

Decoupling Organizational Resilience from Adaptive Capacity: A Reconceptualization of Dynamic Managerial Cognition Under Volatility Regimes

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Abstract. Contemporary business management scholarship has long conflated organizational resilience with adaptive capacity, treating them as functionally interchangeable constructs. This paper critically interrogates that assumption by disaggregating both concepts through the lens of dynamic managerial cognition theory and volatility regime analysis. Employing a mixed-methods design across 214 multinational enterprises operating in high-turbulence markets (2021–2024), we apply structural equation modelling and qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) to isolate the distinct antecedents and performance outcomes of each construct. Findings reveal that resilience and adaptive capacity follow divergent causal pathways, with managerial mental models functioning as an asymmetric moderating variable. These results challenge prevailing resource-based assumptions and carry significant implications for executive decision-making frameworks, strategic human capital allocation, and organizational design in environments characterized by compounding systemic disruptions.

Keywords: organizational resilience, adaptive capacity, dynamic managerial cognition, volatility regime analysis, qualitative comparative analysis, strategic human capital, organizational ambidexterity, structural equation modelling, resource-based view

Introduction

The sustained acceleration of environmental turbulence across global business ecosystems—driven by geopolitical fragmentation, post-pandemic supply chain reconfiguration, and macroeconomic volatility—has placed organizational resilience at the forefront of strategic management discourse. As of 2024–2026, executive leadership teams are operating under an unprecedented convergence of compounding systemic shocks: inflationary spirals, the green energy transition, deglobalization pressures, and the rapid diffusion of generative artificial intelligence into core business processes. In this context, the conceptual precision of management constructs is no longer a purely academic concern; imprecise theoretical frameworks translate directly into misallocated strategic resources and organizational failures with measurable socioeconomic consequences. Despite the proliferation of resilience-oriented scholarship over the past two decades, a persistent and consequential conflation pervades both academic literature and practitioner discourse: the treatment of organizational resilience and adaptive capacity as synonymous or mutually constitutive constructs. Seminal contributions from Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997) through to more recent formulations in the dynamic capabilities tradition have frequently embedded adaptive capacity within broader resilience frameworks without adequately demarcating their respective ontological boundaries. This theoretical collapse has cascading effects—most notably, the design of organizational interventions premised on assumptions that remain empirically unvalidated. Dynamic managerial cognition theory, as advanced by Adner and Helfat (2003) and subsequently elaborated by Eggers and Kaplan (2013), offers a productive corrective by foregrounding the role of managerial mental models, attentional allocation, and sensemaking processes in mediating strategic responses to environmental discontinuities. Yet this theoretical apparatus has rarely been deployed to systematically disentangle resilience from adaptability at the organizational level of analysis. The present study addresses this gap directly, arguing that resilience and adaptive capacity are not merely distinct constructs but exhibit divergent causal architectures that demand differentiated managerial and structural interventions. This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents a critical review of the extant literature on organizational resilience and adaptive capacity, mapping their theoretical genealogies and identifying the points of conflation. Section 3 develops a reconceptualized theoretical framework grounded in dynamic managerial cognition and volatility regime typology. Section 4 details the research methodology, including sample selection criteria, the structural equation modelling approach, and the QCA configuration logic. Section 5 presents and interprets the empirical findings, with particular attention to asymmetric moderating effects. Section 6 discusses the theoretical and managerial implications, and Section 7 concludes with limitations and directions for future research.

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