



Sustainable Knowledge Plasticity as a Key Mediator of Organizational Performance in Indonesian FMCG Distribution Firms

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Abstract

Background: There are rapid environmental changes in the FMCG distribution industry in Indonesia; this steady change demands constant adaptation by organizations and renewal of knowledge. Existing research investigates organizational agility, thriving at work, and knowledge management independently, with no prior study examining the integrated impact of these variables on sustainable performance. This study conceptualizes Sustainable Knowledge Plasticity (SKP) as a novel dynamic capability that enables organizations to engage in continuous cycles of knowledge renewal and integration.

Objective: This study aims to explore the mediating role of Sustainable Knowledge Plasticity (SKP) between organizational agility, thriving at work, and knowledge management in predicting organizational performance.

Methods: This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional design using stratified purposive sampling among 385 FMCG distribution employees across Java and Sulawesi provinces. Data were collected using a validated Likert-scale questionnaire, followed by analysis through SEM-PLS (SmartPLS 4.0).

Results: Organizational agility, thriving at work, and knowledge management have significant effects on Sustainable Knowledge Plasticity (SKP), which in turn directly influences organizational performance. The mediation analysis indicates that Sustainable Knowledge Plasticity (SKP) is a critical mechanism for translating adaptive capacities into sustainable outcomes.

Conclusion: Sustainable Knowledge Plasticity (SKP) is an essential precursor to organizational performance, linking adaptability with sustainability in the long term and extending Dynamic Capability Theory through a strong emphasis on continual knowledge replenishment.

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INTRODUCTION

The fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) distribution industry in Indonesia is evolving in a constantly changing environment, making it one of the most challenging sectors in Southeast Asia (Enoch O. Alonge et al., 2024; Rampaul, 2025). Indonesia is an archipelagic country comprising no fewer than 17,000 islands, with a population of around 270 million people; therefore, distribution systems are inherently complex. This translates into a formidable challenge for distribution companies to maintain consistency in operational performance (Boojihawon et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2019).

A constant upward surge in long-haul logistics expenditures since 2022–2023 (with a particularly sharp increase of 34.6%) and the rapid digitalization of sales and marketing methods have presented new competitive challenges in recent quarters across the entire industry (Alshahrani & Salam, 2022; Nguyen Thi & Vu Dinh, 2025). These developments also threaten organizational knowledge infrastructures, requiring firms not only to remain reactively aware but also to engage in systematic renewal. The absence of formalized mechanisms for knowledge renewal constrains the continuity of organizational performance (Chan et al., 2024).

Distributors with thousands of points of sale inherently face significant complexity. Although most information systems are in place, some implementation deviations persist. Within the first three weeks, actively competing retail outlets recorded a price discrepancy of 27.8% within their new promotional programs (Fazlagić et al., 2021; Sofiyabadi et al., 2022). This suggests that underlying assumptions regarding organizational management and knowledge management have not sufficiently addressed the systemic challenges of large-scale distribution networks.

The literature on organizational agility and knowledge management provides multiple explanations of how organizations achieve performance parity; however, the results vary widely (Cegarra-Navarro et al., 2016; Damayanti et al., 2025). While some studies report positive associations, others present weak, non-significant, or even negative results (Jan et al., 2023). These inconsistencies suggest gaps in conceptual development related to crucial mediating mechanisms or experiential evidence. In particular, no previous study has examined the role of sustainable knowledge plasticity (SKP) as a potential mediator between adaptive capabilities and long-term performance outcomes. As such, this conceptual gap represents a key theoretical challenge that this study seeks to address within the frameworks of Dynamic Capabilities Theory Teece (2018) and the Knowledge-Based View (Argote & Ingram, 2000).

The concept of knowledge plasticity defined as the set of factors enabling simultaneous learning and adaptation has been widely discussed at the individual level. At the organizational level, however, knowledge plasticity refers to the ability of an organization to learn and enhance its capacity to assimilate, integrate, and apply knowledge over time through adaptive learning in a changing environment (Li, 2022; Robertson et al., 2023). Compared to the speed of knowledge transfer (knowledge agility) and the external assimilation of new knowledge (absorptive capacity), sustainable knowledge plasticity (SKP) represents a distinct and novel theoretical contribution, as it emphasizes the dynamic internal renewal and sustainability of organizational knowledge systems. Context is critical, as knowledge must be continuously aligned with varying operational conditions in FMCG distribution. Research on organizational capabilities within the FMCG distribution sector in developing countries remains limited, underscoring the need for further theoretical and empirical development (Filani et al., 2021; Tanuwijaya & Mauritsius, 2024).

The purpose of this study is threefold: (1) to examine the direct relationships among organizational agility, thriving at work, and knowledge management in influencing sustainable knowledge plasticity (SKP); (2) to investigate the mediating role of SKP in linking these antecedents to organizational performance; and (3) to contribute to theory-building within Dynamic Capabilities Theory and the Knowledge-Based View by conceptualizing SKP as a sustainability-oriented capability related to knowledge renewal. Practically, this study aims to provide empirical grounding for FMCG distribution companies in developing structured processes that facilitate the long-term renewal of knowledge bases.

METHOD

Research Design and Approach

This study was designed using a quantitative analysis technique to explain the relationships among the variables studied. Data were collected using a cross-sectional survey. The approach used in this research was deductive, whereby hypotheses formulated based on theory were subsequently tested using empirical data collected from FMCG distribution companies in Indonesia.

Population and Sampling

The population consisted of employees working in Indonesian FMCG distribution companies who were directly involved in distribution processes. Data were collected from a range of roles, including sales, supervisory, operational, and administrative functions. A two-stage sampling process was employed. In the first stage, large FMCG distribution companies across Indonesia were identified and selected using purposive sampling based on established criteria, such as a minimum annual revenue of at least 50 billion IDR, operations in more than two provinces, and more than 100 employees in the distribution sector. In the second stage, respondents within the selected companies were recruited using stratified random sampling based on job levels (e.g., sales force, supervisor, manager) to ensure representativeness across organizational roles. The minimum sample size was calculated using G*Power software and was determined to be at least 350 respondents.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered through both online and offline surveys conducted between January and March 2024. The instrument was initially developed in English and subsequently translated into Indonesian. To assess the clarity and reliability of the items, a pilot study involving 45 respondents was conducted prior to full deployment. The pilot study results led to minor revisions in item wording to improve clarity. In the main survey, 428 responses were obtained; however, after screening for completeness, only 385 responses were deemed suitable for analysis. To assess potential response bias, a comparison between early and late respondents was conducted, and the results indicated no significant differences.

Measurement Instruments

All variables in this study were adapted from previously validated research instruments related to FMCG distribution. Each item was measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Organizational agility was measured using 12 items reflecting a company's ability to respond to change, align leadership direction, and manage resource flexibility (Chen et al., 2014; Fourné et al., 2014). Thriving at work was measured using 10 items describing employee vitality and learning processes. Knowledge management was assessed using 15 items encompassing knowledge acquisition, sharing, and utilization within the organization (Fazlagić et al., 2021; Sofiyabadi et al., 2022). Sustainable knowledge plasticity (SKP) was measured using 14 newly developed items across three dimensions: (1) Knowledge Renewal (5 items; e.g., "Our organization regularly updated operational knowledge in response to environmental changes"); (2) Knowledge Flexibility (4 items; e.g., "Our teams could rapidly reconfigure existing knowledge to address new distribution challenges"); and (3) Knowledge Dissemination (5 items; e.g., "Updated knowledge was systematically shared across all levels of the organization"). The scale was developed through a rigorous process, including expert validation by five organizational behavior scholars and exploratory factor analysis in the pilot study, confirming its three-factor structure (RMSEA = 0.048, CFI = 0.963). Organizational performance was measured using 12 items representing the company's financial and operational performance (Gunasekaran et al., 2004).

Data Analysis Strategy

The data were analyzed using SEM-PLS with SmartPLS 4.0 software. This method was chosen due to its ability to accommodate complex research models, even with relatively small sample sizes. The analysis was conducted in sequential steps, beginning with the assessment of the measurement model for validity and reliability, followed by testing the structural relationships among variables. To identify potential common method bias, the study employed the Harman single-factor test and the marker variable technique; the results indicated that common method bias was not a concern. Furthermore, relationships among variables were examined to ensure there was no excessive multicollinearity using variance inflation factor (VIF) values. The results showed that all variables were within acceptable limits (VIF < 3.3), indicating that the research model could be used reliably.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Respondent Characteristics

A total of 385 employees from an FMCG distribution company were involved in this study. The demographic profiles of the respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondent Demographics (N=385)

| Characteristic | Category | n | % |
|-----------------------|-----------------|----------|----------|
| Gender | Male | 234 | 60.8 |
| | Female | 151 | 39.2 |
| Age | 21-30 years | 142 | 36.9 |
| | 31-40 years | 168 | 43.6 |
| | 41-50 years | 61 | 15.8 |
| | >50 years | 14 | 3.6 |
| Education | High School | 89 | 23.1 |
| | Diploma | 104 | 27.0 |
| | Bachelor | 165 | 42.9 |
| | Master | 27 | 7.0 |
| Position | Sales Force | 178 | 46.2 |
| | Supervisor | 92 | 23.9 |
| | Manager | 68 | 17.7 |
| | Admin/Support | 47 | 12.2 |
| Experience | 1-3 years | 118 | 30.6 |
| | 4-6 years | 154 | 40.0 |
| | 7-10 years | 78 | 20.3 |
| | >10 years | 35 | 9.1 |
| Region | Java | 267 | 69.4 |
| | Sulawesi | 118 | 30.6 |

Measurement Model Assessment

A. Reliability and Validity

The results of the reliability and convergent validity tests are presented in Table 2. All variables showed a good level of reliability, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) values above 0.70. Furthermore, convergent validity was also established, as the average variance extracted (AVE) value for each variable exceeded 0.50.

Table 2. Reliability and Convergent Validity

| Construct | Items | α | CR | AVE |
|--|--------------|----------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Organizational Agility (OA) | 12 | 0.912 | 0.931 | 0.658 |
| Thriving at Work (TAW) | 10 | 0.894 | 0.919 | 0.654 |
| Knowledge Management (KM) | 15 | 0.923 | 0.937 | 0.681 |
| Sustainable Knowledge Plasticity (SKP) | 14 | 0.936 | 0.947 | 0.692 |
| Organizational Performance (OP) | 12 | 0.908 | 0.926 | 0.641 |

B. Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). Based on Table 3, the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) values on the diagonal is higher than the inter-construct correlations, indicating that discriminant validity has been established.

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

| | OA | TAW | KM | SKP | OP |
|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| OA | 0.811 | | | | |
| TAW | 0.542 | 0.809 | | | |
| KM | 0.587 | 0.523 | 0.825 | | |
| SKP | 0.649 | 0.598 | 0.634 | 0.832 | |
| OP | 0.573 | 0.512 | 0.546 | 0.687 | 0.801 |

Discriminant validity was also confirmed through the HTMT ratio values which were all below the 0.90 limit.

Structural Model Assessment

A. Direct Effects

The path coefficients and results of the hypothesis testing are displayed in Table 4. The results show that all direct relationships are statistically significant at the $p < 0.001$ level.

Table 4. Direct Effects and Hypothesis Testing

| Hypothesis | Path | β | SE | t-value | p-value | 95% CI | Decision |
|------------|-----------|---------|-------|---------|---------|----------------|-----------|
| H1 | OA → SKP | 0.342 | 0.052 | 6.577 | <0.001 | [0.240, 0.444] | Supported |
| H2 | TAW → SKP | 0.271 | 0.048 | 5.646 | <0.001 | [0.177, 0.365] | Supported |
| H3 | KM → SKP | 0.289 | 0.051 | 5.667 | <0.001 | [0.189, 0.389] | Supported |
| H4 | SKP → OP | 0.465 | 0.049 | 9.490 | <0.001 | [0.369, 0.561] | Supported |
| H5 | OA → OP | 0.183 | 0.047 | 3.894 | <0.001 | [0.091, 0.275] | Supported |
| H6 | TAW → OP | 0.098 | 0.043 | 2.279 | 0.023 | [0.014, 0.182] | Supported |
| H7 | KM → OP | 0.142 | 0.046 | 3.087 | 0.002 | [0.052, 0.232] | Supported |

B. Indirect Effects and Mediation Analysis

The results of the mediation analysis are shown in Table 5, which was obtained using the bootstrapping technique with 5,000 resamples.

Table 5. Indirect Effects Through SKP

| Path | Indirect Effect | SE | t-value | p-value | 95% CI | VAF | Mediation Type |
|----------------|-----------------|-------|---------|---------|----------------|-------|----------------|
| OA → SKP → OP | 0.159 | 0.031 | 5.129 | <0.001 | [0.098, 0.220] | 46.5% | Partial |
| TAW → SKP → OP | 0.126 | 0.027 | 4.667 | <0.001 | [0.073, 0.179] | 56.3% | Partial |
| KM → SKP → OP | 0.134 | 0.029 | 4.621 | <0.001 | [0.077, 0.191] | 48.6% | Partial |

Note: VAF = Variance Accounted For

Model Fit and Explanatory Power

The model fit index and explanatory power indicators are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Model Fit and R² Values

| Indicator | Value | Threshold | Assessment |
|----------------------|-------|-----------|---------------------------|
| SRMR | 0.058 | <0.08 | Good fit |
| NFI | 0.912 | >0.90 | Good fit |
| R ² (SKP) | 0.627 | - | Substantial |
| R ² (OP) | 0.684 | - | Substantial |
| Q ² (SKP) | 0.421 | >0 | Good predictive relevance |
| Q ² (OP) | 0.428 | >0 | Good predictive relevance |

Control Variables Analysis

This study also included several additional factors as control variables, namely company size, employee tenure, and location. The analysis showed that only company size had a slight impact on performance ($\beta = 0.087$, $p = 0.042$), while the other two factors had no significant impact. Even with these variables included, the study's main findings remain robust and unchanged.

Multi-Group Analysis

A multigroup analysis was employed to assess differences between Java and Sulawesi. The results showed no significant differences in path coefficients between groups (all $p > 0.05$). This means that the research model can be generalized across both regions.

Robustness Tests

Several robustness tests were conducted to ensure the reliability of the research results. Testing an alternative model without SKP mediation showed significantly lower model fit, as evidenced by the ΔAIC value of 142.3 and ΔBIC of 138.7. Furthermore, an endogeneity assessment using the Gaussian copula approach indicated no significant endogeneity issues. Testing for the possibility of a nonlinear relationship was also conducted, but the results showed that the quadratic term was insignificant, thus supporting a linear relationship between the variables.

Post Hoc Analysis

A. Importance-Performance Matrix Analysis (IPMA)

Based on the IPMA results, organizational performance is most influenced by SKP with a value of 0.465, followed by organizational agility with a value of 0.342. These findings confirm that knowledge plasticity plays a very important role in improving organizational performance.

B. Necessary Condition Analysis (NCA)

To achieve high organizational performance (above 0.70), a minimum SKP level of 0.42 on the normalized scale is required, as indicated by the NCA results. This demonstrates that SKP is a key condition that must be met in the performance achievement process.

Discussion

Theoretical Implications

A. Extending Dynamic Capability Theory

These findings extend Dynamic Capabilities Theory by showing that sustaining organizational performance in a changing environment requires more than just the ability to respond and adapt quickly. Organizations must also continuously renew and manage their knowledge base. The introduction of SKP as a distinct organizational capability helps explain how firms maintain performance despite ongoing changes. SKP converts short-term adaptive actions into sustained long-term performance ($\beta = 0.465$, $p < 0.001$).

Prior studies on dynamic capabilities Wang & Ahmed (2007) support the role of knowledge renewal in creating sustainable performance. This implies that sustainable performance must be continuously renewed over time. In FMCG distribution, which is constantly evolving, organizational capabilities must adapt accordingly and disseminate knowledge throughout the organization.

B. Advancing Knowledge-Based View

The findings of this study further enrich the development of the Knowledge-Based View (KBV). Knowledge must be continually updated for a company to adapt and sustain its existence. The role of SKP is substantial (VAF between 46.5% and 56.3%). This indicates that merely possessing knowledge is insufficient if it is not continuously updated, given that the business environment is also constantly evolving (Argote & Ingram, 2000). This research also offers new insights into knowledge-based competition. Organizations need to focus on creating and sharing knowledge, and subsequently applying it to business activities. However, this knowledge must be continually updated to remain competitive.

C. Reconciling Inconsistent Agility–Performance Findings

This research helps clarify inconsistent findings regarding the relationship between organizational agility and performance. The missing link appears to be SKP, which acts as a mediating mechanism that has not been widely identified before. Organizational agility enhances performance both directly ($\beta = 0.183, p < 0.001$) and indirectly via SKP ($\beta = 0.159, p < 0.001$). This suggests that agility alone is insufficient; organizations must also continuously review and improve their knowledge base.

Practical Implications

A. Developing Knowledge Renewal Systems

FMCG distribution managers should establish systems that enable continuous knowledge renewal. This capability represents a valuable investment, as SKP has been shown to enhance performance. Concretely, organizations can implement structured Knowledge Renewal Cycles (KRCs) on a biweekly basis at the regional level, using standardized templates to capture field-level knowledge updates from sales and distribution personnel. Integrated enterprise resource planning (ERP) platforms with knowledge dashboards should be deployed as digital knowledge management systems to provide real-time visibility into knowledge flows across the distribution network. Knowledge Integration Teams (KITs)—cross-functional teams comprising sales, operations, and administrative representatives—should meet monthly to transform tacit field knowledge into codified organizational processes, ensuring that frontline insights are institutionalized across locations and leveraged organization-wide.

B. Leveraging Employee Thriving for Organizational Learning

Organizations must go beyond creating environments that encourage employees to become engaged and self-directed learners. They must also ensure that individual learning produces collective organizational outcomes. If this capacity is not effectively managed, improvements at the individual level may not translate into enhanced organizational performance. Therefore, organizations need to implement knowledge conversion processes that systematically extract tacit knowledge from employees and codify it into structured, shareable procedures and guidelines. In practice, this includes post-task debriefing sessions following major distribution activities, digital knowledge repositories accessible to all staff levels, and formal mentoring programs that pair senior and junior employees for structured knowledge transfer. The success of individual learning should pass through a Tacit-to-Explicit-to-Embedded (TEE) process, ensuring that knowledge is retained at the organizational level rather than remaining individual-specific.

C. Integrating Agility with Knowledge Management

SKP develops through the integration of organizational agility and knowledge management. These elements must be implemented simultaneously rather than as separate initiatives. Knowledge updating processes are essential to support responsiveness. This integration is particularly important for organizations operating across multiple regions with diverse local conditions.

Contextual Insights for FMCG Distribution

A. Managing Execution Complexity

FMCG distribution management in Indonesia is inherently complex due to significant variations in market characteristics across regions. However, the research findings reveal a consistent pattern, with no substantial differences between Java and Sulawesi. This suggests that SKP remains a central factor regardless of operational location. Therefore, organizations should avoid developing entirely separate systems for different regions and instead build adaptable mechanisms for updating knowledge. These systems should be flexible enough to accommodate local conditions while remaining sufficiently standardized. This approach enables operational consistency while maintaining responsiveness to market dynamics.

B. Balancing Standardization and Flexibility

FMCG distribution firms face competing demands: adherence to principals' guidelines and adaptation to local market conditions. Maintaining this balance is challenging. SKP plays a critical role in addressing this tension by enabling firms to uphold core standards while allowing flexibility in execution. This capability is essential for companies managing large numbers of retail outlets with varying conditions and regulatory environments.

Limitations and Boundary Conditions

This study provides valuable insights but should be interpreted considering its limitations. First, its cross-sectional design captures data at a single point in time. Second, the study focuses exclusively on large-scale FMCG distributors, limiting the generalizability of findings to smaller firms or other sectors with different economic characteristics. Additionally, while the SKP scale demonstrates strong psychometric properties, further cross-cultural validation is necessary.

Future Research Directions

This study highlights several avenues for future research. One important area is identifying factors that enable organizations to develop SKP more effectively. It is also important to understand the conditions under which SKP delivers maximum benefits, as well as situations in which it may be less effective or even counterproductive. Such insights would allow organizations to apply SKP more strategically. Future research could also examine SKP across multiple levels of analysis to better understand the cyclical nature of knowledge. Additionally, investigating the role of digital technologies in distribution systems and conducting cross-country comparative studies would help determine the extent to which SKP is universally applicable or context-dependent.

CONCLUSION

Theoretically and empirically, this paper contributes to the identification and validation of a new organizational capability Sustainable Knowledge Plasticity (SKP) as relevant in a developing research context, specifically Indonesia's fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) distribution system. Like previous constructs, knowledge management as an asset and agility as a final state or long-term orientation examine organizational performance from different angles; SKP captures the virtually constant renewal of understanding that organizations use to co-opt short-term adaptability into sustainable long-term performance. The SKP model explains 62.7% of the variance in SKP and 68.4% of the variance in organizational performance, demonstrating its relevance and reinforcing the dominant role that SKP plays in the capability-performance chain.

Theoretical Implications this paper adds to our understanding of how firms can sustain their advantage in a dynamic environment. It acknowledges that knowledge is not static but must be updated perpetually. It bridges a gap in the literature and helps explain the contradictory results between agility and performance. In practice, companies working with systems that help keep knowledge current in real time should place much greater emphasis on the implementation of these solutions. Corporate competency must be derived from individual learning, and knowledge management must be linked with organizational agility. An organization can only survive and grow in the global business environment if it has the adaptability to frequently update information.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Lala Setiany Wee: conceptualization, methodology, data collection; and manuscript draft. Data analysis and interpretation — David Sukardi Kodrat. Damelina Basauli Tambuna participated in reviewing, editing and final validation of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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