

Introduction

Mastery and eminence - these words define Ansoff's school and enduring legacy. Mastery because more and more contexts come to provide empirical proof of Ansoff's holistic approach and theories, and eminence because as times and contexts evolve, the more Ansoff's theories persist as valid.

This paper honors Ansoff's impactful and lasting contributions and school of thought. It examines the confirmation of Ansoff's strategic planning principles, strategic management approach, and Strategic Success Hypothesis in the specific case of Bulgaria.

The paper presents three main groups of elements in support of Ansoff's legacy of theories:

1. The strategic planning empirical validation, an assessment of its utility and predictive role for organizational performance, and a comparison with Mintzberg's incremental trial-and-error approach in a novel setting.
2. Strategic management validation as a relevant approach, even in a less turbulent environment.
3. The Strategic Success Theory validation in the specific context of Bulgaria;

Results from the three groups indicate that Ansoff's holistic approach to strategic management, his Strategic Success Theory, and his approach of strategy formulation and strategic planning are more valid than ever. Ansoff's school of thought gains empirical proof from all three investigations, which significantly relate to performance.

First, we look at evidence for the benefits of strategic planning and strategy formulation compared to Mintzberg's emergent strategy. Next, we explore how useful strategic management is as a strategic behavior. Finally, we give another piece of evidence for the Strategic Success Hypothesis in a different setting.

Ansoff's school of thought gains empirical proof from all three investigations. Results from these groups indicate that Ansoff's holistic approach to strategic management, his Strategic Success Theory, and the approach of Strategic planning are more valid than ever. This evidence shows the timeless relevance and consistent validity of Ansoff's theories and contributions.

Methodology

The research methodology used in this study was carefully planned and is based on the important ideas put forward by Ansoff (1979, 1988), Ansoff et al. (1993), and Ansoff and McDonnell (1990).

Research Design

Rooted in Ansoff's foundational principles, our research design embraces a cross-sectional survey approach to provide a thorough overview of strategic behaviors and performance outcomes across diverse organizational settings.

Building on established designs from prior studies (e.g., Ansoff et al., 1993; Hatziantoniou, 1986) and meticulously crafted to align with Ansoff's conceptual framework, the survey instrument captures key constructs such as environmental turbulence, strategic aggressiveness, strategic planning, strategic management, and organizational performance.

Operationalizing Strategic Planning, Strategic Management, and Strategic Success Hypothesis

Key constructs were operationalized based on Ansoff's seminal frameworks (1988), Ansoff and McDonnell (1990), and Ansoff et al. (1993).

- **Strategy Formulation, Strategy Emergence, and Strategic Planning:**

Strategy formulation and *strategy emergence* as approaches were operationalized using descriptive statements corresponding to the theoretical frameworks of Ansoff (1965; 1988) for strategy formulation and strategic planning and of Mintzberg (1990; 1994; 1998) for strategy emergence. *Strategic planning* was operationalized as a two-stage process, composed cumulatively of (1) the formulation of a strategy for the development of the organization as a whole and (2) the analysis and development of the present resources and capabilities.

- **Strategic Management:**

Strategic management use was defined in a three-stage model composed cumulatively of (1) the strategic planning for the organization, (2) the analysis and development of the future resources and capabilities, and (3) the adoption of at least one issue management practice.

The greatest part of constructs on strategy formulation-emergence, strategic planning, and management was captured using a series of binary (yes/no) items.

- **Strategic Success Hypothesis:**

Strategic gap was operationalized as in Hatziantoniou (1986): the Total gap = Mean (Strategy Gap + Capability Gap). Following Ansoff and McDonnell's (1990) framework, *environmental turbulence* was measured across dimensions such as frequency of change, speed of change, predictability, and the scope of the firm's operations. We also evaluated environmental turbulence using an eleven-item Likert scale from 'very low' to 'very high', which we adapted from Brews and Hunt (1999). Both scales consistently showed high positive correlations in previous studies. Due to the multi-industry nature of the sample, we used subjective assessments.

- **Organizational Performance:**

As in prior studies (e.g., Ansoff et al., 1993; Wang, 1991; Chabane, 1987), we adopted subjective performance measures. *Performance* was assessed using two performance indicators as close to objective as possible, plan achievement according to plan and changes in market share, and closely corresponding to Chabane (1987)

and Sullivan (1987), as well as a nine-item Likert scale (from 'much worse' to 'much better.'), adapted from Brews and Hunt (1999), including indicators as overall sales and revenue growth, overall firm and financial performance, customer growth and satisfaction, stock price performance, competitive position, and overall strategic planning/management performance, together with composite performance indicator that was newly created by summing the ratings from these individual items.

Research Population

The sample included 59 Bulgarian organizations across industries, such as services (37,3%), IT (22,0%), and manufacturing (16,9%). The sample was predominantly private (98.3%), with a majority of firms being locally owned (58,6%), followed by foreign-owned (27,6%), and mixed ownership (13,8%). Organizations with over 250 employees constituted the largest group of participants (39.7%), followed by those with 11 to 49 employees (25,9%), 50 to 99 employees (15,5%), 100 to 249 employees (10,3%), and under 10 employees (8,6%). Data were collected from senior managers and top management team members, ensuring that the responses reflect high-level strategic insights.

Research Questionnaire and Data Collection

Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire administered in person during meetings and on-site conferences. This method allowed respondents to seek clarification in real time and ensured accurate responses. The questionnaire covered strategic practices and behavior, strategy formulation-emergence, environmental stability-turbulence, and performance indicators. For exploring the Strategic Success Hypothesis, we incorporated the original questionnaire by Ansoff et al. (1993) into a thematic section of our survey instrument. This section assessed three aggregate variables: the average turbulence level of the organization's environment, the strategic aggressiveness of the organization, and the organization's capability.

Consistent with the procedures of Ansoff et al. (1993) and Salameh (1991), senior managers or managers who are members of the top management teams in each organization provided data for the study. The data reflect a recent one- to three-year period of strategic practices and performance.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 23. We first calculated descriptive statistics to profile the sample and examine the distribution of key variables. Then, Mann-Whitney U tests were used to compare performance differences between organizations with small and large strategic gaps. Spearman's rho correlation analyses were used to look at the links between strategic planning and management practices, the strategic gap, and different performance indicators.

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was also performed to further investigate the impact of strategic planning on overall profitability or financial performance and to examine the predictors of overall profitability or financial performance. This analysis was conducted in three stages:

- **Model 1:** Incorporated key organizational variables such as strategic planning, size of organization, type, ownership, and environmental stability.
- **Model 2:** Added the industry variable.
- **Model 3:** Introduced interaction terms between strategic planning and key organizational contingencies (ownership, size, and environment).

Interaction terms assessed how strategic planning's impact on performance varied by size, ownership, and environmental turbulence. Statistical significance was established at $p < 0.05$.

By integrating well-validated measures and employing robust statistical analyses, the research provides a carefully designed approach to ensure a rigorous and reliable examination of the practical validation and the applicability of Ansoff's strategic theories in the Bulgarian context and for investigating Ansoff's legacy.

The research approach provides a systematic framework for offering valuable insights and illuminating Ansoff's enduring legacy, the timeless relevance of his theoretical contributions, and their applicability in a contemporary, localized context.

Theoretical foundations

Igor Ansoff is a prominent figure in the vast domain of strategic management, his pioneering and groundbreaking theories serving as a timeless guide for organizations addressing the changes and challenges of their environments.

Strategic Planning: Perennial Relevance and Proof

Faced with new changes and challenges from the 1960s onward, and with the need to respond to declining familiarity with the business environment and decreasing visibility of the future, management systems were constrained to gradually become more sophisticated and adapted (Ansoff, 1988). As environmental complexity, novel changes, and future unpredictability increased, managers developed systemic techniques to deal with them, each complementing and improving previous ones. Various strategic behaviors were adopted by companies, including ad-hoc management, management by objectives, long-term planning, and strategic planning (Ansoff, 1988; Ansoff and McDonnell, 1990).

These management systems were primarily developed by American companies, preparing for a different future. H.I. Ansoff's publication, *Corporate Strategy* (1965), introduced practical experience into the theoretical field of strategic management.

According to Ansoff (1988), early experiences showed it was a useful but not universal system, applicable when a company expects future instability in its environment. However, as changes in the business environment become more frequent, rapid, and unpredictable, strategic planning required supplementation with two closely linked approaches: the development of the organization's internal strategic capabilities and the development of a system for managing unexpected changes.

Both approaches, along with strategic planning, represent (Ansoff, 1988) the systemic and comprehensive preparation of the company for the opportunities and threats of its business environment; this overall method was called strategic management, relevant when the external environment is characterized by strong turbulence and discontinuous changes. Strategic management represents an approach beyond strategic planning, expanded by concepts and techniques for analyzing organizational capabilities and strategic implementation (Ansoff, 1984; Martinet, 1983; Whittington et al., 2002; Koenig, 2004).

Strategic Management: An Integrative and Holistic Approach

The expression "strategic management" officially appeared in 1973, during the First International Conference on Strategic Management at Vanderbilt University. Igor Ansoff, a pioneer of strategic planning, introduced the notion to overcome the limits of strategic planning revealed by theory and practice and exacerbated by new business challenges.

While strategic management emerged in the 1970s, driven by the changing context of the 1960s and imperatives of strategic adaptation, from the 2000s and the novel challenges, it asserts itself as an appropriate strategic behavior of companies and entrepreneurs in several business contexts on a global level. It proves its relevance in the 2020s again, globally, during the coronavirus pandemic.

Strategic management is not the only possible or most relevant strategic behavior for all types of business environments. It is relevant and necessary when the business environment becomes highly unstable, requiring needs and responsibilities to ensure continued success and to protect the company from strategic surprises (Ansoff, 1979; Ansoff and McDonnell, 1990, p. XV).

The Debate: Ansoff vs. Mintzberg and his earlier planning versions

Since the early 1980s, strategic planning has been heavily criticized by management researchers, notably by Mintzberg (1990, 1994). In various articles, Mintzberg (1994)

attacked strategic planning's theoretical foundations, specifically the difficulty of forecasting (Mintzberg, 1994b: 110). Ansoff responded to Mintzberg's critique, leading to a theoretical debate (1988; 1991; 1994).

Pettigrew et al. (2002) note that Mintzberg's statements have received little global evaluation outside Ansoff's detailed replies. Brews and Hunt, 1999; Martinet, 1994, 1997, 2001; and Avenier (1988) have rejected Mintzberg's critique and pointed out his inconsistencies. Many authors, including Ansoff (1994) and Martinet (1997), demonstrate that Mintzberg's criticism (1990; 1991; 1994) is based on strategic planning from its beginnings in the 1960s. However, by the time of Mintzberg's assessments in 1990, 1991, and 1994, strategic planning had evolved significantly. By the time of Mintzberg's assessments in 1990, 1991, and 1994, strategic planning had transformed into strategic management, with its formulation taking into account implementation from the analysis stage. Strategic planning had already improved significantly in the directions suggested by Mintzberg in the 1990s.

Nowadays, despite criticism by some authors, arguments put forward by many others (Ansoff, 1965, 1988; Brews and Hunt, 1999; Martinet, 1997; Avenier, 1988; Brechet, 1996; Grant, 2003) support retaining the idea of a formalized planning process.

Moreover, despite criticism, strategic planning has maintained its relevance in organizational practice.

Studies into the cumulative results of the planning-performance relationship have pointed to positive effects for formal strategic planning (Wolf and Floyd, 2013). Recent research has reported strategic planning to have a positive, moderate, and significant impact on organizational performance (Hamann et al., 2023; George et al., 2019; Hamann, 2017).

The Strategic Success Theory: A Timeless Confirmation of Ansoff's Brilliance

A key paradigm of Ansoff's work is the Strategic Success Hypothesis (1976, 1979), which posits that a firm achieves optimal performance when its level of strategic aggressiveness and its capability responsiveness are aligned with the turbulence of its external environment.

Empirical studies have consistently validated this hypothesis across diverse business contexts. Peter Hatziantoniou (1986) was the first to validate the Strategic Success Hypothesis in the United States by demonstrating the relationship between environmental turbulence, a firm's strategic profile, and its performance.

Early confirmations came from Hassane Chabane's (1987) work with Algerian state-owned enterprises and Patrick Sullivan's (1987) study on a U.S. federal agency, Tamer Salameh's (1987) examination of the banking sector in the United Arab Emirates, Alfred

Lewis's (1989) research in California's banking industry, Jackan Gutu's (1989) analysis of parastatal organizations in Kenya, and Reuben Jaja (1989) in the U.S. commercial banking sector.

In the following decades, empirical validation grew to include studies from Asia, Europe, and Africa, such as those by Setiadi Djohar (1991) in Indonesia, Abainesh Mitiku (1992) in Ethiopia, Roman Lombriser (1992) in Switzerland, Dae-Ryong Choi (1993) in Japan, Randolph Camelia (1993) in the Netherlands, Saib Sallam Thabet (1993) in Yemen, Jan Freidank (1994) in Germany, Catherine Levitt (1997) in China, Ali Mohammad Abu-Rahm (1999) in Jordan, and Young Woo Han (1999) in Korea. These studies affirm the enduring validity of Ansoff's integrative framework.

Taken together, these findings highlight the global applicability of the hypothesis, demonstrating its robustness across economic and institutional contexts. This broad empirical support firmly establishes Ansoff's Strategic Success Hypothesis as a timeless framework for understanding organizational performance across industries and regions.

I. Strategy Formulation and Strategy Emergence - Frequencies and Performance Implications: Exploration in a New Context

Table 1 presents organizations' perceptions about the stability/turbulence of their environment.

As Table 1 shows, the majority of organizations operate in a stable environment.

Tables 2 and 3 provide insights into the strategy formulation-emergence processes of the surveyed organizations.

Table 2 indicates that the majority of firms only occasionally or sometimes engage in strategic actions prior to decisions, a key aspect of Mintzberg's emergent strategy concept, while one fifth of them never do.

Rather, as can be seen in Table 3, the overwhelming majority of organizations have a formulated strategy for the achievement of their goals or formulate one in principle and are not practicing the emergent strategy type of Mintzberg, in which organizations do not formulate specific strategies in advance and organizations' strategies most often emerge and develop over time. Furthermore, a majority state that their organization carefully develops specific strategies/strategic orientations/guidelines, which are usually fully formulated after their elaboration.

Tables 4 through 7 set out the results of the correlational analysis between these practices of strategy elaboration and various performance indicators.

The data reveals that organizations that elaborate in principle strategies show positive correlations with plan achievement and other performance indicators such as overall sales and revenue growth, firm performance/success and profitability (Table 4).

Furthermore, as shown in Table 5. organizations that have a formulated strategy to achieve their goals exhibit significant positive correlations with plan achievement, overall sales growth, firm performance/success, and profitability or financial performance.

Table 6 illustrates the significant positive correlations between the careful development of specific strategies and several performance outcomes, including overall sales growth, firm performance/success, profitability, organization's competitive position, and the performance multi-item scale.

The preceding of strategic decisions by strategic actions correlates positively with customer satisfaction but not with any other performance indicator (Table 7).

The data, as presented in Table 7.1. demonstrates how Mintzberg's emergent strategy significantly correlates negatively with several performance outcomes, including plan achievement, customer satisfaction, stock price performance, overall sales growth, financial performance, the organization's competitive position, and the performance multi-item scale..

II. Strategic Planning: Adoption and Links with Organizational Performance

It is evident from Table 8 that almost two-thirds of the organizations have adopted strategic planning.

The data also supports the benefits of strategic planning:

Significant positive correlations were observed between the strategic planning adoption and various performance indicators, as summarized in Table 9. Among them are the overall firm performance and profitability, the overall performance of the strategic management, and the performance multiple item scale.

The conducted hierarchical multiple regression analysis, presented in Tables 10.1. to 10.5., further demonstrated that strategic planning significantly predicted overall profitability or financial performance, even when controlling for other variables.

The regression analysis, conducted in three stages (Models 1, 2, and 3), with each stage adding more variables, showed that all three models are statistically significant, as can be seen by the ANOVA results.

Furthermore, each model, including the final one with all variables, significantly predicts overall profitability or financial performance. The final model (Model 3) explains 53,9% of the variance in overall profitability or financial performance.

Among the main results, the following should be highlighted:

1. Strategic Planning has a strong positive effect on overall profitability or financial performance, and this effect is highly significant, even when controlling for other factors.
2. Environmental turbulence becomes a significant positive predictor of performance only in the final model, when interaction terms are included (e.g., SP_Environment).
3. Organizational size exhibits a significant positive relationship with performance, but this effect is only evident in the final model.
4. The type of organization (public, private) also significantly affects performance.
5. Industry demonstrates a significant negative effect on performance in the final model, while its significance is only borderline in earlier models (e.g., $p = 0.057$ in Model 2).
6. Moderation Effects: The presence of significant interaction terms (e.g., SP_Environment, SP_Size, and SP_Ownership) suggests that the impact of strategic planning on performance is moderated by environmental turbulence, organizational size, and ownership, underlining the importance of these contingency factors.
7. Contingency Factors: The significance of environmental turbulence, organizational size, and type, particularly in the final model, highlights the important role these factors play in determining financial performance.
8. Complexity of Relationships: The combination of positive and negative coefficients, along with significant interaction terms, emphasizes the complex and multifaceted links between strategic planning, contingency factors, and overall financial performance.

Overall, this hierarchical regression analysis while highlighting the complex interplay between strategic planning and various organizational and environmental factors, also provides strong evidence for the positive impact of strategic planning on financial performance,

III. Strategic Management: A Relevant Approach Even in Less Turbulent Contexts

As the study showed, strategic management was applied by the majority of the studied organizations (Table 11).

Table 11 expectedly indicates a slightly lower adoption rate of strategic management compared to strategic planning; however, it presents a surprising result given the level of organizations' perceived environmental turbulence.

Strategic management was also found to be positively and significantly correlated with overall sales growth, as displayed in Table 12.

Organizations also related indirectly strategic planning and strategic management to their success.

When asked about the success of their organization and the type of strategy that has played a role in it, nearly two-thirds of the organizations indicated that the strategy of their success had been formulated ex-ante and then included unplanned actions and initiatives (Table 13). Also, a little under half of the companies reported that the strategy of their success had been a formulated strategy ex-ante.

Tables 14 and 15 explore the relationships between the strategy elaboration type of the organization and different performance indicators, offering insights into significant correlations and patterns.

The formulation of a strategy ex-ante, corresponding to the strategic planning approach, demonstrated significant positive correlations with the vast majority of the performance indicators - 9 out of 12, as displayed in Table 14, including market share change, firm and stock price performance, profitability, customer satisfaction, the organization's competitive position, and the performance multiple-item scale.

The strategy ex-ante formulation, complemented with unplanned actions, showed significant positive correlations with overall sales growth and profitability, suggesting that the strategic management approach is beneficial (Table 15.).

These results, as well as those set out in Table 12, further demonstrate the relevance of strategic management, even in less turbulent contexts.

The combined Table 16 summarizes the partial correlations between strategic management and overall sales growth, moderated by different variables. It is apparent from the data in this table that:

1. The correlation remained significant even after controlling for environmental stability.
2. The relationship is not consistently significant across all types of contingencies or organizational contexts.
3. The correlation remains relatively stable when controlling for all contingency factors together - environmental stability, industry, organization size, type, and ownership.

Based on the consistent positive correlation between strategic management and overall sales growth across both stable and turbulent environments, we conclude that strategic management improves performance in any environmental context. These findings highlight that strategic management has a positive impact on sales growth, regardless of whether the environment is stable or turbulent.

IV. The Strategic Success Theory: Further Validation in the Context of Bulgaria

Building on the analysis of strategic planning and strategic management, the focus shifted to examining the strategic aggressiveness and strategic capability of organizations. These were analyzed in relation to the level of environmental turbulence to evaluate their strategic gap and assess the applicability of the Strategic Success Hypothesis in Bulgaria.

The findings, illustrated in Table 17, reveal that a slight majority of organizations operate with a small strategic gap.

Subsequently, the Mann-Whitney U tests demonstrated that, while no statistically significant differences were found between organizations with small and large strategic gaps for many performance indicators, two performance indicators - overall sales growth and overall revenue growth - showed significant differences, as depicted in Table 18.

Further, correlational analyses revealed significant negative correlations between the strategic gap and the two performance indicators (Table 19).

These findings:

- Confirm the relationship between the strategic gap and these performance indicators.
- Indicate that as the strategic gap decreases, both sales and revenue growth increase.
- Suggest that the size of the 'gap' is negatively associated with organizational performance.
- Provide strong support for Ansoff's Strategic Success Theory.

These results are particularly noteworthy, as they strongly support the Strategic Success Theory under investigation and confirm its applicability, relevance, and validity.

Overall, the present research:

1. Confirms the merits of Ansoff's school of thought in:

- Strategy formulation
- Strategic planning
- Strategic management.

2. Provides evidence supporting the Strategic Success Theory within the context of Bulgaria.
3. Substantiates Ansoff's holistic approach to strategic management.

Collectively, these findings underscore the value of Ansoff's theories and the significance of his paradigm. They highlight the critical role of strategic planning, strategic management, strategic alignment, and strategy formulation in improving organizational performance.

Discussion: The Perennial Legacy of Ansoff's Strategic Theories

The results of this study provide compelling empirical support for the everlasting validity and applicability of Ansoff's strategic theories. Across multiple dimensions of strategic behavior, planning, and performance, the findings confirm the relevance of Ansoff's school of thought and highlight its robustness even in the evolving and complex business environment of Bulgaria. The evidence strongly underscores the merits, legacy, and eminence of Ansoff's theoretical contributions of Strategic planning, Strategic management, and the Strategic success theory.

Strategic Planning and Its Practical Confirmation

The vast majority of Bulgarian organizations have adopted strategic planning, demonstrating that the principles Ansoff articulated decades ago remain widely relevant. More importantly, organizations that engage in strategic planning exhibit statistically significant positive correlations with important performance indicators, among which are overall firm performance, profitability, and the multi-item performance indicator. The correlational and regression analyses confirm that strategic planning is not merely a theoretical construct but a decisive factor in achieving superior financial performance.

These findings align with Ansoff's (1965, 1988) argument that systematical, comprehensive planning prepares an organization for the opportunities and threats in its external environment. This directly counters the critiques posed by Mintzberg (1994) and his emergent strategy perspective, which questioned the efficacy of formalized planning in both a stable and an unpredictable world.

In a business context characterized by relative stability, strategic planning proves a valuable approach for organizational success. Our empirical findings add further evidence that strategic planning pays, complementing recent meta-analytical studies affirming the positive relationship between strategic planning and organizational performance (Wolf and Floyd, 2013; George et al., 2019; Hamann, 1917; Hamann et al., 2023).

The Ansoff-Mintzberg Debate: Categorical Support for Ansoff's Premises

Further, the findings also provide important insights into the theoretical debate between Ansoff and Mintzberg regarding the role of strategic planning versus emergent strategy.

While Mintzberg (1994) criticized formalized planning for its rigidity, basing his critiques on the version of the planning in the 1960s, the findings revealed that Ansoff's formulated ex-ante strategies were significantly related to organizational performance indicators, among which were plan achievement, sales growth, overall firm performance, and overall financial performance, whereas Mintzberg's emergent strategy was significantly negatively correlated with several performance indicators, including overall financial performance, stock price performance, the organization's competitive position, and performance multiple-item indicator.

Further, as the evidence clearly indicates, the integration of planned strategy with adaptive, unplanned actions - what Ansoff defined as contemporary strategic planning and management as early as 1973 - is fundamental for organizational performance, since it is significantly positively correlated with important performance indicators like market share change, firm and stock price performance, profitability, the organization's competitive position, and the performance multiple-item scale. In this, our study reaffirms the unrelenting validity and generalizability of Ansoff's holistic approach to strategic management.

Rather than viewing the adaptive elements as a separate or opposing school of thought, as in Mintzberg (1990; 1991; 1994), they should be recognized as essential components of a comprehensive strategic approach that remains as relevant today as it was when Ansoff first articulated his ideas.

In this regard, the present study reaffirms that contemporary strategic planning and management - comprising formulated strategy with spontaneous actions - is a testament to Ansoff's visionary legacy, ensuring that his insights remain central to strategic management theory and practice.

Strategic Management: A Universal Relevance

The study further demonstrates the significance of strategic management, as over half of the organizations surveyed actively apply it. Strategic management, as conceptualized by Ansoff (1973, 1984, 1988), represents a systemic approach that integrates strategic planning, adaptation to change, and issues management. The results show a positive correlation between strategic management adoption and sales growth, supporting the idea that organizations benefit from the comprehensive and flexible approach to implementation and adaptation to environmental changes in addition to strategic planning.

Essentially, the findings reveal that even in a relatively stable business environment, where the Strategic Success Theory suggests that the approach of strategic management is not needed, organizations that systematically adopt strategic management still outperform their competitors. This highlights the universal applicability of Ansoff's framework, confirming that strategic management provides organizations with strong and adaptive mechanisms for achieving their goals and competitiveness, regardless of environmental turbulence.

The Strategic Success Hypothesis: Empirical Validation

Another noteworthy validation of Ansoff's legacy is the confirmation of the Strategic Success Hypothesis in the Bulgarian context. Ansoff (1979) posited that an organization achieves optimal performance when its strategic behavior aligns with the level of turbulence in its environment.

Our findings provide robust empirical support, reaffirming the Strategic Success Theory: the results demonstrate a significant negative correlation between the strategic gap - the misalignment between an organization's strategic aggressiveness and environmental turbulence - and important performance indicators such as revenue growth and sales growth. Specifically, organizations with a small strategic gap outperform those with a large gap, further supporting Ansoff's argument that aligning strategic aggressiveness with environmental turbulence is key to optimal performance. These findings add to prior research that validated the Strategic Success Hypothesis across various global contexts (Hatziantoniou, 1986; Sullivan, 1987; Choi, 1993; Han, 1999; Hristova, 2007).

This validation is particularly significant because it confirms the generalizability of Ansoff's theory across different economic and institutional settings. Bulgaria, with its evolving market economy and transitional history, represents a unique empirical ground, yet the findings remain consistent with research conducted in mature Western economies, emerging markets, and distinct industries worldwide. The lasting validity of the Strategic Success Hypothesis attests to the robustness of Ansoff's theoretical framework, further cementing his legacy as the father of strategic management.

Conclusion: The Timelessness of Ansoff's Contributions

Taken together, these findings reaffirm Ansoff's position as a towering figure in strategic management. His visionary insights into **strategic planning, strategic management, and the Strategic Success Theory, among others**, remain profoundly relevant, guiding organizations toward success even in contemporary business environments.

The empirical confirmation of his theories in Bulgaria underscores their **enduring and unfailing generalizability**, demonstrating that his framework is not confined to a particular region, industry, or era. Ansoff's holistic approach continues to provide an invaluable foundation for organizations seeking favorable strategic positioning and

success while helping managers align their organizations with their environment and shelter them from strategic surprises.

Ansoff's pioneering work remains a cornerstone for strategic management practices worldwide, vividly confirmed by evidence from the Bulgarian context. Ansoff's legacy persists not only through the theories he developed but also through the practical, real-world benefits that organizations continue to derive from his systematic and integrative approach.

As strategic management develops, it is imperative to recognize that Ansoff's theories are not relics of the past, but they are progressive tools for the future. His work provides a vital guide for managers leading their organizations through increasingly more complex and unpredictable environments.

The **pride in Ansoff's legacy, and ours as Ansoffian researchers, is well-placed**, as his intellectual contributions continue shaping the strategic thinking of generations of scholars and practitioners alike.