



Strategic Resilience as an Organizational Capability: Toward a Middle-Range Theory of Sustained Competitive Adaptation

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Article History:

Submitted: 06-03-2026

Approved: 14-06-2026

Published: 13-07-2026

Available at the open access
journal:<https://sciedex.com/innogest>

Innogest - Journal of Corporate and
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Abstract

Organizations increasingly operate in environments characterized by persistent turbulence driven by technological disruption, geopolitical uncertainty, climate-related risks, and institutional volatility, making sustained competitive adaptation a strategic imperative. Although Dynamic Capabilities Theory explains how firms renew and reconfigure resources, while Organizational Resilience Theory explains how organizations respond to adversity, existing research provides limited understanding of how resilience evolves into an enduring organizational capability that continuously enables adaptation. This conceptual paper addresses this theoretical gap by developing Strategic Resilience Capability Theory (SRCT) as a middle-range theory integrating dynamic capabilities, adaptive learning, strategic resource reconfiguration, and organizational resilience into a coherent explanatory framework. Using a theory-building approach, the paper specifies the theory's domain, defines its core constructs, develops the underlying capability-building mechanism, identifies boundary conditions, and formulates theoretically grounded propositions. The proposed framework reconceptualizes resilience as a higher-order organizational capability emerging through cumulative adaptive learning and institutionalized resource reconfiguration, thereby enabling sustained competitive adaptation under persistent environmental turbulence. This theory extends strategic management scholarship by offering a coherent conceptual foundation for future empirical research across diverse organizational and institutional contexts.

Keywords

strategic resilience capability; dynamic capabilities;
organizational resilience; adaptive learning; resource
reconfiguration; sustained competitive adaptation

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1. Introduction

Organizations today operate in an environment characterized by persistent turbulence rather than episodic disruption. Geopolitical tensions, climate-related disasters, digital transformation, supply chain fragility, pandemics, and rapid technological change have fundamentally altered the competitive landscape, making uncertainty a structural feature of contemporary business environments rather than a temporary condition. Unlike earlier periods in which organizations could rely on relatively stable industry conditions to sustain competitive advantage, firms now face continuous environmental volatility that repeatedly challenges existing strategic assumptions, organizational routines, and resource configurations (Dess & Beard, 1984; Duncan, 1972; Milliken, 1987). Consequently, maintaining competitiveness increasingly depends not only on responding effectively to individual disruptions but also on developing the capability to continuously adapt under conditions of ongoing uncertainty (Hillmann & Guenther, 2021; Yao *et al.*, 2020).

Recent crises have further reinforced this reality. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed vulnerabilities across global industries, while geopolitical conflicts, inflationary pressures, energy transitions, and accelerating digitalization have created overlapping disruptions that many scholars describe as persistent or continuous adversity rather than isolated crises (Amankwah-Amoah *et al.*, 2021; Ivanov, 2020; Ivanov & Dolgui, 2020). Such conditions have shifted scholarly attention from crisis management toward organizational resilience, emphasizing organizations' ability to absorb shocks, recover from disruptions, and continue creating value despite prolonged environmental turbulence (Bundy *et al.*, 2017; Duchek, 2020; Williams *et al.*, 2017). Increasingly, resilience is viewed not merely as an operational response but as a strategic imperative for long-term organizational survival and competitiveness (Conz & Magnani, 2020; Hillmann & Guenther, 2021).

Within strategic management research, Dynamic Capabilities Theory has become one of the dominant explanations for how firms maintain competitive advantage in rapidly changing environments. Building on the resource-based view (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984), dynamic capabilities explain how organizations integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external resources in response to environmental change (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Teece, 2007; Teece *et al.*, 1997). Subsequent studies have refined this perspective by highlighting processes of sensing opportunities, seizing opportunities, and transforming organizational resource bases to sustain competitiveness over time (Ambrosini *et al.*, 2009; Barreto, 2010; Schilke *et al.*, 2018). Rather than emphasizing static resource possession, this perspective explains competitive advantage through continual capability renewal and strategic resource orchestration (Helfat & Martin, 2015; Sirmon *et al.*, 2007).

Parallel to the development of dynamic capabilities research, organizational resilience has emerged as an increasingly influential concept across strategic management, operations management, and organizational studies. Earlier research primarily conceptualized resilience as an organization's capacity to withstand disruptions and recover from unexpected shocks (Bhamra *et al.*, 2011; Christopher & Peck, 2004; Linnenluecke, 2017). More recent studies, however, argue that resilience extends beyond recovery by encompassing adaptive learning, organizational renewal, and proactive capability development (Conz & Magnani, 2020; Duchek, 2020; Hillmann & Guenther, 2021). Emerging empirical evidence similarly demonstrates that resilience contributes to innovation, strategic flexibility, and long-term organizational performance under highly dynamic conditions (Ciasullo *et al.*, 2024; Do *et al.*, 2022; Dovbischuk, 2022).

Despite substantial advances in both research streams, important theoretical ambiguities remain. Dynamic capabilities research explains how organizations continuously renew resources and capabilities, whereas resilience research primarily explains how organizations respond to adversity. Although both perspectives recognize adaptation as a central

organizational process, they generally conceptualize resilience and dynamic capabilities as parallel or complementary constructs rather than explaining their underlying relationship. Consequently, the literature provides limited theoretical understanding of how resilience itself evolves into an enduring organizational capability that continuously enables strategic adaptation across repeated episodes of environmental turbulence (Conz & Magnani, 2020; Ducheck, 2020; Hillmann & Guenther, 2021).

This limitation becomes particularly important because organizational adaptation is increasingly viewed as a continuous rather than episodic phenomenon. Organizations rarely experience a single disruption followed by a return to equilibrium. Instead, they confront successive waves of technological, institutional, competitive, and environmental changes requiring repeated resource reconfiguration, organizational learning, and strategic renewal (D'Aveni *et al.*, 2010; Liu *et al.*, 2024; Wenzel *et al.*, 2021). Existing theories successfully explain individual adaptation processes but provide less insight into the higher-order capability that enables organizations to sustain adaptive responses over extended periods. Consequently, resilience is frequently treated as an outcome of organizational capabilities rather than as a strategic capability with its own developmental mechanisms.

This unresolved issue represents a broader theoretical problem within strategic management. Dynamic Capabilities Theory explains capability renewal, while Organizational Resilience Theory explains organizational responses to adversity. However, neither perspective sufficiently explains how repeated adaptive processes become institutionalized into an enduring organizational capability capable of sustaining competitive adaptation across multiple environmental shocks. As a result, the mechanisms through which adaptive learning, resource reconfiguration, and strategic renewal collectively transform resilience into a higher-order organizational capability remain theoretically underdeveloped. Addressing this gap requires moving beyond viewing resilience as either an organizational outcome or an episodic response toward conceptualizing resilience as a strategic capability embedded within organizational adaptation processes.

Accordingly, this paper develops a middle-range theory of Strategic Resilience Capability. Rather than positioning resilience solely as an outcome of dynamic capabilities, we argue that strategic resilience constitutes a higher-order organizational capability emerging from continuous cycles of adaptive learning, strategic resource reconfiguration, and capability renewal. Through repeated interactions among these processes, organizations progressively develop an enduring capability that enables sustained competitive adaptation under persistent environmental turbulence. This perspective integrates Dynamic Capabilities Theory with Organizational Resilience Theory while specifying the mechanisms through which resilience becomes strategically embedded within organizational capability development.

The proposed theory makes several contributions to strategic management literature. First, it extends Dynamic Capabilities Theory by explicitly incorporating resilience as an organizational capability rather than treating it solely as an adaptation outcome. Second, it advances Organizational Resilience Theory by identifying the capability-building mechanisms through which resilience evolves over time. Third, it introduces Strategic Resilience Capability as a middle-range theoretical construct that connects adaptive learning, resource reconfiguration, and sustained competitive adaptation within a unified explanatory framework. By integrating these previously fragmented perspectives, the paper offers a more comprehensive explanation of how organizations maintain competitiveness under persistent environmental turbulence.

Accordingly, the objective of this conceptual paper is to develop a middle-range theory explaining how strategic resilience emerges as an organizational capability that enables sustained competitive adaptation. By integrating insights from Dynamic Capabilities Theory and Organizational Resilience Theory, the proposed framework seeks to clarify the mechanisms underlying capability formation, identify the conditions under which strategic resilience develops, and provide a theoretically grounded explanation for sustained organizational adaptation in increasingly volatile environments.

2. Theoretical Foundations and Conceptual Gaps

2.1 Dynamic Capabilities: Explaining Continuous Resource Reconfiguration under Environmental Change

Dynamic Capabilities Theory emerged as an extension of the resource-based view (RBV) to explain why some organizations maintain competitive advantage despite operating in highly dynamic environments. While the RBV emphasizes the strategic value of valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984), it largely assumes that strategic resources remain relatively stable over time. This assumption becomes increasingly problematic in environments characterized by rapid technological change, shifting customer preferences, geopolitical uncertainty, and institutional volatility, where competitive advantages quickly erode and organizational resources require continual renewal (D'Aveni *et al.*, 2010; Priem & Butler, 2001).

To address this limitation, Teece *et al.* (1997), conceptualized dynamic capabilities as the firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies in response to changing environments. Subsequent work refined this perspective by emphasizing three interrelated managerial activities: sensing environmental opportunities and threats, seizing strategic opportunities through investment and resource commitment, and transforming organizational resources through continual reconfiguration (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Teece, 2007). Rather than representing isolated routines, these activities constitute higher-order capabilities that enable organizations to continuously renew their strategic resource base while adapting to evolving environmental conditions (Ambrosini *et al.*, 2009; Winter, 2003).

Research has further demonstrated that dynamic capabilities are deeply embedded in organizational learning, managerial cognition, and resource orchestration. Learning processes facilitate the accumulation of organizational knowledge that supports capability evolution (Felin *et al.*, 2012; Zollo & Winter, 2002), while managerial cognition influences how environmental signals are interpreted and translated into strategic action (Helfat & Martin, 2015; Tripsas & Gavetti, 2000). Similarly, effective resource orchestration enables firms to mobilize, bundle, and deploy strategic resources in ways that sustain competitive performance despite environmental turbulence (Sirmon *et al.*, 2007, 2011). Consequently, dynamic capabilities have become the dominant theoretical explanation for strategic adaptation in uncertain environments (Schilke *et al.*, 2018).

Nevertheless, important conceptual limitations remain. Existing dynamic capabilities research primarily explains how organizations reconfigure resources, but provides less attention to how organizations preserve adaptive capacity across repeated episodes of disruption. Resource reconfiguration explains organizational change, yet it does not fully explain why some organizations consistently sustain adaptive performance while others repeatedly fail despite possessing similar capabilities (Barreto, 2010; Wang & Ahmed, 2007). Moreover, capability renewal is often conceptualized as a sequence of managerial activities rather than as an enduring organizational property that enables long-term resilience under persistent turbulence. As a result, Dynamic Capabilities Theory explains organizational adaptation but only partially explains the organizational conditions necessary for sustained adaptive persistence.

2.2 Organizational Resilience: From Recovery Capability to Strategic Adaptation

Organizational resilience has gained increasing prominence as organizations confront increasingly complex and prolonged environmental disruptions. Early resilience research largely focused on organizational recovery following unexpected crises, emphasizing the ability to absorb shocks, maintain essential functions, and return to pre-disruption conditions

(Bhamra *et al.*, 2011; Christopher & Peck, 2004). This perspective conceptualized resilience primarily as organizational robustness and continuity.

More recent scholarship has substantially broadened this understanding. Rather than viewing resilience solely as recovery, scholars increasingly define organizational resilience as a dynamic process involving anticipation, coping, adaptation, learning, and transformation (Duchek, 2020; Linnenluecke, 2017). Under this perspective, resilient organizations do not simply restore previous operating conditions but continually renew organizational routines and capabilities in response to evolving environmental demands. Consequently, resilience becomes closely associated with organizational learning, innovation, and strategic renewal rather than emergency response alone (Hillmann & Guenther, 2021).

Recent empirical studies reinforce this capability-oriented perspective. Organizational learning enhances resilience by enabling firms to interpret environmental signals, integrate new knowledge, and redesign organizational processes (Do *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, digital capabilities strengthen resilience by improving organizational flexibility and accelerating adaptive responses to environmental change (Liu *et al.*, 2024). Research conducted across supply chain management, tourism, logistics, and strategic management further demonstrates that resilient organizations consistently outperform less resilient competitors under prolonged environmental turbulence because they continuously renew organizational capabilities instead of merely surviving crises (Dovbischuk, 2022; Prayag *et al.*, 2024; Stadtfeld & Gruchmann, 2024).

Despite these advances, Organizational Resilience Theory continues to exhibit conceptual ambiguity. The literature frequently treats resilience simultaneously as a capability, a process, an outcome, or an organizational attribute, leading to inconsistent theoretical explanations (Conz & Magnani, 2020; Hillmann & Guenther, 2021). More importantly, although recent studies recognize that resilience involves adaptive capability development, they rarely explain the mechanisms through which resilience itself evolves into an enduring strategic capability embedded within organizational resource reconfiguration. Consequently, resilience remains insufficiently integrated into mainstream strategic management theory.

2.3 Strategic Adaptation: Explaining Organizational Renewal without Explaining Adaptive Capability Formation

Strategic adaptation has long been recognized as a central mechanism through which organizations maintain alignment with changing environmental conditions. Early organizational theory viewed adaptation as adjustments in organizational structures and strategies responding to environmental complexity and uncertainty (Burgelman, 1991; Duncan, 1972). Subsequent research expanded this perspective by emphasizing organizational learning, strategic renewal, exploration, exploitation, and continuous innovation as fundamental drivers of organizational adaptation (Benner & Tushman, 2003; Jansen *et al.*, 2006; March, 1991)

Within strategic management, adaptation increasingly represents an ongoing process of organizational renewal rather than episodic strategic change. Research on ambidexterity demonstrates that organizations simultaneously exploit existing capabilities while exploring new opportunities to sustain competitiveness (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013; Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008). Similarly, capability reconfiguration and organizational morphing emphasize continual strategic transformation in response to environmental evolution (Lavie, 2006; Rindova & Kotha, 2001)

Although these perspectives successfully explain organizational change, they primarily focus on adaptation as an observable organizational outcome. Existing studies devote comparatively less attention to explaining the organizational capability that consistently enables repeated strategic adaptation across successive environmental disruptions. Organizations often display successful adaptation during individual crises but fail to maintain

adaptive performance when environmental uncertainty becomes persistent and cumulative (Williams *et al.*, 2017; Yao *et al.*, 2020). Consequently, strategic adaptation research identifies what organizations do but provides only limited explanation regarding what organizational capability makes continuous adaptation possible.

This distinction is theoretically important because sustained competitive adaptation requires more than episodic strategic change. It requires an enduring organizational capability that repeatedly supports learning, resource renewal, strategic flexibility, and capability evolution across changing environmental contexts. Yet this underlying capability remains only partially conceptualized within existing adaptation literature.

2.4 Integrative Conceptual Gap: Toward Strategic Resilience as a Higher-Order Organizational Capability

Taken together, Dynamic Capabilities Theory, Organizational Resilience Theory, and Strategic Adaptation research collectively acknowledge that organizations must continuously adjust to environmental turbulence. However, each perspective explains only part of the broader adaptive process.

Dynamic Capabilities Theory explains how organizations renew strategic resources, yet largely assumes that successful capability renewal naturally generates long-term adaptability (Schilke *et al.*, 2018; Teece, 2007). Organizational Resilience Theory explains how organizations withstand and recover from adversity, yet often treats resilience as an outcome or organizational characteristic rather than an evolving strategic capability (Duchek, 2020; Hillmann & Guenther, 2021). Meanwhile, Strategic Adaptation research explains organizational responses to environmental change, but rarely specifies the higher-order capability that repeatedly enables these adaptive responses across successive disruptions.

These theoretical perspectives therefore converge on a common phenomenon: organizational adaptation, but diverge in their underlying explanatory mechanisms. More importantly, none explicitly explains how resilience becomes institutionalized as an enduring organizational capability through repeated cycles of learning, resource reconfiguration, and strategic renewal. This missing mechanism represents an important conceptual gap because organizations increasingly operate under conditions where adaptation is continuous rather than episodic.

Strategic Resilience Capability represents a distinct higher-order organizational capability that bridges these fragmented theoretical perspectives. Rather than conceptualizing resilience as either an outcome of dynamic capabilities or merely a response to crises, we propose that resilience emerges through cumulative processes of adaptive learning, resource reconfiguration, and capability renewal. Once institutionalized, this capability enables organizations to sustain competitive adaptation despite persistent environmental turbulence. By positioning resilience as the mechanism connecting dynamic capabilities with sustained strategic adaptation, the proposed theory addresses an explanatory gap that remains unresolved across the existing literature.

To clarify the unresolved theoretical fragmentation identified above, the proposed positioning framework illustrates how Strategic Resilience Capability integrates previously disconnected perspectives into a coherent explanation of sustained organizational adaptation.

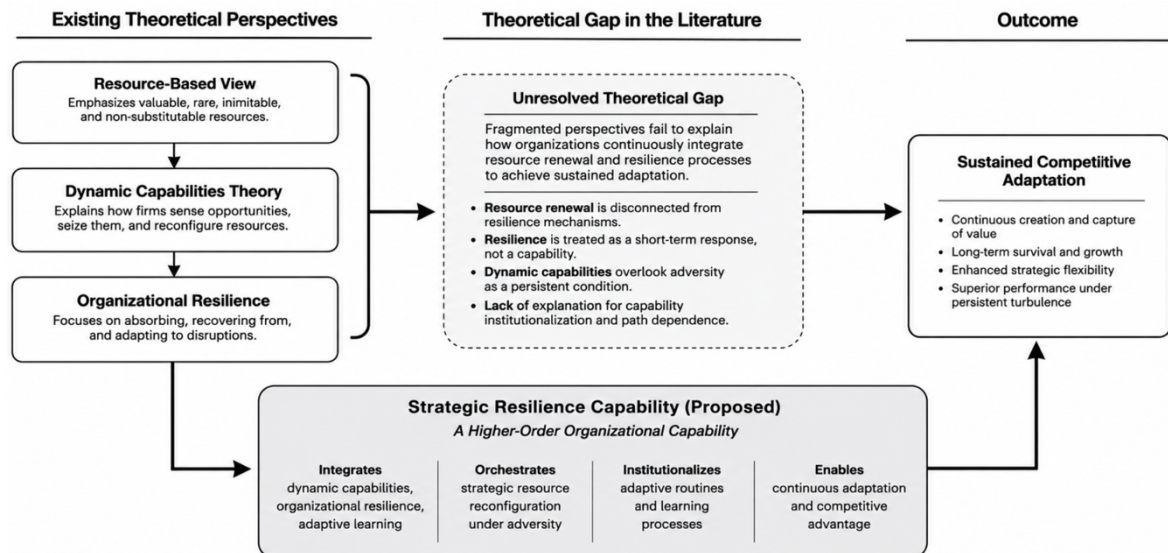


Figure 1. Theoretical Positioning of Strategic Resilience Capability
Source: Developed by the authors.

Figure 1 demonstrates that existing theories explain complementary dimensions of organizational adaptation but leave unresolved the mechanism connecting resource renewal, resilience, and sustained adaptation. The proposed Strategic Resilience Capability occupies this missing theoretical space by integrating these fragmented perspectives into a higher-order organizational capability, thereby establishing the conceptual foundation for the middle-range theory developed in subsequent sections.

To clarify the theoretical fragmentation identified across the reviewed perspectives, the following comparison synthesizes their explanatory strengths, conceptual limitations, and unresolved mechanisms that motivate the proposed middle-range theory.

Table 1. Comparison of Existing Theoretical Perspectives and the Proposed Research Opportunity

Theory	Primary Focus	Main Strength	Conceptual Limitation	Missing Mechanism
Resource-Based View	Strategic resources	Explains sources of competitive advantage	Assumes relative resource stability	How firms continuously renew strategic resources
Dynamic Capabilities	Resource reconfiguration	Explains capability renewal under change	Limited explanation of enduring adaptive capacity	How resilience becomes an organizational capability
Organizational Resilience	Organizational response to adversity	Explains recovery, adaptation, and renewal	Resilience conceptualized inconsistently as process, outcome, or capability	Capability formation through repeated adaptation
Strategic Adaptation	Strategic change and organizational renewal	Explains continuous strategic adjustment	Focuses on adaptation outcomes rather than capability development	Organizational capability enabling sustained adaptation
Proposed Middle-Range Theory	Strategic Resilience Capability	Integrates capability development and resilience into one explanatory mechanism	Addresses fragmentation among existing theories	Explains how adaptive learning and resource reconfiguration produce sustained competitive adaptation

Source: Developed by the authors.

Table 1 demonstrates that existing theoretical perspectives provide complementary yet incomplete explanations of organizational adaptation. While each theory contributes valuable insights, none explicitly explains how resilience evolves into a higher-order organizational capability through repeated adaptive learning and resource reconfiguration. This unresolved mechanism provides the conceptual foundation for developing the proposed Strategic Resilience Capability Theory (SRCT).

3. Building a Middle-Range Theory of Strategic Resilience Capability

3.1 Domain Specification

The proposed theory is developed to explain how organizations sustain competitive adaptation under conditions of persistent environmental turbulence. Unlike existing perspectives that primarily address organizational responses to isolated crises or episodic environmental change, this theory assumes that uncertainty has become a permanent feature of contemporary competitive environments. Organizations increasingly operate within contexts characterized by overlapping technological disruption, geopolitical instability, institutional volatility, climate-related uncertainty, and rapidly evolving customer expectations. Consequently, strategic adaptation is no longer an occasional organizational activity but an ongoing organizational requirement (D'Aveni *et al.*, 2010; Hillmann & Guenther, 2021; Wenzel *et al.*, 2021).

The unit of analysis is the organization as a collective adaptive system. Although managerial cognition and leadership influence strategic decisions (Adner & Helfat, 2003; Helfat & Martin, 2015), the theory focuses on organizational-level capability development rather than individual managerial behavior. Strategic resilience is therefore conceptualized as an organizational capability embedded within routines, learning processes, resource orchestration, and capability renewal mechanisms that persist beyond individual decision makers.

The proposed theory is bounded to organizations operating in environments characterized by moderate to high environmental dynamism. In relatively stable environments, organizations may achieve competitive advantage through ordinary operational capabilities or static resource configurations (Winter, 2003). Under persistent turbulence, however, competitive advantage increasingly depends on the organization's ability to repeatedly learn, reconfigure strategic resources, and renew capabilities without experiencing strategic exhaustion. Accordingly, the explanatory power of the proposed theory is expected to increase as environmental uncertainty becomes more persistent and multidimensional (Dess & Beard, 1984; Milliken, 1987).

Furthermore, the theory assumes that organizational resilience is neither an inherent organizational trait nor an immediate consequence of successful crisis management. Instead, resilience develops cumulatively through repeated adaptive cycles in which organizations continuously interpret environmental change, generate organizational learning, reconfigure strategic resources, and institutionalize adaptive routines. Strategic resilience therefore represents an emergent organizational capability rather than an isolated organizational response.

3.2 Core Constructs

The proposed middle-range theory comprises five interrelated constructs that collectively explain the emergence of Strategic Resilience Capability.

The first construct, environmental turbulence, represents the continuous presence of uncertainty arising from technological change, market instability, institutional transformation,

competitive dynamics, and unexpected disruptions. Rather than functioning solely as an external threat, environmental turbulence serves as the initiating condition that activates organizational adaptation processes (Duncan, 1972; Milliken, 1987).

The second construct, adaptive learning, refers to the organization's ability to acquire, interpret, integrate, and institutionalize knowledge generated from repeated interactions with changing environments. Unlike routine organizational learning, adaptive learning continuously challenges existing assumptions and supports the revision of organizational routines, enabling organizations to avoid capability rigidity while enhancing strategic flexibility (Felin *et al.*, 2012; March, 1991; Zollo & Winter, 2002)

The third construct, strategic resource reconfiguration, captures the organization's capacity to realign tangible and intangible resources in response to evolving environmental conditions. Resource reconfiguration involves more than reallocating assets; it encompasses recombining organizational knowledge, redesigning processes, restructuring capabilities, and redeploying strategic resources to maintain environmental fit (Lavie, 2006; Teece *et al.*, 1997)

The fourth construct, Strategic Resilience Capability, constitutes the central theoretical construct of this paper. It is defined as a higher-order organizational capability enabling organizations to repeatedly absorb environmental disturbances, renew strategic resources, institutionalize adaptive learning, and sustain strategic adaptation across successive episodes of environmental turbulence. Unlike traditional conceptualizations that regard resilience as recovery from disruption, Strategic Resilience Capability emphasizes the organization's accumulated adaptive capacity resulting from repeated cycles of organizational renewal (Conz & Magnani, 2020; Ducheck, 2020; Hillmann & Guenther, 2021).

Finally, sustained competitive adaptation represents the long-term organizational outcome. Rather than measuring short-term performance improvement, this construct reflects the organization's ability to maintain strategic alignment, renew competitive positioning, and continuously create value despite prolonged environmental change (Ciasullo *et al.*, 2024; Teece, 2018).

To consolidate the conceptual foundation of the proposed theory, the following table summarizes each core construct, its conceptual definition, and representative scholarly references underpinning the theoretical framework

Table 2. Core Construct Definitions

Construct	Definition	Representative References
Environmental Turbulence	Persistent multidimensional environmental uncertainty requiring continual adaptation	Duncan (1972); Dess & Beard (1984); Milliken (1987)
Adaptive Learning	Organizational process of acquiring, integrating, and institutionalizing new knowledge	March (1991); Zollo & Winter (2002); Felin <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Strategic Resource Reconfiguration	Continuous renewal and redeployment of organizational resources and capabilities	Teece <i>et al.</i> (1997); Lavie (2006); Sirmon <i>et al.</i> (2011)
Strategic Resilience Capability	Higher-order capability enabling continuous adaptation through institutionalized resilience	Ducheck (2020); Conz & Magnani (2020); Hillmann & Guenther (2021)
Sustained Competitive Adaptation	Long-term capability to maintain strategic fit and competitive advantage under persistent turbulence	Teece (2018); Ciasullo <i>et al.</i> (2024)

Source: Developed by the authors based on the synthesized literature.

Table 2 clarifies the conceptual boundaries of the proposed theory by distinguishing its five interrelated constructs and their respective theoretical foundations. Together, these

constructs establish the explanatory architecture of Strategic Resilience Capability Theory, demonstrating how environmental turbulence initiates adaptive processes that culminate in sustained competitive adaptation through organizational capability development.

3.3 Capability-Building Mechanism

The central argument of the proposed theory is that Strategic Resilience Capability emerges through cumulative organizational learning rather than isolated organizational responses. Existing literature generally assumes that organizations either possess resilience or develop resilience following major disruptions. In contrast, this theory argues that resilience evolves progressively through iterative adaptive cycles.

The process begins when environmental turbulence disrupts established organizational assumptions and exposes the limitations of existing routines. These disruptions generate cognitive disequilibrium, compelling organizations to interpret environmental signals and reassess strategic priorities. Such interpretation stimulates adaptive learning, through which organizations acquire new knowledge, revise existing mental models, and challenge organizational inertia (Nadkarni, 2008; Tripsas & Gavetti, 2000).

Adaptive learning subsequently enables strategic resource reconfiguration. Organizations selectively modify resource portfolios, redesign operational processes, restructure organizational routines, and develop new capability combinations that better align with changing environmental conditions. Importantly, repeated resource reconfiguration generates experiential knowledge regarding which adaptive responses produce sustainable outcomes and which fail under varying environmental circumstances (Schilke *et al.*, 2018; Sirmon *et al.*, 2011).

Over successive adaptive cycles, organizations begin institutionalizing these learning experiences into stable organizational routines. Rather than responding reactively to each new disruption, organizations progressively develop standardized processes for environmental scanning, organizational learning, strategic experimentation, and capability renewal. At this stage, resilience is no longer an episodic response but becomes embedded within organizational structures, routines, and decision-making processes.

The institutionalization of repeated adaptive cycles ultimately gives rise to Strategic Resilience Capability. Unlike conventional dynamic capabilities, which primarily explain resource reconfiguration, Strategic Resilience Capability captures the organization's accumulated ability to sustain adaptive performance across repeated episodes of environmental turbulence. The capability therefore functions as a higher-order integrative mechanism connecting environmental sensing, adaptive learning, resource orchestration, and strategic renewal into a coherent organizational capability.

Finally, Strategic Resilience Capability enables sustained competitive adaptation by reducing strategic rigidity while increasing organizational flexibility, learning speed, and capability renewal. Organizations possessing this capability are not necessarily those that experience fewer disruptions; rather, they are organizations capable of repeatedly converting environmental adversity into opportunities for strategic renewal and long-term competitive persistence.

The proposed capability-building mechanism explains how repeated organizational adaptation progressively transforms resilience into an enduring strategic capability through interconnected learning, resource renewal, and institutionalization processes.

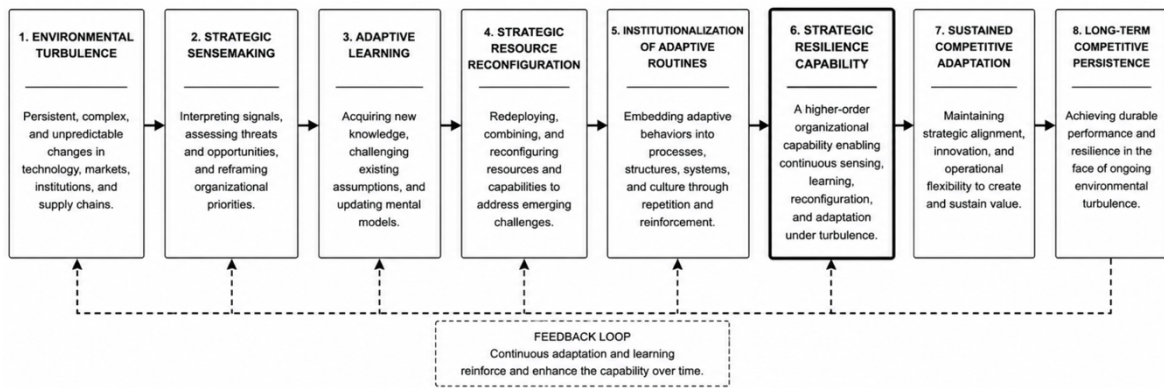


Figure 2. Capability-Building Mechanism of Strategic Resilience Capability

Source: Developed by the authors.

Figure 2 illustrates the proposed capability-building mechanism through which repeated environmental turbulence stimulates strategic sensemaking, adaptive learning, and strategic resource reconfiguration. As these adaptive processes become institutionalized into organizational routines, they generate Strategic Resilience Capability as a higher-order capability that enables sustained competitive adaptation and ultimately supports long-term competitive persistence.

3.4 Boundary Conditions

The explanatory power of the proposed theory depends on several contextual conditions.

First, environmental dynamism strengthens the importance of Strategic Resilience Capability because increasing uncertainty intensifies the need for continuous organizational adaptation (Dess & Beard, 1984).

Second, organizational slack resources facilitate adaptive experimentation by providing sufficient strategic flexibility for capability renewal. Organizations lacking discretionary resources may struggle to institutionalize adaptive learning despite recognizing environmental change (Sirmon *et al.*, 2007).

Third, leadership commitment influences the continuity of adaptive learning and organizational transformation. Sustained capability development requires consistent managerial support for experimentation, organizational learning, and long-term capability investment (Helfat & Martin, 2015)

Finally, digital capability enhances adaptive learning by accelerating information processing, knowledge integration, and resource coordination across organizational functions. Consequently, digital maturity amplifies the effectiveness of Strategic Resilience Capability in highly dynamic environments (Liu *et al.*, 2024).

3.5 Proposition Development

Based on the proposed theoretical mechanism, five propositions are advanced.

Proposition 1.

Environmental turbulence positively stimulates organizational adaptive learning because repeated environmental disruptions increase the need for organizational interpretation and knowledge renewal.

Proposition 2.

Adaptive learning positively facilitates strategic resource reconfiguration by enabling organizations to redesign routines, redeploy resources, and develop new capability combinations.

Proposition 3.

Repeated strategic resource reconfiguration contributes to the emergence of Strategic Resilience Capability through the institutionalization of adaptive routines and organizational learning.

Proposition 4.

Strategic Resilience Capability positively enhances sustained competitive adaptation by enabling organizations to repeatedly maintain strategic alignment under persistent environmental turbulence.

Proposition 5.

The positive relationship between Strategic Resilience Capability and sustained competitive adaptation is strengthened by high levels of environmental dynamism, organizational slack resources, leadership commitment, and digital capability.

The proposed propositions collectively summarize the causal logic underlying Strategic Resilience Capability Theory by linking theoretical relationships with their respective conceptual foundations, thereby providing an integrated overview of the proposed explanatory mechanism.

Table 3. Summary of Theoretical Propositions and Their Supporting Foundations

	Proposition & Explanatory Logic	Supporting Theoretical Basis
P1	Environmental turbulence stimulates adaptive learning	Organizational Learning Theory; Dynamic Capabilities
P2	Adaptive learning enables strategic resource reconfiguration	Dynamic Capabilities; Resource Orchestration
P3	Repeated reconfiguration institutionalizes Strategic Resilience Capability	Capability Evolution; Organizational Resilience
P4	Strategic Resilience Capability enables sustained competitive adaptation	Dynamic Capabilities; Strategic Adaptation
P5	Environmental dynamism, organizational slack, leadership commitment, and digital capability strengthen the proposed relationships	Contingency Perspective; Dynamic Capabilities

Source: Developed by the authors.

Table 3 consolidates the five theoretical propositions and aligns each with its principal theoretical foundation. The summary clarifies how environmental turbulence, adaptive learning, resource reconfiguration, Strategic Resilience Capability, and contextual boundary conditions jointly constitute the explanatory logic of the proposed middle-range theory, facilitating conceptual coherence and providing a clear basis for subsequent theoretical discussion and empirical examination.

4. Proposed Middle-Range Theory and Implications

4.1 Strategic Resilience Capability Theory

The preceding sections argue that existing strategic management literature has not adequately explained how organizations transform repeated adaptive responses into an enduring organizational capability. Dynamic Capabilities Theory provides a robust explanation of resource renewal and capability reconfiguration, while Organizational Resilience Theory explains how organizations anticipate, absorb, and recover from adversity. However, neither perspective explicitly specifies the organizational mechanism through which repeated adaptive processes become institutionalized into a sustainable strategic capability. To address this theoretical gap, this paper proposes Strategic Resilience Capability Theory (SRCT) as a middle-range theory explaining the emergence of resilience as a higher-order organizational capability.

SRCT is founded on the assumption that organizational resilience should not be understood as a temporary response activated during crises. Instead, resilience evolves through cumulative adaptive experiences that progressively reshape organizational routines, knowledge structures, and resource configurations. Organizations repeatedly exposed to environmental turbulence engage in continuous cycles of environmental interpretation, adaptive learning, strategic experimentation, and resource reconfiguration. These cycles gradually become institutionalized, allowing organizations to develop an enduring capability for continuous adaptation rather than merely recovering from isolated disruptions (Conz & Magnani, 2020; Ducheck, 2020).

The proposed theory therefore repositions resilience from an outcome variable to a strategic capability. This distinction is theoretically important because organizational resilience is frequently treated as evidence of successful adaptation after disruptive events. Such a perspective implicitly assumes that resilience is observed only after organizations survive adversity. SRCT instead argues that resilience exists before organizational outcomes emerge because it functions as an enabling capability that shapes how organizations continuously respond to changing environmental conditions. Consequently, resilience becomes an integral component of organizational capability development rather than a consequence of successful crisis management.

Another defining characteristic of SRCT is its emphasis on cumulative capability formation. Dynamic capabilities research generally explains organizational adaptation through sensing, seizing, and transforming activities (Teece, 2007). While these processes explain resource renewal, they provide limited explanation regarding why some organizations repeatedly sustain adaptive performance whereas others gradually experience capability erosion despite possessing similar strategic resources. SRCT proposes that the answer lies in the institutionalization of adaptive learning. Organizations capable of embedding learning into organizational routines progressively accumulate resilience as a higher-order capability that continuously enhances subsequent adaptation cycles.

This perspective also shifts the theoretical focus from episodic adaptation to adaptive continuity. Rather than asking how organizations respond to environmental disruptions, SRCT explains how organizations preserve adaptive capacity despite continuous environmental turbulence. Competitive advantage is therefore viewed not as the consequence of isolated strategic decisions but as the cumulative outcome of repeated capability renewal supported by Strategic Resilience Capability.

The proposed theory is synthesized into an integrated conceptual model that consolidates its principal constructs, causal relationships, contextual boundaries, and expected strategic outcomes within a coherent explanatory framework.

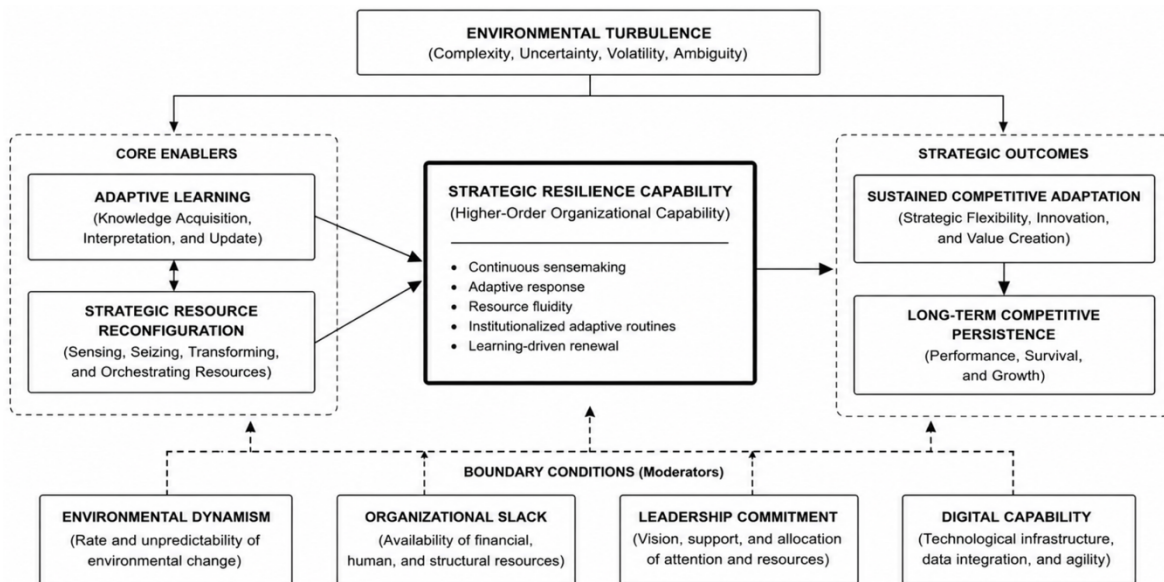


Figure 3. Strategic Resilience Capability Theory (SRCT)
Source: Developed by the authors.

Figure 3 presents Strategic Resilience Capability Theory as an integrated middle-range theory. Environmental turbulence activates adaptive learning and strategic resource reconfiguration, which jointly strengthen Strategic Resilience Capability. This higher-order capability enables sustained competitive adaptation and long-term competitive persistence, while environmental dynamism, organizational slack, leadership commitment, and digital capability define the contextual conditions under which the theory is expected to operate most effectively.

Collectively, the proposed model demonstrates that Strategic Resilience Capability is not merely another organizational capability but a higher-order capability that integrates adaptive learning, strategic resource reconfiguration, and organizational renewal into a coherent mechanism for sustained competitive adaptation. By formalizing these relationships within a bounded explanatory framework, SRCT establishes the theoretical basis for the contributions discussed in the following section.

4.2 Theoretical Contributions

The proposed theory contributes to several streams of strategic management research.

First, SRCT extends Dynamic Capabilities Theory by introducing resilience as an endogenous organizational capability rather than an external organizational outcome. Existing dynamic capabilities research primarily emphasizes resource renewal, capability reconfiguration, and strategic flexibility (Schilke *et al.*, 2018; Teece *et al.*, 1997). Although these processes explain organizational adaptation, they provide limited explanation regarding the organizational capability that sustains repeated adaptation under prolonged environmental turbulence. By positioning Strategic Resilience Capability as a higher-order capability emerging from iterative learning and resource reconfiguration, the proposed theory broadens the explanatory scope of Dynamic Capabilities Theory beyond capability renewal toward capability persistence.

Second, the proposed theory advances Organizational Resilience Theory by clarifying the developmental mechanisms underlying resilience. Prior resilience research has conceptualized resilience as a process, organizational attribute, outcome, or capability, resulting in conceptual fragmentation (Conz & Magnani, 2020; Hillmann & Guenther, 2021). SRCT addresses this ambiguity by specifying how adaptive learning, strategic experimentation, and repeated resource reconfiguration collectively generate resilience as

an institutionalized organizational capability. This mechanism provides a theoretically coherent explanation for resilience development that extends beyond crisis recovery.

Third, SRCT contributes to research on strategic adaptation by identifying the organizational capability responsible for sustaining repeated strategic renewal. Existing adaptation research effectively explains organizational responses to changing environments through organizational learning, ambidexterity, and strategic renewal (March, 1991; O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013; Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008). However, adaptation itself has generally been treated as the dependent phenomenon requiring explanation. The proposed theory shifts analytical attention toward the capability enabling continuous adaptation, thereby providing a more fundamental explanation of long-term strategic persistence.

Finally, the proposed theory contributes methodologically to middle-range theory development. Rather than attempting to establish a universal grand theory of organizational adaptation, SRCT deliberately specifies a bounded explanatory domain. The theory applies to organizations operating under persistent environmental turbulence where adaptive learning, capability renewal, and organizational flexibility become essential conditions for sustained competitiveness. This bounded scope enhances theoretical precision while facilitating future empirical refinement across different organizational and industrial contexts.

4.3 Managerial Implications

The proposed theory also offers important implications for strategic management practice. Contemporary organizations frequently invest substantial resources in crisis management systems, business continuity planning, and risk mitigation initiatives. While these approaches remain valuable, SRCT suggests that sustainable organizational competitiveness depends less on isolated crisis responses than on systematically developing organizational capabilities that continuously support adaptation.

Managers should therefore view resilience as an organizational investment rather than as an emergency response mechanism. Building Strategic Resilience Capability requires institutionalizing adaptive learning through mechanisms that encourage knowledge sharing, strategic experimentation, cross-functional collaboration, and continuous organizational reflection. Organizations capable of embedding these practices into routine decision-making processes are more likely to sustain adaptive performance across successive environmental disruptions.

The theory further implies that resource reconfiguration should become an ongoing managerial process rather than an exceptional strategic intervention. Instead of waiting until environmental crises force organizational restructuring, managers should continuously evaluate resource portfolios, organizational routines, technological capabilities, and strategic priorities to maintain alignment with evolving environmental conditions. Such proactive capability renewal reduces strategic inertia and strengthens organizational flexibility.

Leadership also plays a critical role in sustaining Strategic Resilience Capability. Senior managers influence not only strategic resource allocation but also organizational willingness to challenge established routines, encourage experimentation, and tolerate calculated risk associated with innovation. Consequently, leadership commitment becomes essential for institutionalizing adaptive learning across organizational levels.

Finally, digital transformation should not be viewed solely as technological modernization. Digital capabilities enhance organizational resilience by improving environmental sensing, accelerating knowledge integration, supporting organizational coordination, and facilitating rapid resource reconfiguration. Investments in digital infrastructure therefore contribute to organizational resilience only when integrated into broader organizational learning and capability development processes rather than implemented as isolated technological initiatives (Liu *et al.*, 2024).

5. Discussion and Future Research

5.1 Discussion

The central premise of this paper is that organizational resilience should be understood as a higher-order organizational capability rather than merely as an organizational response to environmental disruption. This perspective challenges the dominant tendency within existing literature to conceptualize resilience either as an organizational outcome or as a collection of adaptive processes activated during crises. Instead, the proposed Strategic Resilience Capability Theory (SRCT) argues that resilience emerges through cumulative organizational learning and repeated resource reconfiguration, eventually becoming institutionalized as an enduring organizational capability that continuously supports strategic adaptation.

This reconceptualization contributes to Dynamic Capabilities Theory by extending its explanatory focus beyond capability renewal toward capability persistence. Existing dynamic capabilities research has successfully demonstrated how organizations sense opportunities, seize emerging possibilities, and transform strategic resources to respond to environmental change (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Teece, 2007; Teece *et al.*, 1997). Nevertheless, the literature has provided relatively limited explanation regarding why organizations displaying similar dynamic capabilities frequently experience different levels of long-term adaptive performance. SRCT suggests that this variation is explained by differences in the degree to which adaptive learning becomes institutionalized into Strategic Resilience Capability. Thus, resilience is not simply an additional organizational capability but the higher-order capability that preserves the effectiveness of other dynamic capabilities under persistent environmental turbulence.

The proposed theory also advances Organizational Resilience Theory by addressing one of its long-standing conceptual ambiguities. Previous studies have variously defined resilience as a process, organizational attribute, capability, or organizational outcome, resulting in fragmented theoretical explanations (Conz & Magnani, 2020; Ducheck, 2020; Hillmann & Guenther, 2021). SRCT resolves this ambiguity by specifying a coherent developmental mechanism linking environmental turbulence, adaptive learning, resource reconfiguration, and institutionalized organizational routines. Consequently, resilience becomes theoretically distinguishable from both crisis response and organizational recovery because it is conceptualized as an accumulated organizational capability that continuously enables adaptation before, during, and after environmental disruption.

Another important contribution concerns the explanation of sustained competitive adaptation. Existing strategic adaptation literature has extensively examined organizational renewal, ambidexterity, strategic flexibility, and continuous innovation (March, 1991; O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013; Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008). However, these perspectives primarily explain adaptive actions rather than the organizational capability sustaining repeated adaptation over time. SRCT addresses this omission by identifying Strategic Resilience Capability as the mechanism connecting repeated organizational learning with sustained strategic renewal. Accordingly, competitive adaptation is no longer interpreted as the outcome of isolated strategic initiatives but as the cumulative consequence of organizational capability evolution.

The proposed theory likewise contributes to middle-range theory development within strategic management. Rather than attempting to formulate a universal explanation applicable across all organizational contexts, SRCT deliberately specifies a bounded explanatory domain characterized by persistent environmental turbulence. Such domain specification strengthens theoretical precision while enabling future empirical refinement across industries, organizational forms, and institutional environments. In this respect, SRCT aligns with the objective of middle-range theorizing by explaining a clearly defined

organizational phenomenon through explicitly articulated mechanisms and boundary conditions.

From a managerial perspective, the theory shifts organizational attention from crisis preparedness toward capability development. Managers frequently invest in contingency planning, business continuity systems, and operational risk management after disruptive events occur. While these initiatives remain important, SRCT suggests that long-term organizational competitiveness depends more fundamentally on the organization's capacity to institutionalize adaptive learning, continuously reconfigure strategic resources, and cultivate routines supporting ongoing strategic renewal. Consequently, resilience should be managed as a strategic organizational investment rather than as an emergency management function.

5.2 Future Research

Although the proposed theory advances the conceptual understanding of organizational resilience, several opportunities remain for future theoretical refinement and empirical validation.

First, future empirical studies should examine the complete capability-building mechanism proposed in this paper using longitudinal research designs. Because Strategic Resilience Capability is conceptualized as an accumulated organizational capability that develops over time, cross-sectional research designs are unlikely to capture its evolutionary nature adequately. Longitudinal case studies, panel data analyses, and process research would provide stronger evidence regarding how adaptive learning becomes institutionalized into organizational capability.

Second, future research should investigate the microfoundations underlying Strategic Resilience Capability. While the present theory adopts the organization as its primary unit of analysis, organizational capabilities ultimately emerge from interactions among managerial cognition, leadership behaviors, organizational routines, and collective learning processes (Felin *et al.*, 2012; Helfat & Martin, 2015). Integrating microfoundational perspectives would improve understanding of how individual- and team-level processes collectively contribute to organizational resilience capability.

Third, empirical research should examine contextual variations across industries and institutional environments. The proposed theory is expected to demonstrate stronger explanatory power in sectors characterized by high technological dynamism, global competition, digital transformation, and environmental uncertainty. Comparative studies across manufacturing, technology, healthcare, logistics, tourism, and public organizations may reveal important differences in the formation and effectiveness of Strategic Resilience Capability.

Fourth, future studies may extend the theory by incorporating additional organizational capabilities that potentially reinforce or complement Strategic Resilience Capability. Digital capability, organizational ambidexterity, strategic agility, sustainability orientation, and innovation capability may function as complementary capability configurations that jointly influence sustained competitive adaptation. Configurational approaches such as fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) may provide valuable insights into multiple pathways through which organizations develop resilience under varying environmental conditions.

Finally, future conceptual work should continue refining the theoretical boundaries of Strategic Resilience Capability. The present paper positions resilience as a higher-order organizational capability emerging through adaptive learning and resource reconfiguration. Future studies may investigate whether this capability interacts with emerging theoretical perspectives, including business model innovation, ecosystem resilience, artificial

intelligence-enabled organizational learning, and digital transformation. Such theoretical extensions would enhance the explanatory scope of SRCT while preserving its identity as a bounded middle-range theory.

To consolidate the proposed directions for subsequent scholarly inquiry, the following table summarizes the principal research opportunities, guiding questions, methodological approaches, and expected theoretical contributions derived from Strategic Resilience Capability Theory.

Table 4. Future Research Agenda

Research Direction	Key Research Question	Recommended Method	Expected Contribution
Capability Evolution	How does Strategic Resilience Capability emerge over time?	Longitudinal case study; Panel data	Validate the proposed evolutionary mechanism
Microfoundations	How do managerial cognition and organizational learning shape Strategic Resilience Capability?	Multi-level analysis; Mixed methods	Extend the microfoundational perspective of capability development
Cross-Context Validation	Does SRCT operate similarly across industries and institutional settings?	Comparative cross-industry studies	Establish contextual boundary conditions
Capability Configurations	How does Strategic Resilience Capability interact with digital capability, ambidexterity, and innovation capability?	fsQCA; SEM; Mixed methods	Identify complementary capability configurations
Theory Extension	How can SRCT be integrated with ecosystem resilience, business model innovation, or AI-enabled organizational learning?	Conceptual and theory-building research	Expand the explanatory scope of Strategic Resilience Capability Theory

Source: Developed by the authors.

Table 4 synthesizes the future research agenda by linking priority research directions with corresponding research questions, methodological recommendations, and anticipated theoretical contributions. This structured overview demonstrates how Strategic Resilience Capability Theory can be empirically validated, theoretically refined, and extended across diverse organizational contexts while preserving its bounded middle-range theoretical orientation.

6. Conclusion

This paper has argued that the increasing persistence of environmental turbulence requires a fundamental reconceptualization of organizational resilience within strategic management research. While Dynamic Capabilities Theory explains how organizations renew and reconfigure strategic resources, and Organizational Resilience Theory explains how organizations respond to adversity, neither perspective sufficiently explains how repeated adaptive responses evolve into an enduring organizational capability that sustains competitive adaptation over time. This unresolved theoretical issue has limited the integration of these two influential streams of research and constrained the understanding of long-term organizational adaptation.

To address this gap, the paper proposed Strategic Resilience Capability Theory (SRCT) as a middle-range theory explaining how resilience emerges through cumulative cycles of adaptive learning, strategic resource reconfiguration, and the institutionalization of adaptive

routines. Rather than conceptualizing resilience as an outcome of successful crisis management or a temporary organizational response, SRCT positions resilience as a higher-order organizational capability that continuously enables organizations to maintain strategic alignment under persistent environmental turbulence. This perspective provides a coherent explanatory mechanism linking environmental turbulence, organizational learning, capability renewal, and sustained competitive adaptation within a unified theoretical framework.

The proposed theory contributes to strategic management research in three important ways. First, it extends Dynamic Capabilities Theory by identifying Strategic Resilience Capability as the organizational mechanism that sustains capability effectiveness over time. Second, it advances Organizational Resilience Theory by clarifying the developmental process through which resilience becomes institutionalized as an enduring capability rather than remaining a crisis-specific response. Third, it contributes to middle-range theory development by integrating previously fragmented theoretical perspectives into a bounded explanatory framework with clearly specified constructs, causal mechanisms, propositions, and boundary conditions.

Although conceptual in nature, SRCT establishes a foundation for future empirical research examining how organizations develop resilience as a strategic capability across different industries, institutional contexts, and technological environments. As organizations continue to confront increasingly interconnected and persistent forms of uncertainty, understanding resilience as an organizational capability rather than merely a reaction to disruption offers a more comprehensive explanation of sustained competitive adaptation and provides a promising direction for future theory development in strategic management.

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