topic in the management, business and economics academic literature.

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### 1. Introduction

Research on dynamic capabilities (DC) stands amongst the most prolific streams of research within the field of management for the last two decades. This might be explained by the high importance and awareness that the strategic management literature has devoted to this topic. Although the research domain of dynamic capabilities has become one of the most active in the strategic management field, several criticisms have aroused arguing the existence of some controversy and confusion around this concept. In fact, the authors are still looking for the nature of dynamic capabilities, its antecedents or drivers, its outcomes and the organizational and managerial processes and procedures underlying this concept (Cepeda & Vera, 2007; Teece, 2007) and there exists a lack of agreement concerning the conceptualization of this topic. However, this lack of agreement, been taken into

account, should not prevent us from attempting to identify in this study the most relevant authors, journals and publications within the dynamic capabilities literature with the aim of building a reference framework for future researchers that might contribute to strengthen and unify this concept.

Despite the widespread diffusion and interest aroused by this topic, little attention has been paid until this moment to the pertinence of building a framework that brings the main currents and studies in the field of dynamic capabilities. In this line, several literature reviews have been made (Ambrosini & Bowman, 2009; Di Stefano, Peteraf, & Verona, 2010; Easterby-Smith, Lyles, & Peteraf, 2009). Nevertheless, few papers like the written by Vogel and Güttel (2013) entitled “*The dynamic capabilities view in strategic management: a bibliometric review*” could be highlighted as an attempt to develop a bibliometric review of this concept. However, these authors use different methods to measure and analyze the research outcomes, such as co-citation and bibliographic coupling, more aimed at detecting intertextual linkages existing between academic publications due to the referencing behaviour of scholars. In addition, these authors document co-citation analysis, while this technique might be also applied to additional bibliographic items (i.e., authors or academic journals). We aim to cover this gap, by

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.iedeen.2017.06.004>

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analyzing further these complementary sources of bibliographic information.

Hence, the main purpose of our study is to orient researchers and enable a wider understanding and grasp of the dynamic capabilities topic. This paper might serve as an introductory reference and preliminary approach for new researchers targeting to become familiar with the literature on dynamic capabilities. To this aim, the article intends to clarify the concept of dynamic capabilities and subsequently develops a bibliometric analysis of the existing research on dynamic capabilities, trying to elucidate which view better describes the evolution of this topic during a period of 24 years (1991–2015), helping this way to clarify the concept and applications of dynamic capabilities. The bibliometric analysis leads us to acknowledge who are the most influential authors, which are the most profuse journals, which countries hold the highest rate of productivity, what has been the number of studies on dynamic capabilities per year, the studies citing dynamic capabilities, or the recent advances on this topic.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section presents the theoretical background, where we intend to shed some light toward the concept of dynamic capabilities, on the basis of prior related studies. The third section comprises a description of the research methodology. The fourth section presents the results of the bibliometric analysis. Finally, the fifth section brings together the discussion, and directions for future research.

## 2. Conceptual framework

Although multiple definitions can be found in the literature (Table 1 gathers the most widely recognized of them), dynamic capabilities can be defined as the capacity that enables a firm to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address rapidly changing environments. This is the sense in which Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997) introduced the term of dynamic capabilities in the article entitled “*Dynamic capabilities and strategic management*”. This paper is considered the most influential study on dynamic capabilities, together with a recently developed new framework of dynamic capabilities (Teece, 2007, 2014). This term is still used in our days, although, over the years, many are

the authors who have attempted to redefine and expand the concept of dynamic capabilities, adjusting it to the particular context of the moment. Authors such as Eisenhardt and Martin (2000), Zollo and Winter (2002), Helfat and Peteraf (2003), Zott (2003), Winter (2003), Zahra, Sapienza, and Davidsson (2006), Teece (2007), Helfat et al. (2009) or Cepeda and Vera (2007), among others, have contributed with their particular view and understanding of dynamic capabilities. However, they have failed to provide a concise and comprehensive definition of dynamic capabilities and its conceptualization has not reached consensus yet (Protogerou, Caloghirou, & Lioukas, 2012). Consequently, this has produced some misunderstandings. More recently, Peteraf, Di Stefano, and Verona (2013) point out that the origin of such confusion appeared very soon, between the publication of what they called “seminal papers” – Teece et al. (1997) and Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) –. What is certain is that, although the concept is born and develops linked to strategic management, the literature shows how researchers have paid great attention to its relationship with an increasingly broad variety of aspects, which jointly with its possible applications to different areas, has critically affected the definition of dynamic capabilities.

In this line, we can find definitions such as the one provided by Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) that presents dynamic capabilities as specific and identifiable processes that especially comprise the development of products, strategic decision-making, and management of alliances. Subsequently, Zahra et al. (2006) define dynamic capabilities as the firm’s ability to reconfigure organizational resources and routines in the form that imagined and considered to be appropriate whereby the main decisions. Whereas, in their later study, Helfat et al. (2009, p. 4) define them as “the ability to perform a task in least minimally acceptable manner”.

In an effort to understand the nature of dynamic capabilities, Zollo and Winter (2002) and Winter (2003) distinguish between two types of routines: the first deals with the firm’s operational activity – “operational routines” – and the latter involves the modification of operating routines – “dynamic capabilities” –. Dynamic and operational capabilities differ in their purposes and intended outcomes (Helfat & Winter, 2011). Operational capabilities comprise the firm’s operational functioning, being also labeled

**Table 1**  
Definitions of dynamic capabilities.

Author	Definition
Teece and Pisano (1994, p. 537)	Timely responsiveness and rapid and flexible product innovation, along with the management capability to effectively coordinate and redeploy internal and external competences.
Teece et al. (1997, p. 516)	The firm’s ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments.
Eisenhardt and Martin (2000, p. 1006)	The firm’s processes that use resources—specifically the processes to integrate, reconfigure, gain, and release resources—to match and even create market change; dynamic capabilities thus are the organizational and strategic routines by which firms achieve new resource configurations as markets emerge, collide, split, evolve and die.
Teece (2000, p. 36)	The ability to sense and then seize opportunities quickly and proficiently.
Griffith and Harvey (2001, p. 597)	Dynamic Capabilities is a combination of resources that are difficult-to-imitate, including effective coordination of inter-organizational relationships, on a global basis that can provide a firm competitive advantage.
Zollo and Winter (2002, p. 340)	A dynamic capability is a learned and stable pattern of collective activity through which the organization systematically generates and modifies its operating routines in pursuit of improved effectiveness.
Lee, Lee, and Rho (2002, p. 734)	Dynamic capabilities are conceived as a source of sustainable advantage in Schumpeterian regimes of rapid change.
Adner and Helfat (2003, p. 1012)	The capabilities with which managers build, integrate, and reconfigure organizational resources and competences.
Helfat and Peteraf (2003, p. 999)	Dynamic capabilities do not directly affect output for the firm in which they reside, but indirectly contribute to the output of the firm through an impact in operational capabilities
Winter (2003, p. 991)	Those (capabilities) that operate to extend, modify, or create ordinary capabilities.
Zahra et al. (2006, p. 918)	The abilities to reconfigure a firm’s resources and routines in the manner envisioned and deemed appropriate by its principal decision-maker(s).
Helfat et al. (2009, p. 4)	The ability to perform a task in least minimally acceptable manner.
Teece (2007, p. 1319)	Dynamic capabilities can be disaggregated in the capacity (a) to sense and shape opportunities and threats, (b) to seize opportunities, and (c) to maintain competitiveness through enhancing, combining, protecting, and, when necessary, reconfiguring the business enterprise’s intangible and tangible assets.
Pavlou and El Sawy (2011, p. 239)	Dynamic capabilities have been proposed as a means for addressing turbulent environments by helping managers extend, modify, and reconfigure existing operational capabilities into new ones that better match the environment.
Helfat and Martin (2015, p. 1)	The capabilities with which managers create, extend, and modify the ways in which firms make a living—helps to explain the relationship between the quality of managerial decisions, strategic change, and organizational performance.

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