

# **Pivoting in Business and Entrepreneurship: A Conceptual Review and Research Agenda**

## **ABSTRACT**

Despite its ubiquity in management discourse, "pivoting" remains theoretically ambiguous and is frequently conflated with general strategic change. This conceptual fragmentation limits cumulative knowledge development and our ability to explain pivot antecedents and consequences. Through a systematic literature review of 66 peer-reviewed articles from 124 leading journals (ABS ranking 3+), we consolidate the fragmented landscape into five interrelated conceptualizations of pivoting: as a strategic decision, evolutionary landmark, unfolding process, narrative device, and experiment-based learning. We identify distinct pivot types—including opportunity versus survival pivots—and synthesize these perspectives into a unified definition: a fundamental reorientation of a venture's core strategy, value proposition, or organizational identity in response to belief disconfirmation, undertaken through iterative testing and learning while maintaining organizational identity continuity despite strategic discontinuity. This definition clearly distinguishes pivoting from general strategic change, resolving existing inconsistencies. We outline a research agenda prioritizing: (1) contextual generalizability beyond technology and startup domains, (2) theoretical mechanisms explaining when different pivot types succeed, (3) stakeholder and identity dynamics governing legitimacy and resource commitment, and (4) temporal and sequencing effects in multi-pivot trajectories and organizational transformation limits.

**Keywords:** Pivoting; strategic reorientation; reconceptualization

## INTRODUCTION

Since Eric Ries's (2011) book "The Lean Startup" introduced the term to a broader practitioner audience as "a structured course correction designed to test a new fundamental hypothesis about the product, strategy, and engine of growth," pivoting has become a central construct in entrepreneurship and strategy (Filosa, Jovanovic, Agostini, & Nosella, 2025; Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2023; Ries, 2011: 149; Sanasi & Ghezzi, 2024). The concept promised a mechanism by which ventures could navigate profound uncertainty, transforming failure into learning (Ries, 2011). Academic interest has surged accordingly, with scholars examining the antecedents (Angus, Houghton, Neck, & Holderness Jr, 2024; Cozzolino, Corbo, & Aversa, 2021; Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2023), unfolding processes (Chen, Elfenbein, Posen, & Wang, 2024; Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2023; Shepherd & Gruber, 2021; Shepherd, Seyb, & George, 2023), barriers (Grimes, 2018; Issah, Calabrò, Clauss, Valentino, & Diaz-Matajira, 2024), and risks (Hampel, Tracey, & Weber, 2020; Lee & Raschke, 2023) of strategic pivots. Yet as the concept's popularity has grown, its theoretical precision has eroded (Lind, Batool, & Bröring, 2024; Sadeghiani & Anderson, 2023).

While pivoting is intuitively understood as a "change in direction," the literature is rife with conflicting conceptualizations that obscure the phenomenon's distinct nature. Some scholars equate pivoting with incremental strategic adjustments accumulated over time. For instance, Kirtley and O'Mahony (2023) observe that pivots are often "not produced with a single decision to change the firm from one strategy to another, but rather the product of multiple independently triggered decisions that unfold over time" (Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2023: 222). In contrast, others conceptualize it as a radical, singular transformation of a firm's identity and goals, distinct from conventional strategic change (Hampel et al., 2020; McDonald & Gao, 2019). Further complicating matters, the term is applied across vastly different contexts, from business and entrepreneurship (Allen, Combs, Carr, Michaelis, & Joseph, 2025; Berchicci & Boons, 2025;

Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2023) to public policy (Carayannis & Jorge, 1998) and education (Fleming, 2022), leading recent critics to argue that pivoting has become an "umbrella construct" with "no agreed definition or measurement methodology in the extant literature" (Lind et al., 2024; Nguyen, Tran, Stephan, Van, & Anh, 2024: 8). As Sadeghiani and Anderson (2023) framed it, defining the pivot has become akin to "touching an elephant in the dark" (Sadeghiani & Anderson, 2023: 1).

This conceptual fragmentation poses a significant threat to the field. Without a rigorous distinction between pivoting and general strategic change, scholars cannot isolate the specific mechanisms that make pivoting unique. If every strategic reorientation becomes a pivot, the term loses its explanatory power. The lack of consensus impedes the emergence of a cumulative body of knowledge, leaving researchers unable to compare findings across studies or provide evidence-based guidance to practitioners. When one study measures pivoting as a radical identity shift and another as a minor product update, their findings regarding "pivot performance" will inevitably contradict, not because reality is complex, but because the constructs are misaligned.

To resolve this ambiguity and establish a foundation for future inquiry, we conduct a systematic review of pivoting research published in 124 leading journals (ABS ranking 3, 4, and 4\*) across nine sub-disciplines of management research. Our analysis reveals that the literature has coalesced around five distinct, though often implicit, conceptualizations of pivoting: (1) a strategic decision, (2) an evolutionary landmark, (3) an unfolding process, (4) a narrative device, and (5) an experiment-based method of learning. Each reflects a different epistemological stance and theoretical grounding, yet these perspectives are frequently conflated. By synthesizing these five perspectives, we develop an inclusive definition of pivoting that establishes clear boundaries between pivoting and general strategic change.

Our article makes two primary contributions. First, we pinpoint the specificities and nuances of the pivoting construct, disentangling it from general organizational change and resolving the conceptual fragmentation characterizing the current literature. Second, we propose a robust research agenda that identifies critical gaps and new directions, connecting pivoting to contemporary "hot topics" in management such as organizational identity, stakeholder legitimacy, and temporal dynamics of transformation. These contributions support the emergence of a coherent body of knowledge, enabling scholars to move beyond "what is a pivot?" to investigating "how, when, and why do pivots succeed?"

## **A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE PIVOTING LITERATURE**

To resolve conceptual confusion surrounding the pivoting construct, we conducted a systematic literature review guided by the research question: How have scholars across management sub-disciplines defined, conceptualized, and operationalized the pivoting construct in published research? This question was motivated by the observation that pivoting, while widely referenced, lacks consistent conceptualization and definition.

Our journal identification followed three deliberate methodological steps designed to balance rigor with comprehensiveness. First, we restricted the scope to non-invited, peer-reviewed journal articles to ensure the quality and independence of published scholarship, excluding editorials, commentaries, and invited contributions that might reflect curated rather than independently validated perspectives (Keupp, Palmié, & Gassmann, 2012; Palmié, Aebersold, Oghazi, Pashkevich, & Gassmann, 2025).

Second, recognizing that leading journals establish the intellectual horizons within management domains (Furrer, Thomas, & Goussevskaia, 2008), we leveraged the 2024 Academic Journal Guide (ABS) ranking published by the Chartered Association of Business Schools,

selecting only journals rated at level 3 or above. This approach reflects established practice in recent high-impact systematic reviews within management (Hillebrand, Raisch, & Schad, 2025; O'Donnell, Leger, O'Gorman, & Clinton, 2024; Soundararajan, Wilhelm, Crane, Agarwal, & Shetty, 2025).

Third, we deliberately selected journals across nine ABS sub-disciplines within management based on theoretical reasoning that pivoting constitutes a salient construct within each domain: (1) Organization Studies, (2) Innovation and Technology Management, (3) Business Strategy, (4) Information Management, (5) Marketing, (6) Operations and Technology Management, (7) Ethics, Governance and Corporate Social Responsibility Management, (8) Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management, and (9) International Business and Area Studies. This deliberate sub-disciplinary approach captured pivoting conceptualizations across theoretically diverse domains while maintaining focus on fields where the concept has demonstrable relevance.

This procedure identified 124 journals of interest (listed in Table A1), aligned methodologically with recent exemplary systematic reviews published in highly regarded venues (Hillebrand et al., 2025; O'Donnell et al., 2024; Soundararajan et al., 2025).

Following established systematic review protocols, we employed a transparent selection process (Elsbach & van Knippenberg, 2020; Hillebrand et al., 2025; O'Donnell et al., 2024; Soundararajan et al., 2025).

First, we searched the Web of Science database, restricted to the 124 preselected journals, using the keywords "pivot" and "pivoting" in the topic field (title, abstract, keywords). This yielded 146 potentially relevant articles.

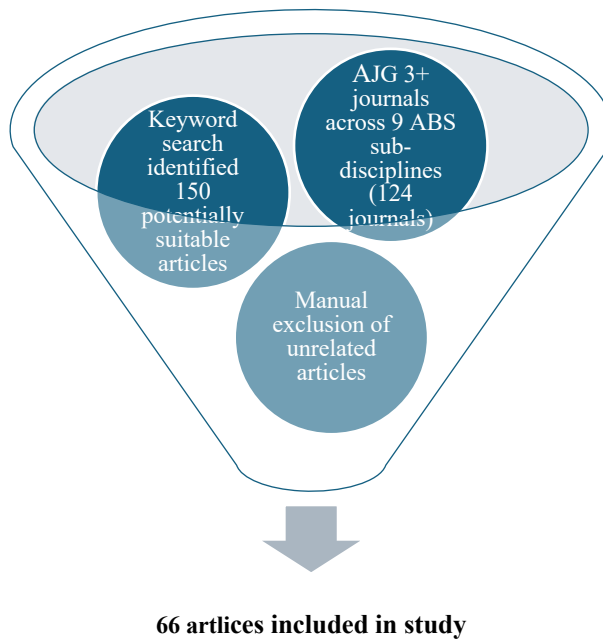
Thereafter, two independent researchers reviewed each article using prespecified inclusion and exclusion criteria, excluding articles that (a) used "pivoting" terminology outside management or entrepreneurship contexts (e.g., biomechanics) and (b) failed to explicitly or implicitly specify an understanding of "pivoting." Disagreements were resolved through discussion or consultation with a senior third researcher. This process yielded 66 relevant articles, which are listed in detail in table A2 in the appendix.

The 66 articles were unevenly distributed across the nine sub-disciplines, ranging from 20 publications in "Ethics, Governance and Corporate Social Responsibility Management" to zero in "International Business and Area Studies." This distribution itself provides insight into where pivoting scholarship has concentrated and where conceptual development remains sparse.

On overview of the methodological approach for the selection of articles included in the study is illustrated in Figure 1.

**FIGURE 1**

**Process used to identify relevant articles**



## Identification of Different Pivoting Conceptualizations

To identify the five distinct conceptualizations of pivoting, we conducted deductive coding using a prespecified coding framework derived from preliminary theoretical analysis and iterative examination of article content. Our coding framework was informed by multiple disciplinary traditions (strategic management, entrepreneurship, and organizational theory) and refined through multiple passes across the sample. As a result, the following five deductive coding categories emerged: (1) pivoting as a strategic decision, (2) pivoting as an evolutionary landmark, (3) pivoting as an unfolding process, (4) pivoting as a narrative device, and (5) pivoting as an experiment-based method of learning.

Two researchers independently coded all 66 articles; disagreement was resolved through discussion with a third senior researcher. The coding process revealed that 90% of sample papers contained at least one of the five pivoting conceptualizations, with most articles containing multiple conceptualizations. Additionally, 42% of articles used implicit pivot(ing) definitions, 32% developed explicit author-defined definitions, and 26% adopted explicit definitions from prior publications. This distribution pattern reflects the nascent state of construct clarity in the field. An overview of the derived categorizations and sub-distinctions is illustrated in Figure 2.

### *Pivoting as a strategic decision (n=60; 85% of sample)*

The conceptualization of pivoting as a strategic decision is the most common in the literature. This perspective emphasizes intentionality and agency, namely the deliberate choice to alter core aspects of a venture's market positioning, value proposition, product offering, or business model architecture.

Strategic decision pivots diverge fundamentally along multiple dimensions. The most consequential distinction separates opportunity-driven pivots from survival pivots, a dichotomy

that maps to fundamentally different decision-making logics and firm conditions (Allen et al., 2025; Berends, Van Burg, & Garud, 2021; Morgan, Anokhin, Ofstein, & Friske, 2020). Opportunity pivots are triggered by external market signals and external opportunities; they unfold gradually and incrementally while preserving core strategic elements. This pattern aligns with entrepreneurial learning theory, where ventures selectively augment strategies in response to positive signals. Opportunity pivots typically emerge within profitable ventures possessing slack resources (Allen et al., 2025; Berends et al., 2021). Conversely, survival pivots represent rapid, comprehensive reorientations triggered by resource constraints or existential threats; they follow the decision calculus of prospect theory, where loss aversion and survival imperatives override incremental learning and drive radical strategic transformation. Survival pivots characterize pre-revenue and pre-profit ventures facing immediate viability questions (Allen et al., 2025; Morgan et al., 2020; Sanasi & Ghezzi, 2024).

Beyond decision triggers, strategic pivots vary systematically in scope, namely the breadth of strategic elements undergoing reorientation. Pivots may be complete (replacing the entire value offering) or targeted (refining existing offerings while retaining foundational elements) (Wood, Palich, & Browder, 2019). More granularly, reorientation targets may focus on product or value proposition, market or customer segments, technology or organizational capabilities, business model mechanisms, or organizational boundaries. Additionally, ventures may execute focused pivots (one or two coordinated strategic redirections) versus unfocused pivots (three or more repeated strategic changes), which introduce different performance implications and stakeholder dynamics (Camuffo, Gambardella, Messinese, Novelli, Paolucci, & Spina, 2024).

*Pivoting as a landmark in venture evolution (n=40; 56% of sample)*

Pivoting conceptualized as an evolutionary landmark represents a significant inflection point or stage in a venture's development. This perspective emphasizes temporal positioning and trajectory, where the pivot marks a structural transition between distinct phases of venture maturation. Six categories of pivoting landmarks emerged from our analysis.

- **Temporal reorientation landmarks:** When a venture's temporal commitments fundamentally reset, shifting from an extended timeline to immediate focus, or vice versa. Entrepreneurs reposition their actions on a "revised timeline," contracting or expanding their temporal runway. This reorientation is distinct from time management; it marks the structural juncture where the temporal contract with stakeholders shifts (Morgan et al., 2020).
- **Legitimacy reconfiguration milestones:** Marking the transition from the legitimacy-acquisition phase (building initial credibility) to the legitimacy-maintenance phase (preserving credibility during disruption). Early-stage ventures focus on credibility attainment; pivoting ventures must now preserve credibility while changing direction, implying a structural shift in legitimacy management strategy (Abreu, Pinheiro de Freitas, Ceglia, & Proença, 2025).
- **Organizational identity transformation landmarks:** When the pivot marks the moment a venture fundamentally reshapes its organizational identity and self-definition. The venture transitions from one identity configuration to another, changing its core characteristics and what stakeholders understand it "to be" (Colucci & Vecchi, 2024).
- **Stakeholder identification reset landmarks:** Marking the critical juncture where stakeholder identification bonds rupture. Communities that previously identified strongly with the venture face an "identification threat" at the time of pivot. This experience can amount to a structural moment in which stakeholder relationships fundamentally reconfigure (Hampel et al., 2020).

- Existential threat response junctures: When the pivot marks the moment a venture confronts imminent failure and must change to survive. These "survival pivots" are distinctly triggered by inside-the-organization threat signals (resource depletion, market rejection) rather than external opportunities (Santos, Liguori, & Garvey, 2023).
- Crisis-induced multi-stage transformation landmarks: When the pivot initiates a structured transformation sequence triggered by exogenous shocks (pandemics, regulatory change). The venture transitions through distinct phases, namely initial shock reaction, strategic response, and retrospection, with the pivot serving as the structural juncture where organized strategic reconfiguration begins (Bruton, Pryor, & Cerecedo Lopez, 2024).

*Pivoting as an unfolding process (n=55; 77% of sample)*

Pivoting conceptualized as an unfolding process represents the learning-driven progression of activities that leads to strategic reorientation. This perspective emphasizes dynamics and unfolding over time, with emphasis on the mechanisms and stages through which change emerges. The unfolding process perspective emphasizes that pivoting is not instantaneous but involves temporal unfolding. Stakeholders gradually recognize reorientation through accumulating signals, multiple organizational units implement coordinated changes, and learning iteratively shapes strategic direction. Process-oriented conceptions differentiate along temporal dimensions:

- Stage-based sequential processes typically follow a three-stage temporal structure (reaction, response, and retrospection phases) with distinct activation points, where each stage involves different organizational activities and learning modes (Sanasi & Ghezzi, 2024).
- Incremental accumulation describes pivots as the product of multiple small strategic decisions that collectively constitute a pivot, rather than emerging from a single discrete decision event.

Over time, accumulated micro-decisions produce a strategic reorientation that observers perceive as a single "pivot event" (Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2023).

- Opportunity-triggered gradual processes are slower, less comprehensive changes driven by opportunity-based information and positive market signals; in contrast, threat-triggered rapid processes are quick, comprehensive changes driven by internal threat-based information, distinct in both speed and scope (Allen et al., 2025).

*Pivoting as an experiment-based method of learning (n=42; 59% of sample)*

Pivoting conceptualized as an experiment-based method of learning emphasizes structured, hypothesis-driven learning where pivots emerge from tested assumptions about market viability. The core mechanism is iterative hypotheses testing, where ventures propose a theory (e.g., "customers in segment X want product feature Y"), conduct an experiment (launch a minimum viable product), gather market feedback, and either validate or falsify the hypothesis. The experimental perspective encompasses the following five sub-categories.

- Hypothesis-driven pivoting emphasizes the application of scientific methodology to business model validation through systematic hypothesis testing. Ventures explicitly articulate their core assumptions, design experiments to test them, and make strategic redirections based on empirical results (Camuffo et al., 2024; Sanasi & Ghezzi, 2024).
- Minimum viable testing centers on the use of Minimum Viable Products (MVPs) and related artifacts as experimental instruments designed to maximize learning with minimal resource commitment (Ghezzi, 2020; Ries, 2011).
- Programmatic experimentation treats pivoting as part of a sequential program of experiments with explicit consideration of resource allocation, pivot thresholds, and strategic trade-offs across multiple trials. Rather than ad-hoc experimentation, ventures maintain a portfolio of

experiments and make strategic decisions about which experiments justify pivoting (Chen et al., 2024).

- Validated learning orientation emphasizes the transformation of experimental market feedback into actionable organizational knowledge through systematic processes of interpretation and documentation (Sanasi & Ghezzi, 2024).
- Crisis-responsive experimentation addresses experimentation conducted under extreme environmental uncertainty and time pressure, particularly when previously validated assumptions become invalidated by exogenous shocks (Sanasi & Ghezzi, 2024).

*Pivoting as a Narrative Device (n=22; 31% of sample)*

With the lowest prevalence, pivoting is conceptualized as a rhetorical tool, namely a narrative device by which founders and leaders explain and legitimize strategic change to internal and external audiences. This perspective emphasizes sensemaking and storytelling. Four types of narrative pivoting emerged.

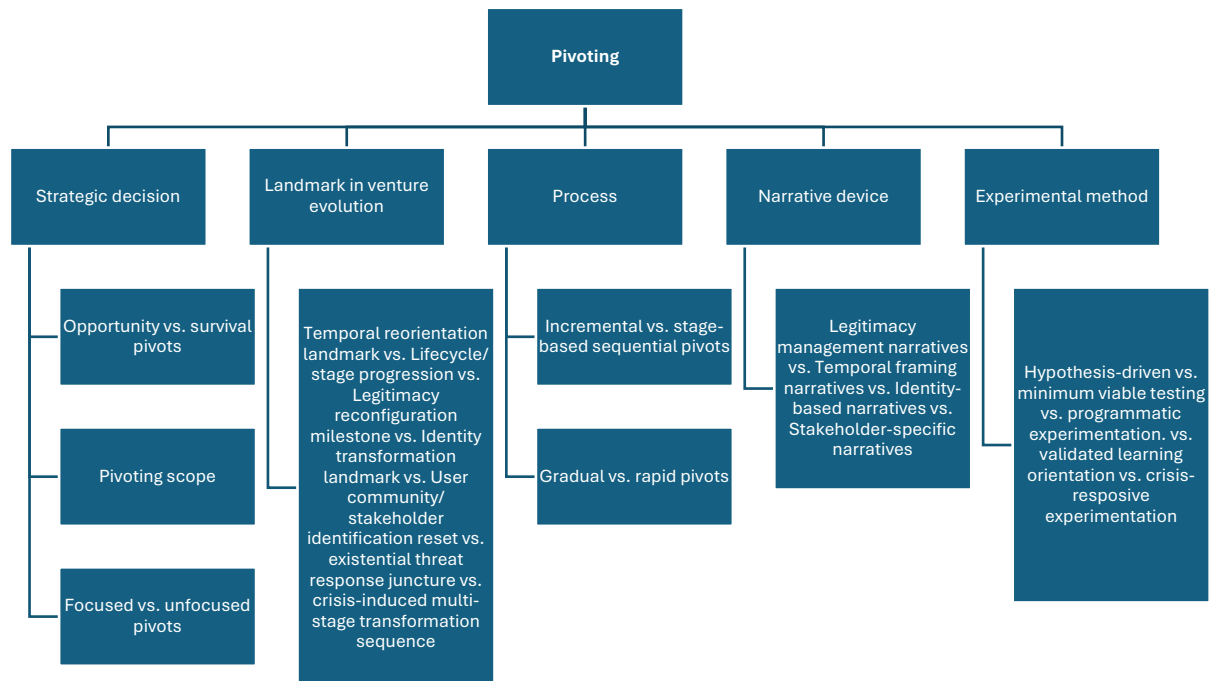
- Legitimacy management narratives maintain or rebuild legitimacy with external stakeholders during strategic reorientation. Legitimacy management narratives can be subdivided into three sub-mechanisms: (a) anticipatory framing uses abstract "umbrella ambitions" rather than narrow solutions before pivots, creating room to maneuver; (b) continuity bridging connects new strategy to enduring founding aims, maintaining coherence despite change through "bridging justifications"; (c) conciliatory rhetoric demonstrates empathy and humility, consoling affected stakeholders and previewing changes (McDonald & Gao, 2019).
- Temporal framing narratives narrate pivots in relation to past, present, and future. Revolutionary narratives emphasize breaking from the past, proximate future promises, and

individual agency/heroism; scientific revision narratives emphasize connecting with the past, distal future promises, and collective agency/learning (Knight, Grimes, & Gehman, 2025).

- Identity-based narratives manage the relationship between founder/organizational identity and strategic change. Founder identity narratives reconcile idea changes with founder self-concept, addressing psychological ownership; organizational identity reset narratives rebuild stakeholder identification after pivots (Grimes, 2018; Hampel et al., 2020).
- Stakeholder-specific narratives tailor pivot narratives to different audience orientations. Market-oriented narratives emphasize tangible milestones and value creation; community-oriented narratives emphasize mission and collective value (Knight et al., 2025).

**FIGURE 2**

**Deductive derivation of five main pivoting conceptualizations**



## **Integrating the Five Perspectives: Overlaps, Distinctions, and Theoretical Implications**

While we identify five distinct conceptualizations, these perspectives are not mutually exclusive. They operate at different analytical levels and emphasize different aspects of the pivoting phenomenon. Understanding their relationships is crucial for developing comprehensive theory.

*Strategic decision vs. evolutionary landmark:* Both perspectives emphasize intentional reorientation, but at different analytical levels. Strategic decisions focus on the deliberate choice moment and its determinants; evolutionary landmarks focus on the structural transition the pivot represents in venture development. A single pivot event can be conceptualized both as a strategic decision and as an evolutionary landmark. These perspectives are complementary rather than contradictory.

*Process vs. experimentation:* The distinction between these perspectives is epistemologically significant. Process conceptions emphasize temporal unfolding and stage-based progression; experimentation emphasizes hypothesis testing and iterative learning. Importantly, a pivot can unfold through an unfolding process (incremental accumulation of decisions over time) while also being grounded in experimentation (each micro-decision tests a hypothesis). The key distinction is that an unfolding process focuses on how change temporally unfolds, while experimentation focuses on what justifies the decision to change. A venture might engage in programmatic experimentation (experiment-based method of learning) that unfolds through a stage-based process (unfolding process), creating a complementary rather than competing conceptualization.

*Narrative device as cross-cutting perspective:* Unlike the other four perspectives, the narrative device perspective is not primarily about what pivoting is but about how pivoting is communicated and legitimized. Pivots conceptualized as strategic decisions, processes,

evolutionary landmarks, or experiment-based method of learnings still require narrative justification and sensemaking. The narrative perspective thus cuts across the other four; every pivot involves narrative work, though some pivots are more narratively salient than others (e.g., identity transformations require more narrative work than market segment pivots).

### **Distinguishing Pivoting from General Strategic Change**

Pivoting is frequently conflated with general strategic change. Clarifying conceptual boundaries is necessary for cumulative theory development and empirical validation. Each distinction below isolates a defining boundary condition that differentiates pivoting from strategic change with which it is routinely confused in the extant literature.

*Epistemic Context:* Strategic change implies recalibrating validated strategies by referencing "a long history of past performance" (Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2023: 199) to establish aspiration levels (Allen et al., 2025; Berends et al., 2021; Cyert & March, 2020; Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2023). When pivoting, by contrast, entrepreneurs face an epistemic gap: they "have little or no historical performance and often lack a suitable industry peer group, making it difficult to know where to set aspiration levels" (Cohen, Bingham, & Hallen, 2019: 813; Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2023). Pivoting thus involves recalibrating formed-but-untested strategies during initial enactment.

*Information triggers:* Strategic change is triggered by performance gaps—comparisons between actual results and historical baselines (Allen et al., 2025; Berends et al., 2021; Cyert & March, 2020; Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2023). Conversely, pivoting is triggered by belief disconfirmation when new information conflicts with or expands entrepreneurs' working assumptions (Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2023). This distinction is consequential. Strategic change responds to measurable deviations; pivoting responds to qualitative surprises encountered during

strategy execution under “absolute uncertainty where entrepreneurs face unlimited options and the possible outcomes are unknown and unknowable” (Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2023: 199).

*Learning Mechanisms:* Strategic change leverages historical analysis: managers identify gaps formally and monitor against validated criteria (Berends et al., 2021). Pivoting employs learning-by-enactment where entrepreneurs use “trial-and-error, bricolage, improvisation, and experimentation” (Bohn & Kundisch, 2020; Ott, Eisenhardt, & Bingham, 2017: 310) through small, low-cost investments that test predictions before larger commitments (Ott et al., 2017). Critically, this learning is conditional: entrepreneurs update strategies only when information directly challenges their beliefs.

## **TOWARD AN INCLUSIVE DEFINITION OF PIVOTING**

The previous section pointed out that different perspectives on pivoting are not mutually exclusive but can be complementary. It is, therefore, possible to define pivoting in a way that accommodates the various perspectives. Drawing on our analysis of the five perspectives, we thus propose a unified, inclusive definition that resolves existing inconsistencies while acknowledging the core insights from each conceptual tradition. The proposed definition reads: Pivoting is a fundamental reorientation of a venture's core strategy, value proposition, or organizational identity in response to belief disconfirmation, undertaken through iterative testing and learning, while maintaining organizational identity continuity despite strategic discontinuity. The conceptual heart of pivoting is a distinctive paradox: ventures deliberately shift strategy (strategic discontinuity) to preserve themselves (organizational continuity). Put differently, discontinuous strategic reorientation becomes the mechanism preventing organizational discontinuity, with the ultimate threat being organizational failure.

## FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

While this review consolidates fragmented pivoting scholarship into five complementary theoretical conceptualizations, it simultaneously reveals substantial gaps in our understanding of how pivoting operates across diverse organizational contexts and temporal scales. The following research agenda addresses critical theoretical, methodological, and empirical voids.

### **Contextual Generalizability: Beyond Startups and Technology**

The extant pivoting literature remains concentrated in startups and technology / digital entrepreneurship, creating a significant blind spot regarding how pivoting operates in mature, capital-intensive, regulated, or service-oriented industries.

*Research direction 1:* Emerging research suggests that pivoting in hardware (Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2023), biotechnology (Schiehll, Lewellyn, & Muller-Kahle, 2018), and regulated sectors, such as healthcare, energy, and financial services (Dahan, Doh, & Raelin, 2015; Dhir, Meenakshi, Nawaz, & Kaur, 2024; Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2023) follows fundamentally different temporal and resource allocation patterns than digital entrepreneurship. Capital intensity constrains pivoting feasibility and frequency (Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2023; Schiehll et al., 2018); regulatory requirements shape what pivots are legally possible (Dahan et al., 2015; Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2023); longer product development cycles alter the experimentation timeline (Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2023; Norbäck, Persson, & Tåg, 2025). Future research could systematically examine such questions as: How do capital requirements and long development timelines change the pivot decision calculus? Does hypothesis-driven experimentation remain viable, or must it be replaced by different validation mechanisms in capital-intensive contexts? How do regulatory compliance requirements reshape what constitutes "viable" pivoting? Are pivots in regulated

industries more likely to be opportunity-driven or survival-driven? Do survival-driven pivots in regulated industries face different constraints than opportunity-driven pivots?

*Research direction 2:* Service-oriented businesses face different pivoting dynamics than product businesses (Gomes, Lehman, Vendrell-Herrero, & Bustinza, 2021; Kurtz, Meyer, & Roth, 2025), due to customer co-creation (Nobari & Dehkordi, 2023), relational intensity (Kurtz et al., 2025), and difficulty in disembodied the service from the service provider (Gomes et al., 2021; Kurtz et al., 2025). How do these differences shape pivoting processes? Does the narrative device perspective gain prominence in service contexts where personal credibility and relationship continuity become more salient? How do service pivots differ in their identity transformation dynamics?

*Research direction 3:* While startups pivot to survive or capitalize on opportunities, incumbent firms pivot to respond to disruption or transformation pressures (Allen et al., 2025; Berends et al., 2021; Morgan et al., 2020; Sanasi & Ghezzi, 2024). Path dependence (Gomes et al., 2021), stakeholder embeddedness (Knight et al., 2025; Wood et al., 2019), and incumbent inertia (Knight et al., 2025; Peppard & Reich, 2025; Shepherd et al., 2023) create distinct pivoting dynamics in mature organizations. How do organizational history and established identities constrain or enable pivoting in incumbent contexts?

### **Theoretical Mechanisms: When and Why Pivots Succeed**

Our analysis identified that different pivot types (opportunity vs. survival; focused vs. unfocused; product vs. identity) likely require different theoretical explanations. Yet our empirical understanding of these mechanisms remains underdeveloped.

*Research direction 4:* Allen et al. (2025) differentiate opportunity from survival pivots theoretically, but empirical examination of how the decision calculus differs remains limited

(Allen et al., 2025). Do survival pivots indeed follow prospect theory's loss-aversion logic? Under what conditions does the opportunity-threat distinction break down? How do founder risk preferences, prior experience, and stakeholder composition shape the decision to pivot versus persist?

*Research direction 5:* The experiment-based method of learning perspective emphasizes hypothesis testing (Ghezzi, 2020; Yoo, Huang, & Arifoğlu, 2021), but how much experimental rigor is required for successful pivoting? Do ventures that employ systematic hypothesis testing (programmatic experimentation) outperform those using ad-hoc experimentation? How do MVP fidelity, iteration speed, and stakeholder involvement in experimentation shape pivot outcomes?

*Research direction 6:* Early evidence suggests that focused pivots (one or two coordinated strategic changes) outperform unfocused pivots (three or more rapid changes). Why? Is this a function of organizational focus and coherence? Do multiple pivots erode stakeholder confidence and legitimacy more severely than focused redirections?

### **Stakeholder Dynamics and Identity Reconstruction**

While recent work addresses stakeholder legitimacy (Hampel et al., 2020) and organizational identity (Snhur & Clarysse, 2022), the mechanisms through which ventures maintain stakeholder commitment during repeated transformation remain incompletely understood.

*Research direction 7:* Knight et al. (2025) reveal that repeated pivoting introduces relational liabilities even in highly flexible organizations (Knight et al., 2025). How do different narrative strategies (revolutionary vs. scientific revision; legitimacy management vs. identity reset) differentially affect stakeholder commitment? When do narratives become incredible?

*Research direction 8:* How do ventures maintain a coherent sense of identity despite discontinuous strategic change? Are founder identity narratives (Grimes, 2018) sufficient, or must organizational identity work accompany founder-level identity reconciliation? How do different stakeholder groups (employees, investors, customers, community) experience and respond to identity transformation?

*Research direction 9:* How do investor narratives about pivoting differ from founder or customer narratives? Under what conditions do pivots enhance investor confidence (demonstrating learning and adaptation) versus eroding it (signaling strategy instability)? How does the investor base (venture capitalists vs. bootstrapped vs. crowdfunded) shape the legitimacy of pivoting narratives?

### **Temporal and Sequencing Effects**

The unfolding process perspective emphasizes temporal unfolding (Berends et al., 2021), yet little research examines how timing of pivots, frequency of pivoting, and sequencing of multiple pivots shape organizational trajectories.

*Research direction 10:* Knight et al. (2025) identify empirical limits to the number of pivots stakeholders will support (Knight et al., 2025). Future research should examine: At what point do additional pivots become counterproductive? Do limits differ across stakeholder groups (investors vs. employees vs. customers)? How does the interval between pivots affect stakeholder fatigue? Are there "optimal" sequences of pivots, or do certain pivot types work better when executed in particular orders?

*Research direction 11:* Different stakeholders operate on different temporal scales: investors on financial cycles (Knight et al., 2025), employees on career development timelines (Berends et al., 2021), customers on product adoption cycles (Hampel et al., 2020). When pivots

disrupt these temporal expectations, how does misalignment affect outcomes? Can narrative devices manage temporal expectations and reduce misalignment effects?

*Research direction 12:* The pandemic literature identified crisis-responsive experimentation as a distinct form of pivoting (Sanasi & Ghezzi, 2024). Future research should examine how exogenous shocks (regulatory changes, technological disruption, geopolitical events) reshape pivoting dynamics. Do crises accelerate pivoting decisions? Do they increase pivot success rates or failure rates? How do crisis-responsive pivots differ from opportunity or survival pivots?

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

Over the last 15 years, pivoting has grown from a practitioner concept to a central focus of academic scholarship across multiple management disciplines, yet this proliferation has produced conceptual fragmentation rather than convergence. By systematically reviewing 66 articles across nine management sub-disciplines, we identified five distinct theoretical perspectives on pivoting: as strategic decision, evolutionary landmark, unfolding process, experiment-based method of learning, and narrative device.

By synthesizing these perspectives into a unified definition emphasizing deliberate, discontinuous reorientation triggered by market feedback and grounded in hypothesis-driven experimentation, we establish clearer conceptual boundaries and distinguish pivoting from general strategic change. The definition accommodates insights from all five perspectives while maintaining construct clarity necessary for cumulative knowledge development.

The research agenda we propose addresses four critical voids: generalization beyond tech and startup contexts, specification of theoretical mechanisms linking pivot characteristics to outcomes, understanding stakeholder and identity dynamics during transformation, and

examination of temporal and sequencing effects in multi-pivot trajectories. These directions move the field beyond "what is pivoting?" to "when and why do pivots succeed?"

For practitioners, this review clarifies that pivoting is not a universal solution to strategic uncertainty but a context-dependent response to specific conditions, with market feedback signaling opportunity or threat, resource constraints forcing reorientation, organizational identity requiring reconstruction. The five perspectives offer different diagnostic lenses for understanding pivoting. Leaders contemplating pivots should explicitly consider whether they are making a strategic decision to exploit new opportunities or respond to survival threats; recognizing the pivot as an evolutionary milestone with implications for legitimacy and identity; designing the pivot as a structured unfolding process with staged implementation; employing rigorous hypothesis-driven experimentation; and carefully managing narratives that sustain stakeholder commitment through discontinuous change.

For scholars, clearer conceptualization enables more precise theory building. Theories need not explain all five perspectives simultaneously; rather, they should specify which pivot types they address and under what conditions. This review consolidates conceptual chaos into structured diversity, establishing the platform from which more precise research can proceed.

Ultimately, this review consolidates conceptual chaos into structured diversity, establishing a platform for more precise research. The pivoting phenomenon is less trivial than prior reviews suggest (Flechas Chaparro & de Vasconcelos Gomes, 2021; Sadeghiani & Anderson, 2023). In fact, it is more complex, encompassing multiple distinct yet related processes. But this structured complexity, properly understood, offers a rich foundation for understanding how organizations navigate uncertainty, learn from failure, and adapt to change.

## APPENDIX A

<p><b>Organization Studies:</b> Organization Science (3); Organizational Research Methods (0); Organization Studies (5); Leadership Quarterly (0); Human Relations (2); Research in the Sociology of Organizations (0); Research in Organizational Behavior (0); Organizational Dynamics (3); Organization and Environment (1); Organization (0); Group and Organization Management (0)</p>
<p><b>Innovation and Technology Management:</b> Research Policy (2); Journal of Product Innovation Management (0); Technovation (5); Technological Forecasting and Social Change (12); R and D Management (1); Journal of Technology Transfer (1); Industry and Innovation (0)</p>
<p><b>Business Strategy:</b> Strategic Management Journal (4); Public Administration Review (0); Administrative Science Quarterly (0); Long Range Planning (1); Global Strategy Journal (0); Public Administration (0); Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory (0); Journal of Strategic Information Systems (0); Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal (1) (mentioned in two categories); Strategic Organization (1); Business Strategy and the Environment (2); International Review of Administrative Sciences (0); American Review of Public Administration (0)</p>
<p><b>Information Management:</b> MIS Quarterly: Management Information Systems (1); Journal of the Association for Information Systems (0); Information Systems Research (0); Journal of Strategic Information Systems (0); Journal of Management Information Systems (1); Journal of Information Technology (0); Information Systems Journal (1); European Journal of Information Systems (0); INFORMS Journal on Computing (7); Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology (JASIST) (0); Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication (0); Internet Research (1); International Journal of Electronic Commerce (1); Information Technology and People (0); Information Systems Frontiers (3); Information Society (0); Information and Organization (0); Information and Management (1); Government Information Quarterly (0); Decision Support Systems (1)</p>
<p><b>Marketing:</b> Marketing Science (3); Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science (0); Journal of Marketing Research (1); Journal of Marketing (0); Journal of Consumer Research (1); Journal of Consumer Psychology (0); Journal of Retailing (2); Quantitative Marketing and Economics (0); Psychology and Marketing (0); Marketing Theory (0); Marketing Letters (0); Journal of Public Policy and Marketing (0); Journal of International Marketing (0); Journal of Interactive Marketing (1); Journal of Advertising Research (0); Journal of Advertising (0); International Marketing Review (1); Industrial Marketing Management (2); European Journal of Marketing (1)</p>
<p>Operations and Technology Management Journal of Operations Management (0); Production and Operations Management (1); Journal of <b>Supply Chain Management:</b> (0); International Journal of Operations and Production Management (2); Supply Chain Management (3); Production Planning and Control (1); Manufacturing and Service Operations Management (0); Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management (0); Journal of Business Logistics (0); International Journal of Production Research (3); International Journal of; Production Economics (4); IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management (3); Computers in Industry (3)</p>
<p><b>Ethics, Governance and Corporate Social Responsibility Management:</b> Journal of Management (2); Administrative Science Quarterly (0); Academy of Management Review (2);</p>

Academy of Management Journal (6); Academy of Management Annals (2); Journal of Management Studies (3); British Journal of Management (1); Academy of Management Perspectives (0); MIT Sloan Management Review (0); Journal of Management Inquiry (0); Journal of Business Research (7); Journal of Business Ethics (2); International Journal of Management Reviews (0); Harvard Business Review (4); Gender, Work and Organization (1); Gender and Society (1); European Management Review (0); California Management Review (1); Business and Society (2); Academy of Management Discoveries (0); Business Ethics Quarterly (0)
<b>Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management:</b> Journal of Business Venturing (6); Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice (1); Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal (1) (mentioned in two categories); Small Business Economics (4); Journal of Small Business Management (3); International Small Business Journal (5); International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research (0); Family Business Review (0); Entrepreneurship and Regional Development (1)
<b>International Business and Area Studies:</b> Journal of International Business Studies (0); Journal of World Business (0); Multinational Business Review (1); Management International Review (0); Management and Organization Review (0); Journal of International Management (0); Journal of Common Market Studies (0); International Business Review (0); Asia Pacific Journal of Management (1); African Affairs (1)

Table A1: Overview of the 124 journals of interest (AJG ranking 3 and above)

Article and Source Title	Author(s) & Year of Publication	Pivoting Definition
A scientific approach to entrepreneurial decision-making: Large-scale replication and extension (STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT JOURNAL)	(Camuffo et al., 2024)	Radical pivoting is defined as a strategic change to a firm's original business model that involves a major alteration to its value proposition or customer segment. ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )
Pivots as strategic responses to crises: Evidence from Italian companies navigating Covid-19 (STRATEGIC ORGANIZATION)	(Sanasi & Ghezzi, 2024: 497) (Ries, 2011: 269)	“A pivot represents a strategic reorientation that enables firms to probe new hypotheses about their business model, rapidly collecting information about its potential viability” “A pivot is a special kind of change designed to test a new fundamental hypothesis about the product, business model, and engine of growth.”
The origins of firm strategy: Learning by economic experimentation and strategic pivots in the early automobile industry (STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT JOURNAL)	(Pillai, Goldfarb, & Kirsch, 2020: 374)	"The subset of economic experiments that are also strategic decisions we label strategic pivots. A strategic pivot implies testing hypotheses regarding a combination of technological, organizational, or market aspects of the firm through market participation. If the

		implied commitment is large relative to the firm such that it is not possible for the firm to pursue more than one path at once, we can say that strategic pivots are strategic choices made under the paradox of entrepreneurship."
What is a pivot? Explaining when and how entrepreneurial firms decide to make strategic change and pivot (STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT JOURNAL)	(Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2023: 199)	"Drawing on the literature on strategic change, we define a pivot as a change in a firm's strategy that reorients the firm's strategic direction through a reallocation or restructuring of activities, resources, and attention. With this definition, we are agnostic about whether the change is in technology, product, or market but, argue that pivots require a reorientation of the firm's strategic direction, supported by resource commitments."
Coordination, sensemaking, and idea work: How founding teams pivot their venture ideas (JOURNAL OF BUSINESS VENTURING)	(Weissenböck, Breugst, & Brattström, 2025: 2)	"The capacity to pivot—to flexibly change and reorient strategic elements of a venture idea in response to novel insights or external feedback—allows firms to improve their solutions and identify a better product-market fit."
Early-stage business model experimentation and pivoting (JOURNAL OF BUSINESS VENTURING)	(Burnell, Stevenson, & Fisher, 2023: 2)	"We define business model pivoting as a fundamental change to a business model component."
Examining entrepreneurial experience in relation to pre-launch and post-launch learning activities affecting venture performance (JOURNAL OF SMALL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT)	(Marvel, Wolfe, Kuratko, & Fisher, 2022: 760)	"This type of process is also referred to as pivoting, which entails keeping a structured course correction designed to test a new fundamental hypothesis about the product, strategy, and engine of growth. The common slogan for this type of learning is build-measure-learn"
From critique to catalyst: How academic entrepreneurs transform negative feedback into pivots and performance (STRATEGIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP JOURNAL)	(Marvel et al., 2022: 2)	"The entrepreneurial strategy literature offers insights into business idea development, that is, how entrepreneurs refine their ideas (also known as pivoting) to create and capture value."
Full Steam Ahead or Abandon Ship? An Empirical Investigation of Complete Pivot Decisions (JOURNAL OF SMALL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT)	(Wood et al., 2019: 1639)	"Pivoting occurs when a new product, service, or method is introduced to the market and the innovator deliberately decides to make a significant change to elements of the offering."

I can't get it out of my mind - Why, how, and when crisis rumination leads entrepreneurs to act and pivot during crises (JOURNAL OF BUSINESS VENTURING)	(Nguyen et al., 2024: 5)	"We subscribe to the definition of pivoting proposed by Snihur and Clarysse, who conceptualize pivoting as a substantive transformation of the company's business model to create or maintain competitive advantage."
Pivoting or persevering with venture ideas: Recalibrating temporal commitments (JOURNAL OF BUSINESS VENTURING)	(Berends et al., 2021: 3)	"We define a pivot as a major change in a venture idea, involving changes in technologies, offerings or relationships with customers and partners, such that some of these elements remain whereas others are discontinued or replaced."
Pivoting to stay the course: How women entrepreneurs take advantage of opportunities created by the COVID-19 pandemic (INTERNATIONAL SMALL BUSINESS JOURNAL-RESEARCHING ENTREPRENEURSHIP)	(Manolova, Brush, Edelman, & Elam, 2020)	Pivoting refers to the process by which firms adapt and change their business models in response to external shocks or changing market conditions and is part of a "discovery-driven approach" to business model adjustment. ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )
Risky business: venture capital, pivoting and scaling (SMALL BUSINESS ECONOMICS)	(Norbäck et al., 2025: 18)	"A pivot in our model is the occurrence where the entrepreneur initially encounters failure with her initial research project in Stage 1, followed by assistance from VC to select a new research project in Stage 3."
Sayings and doings become 'practice' through 'practice thirdness': pivot in recipes for practice (ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT)	(Sadeghiani, Anderson, Ahmadi, Shokouhyar, & Hajipour, 2023: 795)	"A structured course correction designed to test a new fundamental hypothesis about the product, strategy, and engine of growth."
SME response to major exogenous shocks: The bright and dark sides of business model pivoting (INTERNATIONAL SMALL BUSINESS JOURNAL-RESEARCHING ENTREPRENEURSHIP)	(Morgan et al., 2020: 370)	"Pivoting, defined as 'a structured course correction designed to test a new fundamental hypothesis', implies a purposeful search guided by evidence of a fundamentally better entrepreneurial opportunity that the firm in question is qualified to exploit."
Sowing the seeds of failure: Organizational identity dynamics in new venture pivoting (JOURNAL OF BUSINESS VENTURING)	(Snihur & Clarysse, 2022: 3)	"Pivoting is defined as a substantive transformation of the company's business model to create or maintain competitive advantage."

Tell me how and why: Mentor feedback framing, construal level, and entrepreneurial pivoting (JOURNAL OF BUSINESS VENTURING)	(Eleazar & Miller, 2026: 1)	"An entrepreneurial pivot has been defined as "a structured course correction" that amounts to "an especially radical type of organizational change" and a strategic reorientation that "reorients the firm's strategic direction through a reallocation or restructuring of activities, resources, and attention."
The Lean Startup Framework: Closing the Academic-Practitioner Divide (ENTREPRENEURSHIP THEORY AND PRACTICE)	(Shepherd & Gruber, 2021: 980)	"A pivot is a structured course correction designed to test a new fundamental hypothesis about the product, strategy, and engine of growth."
Boards of Directors and the Governance of Large IT Investments: THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT THEYDON'T KNOW (CALIFORNIA MANAGEMENT REVIEW)	(Peppard & Reich, 2025)	Pivoting defined as abandoning the original program approach when facing repeated missed deadlines, requiring a fresh strategic review and revised plan with reset goals, assumptions, and dependencies. ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )
DECENTRALIZATION IN ORGANIZATIONS: A REVOLUTION OR A MIRAGE? (ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT ANNALS)	(Reineke, Katila, & Eisenhardt, 2025: 299)	"We define pivots as theoretical points of reorientation that generate theoretical rethinking".
Digital platform-based ecosystems: The evolution of collaboration and competition between incumbent producers and entrant platforms (JOURNAL OF BUSINESS RESEARCH)	(Cozzolino et al., 2021)	Pivoting defined as a dynamic shift in competitive and cooperative strategies that incumbent producers employ across different market segments and technological components in response to digital entrant platforms as an ecosystem matures. ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )
ENTREPRENEURSHIP EVERY PIVOT NEEDS A STORY (HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW)	(McDonald & Gao, 2017)	Pivoting is defined as a strategic reorientation or course correction where a startup adopts a very different business model from its original plan while navigating a fast-moving stream of hypotheses, experiments, and redirections. ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )
GROUNDING BUSINESS MODELS: COGNITION, BOUNDARY OBJECTS, AND BUSINESS MODEL CHANGE (ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT REVIEW)	(Shepherd et al., 2023: 27)	"Entrepreneurs sometimes need to <i>pivot</i> from their current business model to a different business model—that is, make a structured course correction designed to test a new fundamental hypothesis—based on social interactions and other feedback"

How Do SMEs Respond to Deglobalization? Insights from Italian SMEs in the Interwar Period (1936-1943) (JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT STUDIES)	(Giacomin & Romagnoli, 2025)	Pivoting is defined as SMEs shifting from serving a global niche market of affluent consumers abroad to focusing on offering affordable products to domestic consumers in their home country. ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )
Lean Start-Up in Settings of Impoverishment: The Implications of the Context for Theory (JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT)	(Bruton et al., 2024: 3123)	"A pivot represents an action greater than the incremental development obtained through validated learning and occurs when entrepreneurs make fundamental changes to their business model."
More Than One Way to Pivot: The Case for Opportunity and Survival Pivots (JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT)	(Allen et al., 2025: 2-3)	"Rather than a single type of pivot involving quick, comprehensive change in response to opportunity-based information, we identified two clearly distinct pivot types, neither of which is wholly consistent with prior pivoting research: <i>Opportunity pivots</i> are responses to opportunity-based information but take place gradually and are less comprehensive; <i>survival pivots</i> are quick and comprehensive but triggered by threat-based information."
Pivoting the Role of Government in the Business and Society Interface: A Stakeholder Perspective (JOURNAL OF BUSINESS ETHICS)	(Dahan et al., 2015)	A metaphorical shift or reorientation of the government's position and function within the business-society relationship. ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )
PROGRAMS OF EXPERIMENTATION AND PIVOTING FOR (OVERCONFIDENT) ENTREPRENEURS (ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT REVIEW)	(Chen et al., 2024: 16)	"Each time the entrepreneur switches to a new idea, we count a pivot, and we define the total number of pivots as $N$ ".
Resilience in a Hotter World (HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW)	(Winston, 2014: 59)	"Companies in the vanguard are beginning to make what I call "the big pivot." This represents a profound change in strategy, operations, and business philosophy that will make organizations more resilient and help them create new value in a hotter, resource-scarce world. As I'll discuss in detail, pivoting requires companies to take radically different approaches to how they craft their vision, define value, and form partnerships."

Tackling Climate Change with End-of-Life Circular Fashion Practices-Remade in Italy with Amore (BRITISH JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT)	(Colucci & Vecchi, 2024)	Strategic pivoting is defined as the process of overcoming intrinsic organizational paradoxes through the implementation of end-of-life circular practices, which could yield a paradigm shift in the fashion industry's business model and approach to addressing climate change. <i>(Implicit definition)</i>
THE ART OF THE PIVOT: HOW NEW VENTURES MANAGE IDENTIFICATION RELATIONSHIPS WITH STAKEHOLDERS AS THEY CHANGE DIRECTION (ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT JOURNAL)	(Hampel et al., 2020: 3-4)	"A pivot is a structured course correction designed to test a new fundamental hypothesis about a venture. It happens when resource- constrained ventures come to view their current model and trajectory as unsustainable, and take the decision to transform themselves in an effort to survive and grow. Pivoting is common – new venture creation is complex and entrepreneurs rarely get it ‘right’ first time – but it has profound consequences nonetheless: when a new venture pivots, it fundamentally changes its strategy, identity and overriding goals."
THE LIMITS OF PIVOTING: A CULTURALLY INFORMED MODEL OF RESOURCE COMMITMENTS DURING REPEATED ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION (ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT JOURNAL)	(Knight et al., 2025: 3)	"Pivoting, defined as the process whereby a venture radically reorients its existing strategy."
THE PIVOT: HOW FOUNDERS RESPOND TO FEEDBACK THROUGH IDEA AND IDENTITY WORK (ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT JOURNAL)	(Grimes, 2018: 1693)	"Creative revision and the willingness to change an idea (i.e., ‘pivot’) can be impeded by connections to specific earlier versions of the idea."
Too Many Pivots, Too Little Passion What's wrong with today's entrepreneurship (HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW)	(McGinn, 2012)	Pivoting is defined as shifting or changing from one business idea to another idea in response to customer feedback and validated learning, rather than committing long-term to an initial concept. <i>(Implicit definition)</i>
Wait or pivot? Family and non-family firms' strategic responses to COVID-19 and employment change	(Issah et al., 2024: 1)	"A proactive pivoting strategy can be defined as an approach to crisis management that reorients the firm’s strategic direction through a reallocation

(JOURNAL OF BUSINESS RESEARCH)		or restructuring of activities, resources, and attention. This change may focus on new products, services, technologies, markets or even on the transformation of the business model as a reaction to changing market conditions".
WHEN IT'S TIME TO PIVOT (HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW)	(McDonald & Bremner, 2020)	Pivoting is defined as a change in business strategy and/or business model undertaken when the original plan proves flawed, requiring entrepreneurs to alter their direction while maintaining stakeholder support by linking the new course to an overarching original mission or ambition. ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )
Who responds to critical feedback? The effects of self-leadership on entrepreneurial product pivoting behavior (JOURNAL OF BUSINESS RESEARCH)	(Angus et al., 2024)	Pivoting is defined as abandoning an initial product idea in favor of either iterative modifications or entirely new product alternatives in response to critical environmental feedback during early-stage opportunity development. ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )
FOR STARTUPS, ADAPTABILITY AND MENTOR NETWORK DIVERSITY CAN BE PIVOTAL: EVIDENCE FROM A RANDOMIZED EXPERIMENT ON A MOOC PLATFORM (MIS QUARTERLY)	(Eesley & Wu, 2020)	Pivoting is defined as abandoning the original course startup idea and instead launching/working on a different new venture (i.e., "a new start up that is different from one created in the class," measured two years later) ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )
Responding to platform owner moves: A 14-year qualitative study of four enterprise software complementors (INFORMATION SYSTEMS JOURNAL)	(Kude & Huber, 2025)	Pivoting is defined as a complementor response archetype involving expanding product offerings and addressed markets within the focal platform ecosystem by adjusting to different client segments, geographical markets, or different modules of the same platform owner's system, while maintaining reliance on the same foundational platform. ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )
What Are We Talking About When We Talk About Technology Pivots? - A Delphi Study (INFORMATION & MANAGEMENT)	(Bohn & Kundisch, 2020: 10)	"Technology pivots are fundamental changes to the technology in use that are of critical and strategic importance to the business, consisting of either substitutions of technologies with established technologies or the

		implementation of technology innovations, as well as of IT-architecture design changes. They are caused by validated learnings created to test crucial business hypotheses, a change in the business model, or a business goal being performed, customer feedback received, scalability desired, changes in the competitive landscape, or a startup's own market position. A technology pivot may result in changes to the business model, the value creating technologies and activities, or the value proposition."
A problem half-solved is a problem well-stated: Increasing the rate of innovation through team problem discovery (RESEARCH POLICY)	(Cromwell & Harvey, 2025)	Pivoting is referenced as the dynamic ability to change or adapt a team's problem interpretation and project direction during innovation work to avoid cognitive fixation and increase flexibility in search, but no explicit definition is provided. ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )
Digital startups and the adoption and implementation of Lean Startup Approaches: Effectuation, Bricolage and Opportunity Creation in practice (TECHNOLOGICAL FORECASTING AND SOCIAL CHANGE)	(Ghezzi, 2019: 946)	"Letting it perish or pivoting, that is, undertaking a structured course of correction (according to the "build-measure-learn" feedback loop)."
How digitalization reinvented entrepreneurial resilience during COVID-19 (TECHNOLOGICAL FORECASTING AND SOCIAL CHANGE)	(Santos et al., 2023)	Creative digital pivoting is defined as the act of reinventing products, services, and business models by creating new digital artifacts and platforms to adapt to the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic. ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )
How do we pivot? Facilitators, inhibitors, and strategies of tech healthcare startups before, during, and after a crisis (TECHNOLOGICAL FORECASTING AND SOCIAL CHANGE)	(Dhir et al., 2024: 3)	"It is broadly agreed that pivoting essentially involves course corrections. A pivot essentially refers to innovation in entrepreneurship through experimentation. The process of experimentation can make the results of a pivot uncertain, as the startup does not know whether it should pivot or maintain the current course of action".
How Entrepreneurs make sense of Lean Startup Approaches: Business	(Ghezzi, 2020)	BM pivots are defined as the process of modifying the business model and its

Models as cognitive lenses to generate fast and frugal Heuristics (TECHNOLOGICAL FORECASTING AND SOCIAL CHANGE)		underlying hypotheses based on validated learning and customer feedback obtained from experiments to achieve product-market fit. ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )
Innovation intelligence in managing co-creation process between tech-enabled corporations and startups (TECHNOLOGICAL FORECASTING AND SOCIAL CHANGE)	(Nobari & Dehkordi, 2023)	Pivoting is defined as a strategic reorientation process involving swift changes and reallocation/recombination of resources and activities in response to evaluation outcomes during co-creation, which may lead to continuation, modification, or termination of the innovation process. ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )
Measuring dynamic capabilities in new ventures: exploring strategic change in US green goods manufacturing using website data (JOURNAL OF TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER)	(Arora, Li, Youtie, & Shapira, 2020)	Pivoting is defined as an iterative process of sensing and seizing to manage threats proactively and capitalize on new business opportunities, characterized by decisive and often dramatic changes to business models in response to customer feedback. ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )
The effect of the degree of early-stage failure on entrepreneurial pivoting and success: Evidence from crowdfunding (RESEARCH POLICY)	(Berchicci & Boons, 2025: 3)	“Originally defined as a “structural course correction”, the term pivot has been used in the literature to refer to a wide range of different types of changes”. The authors differentiate two types of changes: a market positioning pivot (changing target customer segment/category) and a narrative pivot (changing campaign content and style). ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )
The entrepreneurial journeys of digital start-up founders (TECHNOLOGICAL FORECASTING AND SOCIAL CHANGE)	(Zaheer, Breyer, Dumay, & Enjeti, 2022)	Pivoting is defined as changing the building blocks of a business model in response to customer feedback and experimental results ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )
A Theoretical Analysis of the Lean Start-up Method (MARKETING SCIENCE)	(Yoo et al., 2021)	Pivoting is defined as modifying or changing the product design location from $\lambda$ to $\Lambda$ in response to consumer feedback after testing, with the authors noting in the abstract that firms should "modify (or 'pivot') the product design accordingly. ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )
Status Pivoting (JOURNAL OF CONSUMER RESEARCH)	(Goor, Keinan, &	Status pivoting is defined as the consumption behavior of displaying

	Ordabayeva, 2021)	success and achievements in an alternative life domain when experiencing status threat from upward comparisons, rather than trying to restore status within the domain of the threat. ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )
Technology oriented, service intensive, transnational entrepreneurs' international target market strategies (INDUSTRIAL MARKETING MANAGEMENT)	(Chaudhry, Crick, & Crick, 2024)	Pivoting is defined as entrepreneurs' capability to flexibly change, reorient, and (re)configure elements of their business model and international target market strategy, including entering, exiting, or reentering markets in response to evolving objectives and conditions rather than adhering rigidly to an initial strategic path. ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )
Virtual Collaboration Technology and International Business Coaching: Examining the Impact on Marketing Strategies and Sales (MARKETING SCIENCE)	(Anderson, Chintagunta, & Vilcassim, 2024: 638)	"Scholars suggest that innovating or changing a firm's business model (i.e., pivoting) can be a source of competitive advantage and can lead to performance improvements."
A history-based framework of servitization and deservitization (INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF OPERATIONS & PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT)	(Gomes et al., 2021: 726)	"Strategic pivots are new strategies or business models resulting from economic experimentation that require firm commitments not easily reversible identifies economic experimentation as a learning mechanism derived from direct market participation that facilitates the accumulation of knowledge about the market value of a product or service and that is conducive to changes in the firm's operations and organizational procedures that transform technological innovation into market value. As such, economic experiments facilitate learning that cannot be known before implementation or deduced from some set of established principles or developed through laboratorial prototype experiments, but rather takes place through real market participation."
Decoding the context of servitization: socio-technical pivots on the journey to service-oriented business models in manufacturing	(Kurtz et al., 2025: 267)	"Pivotal factors 'are new strategies [ ... ] resulting from economic experimentation' and are 'learning mechanism derived from direct market

<p>firms (PRODUCTION PLANNING &amp; CONTROL)</p>		<p>participation that facilitates the accumulation of knowledge about the market value of a product or service and that is conducive to changes in the firm's operations and organisational procedures."</p>
<p>Dynamic capabilities of global and local humanitarian organizations with emergency response and long-term development missions (INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF OPERATIONS &amp; PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT)</p>	<p>(Son, Roscoe, &amp; Sodhi, 2025)</p>	<p>"Pivoting is defined as the organizational ability to rapidly reconfigure supply chain practices in response to disruptions (specifically transitioning from one procurement strategy to another, such as moving to local or regional procurement when global supply chains are disrupted). <i>(Implicit definition)</i></p>
<p>Pivoting B2B platform business models: From platform experimentation to multi-platform integration to ecosystem envelopment (INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF PRODUCTION ECONOMICS)</p>	<p>(Filosa et al., 2025: 3)</p>	<p>"As such, digital servitization represents a strategic pivot, defined as the transformation resulting from economic experimentation and, hence, from the learning process that arises out of the introduction of a new technological or market paradigm. As stated by Greenstein, the deployment of the new strategic pivot "leads to changes in business operations and organizational procedures that translate technological innovation into market value", creating the opportunity for the introduction of a new product or service."</p>
<p>Product Line Design and Channel Configuration in Low-Carbon Supply Chains (IEEE TRANSACTIONS ON ENGINEERING MANAGEMENT)</p>	<p>(He, Han, Hou, &amp; Yue, 2024)</p>	<p>Pivoting is defined as the action of manufacturer decisions depending on or hinging upon critical factors such as emission reduction, channel cost, and consumer price sensitivity. <i>(Implicit definition)</i></p>
<p>Breaking with the Past to Face the Future? Organizational path dependence in family businesses (ORGANIZATION STUDIES)</p>	<p>(de Groote &amp; Kammerlander, 2023: 713)</p>	<p>"Pivoting refers to changing the business model without accepting inefficiencies."</p>
<p>Design thinking: Executing your organization's commitment to customer centricity (ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS)</p>	<p>(Ford &amp; Yoho, 2025)</p>	<p>Pivoting is defined as the ability to quickly redirect from a failing solution or course of action to the next best alternative when feedback indicates change is necessary, enabled by an organizational culture that values failing</p>

		fast to pivot quickly. ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )
Dynamics of strategy implementation across different types of new ventures (ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS)	(Morris & Kuratko, 2025: 2)	"Pivoting was popularized by Eric Ries in his book, The Lean Startup, which he defined as making a structured course correction with the business to test a new fundamental hypothesis about the products or strategy. Pivots reflect learning efforts that often take place in uncertain and resource constrained conditions."
Female Entrepreneurs Targeting Women: Strategic Redirection Under Scientific Decision-Making (ORGANIZATION SCIENCE)	(Gagliardi & Novelli, 2025: 2)	"A radical pivot, that is, a change in a firm's strategy that reorients its strategic direction and, in turn, improves its performance."
Mavericks and Diplomats: Bridging Commercial and Institutional Entrepreneurship for Society's Grand Challenges (ORGANIZATION SCIENCE)	(Volmar & Eisenhardt, 2025: 17)	"By pivot, we mean an abrupt, significant change to add or alter one or several elements of a strategy or an incomplete strategy such as products, partners, customers, and/or business models."
Pilot, Pivot and Advisory Boards: The Role of Governance Configurations in Innovation Commitment (ORGANIZATION STUDIES)	(Schiehll et al., 2018)	Pivoting is defined as a specific governance board archetype where outside directors with high industry-specific expertise and connections manage powerful CEOs, requiring them to navigate between advisory and oversight functions. ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )
Pivoting Isn't Enough? Managing Strategic Reorientation in New Ventures (ORGANIZATION SCIENCE)	(McDonald & Gao, 2019)	Pivoting is defined as a significant shift in a venture's strategy driven by departures from initial plans that encompasses both product reformulation and a revised value proposition aimed at a new or modified target market. ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )
Playing your cards wisely: Strategy implementation through the three processes of pivoting (ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS)	(O'Neill & McGrath, 2025)	Pivoting is defined as a form of active learning wherein established organizations shift to new strategies by matching the pace of internal organizational learning to the pace of external environmental change, implemented through three processes of pacing, shaping, and nudging. ( <i>Implicit definition</i> )

Table A2: Overview of 66 articles in literature review including explicit or implicit pivoting definitions

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