

Flexibility in Management: Applying the 'Anything Goes' Principle to Innovation and Decision Making

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Abstract

Flexibility in organizations is an increasingly important principle in dealing with rapidly changing market dynamics. This study aims to explore how the application of flexibility in decision-making and innovation, by relating to the concept of methodological freedom developed by Paul Feyerabend, can strengthen organizational performance and resilience. Using case studies from several leading companies such as Google, Netflix, Amazon, Zara, and Tesla, the study analyzes how freedom to choose different methodological and experimental approaches can drive innovation, improve responsiveness to change, and provide a sustainable competitive advantage. Organizations that implement flexibility in their operational structure and managerial strategy show improvements in creativity, resilience to uncertainty, and adaptability to external changes. However, the main challenge faced is maintaining a balance between individual freedom and a clear organizational structure. Leadership that supports experimentation and views failure as part of the learning process has proven to be an important factor in creating an innovative culture. This research provides valuable insights for managerial practitioners and academics regarding the importance of implementing flexibility to achieve competitive advantage in organizations.

Keywords: Flexibility, Innovation, Decision Making, Methodological Freedom, Anything Goes, Organization, Leadership, Creativity, Resilience, Innovative Culture

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Flexibility in management is an urgent need in the modern era, where organizations have to deal with rapidly changing market dynamics, technological disruption, and global uncertainty. The ability to adapt quickly in the face of changes in the business environment is key for organizations to stay relevant and competitive. In this context, traditional approaches that rely on fixed procedures and rigid hierarchies are beginning to question their effectiveness. Therefore, a more flexible and innovative management approach is needed to address these challenges (Kanter, 2019).

One of the relevant concepts to answer this challenge is the principle of "anything goes" introduced by Paul Feyerabend in his book *Against Method*. This principle proposes that no single method can be considered correct or absolute in the search for knowledge. Instead, the best solutions often arise from the courage to go beyond conventional rules and limits. In the world of management, this principle can be translated into the courage to explore new ideas, take calculated risks, and adopt a variety of unconventional approaches to innovation and decision-making (Feyerabend, 2020).

The application of the "anything goes" principle in management offers a fresh perspective to encourage creativity and innovation in the organization. By giving individuals and teams the freedom to explore new ideas without being bound by rigid rules, organizations can create a more dynamic and responsive environment to change. This approach also allows for faster and more informed decision-making, especially in situations full of uncertainty.

1.2. The Theoretical Concept and Relevance of the "Anything Goes" Principle

Paul Feyerabend, a controversial philosopher of science, stated that the development of science is not always linear or follows a certain method. In his view, success is often achieved through methods that are flexible and even contrary to existing norms. His "anything goes" principle challenged traditional views of the scientific method and encouraged free experimentation to achieve new breakthroughs (Giddens & Sutton, 2021).

When applied in a management context, these principles offer a more adaptive approach to addressing modern business challenges. Organizations that apply the principle of "anything goes" can be more effective in navigating market changes, improving collaboration between teams, and creating high-impact innovations. In addition, this principle is also relevant in human resource management, where flexibility and diversity of approaches can improve employee engagement and productivity (Treiblmaier, 2019).

1.3. Research Objectives and Significance

This study aims to examine the application of the principle of "anything goes" in management, with a focus on:

1. How these principles can be applied to managerial decision-making.
2. Impact on organizational innovation.
3. Its relevance to organizational sustainability in the face of rapid changing dynamics.

Through this study, it is hoped that it can provide new insights to organizational leaders about the importance of flexibility and freedom in creating innovative solutions. In addition, the study also seeks to offer practical recommendations for organizations to integrate these principles in their management strategies.

1.4. Problem Statement

To achieve these goals, this study will answer several key questions:

1. How can the principle of "anything goes" be implemented in the managerial decision-making process?
2. What impact does the application of these principles have on organizational innovation?
3. How do these principles affect organisational sustainability amid a changing business environment?

1.5. Approach and Methodology

This article uses a literature approach that blends modern management theories with the principles proposed by Feyerabend. The study also involves real-world case analysis to explore how organizations have successfully adopted the principle of "anything goes" in their operational context. This approach aims to provide a holistic overview of the benefits and challenges of applying these principles.

1.6. Article Structure

This article will be divided into several main sections. The first section will discuss theories related to flexibility in management and the principle of "anything goes." The second part will review case studies of organizations that have successfully adopted this principle. The third section will analyze the impact of the application of these principles on innovation and organizational sustainability. The article will conclude with conclusions and recommendations for management leaders and practitioners. By adopting the principle of "anything goes," organizations can leverage flexibility as a competitive advantage in an era of uncertainty and change. This research is expected to be a significant contribution to management literature and provide inspiration for future innovations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Theory of the Against Method by Paul Feyerabend

Paul Feyerabend was a philosopher of science known for his ideas that challenged the norms of conventional scientific methodology. Feyerabend argued that there is no one correct method or way of seeking knowledge. He believed that science developed through methodological freedom, not through strict and rigid rules. Feyerabend rejected the view that the traditional scientific method was the only way to achieve the truth, stating that a variety of approaches—including those considered unconventional—could lead to major discoveries (Feyerabend, 1975).

In Feyerabend's frame of mind, the principle of "anything goes" suggests that experimentation, improvisation, and the courage to go beyond the confines of conventional methodologies are often the keys to scientific breakthroughs. Historical examples support his ideas, such as how Copernicus' heliocentric theory went against the dominant scientific paradigm of his time, but ultimately revolutionized science (Gaida, 2022).

The relevance of this principle extends to a wide range of disciplines, including management. In an ever-changing world, management cannot rely entirely on standard methods to solve problems. Instead, organizations should practice flexibility and adopt a variety of approaches to survive and thrive (Child, 2015).

2.2. Flexibility in Management

Flexibility in management is a topic that has been discussed by researchers for a long time. Theoretically, flexibility refers to an organization's ability to adapt to changes in the environment, both internal and external. Some important theories related to flexibility include:

Change Management

This theory highlights the importance of an organization's ability to respond quickly to change. An organization's success in managing change depends on its flexibility and willingness to modify its strategy, structure, and culture (Appelbaum et al, 2017).

Situational-Based Decision Making

This decision-making model recognizes that there is no single approach that is one-size-fits-all. Contingency theory, as put forward by Fred Fiedler, emphasizes that managerial effectiveness depends on the conformity between the leadership style and the demands of the situation (McAdam et al, 2019).

Open Innovation

Henry Chesbrough introduced the concept of open innovation in his book *Open Innovation*, which shows how organizations can benefit by opening up their innovation process to external collaboration. This approach reflects the importance of flexibility in accepting ideas from multiple sources to drive innovation (Bogers et al, 2017).

The Relationship Between Flexibility and Innovation

Research shows that flexibility has a close relationship with innovation in organizations. In a dynamic business environment, flexible organizations tend to be more successful in generating new ideas and adapting to market needs. Freedom and autonomy in work can increase the creativity of individuals and groups, which ultimately leads to innovation (Burchart et al, 2017).

The Importance of Freedom in Experimentation

Free experimentation allows teams to try new approaches without fear of failure. For example, 3M is well known for supporting free experimentation among its employees, resulting in products such as Post-it Notes (Coster, 2017).

Organizational Flexibility and Competitive Advantage

According to research on dynamic capabilities, flexibility is an essential element for companies to identify new opportunities, integrate resources, and create a competitive advantage (Teece, 2018).

2.3. The Concept of "Anything Goes" in Management Literacy

In management literature, the principle of "anything goes" can be found in a variety of approaches that encourage organizations to abandon traditional mindsets. For example:

Agile Approach: In software development, Agile methodologies allow teams to work in a flexible way and adapt to changing project needs. This principle reflects the spirit of "anything goes" through constant iteration and rapid feedback (Ciric Lalic et al, 2022).

Experimental Management: This approach encourages organizations to try different strategies on a small scale before adopting them broadly. Amazon uses this approach to test new products, ensuring their success before a massive launch (Loorbach et al, 2024).

3. Methodology

This study uses library research. In obtaining research data, researchers collect, analyze, organize, source from articles, books, and previous research on the implementation of strategic management in the field of education. Then the researcher concluded and presented strategy management data for improving the quality of education (Danandjaja, 2014).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Flexibility in Managerial Decision-Making

Applying the "Anything Goes" Principle in Strategic Decisions

In managerial decision-making, the application of the "anything goes" principle provides an innovative and adaptive approach. This principle rejects attachment to a standard method or procedure, giving leaders and teams the freedom to explore various possibilities. In a managerial context, "anything goes" leads to the use of a variety of approaches tailored to the needs of the situation, encompassing a leadership style that is more inclusive, participatory, and results-oriented rather than process-oriented (Oeij et al, 2019).

For example, tech companies like Google and Spotify are adopting a flexible managerial approach by giving their teams autonomy to determine the most relevant strategies. Google uses the principle of design sprints to accelerate decision-making regarding new products, a flexible and collaborative method. Spotify, on the other hand, implements a squad model that allows small teams to work independently but remain coordinated within a larger ecosystem. This approach shows how flexibility can create a dynamic, innovative, and responsive work environment to market changes (Sletten, 2021).

Advantages of Flexibility

Flexibility in decision-making provides various strategic benefits for the organization, including:

Improving Adaptation to Change:

In a business environment full of uncertainty, flexibility allows organizations to adapt quickly to changes in the market or technology. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many companies changed their business models, from direct-to-customer services to digital-based services. Flexibility in decision-making allows this transition to be made quickly and effectively (Bortolini et al, 2018).

Strengthening Crisis Responsiveness:

Flexible organizations are better able to respond to external challenges, such as regulatory changes or supply chain disruptions. Amazon, for example, managed to significantly increase its logistics capacity during the global crisis to meet the surge in online shopping demand. This is only possible through flexible and quick strategic decisions (Hermawati et al, 2024).

Driving Innovation:

By giving organizations, the freedom to try new approaches, they can encourage innovation. This approach provides space for employees to experiment and come up with unusual ideas, which often results in creative solutions to complex problems (Clausen et al, 2020).

Risks and Challenges

However, while it offers many benefits, the application of flexibility in decision-making also has several risks and challenges that need to be managed, including:

Potential Confusion in Decision Making:

When organizations adopt a highly flexible approach, the risk of confusion among team members increases. Ambiguity in priorities or responsibilities can result in delays and inefficiencies. Therefore, it is important for organizations to keep a clear framework in place despite being flexible (Brozovic, 2018).

Uncertainty in Implementation:

Decisions taken without standard procedures may face challenges in implementation, especially if there is no contingency plan. For example, decisions that are too quick or based on unvalidated assumptions can result in financial or reputational losses (Brozovic, 2018).

Balance between Structure and Flexibility: While flexibility is important, too much flexibility can damage an organization's structure. Therefore, organizations need to find the right balance between freedom in decision-making and the need for effective governance (Brozovic, 2018).

4.2 Flexibility in Innovation and Creativity

Creativity as a Result of Methodological Freedom

Innovation and creativity are two key elements in a business strategy oriented towards sustainable growth. Creativity not only arises from brilliant individual thinking but is also influenced by the methodological freedom provided in an organization. The freedom to choose a variety of managerial methods or approaches allows leaders and teams to think outside the box, opening space for more innovative and effective problem-solving. A flexible approach to managerial methodologies gives individuals within the organization the freedom to explore a variety of problem-solving alternatives, allowing for the creation of new solutions that may have previously been overlooked in conventional approaches. (Van Aken & Berends, 2018)

For example, many global companies are pushing for the adoption of various models of innovation, experimentation, and improvement to achieve competitive advantage. For example, tech companies like Google and Apple give product development teams the freedom to choose the method that best suits the challenges at hand. The open innovation model implemented by these companies allows for collaboration with external parties, including customers and partners, who contribute to the creative process. (Kratzer et al, 2017)

However, to ensure that this freedom of methodology truly generates creativity, it is important for companies to have a clear and structured evaluation system. This helps to ensure that the experiments conducted can produce measurable results and can be applied to a wider scale, without sacrificing quality or operational effectiveness.

Case Studies of Companies Using Various Innovation Models

Case studies of companies implementing various innovation models provide a clearer picture of how flexibility in the selection of methodologies can lead to creative breakthroughs. For example, companies like Tesla have adopted a variety of innovation models, including technology-driven innovation, as well as innovation in terms of business and marketing. This multi-model approach allows them to face the challenges of the automotive industry in a more holistic and integrated way.

Tesla is not only focusing on electric vehicle technology innovation, but also on the business models that support the overall electric vehicle ecosystem, including charging and renewable energy provision. This flexibility in Tesla's managerial approach has fueled the company's growth, making it a leader in the electric vehicle market, as well as providing a clear competitive advantage (Chen & Perez, 2018).

In addition, other companies such as 3M are also showing how various models of innovation and experimentation can lead to unexpected innovative products. By giving its employees, the freedom to explore new ideas without strict restrictions, 3M has created iconic products, including Post-it Notes that come from experimental conversations about temporary adhesion (Coster, 2017).

Creating an Innovative Culture

It is important to create an organizational culture that supports flexibility and experimentation in the innovation process. This culture should provide employees with a sense of security to try new ideas without fear of failure. One of the key factors in creating an innovative culture is reducing the fear of failure. Failure should be seen as an important part of the learning process, not as an obstacle to achieving success.

In many leading companies, failure is seen as an opportunity to gain new insights that can drive further innovation. For example, in a company like Amazon, every project failure is considered an opportunity to make further improvements and product development. Thus, failure is not only accepted but considered an integral part of the innovation cycle.

Additionally, open and supportive leadership is essential in creating an innovative culture. Leaders who are open to new ideas and change can inspire team members to dare to think differently and explore approaches that have never been tried before. This leadership not only requires leaders to listen to and receive feedback, but also to support the implementation of innovative ideas even though there is no guarantee of success at the outset (Kremer et al, 2019).

The Relationship between Open Leadership and Team Creativity

Open leadership has a very close relationship with the creativity of the team in achieving innovation. Leaders who encourage two-way communication, receive feedback constructively, and provide space for team members to share their ideas tend to create an atmosphere that is more conducive to creativity. This open leadership allows teams to collaborate effectively, generating fresher ideas and not being constrained by hierarchies or bureaucracies that often hinder innovation (Kremer et al, 2019).

Research studies show that in organizations with inclusive and open leadership, the rate of innovation generated is much higher. Leaders who listen to and appreciate each team member's contributions not only encourage new ideas, but also create a more cooperative and collaborative environment, which is crucial in facing complex challenges that require creative solutions (Kremer et al, 2019).

For example, in the world of technology, corporate leaders such as Microsoft's Satya Nadella have brought about a major change in company culture by promoting more open and collaborative leadership. Microsoft's success in cloud computing innovation, as well as other products, can be largely traced to a leadership approach that emphasizes collaboration and exploration of new ideas.

4.3. Case Study: Implementing Flexibility in Organizations

Examples of Organizations Applying the Principle of Flexibility

The principle of flexibility in organizations is often associated with the ability to adapt quickly to changes in the business environment and market dynamics. This flexibility is reflected in how organizations respond to challenges, rapid decision-making, and a willingness to try new approaches that can drive innovation. For example, some of the world's leading companies have successfully implemented the principle of "anything goes" in decision-making and innovation, allowing them to stay relevant during rapid change.

One example of an organization that has successfully implemented flexibility is Google, which implements the principle of "anything goes" through a policy called 20% Time. This policy allows employees to use up to 20% of their work time working on personal projects or experiments that are not directly related to their main job. Some of Google's well-known products, such as Gmail and Google News, were born out of experiments driven by these policies. By giving employees, the freedom to explore new ideas without having to follow a rigid managerial structure, Google encourages continuous innovation, which contributes to the company's dominant position in the technology market (CNBC, 2022).

Another example is Netflix, which successfully transformed its business model from a DVD rental service to a leading digital streaming platform. Netflix applies flexibility in decision-making, utilizing customer data to continuously adapt the content presented. With a policy of "trial and

error," Netflix gives its team the freedom to innovate in product and service development, allowing them to quickly adapt to changing market and technology trends. This approach has made Netflix the market leader in the digital entertainment industry (Jaworski, 2021).

Analysis of the Impact of the Implementation of Flexibility on Organizational Performance and Resilience

The application of the principle of flexibility in decision-making and innovation not only contributes to the creation of new products and services, but also has a direct effect on the performance and resilience of the organization in the face of change. Organizations that prioritize flexibility tend to be better able to respond quickly to external challenges, such as in the event of changing consumer needs or unexpected market disruptions (Sabuhari et al, 2020).

In this case, Zara, a global retail company known for its production and distribution speed, is another example of the implementation of flexibility in organizations. Zara has a business model that allows them to change their designs and collections in a short period of time, based on trends that appear in real time in the market. The ability to respond quickly to changing trends allows Zara to remain relevant, even in an industry heavily influenced by the fast-paced fashion cycle.

In addition, organizations that apply flexibility in strategic decisions, such as Amazon, have better resilience in the face of market uncertainty. Amazon continues to innovate by adapting their business model, from an online bookstore to an e-commerce giant, as well as expanding into cloud services with AWS (Amazon Web Services). This flexible approach allows Amazon to remain at the forefront of technology and business, despite the ever-changing challenges of the global market.

However, this flexibility also has its challenges. Without proper structure and careful oversight, too much freedom in decision-making can lead to inconsistencies in strategy and execution that risk disrupting operational stability. Therefore, while flexibility brings many advantages, companies must ensure that its implementation is carried out in a controlled manner and integrated with the organization's long-term goals.

Lessons from Cases

Case studies from organizations that successfully implement the principle of flexibility reveal several important learnings. First, the importance of a balance between freedom and structure. An organization that is successful in implementing flexibility does not mean ignoring all forms of structure, but rather providing space for employees to innovate while maintaining a clear vision and purpose of the organization. Organizations like Google and Netflix give the freedom to experiment without leaving focus on the results they want to achieve.

Second, a leadership role that supports experimentation and failure. Leaders in flexible organizations not only provide freedom but also support a culture that allows failure as part of the learning process. By creating an environment that accepts failure as part of experimentation, organizations like Tesla and Amazon can encourage continuous innovation, which in turn improves their competitiveness in the market.

Third, the importance of adaptation to external dynamics. Flexible organizations must be able to respond to rapid market or environmental changes, such as Zara in responding to global fashion trends or Netflix in adapting to changing customer preferences. Rapid adaptation allows organizations to remain relevant and competitive amid uncertainty and market changes.

In conclusion, the implementation of flexibility in an organization can provide a significant competitive advantage, but it must be done with careful planning, proper oversight, and an organizational culture that supports continuous experimentation and learning.

5. Conclusion

This research reveals that the application of the principle of flexibility in organizations can have a significant impact on organizational performance and resilience in the face of dynamic market changes. Organizations that successfully adapt freedom in decision-making and innovation, such as Google, Netflix, and Amazon, show that flexibility can foster creativity, experimentation, and continuous innovation, which in turn results in a sustainable competitive advantage. However, this success depends heavily on the right balance between freedom and structure, as well as leadership roles that support experimentation and consider failure as part of the learning process.

Furthermore, flexibility in organizations has also been shown to increase organizational resilience to uncertainty and external changes. By allowing employees to explore new ideas and adapt to evolving trends, organizations can more quickly respond to market challenges and maintain relevance amid increasingly fierce competition. However, it is important for organizations to ensure that these flexibility policies are implemented with a structured and controlled approach, so as not to disrupt the consistency of long-term strategies.

Overall, flexibility is a crucial component in creating an innovative and resilient organization. To that end, organizations must continue to develop a culture that supports freedom of methodology, experimentation, and openness to failure, while maintaining clear strategic objectives. This research provides valuable insights for managerial practitioners and researchers interested in further understanding how flexibility can be integrated in business practices to achieve long-term success.

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