

Understanding Business Restructuring and Streamlining: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract—Business restructuring & streamlining has become an essential strategic response to increasing environmental turbulence driven by technological disruption, digital transformation, regulatory change, and economic uncertainty. Despite extensive research, the streamlining literature remains fragmented, offering limited insight into when firms should restructure & streamline and why different strategies are adopted under similar conditions. This study addresses this gap through a systematic literature review of 112 peer-reviewed articles published between 2016 and 2025, following the PRISMA framework. Using thematic synthesis, the review integrates evidence on restructuring & streamlining antecedents, types, and organizational mechanisms into a unified conceptual framework. The study proposes the Restructuring and Streamlining Urgency Matrix (RSUM), which explains how the interaction between external environmental pressure and internal organizational motivation shapes restructuring & streamlining urgency and influences decisions. The framework further highlights organizational capabilities as a key boundary condition explaining variation in restructuring & streamlining responses across firms facing similar environmental pressures. By integrating previously disconnected streams of research, this study advances the theoretical understanding of business restructuring & streamlining and provides a practical framework to support strategic decisions under conditions of uncertainty.

Keywords—business restructuring; business streamlining; strategic management; systematic literature review; restructuring & streamlining urgency matrix

I. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary firms operate within a business environment that is increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, a condition widely captured by the VUCA framework [1]. This turbulence has intensified through the convergence of three interrelated forces. Digital transformation has reshaped traditional business models, compelling organizations to adopt data-driven and interoperable systems while simultaneously fostering innovation and resilience [2], [3]. Technological disruption, manifested through automation, artificial intelligence, and big data, has redefined decision-making

processes, shortened product life cycles, and intensified competitive pressure [4], [1]. At the same time, global economic uncertainty, stemming from geopolitical tensions, post-pandemic recovery dynamics, and increasingly interconnected value chains, has heightened firms' exposure to external shocks [5], [6]. Together, these forces have eroded the stability that once allowed organizations to rely on incremental adjustment, instead demanding continuous adaptation, strategic foresight, and organizational designs flexible enough to accommodate rapid and often unpredictable change [7], [8]. The cumulative effect is a competitive landscape in which the capacity to reconfigure internal structures and processes in step with external conditions has become a determinant of organizational survival rather than a peripheral managerial concern.

Within this turbulent landscape, organizational streamlining has emerged as one of the principal strategic mechanisms through which firms seek to realign themselves with shifting environmental conditions. Firms respond to environmental turbulence through strategies, ranging from substantive actions that alter strategy, structure, and process, to more symbolic actions intended primarily to signal responsiveness without enacting deep change [9]. Strategic agility and innovation-oriented responses are likewise central to navigating high-turbulence conditions [10], and digital transformation itself has enabled firms to shift from reactive to proactive postures [11]. Streamlining sits at the core of this strategic repertoire: it can take fundamental forms, such as downsizing or mergers, or more incremental forms involving gradual reconfiguration of resources and capabilities, with the appropriateness of each form contingent on the stability or dynamism of the surrounding environment [12]. Beyond adaptation to market conditions, streamlining also functions as a mechanism for financial survival, with firms receiving streamlining support shown to reduce exit risk and improve long-term viability [13], and even as a legitimacy-repair device following organizational misconduct or crisis [14]. Streamlining, in this sense, is not a singular event but a strategic category encompassing financial, organizational, and portfolio-level interventions undertaken in pursuit of efficiency, alignment, and continuity.

The strategic significance of streamlining is matched by the magnitude of what is at stake when firms undertake it. On the positive side, streamlining is

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associated with improved operational efficiency, enhanced organizational flexibility, and better alignment of resources with strategic priorities, often translating into stronger long-term financial stability when executed effectively. Yet these benefits are accompanied by considerable risk. The immediate costs of streamlining, including severance payments and consulting expenditures, can strain financial resources and depress short-term performance, while poorly managed streamlining efforts have been linked to declining employee morale, talent flight, cultural disruption, and erosion of organizational knowledge [15], [16].

Despite the breadth of scholarly attention streamlining has received, the resulting body of knowledge remains notably fragmented. A substantial portion of existing research concentrates on the consequences of streamlining, its effects on performance, employee well-being, knowledge retention, and organizational culture, or on classifying its various forms, such as financial, portfolio, and employment streamlining [17], [18], [19]. Comparatively little systematic attention has been devoted to the conditions and decision-making logics that precede streamlining: the antecedents that push firms toward this strategic path in the first place. Where antecedents are discussed, they tend to be examined in isolation, often confined to specific contexts such as performance decline in emerging economies [20] or acquisition-driven integration challenges [21], rather than synthesized into a coherent account of when and why streamlining becomes the preferred organizational response.

This fragmentation produces a meaningful gap in the literature. There is, first, no integrated understanding of when firms undertake streamlining, that is, of the conditions, pressures, or thresholds that translate environmental or organizational strain into a streamlining decision. Second, the literature offers limited clarity on why firms select streamlining, specifically, over alternative adaptive strategies, leaving the underlying decision logic underspecified. Third, explanations for streamlining remain scattered across disconnected theoretical lenses, spanning agency-based, institutional, dynamic-capabilities, and crisis-response perspectives, without a unifying account of how these perspectives relate to one another. Existing systematic reviews, while valuable, have largely addressed streamlining through narrow lenses such as portfolio streamlining [19] or responsible employment practices during crises [22], and consistently call for more integrative frameworks linking antecedents, processes, and outcomes. To address this gap, the present systematic literature review is guided by three research questions:

- RQ1: How has business streamlining been conceptualized in the existing literature?
- RQ2: What are the key dimensions of business streamlining identified in the literature?
- RQ3: How do organizational motivation interact to shape the urgency and type of business streamlining firms undertake?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Business Streamlining

In the literature, business streamlining, often discussed interchangeably with business restructuring,

refers to deliberate, significant changes made to a firm's business model, management arrangements, or financial structure with the aim of addressing operational or competitive challenges and enhancing shareholder value. Such changes typically encompass mergers, acquisitions, asset sales, workforce reductions, and internal reorganizations [23], [24]. Streamlining, as a related but distinct emphasis within this broader construct, foregrounds the reduction of time, cost, and effort in service or process delivery through the elimination of redundancies, improved coordination, and the automation of repetitive tasks [25], [26]. While restructuring is often associated with structural or ownership-level change, streamlining is more closely tied to operational efficiency, suggesting that the two concepts occupy overlapping but not identical positions within the broader vocabulary of organizational adaptation. For clarity and consistency, this paper adopts streamlining as the umbrella term for the remainder of the manuscript, reserving restructuring specifically for the asset-, financial-, and operational-level typology through which streamlining is enacted, consistent with prior literature.

Despite this conceptual nuance, both restructuring and streamlining converge on a shared set of strategic objectives. The first is efficiency gain, understood as the pursuit of greater output from equivalent or reduced resource inputs [27], [25]. The second is financial performance enhancement, with restructuring activities frequently justified by their expected contribution to profitability and market value [28]. The third is adaptability, whereby restructuring and streamlining are positioned as mechanisms enabling the organization to respond to dynamic and uncertain market conditions [26], [28]. These three objectives, efficiency, financial performance, and adaptability, function as the conceptual anchors around which most definitions of business restructuring in the literature are organized, and they reinforce the positioning of restructuring as a deliberate, outcome-oriented strategic intervention rather than an incidental organizational adjustment.

The literature further differentiates business restructuring according to the locus of change it targets. Asset restructuring encompasses mergers, acquisitions, spin-offs, and plant closures, representing changes to the firm's portfolio of physical and ownership assets [24]. Financial restructuring involves activities such as initial public offerings, equity offerings, and leveraged recapitalizations, targeting the firm's capital structure rather than its operations [24]. Operational restructuring, by contrast, concentrates on internal processes, including downsizing, facility closures, and process improvement initiatives [26]. This tripartite distinction, asset, financial, and operational, offers a useful conceptual scaffold for organizing the otherwise heterogeneous set of activities that fall under the restructuring label, and it underscores that restructuring is not a single intervention but a family of related strategic actions differentiated by the organizational domain they address.

Operationalizing restructuring in practice depends on a range of strategic components. Resource optimization, achieved through reorganizing internal resources, outsourcing non-core functions, and leveraging technology, is consistently identified as central to improving operational efficiency during restructuring [29], [30]. Effective leadership and structured decision-

making frameworks are similarly emphasized as critical enablers of successful restructuring outcomes [26], [29]. Knowledge management also features prominently, particularly in distressed firms, where the ability to manage organizational knowledge in a balanced and cohesive manner has been linked to more effective restructuring execution [31]. More recently, the integration of artificial intelligence and machine learning has been recognized as enhancing decision-making, automating routine processes, and supporting strategic planning throughout the restructuring process [30], [32], pointing to an emerging technological dimension within the conceptualization of restructuring that complements its more traditional strategic and financial framings.

This conceptual richness, however, is not without its tensions. Restructuring frequently demands cultural transformation, requiring shifts in employee behavior and organizational norms to align with new strategic directions [33], and when poorly managed, it carries a tangible risk of failure, including diminished market value or even insolvency [23], [31]. Sustainability of outcomes is a further consideration, as restructuring efforts that yield short-term efficiency gains do not necessarily translate into durable long-term performance improvements unless carefully planned and executed [29], [34]. Taken together, these conceptualizations indicate that business restructuring, inclusive of its streamlining dimension, is best understood as a multidimensional strategic construct, spanning asset, financial, and operational domains, supported by an array of process, synergy, risk, and valuation models, and requiring deliberate management of resources, knowledge, leadership, and culture to achieve efficiency, financial performance, and adaptability without compromising long-term organizational sustainability. This conceptual grounding provides the foundation upon which the subsequent review of antecedents, triggers, and mechanisms of restructuring decisions is built.

III. METHODOLOGY

Table 1.
Screening Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Studies examining organizational restructuring, corporate restructuring, business streamlining, downsizing, or related transformation activities	Studies focusing solely on legal, accounting, or technical procedures without organizational or strategic implications
Studies investigating antecedents, triggers, or organizational, financial, and environmental drivers of streamlining decisions	Studies lacking organizational or managerial implications
Studies discussing restructuring/streamlining types, mechanisms, or links to firm performance	Studies focusing exclusively on operational techniques without outcomes explaining organizational motivations
Peer-reviewed journal articles published in English within the Business, Management and Accounting subject area	Editorials, notes, book reviews, conference papers, and non-peer-reviewed publications

C. Data Analysis and Synthesis

Data extraction focused on study characteristics, theoretical foundations, organizational contexts, internal/external antecedents, restructuring types, and principal findings. The analysis employed a thematic synthesis approach involving iterative coding,

Research Design

To ensure methodological rigor, transparency, and reproducibility, this study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach following established guidelines for structured evidence synthesis in management and organizational research [35], [36]. The review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework to guide the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion of relevant studies (Figure. 1). Scopus was selected as the primary database because of its extensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals in business, management, and organizational research.

A targeted search string was developed to capture studies addressing organizational streamlining and the closely related construct of business streamlining. The search query was defined as follows: TITLE-ABS-KEY (("business" OR "enterprise" OR "company" OR "organization") AND ("restructuring" OR "streamlining")), to ensure consistency and quality, the search was restricted to final-stage, English-language journal articles published between 2016 and 2025 within the Business, Management and Accounting subject area, and was further refined using a set of exact keywords directly relevant to the focal construct, namely Streamlining, Corporate Restructuring, Organizational Restructuring, Mergers and Acquisitions, Downsizing, and Crisis Management. The search was conducted in June 2026 and resulted in 116 records. Study Selection

The study selection process followed three stages: duplicate removal, title and abstract screening, and full-text eligibility assessment. During this stage, studies were evaluated based on their relevance to the review objective, namely understanding the antecedent conditions, decision-making logics, and theoretical perspectives that explain when and why firms undertake organizational streamlining, as shown in Table 1. 112 studies were retained for qualitative synthesis. Figure 1 presents the PRISMA flow diagram of the study selection process.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria applied throughout the screening process are summarized in Table 1.

categorization, and theme development. Through repeated comparison across the 112 included studies, recurring patterns were identified and consolidated into higher-order themes explaining when and why organizations undertake streamlining, the forms such

streamlining takes, and the mechanisms through which it is linked to firm performance outcomes.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The systematic analysis of 112 peer-reviewed articles through a three-phase inductive coding process yielded a structured account of when, why, and how organizations undertake streamlining. From an initial pool of 59 open codes, 13 external antecedents, 13 internal antecedents, 16 restructuring types, and 17 mechanisms, axial coding consolidated these into 19 second-order categories, later integrated through selective coding into four aggregate themes: (1) external antecedents, (2) internal antecedents, (3) organizational restructuring types, and (4) organizational mechanisms linking streamlining to firm outcomes, as shown in Figure. 2. These themes are interdependent and together explain the streamlining decision. Research Dimension 1: External Antecedents The first research dimension examines the external conditions that compel organizations toward streamlining even when internal performance appears otherwise stable. While closely connected to the internal antecedents discussed in Dimension 2, external triggers operate at a different level of analysis: they define the conditions under which streamlining becomes necessary rather than merely desirable, and they are largely beyond any single firm's control. A primary external trigger stems from macroeconomic and crisis-driven instability. Recessions, financial downturns, and global economic shocks compress demand, tighten access to credit, and erode firm revenue, leaving little room for incremental adjustment [37]. This logic intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, when liquidity and solvency pressure on businesses outpaced the government support measures that had previously cushioned firms, prompting renewed debate over how streamlining law itself should adapt to sustained crisis conditions [38]. A related but more diffuse pattern appears in nascent, rapidly evolving industries, where firms must navigate complex merger decisions under high uncertainty about future market and regulatory trajectories, suggesting that crisis-driven and uncertainty-driven streamlining share a common underlying logic even when the source of disruption differs. Closely intertwined with crisis pressure is a second stream of regulatory and institutional change. Reforms to insolvency law do not merely respond to economic conditions; they actively reshape the menu of streamlining options available to firms, as illustrated by the EU's Preventive Streamlining Directive, which created an accessible new streamlining and rescue pathway specifically for small and medium-sized enterprises that previously lacked one [39]. Deregulation and market liberalization operate as a related but distinct force: in the telecommunications equipment industry, a new technological paradigm combined with worldwide deregulation dismantled the protective structures that had sustained incumbent oligopolies, compelling a wave of streamlining even as the sector's underlying concentrated structure persisted under new global leadership [40]. Government policy operates as a complementary institutional force at the industry level: public policy direction, such as pollution taxation and renewable-energy incentives, has been shown to actively reshape the pace and direction of industry-level streamlining, for instance accelerating a shift away from fossil-fuel-dependent industry structures toward renewable alternatives [41].

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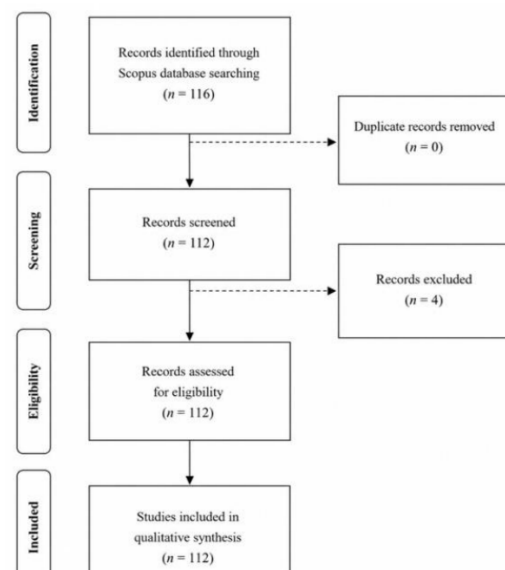


Fig. 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram

A third stream concerns technological and competitive disruption. The diffusion of artificial intelligence and related digital technologies has been linked to structural adjustment within organizations, as

firms confront new collaborative-management and human-resource-allocation challenges that existing structures were not designed to handle [42]. This technological pressure is frequently compounded by competition from new entrants and modern business models, which erodes the position of resource-constrained or traditionally organized firms to the point where structural change becomes the only viable response to survive [43]. Finally, globalization and external capital-market forces constitute a more diffuse but no less consequential pressure. Integration into global value chains propagates streamlining pressure across firm boundaries, as lead firms reconfigure supplier and labour relations in ways that cascade through entire production networks and provoke worker resistance further down the chain [44]. External financial actors add a further layer of pressure from outside the firm: in the market for divested corporate assets, private equity acquirers have been shown to generate substantially greater value gains than ordinary corporate buyers specifically because of their streamlining capabilities, making divestiture to such buyers an increasingly attractive, and externally reinforced, channel for corporate streamlining [45].

Research Dimension 2: Internal Antecedents

Whereas external antecedents establish environmental urgency, internal antecedents explain why that urgency is interpreted, and acted upon, differently across firms. This dimension distinguishes two broad logics: streamlining driven by deteriorating performance, and streamlining driven by deliberate strategic ambition, a distinction that recurs throughout the corpus as the dividing line between reactive and proactive organizational change.

Financial distress is the most consistently documented internal antecedent. Falling profitability, debt-covenant breaches, and chronic unprofitability narrow a firm's strategic options to the point where streamlining ceases to be a choice and becomes a condition of survival [46]. High leverage compounds this dynamic, as debt-servicing obligations narrow the flexibility a firm would otherwise have to absorb a downturn without structural change [47]. Tax considerations interact with this financial logic in less obvious ways: firms with larger accumulated net operating losses are more likely to file for Chapter 11 reorganization, in part because doing so allows them to capture more favorable post-reorganization tax treatment, indicating that the financial calculus behind distress-driven streamlining is shaped by tax exposure as well as by leverage itself [48]. A related but conceptually distinct condition is operational inefficiency: even resource-constrained but otherwise viable organizations restructure when their cost structures and managerial practices fall behind those of modern competitors, suggesting that distress and inefficiency, although often co-occurring, are analytically separable triggers [43].

At the opposite end of this continuum lies strategic renewal. A share of the corpus documents streamlining undertaken not from weakness but from ambition, firms repositioning, diversifying, or pursuing growth opportunities that existing structures cannot accommodate [49], [50], [51]. This proactive logic is not always free of error, however; at least one study traces streamlining to the correction of prior strategic missteps tied to a major capital investment that did not perform

as anticipated, blurring the line between proactive renewal and reactive course-correction [37]. Layered onto both logics is the role of leadership and governance. CEO behavior shapes how distress is recognized and addressed in the first place: research on SME streamlining shows that a CEO's advice-seeking behavior, whether and from whom they seek guidance, influences how quickly they become aware of financial difficulty, and that this awareness in turn shapes the subsequent streamlining process [52]. Managerial power is exercised more structurally elsewhere in the corpus, where management uses boundary-work practices, including the deliberate exclusion of certain employee groups, to determine who bears the burden of a given streamlining episode, demonstrating that streamlining decisions are not always evenly experienced even within the same organization [53]. Governance structure adds a further layer of contingency: in family firms, owners have been shown to initially resist streamlining poorly performing portfolio firms before escalating their intervention, a pattern explained by socioemotional considerations around succession and control that can override the purely economic logic that might otherwise dictate an earlier streamlining decision [54]. Finally, a firm's capacity to act on either logic, distress or ambition, depends on its underlying organizational readiness. A firm's streamlining potential and capacity for innovation-driven development determine whether a recognized need for streamlining can be translated into an effective streamlining program [55], while misalignment between a holding company's structure and its degree of diversification is itself documented as a distinct trigger for streamlining, independent of financial performance [56].

Research Dimension 3: Business Restructuring and Streamlining Types

Once external and internal antecedents converge, restructuring and streamlining takes concrete organizational form. Rather than a single intervention, the corpus reveals restructuring to be a family of related but distinct strategic actions, differentiated by the organizational domain each targets.

Corporate portfolio type is the most extensively documented form, encompassing mergers and acquisitions undertaken in pursuit of growth, consolidation, or regulatory compliance, as seen in the wave of M&A activity surrounding REIT conversions, where firms paid a premium to acquire desired portfolios partly to satisfy conversion requirements [57], and its inverse, divestiture, in which firms sell assets to refocus the portfolio, as in the large-scale Fox/Disney/Comcast media divestiture that generated measurable valuation gains for shareholders of all three firms [58]. Spin-offs and divisional buyouts represent a more deliberate variant of this same logic, separating a unit into an independently governed entity, typically under private-equity control, in transactions shown to generate significantly greater value than comparable intercorporate asset sales [45].

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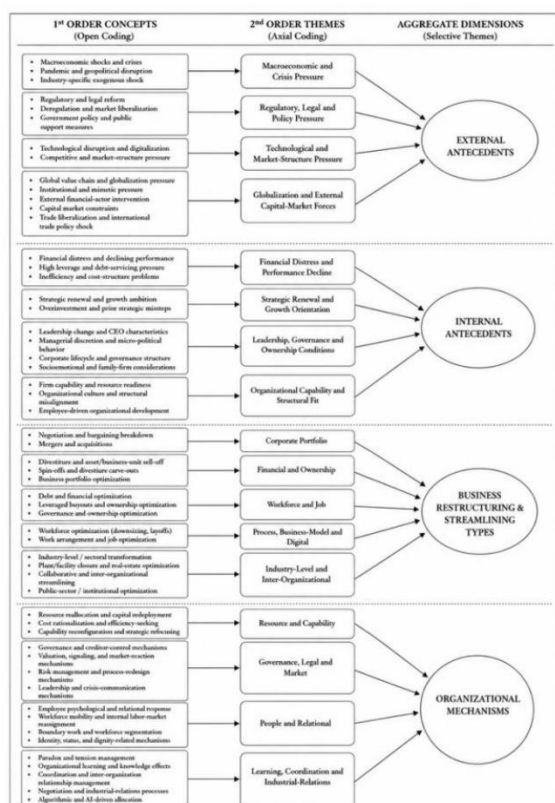


Fig. 2.

Coding Result A smaller but rapidly growing category concerns process, business-model, and digital type: the redesign of core operating processes and value-delivery logic, illustrated by how new technology agents progressively displaced traditional distribution channels and redefined business models in the music industry [59], and increasingly entangled with AI-enabled reconfiguration of collaborative management and human-resource allocation in contemporary organizations [42]. Industry-level and inter-organizational type extends the unit of analysis beyond the single firm, capturing sectoral concentration and government-policy-driven transformation of entire industries [60]. Finally, a notably large residual share of the corpus references restructuring and streamlining only as a general strategic label, without specifying which of the above forms is at stake [12]. Rather than a coding artifact, this pattern reflects a genuine feature of the field: restructuring continues to function, in much of the literature, as an umbrella construct rather than a

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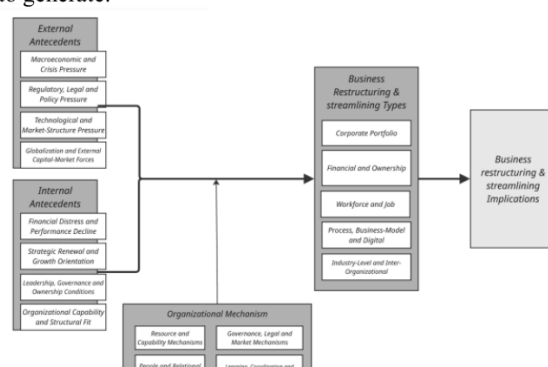


Fig. 3. Integrated View of Business Restructuring & Streamlining

Research Dimension 4: Organizational Mechanisms The final research dimension addresses a question the literature answers far less consistently than the first three: through what mechanism does a streamlining action actually produce a firm-level outcome? The most direct pathway operates through resource and capability reallocation. Firms violating debt covenants show reduced employment, investment, and more frequent closures specifically among their non-core and less productive business lines, with these reallocation effects concentrated where creditor control over the firm's resource-use decisions is strongest, indicating that enhanced creditor control, not managerial choice alone, drives this reallocation mechanism [46].

A second pathway operates through governance and market mechanisms. Formal legal procedures discipline how resources are used once streamlining is underway, as in the EU framework created specifically to make rescue procedures more accessible to SMEs [39]. Running alongside this procedural logic is a signaling mechanism documented in event-study research: stock market reactions to layoff announcements in the renewable energy sector show that investors interpret such announcements as new information about a firm's prospects, independent of whatever operational change eventually follows [61].

A third and notably more heterogeneous pathway operates through people and relational dynamics. Employee psychological responses to streamlining and downsizing are not uniform: longitudinal research in a public-sector setting identifies distinct employee profiles, "flourishers," "recoverers," and "ambivalents",

whose differing trajectories of commitment, engagement, and anxiety mediate how the same streamlining episode produces different outcomes across a workforce [62]. The framing of a streamlining episode by multiple actors, companies, trade unions, media, and administrative bodies, further shapes the narratives that emerge around it and, in turn, its reputational consequences, underscoring that the rhetorical and communicative dimension of streamlining is itself a mechanism shaping outcomes, not merely a backdrop to them [63].

A fourth pathway concerns organizational learning. A longitudinal case of workplace redesign in a Norwegian factory illustrates this pathway directly: the gradual development of employee autonomy, control, and organizational learning over a decade was associated with a sustained productivity increase of 20 percent, indicating that streamlining-related outcomes can compound over time when accompanied by genuine organizational learning rather than being realized immediately [64].

What is equally striking, however, is how often this mechanism-level explanation is simply absent. Several studies in the corpus document a direct association between a streamlining action and a performance outcome without theorizing what connects the two, for instance, research on REIT conversions reports that a lower level of post-conversion streamlining activity is associated with higher risk-adjusted firm performance, without specifying the organizational process through which streamlining intensity translates into that performance difference [57]. The Restructuring and Streamlining Urgency Matrix (RSUM) The four themes presented reveal a consistent underlying pattern: the character and intensity of a firm's streamlining response are jointly determined by the interaction between external environmental pressure and its internal motivational logic. This section synthesizes that pattern into the Restructuring and Streamlining Urgency Matrix (RSUM), an integrative framework that maps the conditions under which streamlining is undertaken onto the type of restructuring most likely to result. Critically, however, the quadrant a firm occupies does not determine its restructuring and streamlining type outright. The type of restructuring and streamlining a firm ultimately chooses, and the mechanism through which that restructuring operates, are further filtered by the organization's available capabilities and resources. Two firms facing identical external pressure and internal motivation may arrive at structurally different restructuring and streamlining responses if one possesses the managerial capacity, financial slack, and implementation readiness that the other lacks [55], [43]. The RSUM, therefore, captures the urgency of streamlining so the organization can tell the boundary conditions under which different types and mechanisms become organizationally feasible.

The RSUM is organized around two dimensions. The first, external pressure, captures the intensity of environmental forces driving restructuring and streamlining from outside the firm, spanning macroeconomic shocks, regulatory mandates, technological disruption, and competitive change. The second, internal motivation, captures the firm's motivational logic, ranging from reactive responses rooted in financial distress to proactive responses grounded in strategic intent and organizational capability.

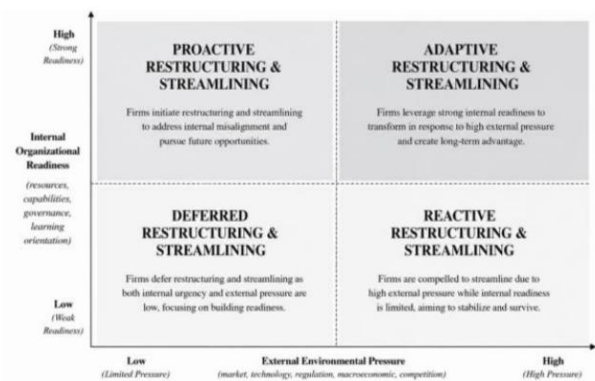


Fig. 4. The Restructuring & Streamlining Urgency Matrix

Compelled restructuring and streamlining represents the highest-urgency configuration. Firms here face simultaneous external shocks and internal deterioration, leaving minimal discretion over whether or how to restructure. Macroeconomic downturns and regulatory mandates compel action regardless of managerial intent [37], [65], with the dominant types being financial and legal, debt renegotiation, insolvency procedures, and crisis-driven workforce downsizing. The primary mechanisms are cost rationalization [66], [67] and negotiated creditor or labour renegotiation [39], [68]. Leadership in this quadrant functions primarily as an interpreter of unavoidable conditions rather than as an architect of strategic direction.

Adaptive restructuring and streamlining captures firms that face comparable external pressure but respond from a position of strategic capability rather than distress. Their internal motivational logic frames environmental pressure as an opportunity for structural realignment. Firms in sectors subject to technological disruption or competitive de-concentration that respond proactively through portfolio or structural restructuring demonstrate significantly better post-outcomes [69], [42]. The dominant types are portfolio M&A and structural realignment, and the primary mechanisms are strategic alignment [12], [70] and capability reconfiguration [71], [55].

Deferred restructuring and streamlining isolates streamlining that originates within the firm's own boundaries, triggered by internal deterioration that has been allowed to accumulate before action is taken. Financial distress, governance misfit, and leadership succession are the dominant antecedents [46], [54], [72]. The dominant types are debt and governance restructuring, and the primary mechanisms are resource reallocation [46], managerial sensemaking [52], and legitimation work [63]. This quadrant represents the most theoretically contested terrain in the corpus, as the boundary between delayed distress response and deliberate governance action is frequently blurred.

Reactive restructuring and streamlining is the least frequently documented and the most strategically deliberate. The label "reactive" here denotes forward-looking anticipation of future environmental shifts rather than a response to present pressure. Firms undertake streamlining from a position of relative health, driven by organizational readiness and strategic intent [71], [49], [73]. The dominant types are process streamlining and portfolio diversification, and the primary mechanisms are organizational learning [64], [65] and capability building [43]. The comparative rarity of this quadrant in the

literature suggests that genuinely forward-looking streamlining remains an underexplored frontier.

The RSUM is best understood as a diagnostic tool rather than a rigid typology. Firms may move across quadrants within a single restructuring and streamlining episode as environmental conditions evolve. The diagonal from Quadrant IV to Quadrant I captures a continuous urgency gradient: urgency rises as both external pressure and reactive motivation intensify simultaneously.

V. CONCLUSION

This study set out to develop an integrated understanding of when and why firms undertake organizational restructuring and streamlining, what forms it takes, and through what mechanisms it connects to firm-level outcomes. By synthesizing 112 peer-reviewed studies through a three-stage thematic coding procedure, the review identifies two distinct but interacting streams of antecedents, external conditions that define when streamlining becomes necessary and internal conditions that explain why firms facing similar pressure arrive at different responses, five analytically distinct restructuring and streamlining types differentiated by the organizational domain each targets, and four mechanism families connecting streamlining actions to outcomes. These findings are synthesized in the Restructuring and Streamlining Urgency Matrix (Figure 4), which positions external pressure and internal motivation as the joint determinants of restructuring and streamlining urgency and predicts both the most likely type and the operative mechanisms available to the firm, subject, critically, to what its organizational capabilities and resources make feasible. Urgency creates the imperative; capability determines the response.

Theoretical Contributions

The first concerns the integration of antecedents, restructuring and streamlining types, and mechanisms into a single explanatory account. Prior systematic treatments of streamlining have largely addressed these elements in separation: some focus on the consequences of streamlining for performance and employee well-being, others on classifying its forms, and others still on specific antecedent conditions in particular organizational contexts [17], [18], [19]. What has remained absent is a unified account connecting why firms streamline, what form that streamlining takes, and through what process it produces outcomes. The present review demonstrates that these three elements are not independent research agendas. External and internal antecedents jointly shape the urgency of the restructuring and streamlining decision; that urgency is associated with identifiable restructuring types; and each type is connected to firm-level outcomes through a characteristic set of mechanisms, as mapped in the Restructuring and Streamlining Urgency Matrix (Figure. 4). In doing so, the framework responds directly to calls for more integrative accounts linking antecedents, processes, and outcomes in streamlining research [19], [22].

The second contribution concerns the role of organizational capability and resources in shaping streamlining decisions. The corpus consistently shows that the type of restructuring and streamlining a firm

chooses, and the mechanism through which it operates, are not determined solely by the urgency conditions a firm faces. Two firms experiencing identical external pressure and sharing a comparable internal motivation may arrive at structurally different restructuring and streamlining responses if their organizational capabilities, financial slack, and implementation readiness differ [55], [43]. This finding repositions organizational capability not as a background enabling condition of restructuring and streamlining but as a variable that determines which restructuring types and mechanism families are feasible in a given situation. The implication is that the decision logic behind restructuring and streamlining cannot be fully understood by examining antecedent conditions alone: what a firm is capable of doing constrains what it actually does, independently of what urgency conditions suggest it should do. Future Research Directions

The first concerns the dynamics of restructuring and streamlining over time. The RSUM is presented here as a diagnostic framework for understanding a firm's position at a given moment, but streamlining is rarely a single episode. Firms may move across urgency configurations as external conditions change and internal capabilities evolve, and the outcomes of one episode may strengthen or deplete the organizational readiness available for the next. All 112 studies reviewed here capture restructuring and streamlining at a point in time or across a short observation window, leaving the question of how firms accumulate or lose restructuring and streamlining capacity across repeated episodes largely unaddressed. Longitudinal research designs tracking the same organizations across multiple restructuring and streamlining events would be particularly valuable in this regard [65], [64].

The second direction concerns mechanism-level explanation. As noted before, a notable portion of the corpus documents associations between streamlining actions and performance outcomes without specifying the organizational process connecting the two. The four mechanism families identified in this review provide a more granular vocabulary for future research to work with, but the internal processes through which each mechanism is activated, and the conditions under which mechanism activation succeeds or fails, remain underspecified. Future studies that focus explicitly on the pathway between restructuring type and outcome, rather than treating that pathway as a black box, would significantly advance the explanatory ambitions of the field.

Finally, concerns the boundary conditions of the findings reported here. The review draws on studies spanning a wide range of industries, firm sizes, and national contexts, but the resulting framework does not systematically account for how these contextual factors moderate the relationships between urgency conditions, types, and mechanisms. Comparative studies across institutional environments, particularly between contexts with more and less developed insolvency regimes, corporate governance frameworks, or capital market structures, would help establish the scope conditions under which the framework's propositions hold and where they require modification [74], [75], [76].

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