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Andreea. Popescu¹, Ayesha. Khan^{2*}

1 Department of Health Psychology, University of Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania
2 Department of Psychology, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

Corresponding author email address:
ayesha.khan@pu.edu.pk

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Managerial Flexibility and Operational Efficiency: The Mediating Role of Role Consistency

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between managerial flexibility and operational efficiency, with role consistency examined as a potential mediating variable. A descriptive correlational design was employed, and data were collected from 419 participants working in medium and large-scale organizations across Pakistan. The sample size was determined using the Morgan and Krejcie table, and participants were selected through stratified random sampling. Standardized instruments were used to measure managerial flexibility (Combe & Greenley, 2004), role consistency (adapted from Rizzo et al., 1970), and operational efficiency (Ward et al., 1998). Data analysis included Pearson correlation to examine bivariate relationships using SPSS-27 and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in AMOS-21 to test the hypothesized mediation model and evaluate model fit indices. Pearson correlation results showed that managerial flexibility was significantly correlated with operational efficiency ($r = .54, p = .001$) and role consistency ($r = .47, p = .002$), while role consistency was also positively correlated with operational efficiency ($r = .49, p = .003$). SEM results indicated excellent model fit ($\chi^2 = 164.87, df = 84, \chi^2/df = 1.96, CFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.046$). The direct effect of managerial flexibility on operational efficiency was significant ($B = 0.44, \beta = .46, p = .001$), as were the paths from managerial flexibility to role consistency ($B = 0.41, \beta = .47, p = .001$) and role consistency to operational efficiency ($B = 0.36, \beta = .42, p = .002$). The indirect effect of managerial flexibility on operational efficiency through role consistency was also significant ($B = 0.15, \beta = .20, p = .003$), confirming partial mediation. The results underscore the importance of embedding role consistency within flexible managerial environments to optimize operational efficiency, highlighting a balanced strategic approach for enhancing organizational performance.

Keywords: Managerial Flexibility, Role Consistency, Operational Efficiency.

Introduction

Managerial flexibility, often conceptualized as the capacity of leaders to make adaptive decisions in response to change, plays a central role in shaping organizational success. As organizational environments become more volatile and ambiguous, the ability of managers to reconfigure strategies, revise priorities, and innovate operational approaches has become indispensable. According to [1], achieving consistent outcomes in complex production systems—such as apparel manufacturing—relies not only on process stability but also on managerial adaptability through precise documentation and flexible operations. Such flexibility ensures that organizations remain agile in resource allocation and policy execution, particularly under dynamic conditions. Likewise, [2] underscores how adaptive parameter normalization facilitates strategic decision-making by minimizing inconsistencies across rival options, enhancing the robustness of performance evaluations.

However, flexibility without structural coherence can generate chaos. Thus, role consistency—the degree to which individuals' responsibilities are clearly defined, predictable, and aligned with organizational expectations—is essential for translating managerial flexibility into operational effectiveness. As demonstrated by [3], individuals form trust-based

impressions when behavioral patterns exhibit internal consistency. Extending this logic to organizations, employees are more likely to follow leadership directives and align with operational goals when roles are clearly communicated and consistently reinforced. This connection is further supported by [4], who found that consistent orthographic cues enhanced processing efficiency in linguistic tasks—a metaphor for the benefits of clarity and consistency in managerial communication.

Role consistency also functions as a key enabler of organizational alignment, allowing teams to coordinate effectively even as strategies evolve. In experimental settings, [5] illustrated how role-reversal games based on the Golden Rule emphasized mutual expectations and cooperative behavior, reinforcing the role of consistency in maintaining functional interdependence. At the organizational level, such clarity mitigates conflict, prevents task overlap, and ensures smoother information flow. Similarly, [6] emphasized that systematic consistency in educational systems plays a central role in shaping professional competence—an insight that translates directly to managerial development and operational effectiveness in corporate settings.

The pursuit of operational efficiency, then, is inherently tied to how well organizations integrate flexibility with consistency. [7] highlighted the epistemological importance of consistency requirements, stating that they stabilize complex systems by establishing predictable behavior patterns. In corporate settings, consistency in role structures and managerial expectations minimizes ambiguity, promotes accountability, and accelerates decision-making. Supporting this, [8] found that consistent alignment between organizational mission and performance frameworks predicted improved outcomes, suggesting that internal coherence enhances external success.

These insights are further echoed in the neuroscientific domain. [9] showed that consistent response patterns in decision-making are underpinned by prefrontal brain activity, demonstrating how cognitive consistency supports behavioral reliability. This suggests that when managerial decisions align with clearly defined roles, performance becomes not only more predictable but also neurologically efficient. [10] also found that factual consistency in textual communication increased reliability and trustworthiness—an implication for leadership communication in management contexts where consistent messaging enhances execution fidelity.

Moreover, the philosophical and institutional significance of consistency extends beyond organizational behavior. [11] examined the legal concept of consistency as a mechanism for enhancing regulation and compliance, arguing that when rules are interpreted consistently, they produce more stable and efficient outcomes. Applied to organizations, this indicates that role consistency helps minimize interpretive ambiguity, thereby increasing the probability of efficient implementation. [12] similarly explored consistency from an economic pluralism perspective, suggesting that systems with microfoundational coherence perform better under stress—a notion that supports the integration of managerial flexibility within a consistent operational framework.

In cognitive research, the benefits of consistency for performance and memory retention are well-documented. [13] found that participants performed significantly better on memory tasks when given consistent cues, indicating that predictability enhances task performance. In organizational settings, such predictability through role consistency can help reduce the cognitive burden on employees, allowing more focus on execution. Consistency also plays a vital role in marketing and communication strategies. According to [14], brand messages that balance uniqueness with consistency lead to greater advertising effectiveness—a finding that parallels the importance of reinforcing coherent organizational messages through clear managerial roles.

Organizational trust and efficiency also rely heavily on consistent precedents and practices. [15] argued that consistency in international trade arbitration (e.g., MPIA) enhances legitimacy and predictability, which are essential for stakeholder confidence. Similar principles apply to intra-organizational operations, where consistent managerial behavior creates a sense of fairness, stability, and credibility. From a perceptual psychology standpoint, [16] showed that scene consistency enhances recognizability and processing speed, implying that environments perceived as coherent enable more rapid and accurate decision-making—just as consistent organizational environments facilitate smoother operational flows.

Further, the role of social consistency in identity and behavior formation has been widely recognized. [17] demonstrated that youth identity expression was strengthened by social role consistency, leading to higher levels of engagement and self-definition. By analogy, consistent roles in the workplace foster stronger professional identities, greater engagement, and more effective task execution. Organizational forecasting can also benefit from consistent input patterns. [18] showed that public opinion, when shaped through consistent news narratives, becomes a useful proxy for current socio-economic conditions. This supports the notion that consistency provides a basis for reliable prediction—both at the individual and institutional levels.

[19] emphasized the value of consistent terminology in scientific experimentation, particularly in enhancing the reproducibility and credibility of results. In organizations, consistent language around roles and expectations similarly ensures that tasks are executed in alignment with strategic objectives. From a data science perspective, [20] argued that consistency in interpreting nested data partitions is essential for valid conclusions—an insight applicable to managerial decisions that rely on layered or hierarchical inputs. These findings collectively affirm that consistency serves as a structural necessity for the meaningful interpretation and implementation of decisions.

Taken together, the literature provides a compelling rationale for investigating how role consistency mediates the relationship between managerial flexibility and operational efficiency. While managerial flexibility enables organizations to navigate dynamic challenges, it is role consistency that anchors these adaptations in a functional and predictable framework. The absence of either dimension can undermine organizational performance: excessive rigidity may hinder innovation, while unstructured flexibility may produce confusion and inefficiency. By bridging this conceptual gap, role consistency may serve as a stabilizing mechanism that allows flexible managerial decisions to yield measurable improvements in operational performance. This study aims to empirically test this hypothesis in medium and large-scale organizations in Pakistan.

Methods and Materials

Study Design and Participants

This research employed a descriptive correlational design to investigate the relationship between managerial flexibility, role consistency, and operational efficiency. The target population included employees working in medium and large-scale organizations in Pakistan. Using the Morgan and Krejcie (1970) sample size determination table, a total of 419 participants were selected through stratified random sampling to ensure diversity across departments and organizational levels. Inclusion criteria required participants to hold supervisory or managerial roles with at least two years of work experience. Participation was voluntary and confidential, with informed consent obtained prior to data collection.

Data Collection

Operational Efficiency can be measured using the Operational Performance Scale developed by Ward, McCreery, Ritzman, and Sharma (1998). This scale consists of 8 items designed to evaluate key dimensions of efficiency such as cost reduction, productivity improvement, inventory turnover, and cycle time reduction. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater operational efficiency. The scale includes subscales covering cost efficiency, delivery reliability, and utilization of capacity. The measure has demonstrated good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0.80 in several studies, and its construct and convergent validity have been confirmed across diverse organizational and cultural contexts.

Role Consistency can be assessed using the Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale originally developed by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970). While the scale is primarily used to measure role conflict and ambiguity, items from the role ambiguity subscale (consisting of 6 items) are widely accepted as indicators of role consistency when reverse-coded. These items assess the clarity, predictability, and alignment of job roles within an organization. Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very false) to 7 (very true), with higher reverse-coded scores reflecting greater role consistency. The scale has been validated in numerous organizational behavior studies and has demonstrated strong reliability (Cronbach's alpha above 0.80) and satisfactory construct validity.

Managerial Flexibility can be measured using the Managerial Flexibility Scale developed by Combe and Greenley (2004). This scale includes 12 items that assess a manager's capacity to adapt strategies, resource allocations, and leadership approaches in response to environmental changes. The scale comprises two subscales: strategic flexibility and resource flexibility. Items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating higher perceived flexibility. The instrument has been used in strategic management and organizational change research and has shown high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha > 0.85). Its content and construct validity have been supported through factor analysis and empirical testing in multiple industries.

Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 27 and AMOS version 21. Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants. Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the relationships between operational efficiency (dependent variable) and each of the independent variables—managerial flexibility and role consistency. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed in AMOS-21 to test the overall conceptual model, including the mediating role of role consistency. Model fit indices such as CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and χ^2/df were used to assess the goodness of fit. Prior to conducting the main analyses, assumptions including normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were checked and confirmed.

Findings and Results

Of the 419 participants included in the study, 224 (53.5%) were male and 195 (46.5%) were female. The majority of participants were between the ages of 31 and 40 years ($n = 161$, 38.4%), followed by 129 participants (30.8%) aged 21–30 years, 87 participants (20.8%) aged 41–50 years, and 42 participants (10.0%) above 50 years of age. In terms of organizational level, 183 participants (43.7%) held middle-management positions, 146 participants (34.8%) were in senior management, and

90 participants (21.5%) were in lower management or supervisory roles. Regarding educational background, 207 participants (49.4%) held a master’s degree, 158 (37.7%) had a bachelor’s degree, and 54 (12.9%) had a doctoral or professional degree.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Managerial Flexibility	44.73	6.82
Role Consistency	36.15	5.41
Operational Efficiency	30.92	4.87

The results presented in Table 1 show that the participants reported relatively high levels of managerial flexibility (M = 44.73, SD = 6.82), which is consistent with the upper range of the scale used. Role consistency also showed a moderate to high average score (M = 36.15, SD = 5.41), indicating relatively stable role clarity across the sample. Operational efficiency, the dependent variable, had a mean of 30.92 (SD = 4.87), suggesting a generally favorable perception of organizational efficiency among participants.

Prior to conducting Pearson correlation and SEM analyses, the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were evaluated. Skewness values for all variables ranged from -0.61 to 0.38, and kurtosis values ranged from -0.89 to 0.72, indicating acceptable normal distribution. Scatterplots confirmed linear relationships between variables. The variance inflation factor (VIF) values ranged from 1.02 to 1.41, and tolerance values exceeded 0.71 for all predictors, suggesting no issues with multicollinearity. Additionally, Levene’s test results were non-significant (p > .05), and residual plots indicated homoscedasticity. Therefore, the data met the required assumptions for both correlational and SEM analyses.

Table 2

Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Variables (N = 419)

Variables	1	2	3
1. Managerial Flexibility	—		
2. Role Consistency	.47** (p = .002)	—	
3. Operational Efficiency	.54** (p = .001)	.49** (p = .003)	—

As shown in Table 2, managerial flexibility was positively and significantly correlated with operational efficiency (r = .54, p = .001), indicating a strong relationship. Role consistency was also significantly associated with operational efficiency (r = .49, p = .003) and managerial flexibility (r = .47, p = .002). These findings suggest that all three variables are moderately to strongly interrelated and justify further testing through structural modeling.

Table 3

Model Fit Indices for the Structural Equation Model

Fit Index	Value	Threshold Criteria
χ^2	164.87	—
df	84	—
χ^2/df	1.96	< 3.00
GFI	0.94	≥ 0.90
AGFI	0.91	≥ 0.90
CFI	0.96	≥ 0.90
RMSEA	0.046	≤ 0.08
TLI	0.95	≥ 0.90

The fit indices presented in Table 3 indicate an excellent model fit. The Chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 164.87$, $df = 84$) yielded a χ^2/df ratio of 1.96, which is well within the acceptable threshold of less than 3. Goodness-of-fit indices such as GFI (0.94), AGFI (0.91), CFI (0.96), and TLI (0.95) exceeded the recommended minimum of 0.90. The RMSEA value of 0.046 falls within the acceptable range below 0.08, confirming the structural model is a strong representation of the data.

Table 4

Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects Between Variables in the Structural Model

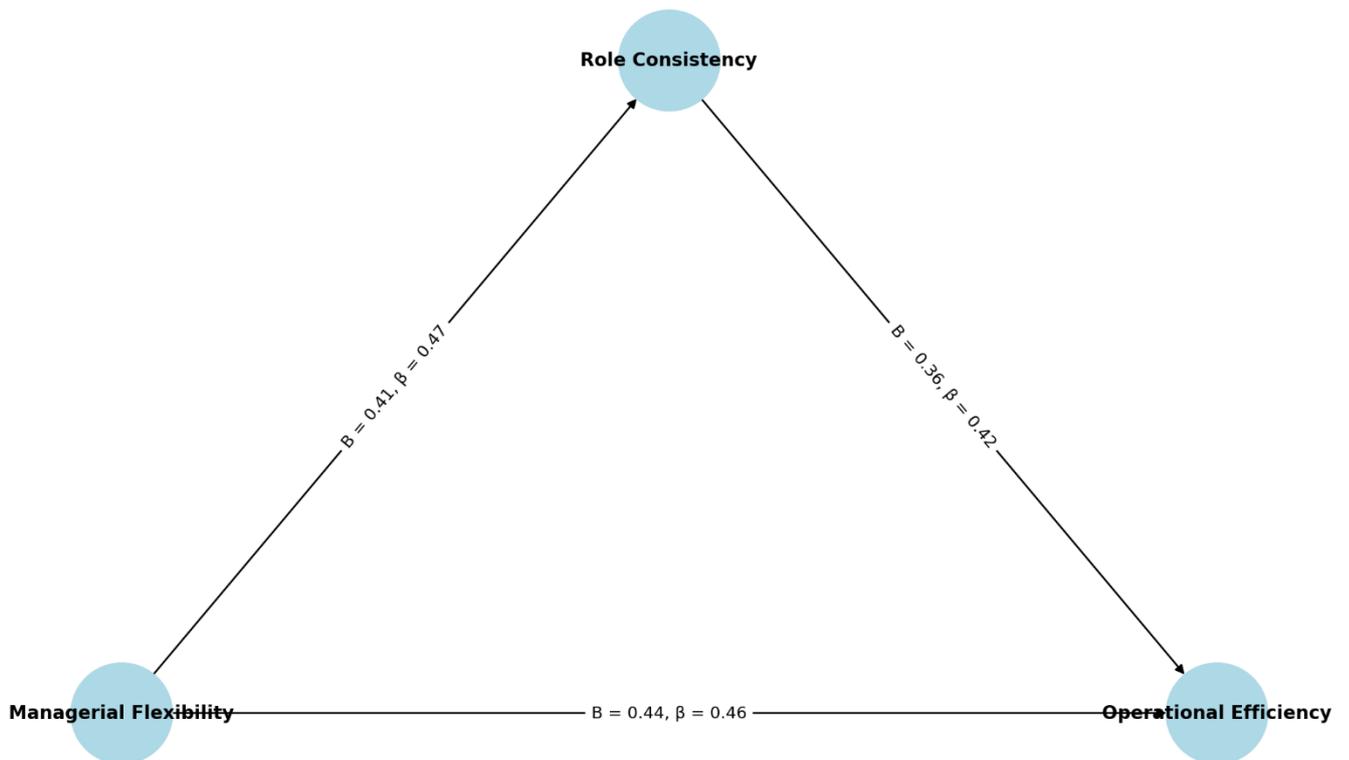
Path	B	S.E.	β	p
Managerial Flexibility → Role Consistency	0.41	0.06	.47	.001
Role Consistency → Operational Efficiency	0.36	0.07	.42	.002
Managerial Flexibility → Operational Efficiency (Direct)	0.44	0.08	.46	.001
Managerial Flexibility → Operational Efficiency (Indirect via Role Consistency)	0.15	0.04	.20	.003
Managerial Flexibility → Operational Efficiency (Total)	0.59	—	.66	.001

The results in Table 4 provide a detailed decomposition of the relationships tested through SEM. The direct path from managerial flexibility to operational efficiency was statistically significant ($B = 0.44$, $\beta = .46$, $p = .001$), confirming a direct influence. Additionally, the path from managerial flexibility to role consistency ($B = 0.41$, $\beta = .47$, $p = .001$) and from role consistency to operational efficiency ($B = 0.36$, $\beta = .42$, $p = .002$) were both significant. The indirect effect of managerial flexibility on operational efficiency through role consistency was also significant ($B = 0.15$, $\beta = .20$, $p = .003$), indicating that role consistency partially mediates the relationship. The total effect of managerial flexibility on operational efficiency ($B = 0.59$, $\beta = .66$, $p = .001$) was substantial, reinforcing the central hypothesis of the study.

Figure 1

Model with Beta Values

Structural Model of Managerial Flexibility, Role Consistency, and Operational Efficiency



Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study support the hypothesis that managerial flexibility positively predicts operational efficiency and that this relationship is significantly mediated by role consistency. The results of Pearson correlation analysis showed that both managerial flexibility and role consistency are positively correlated with operational efficiency. Structural Equation Modeling further confirmed that role consistency acts as a partial mediator, suggesting that flexible managerial strategies are more effective when embedded within clearly defined and consistently applied role structures. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how behavioral and structural dynamics interact to optimize organizational performance in complex environments.

The direct relationship between managerial flexibility and operational efficiency corroborates prior findings that emphasize the importance of responsive leadership in achieving performance outcomes. Managerial flexibility allows decision-makers to adjust processes, adapt resource allocation, and align strategies with environmental volatility. This dynamic capability enhances the speed and accuracy of organizational responses to challenges, which in turn improves overall operational efficiency. As demonstrated by [1], flexible production processes that are paired with technical accuracy can enhance system output and product reliability. This is echoed in [2], who found that consistency in parameter normalization facilitates competitive decision-making, allowing firms to better allocate resources in changing markets.

Nonetheless, the present study demonstrates that flexibility alone does not guarantee efficiency unless it is supported by role consistency. The mediating effect of role consistency implies that when job roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, flexible managerial decisions are more easily executed and less likely to be misunderstood or misaligned with strategic goals. This finding is consistent with the philosophical and legal arguments presented by [11], who emphasized the significance of consistency in regulatory environments to ensure clarity, predictability, and compliance. In an organizational setting, consistent roles ensure that even when flexible decisions are made, they are implemented within a stable framework that supports efficiency rather than undermining it.

Further support comes from cognitive and social psychological studies that emphasize the role of consistency in shaping effective responses. [21] found that consistent sensory cues improve perceptions of agency and ownership—suggesting that predictability fosters more confident and coherent actions. Translated to a management context, clearly defined and consistently applied roles may enhance employees' confidence and clarity when implementing flexible decisions. Similarly, [3] noted that trust in interpersonal impressions increases when behaviors are perceived as consistent, which parallels the importance of consistency in managerial communication and delegation for maintaining trust in leadership.

The role of consistency as a mediator is further affirmed by [8], who showed that consistent alignment between an organization's mission and its internal practices was a significant predictor of performance success. In this study, role consistency served a similar function by ensuring that flexible managerial efforts were aligned with operational realities and employee expectations. The necessity of such alignment is underscored in [20], which demonstrated that consistent interpretation mechanisms improve the reliability of complex systems—a logic that directly applies to organizational processes.

Moreover, this study's findings are supported by neurological and behavioral research indicating the performance-enhancing effect of consistent internal cues. For example, [13] found that consistent prompts in delayed memory tasks significantly improved recall and accuracy, a phenomenon that mirrors how consistent job expectations can enhance

execution and reliability in work settings. This resonates with [14], who found that consistency in advertising messaging improves brand trust and message retention, reinforcing the broader principle that coherence leads to more effective outcomes in both internal and external organizational functions.

Likewise, [15] emphasized the value of consistent legal precedent in dispute resolution, arguing that such predictability reinforces stakeholder confidence and reduces interpretive ambiguity. In the current study, when role consistency is present, employees are better able to interpret and implement managerial decisions, resulting in smoother and more efficient operational flow. [7] similarly argued that consistency requirements provide a robust explanatory foundation for action and reasoning, highlighting the cognitive stability that consistent frameworks offer. These findings collectively reinforce the idea that flexible management strategies yield the best results when coupled with organizational coherence.

Recent developments in natural language processing also underscore the impact of consistency on task effectiveness. [10] demonstrated that factual consistency, measured via semantic role labeling, significantly influences the accuracy and usefulness of generated texts. This insight supports the current study's finding that role consistency enhances operational accuracy by minimizing misinterpretation and ambiguity. The consistency of organizational messaging and role execution, much like consistent semantic structuring in language models, contributes to higher performance outcomes.

Additionally, perceptual and cognitive studies further validate these results. [16] demonstrated that consistent visual scenes are processed more rapidly and accurately, reducing cognitive load. Similarly, employees in consistent work environments can devote more mental energy to task execution rather than resolving uncertainty. [4] also found that orthographic consistency significantly improves linguistic task accuracy, suggesting that consistency in any domain reduces error rates and enhances overall efficiency—a finding directly relevant to role clarity and operational performance in organizations.

The social dimension of consistency also provides explanatory support. [17] found that consistent identity roles in youth social activity correlated with stronger self-expression and behavioral alignment. In organizations, consistent professional identities foster clarity, reduce conflict, and facilitate collaboration. Furthermore, [18] demonstrated that consistent news narratives improved public opinion nowcasting—indicating that coherent information patterns yield better predictive and operational outcomes. This parallels the notion that consistency in managerial expectations and role execution leads to more accurate, timely, and effective organizational performance.

Finally, [19] emphasized the importance of consistent terminology in scientific reproducibility, highlighting how precision and coherence across datasets improve replicability and reliability. The same logic applies to organizational structures: consistent roles and responsibilities create a replicable, scalable foundation for performance. As [12] argued, consistency within pluralistic frameworks—such as modern organizational ecosystems—facilitates integration and cooperation, reinforcing the argument that coherence is not contrary to flexibility, but foundational to its success.

Despite its significant findings, the study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional research design restricts the ability to infer causality between variables. Longitudinal studies would be needed to determine the temporal direction of the observed relationships. Second, the use of self-report measures may introduce bias due to participants' subjective interpretation of items or social desirability effects. Third, the sample was limited to employees from Pakistan, which may affect the generalizability of results to different cultural, industrial, or economic contexts. Fourth, the study did not examine

moderating variables such as organizational size, leadership style, or environmental uncertainty, all of which may influence the strength or direction of the relationships between managerial flexibility, role consistency, and operational efficiency.

Future research should consider using longitudinal methods to better examine how managerial flexibility and role consistency evolve over time and influence operational outcomes in the long run. Researchers could also explore how contextual factors such as industry volatility, technological adoption, and organizational culture moderate these relationships. Expanding the sample across different countries or regions would enhance generalizability and allow for cross-cultural comparisons. Additionally, mixed-methods approaches that combine quantitative analysis with in-depth interviews or case studies may provide richer insights into how role consistency is operationalized in real-world organizations. Future work may also examine how digital transformation and hybrid work environments challenge or enhance the consistency-flexibility dynamic.

Organizations aiming to improve operational efficiency should foster both adaptability and internal coherence. Clear role definitions, structured communication protocols, and consistent performance expectations are essential to ensure that managerial flexibility leads to productive outcomes. Managers should be trained not only in adaptive decision-making but also in reinforcing predictable structures that support staff coordination. Organizational leaders must strike a balance between empowering autonomous action and maintaining a coherent framework that guides that action. By institutionalizing consistency alongside flexibility, firms can create agile yet stable systems capable of sustained high performance.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Written consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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