



Building Organizational Legitimacy in Volatile Markets: A Strategic Marketing Alignment Perspective on Sustainable Growth

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Abstract

Organizations increasingly operate in environments characterized by persistent uncertainty, technological disruption, and rapidly changing competitive conditions, making continuous strategic renewal a critical capability for long-term survival. Despite extensive research on leadership sensemaking, strategic renewal, dynamic capabilities, and strategic human resource management, existing knowledge remains theoretically fragmented, providing limited explanation of how leaders' cognitive interpretations are translated into sustained organizational adaptation. This conceptual article addresses this gap by developing an integrated middle-range theoretical framework that explains the recursive process through which leadership sensemaking shapes strategic interpretation, stimulates human resource reconfiguration, and ultimately enables continuous strategic renewal. Drawing upon the complementary insights of sensemaking theory, dynamic capability theory, strategic renewal, and strategic human resource management, the article synthesizes these perspectives into a coherent causal mechanism and advances a set of theoretically grounded propositions. The proposed framework extends current knowledge by identifying human resource reconfiguration as the critical adaptive mechanism linking managerial cognition with capability renewal and organizational adaptation. The study contributes to theory by integrating previously disconnected perspectives into a unified explanatory model and provides a robust foundation for future empirical research examining the cognitive and organizational microfoundations of continuous strategic renewal in increasingly turbulent environments.

Keywords

leadership sensemaking; human resource reconfiguration;
continuous strategic renewal; dynamic capabilities; strategic
human resource management; organizational adaptation

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1. Introduction

Organizations increasingly operate in environments characterized by technological disruption, geopolitical instability, accelerated digital transformation, shifting workforce expectations, and persistent competitive uncertainty. Rather than confronting episodic change, organizations are now required to sustain continuous adaptation to maintain strategic relevance and long-term competitiveness. Consequently, organizational adaptation is no longer viewed as a discrete strategic response but as an ongoing renewal process that continuously aligns organizational resources, capabilities, and strategic intent with evolving environmental conditions (Agarwal & Helfat, 2009; Schmitt *et al.*, 2018). Recent studies further suggest that continuous strategic renewal depends not only on the ability to recognize environmental changes but also on an organization's capacity to repeatedly reorganize its internal resources, particularly human resources, to support evolving strategic priorities (Apascaritei & Elvira, 2022; Nevalainen *et al.*, 2025).

Leadership plays a pivotal role in this adaptation process because environmental changes do not automatically translate into organizational action. Strategic responses emerge through managerial interpretation of ambiguous events, evolving opportunities, and potential threats. The sensemaking perspective argues that organizational realities are socially constructed through ongoing processes of interpretation in which leaders assign meaning to uncertain situations before initiating strategic action (Weick, 1988; Weick *et al.*, 2005). Through sensemaking and subsequent sensegiving, leaders influence how organizational members understand strategic priorities, interpret environmental signals, and coordinate collective responses during periods of change (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). Consequently, leadership sensemaking represents a critical cognitive foundation that shapes organizational adaptation under conditions of uncertainty.

The organizational sensemaking literature has substantially advanced understanding of how leaders interpret crises, construct organizational identities, and mobilize strategic change (Cornelissen *et al.*, 2014; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Gioia *et al.*, 2000). Likewise, research on strategic renewal has demonstrated that organizational longevity depends on continuous learning, capability development, and strategic reorientation rather than isolated episodes of transformation (Agarwal & Helfat, 2009; Crossan & Berdrow, 2003; Schmitt *et al.*, 2018). Parallel developments within the dynamic capabilities literature emphasize the importance of sensing opportunities, seizing emerging possibilities, and transforming organizational resources to sustain competitive advantage in turbulent environments (Helfat & Peteraf, 2015; Schilke *et al.*, 2018; Teece, 2007). Meanwhile, strategic human resource management research increasingly recognizes that human capital and human resource systems constitute strategic assets whose configuration significantly influences organizational adaptability and long-term performance (Apascaritei & Elvira, 2022; Lepak & Snell, 1999; Wright & McMahan, 1992).

Despite these theoretical advances, existing research remains fragmented across disciplinary boundaries. First, the sensemaking literature primarily explains how leaders interpret changing environments and construct shared organizational meaning but offers limited theoretical explanation regarding how these interpretations become concrete organizational resource changes (Cristofaro, 2022; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Second, dynamic capability theory extensively explains resource reconfiguration as a mechanism for organizational renewal but pays comparatively less attention to the cognitive processes through which leaders recognize the need for such reconfiguration (Helfat & Martin, 2015; Teece, 2007). Third, strategic HRM research demonstrates that human resource systems enhance organizational performance and resilience but provides limited explanation regarding how human resource reconfiguration emerges as an adaptive consequence of leadership cognition during strategic renewal (Apascaritei & Elvira, 2022; Jiang *et al.*, 2012; Mehralian *et al.*, 2023). As a result, the theoretical connection linking leadership

interpretation, human resource reconfiguration, and continuous strategic renewal remains insufficiently developed.

This fragmentation is particularly significant because human resources represent one of the most malleable strategic assets available to organizational leaders during periods of environmental change. Leadership interpretations frequently shape decisions concerning talent redeployment, workforce flexibility, capability development, learning investments, organizational restructuring, and knowledge integration. Such human resource reconfiguration subsequently influences the organization's ability to renew capabilities, overcome inertia, and sustain strategic adaptation over time (Chadwick *et al.*, 2015; Montero Guerra *et al.*, 2023; Sirmon *et al.*, 2007). Nevertheless, existing theoretical perspectives rarely conceptualize these processes as an integrated explanatory mechanism connecting managerial cognition with organizational renewal.

Accordingly, this paper argues that leadership sensemaking should not be viewed merely as a cognitive process of environmental interpretation but as the initiating mechanism of organizational adaptation that activates human resource reconfiguration and ultimately enables continuous strategic renewal. Building upon insights from sensemaking theory, strategic renewal, dynamic capabilities, and strategic human resource management, this article proposes an integrated conceptual explanation that connects these previously disconnected theoretical streams into a coherent middle-range theory of organizational adaptation. Specifically, the proposed framework explains how leadership sensemaking shapes strategic interpretation, how strategic interpretation guides human resource reconfiguration, and how such reconfiguration facilitates ongoing capability renewal under conditions of environmental turbulence.

The article makes three primary theoretical contributions. First, it extends organizational sensemaking theory by specifying the organizational mechanism through which managerial interpretation influences strategic adaptation beyond meaning construction alone. Second, it enriches dynamic capability and strategic renewal research by introducing leadership sensemaking as an important cognitive antecedent of resource reconfiguration. Third, it advances strategic HRM literature by conceptualizing human resource reconfiguration as a dynamic adaptive process linking managerial cognition with continuous strategic renewal rather than as a static bundle of HR practices. Through this theoretical integration, the paper develops a middle-range theory that offers a more comprehensive explanation of how organizations continuously adapt by connecting leadership cognition, human resource reconfiguration, and strategic renewal into a unified conceptual framework capable of explaining sustained organizational adaptation in increasingly turbulent environments.

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Leadership Sensemaking as the Cognitive Foundation of Organizational Adaptation

Organizational adaptation begins with interpretation rather than action. Environmental turbulence, technological disruption, and institutional uncertainty do not inherently determine strategic responses; instead, they become meaningful through the interpretive processes of organizational leaders. Sensemaking theory argues that individuals actively construct plausible explanations for ambiguous events, enabling coordinated action under conditions of uncertainty (Weick, 1988; Weick *et al.*, 2005). Rather than treating environmental signals as objective facts, leaders selectively notice, interpret, and organize information into coherent strategic narratives that shape organizational decision-making. Consequently, leadership sensemaking serves as a cognitive mechanism that influences how organizations recognize strategic threats, identify emerging opportunities, and determine appropriate adaptive responses (Cristofaro, 2022; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014).

Subsequent developments in the sensemaking literature expanded this perspective by introducing sensegiving, emphasizing that leaders do not merely interpret organizational realities for themselves but also actively shape collective understanding among organizational members (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). Through communication, framing, and symbolic actions, leaders influence organizational attention, reduce ambiguity, and mobilize coordinated responses to strategic change. Organizational adaptation therefore depends not only on the accuracy of managerial interpretation but also on leaders' ability to align collective cognition with emerging strategic priorities (Cornelissen *et al.*, 2014; Rouleau, 2005). This social dimension of sensemaking highlights that organizational renewal is fundamentally an interpretive process before it becomes a structural or operational transformation.

Nevertheless, despite its substantial contributions, the sensemaking literature primarily explains how meanings are created and shared rather than how those interpretations subsequently reshape organizational resources. Reviews by Maitlis & Christianson (2014) and Cristofaro (2022) acknowledge that although considerable attention has been devoted to cognitive interpretation, communication, and identity construction, comparatively limited theoretical development explains the organizational mechanisms translating leadership interpretation into sustained strategic adaptation. Existing research therefore leaves an important explanatory gap concerning how leadership sensemaking becomes embedded in organizational capabilities and resource configurations that support continuous renewal.

2.2 Strategic Renewal and Organizational Adaptation

Strategic renewal literature conceptualizes organizational adaptation as a continuous process through which firms modify strategies, capabilities, and organizational arrangements to maintain long-term competitiveness (Agarwal & Helfat, 2009; Schmitt *et al.*, 2018). Unlike episodic organizational change, strategic renewal emphasizes ongoing reorientation in response to evolving competitive environments. This perspective recognizes that successful organizations continuously renew strategic resources, revise organizational routines, and develop new capabilities rather than relying solely on existing competitive advantages.

Foundational studies explain strategic renewal through organizational learning, strategic experimentation, and capability evolution. Crossan *et al.* (1999) and Crossan & Berdrow (2003) describe renewal as a learning process linking individual intuition, collective interpretation, institutionalization, and organizational knowledge development. Similarly, March (1991) argues that organizations must continuously balance exploration of new opportunities with exploitation of existing competencies to avoid strategic stagnation. Burgelman (1991) further demonstrates that organizational adaptation emerges through interactions among managerial initiatives, internal strategic processes, and evolving organizational contexts. Together, these perspectives position renewal as a dynamic organizational capability rather than a one-time strategic event.

Recent reviews reinforce the importance of strategic renewal while identifying unresolved theoretical tensions. Schmitt *et al.* (2018) argue that existing research has concentrated primarily on organizational outcomes, renewal trajectories, and environmental contingencies but provides less explanation regarding the underlying cognitive and managerial mechanisms initiating renewal. Similarly, Hortovanyi *et al.* (2021) and Nevalainen *et al.* (2025) suggest that leadership capabilities and executive development significantly influence renewal processes, yet existing frameworks insufficiently explain how managerial interpretation translates into organizational resource transformation. Consequently, although strategic renewal explains why organizations must continuously adapt, it offers only limited insight into the cognitive origins of adaptive resource reconfiguration.

2.3 Dynamic Capabilities and Human Resource Reconfiguration

Dynamic capability theory offers an influential explanation of how organizations sustain competitive advantage under changing environmental conditions. Teece *et al.* (1997) define dynamic capabilities as the firm's capacity to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external resources in response to environmental change. Teece (2007) subsequently identifies sensing, seizing, and transforming as three interrelated processes through which organizations recognize opportunities, mobilize resources, and continuously renew organizational capabilities. Unlike traditional resource-based perspectives that emphasize resource possession, dynamic capability theory focuses on organizational capacity for continuous resource reconfiguration.

Subsequent studies increasingly recognize that managerial cognition constitutes an important microfoundation of dynamic capabilities. Helfat & Peteraf (2015) argue that managerial cognitive capabilities influence strategic judgment, opportunity recognition, and capability development, while Helfat & Martin (2015) emphasize that managerial decisions significantly shape strategic change outcomes. Similarly, Sirmon *et al.* (2007) and Sirmon *et al.* (2011) propose that competitive advantage depends on effective resource orchestration involving resource structuring, bundling, and leveraging rather than resource ownership alone. These perspectives suggest that managerial interpretation influences how organizational resources are configured to support strategic objectives.

Within this broader resource orchestration perspective, human resources occupy a particularly strategic position because they constitute both valuable organizational assets and the primary carriers of organizational knowledge, learning, and capability development. Strategic HRM scholars argue that human resource systems influence organizational adaptability through capability development, workforce flexibility, talent deployment, and knowledge integration (Jiang *et al.*, 2012; Lepak & Snell, 1999; Wright & McMahan, 1992). More recent integrative reviews further propose that dynamic capabilities and strategic HRM should be examined jointly because adaptive human resource systems facilitate organizational renewal by enabling continuous capability development (Apascaritei & Elvira, 2022; Mehralian *et al.*, 2023)

However, existing research primarily conceptualizes human resources as organizational assets that support dynamic capabilities rather than as resources that are themselves strategically reconfigured through leadership cognition. Although dynamic capability theory recognizes resource transformation, and strategic HRM emphasizes human capital development, limited theoretical attention has been devoted to explaining how leadership sensemaking guides the reconfiguration of human resources as an adaptive mechanism for continuous strategic renewal. This omission represents an important conceptual opportunity because human resource reconfiguration provides the organizational bridge connecting leadership interpretation with evolving strategic capabilities.

2.4 Toward an Integrated Theoretical Perspective

Collectively, the three theoretical traditions offer complementary yet incomplete explanations of organizational adaptation. Sensemaking theory explains how leaders interpret environmental ambiguity and construct shared organizational meaning, but it provides limited explanation regarding how interpretation becomes organizational capability. Strategic renewal literature explains why organizations continuously adapt but pays relatively less attention to the cognitive processes initiating renewal. Dynamic capability and strategic HRM research explain how organizational resources are developed and reconfigured, yet they insufficiently theorize leadership sensemaking as the initiating mechanism underlying resource transformation.

The preceding theoretical review reveals complementary insights alongside important explanatory limitations. Integrating these perspectives establishes the conceptual foundation required to develop a more comprehensive theory of organizational adaptation.

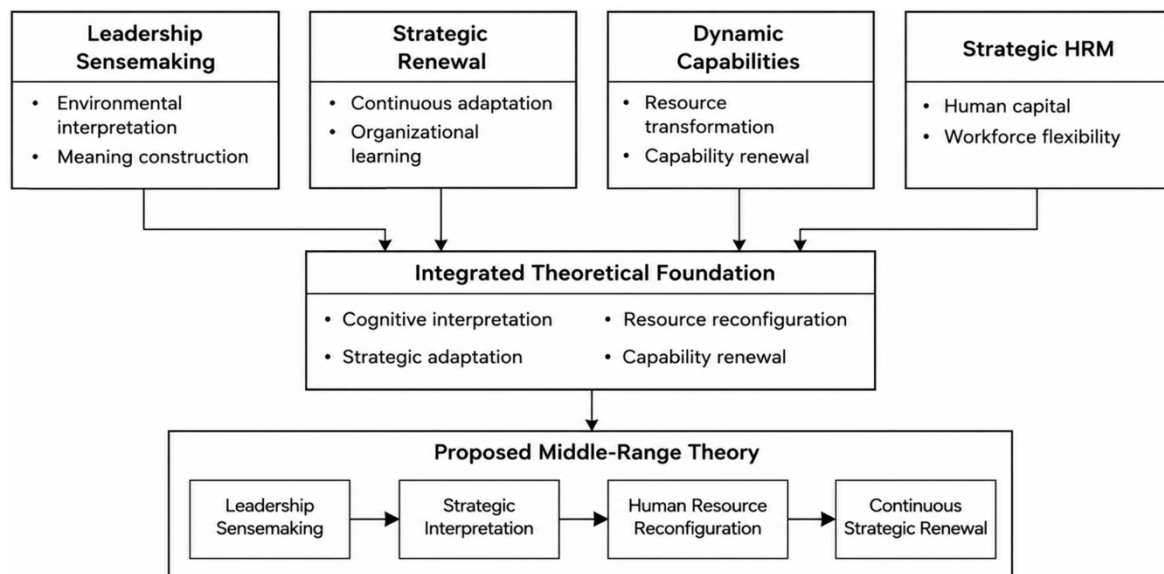


Figure 1. Integrated Theoretical Foundation for Organizational Adaptation

Source: Developed by the author based on the integration of Leadership Sensemaking Theory, Strategic Renewal Theory, Dynamic Capability Theory, and Strategic Human Resource Management literature.

Figure 1 illustrates how four complementary theoretical perspectives are integrated to overcome their individual explanatory limitations. Rather than treating these perspectives as competing explanations, the framework demonstrates their collective contribution to the proposed middle-range theory by linking leadership cognition, strategic adaptation, resource reconfiguration, and capability renewal into a unified conceptual foundation for explaining continuous organizational adaptation.

The preceding discussion demonstrates that existing theoretical perspectives provide complementary but incomplete explanations of organizational adaptation. Their systematic integration establishes the conceptual foundation for the proposed middle-range theory developed in the following section.

Table 1. Comparative Integration of Theoretical Foundations for Organizational Adaptation

Theoretical Perspective	Primary Focus	Key Limitation	Role in the Proposed Theory
Leadership Sensemaking	Explains how leaders interpret environmental ambiguity and construct shared strategic meaning.	Does not sufficiently explain how managerial interpretations become organizational resource transformation.	Serves as the cognitive antecedent initiating organizational adaptation through strategic interpretation.
Strategic Renewal	Explains continuous organizational adaptation through learning, capability development, and strategic change.	Provides limited explanation of the cognitive mechanisms initiating renewal.	Defines the organizational outcome of sustained adaptation and capability evolution.
Dynamic Capabilities	Explains how organizations sense, seize, and transform resources to sustain competitiveness.	Gives limited attention to leadership cognition preceding resource reconfiguration.	Provides the capability transformation logic connecting cognition with organizational renewal.

Theoretical Perspective	Primary Focus	Key Limitation	Role in the Proposed Theory
Strategic Human Resource Management	Explains how human capital and HR systems enhance organizational performance and flexibility.	Primarily treats HR systems as strategic assets rather than adaptive reconfiguration mechanisms.	Positions human resource reconfiguration as the central mechanism translating strategic interpretation into continuous renewal.

Source: Developed by the author based on the synthesis of Leadership Sensemaking Theory, Strategic Renewal Theory, Dynamic Capability Theory, and Strategic Human Resource Management literature.

Table 1 demonstrates that each theoretical perspective contributes a distinct yet incomplete explanation of organizational adaptation. Their integration reveals complementary strengths while addressing individual theoretical limitations. This synthesis provides the conceptual rationale for positioning leadership sensemaking, strategic interpretation, human resource reconfiguration, and continuous strategic renewal as sequential components of a unified middle-range theory that explains adaptive organizational change.

This conceptual fragmentation suggests that organizational adaptation cannot be adequately explained through any single theoretical perspective. Instead, continuous strategic renewal should be understood as an integrated process in which leadership sensemaking shapes strategic interpretation, strategic interpretation directs human resource reconfiguration, and human resource reconfiguration facilitates the renewal of organizational capabilities. By connecting these previously separate theoretical streams, a more comprehensive explanation emerges regarding how organizations continuously adapt under conditions of persistent environmental turbulence. Accordingly, this article proposes an integrated middle-range theory positioning leadership sensemaking as the cognitive antecedent of human resource reconfiguration and continuous strategic renewal. This theoretical integration provides the foundation for the conceptual model and proposition development presented in the following section.

3. Conceptual Theory Development

3.1 Core Constructs

The proposed theory is built upon four interrelated constructs: leadership sensemaking, strategic interpretation, human resource reconfiguration, and continuous strategic renewal. These constructs are organized sequentially to explain how cognitive processes initiated by organizational leaders are translated into organizational actions that sustain adaptation over time. Rather than viewing organizational renewal as a direct consequence of environmental turbulence, this framework argues that renewal emerges through a chain of managerial interpretation and organizational resource transformation.

Leadership sensemaking constitutes the starting point of the proposed theory. Drawing on Weick (1988) and Weick *et al.* (2005), leadership sensemaking refers to the continuous process through which leaders notice environmental cues, interpret ambiguous events, construct plausible explanations, and formulate strategic meaning for organizational members. Unlike information processing, sensemaking is an active process of meaning construction that enables leaders to reduce ambiguity and provide cognitive direction under conditions of uncertainty. Subsequent studies emphasize that sensemaking extends beyond individual cognition because leaders communicate their interpretations through sensegiving, thereby shaping collective understanding and coordinated organizational responses (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). Consequently, leadership sensemaking represents the cognitive foundation from which strategic adaptation originates.

Strategic interpretation represents the organizational translation of leadership sensemaking into shared strategic understanding. While sensemaking concerns how leaders construct meaning, strategic interpretation refers to the organizational framing of environmental opportunities, threats, and priorities that guides subsequent decision-making. Previous research demonstrates that managerial interpretations influence strategic attention, organizational identity, and strategic choices by determining which environmental signals receive organizational emphasis (Barr *et al.*, 1992; Kaplan, 2008; Ocasio *et al.*, 2018). Within the proposed framework, strategic interpretation functions as the immediate outcome of leadership sensemaking and provides the cognitive basis for subsequent organizational resource decisions.

Human resource reconfiguration constitutes the central mediating construct in the proposed theory. Existing strategic HRM literature has traditionally emphasized human capital development, high-performance work systems, and strategic talent management as drivers of organizational performance (Jiang *et al.*, 2012; Lepak & Snell, 1999; Wright & McMahan, 1992). However, these perspectives primarily conceptualize HR systems as relatively stable organizational arrangements. Building upon dynamic capability theory, this article instead conceptualizes human resource reconfiguration as the deliberate restructuring, redeployment, development, and orchestration of human resources to support evolving strategic priorities. Such reconfiguration may involve changes in workforce capabilities, leadership development, talent allocation, learning systems, collaborative structures, and organizational roles. Human resources therefore become adaptive strategic resources rather than static organizational assets (Apascaritei & Elvira, 2022; Chadwick *et al.*, 2015; Sirmon *et al.*, 2011)

Continuous strategic renewal represents the ultimate outcome of the proposed framework. Consistent with Agarwal & Helfat (2009) and Schmitt *et al.* (2018), continuous strategic renewal refers to an organization's ongoing capability to revise strategies, transform capabilities, and realign organizational resources in response to changing environmental conditions. Continuous strategic renewal reflects an enduring adaptive capacity sustained through capability renewal, organizational learning, and strategic evolution. It is therefore conceptualized as an ongoing organizational process driven by repeated managerial interpretation and resource transformation rather than episodic change.

The proposed theory is constructed around four interrelated concepts that collectively explain the progression from managerial cognition to sustained organizational adaptation through a coherent and sequential conceptual structure.

Table 2. Core Constructs of the Proposed Middle-Range Theory

Core Construct	Conceptual Definition	Role in the Proposed Theory	Representative References
Leadership Sensemaking	Leaders' ongoing process of interpreting ambiguous environmental cues and constructing strategic meaning under conditions of uncertainty.	Initiates the adaptation process by shaping managerial understanding of environmental change.	Weick (1988); Weick <i>et al.</i> (2005); Maitlis & Christianson (2014)
Strategic Interpretation	Collective organizational understanding that translates leadership interpretations into shared strategic priorities and attention.	Converts leadership cognition into organizational strategic direction that guides subsequent resource decisions.	Barr <i>et al.</i> (1992); Kaplan (2008); Ocasio <i>et al.</i> (2018)
Human Resource Reconfiguration	Deliberate restructuring, redeployment, and development of human resources to align	Functions as the central mediating mechanism transforming strategic	Sirmon <i>et al.</i> (2011); Chadwick <i>et al.</i> (2015); Apascaritei & Elvira (2022)

Core Construct	Conceptual Definition	Role in the Proposed Theory	Representative References
	organizational capabilities with evolving strategic priorities.	interpretation into adaptive organizational capabilities.	
Continuous Strategic Renewal	The enduring organizational capability to repeatedly renew strategies, competencies, and resources in response to environmental change.	Represents the ultimate adaptive outcome achieved through recurring cycles of cognition and resource transformation.	Agarwal & Helfat (2009); Schmitt <i>et al.</i> (2018)

Source: Developed by the author based on the synthesis of the organizational adaptation, leadership sensemaking, strategic renewal, dynamic capabilities, and strategic human resource management literature.

Table 2 consolidates the four core constructs underpinning the proposed middle-range theory and clarifies their distinct conceptual roles within the explanatory framework. By explicitly defining each construct and specifying its theoretical function, the table establishes conceptual consistency, minimizes construct ambiguity, and provides a clear foundation for understanding the sequential causal mechanism and proposition development presented in the subsequent section.

3.2 The Proposed Causal Mechanism

The principal contribution of this article lies in explaining how leadership cognition is transformed into continuous organizational adaptation. Existing theories acknowledge the importance of managerial interpretation, resource reconfiguration, and organizational renewal, yet they generally examine these elements independently. The proposed framework integrates them into a coherent causal mechanism composed of four sequential stages.

The first stage involves leadership sensemaking, in which leaders interpret environmental uncertainty through selective attention, prior experiences, organizational identity, and contextual knowledge. Sensemaking enables leaders to distinguish meaningful environmental signals from background noise and develop plausible interpretations regarding organizational priorities (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick *et al.*, 2005). This stage is inherently cognitive because environmental turbulence does not possess objective strategic meaning until interpreted by organizational decision-makers.

The second stage concerns strategic interpretation. Leadership interpretations subsequently influence how organizational members collectively understand strategic challenges through communication, framing, and sensegiving. Strategic interpretation therefore determines which organizational capabilities require development, which routines should be modified, and which strategic priorities deserve resource allocation. Consistent with the attention-based view of the firm, managerial interpretation directs organizational attention toward selected strategic issues while simultaneously reducing attention devoted to competing priorities (Ocasio, 1997; Ocasio *et al.*, 2018). In this way, strategic interpretation becomes the decision-making mechanism translating cognition into organizational priorities.

The third stage involves human resource reconfiguration, which represents the central adaptive mechanism proposed in this article. Once strategic priorities are interpreted and communicated, organizations rarely achieve renewal solely by revising strategic plans. Instead, they must modify the human capabilities required to execute new strategic directions. Human resource reconfiguration therefore includes redeploying talent, redesigning organizational roles, developing new competencies, strengthening cross-functional collaboration, reallocating leadership responsibilities, and enhancing workforce flexibility. These activities collectively transform human resources into dynamic

organizational capabilities capable of supporting strategic adaptation (Apascaritei & Elvira, 2022; Beltrán-Martín *et al.*, 2008; Lengnick-Hall *et al.*, 2011). Human resource reconfiguration thus constitutes the organizational bridge connecting leadership cognition with capability renewal.

The final stage is continuous strategic renewal. Through repeated cycles of human resource reconfiguration, organizations gradually renew routines, capabilities, knowledge bases, and strategic competencies. Rather than occurring as isolated transformation projects, organizational renewal becomes an ongoing adaptive capability enabling firms to continuously align organizational resources with changing environmental conditions (Crossan & Berdrow, 2003; Schmitt *et al.*, 2018; Teece, 2007). Continuous renewal therefore represents the cumulative outcome of recurring cycles of leadership interpretation and organizational resource transformation.

Collectively, these four stages explain organizational adaptation as a recursive rather than linear process. Environmental changes continually stimulate new cycles of leadership sensemaking, which reshape strategic interpretation, initiate additional human resource reconfiguration, and reinforce subsequent organizational renewal. The proposed framework therefore conceptualizes adaptation as a dynamic capability embedded within recurring managerial cognition rather than as an isolated organizational response.

3.3 Boundary Conditions

Although the proposed theory assumes that leadership sensemaking initiates organizational adaptation, its explanatory power is expected to vary across organizational contexts. Accordingly, several boundary conditions define the circumstances under which the proposed causal mechanism is likely to operate most effectively.

First, environmental turbulence strengthens the importance of leadership sensemaking because uncertain environments increase ambiguity, reduce the usefulness of established routines, and require continuous interpretation of emerging opportunities and threats (Teece, 2007). In relatively stable environments, routine decision-making may reduce the strategic importance of leadership interpretation.

Second, organizational inertia may weaken the translation of strategic interpretation into human resource reconfiguration. Organizations characterized by rigid routines, deeply embedded structures, and path dependence frequently experience resistance to resource transformation despite recognizing environmental change (Mikalef & Gupta, 2021; Tripsas & Gavetti, 2000). Consequently, effective sensemaking alone may be insufficient unless organizations possess adequate structural flexibility.

Third, human resource flexibility influences the effectiveness of resource reconfiguration. Flexible HR systems facilitate workforce mobility, competency development, learning, and knowledge integration, thereby enabling organizations to implement strategic changes more rapidly (Beltrán-Martín *et al.*, 2008; Lengnick-Hall *et al.*, 2011). Conversely, rigid employment structures may constrain organizational adaptation despite accurate strategic interpretation.

Finally, leadership cognitive capability shapes the quality of sensemaking itself. Leaders possessing broader strategic knowledge, stronger cognitive flexibility, and greater learning orientation are more likely to identify emerging opportunities, reinterpret organizational assumptions, and initiate effective resource transformation (Helfat & Martin, 2015; Helfat & Peteraf, 2015). Accordingly, managerial cognition functions not only as the origin of adaptation but also as a boundary condition affecting the effectiveness of the proposed causal mechanism.

3.4 Proposition Development

Based on the preceding theoretical integration, five propositions are advanced.

Proposition 1.

Leadership sensemaking positively influences strategic interpretation by enabling organizational leaders to construct shared meanings regarding environmental opportunities and threats.

Proposition 2.

Strategic interpretation positively influences human resource reconfiguration because shared strategic understanding guides the restructuring, deployment, and development of organizational human resources.

Proposition 3.

Human resource reconfiguration positively contributes to continuous strategic renewal by facilitating capability renewal, organizational learning, and strategic flexibility.

Proposition 4.

Human resource reconfiguration mediates the relationship between leadership sensemaking and continuous strategic renewal.

Proposition 5.

Environmental turbulence, organizational inertia, human resource flexibility, and leadership cognitive capability moderate the effectiveness of the proposed relationships by influencing the translation of leadership interpretation into adaptive organizational renewal.

The theoretical arguments developed throughout the preceding sections culminate in a coherent set of propositions that collectively specify the causal logic underpinning the proposed middle-range theory.

Table 3. Summary of Theoretical Propositions and Explanatory Logic

	Proposition & Theoretical Relationship	Underlying Explanatory Logic	Expected Outcome
P1	Leadership Sensemaking → Strategic Interpretation	Leaders' interpretation of environmental ambiguity shapes shared organizational understanding and strategic attention.	Shared strategic priorities are established.
P2	Strategic Interpretation → Human Resource Reconfiguration	Shared strategic understanding guides the restructuring, deployment, and development of human resources.	Human resources become aligned with evolving strategic priorities.
P3	Human Resource Reconfiguration → Continuous Strategic Renewal	Adaptive HR reconfiguration renews organizational capabilities, learning processes, and strategic flexibility.	Sustained organizational adaptation and capability renewal.
P4	Leadership Sensemaking → Human Resource Reconfiguration → Continuous Strategic Renewal	Human resource reconfiguration functions as the central mediating mechanism translating leadership cognition into organizational renewal.	Indirect effect of leadership cognition on strategic renewal.
P5	Boundary Conditions Moderate the Proposed Relationships	Environmental turbulence, organizational inertia, HR flexibility, and leadership cognitive capability influence the strength of the proposed causal relationships.	Context-dependent effectiveness of organizational adaptation.

Source: Developed by the author based on the integrated conceptual framework proposed in this study.

Table 3 synthesizes the five propositions into a coherent theoretical sequence that links managerial cognition, organizational resource transformation, and continuous strategic renewal. By explicitly connecting each proposition with its underlying explanatory logic and expected outcome, the table reinforces the internal consistency of the proposed framework and prepares readers for the integrated conceptual model presented in the subsequent figure.

The preceding propositions collectively establish the causal structure of the proposed theory. Their integration is summarized through a conceptual model that illustrates the complete explanatory mechanism of organizational adaptation.

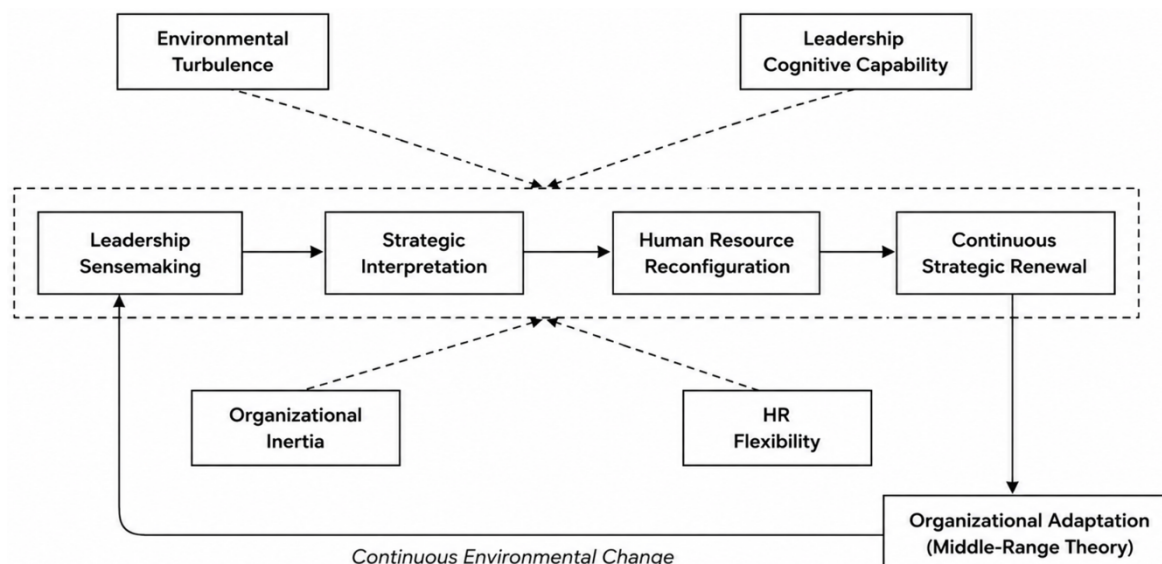


Figure 2. Proposed Middle-Range Theory of Organizational Adaptation

Source: Developed by the author based on the integrated theoretical framework proposed in this study.

Figure 2 presents the proposed middle-range theory by integrating the sequential relationships among leadership sensemaking, strategic interpretation, human resource reconfiguration, and continuous strategic renewal into a recursive explanatory model. The feedback loop emphasizes the ongoing nature of organizational adaptation, while the boundary conditions define the contextual circumstances under which the proposed causal mechanism is expected to operate most effectively.

4. Discussion

4.1 Theoretical Contributions

This article contributes to the organizational adaptation literature by integrating leadership sensemaking, strategic human resource management, dynamic capabilities, and strategic renewal into a unified middle-range theoretical framework. While these perspectives have independently generated substantial insights into organizational change, they have evolved largely in parallel, resulting in fragmented explanations of how organizations continuously adapt to environmental turbulence. The proposed framework addresses this fragmentation by specifying the causal mechanism through which leadership cognition is translated into organizational resource transformation and sustained strategic renewal.

The first contribution extends the sensemaking literature by moving beyond its traditional emphasis on interpretation and meaning construction. Existing studies have established that leaders interpret ambiguous environments through sensemaking and subsequently influence collective understanding through sensegiving (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick *et al.*, 2005). However, relatively little attention has been devoted to explaining how these interpretive processes become embedded within organizational structures and capabilities.

The proposed framework argues that the organizational consequences of leadership sensemaking materialize through human resource reconfiguration, which transforms managerial interpretations into adaptive organizational capabilities. In doing so, this article identifies a missing organizational mechanism that connects leadership cognition with strategic adaptation.

The second contribution enriches the dynamic capability literature by introducing leadership sensemaking as an explicit cognitive antecedent of resource reconfiguration. Dynamic capability theory has traditionally emphasized sensing, seizing, and transforming as organizational processes enabling adaptation under environmental change (Helfat & Peteraf, 2015; Teece, 2007). Although these processes implicitly assume managerial judgment, the cognitive origins of resource transformation remain underdeveloped. The proposed theory addresses this limitation by explaining that resource reconfiguration is preceded by leadership interpretation of environmental signals. Consequently, resource transformation is not conceptualized as an isolated organizational capability but as the outcome of continuous managerial sensemaking that directs organizational attention, strategic priorities, and capability development.

Third, this article advances strategic HRM research by repositioning human resource reconfiguration from a supporting organizational practice to a central adaptive mechanism within strategic renewal. Previous strategic HRM studies have demonstrated that human capital, high-performance work systems, and talent management contribute to organizational performance, innovation, and resilience (Apascaritei & Elvira, 2022; Jiang *et al.*, 2012; Lepak & Snell, 1999). Nevertheless, these perspectives generally conceptualize HR systems as strategic resources that improve organizational effectiveness rather than as dynamic mechanisms continuously reshaped through leadership cognition. The present framework suggests that HR reconfiguration should be understood as an ongoing process of capability renewal through which organizations repeatedly align workforce competencies, organizational structures, and learning systems with evolving strategic priorities. This perspective broadens the theoretical role of strategic HRM within organizational adaptation.

Finally, the proposed framework contributes to strategic renewal research by providing a multilevel explanation that connects individual managerial cognition with organizational capability development. Existing strategic renewal literature primarily emphasizes organizational learning, exploration, capability evolution, and strategic transformation (Agarwal & Helfat, 2009; Crossan & Berdrow, 2003; Schmitt *et al.*, 2018). While these studies explain why organizations renew themselves, they provide comparatively less insight into the micro-level processes initiating renewal. By integrating leadership sensemaking with human resource reconfiguration, the present theory explains how individual cognitive processes generate organizational-level adaptation, thereby strengthening the microfoundational understanding of continuous strategic renewal.

4.2 The Proposed Middle-Range Theory of Organizational Adaptation

The central proposition emerging from this study is that organizational adaptation is fundamentally a recursive cognitive-resource process rather than merely a sequence of strategic decisions. Continuous strategic renewal begins when organizational leaders interpret environmental ambiguity through sensemaking. These interpretations shape strategic priorities that subsequently guide the reconfiguration of human resources, enabling organizations to renew capabilities and sustain adaptation over time. Rather than treating cognition, resources, and strategic renewal as separate phenomena, the proposed theory conceptualizes them as interdependent stages within a continuous adaptive cycle.

This perspective differs from existing theories in three important respects. First, it positions leadership sensemaking as the initiating mechanism of organizational adaptation instead of treating managerial cognition as a contextual factor surrounding strategic decision-making.

Second, it conceptualizes human resource reconfiguration as the principal organizational mechanism translating strategic interpretation into capability renewal, thereby extending both dynamic capability theory and strategic HRM. Third, it emphasizes that strategic renewal is recursive rather than episodic. As organizations experience new environmental changes, leaders engage in renewed cycles of interpretation, resource reconfiguration, and capability development, creating an ongoing process of organizational adaptation rather than isolated transformation initiatives. Accordingly, the proposed framework represents a middle-range theory because it specifies clearly bounded constructs, causal mechanisms, and contextual conditions while remaining sufficiently general to explain adaptation across diverse organizational settings characterized by environmental turbulence.

The proposed theory is intentionally bounded to specific organizational contexts. Clarifying these contextual boundaries strengthens its explanatory scope and defines the conditions under which the theoretical mechanism is expected to operate.

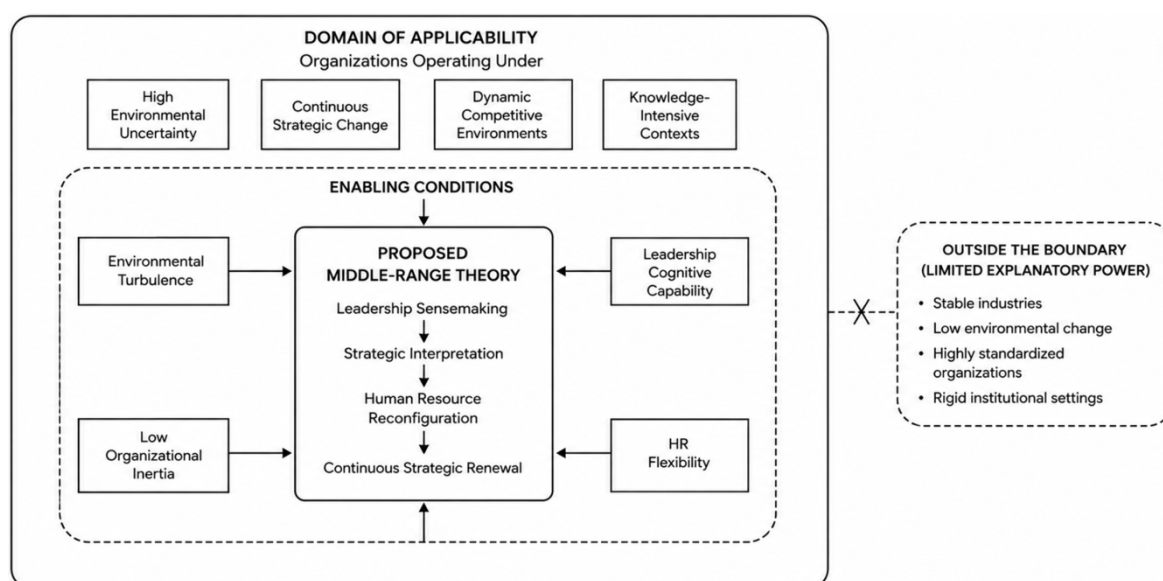


Figure 3. Boundary Conditions and Domain of Applicability of the Proposed Middle-Range Theory
Source: Developed by the author based on the theoretical boundary conditions and domain specification of the proposed middle-range theory.

Figure 3 delineates the contextual scope of the proposed middle-range theory by distinguishing the organizational conditions under which its explanatory mechanism is expected to operate effectively. The framework emphasizes that the theory is designed for organizations facing persistent environmental uncertainty and strategic change, while acknowledging reduced explanatory power in stable and highly standardized contexts.

4.3 Managerial Implications

The proposed theory also offers several managerial implications. First, it suggests that organizational adaptation depends not solely on strategic planning but on leaders' capacity to interpret environmental change accurately and communicate coherent strategic meaning throughout the organization. Leadership development initiatives should therefore emphasize cognitive capabilities, environmental scanning, strategic framing, and sensegiving competencies alongside traditional managerial skills (Helfat & Martin, 2015; Nevalainen *et al.*, 2025).

Second, managers should recognize human resources as adaptive capabilities requiring continuous reconfiguration rather than as relatively stable organizational assets. Organizations facing digital transformation, technological disruption, or changing competitive conditions should regularly reassess workforce competencies, leadership structures, talent allocation, and learning systems to ensure alignment with evolving strategic priorities. Human

resource flexibility, continuous learning, and cross-functional capability development become central mechanisms supporting sustained organizational renewal rather than isolated HR initiatives (Apascaritei & Elvira, 2022; Lengnick-Hall *et al.*, 2011; Montero Guerra *et al.*, 2023).

Finally, the framework underscores that successful strategic renewal requires close integration between executive leadership and HR functions. Strategic adaptation should not be viewed as the exclusive responsibility of senior executives, nor should HR departments operate merely as administrative support units. Instead, continuous renewal requires collaborative processes through which leadership interpretation, strategic priorities, and human resource decisions are aligned to facilitate ongoing capability development. Such integration is particularly relevant in environments characterized by persistent uncertainty, where organizational competitiveness increasingly depends on the ability to repeatedly renew strategic capabilities rather than preserve existing competitive advantages.

4.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

As a conceptual theory-building article, this study is subject to several limitations that simultaneously create opportunities for future research. First, the proposed framework has not yet been empirically validated. Future studies should examine the proposed propositions using longitudinal, multi-level, or mixed-method research designs capable of capturing the recursive nature of leadership sensemaking, human resource reconfiguration, and strategic renewal over time. Longitudinal approaches are particularly appropriate because the proposed theory conceptualizes adaptation as a continuous process rather than a single organizational event.

Second, the theory is intentionally bounded to organizations operating in environments characterized by moderate to high environmental turbulence. Consequently, its explanatory power may differ in highly regulated or relatively stable industries where strategic renewal occurs less frequently. Future research should investigate contextual variations across industries, organizational sizes, ownership structures, and institutional environments to refine the theory's boundary conditions.

Third, although the framework identifies leadership sensemaking as the primary cognitive antecedent of organizational adaptation, future research may incorporate additional microfoundations such as executive team diversity, organizational identity dynamics, digital leadership, or artificial intelligence-assisted decision-making. Integrating these emerging perspectives may enrich understanding of how managerial cognition interacts with technological capabilities and organizational learning to shape strategic renewal. Through such empirical refinement and theoretical extension, the proposed middle-range theory can evolve into a broader explanatory framework for organizational adaptation in increasingly dynamic competitive environments.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to address a persistent theoretical problem in the organizational adaptation literature: although leadership sensemaking, dynamic capabilities, strategic human resource management, and strategic renewal have each been extensively examined, existing research has largely treated them as separate domains, leaving insufficient explanation of how managerial interpretation is translated into sustained organizational adaptation. Specifically, prior studies have not adequately explained the organizational mechanism through which leadership sensemaking shapes human resource transformation and ultimately enables continuous strategic renewal. Responding to this gap, this article developed an integrated conceptual framework that positions leadership sensemaking as the cognitive antecedent of strategic interpretation, human resource reconfiguration as the

central adaptive mechanism, and continuous strategic renewal as the organizational outcome of an ongoing recursive adaptation process.

The proposed framework contributes to theory in several important ways. First, it extends the sensemaking literature by moving beyond the traditional emphasis on meaning construction and specifying how leadership interpretation becomes embedded in organizational resource transformation. Second, it advances dynamic capability theory by identifying leadership sensemaking as a critical microfoundational antecedent that initiates resource reconfiguration rather than treating resource transformation as an autonomous organizational process. Third, it broadens strategic human resource management by conceptualizing human resource reconfiguration as a dynamic organizational capability that continuously aligns workforce competencies, organizational structures, and strategic priorities in response to environmental change. By integrating these previously disconnected theoretical perspectives, the study develops a middle-range theory that offers a more comprehensive explanation of continuous organizational adaptation than existing single-theory approaches.

Beyond its theoretical contributions, the proposed framework also offers meaningful managerial implications. It suggests that sustainable strategic renewal depends not only on organizational resources or strategic planning but also on leaders' ability to interpret environmental ambiguity and continuously reconfigure human resources in alignment with evolving strategic demands. Consequently, organizations should view leadership cognition, strategic interpretation, and human resource flexibility as mutually reinforcing capabilities that collectively strengthen long-term organizational resilience and adaptability.

Nevertheless, this study remains conceptual in nature and therefore does not empirically validate the proposed causal relationships. Future research should examine the proposed propositions using longitudinal, multilevel, and comparative research designs capable of capturing the recursive interactions among leadership sensemaking, human resource reconfiguration, and strategic renewal across diverse organizational and institutional contexts. Additional studies may also extend the framework by incorporating emerging themes such as digital leadership, artificial intelligence-enabled decision-making, ecosystem collaboration, organizational identity dynamics, and sustainability-oriented transformation as potential boundary conditions or complementary microfoundations.

In conclusion, this article argues that continuous strategic renewal cannot be fully understood without recognizing the pivotal role of leadership cognition in shaping adaptive organizational capabilities. By theorizing the dynamic relationship among leadership sensemaking, human resource reconfiguration, and strategic renewal, the proposed framework provides a coherent and theoretically grounded explanation of organizational adaptation while establishing a robust foundation for future conceptual refinement and empirical investigation. As organizations confront increasingly volatile and complex environments, this middle-range theory offers a promising lens for advancing both scholarly understanding and strategic practice in organizational adaptation.

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