

The Evolution of Strategic Management Theory: A Systematic Literature Review on the Role of Strategic Leadership

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***Abstract:** The increasing complexity of the global business environment driven by digital disruption, globalization, and economic uncertainty has fundamentally challenged the explanatory capacity of established strategic management theories. Since the 1960s, the field has evolved from corporate planning and industrial organization perspectives toward more dynamic approaches, including the resource-based view (RBV), knowledge-based view (KBV), dynamic capabilities, and digital ecosystem strategies. However, this theoretical progression remains fragmented, particularly in its limited ability to account for the role of leadership as an integrative force in strategy formulation and execution. This study aims to critically examine the evolution of strategic management theory from 1960 to 2025 and to identify its key conceptual limitations in explaining how strategic direction is shaped and coordinated. Using a systematic literature review based on a PRISMA-guided chronological approach, this study synthesizes major theoretical developments and evaluates their underlying assumptions. The findings reveal a persistent bias toward explaining “what firms possess” and “how firms compete,” while neglecting “who directs strategy” and “how strategic integration is achieved.” This gap leads to an incomplete understanding of strategic adaptation in complex environments. As a novel contribution, this study proposes the Strategic Leadership-Based Dynamic Ecosystem (SLDE) framework, which reconceptualizes strategic leadership as the central mechanism that integrates dynamic capabilities, knowledge resources, and digital ecosystems. By explicitly positioning leadership as the core driver of strategic coherence and adaptability, this study offers a more integrative perspective that extends existing theory and provides a clearer foundation for future research in strategic management.*

***Keywords:** Strategic Leadership Capability, Dynamic Capabilities, Digital Ecosystem, Strategic Management, SLDE Framework*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The evolution of the global business environment over recent decades has been marked by increasing complexity, driven by digital technological disruption, market globalization, and heightened economic uncertainty. Under these conditions, organizations are required not only to formulate appropriate strategies but also to continuously adapt in response to rapid environmental changes. Consequently, the field of strategic management has undergone a significant transformation from relatively static and planning-oriented approaches toward more dynamic, adaptive, and ecosystem-based perspectives [1].

In its early development, strategic management was largely dominated by the corporate planning paradigm, which emphasized rational, structured, and long-term planning as the primary mechanism for guiding organizational growth [2]. This approach assumed relatively stable environments in which formal analysis could reliably inform strategic decisions. However, as environmental volatility increased, this perspective was increasingly criticized for its rigidity and limited responsiveness. In contrast, subsequent scholarship suggests that strategy may also emerge through iterative learning and adaptation processes rather than solely through deliberate planning [3]. This shift marks an important transition from prescriptive to more emergent views of strategy.

Building on this development, the Industrial Organization (IO) perspective further advanced strategic management by highlighting the role of industry structure and competitive positioning in shaping firm performance [4]. While this perspective provides valuable insights into external environmental forces, it remains limited in explaining why firms within the same industry often exhibit different performance outcomes [5]. In response to this limitation, the Resource-Based View (RBV) shifts the analytical focus inward, emphasizing firm-specific resources as the foundation of sustained competitive advantage [6]. In particular, RBV posits that resources characterized as valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) can generate long-term performance advantages. Nevertheless, RBV has been widely critiqued for its relatively static nature, especially in explaining how firms adapt their resource base in rapidly changing environments [7].

To address these limitations, the dynamic capabilities perspective introduces a more process-oriented view of strategy by emphasizing an organization's ability to sense opportunities, seize them, and transform its resource base accordingly [8]. This perspective highlights the importance of adaptability, innovation, and continuous reconfiguration as key drivers of competitive advantage. Empirical research further indicates that dynamic capabilities play a critical role in enhancing firm performance, particularly in turbulent environments [9]. In parallel, the Knowledge-Based View (KBV) extends RBV by positioning knowledge as a central strategic resource, thereby shifting attention toward organizational learning and knowledge creation processes [10]. In this regard, knowledge is not merely an asset but is continuously generated through the interaction between tacit and explicit forms, reinforcing the importance of collaboration and learning within organizations [11].

As the business landscape enters the digital era, strategic management has increasingly incorporated ecosystem-based perspectives. Firms are no longer viewed as isolated entities but as participants within interconnected networks that co-create value [12]. This transition is further reinforced by the rise of artificial intelligence and advanced analytics, which enhance data-driven decision-making capabilities [13]. Accordingly, competitive advantage is increasingly shaped by an organization's ability to operate within and orchestrate digital ecosystems.

Despite these substantial theoretical advancements, a critical gap remains in the literature. Existing perspectives whether focusing on industry structure, resources, capabilities, or knowledge tend to examine strategic elements in isolation. More importantly, the role of Strategic Leadership Capability (SLC) is often treated as peripheral rather than as a central component of strategic management theory. This limitation becomes particularly evident in complex and dynamic environments where the integration of multiple strategic elements is required.

In this context, strategic leadership, as articulated by Ireland and Hitt, encompasses the ability to establish organizational direction, manage change, and align strategy formulation with implementation [14]. More importantly, within the dynamic capabilities framework, leadership plays a crucial role in activating sensing, seizing, and transforming processes, thereby enabling organizational capabilities to function effectively [8]. However, despite its recognized importance, strategic leadership has not yet been systematically integrated into the core architecture of strategic management theory.

Empirical observations further reinforce this gap. The transformation of major global organizations such as Apple under Steve Jobs, Microsoft under Satya Nadella, and Tesla under Elon Musk suggests that leadership plays a critical role in shaping strategic direction and enabling innovation. Similarly, firms such as Amazon demonstrate how leadership can drive the development of platform-based ecosystems. Comparable patterns are also evident in emerging markets, including organizations in Asia and Indonesia, where leadership significantly influences digital transformation and service integration.

Taken together, these observations suggest that competitive advantage is not solely determined by the possession of resources or capabilities, but is also shaped by the ability of leaders to integrate and orchestrate these elements effectively. From a theoretical standpoint, while strategic management has extensively addressed questions related to “what firms possess” and “how firms compete,” it has paid comparatively less attention to “who directs strategy” and “how strategic elements are integrated and executed.” This limitation highlights the need for a more integrative perspective.

Based on this identified gap, this study aims to critically analyze the evolution of strategic management theory and to develop an integrative theoretical framework. Specifically, this study proposes that Strategic Leadership Capability should be positioned as a central construct within strategic management. This integration is conceptualized through the Strategic Leadership-Based Dynamic Ecosystem (SLDE) framework, which positions strategic leadership as the primary driver in aligning dynamic capabilities, knowledge, and digital ecosystems to achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

To address this objective, the study formulates the following research questions (RQ):

1. How has strategic management theory evolved from 1960 to 2026, and what are the key conceptual limitations of each paradigm in explaining competitive advantage?
2. To what extent have existing strategic management theories incorporated Strategic Leadership Capability, and why has it not yet become a central construct?
3. How can Strategic Leadership Capability be integrated with dynamic capabilities and digital ecosystems into a new theoretical framework (SLDE)?

2. METHOD

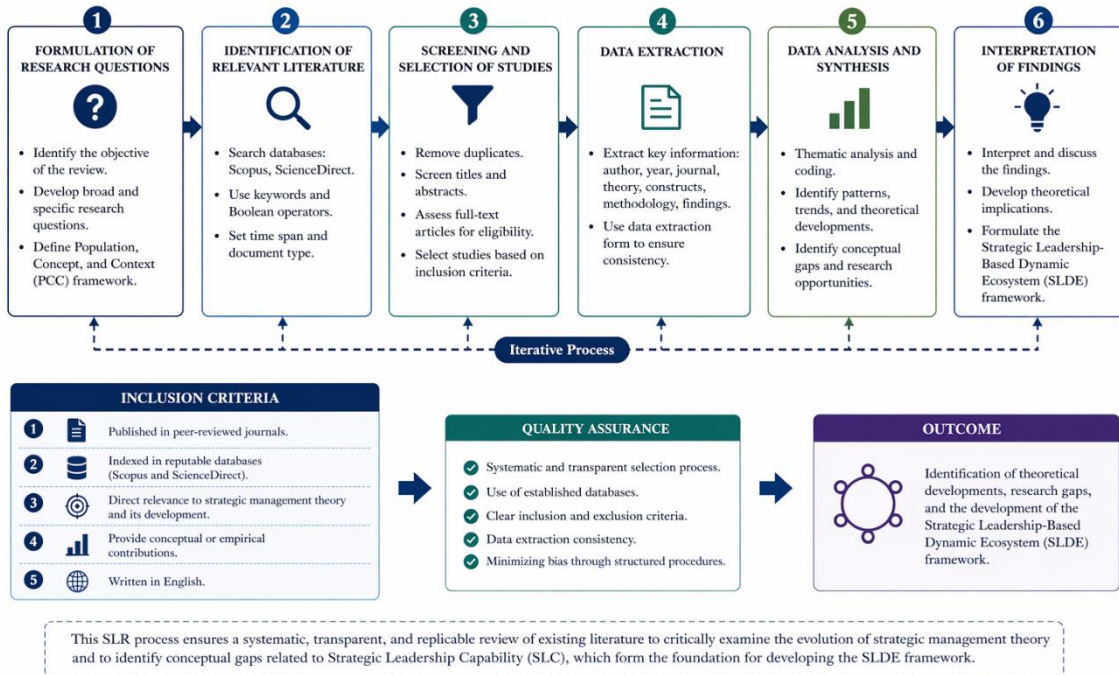
This study adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to critically examine the evolution of strategic management theory while identifying conceptual gaps related to *Strategic*

Leadership Capability (SLC). The SLR method is selected because it enables a structured, transparent, and replicable synthesis of existing knowledge, thereby supporting a more comprehensive and academically rigorous analysis [15].

Figure 2.1

SLR RESEARCH FLOW MODEL

Systematic Literature Review for Developing the Strategic Leadership-Based Dynamic Ecosystem (SLDE)



Beyond its descriptive function, the SLR approach in this study is employed as an analytical tool to facilitate critical evaluation and theory development. In this regard, the method is particularly relevant for integrating fragmented theoretical perspectives and for supporting the development of a new conceptual framework, namely the *Strategic Leadership-Based Dynamic Ecosystem (SLDE)* [16].

The research design follows established SLR procedures commonly applied in management research. These procedures include the formulation of research questions, identification of relevant literature, screening and selection of studies, data extraction, data analysis and synthesis, and interpretation of findings [17]. The adoption of these stages is intended to ensure methodological consistency while reducing the risk of bias in the selection and evaluation of the literature.

To maintain the quality and relevance of the reviewed studies, a set of inclusion criteria is applied. Selected articles must: (1) be published in peer-reviewed journals, (2) be indexed in reputable databases such as Scopus and ScienceDirect, (3) demonstrate direct relevance to the development of strategic management theory, (4) provide either conceptual or empirical contributions, and (5) be written in English [18]. These criteria are intended to ensure that the selected literature meets acceptable academic standards and contributes meaningfully to the objectives of the study.

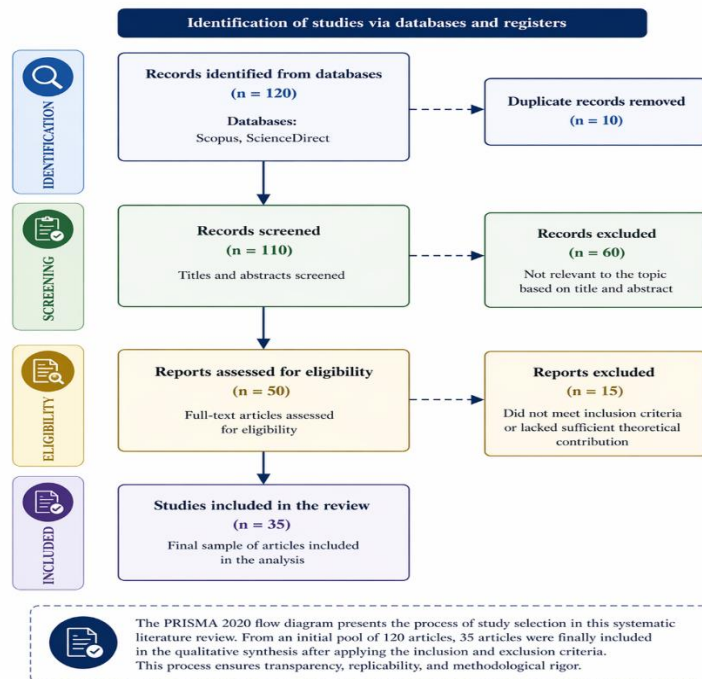
The literature search was conducted systematically using a set of predefined keywords, including “strategic management theory,” “resource-based view,” “dynamic capabilities,” “knowledge-based view,” “digital strategy,” “platform ecosystem,” and “strategic leadership.” The use of these keywords was designed to capture the major theoretical streams within strategic management while ensuring adequate coverage of relevant studies.

To enhance transparency in the selection process, this study adopts the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework [19]. The PRISMA framework structures the literature selection process into four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. In the identification stage, approximately 120 articles were retrieved from selected databases. After removing duplicates, 110 articles remained for further screening. During the screening stage, titles and abstracts were reviewed, leading to the exclusion of 60 articles due to limited relevance. Subsequently, 50 articles were assessed at the eligibility stage through full-text review. Of these, 15 articles were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria or lacked sufficient theoretical contribution. As a result, a final sample of 35 articles was included in the analysis.

Figure 2.2

PRISMA 2020 FLOW DIAGRAM

Systematic Literature Review for Developing the Strategic Leadership-Based Dynamic Ecosystem (SLDE)



The use of the PRISMA framework provides a clear representation of the literature selection process and contributes to the overall transparency and credibility of the study. The data analysis was conducted using three complementary approaches. First, thematic analysis was employed to classify the literature into major theoretical perspectives, including corporate planning, Industrial Organization (IO), Resource-Based View (RBV), Knowledge-Based View (KBV), dynamic capabilities, and digital ecosystem strategy. This analysis addresses the first research question concerning the evolution of strategic management theory.

Second, comparative analysis was conducted to examine the strengths and limitations of each theoretical perspective, particularly with respect to the role of Strategic Leadership Capability. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of how leadership has been positioned within existing theoretical frameworks and helps identify areas where integration remains limited.

Third, critical integrative synthesis was applied to combine insights from the reviewed literature in order to develop a new conceptual framework [16]. This approach not only connects existing theoretical constructs but also facilitates the identification of relationships among key variables, thereby supporting theory development.

The final stage of the methodology involves the development of the Strategic Leadership-Based Dynamic Ecosystem (SLDE) framework. This framework integrates three core theoretical components:

- (1) *Dynamic Capabilities*, which emphasize organizational adaptation through sensing, seizing, and transforming processes [8];
- (2) *Knowledge-Based Strategy*, which highlights knowledge as a critical source of competitive advantage [10]; and
- (3) *Digital Ecosystem Strategy*, which emphasizes the role of interconnected platforms and networks in value creation [12].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 3.1 Classification of Strategic Management Literature Based on PRISMA Results

No.	Author	Year	Theory Category	Short Academic Summary	Strategic Leadership Position
1	Wernerfelt	1984	RBV	Introduces resource-based strategy focusing on internal resources.	Directs resource-based strategy.
2	Barney	1991	RBV	Introduces VRIN framework for sustained competitive advantage.	Allocates strategic resources.
3	Peteraf	1993	RBV	Defines conditions for sustained competitive advantage.	Maintains competitive advantage.
4	Nonaka	1994	Knowledge Strategy	Introduces SECI model of knowledge creation.	Builds learning and innovation culture.
5	Grant	1996	Knowledge Strategy	Positions knowledge as a key strategic resource.	Integrates organizational knowledge.
6	Eisenhardt & Martin	2000	Dynamic Capabilities	Defines dynamic capabilities as adaptive organizational processes.	Facilitates adaptive decision-making.
7	Eisenhardt & Martin	2000	Dynamic Capabilities	Emphasizes innovation and decision-making processes for adaptation.	Enables flexible organizational processes.
8	Helfat & Peteraf	2003	Dynamic Capabilities	Explains capability lifecycle and renewal.	Guides capability development.
9	Helfat & Peteraf	2003	Dynamic Capabilities	Describes capability evolution stages.	Directs capability sustainability.
10	Winter	2003	Dynamic Capabilities	Distinguishes ordinary vs dynamic capabilities.	Determines transformation timing.
11	Ireland & Hitt	2005	Strategic Leadership	Defines leadership as a core strategic capability.	Core driver of competitiveness.
12	Helfat et al.	2007	Dynamic Capabilities	Explains strategic change via capability integration.	Drives organizational change.
13	Teece	2007	Dynamic Capabilities	Introduces sensing, seizing, transforming framework.	Directs adaptive transformation.

No.	Author	Year	Theory Category	Short Academic Summary	Strategic Leadership Position
14	Augier & Teece	2009	Dynamic Capabilities	Links managerial decisions to capability development.	Orchestrates capabilities.
15	Augier & Teece	2009	Strategic Leadership	Emphasizes managerial orchestration role.	Integrates strategic resources.
16	Achtenhagen et al.	2013	Strategic Renewal	Explains strategic renewal processes.	Acts as change agent.
17	O'Reilly & Tushman	2013	Ambidexterity	Explains balancing exploration and exploitation.	Manages innovation balance.
18	Tiwana	2014	Platform Ecosystem	Highlights governance in platform ecosystems.	Controls ecosystem governance.
19	Karimi & Walter	2015	Digital Strategy	Examines response to digital disruption.	Leads digital transformation.
20	Parker et al.	2016	Platform Strategy	Explains multi-sided platform value creation.	Designs platform architecture.
21	Nambisan	2017	Digital Innovation	Explains innovation through digital ecosystems.	Builds ecosystem collaboration.
22	Kapoor & Agarwal	2017	Innovation Ecosystem	Explains collaborative innovation networks.	Orchestrates innovation ecosystem.
23	Schilke et al.	2018	Dynamic Capabilities	Reviews dynamic capabilities evolution.	Enables capability development.
24	Teece	2018	DC & Business Model	Links capabilities with business model innovation.	Designs adaptive business models.
25	Jacobides et al.	2018	Ecosystem Strategy	Explains ecosystem architecture and modularity.	Orchestrates ecosystem structure.
26	Warner & Wäger	2019	Digital DC	Explains digital dynamic capabilities.	Leads digital readiness.
27	Li et al.	2019	Innovation Capability	Highlights innovation capability for competitiveness.	Drives innovation processes.
28	Verhoef et al.	2021	Digital Transformation	Explains digital transformation across business dimensions.	Integrates digital strategy.
29	Budianto et al.	2023	Digital Leadership	Explains leadership as mediator in digital strategy.	Mediates innovation and strategy.
30	Ali Al-Moaid & Almarhdi	2024	Digital Capability	Emphasizes integration of digital capability.	Facilitates digital innovation.
31	Chen et al.	2024	Digital Capability	Explains evolution of digital capabilities.	Leads capability development.
32	Mollah	2024	Innovation Leadership	Links leadership with innovation performance.	Drives innovation culture.
33	Judijanto & Suroso	2025	Digital Strategy	Explains digital-driven strategic evolution.	Integrates digital strategy.
34	Alhameed & Emeagwali	2026	Digital Leadership	Explains leadership in sustainable transformation.	Leads long-term transformation.
35	Technovation Review Team	2026	Digital Innovation	Defines future research agenda in digital strategy.	Guides future strategy direction.

The findings indicate that strategic management theory has undergone a gradual yet substantive transformation, shifting from a planning-oriented perspective toward more dynamic and integrative approaches. This transition reflects broader changes in the business environment, where uncertainty and complexity increasingly challenge traditional assumptions about strategy formation and execution.

Initially, strategic management was dominated by the corporate planning paradigm, which emphasized structured, long-term planning as the foundation of organizational growth [2]. However,

this perspective was later questioned by the emergence of adaptive and learning-based views of strategy, suggesting that strategic outcomes may evolve through iterative processes rather than being fully predetermined [3]. This shift marks an important departure from deterministic models toward more flexible and context-sensitive approaches.

Building on this transition, the Industrial Organization (IO) perspective introduced a stronger focus on external factors, particularly industry structure and competitive positioning [4]. Although this perspective provided valuable analytical tools for understanding competition, it offered limited insight into why firms within the same industry often perform differently [5]. This limitation prompted the development of the Resource-Based View (RBV), which redirected attention toward firm-specific resources as the primary source of competitive advantage [20], [6]. RBV further suggests that resources characterized as valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) can support sustained performance [6], [21]. Nevertheless, RBV has been widely critiqued for its relatively static orientation, particularly in explaining how firms adjust their resource configurations in dynamic environments [7].

To address this shortcoming, the Knowledge-Based View (KBV) extends RBV by emphasizing knowledge as a central strategic resource [10]. In this perspective, competitive advantage is closely associated with an organization's ability to create, integrate, and apply knowledge effectively. The interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge, as highlighted in the literature, plays a key role in supporting innovation and organizational learning [11]. At the same time, complementary perspectives such as core competencies and evolutionary theory further reinforce the importance of routines, learning processes, and capability development in shaping firm performance [22], [23].

The dynamic capabilities perspective represents a further refinement by explicitly addressing the role of adaptation in rapidly changing environments. By focusing on sensing, seizing, and transforming processes, this perspective offers a more process-oriented explanation of how organizations respond to environmental change [8]. Subsequent studies extend this view by highlighting the importance of managerial processes, organizational structures, and capability evolution in sustaining performance over time [24], [25], [26]. In this regard, dynamic capabilities provide an important bridge between static resource-based explanations and more adaptive strategic perspectives.

In parallel, the increasing relevance of digital transformation has led to the emergence of ecosystem-based perspectives in strategic management. Organizations are increasingly embedded within interconnected networks, where value is co-created through interactions among multiple actors [27]. Platform-based strategies further illustrate how firms facilitate these interactions, enabling coordination and exchange across complex systems [28], [29]. As a result, competitive advantage is no longer determined solely by internal capabilities but also by the ability to manage relationships within broader ecosystems [30].

Despite these theoretical advancements, the analysis suggests that strategic management research remains conceptually fragmented. Existing perspectives tend to emphasize specific dimensions—such as resources, capabilities, knowledge, or technology—without sufficiently addressing how these elements are integrated in practice. More importantly, the role of Strategic

Leadership Capability (SLC) is often underrepresented, despite its potential importance in coordinating strategic processes.

From a leadership perspective, prior studies suggest that strategic leadership plays a critical role in shaping organizational direction and aligning strategy with execution [14]. Beyond vision formulation, leadership involves managing complexity, responding to uncertainty, and guiding organizational transformation. In dynamic contexts, leadership is also associated with the ability to balance exploration and exploitation, often conceptualized as organizational ambidexterity [33], as well as facilitating learning processes through absorptive capacity [34]. These insights indicate that leadership may serve as a key enabling mechanism for both knowledge-based and dynamic capabilities.

The relevance of leadership becomes even more pronounced within digital ecosystems, where coordination across multiple actors is required. Ecosystem research suggests that value creation depends not only on participation but also on effective orchestration of relationships and interactions [35], [36]. In this context, leadership can be understood as a coordinating force that aligns diverse actors within a shared strategic framework. Similarly, research on integrative capabilities and business model innovation highlights the importance of leadership in recombining resources and redefining value creation mechanisms [37], [1].

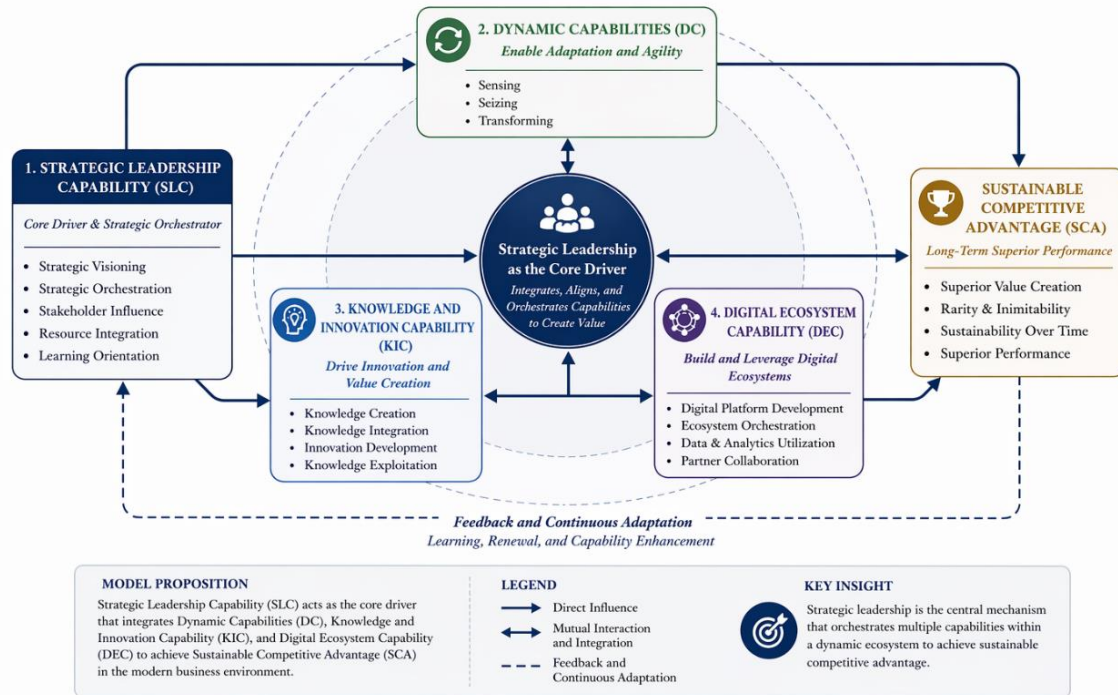
Taken together, these findings suggest that contemporary strategic management requires the integration of three core elements: dynamic capabilities, knowledge and innovation, and digital ecosystems. However, these elements do not operate independently and require a central coordinating mechanism to function effectively. In this study, Strategic Leadership Capability is proposed as that integrative mechanism.

Based on this synthesis, the study introduces the Strategic Leadership-Based Dynamic Ecosystem (SLDE) framework as a novel theoretical contribution. The framework integrates multiple strands of strategic management theory into a more coherent structure, positioning strategic leadership as the primary driver of organizational adaptation and value creation.

The SLDE framework consists of four interrelated components:

- (1) Strategic Leadership Capability (SLC),
- (2) Dynamic Capabilities (DC),
- (3) Knowledge and Innovation Capability (KIC), and
- (4) Digital Ecosystem Capability (DEC).

Figure 3.1
FINAL MODEL: SLDE
Strategic Leadership–Based Dynamic Ecosystem for Sustainable Competitive Advantage



Source: Developed for this study.

Within this framework, SLC is positioned at the center, reflecting its role in integrating and coordinating the other components. Specifically, leadership functions as a strategic orchestrator that aligns resources, processes, and technologies within a unified system [14], [26]. Dynamic capabilities enable organizations to adapt to environmental changes [8], while knowledge and innovation capabilities support value creation through learning processes [10], [11]. At the same time, digital ecosystem capabilities facilitate interaction and collaboration across organizational boundaries [12], [28].

The integration of these components suggests that sustainable competitive advantage emerges not from isolated capabilities, but from the alignment and coordination of multiple strategic elements. In this sense, leadership plays a central role in ensuring that these elements operate cohesively rather than independently. While KBV provides a more dynamic understanding of internal resources, it remains primarily focused on intra-organizational processes and offers limited explanation regarding how knowledge is coordinated across organizational boundaries, particularly within increasingly interconnected environments.

To address the limitations of both RBV and KBV, the dynamic capabilities perspective introduces a process-oriented view of strategy by emphasizing sensing, seizing, and transforming activities [8]. This perspective has significantly contributed to understanding how firms adapt to changing environments. At the same time, subsequent studies suggest that these processes are closely

associated with managerial and organizational actions [24], [26]. However, the role of leadership as a distinct and explicitly theorized construct is not consistently emphasized, as dynamic capabilities are often conceptualized at the organizational level rather than at the level of leadership capability.

This limitation becomes more apparent when considering the increasing relevance of digital transformation and ecosystem-based competition. In contemporary contexts, firms operate within interconnected networks where value is co-created through interactions among multiple actors [27], [30]. Platform-based strategies further illustrate the importance of coordination and alignment in facilitating these interactions [28], [29]. As a result, competitive advantage is shaped not only by internal capabilities but also by the ability to manage relationships within broader ecosystems.

Despite these theoretical advancements, the analysis indicates that existing perspectives remain only partially integrated. RBV, KBV, dynamic capabilities, and digital ecosystem approaches each provide valuable insights, yet they tend to focus on specific dimensions of strategy without fully addressing how these elements are aligned and coordinated in practice. In particular, the role of Strategic Leadership Capability (SLC) appears to be underrepresented as a central integrative mechanism.

From a strategic leadership perspective, prior research suggests that leadership plays an important role in shaping organizational direction, maintaining flexibility, and aligning strategic intent with implementation [14]. In addition, leadership has been associated with managing complexity and uncertainty, as well as supporting organizational learning and adaptation processes [33], [34]. These perspectives indicate that leadership may influence how resources and capabilities are deployed, although its role is not always explicitly integrated into broader strategic management frameworks.

Furthermore, studies on managerial decision-making and resource orchestration suggest that strategic outcomes are influenced by how managers configure and deploy organizational resources [26]. This view highlights the importance of managerial agency in shaping firm performance, yet the concept of leadership as a distinct capability remains relatively underdeveloped within the core structure of strategic management theory.

Recent studies also suggest that strategic leadership plays an important role in aligning organizational capabilities and responding to environmental complexity, particularly in dynamic and digital contexts (e.g., Budianto et al.; Mollah; Alhameed & Emeagwali). These findings reinforce the argument that leadership may serve as a connecting mechanism across different strategic dimensions.

Taken together, these observations point to a broader theoretical gap: while strategic management theory has evolved to incorporate increasingly complex elements, it has not fully articulated the mechanism through which these elements are integrated. In particular, there is limited conceptualization of how leadership contributes to aligning resources, capabilities, knowledge, and ecosystem interactions in a coherent manner.

To address this gap, this study proposes that Strategic Leadership Capability can be understood as an integrative mechanism within strategic management. Rather than replacing existing theoretical perspectives, this study positions leadership as a complementary construct that connects and aligns

key strategic elements. Based on this argument, the Strategic Leadership-Based Dynamic Ecosystem (SLDE) framework is introduced as an integrative conceptual model. The framework combines three core components:

- Dynamic Capabilities, which support organizational adaptation through sensing, seizing, and transforming processes [8]
- Knowledge and Innovation Capability, which enables value creation through knowledge development and learning processes [10], [11]
- Digital Ecosystem Capability, which facilitates interaction and coordination across networked environments [12], [28]

Within this framework, Strategic Leadership Capability is positioned as a central coordinating element that supports the alignment of these components. In line with prior literature, leadership is understood as enabling organizations to maintain strategic direction, manage change, and coordinate organizational processes [14]. At the same time, consistent with the notion of managerial orchestration, leadership can be seen as influencing how resources and capabilities are configured and deployed [26].

This study contributes to the strategic management literature in several ways. First, it provides an integrative perspective that connects previously fragmented theoretical approaches. Second, it extends the dynamic capabilities literature by emphasizing the role of leadership as a coordinating mechanism, while remaining consistent with its original conceptual foundations. Third, it offers a conceptual basis for understanding strategy within ecosystem-based environments, where coordination across multiple actors is increasingly important. Overall, the findings suggest that sustainable competitive advantage may not be derived solely from individual resources or capabilities, but from the ability to align and integrate multiple strategic elements. In this context, leadership appears to play a facilitating role in enabling such alignment.

Finally, this study highlights several directions for future research. Further empirical work is needed to examine how Strategic Leadership Capability can be operationalized and measured across different organizational contexts. In addition, future studies may explore how leadership interacts with dynamic capabilities and ecosystem structures in shaping long-term organizational performance. Overall, the SLDE framework offers a more integrative perspective on strategic management by addressing the fragmentation of existing theories and emphasizing the role of leadership as a central coordinating mechanism. This perspective contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how organizations can achieve sustained competitive advantage in dynamic and interconnected environments.

4. Theoretical Positioning and Contextual Validation of the SLDE Model

The Strategic Leadership-Based Dynamic Ecosystem (SLDE) model is proposed not merely as a conceptual framework, but as an integrative theoretical perspective that addresses a persistent gap in strategic management literature namely, the lack of a clearly articulated mechanism that explains

how diverse strategic elements are coordinated in practice. Existing perspectives, including the Resource-Based View (RBV), Dynamic Capabilities, the Knowledge-Based View (KBV), and Digital Ecosystem theory, each provide important but partial explanations of competitive advantage. However, they tend to focus on specific domains—resources, processes, knowledge, or networks—without sufficiently explaining how these elements are aligned and operationalized within organizations.

The SLDE model extends these perspectives by introducing Strategic Leadership Capability (SLC) as a central theoretical construct that functions as an integrative mechanism. In this sense, SLDE shifts the analytical focus from *what organizations have* and *what organizations do* toward *how strategic elements are coordinated through leadership*.

Within the Strategic Leadership-Based Dynamic Ecosystem (SLDE) model, Strategic Leadership Capability (SLC) is conceptualized as a higher-order integrative capability that enables the alignment and coordination of multiple strategic dimensions. Specifically, SLC facilitates the integration of:

- Dynamic Capabilities (organizational adaptation processes)
- Knowledge and Innovation Capability (organizational learning and knowledge creation processes)
- Digital Ecosystem Capability (inter-organizational coordination and network interaction processes)

This positioning reflects a shift from viewing leadership as a contextual or supporting variable toward understanding it as a core theoretical construct embedded within the architecture of strategy. In contrast to prior approaches that implicitly acknowledge managerial roles, the SLDE model explicitly conceptualizes leadership as the mechanism through which strategic elements are activated, aligned, and sustained.

From a theoretical standpoint, this conceptualization is grounded in strategic leadership literature, which emphasizes the role of leadership in defining direction, maintaining strategic coherence, and managing organizational complexity. However, the SLDE model extends this perspective by embedding leadership within the structural logic of strategic management theory, thereby addressing a key limitation in existing frameworks that tend to under-specify the role of leadership in integrating strategic processes.

Importantly, in environments characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), the role of SLC becomes increasingly critical. Under such conditions, organizations are required not only to possess resources and capabilities but also to continuously interpret environmental signals, coordinate adaptive responses, and align multiple strategic domains. Within this context, SLC functions as a stabilizing and sensemaking mechanism that enables organizations to navigate uncertainty while maintaining strategic coherence.

Thus, SLC in the SLDE model is not merely an enabling factor but a central organizing capability that determines how effectively organizations integrate adaptation, learning, and ecosystem participation in dynamic environments.

The central theoretical mechanism of the SLDE model can be understood as an integrative process through which Strategic Leadership Capability enables the alignment of organizational adaptation, knowledge processes, and ecosystem interactions. More specifically, the model proposes that: Strategic Leadership Capability acts as the coordinating mechanism that integrates Dynamic Capabilities (DC), Knowledge and Innovation Capability (KIC), and Digital Ecosystem Capability (DEC), thereby facilitating the achievement of Sustainable Competitive Advantage.

This mechanism provides a unified explanation of how organizations operate in environments characterized by high levels of interdependence and uncertainty. Rather than treating adaptation, learning, and ecosystem engagement as independent processes, the SLDE model conceptualizes them as interrelated components that require coordination through leadership. In this context, the role of SLC can be understood through three interrelated functions:

1. Interpretive Function (Sensemaking)

SLC enables organizations to interpret complex and ambiguous environmental signals, particularly under VUCA conditions.

2. Integrative Function (Alignment and Orchestration)

SLC aligns internal capabilities (DC and KIC) with external ecosystem interactions (DEC), ensuring coherence across strategic domains.

3. Transformational Function (Activation and Reconfiguration)

SLC supports the continuous reconfiguration of organizational capabilities in response to environmental change.

Through these functions, the SLDE model moves beyond static or single-dimensional explanations of strategy and instead offers a dynamic and system-level perspective. It emphasizes that competitive advantage is not derived solely from possessing resources or capabilities, but from the ability to integrate and coordinate them effectively over time. Importantly, the SLDE model does not seek to replace existing strategic management theories. Instead, it repositions them within an integrated system, where their effectiveness is contingent upon the presence of leadership capability as a coordinating force. In this sense, SLDE contributes to theory by clarifying the underlying mechanism that connects previously fragmented perspectives.

Furthermore, within VUCA environments, this integrative mechanism becomes increasingly relevant, as organizations must simultaneously manage volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. The SLDE model suggests that leadership capability is essential in enabling organizations to maintain strategic alignment while adapting to rapidly changing conditions.

To further strengthen the theoretical validity of the SLDE model, it is important to examine how the integrative role of Strategic Leadership Capability (SLC) is manifested across different industry contexts, particularly within environments characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA). Contemporary organizations increasingly operate under VUCA conditions, where rapid technological change, shifting market dynamics, and interconnected systems require more adaptive and integrative strategic approaches.

Within this context, the SLDE model provides a useful lens for understanding how leadership enables the alignment of dynamic capabilities, knowledge processes, and ecosystem interactions. While the core mechanism of SLDE remains theoretically consistent, its operational expression varies depending on how VUCA conditions are experienced across industries.

In digital and platform-based industries, volatility and complexity are particularly pronounced due to rapid technological disruption and network interdependencies. In such environments, the SLDE model is reflected in leadership's ability to coordinate ecosystem interactions under high uncertainty. Here, SLC operates as an ecosystem orchestrator, aligning platform participants, managing complementarities, and responding to shifting market conditions. This context highlights the strong linkage between SLC and Digital Ecosystem Capability (DEC), where leadership plays a central role in stabilizing and guiding value creation within volatile networks.

In manufacturing industries undergoing digital transformation, uncertainty and technological complexity drive the need for continuous adaptation. In this context, the SLDE model is manifested through leadership's role in integrating emerging technologies with established operational systems. SLC enables organizations to navigate uncertainty by activating Dynamic Capabilities (DC), while simultaneously supporting Knowledge and Innovation Capability (KIC) through learning and process improvement. Here, leadership functions as a transformation enabler that balances stability with adaptation.

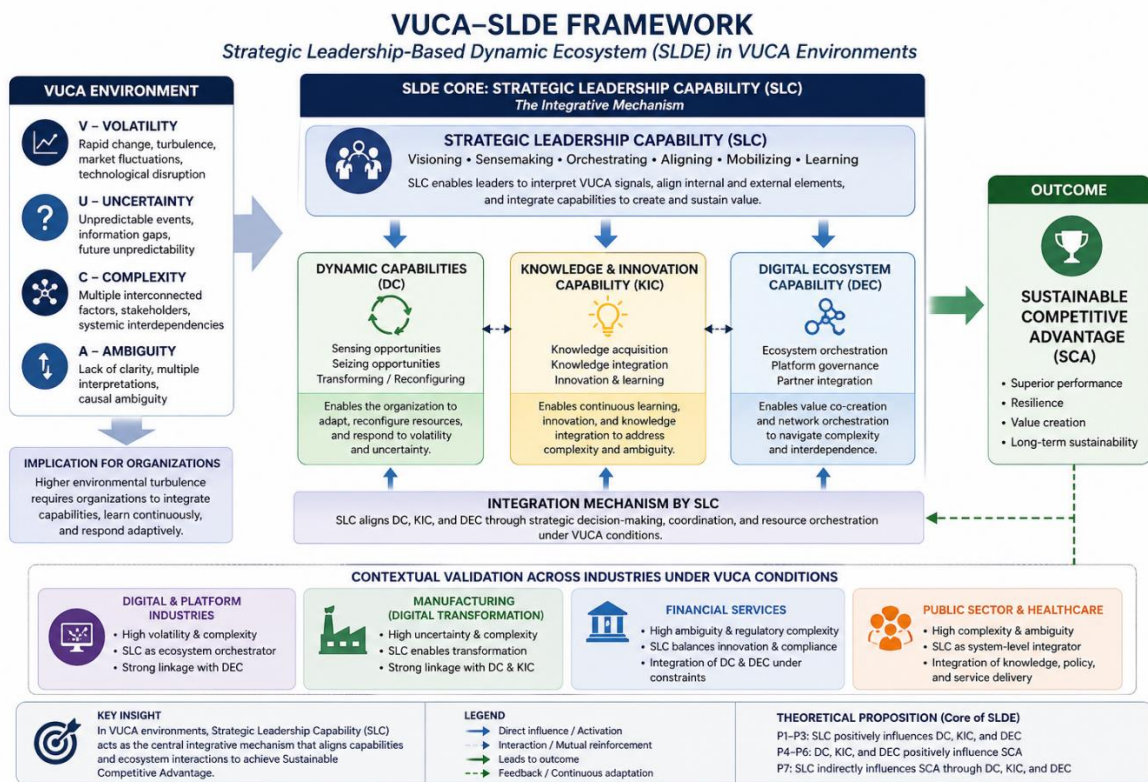
In financial services, ambiguity and regulatory complexity are dominant features of the environment. Organizations must innovate while operating within evolving institutional constraints. Within this setting, the SLDE mechanism is reflected in leadership's ability to interpret ambiguous regulatory landscapes and align strategic responses accordingly. SLC operates as a coordinating mechanism that integrates dynamic adaptation with risk management, illustrating how leadership enables the alignment of DC and DEC under conditions of institutional uncertainty.

In public sector and healthcare organizations, high levels of complexity and ambiguity arise from multi-stakeholder interactions and policy-driven environments. In this context, the SLDE model is expressed through leadership's ability to coordinate diverse actors, integrate knowledge systems, and align service delivery objectives. SLC functions as a system-level integrator, enabling the alignment of knowledge, policy, and operational processes within highly complex environments.

These contextual variations suggest that while the SLDE model provides a general theoretical structure, its practical manifestation is shaped by the specific configuration of VUCA conditions within each industry. Importantly, the model demonstrates that Strategic Leadership Capability serves as a stabilizing and integrative force across volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environments.

“In VUCA environments, strategy without leadership integration becomes fragmented...”

To further clarify the theoretical positioning of the proposed Strategic Leadership-Based Dynamic Ecosystem (SLDE) model, a comparative analysis with established strategic management theories is presented in figure below. This comparison highlights how prior perspectives while offering valuable insights into specific dimensions such as resources, capabilities, knowledge, and ecosystems tend to provide partial and fragmented explanations of competitive advantage. The table aims to demonstrate how the SLDE model integrates these perspectives into a more coherent framework by explicitly incorporating Strategic Leadership Capability as a central coordinating mechanism.



As illustrated in figure, existing strategic management theories contribute significantly to understanding competitive advantage, yet they often emphasize isolated dimensions without fully explaining how these elements are aligned in practice. Taken together, the comparison underscores that the primary contribution of the SLDE model lies not in replacing existing theories, but in resolving their fragmentation. By positioning Strategic Leadership Capability as a central integrative construct, SLDE offers a more comprehensive explanation of how strategic elements are coordinated, thereby advancing the theoretical development of strategic management in complex and dynamic environments.

Overall, the incorporation of a VUCA perspective reinforces the relevance of SLDE as a contemporary strategic management theory. It highlights that the effectiveness of strategy is not only determined by resources or capabilities, but also by the ability of leadership to interpret environmental

signals, coordinate organizational responses, and align multiple strategic dimensions under conditions of uncertainty. Thus, the core proposition of SLDE that leadership integrates diverse strategic elements remains consistent, while its operationalization becomes increasingly critical in VUCA-driven contexts.

The Strategic Leadership-Based Dynamic Ecosystem (SLDE) model contributes to strategic management theory by addressing a fundamental limitation in existing literature namely, the lack of a coherent explanation of how diverse strategic elements are effectively integrated within organizations.

First, the SLDE model provides an integrative theoretical advancement by bridging previously fragmented perspectives, including the Resource-Based View (RBV), Dynamic Capabilities, the Knowledge-Based View (KBV), and Digital Ecosystem theory. While these perspectives have significantly advanced the understanding of competitive advantage, they largely operate in isolation. The SLDE model contributes by repositioning these perspectives within a unified analytical structure, thereby offering a more holistic explanation of strategy in complex environments.

Second, this study extends the dynamic capabilities perspective by explicitly identifying Strategic Leadership Capability (SLC) as the underlying mechanism that enables the activation and coordination of organizational capabilities. Although prior literature acknowledges the importance of managerial action, it tends to under-specify the role of leadership as a distinct construct. The SLDE model addresses this gap by conceptualizing leadership not merely as a contextual factor, but as a central coordinating capability that shapes how dynamic capabilities are developed and deployed.

Third, the SLDE model advances strategic leadership theory by repositioning leadership from a supporting role to a core structural element within strategic management. Rather than treating leadership as an external or behavioral variable, this study conceptualizes Strategic Leadership Capability as a higher-order capability embedded within the strategic system. This perspective provides a more explicit explanation of how leadership influences the alignment of resources, knowledge processes, and ecosystem interactions.

Fourth, the SLDE model contributes to the growing literature on ecosystem-based strategy by integrating leadership into the analysis of networked value creation. While existing studies emphasize platforms, networks, and inter-organizational relationships, they provide limited insight into how these complex systems are coordinated. The SLDE model addresses this gap by positioning leadership as a mechanism of ecosystem orchestration.

Finally, the SLDE model offers a forward-looking theoretical foundation for understanding strategy in contemporary business environments characterized by complexity, interdependence, and rapid technological change. By integrating multiple strategic dimensions into a coherent framework, the model provides a more comprehensive explanation of how organizations achieve and sustain competitive advantage under conditions of uncertainty.

The theoretical validation of the SLDE model suggests a need to reconsider the role of leadership within the core structure of strategic management theory. Existing perspectives have made significant progress in explaining what drives competitive advantage, yet they often treat leadership

as a secondary or contextual factor. The SLDE model challenges this assumption by proposing that leadership should be understood as an integral component of strategic systems. This perspective implies that future theoretical development in strategic management may benefit from explicitly incorporating leadership into the architecture of core theories, rather than positioning it as an external variable. In particular, integrating Strategic Leadership Capability into frameworks such as dynamic capabilities and ecosystem strategy may provide a more complete explanation of how strategic processes are coordinated and executed.

Moreover, the SLDE model opens new avenues for research by highlighting the interaction between leadership, organizational capabilities, and ecosystem dynamics. Future studies may explore how leadership influences the configuration of capabilities, how it shapes organizational responses to environmental change, and how it facilitates coordination within complex ecosystems. From a practical standpoint, this theoretical shift also has important implications for corporate strategic management. It suggests that competitive advantage may not only depend on the possession of resources or capabilities, but also on the organization’s ability to develop leadership capabilities that enable integration and alignment. As such, leadership development may need to be reconsidered as a strategic priority, particularly in industries characterized by high levels of complexity and interdependence.

Overall, the SLDE model provides a foundation for advancing strategic management theory toward a more integrative and leadership-centered perspective, thereby contributing to both theoretical refinement and practical relevance. Table X presents a comparison between the proposed SLDE model and existing strategic management theories. The table highlights the distinct contribution of SLDE in addressing the fragmentation of prior perspectives and in positioning strategic leadership as a central integrative mechanism.

Table 4.1. Comparison of SLDE and Existing Strategic Management Theories

Theoretical Perspective	Core Focus	Strengths	Limitations	Position of Leadership	Contribution of SLDE
Resource-Based View (RBV) (Barney, 1991)	Firm resources as source of competitive advantage	Explains internal sources of sustained advantage (VRIN)	Relatively static; limited explanation of adaptation and integration processes	Implicit or not explicitly addressed	SLDE extends RBV by explaining how resources are strategically aligned and integrated through leadership capability
Dynamic Capabilities (Teece, 2007)	Organizational adaptation (sensing, seizing, transforming)	Explains how firms respond to environmental change	Under-specifies the role of leadership as a distinct coordinating mechanism	Acknowledged indirectly (managerial role), but not central	SLDE explicitly positions leadership as the mechanism that activates and orchestrates dynamic capabilities
Knowledge-Based View (KBV) (Grant, 1996;	Knowledge as strategic resource and	Explains learning, innovation, and	Primarily internally focused; limited	Not central; treated as contextual enabler	SLDE explains how leadership facilitates knowledge integration and

Nonaka, 1994)	driver of innovation	knowledge creation	integration with broader strategic system		innovation across organizational boundaries
Digital Ecosystem / Platform Theory (Jacobides et al., 2018; Parker et al., 2016)	Value creation through networks and ecosystems	Explains inter-organizational value creation and platform dynamics	Limited explanation of how ecosystem interactions are coordinated internally	Rarely conceptualized explicitly	SLDE introduces leadership as an ecosystem orchestrator that aligns internal and external strategic interactions
Strategic Leadership Theory (Ireland & Hitt, 2005)	Role of leadership in strategic direction and performance	Highlights importance of leadership in strategy execution	Not structurally integrated into core strategic management theory	Central, but often treated separately from core theories	SLDE embeds leadership as a core structural component within strategic management theory
SLDE Model (This Study)	Integration of capabilities through Strategic Leadership Capability (SLC)	Provides a holistic and integrative explanation of strategy across multiple dimensions	Conceptual; requires empirical validation	Central (core driver and integrator)	Positions leadership as a unifying mechanism that aligns resources, capabilities, knowledge, and ecosystems to achieve sustained competitive advantage

As shown in Table X, existing theories provide valuable but partial explanations of competitive advantage, often focusing on specific dimensions such as resources, capabilities, knowledge, or ecosystems. The SLDE model contributes by integrating these perspectives into a unified framework, while explicitly identifying Strategic Leadership Capability as the mechanism that aligns and coordinates these elements.

This study examined the evolution of strategic management theory and identified a persistent limitation in the literature, namely the insufficient integration of Strategic Leadership Capability (SLC) within existing theoretical frameworks. While dominant perspectives such as the Resource-Based View (RBV), dynamic capabilities, and the Knowledge-Based View (KBV) have significantly advanced the understanding of competitive advantage, they tend to emphasize specific dimensions of strategy without fully explaining how these elements are aligned and coordinated in practice.

The findings suggest that contemporary organizations increasingly operate within environments characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), where the ability to integrate multiple strategic dimensions becomes critical. Under such conditions, the effectiveness of strategy depends not only on the possession of resources or capabilities, but also on the capacity to interpret environmental signals, coordinate adaptive responses, and align internal and external strategic processes. In this context, leadership emerges not merely as a contextual factor, but as a central mechanism within the strategic system.

To address this gap, the study proposes the Strategic Leadership-Based Dynamic Ecosystem (SLDE) model as an integrative theoretical perspective. The SLDE model positions Strategic Leadership Capability as a higher-order capability that enables the alignment of Dynamic Capabilities, Knowledge and Innovation Capability, and Digital Ecosystem Capability. By doing so, the model provides a coherent explanation of how organizations achieve Sustainable Competitive Advantage through the integration of adaptation, learning, and ecosystem interaction processes.

Importantly, the SLDE model does not seek to replace existing strategic management theories, but rather to extend and reposition them within an integrated system. It contributes to theory by clarifying the role of leadership as the mechanism that connects and activates previously fragmented strategic elements. In this sense, the study advances strategic management theory by shifting the analytical focus from isolated capabilities toward the processes of strategic integration enabled by leadership.

The contextual validation across industries further suggests that while the core mechanism of SLDE remains consistent, the operationalization of SLC varies depending on environmental conditions. In particular, under VUCA contexts, SLC functions as a sensemaking, integrative, and coordinating capability that enables organizations to navigate complexity and uncertainty. This highlights the relevance of SLDE as a theoretical framework for understanding strategy in contemporary, ecosystem-based environments.

From a practical perspective, the study suggests that organizations may benefit from developing leadership capabilities that go beyond traditional managerial roles. Specifically, leadership development should emphasize the ability to integrate capabilities, coordinate across organizational boundaries, and respond adaptively to dynamic environments. This implies that Strategic Leadership Capability can be considered a critical strategic resource in itself.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. As a conceptual study based on a systematic literature review, it relies on secondary data and theoretical synthesis. Future research is therefore encouraged to empirically test the SLDE model across different industries, particularly to examine how SLC is operationalized under varying VUCA conditions. Further research may also focus on developing measurement scales for SLC and exploring its interaction with organizational capabilities and ecosystem dynamics.

In conclusion, this study suggests that the future development of strategic management theory may depend not only on the refinement of individual perspectives, but also on the ability to integrate them within a coherent framework. The SLDE model offers such a perspective by positioning strategic leadership as the central mechanism that enables integration in complex and dynamic environments.

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