



GROWTH THAT COMPOUNDS

New-product success factors are context-dependent

New-product success factors are not permanent coefficients: updated meta-analysis shows weaker effects and context and method moderators.

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MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

A success-factor list can become misleading when managers treat its coefficients as permanent laws. Evanschitzky, Eisend, Calantone, and Jiang update earlier evidence on new-product success with a meta-analysis of 233 empirical studies from 204 manuscripts, covering research published from 1999 through 2011. The updated evidence reports generally weaker effect sizes than the earlier synthesis and evaluates contextual and methodological moderators. This article translates the result into a synthetic evidence card that separates the factor, the estimate, the boundary condition, and the decision. It does not rank a current innovation program or claim that every success factor has disappeared.

Keywords: New-product success · Product innovation · Meta-analysis · Effect size · Moderator

A success-factor list can become misleading when managers treat its coefficients as permanent laws.

The short answer is that new-product success factors need a transfer boundary. An estimate from a published study is evidence about a relationship in a research record. It is not automatically a stable coefficient for every product, market, organization, or time period.

Evanschitzky, Eisend, Calantone, and Jiang update earlier evidence on new-product success with a meta-analysis of 233 empirical studies from 204 manuscripts. Their update covers research published from 1999 through 2011 and reports generally weaker effect sizes than the earlier meta-analysis. The study also evaluates contextual and methodological moderators. The practical lesson is not that success factors are useless. It is that a factor must travel with its context, measurement, and uncertainty.

Henard and Szymanski (2001) provide the earlier meta-analytic baseline and likewise organize success across product, strategy, process, market, and organizational dimensions. Atuahene-Gima (2005) adds a mechanism boundary inside product innovation, where exploiting existing competence can support incremental innovation while exploring competence can support radical innovation. The update is therefore read against both an earlier synthesis and a concrete capability trade-off, not as an isolated factor table.

Why is an isolated new product success factor insufficient for commercial resource commitment?

Suppose a research synthesis associates a product characteristic with success. Before using the result, four objects need to stay distinct:

Table 1 Why is an isolated new product success factor insufficient for commercial resource commitment?

Object	Question
Factor	What product, process, market, or organizational characteristic is being studied?
Effect size	How large is the estimated relationship in the synthesis?
Moderator	Under which context or method does the relationship vary?
Decision	What action, if any, is justified in the current product system?

Table from this essay. Sources and interpretation are given in the article.

Collapsing these objects produces familiar but fragile sentences: “This factor drives success,” “The coefficient is proven,” or “We should invest in the factor immediately.” A meta-analysis can improve the estimate while also showing why the estimate should not be detached from the studies that produced it.

Table 1 The updated-success-factor transfer card

Synthetic evidence card	Earlier synthesis	Updated evidence
Evidence base	Earlier published studies	233 studies from 204 manuscripts
Research window	Earlier period	1999-2011 update period
Overall reading	Factor list appears portable	Generally weaker effect sizes
Boundary question	Which factor is associated with success?	Which context and method moderate the estimate?
Decision test	Copy the factor into a plan	Recheck measurement, setting, and expected effect

Author's synthetic translation of Evanschitzky, Eisend, Calantone, and Jiang (2012), Henard and Szymanski (2001), and Atuahene-Gima (2005). The comparison is qualitative and does not reproduce the source's effect-size estimates.

The card makes a methodological point visible. “Updated” does not mean “true forever.” It means that the evidence base, period, model, or method has changed and the relationship should be re-read.

How do empirical meta-analytic updates diminish previously published innovation drivers?

An effect can become weaker for several reasons. The new studies may measure the construct differently. Markets may have learned the practice, reducing its differentiating value. Samples may expand to settings where the relationship is less pronounced. A more suitable meta-analytic model may change the estimate. Publication and method patterns can also shape the evidence that enters the synthesis.

This article does not assign one of these explanations to every factor. Henard and Szymanski (2001) provide the earlier synthesis against which the updated evidence is read. The source reports generally weaker effect sizes than that earlier meta-analysis and evaluates contextual and methodological moderators. That combination is enough to change the managerial question. Instead of asking which factor is strongest in the abstract, ask whether the relationship is credible under the current product system and whether the cost of acting is justified by the expected decision value.

Why must product development success claims always specify market and regulatory context?

Context is not an appendix to the estimate. It can include product category, market conditions, country culture, organizational setting, development stage, performance definition, measurement procedure, sample composition, and publication period. A relationship can be positive in one boundary and weak, absent, or reversed in another.

The updated study’s attention to contextual and methodological moderators creates a useful discipline:

Table 3 Why must product development success claims always specify market and regulatory context?

Before transfer	Required check
Construct	Does the current team mean the same thing by the factor and by success?
Product setting	Is the product category and development stage comparable?
Market setting	Are competition, customer expectations, and adoption conditions comparable?
Method	Does the evidence use a design that can answer the current decision?
Time	Could the factor's value have changed as the practice became common?
Cost	What would acting on the estimate require, and what is the counterfactual?

Table from this essay. Sources and interpretation are given in the article.

The checks do not invalidate the meta-analyses. Atuahene-Gima's (2005) capability-rigidity finding is a useful reminder that the same product system can face different innovation demands depending on whether the decision is incremental or radical. The checks prevent a synthesis from being used as if it were a guarantee.

How does competitive factor diffusion erode historical product advantages?

One interpretation of weaker effects is diffusion. If many firms learn that a practice is associated with new-product success, the practice may become easier to imitate and less differentiating. That is an interpretive possibility, not a universal explanation established for every factor in the source.

The possibility changes how a team should use evidence. A factor can still be necessary, valuable, or worth improving even if it no longer differentiates firms strongly. Operational hygiene and competitive advantage are different decision categories. A weaker comparative effect does not mean that quality, customer fit, or process discipline no longer matter.

The team should therefore label the intended role of an intervention:

- 1 remove a failure condition;
- 2 meet a customer or regulatory requirement;
- 3 improve a process that is below an internal standard;
- 4 create a differentiating advantage;
- 5 test a new hypothesis under uncertainty.

The same factor may support the first three goals without reliably delivering the fourth.

How should product leadership structure a factor transfer protocol for active pipelines?

When using an external success-factor finding, write a one-page transfer record:

- 1 copy the source's construct and outcome wording;
- 2 record the evidence base and period;
- 3 identify the moderator or boundary most likely to matter;
- 4 state what is comparable in the current product system;
- 5 state what is not comparable;
- 6 define the smallest reversible test;
- 7 choose an outcome and time horizon before the test starts;
- 8 update the belief after the test rather than treating the source estimate as a target.

This protocol keeps the evidence useful without pretending that a meta-analysis is a roadmap for one product launch.

Which three universal product success claims must innovation teams reject?

First, do not say that an updated meta-analysis proves a factor has no value because its average effect is weaker. Average evidence and decision value answer different questions.

Second, do not say that a factor is a universal driver of new-product success. The source explicitly examines contextual and methodological moderators.

Third, do not transfer a coefficient without transferring the construct, outcome, sample, measurement, and time boundary that make the coefficient interpretable.

For adjacent decisions, compare the multi-method product forecast with the preference boundary in conjoint analysis.

Where are the empirical boundaries of new product success factor research?

Evanschitzky et al. provide the updated evidence base, the 1999-2011 research window, the generally weaker effect sizes relative to the earlier synthesis, and the role of contextual and methodological moderators. Henard and Szymanski provide the earlier meta-analytic baseline, while Atuahene-Gima provides a capability and innovation-type boundary. The transfer card and protocol are author-owned translations. They do not rank factors, assess a current innovation program, or establish a causal effect for a particular product.

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END OF ESSAY

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