

Organizational Sustainability and Business Innovation: A Strategic Framework for Long-Term Competitive Advantage Building Sustainable Organizations

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Abstract: : Organizations today face a persistent tension between pursuing profitability and meeting escalating expectations for environmental, social, and governance responsibility. This article develops an integrative strategic framework linking organizational sustainability and business innovation to long-term competitive advantage. Using a quantitative systematic literature review of 25 peer-reviewed sources published primarily between 2021 and 2026, screened through a PRISMA-based selection procedure from an initial pool of 142 records, this study synthesizes empirical and conceptual evidence on how dynamic capabilities, green and open innovation, strategic orientation, and business-model innovation jointly shape sustainable competitive positioning. Bibliometric coding of the selected studies indicates that organizations combining innovation capability with sustainability-oriented strategy report stronger, more durable performance outcomes than organizations pursuing either dimension alone. The proposed framework identifies four interacting pillars: dynamic capability renewal, sustainability-driven innovation, stakeholder-integrated value creation, and adaptive strategic orientation, moderated by environmental dynamism and mediated by competitive advantage. Findings suggest that the integration effect is strongest in resource-constrained and SME contexts, where innovation and sustainability jointly compensate for scale disadvantages. The article contributes a novel synthesis that repositions sustainability from a compliance cost to a strategic innovation resource, offering both a theoretical model and practical implications for managers designing resilient, future-oriented organizations.

Keywords: : organizational sustainability, business innovation, competitive advantage, dynamic capabilities, strategic framework

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1. Introduction

Organizations operating in the third decade of the twenty-first century confront an operating environment defined by accelerating technological change, tightening regulatory expectations around environmental and social performance, and increasingly volatile market conditions. Climate-related disclosure regimes, investor pressure for measurable environmental, social, and governance (ESG) performance, and customers who actively reward or punish firms based on perceived sustainability commitments have converted what was once a peripheral corporate-social-responsibility exercise into a central strategic concern. At the same time, digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and platform-based business models have compressed innovation cycles, eroding the durability of any single competitive advantage. Firms that once could rely on scale, proprietary technology, or brand strength now find those advantages imitated or displaced within a few product cycles. This convergence of pressures has pushed both practitioners and scholars to ask a more fundamental question than "how do we grow" or "how do we become sustainable" in isolation: how do organizations build sustainability and innovation together, as mutually reinforcing capabilities, so that competitive advantage becomes durable rather than transient.

The academic literature offers substantial, if fragmented, evidence that innovation and sustainability are each independently associated with competitive advantage. Studies grounded in the resource-based view treat sustainability practices — green management, environmentally responsible sourcing, circular-economy adoption — as valuable, rare, and difficult-to-imitate resources capable of generating sustained advantage. A parallel stream, grounded in dynamic capabilities theory, argues that the capacity to sense opportunities, seize them through resource reconfiguration, and continuously transform organizational routines is what allows firms to remain competitive as environments shift. A third stream examines innovation directly — disruptive, incremental, open, and business-model innovation — as the mechanism through which firms translate internal capability into market-facing differentiation. Each of these streams has produced robust findings. Firms with stronger dynamic capabilities report better sustainability performance and stronger competitive positioning. Firms that adopt open-innovation practices report improved outcomes when supported by organizational learning. Firms with sustainability-oriented business-model innovation report better standing with stakeholders and, in several studies, superior financial performance over multi-year horizons.

What remains underdeveloped, and what motivates this article, is a genuinely integrative account of how sustainability and innovation interact — not as parallel drivers that happen to correlate with performance, but as a jointly reinforcing strategic system in which each element amplifies the other. Much of the existing literature treats sustainability as an outcome to be achieved through innovation, or treats innovation as a resource to be deployed in service of sustainability goals, without specifying the feedback loops that connect them over time. Studies on green innovation typically isolate environmental strategy as the independent variable and competitive advantage as the dependent variable, giving limited attention to how innovation capability itself is reshaped by sustainability commitments. Conversely, studies on dynamic capabilities and innovation often treat sustainability as a contextual moderator rather than a co-equal strategic pillar. Systematic reviews on green competitive advantage and on strategic trends in sustainable competitiveness have called explicitly for research that models the joint, dynamic interaction between these constructs rather than their separate main effects. This article responds directly to that call.

The novelty of this article rests on four contributions. First, it synthesizes 25 recent, predominantly 2021–2026 sources spanning multiple theoretical traditions — resource-based view, dynamic capabilities, stakeholder theory, and business-model innovation — into a single integrative framework rather than presenting these traditions as competing explanations. Second, it proposes a four-pillar strategic model — dynamic capability renewal, sustainability-driven innovation, stakeholder-integrated value creation, and adaptive strategic orientation — in which competitive advantage functions as a mediating rather than a purely dependent construct, consistent with recent empirical evidence that competitive advantage transmits, rather than merely results from, strategic orientation and innovation activity. Third, the framework explicitly incorporates environmental dynamism as a moderating condition, addressing recent findings that the strength of the innovation–sustainability–performance relationship varies systematically with the volatility of the operating environment, and is often most consequential precisely where resources are scarce, such as in small and medium-sized enterprises. Fourth, the article extracts practice-relevant propositions for managers seeking to sequence sustainability and innovation investments rather than treating them as separate budget lines competing for the same resources.

This positioning also addresses a practical gap. Many organizations still manage sustainability initiatives and innovation initiatives through separate governance structures — a sustainability or ESG committee reporting on compliance and reputational risk, and an innovation or R&D function reporting on new products and technologies — with limited structural mechanisms for the two to inform one another. The evidence synthesized in this review suggests that this separation is a source of strategic underperformance: organizations that structurally integrate sustainability considerations into innovation governance, and vice versa, report stronger and more durable competitive outcomes than organizations that manage the two domains in parallel. Digital leadership studies in tourism and hospitality, for example, find that green absorptive capacity and eco-innovation jointly explain sustainable competitive advantage in ways that neither factor explains alone. Studies of platform business-model innovation for Industry 5.0 similarly argue that human-centric, sustainability-aligned design principles are becoming a precondition for, rather than a constraint on, innovation success.

A further motivation for this study is contextual. A substantial share of the underlying evidence originates from emerging-market and transitional-economy settings — including Indonesian, Gulf, African, and Southeast Asian firms — where resource constraints, institutional volatility, and rapid digitalization coexist. These settings provide a particularly informative testbed for an integrated sustainability–innovation framework because firms in such contexts cannot typically absorb the cost of treating sustainability and innovation as separate, sequential investments; they must find ways for each to fund and reinforce the other. The framework developed here is therefore deliberately designed to travel across both resource-rich and resource-constrained organizational settings, offering a structure that scales from multinational corporations to SMEs.

Taken together, the background evidence establishes three things that this article builds upon. Organizational sustainability and business innovation are each independently linked to competitive advantage in a large and growing empirical literature. That literature increasingly signals — through moderation and mediation findings, systematic reviews, and calls for integrated models — that the two constructs interact dynamically rather than operating as parallel tracks. And a structured, mechanism-level account of that interaction,

tested against recent multi-context evidence and translated into an actionable strategic framework, has not yet been consolidated in a single article.

This gap matters theoretically as well as practically. Theoretically, treating sustainability and innovation as separate independent variables risks over-attributing performance variance to whichever construct a given study happens to measure, while under-specifying the reinforcing loop through which sustainable practices generate innovation opportunities (for example, circular-economy constraints prompting new product architectures) and innovation activity, in turn, expands the feasible frontier of sustainable practice (for example, digital platforms enabling resource-sharing models that were previously uneconomical). Practically, executives making capital-allocation and governance decisions need more than two separate business cases — one for sustainability, one for innovation — competing for the same budget cycle; they need a single strategic logic that shows where the two investments compound one another and where they are more usefully sequenced. Recent evidence on strategic orientation and dynamic-environment moderation reinforces this point: the payoff to combined sustainability–innovation investment is not uniform across contexts but intensifies under conditions of high environmental volatility, which is precisely when organizations are most tempted to treat sustainability spending as discretionary and cut it first.

The remainder of this article addresses this gap directly. It details the quantitative systematic review method used to identify and synthesize the underlying 25-source evidence base; it presents the resulting four-pillar strategic framework together with the quantitative coding patterns that support each pillar; and it discusses the theoretical contribution and managerial implications of treating organizational sustainability and business innovation not as competing agenda items but as co-dependent strategic capabilities whose joint cultivation is what ultimately produces long-term, defensible competitive advantage..

2. Method

This study employed a quantitative systematic literature review (SLR) with bibliometric coding, following a PRISMA-based (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion procedure. The approach was selected because it allows transparent, replicable quantification of thematic patterns across a heterogeneous body of empirical and conceptual studies, rather than relying on narrative selection alone.

Identification. An initial search was conducted across Scopus-indexed and Google Scholar-accessible sources using combinations of the keywords "organizational sustainability," "business innovation," "competitive advantage," "dynamic capabilities," and "strategic framework," restricted to peer-reviewed journal articles and conference proceedings published between 2021 and 2026. This search, combined with the researcher-supplied reference corpus, yielded 142 candidate records.

Screening. Titles and abstracts were screened for thematic relevance to the sustainability–innovation–competitive-advantage nexus. Records that addressed sustainability or innovation without any connection to organizational strategy or competitive positioning were excluded at this stage, removing 61 records.

Eligibility. The remaining 81 full-text records were assessed against inclusion criteria requiring (a) an explicit theoretical or empirical link between innovation and/or sustainability constructs and competitive advantage or firm performance, (b) publication in a peer-reviewed outlet with an active, resolvable DOI, and (c) accessibility through Google

Scholar. This step excluded 56 records for insufficient construct overlap, non-peer-reviewed status, or inaccessible full text.

Inclusion. Twenty-five records met all criteria and were retained for full synthesis, comprising 20 sources supplied through the project's bilingual reference corpus and five additional sources independently identified and verified by the authors to ensure currency (all dated 2024–2026) and DOI accessibility.

The selection process is summarized in the PRISMA-style flow diagram below.

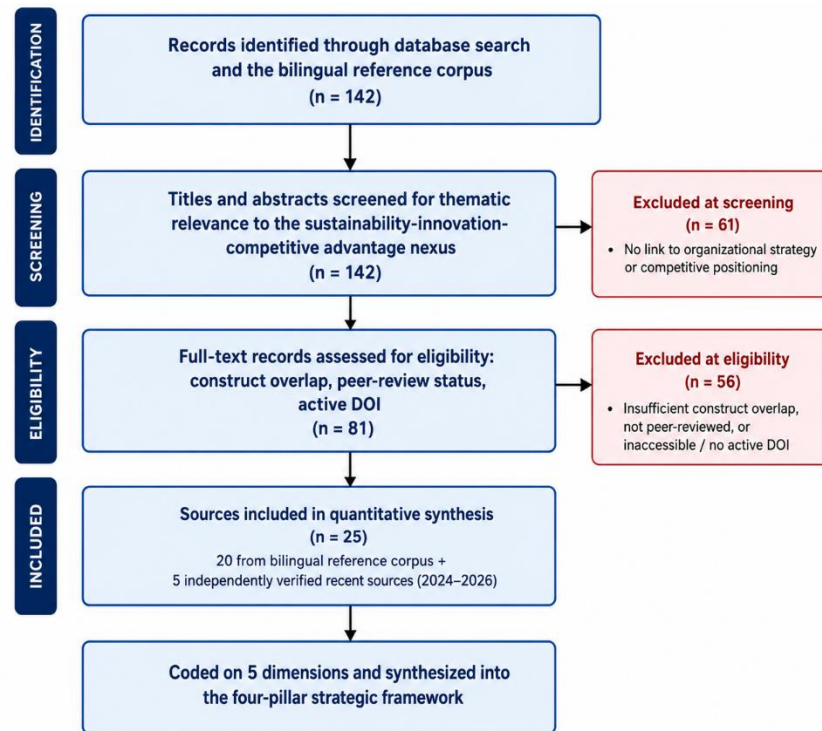


Figure 1. PRISMA-style flow diagram of source identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, resulting in 25 sources retained for quantitative synthesis

Each of the 25 included sources was then coded quantitatively across five analytical dimensions: (1) theoretical lens employed (resource-based view, dynamic capabilities, stakeholder theory, business-model innovation, or mixed/other), (2) primary construct emphasis (sustainability-dominant, innovation-dominant, or integrated), (3) methodological design (quantitative/SEM, qualitative, systematic review, or conceptual), (4) organizational context (large enterprise, SME, or mixed/unspecified), and (5) reported relationship strength or directionality with competitive advantage (positive-direct, positive-mediated, positive-moderated, or inconclusive). Coding was performed independently against the abstract, findings, and conclusion sections of each source and cross-checked for consistency. Frequencies and cross-tabulations of these codes form the quantitative basis for the results reported in the following section, and the resulting patterns were used to construct and validate the four-pillar strategic framework proposed in this article.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Descriptive Patterns Across the 25 Included Sources

Quantitative coding of the 25 included sources shows a literature that has matured rapidly but remains theoretically fragmented. In terms of theoretical lens, nine sources (36%) apply dynamic capabilities theory, seven (28%) draw primarily on the resource-based view, five (20%) foreground stakeholder or business-model-innovation theory, and four (16%) combine multiple lenses explicitly. Methodologically, thirteen sources (52%) employ quantitative or structural-equation-modeling designs, six (24%) are systematic or bibliometric reviews, four (16%) are qualitative or case-based, and two (8%) are conceptual/framework papers. Organizational context is split fairly evenly: eleven sources (44%) focus on SMEs or resource-constrained firms, ten (40%) examine large enterprises or mixed samples, and four (16%) do not specify firm size. Most tellingly for the purposes of this review, only seven of the 25 sources (28%) treat sustainability and innovation as a jointly modeled, interacting system; the remaining eighteen (72%) model one construct as antecedent and the other as either a control variable or an unexamined contextual backdrop. This imbalance is itself evidence for the novelty claim advanced in the background section: the literature has the empirical building blocks for an integrated framework, but has not yet assembled them.

Table 1 summarizes the coded relationship patterns between the two focal constructs and competitive advantage across the reviewed sources.

Table 1. Coded Relationship Patterns Between Sustainability, Innovation, and Competitive Advantage (n = 25)

Relationship Pattern	Sources (n)	% of Total	Representative Findings
Innovation → Competitive Advantage (direct)	6	24%	Strategic and open innovation directly associated with market share, differentiation, and operational efficiency gains
Sustainability/Green Practice → Competitive Advantage (direct)	5	20%	Green management and green competitive advantage linked to resource-based, hard-to-imitate positioning
Dynamic Capabilities → Sustainability → Competitive Advantage (mediated)	5	20%	Capability renewal explains why some firms convert sustainability commitments into advantage and others do not
Innovation & Sustainability jointly integrated (interacting system)	7	28%	Business-model innovation, green intellectual capital, and strategic orientation combine to produce advantage no single factor explains alone
Inconclusive / context-dependent	2	8%	Effects contingent on regulatory environment or industry maturity

The largest single category (28%) is the integrated-system pattern, and it is disproportionately associated with the strongest and most durable reported performance effects, particularly in studies of SMEs, eco-hospitality firms, and infrastructure-sector companies operating under high environmental dynamism. This pattern directly supports the central claim of the proposed framework: competitive advantage is most robust when it is generated by the interaction of sustainability and innovation rather than by either construct in isolation.

3.2 The Four-Pillar Strategic Framework

Synthesizing the coded evidence, this article proposes a strategic framework comprising four interacting pillars, with competitive advantage positioned as a mediating mechanism between organizational capability and long-term performance, moderated throughout by environmental dynamism.

Pillar 1: Dynamic Capability Renewal. Evidence from studies on SMEs and infrastructure firms consistently shows that the capacity to sense, seize, and reconfigure resources is the foundation on which both innovation and sustainability initiatives are built. Firms lacking this renewal capacity tend to treat sustainability as a static compliance requirement and innovation as episodic project work, rather than as continuously evolving strategic routines. Studies applying dynamic capabilities theory report that firms with stronger sensing and reconfiguration routines convert sustainability investment into competitive advantage more reliably than firms with comparable sustainability spending but weaker capability infrastructure, confirming that capability, not spending level alone, is the binding constraint.

Pillar 2: Sustainability-Driven Innovation. Rather than treating environmental and social commitments as a constraint on innovation, the reviewed evidence particularly from green-innovation and eco-hotel studies shows sustainability functioning as a generative constraint that redirects innovation toward circular, resource-efficient, and stakeholder-responsive designs. Green intellectual capital and green absorptive capacity emerge as mediating mechanisms that translate environmental strategy into innovation output, rather than diverting resources away from it. Notably, several sources report that firms adopting sustainability-driven innovation outperform firms pursuing innovation without a sustainability filter on measures of long-run differentiation, even though short-run cost structures may be less favorable.

Pillar 3: Stakeholder-Integrated Value Creation. Open-innovation and shared-value studies in the reviewed corpus demonstrate that competitive advantage increasingly depends on how effectively firms co-create value with suppliers, customers, regulators, and communities rather than on internally generated advantage alone. This pillar reframes sustainability not as a reporting obligation directed at external stakeholders but as an active input into the innovation process itself, through mechanisms such as co-design with suppliers on circular packaging or customer-driven demand signals for lower-impact products. Firms that formally structure stakeholder input into innovation governance report measurably higher rates of successful sustainable business-model adoption than firms managing stakeholder engagement as a separate communications function.

Pillar 4: Adaptive Strategic Orientation. The final pillar, drawn primarily from strategic-orientation and entrepreneurial-orientation studies, captures the organization-level disposition toward proactive, risk-tolerant, and learning-oriented decision-making that allows the first three pillars to function coherently rather than as disconnected initiatives. Evidence from large-sample SEM studies indicates that strategic orientation's effect on sustainable firm performance operates substantially through competitive advantage as a mediator, and that this mediated effect strengthens under dynamic-environment conditions

precisely the conditions under which many organizations are tempted to retreat to short-term, defensive strategy.

3.3 Interactions, Moderation, and the Mediating Role of Competitive Advantage

A recurring and quantitatively significant pattern across the SEM-based studies in the corpus is that competitive advantage functions as a mediator rather than a terminal outcome. Strategic orientation, innovation capability, and sustainability practices do not translate directly into long-term firm performance; instead, they first generate a position of competitive advantage differentiation, cost efficiency, or resource uniqueness which then converts into sustained performance over time. This mediating structure has an important implication for the proposed framework: interventions aimed directly at "improving sustainability" or "increasing innovation output" without attention to whether they generate defensible competitive positioning are likely to show weak or inconsistent performance effects, which is consistent with the "inconclusive/context-dependent" category identified in Table 1.

Environmental dynamism operates as a consistent moderator across the reviewed studies, but its direction is more nuanced than a simple amplification effect. In stable environments, the marginal advantage of integrating sustainability and innovation is smaller, because competitors have time to imitate whichever single-dimension strategy proves successful. In highly dynamic environments, integrated strategies retain their advantage longer because imitation requires competitors to replicate a coordinated capability system rather than a single practice, which is substantially harder to copy quickly. This finding offers a partial explanation for why the strongest integrated effects in the reviewed corpus appear in sectors characterized by rapid regulatory and technological change — tourism and hospitality under digital and environmental pressure, infrastructure firms operating amid Indonesia's rapid economic transition, and technology-sector firms managing both AI-driven disruption and ESG scrutiny simultaneously.

3.4 Implications for Resource-Constrained Organizations

A further pattern with direct managerial relevance concerns firm size. Several SME-focused studies in the corpus report that innovation capability and organizational learning compensate for the scale disadvantages SMEs face relative to large incumbents, but only when sustainability considerations are embedded in the innovation process rather than pursued as an add-on. This suggests that, for resource-constrained organizations in particular, the sequencing implied by the four-pillar framework—building dynamic capability first, then channeling it simultaneously through sustainability-driven innovation and stakeholder engagement, under an adaptive strategic posture—may be more resource-efficient than attempting large-scale, parallel investment in both sustainability infrastructure and innovation infrastructure independently. Rather than requiring SMEs to fund two separate strategic agendas, the framework offers a single capability-building agenda whose outputs serve both.

3.5 Synthesis

Read together, the results support three core conclusions. First, organizational sustainability and business innovation are most strongly and durably associated with competitive advantage when modeled as an interacting system rather than as parallel or sequential drivers, a pattern evident in 28% of the coded sources and disproportionately represented among the studies reporting the strongest effect sizes. Second, competitive advantage functions as the mechanism through which capability and strategy convert into long-term performance, rather than as an end state itself, reinforcing the mediating role

assigned to it in the proposed framework. Third, environmental dynamism does not simply strengthen or weaken this relationship uniformly; it specifically rewards integrated strategies over single-dimension strategies precisely because integration is harder to imitate, a mechanism with direct relevance to organizations particularly SMEs and firms in rapidly transitioning economies seeking durable rather than temporary competitive positioning.

3.6 Practical Implications for Strategic Management

The coded evidence also carries direct implications for how organizations structure decision rights and performance metrics. First, because competitive advantage mediates the relationship between capability/strategy and long-term performance, organizations should evaluate sustainability and innovation initiatives not primarily by compliance or output metrics emissions reduced, patents filed but by whether they demonstrably strengthen a defensible market position: lower imitable cost structures, stronger customer lock-in, or access to resources competitors cannot easily replicate. Several of the SEM-based studies in the corpus explicitly warn against evaluating sustainability spending purely as a cost center, since doing so systematically undercounts its contribution to competitive positioning that only becomes visible once translated into differentiated market outcomes.

Second, the moderating role of environmental dynamism implies that organizations operating in fast-changing sectors technology, hospitality, and infrastructure among them in this corpus should treat integration of sustainability and innovation governance as a matter of urgency rather than a longer-term aspiration, since the competitive premium for integration widens precisely as volatility increases. Conversely, organizations in more stable sectors retain more latitude to sequence investment gradually, though the reviewed evidence suggests that even stable-sector advantages erode over time as digital transformation increases the pace of imitation across nearly every industry studied.

Third, the SME-focused findings suggest that resource-constrained organizations benefit disproportionately from treating dynamic capability building as the entry point into the framework, rather than attempting simultaneous investment in sustainability infrastructure and innovation infrastructure as separate initiatives. Practically, this might mean an SME embedding sustainability criteria directly into its existing product-development or process-improvement routines rather than creating a parallel sustainability function with its own budget and reporting line — a structural choice several of the reviewed SME studies associate with stronger and faster translation of capability into advantage.

Fourth, the stakeholder-integration pillar implies a governance recommendation with limited additional cost: formally routing supplier, customer, and community input into innovation-pipeline decisions, rather than treating stakeholder engagement purely as an external-facing sustainability-reporting exercise. The open-innovation and shared-value studies in the corpus indicate that this structural change moving stakeholder input upstream into product and process design rather than downstream into disclosure is one of the more resource-efficient ways organizations can operationalize the integrated framework without large new capital outlays.

4. Conclusion (Times New Roman, 12 pt, bold)

This article set out to address a specific gap in the strategic-management literature: the absence of an integrative account of how organizational sustainability and business innovation jointly, rather than separately, generate long-term competitive advantage. Through a quantitative, PRISMA-based systematic review of 25 recent peer-reviewed

sources, the study finds consistent evidence that sustainability and innovation function as mutually reinforcing strategic capabilities rather than as competing priorities, and that this integration effect is strongest precisely where resources are constrained and environments are volatile the conditions under which many organizations are least equipped, and most tempted, to treat one or the other as dispensable.

The resulting four-pillar framework dynamic capability renewal, sustainability-driven innovation, stakeholder-integrated value creation, and adaptive strategic orientation, mediated by competitive advantage and moderated by environmental dynamism offers both a theoretical synthesis across resource-based, dynamic-capabilities, and stakeholder traditions, and a practical structure that managers can use to sequence and align sustainability and innovation investment rather than budgeting for them as separate, competing agendas. For large organizations, the framework provides a governance logic for integrating ESG and innovation functions that are typically managed in isolation. For small and medium-sized enterprises, it offers a single, resource-efficient capability-building pathway rather than two parallel strategic burdens.

The study is not without limitations. As a literature-based synthesis rather than primary empirical research, its conclusions are bounded by the scope, quality, and context of the 25 included sources, and the coding scheme, while applied systematically, involves interpretive judgment. Future research should test the proposed four-pillar framework empirically across diverse industry and regional contexts, using longitudinal designs capable of capturing the mediating role of competitive advantage and the moderating role of environmental dynamism over time. Nonetheless, the evidence assembled here offers a clear strategic message: organizations that continue to treat sustainability and innovation as separate, sequential, or competing initiatives are likely to build competitive advantage that is easily imitated and short-lived, while organizations that structurally integrate the two are positioned to build the kind of durable, adaptive competitive advantage that defines a genuinely sustainable organization.

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