

Orchestrating recovery: strategic agility amid an endogenous misstep

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Abstract

Purpose – This study extends prevailing conceptualizations of strategic agility by examining its role in managing internally generated organizational errors. It explains how strategic sensitivity, leadership unity and resource fluidity support detection, communication and damage control in the wake of an internally generated failure that escalated into a strategic misstep.

Design/methodology/approach – This study adopts a historical case design (August 2016–September 2017), triangulating more than 150 secondary sources and combining descriptive coding with theory-guided template analysis to reconstruct Samsung’s actions during the Galaxy Note 7 recall.

Findings – A process model is proposed to explain how strategic agility functions as a coordination mechanism over time in response to an internal error. The meta-capabilities were distinctively activated across the recovery process, with their role appearing to depend on temporal and functional alignment.

Practical implications – Managers should treat error recovery not as improvisation but as capability orchestration. Cultivating strategic agility in advance and rehearsing the alignment of its meta-capabilities under pressure can shape whether an error escalates into reputational loss or is more likely to be converted into a recovery trajectory and organizational learning. This capability orchestration also reduces the risk of error amplification, in which errors repeat, accumulate, or escalate through reinforcing feedback loops.

Social implications – Recovery strategies influence how firms are judged as corporate citizens. Stakeholders weigh technical fixes alongside the speed, coherence and transparency of responses.

Originality/value – The study contributes to strategic management and organizational resilience literature by conceptualizing strategic agility as a phase-sensitive capability applicable to endogenous disruptions.

Keywords Strategic agility, Error management, Endogenous disruption, Organizational resilience, Recovery strategy, Capability orchestration

Paper type Research article

1. Introduction

Errors are endemic to organizations due to uncertainty in human behavior, interaction, and decision-making (Lei *et al.*, 2016; Lei and Naveh, 2023; Olson *et al.*, 2024). In management research, errors are defined as “unintended deviations from plans, goals, or adequate feedback processing, as well as incorrect actions” (Frese and Keith, 2015, p. 662). They can arise from cognitive biases, information asymmetry, or systemic interdependencies (Akgün *et al.*, 2022). Once incurred, errors, ranging from tactical oversights to strategic blunders, can damage performance, erode trust, and threaten long-term viability (Dahlin *et al.*, 2018; Zhao *et al.*, 2022). Absent effective recovery capabilities, organizations risk falling into a *zemblanity trap*, where “errors tend to repeat, accumulate, or multiply through a series of decisions or behaviors relying on error-amplifying feedback loops” (Balzano, 2025, p. 1).

Scholars have dedicated significant efforts to investigating their root causes, devising strategies for error prevention, and evaluating the reliability of systems overall (Goodman *et al.*, 2011). A central distinction is between error prevention (efforts aimed at avoiding deviations from intended goals) and error management, which concerns how organizations respond once an error has occurred (Frese and Keith, 2015; Keith and Frese, 2008). The latter



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has recently been structured around a three-phase model (Lei and Naveh, 2023) error detection, referring to the recognition that an error has taken place (Sellen, 1994; Zapf *et al.*, 1992) error communication, involving the internal and external exchange of information; and damage control, encompassing both immediate recovery actions and reflective learning to prevent recurrence (Frese and Keith, 2015).

Recent advances in research on organizational capabilities and strategic agility, including work emphasizing agility's growing relevance under uncertainty (Mueller-Saegebrecht and Walter, 2025) and studies linking agility to learning, resilience, and recovery outcomes (Atanassova *et al.*, 2025), have portrayed organizational responses as good practices or as reactions to exogenous disruptions, rather than as internally differentiated capability deployments. As a result, we know comparatively less about how organizations coordinate internal capabilities across the phases of error management under acute stakeholder pressure. Building on the error-as-process perspective (Lei and Naveh, 2023), this study examines how strategic agility operates as a coordinating mechanism across detection, communication, and damage control phases following an internally generated misstep.

Strategic agility is often framed as the ability to “adapt to changing and uncertain environments” (Tarba *et al.*, 2023, p. 1090), and is commonly theorized in relation to exogenous turbulence. Its function as a response mechanism to internally incurred errors, however, remains underexplored (Balzano, 2025). To address this gap, the study employs an interpretive historical case design, analyzing Samsung's Galaxy Note 7 recall (August 2016–September 2017). This case offers an informative context: a global market leader confronted a reputationally damaging quality failure originating within its own production system that escalated into a strategic misstep. Such contexts heighten the importance of transparency and credibility in shaping stakeholder trust during recovery trajectories (Ripamonti, 2024). Drawing on more than 150 secondary sources, the study combines descriptive coding with theory-guided template analysis (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; King, 2012; Miles and Huberman, 1994) to trace how Samsung orchestrated its response across phases. The Note 7 case illustrates how a high-stakes misstep compressed decision timelines, exposed the firm to reputational risk, and tested its internal coordination under pressure.

The analysis contributes to theory and practice in three ways. First, it extends prior conceptualizations of strategic agility by theorizing it as a phase-sensitive coordination capability enacted through shifting combinations of its meta-capabilities when managing endogenous disruptions. The findings show that strategic sensitivity, leadership unity, and resource fluidity were activated in distinct ways across phases, with effectiveness depending on temporal and functional alignment. Second, it advances capability-based views of error management by showing that recovery depends on the coordinated enactment of multiple meta-capabilities within the firm; the absence of one may amplify the trajectory of failure. Without such alignment, organizations risk sliding into patterns of error amplification (Balzano, 2025). Third, it shows that recovery hinges less on the occurrence of error than on the organization's ability to reconfigure its internal architecture at the right moment under conditions of public scrutiny. From a practical standpoint, this positions error recovery not as improvisation but as capability orchestration, where strategic agility, enacted under pressure, can influence whether errors escalate into legitimacy loss or are more likely to be converted into recovery and organizational learning.

2. Strategic agility as a means to cope with internal errors

Strategic agility refers to the firm's ability to respond to sudden change (Doz and Kosonen, 2010). This involves the capacity to swiftly adapt, pivot, or realign strategic direction and operations in response to emerging challenges and opportunities in the external business environment (Mina and Michelini, 2024). Over the past two decades, strategic agility has gained prominence in strategic management research as a response to the volatility, uncertainty, and ambiguity that characterize contemporary markets. Strategic agility is

recognized as an increasingly urgent organizational capability under conditions of accelerated change and heightened uncertainty (Mueller-Saegebrecht and Walter, 2025). Consistently, scholars have significantly contributed to this discourse by delineating strategic agility into three core meta-capabilities: strategic sensitivity, leadership unity, and resource fluidity (Doz and Kosonen, 2010; Fourné *et al.*, 2014; Tarba *et al.*, 2023; Weber and Tarba, 2014).

Strategic sensitivity refers to a firm's ability to detect weak signals and make sense of environmental changes through heightened situational awareness. It involves both the continuous monitoring of external developments and the cultivation of internal openness to divergent viewpoints (Doz, 2020). Strategic sensitivity enables firms to act early, but more fundamentally, to interpret emerging issues as strategically relevant (Tarba *et al.*, 2023). Leadership unity, by contrast, captures the degree to which top management teams can converge around strategic priorities and enact coherent decisions rapidly. This dimension is particularly salient in high-stakes contexts, where political fragmentation or indecision can paralyze timely action (Morton *et al.*, 2018). Finally, resource fluidity designates a firm's capacity to reallocate financial, human, and operational resources without structural or procedural inertia (Heracleous *et al.*, 2023). It reflects the institutionalized ability to shift assets across silos, units, and priorities. The literature has extensively demonstrated how strategic agility helps firms seize market opportunities, respond to technological disruptions, and maintain competitive relevance in shifting environments (Doz, 2020).

In this respect, strategic agility has often been linked to the broader literature on dynamic capabilities. Prior work conceptualizes dynamic capabilities as the firm's ability to purposefully create, extend, or modify its resource base over time (Teece *et al.*, 1997; Teece, 2007). Within this perspective, dynamic capabilities are often viewed as enabling conditions for the development of strategic agility. While dynamic capabilities describe evolutionary, path-dependent processes of renewal, strategic agility captures their short-cycle expression: rapid detection of change, unified leadership response, and fluid reallocation of resources (Atanassova *et al.*, 2025; Zahoor *et al.*, 2022). This positioning underscores agility as a capability system particularly attuned to situations where compressed timelines and heightened uncertainty necessitate immediate orchestration of managerial attention and organizational resources. However, even recent dynamic capability-based accounts primarily examine such orchestration in response to external turbulence, leaving open how strategic agility operates when uncertainty is generated by internally incurred errors (Atanassova *et al.*, 2025). Table 1 conceptually distinguishes strategic agility from adjacent constructs, specifically resilience, crisis management, and organizational learning.

Yet, how strategic agility unfolds when disruption originates internally remains underdeveloped. Endogenous errors often present distinct challenges that differ substantively from external turbulence. Whereas the latter typically triggers opportunity-seeking or realignment, the former requires containment, accountability, and recovery. The firm must make sense of what went wrong, while managing stakeholder perceptions, coordinating immediate damage control, and initiating reflective learning, all while maintaining legitimacy. These dynamics place particular stress on the temporal and functional coherence of capability deployment. When errors are incurred, strategic agility is exercised not only in anticipation of future uncertainty but also to enable immediate internal readjustment. Drawing from the error-as-process perspective (e.g. Lei and Naveh, 2023), this study proposes that strategic agility can also function as a recovery-oriented mechanism shaped by the demands of the error management process, prompting organizational self-correction.

3. Methods

3.1 Empirical setting and case selection

To investigate how firms mobilize strategic agility when confronted with internally generated errors, this study examines a longitudinal case study of the Samsung Galaxy Note 7. The case

Table 1. Strategic agility and related constructs

Construct	Definitional emphasis	Temporal orientation	Unit of analysis	Distinctive contribution vs. Strategic agility
Organizational Flexibility	Adaptability of structures, processes, and resource configurations to shifting conditions (Volberda, 1996)	Short- to medium-term; adjustments are often incremental or structural	Functional units, structural arrangements, organizational subsystems	Explains looseness of arrangements but lacks integration of sensing, leadership, and resource redeployment across multiple phases of an error process
Resilience	Capacity to withstand shocks, absorb disruption, and return to functioning (Williams <i>et al.</i> , 2017)	Event-triggered; focuses on recovery trajectory after disruption	Whole-organization outcomes and endurance	Focuses on post-event recovery outcomes; does not specify how coordinated capabilities support unfolding responses in real time
Crisis Management	Planned interventions and protocols to prepare for, mitigate, and respond to crises (Bundy <i>et al.</i> , 2017)	Episodic; centered on crisis onset, escalation, and termination	Organizational practices, procedures, and specialized teams	Provides ex-ante planning and ex-post mitigation but not continuous orchestration of interdependent capabilities under reputational pressure
Organizational Learning	Knowledge acquisition, interpretation, and retention for long-term improvement (Argote, 2013)	Retrospective and cumulative; moving from past experience, through present interpretation, toward future application	Individual, group, and organizational levels	Oriented to lessons and prevention; less concerned with immediate orchestration of capabilities during the error itself
Strategic Agility	Ability to integrate strategic sensitivity, leadership unity, and resource fluidity as interdependent meta-capabilities enabling rapid adaptation (Doz and Kosonen, 2010)	Phase-sensitive to evolving external changes; typically short-cycle responsiveness and forward-looking adaptation	Firm-level, enacted through orchestration of meta-capabilities across leadership and organizational layers	This study extends the concept to endogenous errors: unlike other constructs, agility operates as a coordination mechanism, where all three capabilities may be activated across phases of error management, with their relative salience varying with situational demands. Their relative prominence shifts with situational demands, enabling timely detection, communication, and damage control under reputational and time pressure

Source(s): Author's own elaboration

provides high analytical leverage, as a global market leader faced a reputationally damaging quality failure originating within its own production system under conditions of compressed timelines, technological complexity, and reputational exposure.

The observation window spans from August 2016, when initial reports of overheating and fires emerged, through September 2017, when Samsung concluded its second recall and presented the final technical investigation. This timeframe enables longitudinal tracing of error management across its three phases. The case was selected as a revelatory case (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2018) as it exposes how an established multinational enacted internal capabilities to manage a self-inflicted disruption.

During this period, events followed a rapid and highly visible sequence. In August 2016, the device was launched and early failures were reported. By September, Samsung had initiated a global recall, coordinated with telecom operators, and faced regulatory bans. In October, production was halted entirely, followed by a refund and exchange program. In January 2017, Samsung disclosed the results of an extensive technical investigation, supported by external experts, and introduced new multi-layered safety protocols. By March 2017, Samsung’s smartphone shipments showed signs of improvement relative to the immediate post-recall period, and the September 2017 launch of the Galaxy Note 8 was accompanied by messaging that emphasized safety and reliability. This temporal unfolding provides the backbone for analyzing how strategic agility was enacted across the error management phases. Figure 1 summarizes the timeline of events, while Appendix 1 provides a detailed account of the technical causes of the issue.

3.2 Data sources and collection

The inclusion of secondary sources followed explicit relevance and quality criteria. Materials were selected only if they directly documented actions, decisions, or communications related to the Galaxy Note 7 incident within the defined observation window (August 2016–September 2017). Priority was given to contemporaneous sources, including official corporate disclosures, regulatory statements, and reporting from established international media outlets. Evidentiary quality was strengthened through systematic triangulation: factual claims and event sequences were retained only when corroborated across multiple

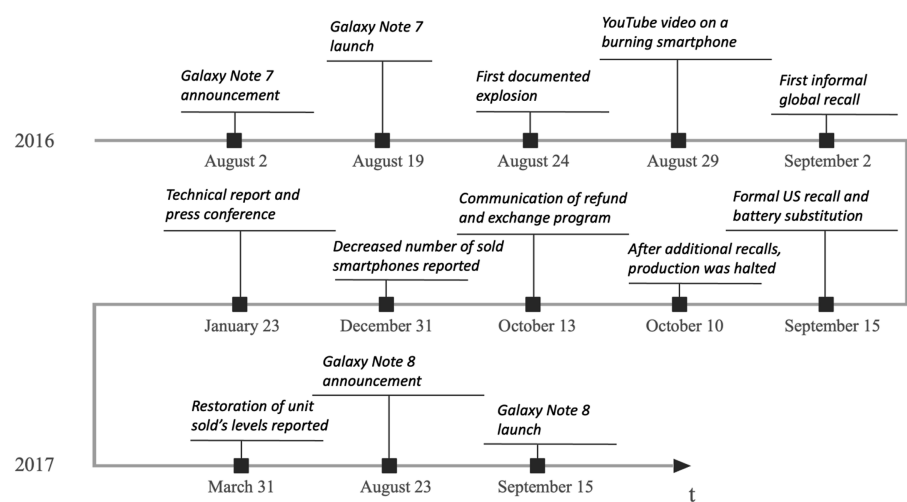


Figure 1. The timeline of events. Source: Author’s own elaboration based on Samsung (2016–2017) and media reports

independent sources, while single-source accounts were used exclusively to capture stakeholder perceptions rather than to establish chronology. Personal blogs, speculative commentary, and sources lacking identifiable authorship or institutional provenance were excluded. This selection logic aligns with established standards for rigor in historical and archival case research, emphasizing credibility, corroboration, and temporal proximity to the events analyzed.

The empirical corpus was accordingly assembled from a wide range of secondary sources, reflecting the great visibility of the Galaxy Note 7 case and the extensive documentation it generated. Corporate reports, investor briefings, and stock-exchange filings provided information on financial exposure and official positioning. Press releases, recall webpages, public statements, and transcripts of press conferences documented how the company addressed multiple audiences in real time. Media coverage from international outlets such as BBC, Reuters, The Verge, Forbes, and DigitalTrends offered contemporaneous reporting and independent interpretation of events, while industry and technical analyses, ranging from market data and device specifications to interviews with battery scientists, shed light on causal explanations and market implications. Social media content, including incident videos uploaded to YouTube, forum discussions, and consumer posts, gave access to dispersed evidence of device failures and the ways in which these were amplified across online communities. Academic publications and practitioner commentaries, including interviews with Samsung executives published in trade outlets, were used to connect the episode to broader debates in strategic management and corporate response.

Table 2 provides a detailed overview of these materials, indicating representative examples and their analytical contribution. In total, more than 150 documents spanning the period from the device’s launch through the second recall and subsequent recovery were reviewed. The heterogeneity of the corpus allowed systematic triangulation, whereby events could be verified

Table 2. Sources of historical evidence

Type of source	Examples of documents and materials	Analytical contribution
Corporate Reports and Disclosures	Samsung business reports; investor briefings; stock-exchange filings during the recall	Anchored firm self-disclosure on the incident, responses, and post-issue safety rhetoric
Official Communications	Press releases and recall pages; “Our Safety Promise”; Seoul press-conference transcript (Jan 23, 2017)	Reconstructed Samsung’s public narrative, timing of admissions, and framing of corrective measures
Media Coverage	BBC, Reuters, The Verge, Time, Forbes, DigitalTrends coverage across Aug 2016–Jan 2017	Provided contemporaneous reporting, external interpretation of risk, and triangulation of corporate statements
Industry and Technical Analyses	Statista market/shipments series; GSM Arena device specifications; published expert interviews with battery scientists (e.g. MIT)	Contextualized sales impact; clarified device architecture; explained battery-fault mechanisms for causal plausibility
Social Media and Online Communities	YouTube incident videos referenced in early coverage; forum threads and consumer posts (e.g. XDA)	Surfaced user-level evidence and sentiment signals that amplified salience of the hazard
Academic Literature	Academic work on error management, error response, and rhetorical history used to inform coding and interpretation	Linked the Samsung episode to established constructs and guided the process view of detection–communication–control
Published Interviews and Practitioner Commentary	Interviews with Samsung executives and external experts as reported by major outlets (e.g. Forbes, The Guardian, Time)	Offered insider perspectives via public sources; treated as secondary materials for triangulation
Source(s): Author’s own elaboration		

across independent accounts. This procedure aimed at reducing the risk of anecdotal reconstruction while strengthening the credibility of the analysis by enabling the convergence of multiple perspectives on the same sequence of events.

3.3 Data analysis

This study relies on a single-case design interpreted through a historical lens, an approach particularly appropriate for revelatory cases where endogenous processes can be traced in depth (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2018). This design enables the reconstruction of sequences of action and meaning unfolding over time and provides analytical leverage on how organizations mobilize and realign error management responses under reputational exposure.

The analysis followed a theory-guided qualitative approach iteratively applied combining template analysis (King, 2012) and theory-guided qualitative coding (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Miles and Huberman, 1994). An initial coding template was developed based on extant theory and structured around (1) the three phases of error management—detection, communication, and damage control (Lei and Naveh, 2023)—and (2) the three meta-capabilities of strategic agility—strategic sensitivity, leadership unity, and resource fluidity (Doz and Kosonen, 2010). This template functioned as a sensitizing analytical structure, guiding the coding process while preserving openness to evidence not readily captured by the *a priori* categories.

In the first stage, the source material was subjected to descriptive and process-oriented coding focused on concrete actions, decisions, and events documented in the sources (e.g. shipment delays for additional testing, successive recall announcements, software updates designed to disable charging, and press conferences providing technical explanations). Codes were compared across sources and over time to establish consistency and identify recurrent patterns. In the second stage, the template was applied and iteratively refined by assigning evidence to phase-specific and capability-specific categories. Evidence that did not fit the initial template, such as delayed technical identification, contradictory signals, or persistent reputational losses in specific markets, was systematically examined separately as non-fitting or negative evidence and used to refine category definitions and specify boundary conditions, thereby reducing the risk of a one-sided narrative. Illustrative examples included uneven reputational recovery across geographic markets and early inconsistencies in recall communication across channels; these instances informed boundary conditions rather than altering the core process model.

In the third stage, the coded evidence was synthesized into a process account using temporal bracketing aligned with the three error management phases. This step enabled the tracing of sequencing and the examination of how the role and salience of the meta-capabilities varied across stages. As detailed in Appendix 2, this analytic sequence documents how archival evidence was coded, how the template was refined over successive iterations, and how the resulting coding supported the process theorization presented in the case analysis.

4. Case analysis

4.1 Error detection

The detection phase of the Galaxy Note 7 case unfolded in the immediate aftermath of its launch on August 19, 2016. At that point, Samsung was positioning the device to reinforce its leadership in the smartphone industry, presenting the Note 7 in New York as a product expected to consolidate its position at the forefront of innovation (Seifert, 2016; Statista, 2023). Within days, however, warning signals emerged. On August 24, the first reported case of an explosion was made public (Samuelson, 2016), and by August 29, a widely circulated video of a burned device amplified consumer concern and media attention (BBC, 2016). These incidents transformed what might have been dismissed as isolated defects into organizationally salient events, demanding recognition and immediate framing by

management. Samsung's response revealed strong strategic sensitivity: the company announced that "shipments of the Galaxy Note 7 are being delayed due to additional tests being conducted for product quality" (Gibbs, 2016), effectively elevating the problem from scattered incidents to an acknowledged anomaly. It further quantified exposure by stating that "there have been 35 cases that have been reported globally" (Samsung, 2016a), thereby reframing uncertainty into measurable consumer risk. This quantification helped bound uncertainty, though the decision to communicate sparingly during the initial window also constrained transparency across markets (Gibbs and Yuh, 2016). At the same time, managers emphasized ongoing inspections with suppliers "to identify possible affected batteries in the market" (Samsung, 2016b), extending the monitoring process beyond consumer reports to the production system itself.

The same phase was marked by visible manifestations of resource fluidity. Financial resources were reprioritized, with explicit reference to redirecting attention and funds toward "producing the highest quality products" and handling the incident with gravity (Samsung, 2016b). In parallel, the redeployment of technical personnel was extraordinary: reports describe how "a team of 700 company engineers conducted internal testing, and independent reviews of potential problems were carried" (Moynihan, 2017). This large-scale shift of human capital toward diagnostic work was less about immediate remediation and more about compressing investigative cycle times. Resource fluidity at this stage thus functioned as a means to preserve diagnostic flexibility under uncertainty: capital and expertise were rechanneled to generate reliable knowledge under uncertain conditions rather than to implement final solutions.

Leadership unity was inferred from the enacted coherence of top-level communication (as observable in public statements) that bound these actions together. Official communications in this early period were intentionally limited in scope. As noted, "the Samsung statement to Reuters is terse [...] Samsung, in a statement to Reuters, did not elaborate on what it is testing the devices for or in which markets the shipments are being delayed" (Reuters, 2016b). This form of disciplined minimalism avoided contradictions across markets while reinforcing the message that safety was paramount, expressed explicitly in statements such as "our number one priority is the safety of our customers" (Samsung, 2016c). This disciplined communicative coherence appeared effective in stabilizing expectations: contemporaneous accounts highlighted that "initially, Samsung was praised for its fast and decisive reaction to the reports" (RedBanyan, 2016). Leadership unity here rested on disciplined coherence rather than full disclosure.

4.2 Error communication

The error communication phase began when Samsung shifted from containing anomalies to disclosing the issue publicly and engaging consumers, regulators, and other stakeholders. On September 2, 2016, the company announced a global recall, described as its "first significant step in reporting the issue" (Wiggers, 2017). This was followed by a formal U.S. recall on September 15, accompanied by a battery substitution program (Statt, 2016). Yet, Statt (2016) pointed to "mixed messaging" and "confusing responses," which complicated stakeholder sensemaking in this phase. Strategic sensitivity shaped how consumer risk was recognized and bounded, while leadership unity governed how this risk was framed and communicated to stakeholders. The escalation was reinforced by regulatory and channel interventions: the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission formally supported the recall, while major carriers such as AT&T and T-Mobile suspended sales and exchanges of the Note 7, amplifying rather than substituting the firm's own coordination efforts. These external measures magnified the credibility of Samsung's own announcements and illustrated how error communication extended beyond the firm to involve institutional actors. During a press conference in Seoul, DJ Koh, President of Mobile Communications Business, declared, "By putting our top priority on customer safety, we've decided to halt

sales (of Galaxy Note 7) and offer new replacement handsets to all customers” (Petrov, 2016). This explicit prioritization of safety communicated acute awareness of stakeholder concerns while positioning the company as responsive and decisive. The ambition of the recall was also communicated clearly. As reported at the time, “Samsung aggressively told the media its goal was a 100% recall. Less than three months later, the company has reached a 96% return rate globally” (Lopez, 2017; McCurry, 2017; Tilley, 2017). The coupling of a bold target with measurable progress signaled strategic sensitivity to consumer trust and market expectations.

Resource fluidity underpinned the credibility of these communicative efforts. Samsung pursued direct outreach to consumers, with “the company [sending] text messages and emails to communicate the recall” (Lopez, 2017). This mode of engagement was complemented by operational redeployment. “Teams of Samsung employees were sent to airports to collect the phones” (Lopez, 2017) after the U.S. Department of Transportation banned the Note 7 from flights, allowing the company to turn communication into direct action and consumer support. At the same time, a technological intervention reinforced both safety and messaging: “Samsung also improved the volume and speed of returned units by working with telecom carriers to issue a software update that would disable the Galaxy Note 7’s charging abilities” (Lopez, 2017). This software modification served a dual function. It materially contained risks by making the device inoperable, while simultaneously conveying to consumers the seriousness of the hazard. Resource fluidity in this phase thus meant reallocating employees and logistical capacity to the recall, as well as using technical expertise to reinforce communicative commitments. Still, this measure accelerated returns, but some observers read it as coercive rather than trust-restoring, pointing to a legitimacy cost of aggressive containment (Lopez, 2017).

Leadership unity ensured that these diverse interventions were aligned under a coherent narrative. Koh’s announcement in Seoul was mirrored in the United States by Tim Baxter, President and COO of Samsung Electronics America, who stated in a video apology: “We did not meet the standards of excellence that you expect and deserve. For that, we apologize, especially to those of you who were personally impacted by this” (King, 2016). This simultaneous visibility of senior executives across geographies signaled that communication was not fragmented but globally orchestrated. Their statements reflected coordinated enactment of corporate responsibility, combining expressions of empathy with decisive recall measures. The consistency of messaging was further reinforced by Samsung’s framing of its customer relationship. In its recall communication, the firm stated, “Our number one priority is the safety of our customers. . . . We sincerely thank our customers for their understanding and patience” (Samsung, 2016c). By repeating safety and gratitude as key themes, leadership avoided contradictory signals and sustained a unified stance that placed consumer well-being at the center of the corporate narrative.

4.3 Damage control

The damage control phase extended from October 2016 into 2017, marking the period when Samsung moved beyond immediate recall execution to mitigate long-term reputational damage, institutionalize reforms, and restore consumer trust. The transition into this phase was punctuated on October 10, when Samsung “officially recognized the error, announcing a halt in sales and a voluntary recall of the units sold” (BBC, 2016). This announcement formalized the company’s full withdrawal from the Note 7, reinforced by a filing to the Seoul stock exchange stating, “[we] have decided to halt production and sales of the Galaxy Note 7 in order to consider our consumers’ safety first and foremost” (Reuters, 2016a). These decisive acts marked a shift from reactive communication toward a structured program of recovery. This shift was reinforced by the launch of the U.S. Note 7 Refund and Exchange Program on October 13, which offered affected customers both refunds and exchanges. Even so, getting devices out of circulation proved nontrivial, “getting the volatile phone out of consumers’

hands remains a challenge” (Moynihan, 2016). By institutionalizing consumer compensation alongside product withdrawal, Samsung signaled that its approach to damage control extended beyond recall execution to restoring fairness and consumer confidence. They also provided the foundation for a broader effort in which strategic sensitivity, resource fluidity, and leadership unity were all reconfigured for long-term resilience rather than short-term containment.

However, the impact of this unexpected issue was reflected in a recorded decrease in smartphone quarterly sales by December 31, as compared with the previous quarter of 2016 (Statista, 2024). In their business report of December 31, 2016, Samsung wrote: “based on the lessons we learned from the Galaxy Note 7 quality issue, we will continue to ensure that consumer safety is our highest priority while pursuing innovation. To prevent a similar incident from occurring again, we have implemented multi-layer safety measures and a thorough safety-check process, and formed an organization devoted to safety verification. We will take this experience as a valuable lesson and work hard to enhance consumer trust” (Samsung Business Report, 2016). Yet, it is worth acknowledging market recovery was uneven across geographies (e.g. “Samsung’s reputation has suffered particularly in China”; Garside, 2016), and reputational repair did not proceed uniformly despite the institutionalization of new safety routines.

Strategic sensitivity in this stage involved demonstrating both external validation and internal institutionalization of safety reforms. A central element was the creation of the “Battery Advisory Group of external advisers, academic and research experts to ensure it maintains a clear and objective perspective on battery safety and innovation” (Samsung, 2017b). By incorporating external experts, Samsung communicated that its diagnosis and solutions were not merely internal claims but aligned with independent scrutiny. This outward-looking posture was reinforced through the introduction of the “8-Point Battery Safety Check,” (see Figure 2) described by the firm as involving “extreme testing, inside and out, followed by careful inspection by X-ray and the human eye to ensure highest quality” (Samsung, 2017d).

The protocol included a sequence of rigorous procedures: durability testing under extreme conditions, visual inspections, non-invasive X-ray scans, battery disassembly, Total Volatile Organic Compound (TVOC) checks for leakage, Delta Open Circuit Voltage (Δ OCV) monitoring, repeated charge–discharge cycles, and accelerated usage simulations (Samsung, 2017d). These measures were complemented by Samsung’s announcement that its enhanced multi-layer safety protocol would apply across “every element of the company’s devices including the overall design and materials used, device hardware strength and capabilities, and

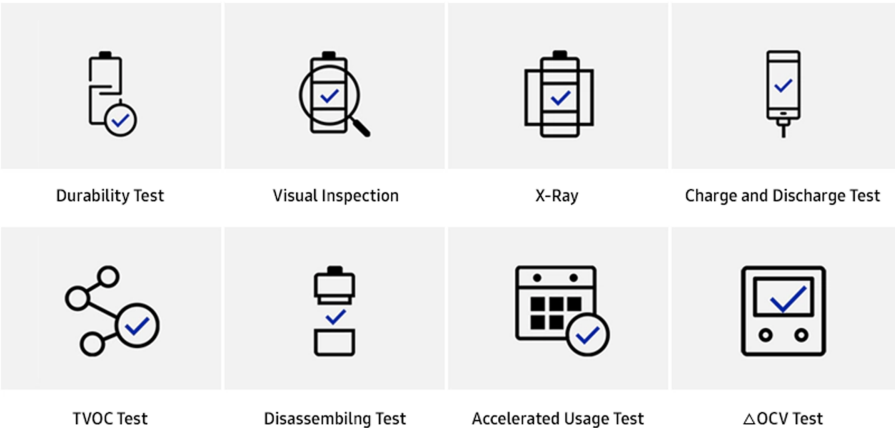


Figure 2. Samsung’s 8-point battery safety check. Source: Samsung (2017d)

improved software algorithms for safer battery charging temperature, current and duration” (Samsung, 2017e). Beyond process changes, Samsung also engaged in reputational reframing, investing in campaigns that presented the company’s renewed safety emphasis. As reported, it “began a massive marketing campaign to re-establish itself as the number one mobile brand in the world following the recall ... that all started with a TV ad ... explaining Samsung is improving the manufacturing process since the Note7 issues” (Fenech, 2017). In this way, strategic sensitivity in damage control was expressed not through rapid anomaly recognition, as in earlier phases, but through embedding safety routines, validating them externally, and anchoring the corporate narrative around recovery and renewed commitment.

Resource fluidity underpinned this transition by mobilizing both technical and financial assets on an unprecedented scale. Reports noted that “Samsung ... 700 researchers tested 200,000 phones” (Lopez, 2017), highlighting how human capital was redeployed from commercial activities to long-term technical diagnosis. This massive redeployment culminated in January 2017, when the firm held a press conference in Seoul to present the results of its investigation alongside executives from UL, Exponent, and TÜV Rheinland (Lopez, 2017). In parallel, Samsung reinforced transparency through the launch of its “Our safety promise” webpage, which included sections titled “What happened,” “Our investigation,” and “Why it won’t happen again” (Samsung, 2017c). This online communication codified the leadership’s public stance, framing the company’s lessons learned and aligning internal reforms with an explicit pledge of accountability. At the same time, technological interventions supported risk containment beyond recall execution. One example was a software update that disabled charging, reducing the likelihood that devices in circulation would continue to pose risks (Lopez, 2017). Financially, Samsung committed to future-proofing its operations, with Samsung SDI announcing that it had “invested about 150 billion won (\$129 million) in safety and that its batteries will probably be among the safest in the industry after the additional steps taken” (Bloomberg, 2017). Thus, resource fluidity in damage control meant redirecting engineers, funds, and technological capacities for both immediate containment and to build enduring organizational capabilities for risk prevention and quality assurance.

Leadership unity was publicly sustained throughout the damage control phase through transparency, accountability, and a forward-looking orientation. Senior executives consistently enacted corporate responsibility in visible forums. Tim Baxter’s earlier apology was followed by further statements that reinforced the theme of transparency, while DJ Koh played a central role in announcing the results of the internal and external investigations. Samsung articulated its recovery narrative in explicitly forward-oriented terms, declaring: “Today, more than ever, we are committed to earning the trust of our customers through innovation that redefines what is possible in safety” (Samsung, 2017b). This theme of renewal was also tied directly to the launch of new flagship products, with executives asserting that “the Galaxy S8 is our testament to regaining your trust by redefining what’s possible in safety” (Samsung, 2017f). Leadership aligned in explaining what went wrong and also around using the delicate issue as a pivot to articulate a forward-looking vision, with consistent messaging anchored in responsibility and renewal that prevented fragmentation and reassured stakeholders. These measures coincided with improvements in some market indicators. By March 2017, Samsung’s smartphone shipments were reported to exceed pre-issue levels (Statista, 2024), suggesting a rebound in unit volumes relative to the recall period.

All in all, the damage control phase reflected a reconfiguration of Samsung’s capabilities. This alignment was rendered visible in symbolic commitments (e.g. the *Our safety promise* webpage; Samsung, 2017c). Separately, shipment data suggest that unit volumes surpassed pre-issue levels by March 2017 (Statista, 2024). The launch of the Galaxy Note 8 can be read as a later milestone in this trajectory, and was framed as a strategic realignment in which safety and quality were positioned as foundations for future innovation (Farooqui, 2017).

5. Toward a process model

The Note 7 case shows how strategic agility can serve as a key capability for internal error management. Across the three phases, the firm's actions reveal that the three meta-capabilities underpinning strategic agility were sequentially redeployed as the firm moved from a technical malfunction toward a structured recovery process (see Table 3). Early reports of device malfunction, initially documented as scattered incidents, were treated by Samsung as measurable consumer risk, stabilizing expectations and reducing the risk of drift, helping to bound uncertainty and provide a stable interpretive frame for stakeholders. The capacity to reallocate engineers, funds, and monitoring efforts toward diagnosis is consistent with resource fluidity functioning not only as a mechanism of responsiveness but as a means of compressing investigative cycle times under uncertainty. Leadership unity, expressed through disciplined coherence rather than disclosure, anchored this first phase by imposing a single, safety-centered frame across geographies. While strategic agility is cultivated prior to disruption, its effectiveness during error recovery depends on how its meta-capabilities are recalibrated and recombined under unfolding conditions.

Once error recognition became unavoidable, strategic sensitivity pivoted toward managing reputational exposure. By linking consumer risk directly to safety imperatives, Samsung's safety framing helped justify drastic measures such as recalls and software-based device disablement. Resource fluidity supported this escalation by converting communication into operational delivery—text messages, employee redeployment to airports, and technical updates that materialized the firm's communicative stance. Leadership unity synchronized apologies, executive visibility, and coordinated messaging, ensuring that communication reinforced rather than diluted credibility.

Table 3. Error management responses across phases of the Note 7 case

	<i>Error detection (August 2016)</i>	<i>Error communication (September 2016)</i>	<i>Damage control (October 2016–September 2017)</i>
Strategic Sensitivity	– Recognition of product safety anomalies – Attention to consumer risk perceptions – Continuous scanning and internal monitoring	– Interpreting and prioritizing evolving consumer risk signals	– External expert validation of safety practices – Institutionalization of risk monitoring
Resource Fluidity	– Financial reallocation to risk management – Human redeployment	– Operational redeployment for recall execution	– Technological interventions for risk containment – Strategic reframing of corporate reputation – Embedding safety routines in operations – Long-term capacity building for risk prevention
Leadership Unity	– Delivery of a few initial, clear messages to stakeholders	– Leadership coordination across units – Leadership enactment of corporate responsibility	– Transparent executive engagement in long-term damage control – Leadership focus on renewal and forward strategy

Note(s): While all three meta-capabilities are observable across phases, their functional salience and coordination role vary with phase-specific demands

Source(s): Author's own elaboration

Damage control marked the point at which strategic agility shifted from tactical containment to institutional embedding. Strategic sensitivity extended beyond consumers to regulators and external experts, converting scrutiny into validation of new routines such as the 8-Point Battery Safety Check. Resource fluidity was channeled into long-term investments in safety technologies, R&D, and the redesign of quality assurance protocols, reallocating capacity from short-term remediation to durable safeguards. Leadership unity amplified this institutional turn through transparency and renewal, codifying lessons in the “Our safety promise” and aligning recovery narratives with flagship launches that explicitly tied safety to future innovation.

In this sense, the Note 7 case illustrates a process model in which the three dimensions of strategic agility are recursively recombined, sometimes imperfectly, with uneven salience across phases, to manage error trajectories: sensitivity reframes anomalies as actionable frames, fluidity mobilizes resources to operationalize those frames, and unity provides the coherence required to sustain credibility. The internal redeployment of these capabilities appears to have supported Samsung’s efforts to contain a hazardous malfunction and to reconstitute organizational routines around a safety-first orientation.

6. Discussion

6.1 Theoretical contributions

Building on an historical analysis of the Samsung Galaxy Note 7 case, this study advances understanding of strategic agility by theorizing its role as a recovery-enabling capability. In doing so, it offers three main theoretical contributions. First, it advances a capability-based understanding of how organizations coordinate the error management phases (Lei and Naveh, 2023) when the stakes for organizational legitimacy are high. Building on the error-as-process perspective (Frese and Keith, 2015; Goodman *et al.*, 2011; Lei and Naveh, 2023), this study advances error-process models by theorizing strategic agility as a temporally phase-sensitive coordination capability that enables alignment across error management phases under acute temporal, reputational, and decision-making pressure. In this view, strategic agility functions as a structuring device that aligns error response activities over time and across stakeholder interfaces. In framing error management as a contingent reconfiguration of agility’s meta-capabilities, this study shifts the theoretical lens from *what firms do when errors occur* (Frese and Keith, 2015; Lei and Naveh, 2023) to *how firms recalibrate their internal capability system under temporal constraints*. In this perspective, strategic agility is phase-sensitive, as its complementary capabilities are simultaneously necessary and may be unevenly required across the process, depending on the evolving demands of the situation. In particular, the findings show that the orchestration of error management is greatly driven by how strategic agility is enacted when a corporation faces public scrutiny, suggesting that agility is not only relevant for anticipating disruption but also for navigating a critical period once it occurs (Bundy *et al.*, 2017; Pearson and Clair, 1998). This responds to recent calls to move beyond abstract accounts of agility under uncertainty by showing how strategic agility is enacted as an internal coordination mechanism during breakdowns, rather than as a generic set of best practices (Atanassova *et al.*, 2025; Mueller-Saegebrecht and Walter, 2025).

Second, given the ubiquity of errors, the findings underscore the strategic necessity of cultivating capabilities that are functional to eventual effective error management (Geng *et al.*, 2022). Firms that lack strategic sensitivity may delay recognition or misread the scope of the problem; those lacking leadership unity may struggle to convey a coherent position to stakeholders; and those without resource fluidity may fail to convert recognition into timely action. This integration suggests that error management effectiveness hinges, beyond resilience understood as a post-disruption recovery trajectory in which organizations eventually restore stability (DesJardine *et al.*, 2019; Williams *et al.*, 2017), on the real-time orchestration of agility’s meta-capabilities during the disruption itself (Atanassova *et al.*, 2025). By embedding agility into the canonical error phases, the study introduces a process

model in which errors become occasions for capability recombination, not merely for recovery. The study thereby adds to the recovery literature by identifying a means to make recovery a viable path: the capacity to mobilize, align, and recalibrate key organizational levers in the face of breakdown. In this way, the paper enriches ongoing debates in both strategic management and organizational resilience (DesJardine *et al.*, 2019; Wang *et al.*, 2009; Williams *et al.*, 2017), offering a capability-based process explanation for how firms can endure crises and reconstitute legitimacy and function through internally generated disruption.

Third, the findings extend prior conceptualizations of strategic agility. Much of the literature has conceptualized agility primarily as anticipatory, a capacity to sense shifts in the external environment and act before rivals (e.g. Doz and Kosonen, 2010; Tarba *et al.*, 2023). The present analysis shows that agility also has a corrective dimension: it enables organizations to recalibrate their internal systems once a trajectory has already been disrupted by errors. This dual role positions agility as both opportunity-seeking and failure-governing, extending its domain from market dynamism to the governance of organizational breakdowns. As a result, the study attempts to broaden the scope of the strategic agility concept from a forward-looking orientation to a more encompassing process capability that spans anticipation, adaptation, and correction of endogenous issues. Documenting this corrective role, the study complements dominant anticipatory views of agility (Doz and Kosonen, 2010; Tarba *et al.*, 2023) and responds to recent conceptual work calling for greater attention to agility's role once strategic trajectories have already been disrupted (Mueller-Saegebrecht and Walter, 2025).

6.2 Managerial implications

This study offers three key actionable implications for managers seeking to strengthen their organization's capacity to manage endogenous errors, grounded in the phase-sensitive enactment of strategic agility identified in the analysis. First, when an error occurs, what differentiates recovery from escalation is not just whether an organization reacts, but how it leverages its internal architecture of capabilities (Lei and Naveh, 2023). Managers should move beyond viewing error response as an ad hoc intervention and instead recognize it as a coordination problem that requires pre-existing, embedded capabilities (Doz and Kosonen, 2010; Tarba *et al.*, 2023). In particular, they should ensure that the three meta-capabilities underpinning strategic agility are all present within the organization. Periodic internal monitoring should assess whether these capabilities are unevenly distributed or institutionally underdeveloped. For example, organizations might excel in resource reallocation but lack early detection processes, leaving them vulnerable to delayed or misdirected action. Addressing such imbalances in advance increases the chances of a coherent and timely recovery when an error surfaces (Balzano, 2025).

Second, managers should recognize that recovery unfolds through sequential, yet overlapping phases, bearing in mind that each phase requires tailored actions. For example, strategic sensitivity must be operationalized early to enable rapid signal recognition and avoid interpretive paralysis. Communication requires not just transparency but internal narrative coherence, which can only emerge from leadership unity. During damage control, resource fluidity becomes key to fund technical fixes and to visibly demonstrate organizational accountability. Each phase, therefore, calls for targeted deployment of existing capabilities. Critically, these capabilities should not be deployed in isolation; their efficacy depends on the extent to which the others can be equally leveraged (Doz and Kosonen, 2008) but also on the temporal and contextual precision with which they are activated. Managers should prepare internally for this orchestration by stress-testing how their existing teams, routines, and decision structures perform under pressure. The ability to recalibrate and recombine these capabilities across phases often distinguishes effective recovery from reputational free fall. This phased deployment logic mirrors the process model advanced in this study and extends

recent prescriptions on agility by specifying when and how each meta-capability should be activated during an unfolding error (Mueller-Saegebrecht and Walter, 2025).

Third, despite continuous efforts to improve systems and reduce risk, some errors will remain difficult to foresee or prevent entirely, especially when they stem from deeply embedded organizational assumptions or fast-moving decisions under uncertainty. Managers should therefore adopt a dual stance: pursuing error prevention, while simultaneously building recovery preparedness. This means investing in systemic robustness, training leadership teams to act with speed and cohesion under unexpected necessity, and designing resource allocation mechanisms that can absorb and redirect capital or personnel without delay. Proactive cultivation of these conditions also reduces the risk of error amplification (Balzano, 2025). Thus, recovery preparedness reflects strategic agility's corrective function, complementing its more established anticipatory role in dynamic capability research (Atanassova et al., 2025).

6.3 Social implications

Viewing error management through the lens of strategic agility reveals that recovery carries consequences extending beyond organizational continuity. The Note 7 case illustrates how recovery transforms companies into civic participants: their legitimacy is assessed not only by their capacity to innovate but also by how they acknowledge, communicate, and correct their failures. As a result, recovery can redefine corporate citizenship, positioning firms as visible stewards of public safety in the eyes of stakeholders as well as producers of private value.

Once errors enter public view, legitimacy depends less on publicly targeting flawless competences and more on building the capacity to disclose risks and institutionalize safeguards against recurrence. In contemporary contexts, disclosure has become a condition of trust rather than a reputational liability (Bundy et al., 2017; Ripamonti, 2024). Yet transparency alone rarely suffices. It acquires force when performed through leadership communication. In this perspective, executive apologies, delivered under the scrutiny of global audiences, can be political acts that stage responsibility and signal unity. They can anchor interpretations of crises, shaping whether organizations are seen as capable of shouldering accountability or as retreating into denial (Bundy et al., 2017).

Resilience can be viewed as relational, as the capacity to sustain credibility across interdependent stakeholders. Safety protocols, risk monitoring, and resource reallocation operate as public accountability devices once rendered visible, their credibility resting on social legibility rather than technical detail (Power, 2007). They reassure audiences that the organization has institutionalized both the will and the means to prevent repetition.

At this boundary, the orchestration of capabilities can acquire quasi-regulatory significance (Haufler, 2013). When firms can align each error management phase with coherence and speed, their legitimacy may increasingly rest on the idea that they can govern risks as effectively as regulators, shaping societal expectations of corporate responsibility in sectors where regulation often lags. The temporal sequencing of responses reinforces this effect. Errors can be serious in their consequences, yet it is the speed, coherence, and credibility of the reaction that determines whether trust can be preserved or whether it unravels. A firm that detects swiftly, communicates clearly, and implements credible recovery demonstrates responsibility, while one that hesitates or fragments in its response risks amplifying damage and eroding its social license to operate.

Relatedly, public debate and the social circulation of corporate errors can stigmatize organizations for their missteps, amplifying negative effects even when effective recovery follows (Devers et al., 2009; Hudson, 2008). Yet focusing solely on the error obscures the more meaningful question of how firms respond. The Note 7 case suggests that legitimacy judgments should shift from the occurrence of failure to the transparency, coherence, and learning enacted during recovery (Piazza and Perretti, 2015; Vergne, 2012). For stakeholders, this entails resisting stigmatization and instead assessing whether errors remain isolated or indicate a pattern. Such an orientation may encourage firms to treat disclosure and corrective

6.4 Limitations and future research avenues

While offering original implications for both theory and practice, this study presents several characteristics that define its boundary conditions. Firstly, it examines a single event with unique features, which restricts the extent to which findings can be generalized beyond the case. The insights should therefore be read as analytically transferable rather than broadly representative. Secondly, the analysis provides a historical reconstruction of the Samsung Galaxy Note 7 case without systematic attention to other major players or competitors that may have influenced Samsung's strategic decisions. Thirdly, although Samsung operated in multiple countries during the period under examination, the study adopts a global perspective that overlooks national differences—most notably the substantial losses in China. This choice offers a holistic overview of the firm's error management strategy but reduces the granularity of local dynamics. Future research could focus on these variations and on how different institutional and market contexts shape error responses.

Moreover, the study is limited by its reliance on secondary data. Although triangulation across multiple sources mitigated bias, the analysis does not access confidential decision-making processes, internal deliberations, or proprietary materials, which constrains insight into managerial intent and behind-the-scenes capability orchestration. The retrospective design also introduces an element of hindsight: while contemporaneous documents were used, the reconstruction of sequential capability deployment inevitably simplifies the uncertainties of real-time decision-making. In addition, the interpretive coding process reflects the researchers' analytical lens; different scholars might emphasize alternative dimensions or evaluate Samsung's actions differently.

Finally, the findings are bounded by the characteristics of the case. Samsung is a large multinational in the technology sector, operating with high visibility and substantial resources. These features may not be shared by small and medium-sized firms or by organizations in less visible industries, where resource constraints and reduced public scrutiny could produce different recovery dynamics. Critically, future studies could test the transferability of the proposed framework by applying it to organizations with different resource endowments, visibility profiles, and industry settings.

Departing from these limitations, future studies can explore the dynamics of error management considering the competitive landscape in which firms are embedded across different cultural and regulatory environments, particularly focusing on how multinational corporations adapt their strategies to local markets while maintaining a coherent global response. Further investigation could also delve into the role of digital media and communication technologies in shaping public perception and corporate reputation in spite of an incurred error.

Furthermore, future research could dig deeper into the long-term implications of crisis management on innovation and product development processes within firms. Investigating how firms integrate lessons learned from incurred errors into their operational and strategic frameworks could provide additional insights on the resilience and adaptability of organizations in the face of adversity.

7. Conclusion

This study has examined how organizations mobilize strategic capabilities in the face of an incurred error, highlighting how recovery unfolds as a coordinated effort through structured processes. Through the case of the Galaxy Note 7, it shows that managing error under high public scrutiny demands more than crisis communication or technical fixes alone. What distinguishes effective recovery is the organization's capacity to enact a temporally aligned

sequence of detection, communication, and damage control, each underpinned by distinct applications of interdependent organizational capabilities. The proposed process model shows that organizations manage errors by orchestrating internal levers that condition the quality of their response. The capabilities underpinning strategic agility do not eliminate error but shape its trajectory. By treating error as a process rather than a one-time event, and recovery as orchestration rather than an improvised reaction, this study proposes a recalibration in how organizations and scholars could think about managing something they cannot entirely avoid.

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Appendix 1

Description of the technical issue of the Galaxy Note 7

The Galaxy Note 7 was a device that combined sophisticated design with advanced technology. The chassis, crafted from metal and glass, was engineered for durability and aesthetics, featuring an IP68 rating for water resistance (GSM Arena, 2023). At its core, the Note 7 housed an octa-core Exynos 8890 system-on-chip for most markets, while specific regions such as China, Japan, the United States, and Canada received models with the quad-core Qualcomm Snapdragon 820, to ensure compatibility with different network standards.

The Galaxy Note 7 was distinguished by several hardware innovations, including a USB Type-C port, marking Samsung's first adoption of this symmetrical connector. The device boasted a 5.7-inch 1440p Super AMOLED display with a sleek edge design and featured the signature S Pen stylus, enhanced for greater precision with 4,096 levels of pressure sensitivity and water resistance. Security features were also advanced, introducing an iris recognition system to complement the existing fingerprint reader.

Samsung equipped the Galaxy Note 7 with a suite of accessories such as the S-View Standing Cover and a water-resistant battery case, catering to a broad range of user preferences. The software experience was powered by Android 6.0.1 Marshmallow, with an updated version of the Samsung TouchWiz interface, offering features like the always-on display, enhanced S Pen functionality, and the consolidated Samsung Notes app.

The Galaxy Note 7 was equipped with a lithium-ion battery, designed to support the device's substantial features without frequent recharges. The battery's high capacity, voltage optimization, and compatibility with fast and wireless charging technologies were essential to meet the smartphone's performance demands. However, the design integration, which allowed for a slim profile and aesthetic appeal, overshadowed critical safety considerations. In an interview with Donald R. Sadoway, the John F. Elliott Professor of Materials Chemistry at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, it is pointed out that the technical issue with the Galaxy Note 7 stems primarily from its lithium-ion battery (Fitzpatrick, 2016).

The problem with the Galaxy Note 7's battery appears to be related to the battery's internal structure and the manufacturing process. Lithium-ion batteries consist of two electrodes separated by an electrolyte. The electrolyte in these batteries is an organic liquid, which is volatile and flammable, presenting a risk of combustion. During the manufacturing process, tiny metal particles can sometimes end up in the electrolyte. Under certain conditions, these metal fragments can align and form a conductive path between electrodes, leading to a short circuit. This can cause excessive heat generation, potentially resulting in the electrolyte bloating and the battery exploding. Another critical factor is the possibility of the battery going into thermal runaway, especially during charging. This occurs when a side reaction during charging leads to excessive heat generation, potentially causing the battery to catch fire or explode. Thermal runaway can be particularly hazardous if it reaches a point where the metal oxide in the negative electrode starts releasing oxygen, thereby fueling the fire internally and turning the battery into a bomb-like scenario (Fitzpatrick, 2016). Indeed, as Samsung clarified (Samsung, 2017a), the Galaxy Note 7 recall was primarily due to technical issues with the batteries from two suppliers, SDI and ATL. The SDI batteries had internal short circuits, with some exhibiting damaged or deformed top right corners. Additionally, some batteries had negative electrodes that were excessively long, as depicted in Figure A1.

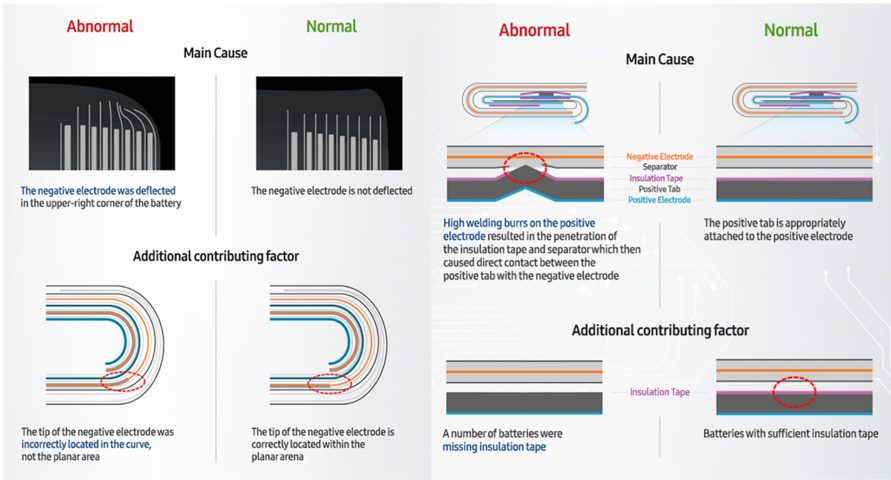


Figure A1. Samsung’s report of the technical issue. Source: [Samsung \(2017a\)](#)

On the other hand, the ATL batteries suffered from missing insulation tapes and damage caused by protruding welds. These flaws in both types of batteries led to short-circuiting, overheating, and in some cases, explosions. The problem was further exacerbated during the charging process, which could induce thermal runaway—a condition where the battery generates heat faster than it can dissipate, leading to a fire or explosion.

Appendix 2

Table A1. Coding template and evidence-to-template mapping (audit trail)

Evidence excerpts	Descriptive code	Template mapping	Process inference
“Shipments of the Galaxy Note 7 are being delayed due to additional tests being conducted for product quality” (Gibbs, 2016)	Decision to delay shipments for quality tests	<i>Strategic sensitivity</i> <i>× Error detection</i>	Recognition of product safety anomalies
“In response to recently reported cases of the new Galaxy Note7, we [noted that] there have been 35 cases that have been reported globally” (Samsung, 2016a)	Immediate acknowledgement	<i>Strategic sensitivity</i> <i>× Error detection</i>	Attention to consumer risk perceptions
Samsung said it was “currently conducting a thorough inspection with our suppliers to identify possible affected batteries in the market” (Samsung, 2016b)	Internal awareness of incidents	<i>Strategic sensitivity</i> <i>× Error detection</i>	Continuous scanning and internal monitoring

(continued)

Table A1. Continued

Evidence excerpts	Descriptive code	Template mapping	Process inference
Samsung referred to “producing the highest quality products” and stressed that it was “taking [the] incident [. . .] very seriously,” thereby prompting the allocation of resources toward quality control (Samsung, 2016b)	Redirected funds toward quality control	Resource fluidity × Error detection	Financial reallocation to risk management
“Koh says a team of 700 company engineers conducted internal testing, and independent reviews of potential problems were carried” (Moynihan, 2017), referring to actions undertaken shortly after the issue was discovered	Technical redeployment for immediate testing	Resource fluidity × Error detection	Human redeployment
From Samsung Urges Galaxy Note7 Users to Immediately Participate in The Replacement Program: “Our number one priority is the safety of our customers. . . . We sincerely thank our customers for their understanding and patience.” (Samsung, 2016c)	Empathetic framing	Leadership unity × Error detection	Early safety-centered framing aligns messaging and stabilizes stakeholder expectations
“The Samsung statement to Reuters is terse [. . .] Samsung, in a statement to Reuters, did not elaborate on what it is testing the devices for or in which markets the shipments are being delayed.” (Reuters, 2016b)	Delivery of terse stakeholder communication	Leadership unity × Error detection	Delivery of a few initial, clear messages to stakeholders
“Initially, Samsung was praised for its fast and decisive reaction to the reports” (RedBanyan, 2016)	Fast decisive messaging	Leadership unity × Error detection	Early coherence and speed of messaging reinforced credibility and limited interpretive drift among stakeholders
“Recalling a product is never easy, and yielding returns of more than 30% is extremely challenging. Samsung aggressively told the media its goal was a 100% recall. Less than three months later, the company has reached a 96% return rate globally” (Lopez, 2017)	Proactive recall announcement	Strategic sensitivity × Error communication	Interpreting evolving risk signals and stakeholder responses
“The company sent text messages and emails to communicate the recall” (Lopez, 2017)	Direct communication through multiple channels	Strategic sensitivity × Error communication	Broadening stakeholder reach to accelerate recall compliance

(continued)

Table A1. Continued

Evidence excerpts	Descriptive code	Template mapping	Process inference
“Teams of Samsung employees were sent to airports to collect the phones” (Lopez, 2017)	Employee mobilization to support consumers	<i>Resource fluidity</i> × <i>Error communication</i>	Operational redeployment for recall execution
On September 2, 2016, during a press conference in Seoul, DJ Koh announced: “By putting our top priority on customer safety, we’ve decided to halt sales (of Galaxy Note 7) and offer new replacement handsets to all customers” (Petrov, 2016)	Executive alignment in recall announcements	<i>Leadership unity</i> × <i>Error communication</i>	Leadership coordination across units
Tim Baxter, President and COO of Samsung Electronics America, stated in a September 2016 video apology: “We did not meet the standards of excellence that you expect and deserve. For that, we apologize, especially to those of you who were personally impacted by this” (King, 2016)	Transparent executive engagement	<i>Leadership unity</i> × <i>Error communication</i>	Leadership enactment of corporate responsibility
“Samsung also formed a Battery Advisory Group of external advisers, academic and research experts to ensure it maintains a clear and objective perspective on battery safety and innovation” (Samsung, 2017b)	Formation of external expert group	<i>Strategic sensitivity</i> × <i>Damage control</i>	External expert validation of safety practices
“Since the Note7 recall, we’ve re-assessed every step of the smartphone manufacturing process and developed this 8-Point Battery Safety Check. It involves putting our batteries through extreme testing, inside and out, followed by careful inspection by X-ray and the human eye to ensure highest quality” (Samsung, 2017d)	Development of new quality standards	<i>Strategic sensitivity</i> × <i>Damage control</i>	Institutionalization of risk monitoring
“Samsung . . . 700 researchers tested 200,000 phones” (Lopez, 2017)	Large-scale redeployment of engineers	<i>Resource fluidity</i> × <i>Damage control</i>	Mobilization of technical expertise

(continued)

Table A1. Continued

Evidence excerpts	Descriptive code	Template mapping	Process inference
“Samsung also improved the volume and speed of returned units by working with telecom carriers to issue a software update that would disable the Galaxy Note 7’s charging abilities” (Lopez, 2017)	Technical software fix to mitigate hazard	<i>Resource fluidity</i> × <i>Damage control</i>	Technological interventions for risk containment
“Samsung has begun a massive marketing campaign to re-establish itself as the number one mobile brand in the world following the recall . . . that all started with a TV ad . . . explaining Samsung is improving the manufacturing process since the Note7 issues” (Fenech, 2017)	Repositioning investments in advertising	<i>Resource fluidity</i> × <i>Damage control</i>	Strategic reframing of corporate reputation
“Samsung’s enhanced multi-layer safety measures protocol will implement strict safety standards on every element of the company’s devices including the overall design and materials used, device hardware strength and capabilities, and improved software algorithms for safer battery charging temperature, current and duration” (Samsung, 2017e)	Institutionalization of standardized testing	<i>Resource fluidity</i> × <i>Damage control</i>	Embedding safety routines in operations
“Samsung SDI said in a statement that it has invested about 150 billion won (\$129 million) in safety and that its batteries will probably be among the safest in the industry after the additional steps taken” (Bloomberg, 2017)	Funding long-term safety innovation	<i>Resource fluidity</i> × <i>Damage control</i>	Long-term capacity building for risk prevention
“Today, more than ever, we are committed to earning the trust of our customers through innovation that redefines what is possible in safety.” (Samsung, 2017b)	Public reaffirmation of safety and transparency	<i>Leadership unity</i> × <i>Damage control</i>	Transparent executive engagement in long-term damage control
“The Galaxy S8 is our testament to regaining your trust by redefining what’s possible in safety.” (Samsung, 2017f)	Linking recovery narrative to new flagship launch	<i>Leadership unity</i> × <i>Damage control</i>	Leadership focus on renewal and forward strategy
Source(s): Author’s own elaboration			

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