

DOCTORAL CONSORTIUM

BUSINESS SYSTEM

LONG-TERM VIABILITY ACROSS LIFE-CYCLE PHASES

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This research addresses how business systems can achieve short-term success while sustaining long-term viability. Although the organizational literature already examines performance, resilience, and life-cycle dynamics, it lacks an integrated, empirically grounded framework that systematically connects internal and external factors to long-term viability across developmental phases. The research is conceptualized as a proposed Design Science Research study and will adopt a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to identify, classify, and analyse factors influencing both short-term success and long-term viability. Using a five-phase life-cycle typology as an analytical framework, the research is expected to develop a reference model and accompanying analytical factor cards as its primary artefact. The original scientific contribution of the research is expected to lie in distinguishing short-term success from long-term viability, classifying factors across life-cycle phases and integrating them into a unified model. The results are expected to advance organizational theory and provide a structured analytical foundation for examining long-term viability in complex environments.

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1 Introduction

The central issue addressed in this research is how to design a business system that ensures success at a given point in time while also maintaining preparedness for future challenges and long-term viability. From an organizational perspective, this challenge requires reflection on how to design processes, organizational structure, and culture so that the business system performs effectively today while remaining resilient and adaptable in the future (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Chandler, 1962; Mintzberg, 1979; Duchek, 2019; Hillmann et al., 2022; Florez-Jimenez et al., 2024). This research, therefore, focuses on identifying and classifying the internal and external factors that enable long-term viability, and on explaining how their relevance changes across different phases of a business system's life-cycle.

The research is based on the thesis that long-term viability is statistically dependent on the interconnected operation of internal and external factors, and that the significance of these factors varies across life-cycle phases (Napolitano et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2019; Miceli et al., 2021; Padovano & Ivanov, 2025). In line with this, the research distinguishes between short-term success, a results-oriented dimension, and long-term viability, a capability-oriented, systemic dimension. Short-term success may support long-term viability, but it does not guarantee it. This distinction is critical because many business systems demonstrate strong short-term performance while gradually losing their capacity to remain functional, legitimate, and value-creating (Blasini et al., 2013; Hitt et al., 2015; Ortiz-de-Mandojana & Bansal, 2015; Kaplan, 2012; Kayani et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2024).

Every business system is inherently vulnerable to decline or termination. However, through deliberate organizational approaches and strategic interventions, this process can be slowed, redirected, or in some cases prevented. Unlike biological organisms, business systems can persist for extended periods when appropriately designed and institutionally supported (Collins & Porras, 1994; Elkington, 1997; Barney & Hesterly, 2015; Georgescu et al., 2024; Dickson, 2025).

Although long-term viability is often assessed through financial or market indicators, this research proceeds on the assumption that it is not primarily an economic phenomenon but an organizational one. It fundamentally depends on how business systems develop and renew appropriate structures, decision mechanisms, routines,

culture, and adaptive capacity in a changing environment (Makkonen et al., 2014; Koronis & Ponis, 2018; Duchek, 2019; Miceli et al., 2021; Florez-Jimenez et al., 2024). Consequently, long-term viability is treated as an emergent systemic property, arising from the interaction of multiple organizational and environmental domains rather than from a single isolated factor (Barasa et al., 2018; Napolitano et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2019; Miceli et al., 2021).

To address this problem, the research develops a research artefact in the form of a phase-sensitive reference model of factors and analytical factor cards. The factor cards serve as an operational instrument for structured analysis and comparison of factor influence across contexts and phases.

The research is guided by research questions that focus on identifying factors of long-term viability, distinguishing them from factors of short-term success, examining their overlaps and tensions, and analysing how their relevance changes across life-cycle phases. By integrating these components into a coherent analytical framework, the research aims to strengthen theoretical clarity and provide a transferable basis for empirical testing and practical diagnosis.

2 Problem definition

The long-term viability of business systems is a crucial yet insufficiently integrated field within organizational studies, particularly amid increasing environmental volatility, technological disruption, and institutional instability. Business systems today operate in a world characterized by rapid digitalization, global interdependence, regulatory shifts, and recurrent crises. These dynamics continuously challenge their stability, adaptive capacity, and long-term continuity.

Most of the existing research predominantly focuses on factors of short-term success, such as profitability, innovation output, efficiency, competitive positioning, and market share (Blasini et al., 2013; Kaplan, 2012; Hitt et al., 2015; Sun et al., 2024; Hillmann et al., 2022; Kayani et al., 2023). While these contributions provide valuable insights into performance dynamics, comparatively less attention has been devoted to understanding the systemic conditions that enable business systems to remain functional and legitimate over extended periods.

Although long-term viability is frequently evaluated through financial indicators or longevity measures, this research proceeds on the assumption that it is not primarily an economic outcome but an organizational phenomenon. It depends on the capability of a business system to configure and reconfigure its structures, processes, governance mechanisms, and cultural patterns in alignment with changing environmental conditions (Makkonen et al., 2013; Koronis and Ponis, 2018; Duchek, 2019; Miceli et al., 2021; Florez-Jimenez et al., 2024). In this sense, long-term viability is conceptualized as an emergent systemic property arising from the interaction of internal and external factors.

Foundational organizational theories emphasize the alignment between strategy and structure (Chandler, 1962), the importance of organizational design (Mintzberg, 1979), and the need to adapt structural configurations to environmental uncertainty (Burns and Stalker, 1961). Across different streams of research, various factors of organizational stability and long-term functioning have been identified. Innovation capability has been consistently identified as a key survival factor in dynamic industries (Christensen, 1997). Vision and organizational culture (Collins and Porras, 1994), sustainability-oriented approaches (Elkington, 1997), and organizational health (McKinsey, 2024) further contribute to stability and resilience. However, these contributions remain fragmented across conceptual domains and are rarely integrated within a unified, phase-sensitive analytical framework.

Empirical evidence demonstrates that short-term success does not necessarily translate into long-term viability. The case of Eastman Kodak illustrates how strong historical performance can coexist with structural rigidity and strategic misalignment in the face of disruptive technological change (Lucas et al., 2009; Mui, 2012). Similarly, Nokia's rapid decline during the smartphone transition highlights the consequences of delayed strategic adaptation despite prior market dominance (Vuorti and Huy, 2016; Kornelakis and Petrakaki, 2024). These cases reveal a structural gap between operational success and long-term systemic adaptability.

At a systemic level, this dynamic is further illuminated by the Gartner Hype Cycle, which describes fluctuating expectations surrounding emerging technologies. Organizations often make strategic decisions under conditions of uncertainty, misaligned timing, or distorted expectations (Shi and Herniman, 2022; Mora-López et al., 2025). Failures, therefore, frequently result not from lack of competence or

resources but from temporal misalignment between environmental shifts and organizational response capacity.

In contrast, the case of Pliva and the development of azithromycin (Sumamed) illustrates a trajectory of sustained long-term viability through the integration of technological innovation, intellectual property protection, regulatory positioning, and international licensing (Tomišić and Inić, 2024). This example demonstrates that long-term viability may depend not only on innovation itself but on the institutional and strategic mechanisms that enable prolonged value appropriation.

Despite the growing emphasis on resilience, sustainability, and adaptability in management discourse, the academic literature still lacks a comprehensive, empirically grounded framework that systematically integrates internal and external factors to ensure long-term viability across the different phases of the business system life-cycle. Existing research remains dispersed across performance studies, resilience research, life-cycle models, and strategic management theories, limiting cumulative knowledge and comparative analysis (Napolitano et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2019; Miceli et al., 2021; Padovano and Ivanov, 2025).

The central research problem, therefore, arises from the need to systematically identify and classify the factors that enable the long-term viability of business systems, distinguish them from factors of short-term success, and examine how their relative importance changes across life-cycle phases. In particular, the research seeks to address the absence of an integrative, phase-sensitive analytical model capable of capturing the interconnected operation of internal and external factors of long-term viability.

By addressing this gap, the research aims to move beyond fragmented explanations and to provide a structured conceptual and empirical foundation for understanding how business systems sustain themselves under varying environmental and developmental conditions.

3 Methodology

The presented methodological framework represents the design and preparation of the research, while the empirical phase has not yet been conducted. The research is designed as a proposed mixed-methods study that will combine qualitative and

quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive treatment of the research problem and to integrate theoretical foundations with empirical evidence. The methodological framework will follow the principles of Design Science Research, within which a research artefact will be developed and analytically evaluated through iterative interaction between conceptual development and empirical inquiry. The central objective of the methodological design will be to identify, classify, and analyse internal and external factors influencing the long-term viability of business systems and, on this basis, to develop and empirically ground a phase-sensitive reference model and accompanying analytical factor cards.

The research design will connect theoretical synthesis, empirical data collection, and analytical integration within a structured comparative framework. The research will be cross-sectional and will not follow individual business systems longitudinally. Instead, it will analyse business systems at different life-cycle phases at a single point in time. The life-cycle will be used as an analytical typology. Its purpose is to enable structured comparison of factor configurations across developmental contexts.

The theoretical phase will consist of a systematic review of scientific literature covering organizational theory, business performance, internal and external factors, life-cycle models, organizational resilience, and long-term viability. Sources will be drawn from ProQuest, ScienceDirect, Scopus, and Web of Science. A comparative analysis of existing models will provide the conceptual foundation for identifying candidate factors and for constructing the initial version of the reference model and the analytical factor cards. The literature review will serve as a structural basis for artefact development.

The empirical phase will focus primarily on service-based business systems and will employ purposive sampling. The objective will not be statistical representativeness in the classical sense, but the identification of information-rich cases that allow the examination of complex, context-dependent relationships among internal and external factors. The sample will include business systems of varying sizes, ages, and life-cycle positions. Service systems will be selected due to their structural reliance on intangible resources such as knowledge, culture, relational capital, digital integration, and adaptive capacity, which makes them analytically suitable for examining long-term viability dynamics. Sampling will be conducted through professional and research networks as well as publicly available business databases.

Heterogeneity of the sample will be treated as an analytical advantage, enabling comparative analysis across different configurations. If insufficient cases are identified within a specific life-cycle phase, the sample will be iteratively supplemented to ensure phase comparability.

Data collection will consist of two complementary instruments. First, a structured survey questionnaire will collect quantitative data regarding the perceived importance and influence of internal and external factors. Measurement scales will be adapted from established constructs in organizational resilience, culture, and strategic management research. The questionnaire will be distributed via an online platform, and a minimum of 100 valid responses will be targeted to ensure basic statistical robustness for quantitative analysis. Second, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with representatives of at least 10 business systems to capture in-depth perspectives on factor dynamics, strategic decisions, and contextual influences. The number of interviews will be guided by the principle of theoretical saturation.

Quantitative data will be analysed using descriptive statistical methods in SPSS or JASP. Where appropriate, comparative analyses will be conducted across business systems that differ in size, age, or life-cycle phase. Qualitative data from interviews will be analysed using thematic analysis supported by Atlas.ti, enabling identification of recurring patterns, contextual mechanisms, and variations in factor influence. Integration of qualitative and quantitative findings supports triangulation and will strengthen the internal consistency of the analytical conclusions.

The reference model and analytical factor cards will constitute the central research artefact. Artefact development will follow an iterative refinement process. It will begin with conceptual construction based on the literature. It will then proceed with empirical calibration using collected data and will conclude with analytical integration. Evaluation of the artefact will be conducted as an analytically grounded assessment of conceptual coherence, phase sensitivity, internal consistency, explanatory capacity, and practical applicability. The evaluation will not take the form of experimental testing, but rather structured analytical validation supported by empirical findings.

The research is limited by purposive sampling, a cross-sectional design, and contextual variability of factors. The proposed model remains conceptual and requires further validation across additional sectors and institutional environments.

4 Expected results

The original scientific contribution of this research is expected to lie in developing a phase-sensitive reference model that systematically integrates internal and external factors influencing the long-term viability of business systems. The model advances existing theoretical approaches by moving beyond fragmented treatments of performance, resilience, sustainability, and life-cycle models in isolation. Instead, it provides a structured analytical framework that connects these domains within a unified conceptual architecture.

The research is expected to contribute to clearer differentiation between short-term success and long-term viability. While short-term success is reflected in results-oriented performance indicators, long-term viability is a systemic, capability-based phenomenon. The research is expected to demonstrate how these two dimensions overlap, diverge, and in certain configurations condition one another. In doing so, it is expected to address the persistent ambiguity in existing literature, where longevity is often equated with financial performance or survival duration without deeper structural analysis. This differentiation is expected to clarify under which conditions performance-enhancing mechanisms contribute to long-term resilience and under which conditions they may undermine systemic adaptability.

Another key expected result is the classification of the identified factors by their relative importance across different life-cycle phases. By applying the five-phase analytical typology, the research is expected to demonstrate how the relevance and interactions of factors change across developmental contexts. This phase-sensitive perspective represents a significant theoretical extension beyond static models of performance or resilience.

The final research artefact is expected to be a reference model of long-term viability factors, providing a structured representation of their interrelationships across life-cycle phases and long-term viability. The analytical factor cards will operationalize the model by enabling systematic monitoring, classification, and comparative

evaluation of factor influence across contexts. Together, they will constitute a theoretically and empirically informed analytical instrument.

The originality of the contribution is grounded in evidence of a research gap in existing literature. Searches in the Web of Science database reveal extensive research on individual concepts such as “life-cycle,” “key success factors,” and “long-term viability,” yet minimal integration among them. Combined searches yield only a very limited number of publications, and closer examination indicates that none address the interconnected operation of internal and external factors influencing long-term viability across life-cycle phases.

Beyond conceptual advancement, the research is expected to generate empirically grounded insights into how business systems maintain stability while remaining adaptable amid digital transformation, globalization, and recurring systemic disruptions. The findings are expected to contribute to organizational sciences, strategic management, systems approaches, and organizational resilience by offering a structured explanation of how long-term viability emerges from interconnected factor dynamics rather than isolated strategic decisions.

5 Future development

Although the research is expected to develop an empirically grounded reference model of long-term viability, it also opens several avenues for further theoretical refinement, empirical expansion, and methodological advancement.

First, future research may extend the cross-sectional design to a longitudinal design, which would allow direct observation of how factor configurations evolve and interact as systems transition between phases. Such an approach would provide deeper insight into causal mechanisms and temporal sequences underlying long-term viability.

Second, additional empirical validation across diverse institutional and sectoral contexts would strengthen the robustness and generalizability of the proposed model. The current research primarily focuses on service-based business systems. Replication in other sectors could reveal sector-specific configurations of factors and refine the model’s contextual sensitivity. Comparative international research may

further illuminate the moderating role of regulatory, cultural, and macroeconomic conditions.

Third, the structural relationships embedded in the reference model may be tested using advanced quantitative techniques. Methods such as structural equation modeling, multilevel modeling, or system dynamics simulation could examine indirect, mediating, or feedback effects among internal and external factors. Such methodological expansion would enhance explanatory depth and allow more precise operationalization of constructs such as resilience, adaptability, and strategic stability.

Fourth, future research may further develop operational and measurement approaches for analysing long-term viability. While this research establishes the conceptual distinction between short-term success and long-term viability, additional work may refine empirical indicators capturing long-term viability as a systemic capability. Such developments would strengthen cumulative theory building and facilitate cross-research comparability.

Fifth, the transformation phase of a business system's life-cycle represents a particularly fertile area for deeper investigation. Future research may analyse triggers of transformation, decision-making dynamics during renewal processes, and the conditions under which transformation strengthens rather than destabilizes long-term viability. Further examination of specific transformation contexts, including digital transformation and innovation ecosystems, could enhance the model's contemporary relevance.

Sixth, the practical application of the research artefact may evolve through the development of a digital diagnostic tool based on the reference model and analytical factor cards. Such a tool could support structured self-assessment, benchmarking, and scenario analysis within business systems. Iterative feedback from practice would simultaneously inform further theoretical refinement.

Overall, future development of this research should aim to deepen temporal, contextual, and structural understanding of long-term viability while progressively strengthening empirical validation of the model. Through iterative refinement and cross-contextual testing, the proposed framework may evolve into a transferable

analytical instrument for studying and supporting the long-term viability of business systems in complex and uncertain environments.

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