

# The Influence of Dynamic Capabilities and Strategic Orientation of SME Leaders

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Abstract	Article Info
<p>Organizational resilience (OR) has become increasingly vital due to the unprecedented disruptions in the corporate environment. In today's knowledge-driven economies, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) serve as key drivers of local economic growth and employment generation. To enhance business sustainability, SMEs must strategically develop organizational resilience. The theory of dynamic capability (DC) provides a framework for organizations to integrate, renew, and adapt their resources, capabilities, and competencies in response to highly volatile environments. However, many SME leaders struggle to continuously manage OR and must deliberately move beyond conventional capability-building approaches to navigate challenges and seize opportunities. This study presents a comprehensive framework to explore the relationship between OR and DC, drawing on data collected from 441 business leaders in the SME sector. The findings indicate that a well-balanced DC is crucial, particularly for SME leaders, who must proactively leverage specialized competencies and expertise in business processes to enhance organizational resilience. Additionally, the study highlights the significant role of strategic orientation in mediating the relationship between DC and OR, particularly in periods of economic uncertainty. The results further suggest that older SMEs must adopt a more strategic orientation and implement necessary reforms to strengthen resilience within the Malaysian SME sector.</p>	<p><b>Keywords:</b> Organisational Resilience, Dynamic Capability, Strategic Orientation, SME Leaders</p>

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## INTRODUCTION

Organizational resilience (OR) has emerged as a critical concept across multiple disciplines, encompassing diverse meanings and aspects depending on the context (Duchek et al., 2020; Saad et al., 2021). Prior research characterizes OR as an essential capability that enables firms to anticipate and withstand external disruptions by adapting their business processes, ultimately ensuring long-term sustainability and success (Granig & Hilgarter, 2020; Kantur & Iseri-Say, 2012). Annarelli and Nonino (2016) describe resilience as an inherent organizational trait linked to strategic awareness, allowing firms to proactively navigate shocks and uncertainties. Additionally, OR plays a crucial role in mitigating disruptive events and facilitating rapid recovery (Annarelli & Nonino, 2016). While earlier studies predominantly viewed OR as an organization's ability to restore itself to its prior state, recent perspectives increasingly recognize resilience as a dynamic process requiring proactive engagement in managing disruptions (Duchek et al., 2020; Burnard & Bhamra, 2019). Linnenlucke et al. (2011) argue that resilience consists of two fundamental dimensions: the ability to withstand disruptions and the capacity to recover and restore operations. However, resilience extends beyond mere restoration, as scholars emphasize the importance of proactive planning and preparedness to strengthen organizational resilience (Zighan & Ruel, 2021; Lisdiono et al., 2022; Iborra et al., 2020; Sahebjamnia et al., 2015).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite its conceptual distinctions from adaptation, agility, flexibility, improvisation, recovery, redundancy, and robustness, resilience fundamentally represents an organization's response to adversity, emphasizing its ability to recover and thrive amidst uncertainty, discontinuity, and crises (Xiao & Cao, 2017). According to them, OR is defined by three key capabilities: the ability to survive, adapt, and develop in the face of adversity; the capacity to evolve within a constantly changing internal and external environment; and a multi-level framework encompassing organizational resources, routines, and processes. In this study, OR is conceptualized as an organization's ability to either return to its previous state or develop new competencies in response to adverse conditions. Accordingly, OR enables firms to anticipate potential disruptions, implement adaptive countermeasures, and recover by restoring operations or achieving a new equilibrium (Burnard & Bhamra, 2019; Umoh et al., 2013). The capacity of firms to absorb shocks through resilience mechanisms determines their preparedness for unforeseen disruptions (Umoh, 2007; Umoh et al., 2013; Yuan et al., 2022). Scholars have long contended that OR should be examined in context, as its manifestation is contingent on resource availability and firm-specific capabilities (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). However, OR in the context of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) remains underexplored, with limited studies addressing how strategic decision-making influences resilience in volatile economic environments.

SMEs constitute the backbone of economic growth in both developed and developing economies, accounting for over 90% of global enterprises and 70% of Malaysia's market share. The rapidly evolving business environment presents challenges for SMEs, affecting their ability to sustain growth and maintain competitive advantage. SMEs face greater difficulty in navigating turbulent market conditions due to constraints in human capital, strategic planning, organizational resources, financial capital, and technical expertise. Nevertheless, SMEs are inherently more adaptable than larger enterprises, allowing them to respond more flexibly to external shifts (Detarsio et al., 2013; Corvello et al., 2022). SME leaders are often overburdened with operational demands, making it difficult to delegate tasks and explore innovative strategies (Van Bruysteg et al., 2008; Fadahunsi, 2022). Key barriers include restricted access to market intelligence, insufficient technological capabilities, limited financial resources, and inadequate strategic management. To address these challenges, scholars advocate the development of dynamic capability (DC) as a means of continuously renewing, reconfiguring, and adapting firm-specific resources to align with volatile external conditions (Teece et al., 1997).

OR and DC are interrelated concepts that have garnered increasing attention in strategic and operational management literature. The present study examines how firms adapt to rapidly evolving environments through the dual lenses of OR and DC (Siguaw, Simpson, & Enz, 2006). Pavlou and El Sawy (2011) highlight the need to contextualize these constructs, particularly within SMEs, as leaders must strike a balance between firm-specific characteristics and external market conditions, especially in periods of heightened uncertainty. The alignment of DC and OR is crucial for survival in turbulent environments, necessitating deliberate planning

and strategic implementation. Pavlou and El Sawy (2011) synthesized multiple theoretical perspectives to consolidate the conceptual framework of DC, aligning with Teece et al.'s (1997) and Teece's (2007) formulations. DC serves as a mechanism for reconfiguring existing operational capabilities, enabling firms to capitalize on market opportunities and respond effectively to technological shifts (Teece et al., 1997). Empirical studies from Western and European contexts reveal positive correlations between DC dimensions and OR, particularly in enhancing firms' adaptability to crises. Itkien et al. (2015) examined Slovenian service firms, demonstrating the significant role of DC in fostering service innovation. Their comparative analysis of secondary data underscored the importance of dynamic skills in identifying market opportunities, fulfilling customer demands, and achieving long-term competitive advantage (p. 276). Morales et al. (2019) further emphasized that OR is closely linked to leaders' strategic capabilities in formulating effective crisis responses. The coexistence of proactive and reactive resilience perspectives underscores the dynamic interplay between OR and DC. Manfield and Newey (2018) describe resilience as a portfolio of skills comprising diverse strategic responses to threats and disruptions. Various studies highlight the role of leaders in fostering OR through capability-building efforts. OR derives from organizational competencies (Douglas, 2021) and is influenced by managerial practices that optimize resource allocation through DC (Weaven et al., 2021; Barghersad & Zobel, 2021). Effective resource identification and competency development are critical in proactively mitigating disruptions (Sullivan-Taylor & Branicki, 2011; Jia et al., 2020). Leaders' ability to navigate DC is instrumental in fostering interdepartmental collaboration and managerial efficiency, which in turn enhances resilience against external shocks (Paul et al., 2017). While large firms benefit from greater resource availability to withstand and recover from crises (Barghersad & Zobel, 2021), SMEs typically encounter resource constraints that impede their resilience (Sullivan-Taylor & Branicki, 2011). Consequently, DC development is particularly essential for SMEs in emerging economies such as Malaysia, where businesses must contend with volatile market conditions and external uncertainties. Despite growing interest in DC, most existing studies remain theoretical, necessitating further empirical research to substantiate its application (Lavie, 2006). Consequently, discussions surrounding DC development remain underdeveloped, highlighting the need for additional insights into how firms cultivate DC within the SME sector.

Strategic orientation (SO) serves as a critical factor influencing DC development, providing firms with a strategic direction to enhance long-term resilience. SO encompasses the principles, practices, and decision-making frameworks guiding firms' engagement with external market conditions, significantly impacting competitive advantage and OR (Jantunen et al., 2008; Crovini, Santoro & Ossola, 2021). In competitive markets, firms must continuously monitor their rivals to assess their relative positioning and identify strategic opportunities (Han et al., 1998; Al-Kwafi, Farha & Zaraket, 2020). SO plays a significant role in moderating the relationship between DC and OR, particularly in emerging economies such as Malaysia, where firms must develop tailored strategies to navigate market uncertainties. SO facilitates firms' ability to integrate strategic awareness with resource reconfiguration, aligning internal processes with external market demands (Day, 1994; Gatignon & Xuereb, 1997; Lin & Kunnathur, 2019). By recognizing opportunities, SO enables firms to align their external market positioning with internal strategic capabilities, complementing DC in optimizing resource utilization. While DC focuses on integrating and revitalizing corporate resources, SO offers a structured approach to decision-making that enhances resilience. Annarelli and Nonino (2016) and Annarelli et al. (2020) define OR as an organization's ability to withstand disruptions and unanticipated changes through strategic awareness and the coordination of internal and external capabilities. Given the scarcity of empirical research on the intersection of SO, DC, and OR in SME contexts, further investigation is warranted to examine how these elements collectively shape resilience strategies amid economic uncertainty.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

To examine the relationship between dynamic capability, strategic orientation, and organisational resilience within the Malaysian SME sector, this study adopts a causal research design. Causal research, also referred to as explanatory research, aims to determine the extent and nature of cause-and-effect relationships (Zikmund et al., 2012). Such studies focus on investigating specific situations to explain the relationships between variables (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008; Levin, 2006). To evaluate the key capabilities that drive organisational resilience in Malaysian SMEs, this research follows a three-step approach, including identification, data collection, and data analysis.

A quantitative methodology (Creswell, 2009) was employed, using survey data gathered through a structured questionnaire adapted from previously validated scales in the literature. The unit of analysis in this study is at the individual level, focusing on SME leaders' perspectives. The target population consists of SMEs registered under SME Corp Malaysia and the Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives (MEDAC). After refining the list to eliminate duplicates, a total of 8,438 SMEs were identified as the study population, with one leader from each SME selected for participation. Ensuring a rigorous sampling strategy is critical to maintaining research quality by appropriately identifying and validating respondent selection (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). In this regard, SME leaders were carefully chosen to address the study's research questions. The final sample includes 441 SME leaders, selected using a simple random sampling method. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire comprising 43 items, which was designed, distributed, and administered via Google Forms. The study developed a conceptual framework based on relevant theories and literature, incorporating three independent variables, one mediating variable, and two moderating variables to achieve the overall research objectives within the Malaysian SME context.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the role of dynamic capabilities, namely sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring capabilities, in enhancing organisational resilience among SMEs in Malaysia. The results indicate that these capabilities collectively contribute to strengthening the resilience of SMEs by equipping them with the ability to navigate market uncertainties and external shocks. This aligns with the findings of Kantan et al. (2017), who employed structural equation modeling to examine the influence of dynamic capabilities on organisational agility in the Turkish retail sector. Their study revealed that agility among retail businesses was positively and significantly influenced by the characteristics of dynamic capabilities. Furthermore, Kantan et al. (2017) argued that to enhance a firm's agility in an environment characterised by rapid changes and high uncertainty, the ability to sense, seize, and transform opportunities must be strategically integrated with the firm's overall strategy. Similarly, Žitkienė et al. (2015) examined the impact of dynamic capabilities on service innovation within Slovenian service firms and found that these capabilities are essential for enabling firms to identify market opportunities, understand customer needs, and leverage their existing resources to gain a competitive advantage. These findings underscore the importance of dynamic capabilities in building organisational resilience; however, they fall short in providing a comprehensive understanding of how these capabilities interact with strategic orientation while considering market conditions and firm-specific characteristics.

This study makes several theoretical contributions by expanding the understanding of organisational resilience within the SME sector in Malaysia. Unlike previous research that has primarily focused on large and well-established multinational enterprises (MNEs) (Pereira et al., 2018), this study emphasises the importance of resilience in SMEs, which face greater resource constraints and higher levels of market uncertainty. The findings are particularly relevant for Malaysian SMEs operating in the service and manufacturing sectors, as these businesses often struggle with limited financial resources, capabilities, and knowledge, making them more vulnerable in competitive markets (Ratten et al., 2016; Sadeghi and Biancone, 2018; Sukumar et al., 2020). Given that Malaysian SMEs contribute significantly to the country's economy, particularly in terms of employment generation and innovation, understanding the mechanisms that enhance their resilience is crucial. The study highlights that strategic orientation serves as a mediating factor that enables SMEs to mitigate resource constraints and adapt to changing market conditions, ultimately fostering long-term organisational resilience.

The findings further illustrate that organisational resilience is not an isolated attribute but rather a function of how well SMEs integrate their dynamic capabilities. Seizing opportunities alone is insufficient; instead, it must be accompanied by sensing and reconfiguring capabilities to enable firms to remain competitive. Through the lens of the dynamic capabilities framework, this study extends existing research by evaluating the interplay between these three meta-capabilities and strategic orientation, taking into account firm-specific characteristics and prevailing market conditions. This perspective is particularly relevant for Malaysian SMEs, which operate in an environment of economic fluctuations, rapid technological advancements, and evolving consumer



preferences. Accordingly, the study proposes a conceptual framework tailored to SMEs, especially in times of economic uncertainty, to enhance their ability to withstand external shocks.

In addition to its theoretical contributions, this study also provides practical implications for SME leaders in Malaysia. The findings highlight the necessity for SMEs to strategically leverage their dynamic capabilities and strategic orientation by considering both internal and external resources. Unlike larger organisations with extensive resources and established market presence, SMEs often operate with limited inherent resources, making strategic orientation a crucial factor in ensuring survival and growth (Hagen et al., 2019). For Malaysian SMEs, where market volatility is a persistent challenge, the ability to identify and seize long-term business opportunities becomes even more critical. The study suggests that SME leaders should focus on exploring new business ventures while simultaneously ensuring their firms' survival in uncertain markets. This approach enables SMEs to build resilience by continually adapting to external disruptions, thereby improving their capacity to respond to unexpected challenges.

Given the dynamic and ever-changing business environment, organisations frequently encounter unforeseen disruptions and crises. SMEs, in particular, are more susceptible to external shocks due to their limited resources and capacity to engage in extensive crisis planning. Consequently, SME leaders must develop a high degree of organisational resilience to navigate potential future challenges. The findings of this study suggest that a strategic orientation allows SMEs to experiment with new concepts, monitor competitors' activities, and make swift decisions to capitalise on untapped opportunities. In the Malaysian context, where SMEs play a vital role in driving economic development and job creation, fostering a culture of resilience is essential. The study implies that SME leaders should not only focus on sustaining their current operations but also actively pursue innovation and improvement in their business processes. By adopting contemporary management techniques and enhancing their research and development (R&D) activities, SMEs can achieve both short-term adaptability and long-term sustainability.

Furthermore, the findings emphasise that SME leaders must continuously seek new knowledge and market opportunities to enhance resilience. In the Malaysian SME landscape, where government policies and initiatives often provide support for capacity-building and innovation, businesses should capitalise on available resources to strengthen their competitive position. Programs such as grants, digitalisation incentives, and SME development initiatives can serve as enablers for firms seeking to improve their strategic capabilities. By aligning their dynamic capabilities with strategic orientation, SMEs can enhance their resilience and sustain their operations despite economic uncertainties. Thus, this study underscores the importance of fostering a proactive and adaptive mindset among SME leaders to ensure long-term success in the Malaysian business environment.

## CONCLUSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This study has empirically demonstrated that dynamic capabilities, specifically sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring capabilities, play a vital role in enhancing SME resilience through strategic orientation, particularly in an economically uncertain environment. The findings highlight that a well-balanced approach to dynamic capabilities is essential for SMEs to sustain and strengthen their resilience. SME leaders must actively seek new opportunities by leveraging specialised competencies and expertise in their business processes to achieve long-term organisational resilience. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of strategic orientation in mediating the relationship between dynamic capabilities and organisational resilience, particularly during periods of heightened economic uncertainty. It was also observed that older SMEs need to adopt a more strategically oriented approach, making necessary reforms to strengthen their resilience in the Malaysian SME sector. However, the findings suggest that neither the reconfiguration process nor the sensing process alone is sufficient to build organisational resilience without the support of strategic orientation, reinforcing the interconnected nature of these elements.

In light of these findings, the study provides several recommendations for SME leaders and policymakers in Malaysia. First, SMEs must enhance their ability to anticipate potential changes in the highly unpredictable business environment. This requires proactive efforts in monitoring external market conditions, technological advancements, and policy changes, allowing them to effectively plan and modify internal processes in a way that supports resilience. Given the increasing volatility in global and local markets, the ability to forecast and swiftly respond to disruptions will be critical for ensuring long-term sustainability.

Second, Malaysian SME leaders should adopt a strategic approach to identifying and capitalising on new opportunities and capabilities. By doing so, they can develop a competitive advantage that enables them to gather and utilise external market intelligence, technological developments, and industry trends. This is particularly important for SMEs operating in fast-evolving sectors such as manufacturing, digital services, and technology-based industries, where adaptability is crucial for survival. As economic uncertainties continue to pose challenges, the ability to swiftly adjust business strategies in accordance with the firm's age and market conditions will determine its longevity and competitiveness.

Third, the study recommends that SME leaders effectively integrate strategic orientation with dynamic capabilities to combine externally acquired competencies with existing internal resources. By fostering a culture of innovation and continuous improvement, SME leaders can create synergies that result in improved business processes and the ability to seize untapped opportunities. This is particularly relevant for older SMEs that need to reinvent themselves in response to market changes. Through strategic orientation, these firms can enhance their agility, ensuring that they remain competitive even in turbulent economic conditions.

Finally, SME leaders must continuously monitor shifts in consumer demands, competitive dynamics, and technological advancements. The ability to respond rapidly to these changes is essential for fostering resilience. By aligning business processes with evolving market needs, SMEs can position themselves advantageously to meet customer expectations while staying ahead of competitors. This requires leaders to develop a keen understanding of market trends, actively engage with industry networks, and implement agile decision-making processes. Consequently, SME leaders play a crucial role in seizing the right opportunities at the right time to sustain their businesses and drive long-term growth.

Overall, this study contributes to the understanding of SME resilience in Malaysia by emphasising the importance of integrating dynamic capabilities with strategic orientation. Given the vital role of SMEs in the Malaysian economy, the insights from this research can inform business strategies and policy decisions aimed at strengthening the resilience of SMEs, ensuring their sustainability in an increasingly unpredictable economic environment. Future research could further explore sector-specific strategies for enhancing SME resilience, particularly in high-growth industries where market disruptions are more frequent.

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