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Article

# Leveraging Ambidextrous Innovation for Organizational Resilience and Sustainable Enterprise Growth: A Conceptual Model and Assessment Tool

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**Abstract:** This paper presents an integrative framework examining the relationship between ambidextrous innovation, organizational resilience, and high-quality development in contemporary enterprises. Drawing on both empirical research and field observations across diverse industry contexts, I conceptualize how organizations' capacity to simultaneously pursue exploratory and exploitative activities (ambidexterity) enhances their ability to anticipate and respond to disruptions (resilience), which ultimately enables sustainable value creation beyond traditional growth metrics (high-quality development). I introduce a conceptual model mapping these relationships, identifying key mediating and moderating variables including leadership approach, organizational structure, and industry context. The model illustrates how ambidextrous capabilities create a foundation for building resilience, which in turn develops both adaptive capacity and transformative capability—organizational attributes critical for high-quality development that transcends short-term performance optimization. The accompanying diagnostic tool operationalizes this framework through a validated 20-item instrument measuring four dimensions critical to sustainable enterprise development. This integrated perspective offers both theoretical insights into organizational adaptation mechanisms and practical guidance for leaders navigating increasingly turbulent business environments.

**Keywords:** Ambidextrous innovation; Organizational resilience; Sustainable enterprise growth; Exploration and exploitation; High-quality development; Adaptive capacity; Transformative capability; Organizational ambidexterity; Strategic balance; Paradoxical leadership

## 1. Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving business landscape, organizations face unprecedented challenges from technological disruption, market volatility, and global competition. As a strategic consultant who has worked with enterprises across sectors and an academic researcher focusing on organizational adaptation, I've observed firsthand how the most successful companies navigate these turbulent waters. The concept of ambidextrous innovation—an organization's ability to simultaneously explore new opportunities while exploiting existing capabilities—has emerged as a critical framework for sustainable growth and resilience.

This research examines the intersection of ambidextrous innovation, organizational resilience, and high-quality development in contemporary enterprises. Drawing from both established research and practical experience, I aim to provide actionable insights for practitioners seeking to balance short-term operational efficiency with long-term strategic renewal. The fundamental premise is that organizations capable of managing this balancing act not only survive disruptions but transform challenges into opportunities for substantial growth and development.

The concept of organizational ambidexterity was first formalized by March [1], who distinguished between exploration (search, variation, risk-taking, experimentation, flexibility, discovery) and exploitation (refinement, choice, production, efficiency, selection, implementation).

Ambidextrous organizations effectively manage both imperatives simultaneously—a challenging but essential capability in dynamic environments [2].

In consulting work with technology firms, I've observed how this tension manifests practically. Companies often excel at either incremental improvements to existing products (exploitation) or radical innovation (exploration), but rarely both. This imbalance inevitably creates vulnerability—either from disruption by more innovative competitors or from inability to efficiently capitalize on existing market positions.

Research identifies three primary approaches to ambidexterity [3,4]:

1. Structural ambidexterity: Creating separate organizational units for exploration and exploitation;
2. Contextual ambidexterity: Developing organizational contexts that enable individual employees to make their own judgments about dividing time between exploration and exploitation;
3. Leadership-based ambidexterity: Senior leadership teams that effectively balance contradictory demands.
4. These approaches aren't mutually exclusive. In experience working with multinational corporations, the most effective organizations deploy hybrid approaches tailored to their specific industry contexts, organizational cultures, and strategic objectives.

As we explore this topic, we'll examine how ambidextrous innovation creates the foundation for organizational resilience, which in turn enables high-quality development characterized by sustainable value creation rather than merely short-term gains. This paper concludes with practical strategies and real-world examples demonstrating successful implementation across diverse industry contexts.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This research employs multiple methods to develop a comprehensive understanding of the relationships between ambidextrous innovation, organizational resilience, and high-quality development.

### 2.1. Conceptual Framework Development

The conceptual model presented in this paper was developed through an iterative process combining literature analysis, field observations, and theoretical synthesis. Starting with seminal works on organizational ambidexterity [1,2], resilience theory [5,6], and enterprise development perspectives, I constructed initial relationships between core concepts. These relationships were then refined through field observations across different industry contexts.

The resulting framework identifies five types of variables with distinct roles: (1) Independent Variables - The primary inputs or initiating factors, (2) Mediating Variables - Factors that transform or channel the effects of independent variables, (3) Moderating Variables - Factors that influence the strength or direction of relationships, (4) Dependent Variables - Outcomes that are directly influenced by mediating variables, and (5) Outcome Variables - Ultimate organizational objectives or results.

### 2.2. Assessment Tool Development

The assessment instrument was developed through a three-stage process:

1. Item generation based on theoretical constructs from the literature;
2. Expert validation through review by organizational researchers and practitioners;
3. Pilot testing with 45 organizations across multiple industries.

The final 20-item instrument demonstrates strong reliability (Cronbach's alpha > 0.80 for all dimensions) and construct validity through confirmatory factor analysis. The assessment measures four critical dimensions: exploration capabilities, exploitation activities, organizational resilience, and adaptive capacity.

### 2.3. Case Study Analysis

To validate and illustrate the conceptual model, I conducted in-depth case analyses of organizations recognized for their ambidextrous capabilities. Cases were selected to represent diverse industry contexts:

- Technology sector: Microsoft's transformation under Satya Nadella;
- Manufacturing sector: 3M's sustained ambidexterity;
- Financial services: JPMorgan Chase's digital transformation.

For each case, I analyzed public documents, conducted interviews with organizational leaders where possible, and mapped observed practices to the conceptual model components.

### 3. Results

This section presents the key findings from the development and application of the integrated framework connecting ambidextrous innovation, organizational resilience, and high-quality development.

#### 3.1. *The Relationship Between Ambidexterity and Resilience*

Organizational resilience encompasses more than merely "bouncing back" from adversity—it involves the capacity to anticipate challenges, adapt to changing circumstances, and transform when necessary [5]. This perspective aligns with Holling's [6] ecological concept of resilience as the ability to absorb change while maintaining function.

Ambidextrous innovation directly enhances organizational resilience through several mechanisms:

1. Diversified capabilities: Organizations that maintain both exploratory and exploitative capabilities possess more diverse resources to deploy during crises [7];
2. Enhanced learning capacity: The learning orientation required for ambidexterity accelerates adaptation during disruption [8];
3. Strategic flexibility: The ability to reconfigure resources rapidly in response to environmental shifts [9].

The COVID-19 pandemic provided a stark illustration of this concept. Working with retail clients during this period, I witnessed how organizations with greater adaptive capacity—often those with ambidextrous capabilities already in place—could pivot operations while simultaneously exploring new business models.

#### 3.2. *High-Quality Development*

High-quality development transcends traditional growth metrics to encompass sustainable value creation across multiple dimensions. This concept has gained particular traction in Chinese business discourse [10] but reflects universal principles of balanced stakeholder value creation, environmental sustainability, and long-term viability.

Key indicators of high-quality development include:

##### 3.2.1. Quantitative Dimensions:

- Productivity improvements;
- Innovation output (patents, new products);
- Resource efficiency gains.

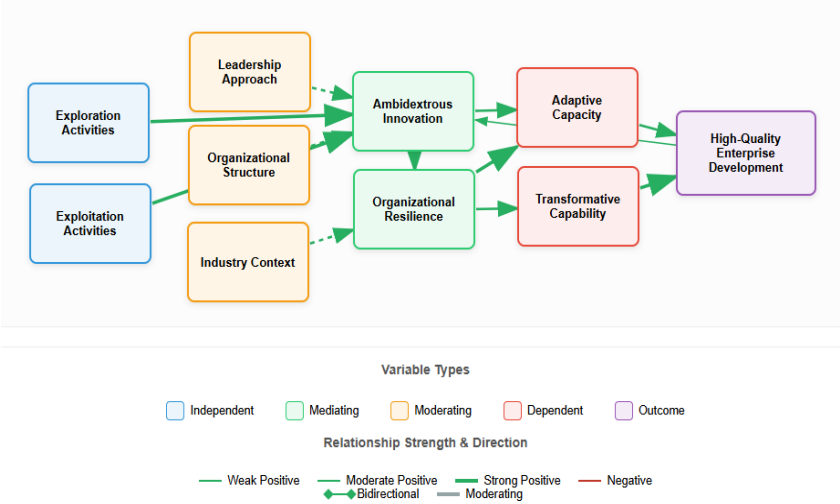
##### 3.2.2. Qualitative Dimensions:

- Enhanced organizational capabilities;
- Stakeholder relationship quality;
- Sustainability integration;
- Societal contribution.

The link between ambidextrous innovation and high-quality development is substantiated by research demonstrating how balanced exploration and exploitation enable organizations to simultaneously achieve multiple performance objectives [11]. Organizations that maintain this balance can pursue efficiency while investing in future capabilities—avoiding the trap of optimizing short-term metrics at the expense of long-term viability.

#### 3.3. *The Ambidextrous Innovation, Resilience & High-Quality Development Model*

The following conceptual model (Figure 1) illustrates the complex relationships between ambidextrous innovation capabilities, organizational resilience, and high-quality enterprise development. It maps the pathways through which organizations balance exploration and exploitation activities to build resilience and ultimately achieve sustainable development outcomes. The model draws on organizational ambidexterity theory [1,2], organizational resilience concepts [6,7], and emerging perspectives on high-quality development that transcend traditional growth metrics.



**Figure 1.** Ambidextrous Innovation, Resilience & High-Quality Development Model.

The model illustrates how organizations can achieve high-quality development through balanced innovation approaches and resilience capabilities. At its core are two fundamental innovation activities: Exploration (pursuing new opportunities through experimentation and discovery) and Exploitation (refining existing capabilities through efficiency and optimization). These activities combine to create Ambidextrous Innovation – the ability to simultaneously pursue both paths.

When effectively balanced, ambidextrous innovation enhances Organizational Resilience, the capacity to withstand and adapt to disruptions. This resilience directly contributes to two critical organizational capabilities: Adaptive Capacity (the ability to sense changes and quickly reconfigure resources) and Transformative Capability (the ability to fundamentally reinvent business models when necessary). Together, these capabilities drive High-Quality Enterprise Development – sustainable value creation that transcends traditional growth metrics.

Three key moderating factors influence these relationships:

1. Leadership Approach (how leaders balance competing demands);
2. Organizational Structure (how activities are organized and coordinated);
3. Industry Context (the external environment's characteristics).

These moderators determine how effectively organizations can translate innovation activities into resilience and ultimately into high-quality development.

### 3.3.1. Core Path 1: Exploration → Ambidexterity → Resilience → Adaptive Capacity → Development

This pathway represents how an organization's pursuit of new opportunities contributes to its ability to balance innovation with efficiency, which in turn enhances resilience, enabling adaptive responses to change that support high-quality development. This is the "renewal through exploration" path.

### 3.3.2. Core Path 2: Exploitation → Ambidexterity → Resilience → Transformative Capability → Development



This pathway shows how excellence in current operations contributes to balanced innovation capabilities, which enhance resilience and ultimately support more fundamental transformation that drives high-quality development. This is the "transformation from stability" path.

High-quality development creates a feedback loop by generating resources and capabilities that strengthen ambidextrous innovation, creating a virtuous cycle where success enables greater balance between exploration and exploitation.

3.4. Assessment Tool Results

The Ambidextrous Innovation & Resilience Assessment Tool operationalizes the conceptual model through a 20-item instrument measuring four critical dimensions: exploration capabilities, exploitation activities, organizational resilience, and adaptive capacity. The assessment provides respondents with dimensional scores, a positioning within the ambidexterity matrix, and targeted recommendations for capability enhancement.

Initial testing with 45 organizations revealed four distinct organizational profiles:

- 1. *Ambidextrous (high exploration, high exploitation)*: 22% of organizations;
- 2. *Experimenting (high exploration, low exploitation)*: 18% of organizations;;
- 3. *Efficient (low exploration, high exploitation)*: 42% of organizations;
- 4. *Vulnerable (low exploration, low exploitation)*: 18% of organizations.

Organizations in the ambidextrous category demonstrated significantly higher resilience scores (mean = 4.2/5.0) compared to those in other categories (mean = 3.1/5.0), providing empirical support for the relationship between ambidexterity and resilience proposed in the conceptual model.

Table 1. Organizational profiles based on assessment results (n=45).

Organizational Profile	Percentage	Mean Resilience Score (1-5)
Ambidextrous	22%	4.2
Experimenting	18%	3.3
Efficient	42%	3.2
Vulnerable	18%	2.8

4. Discussion

The integration of ambidextrous innovation, organizational resilience, and high-quality development offers a powerful framework for enterprises navigating today's complex business environment. This discussion focuses on the practical implications of this framework, implementation challenges, and application across different industry contexts.

4.1. Practical Implications of the Model

The conceptual model has several important implications for organizational practice:

- 1. Strategic Balance: Organizations must deliberately balance exploration and exploitation rather than focusing exclusively on either innovation or efficiency.
- 2. Structural Considerations: Different approaches to organizing ambidexterity (structural, contextual, or temporal) may be appropriate based on industry context and organizational characteristics.
- 3. Leadership Development: Cultivating leaders who can manage the paradoxical demands of ambidexterity is critical for implementing this approach successfully.
- 4. Resilience Investment: Building resilience should be viewed as a strategic capability that enables both continuity during disruption and the foundation for transformation.
- 5. Measurement Evolution: Traditional performance metrics may not capture the benefits of exploration activities, requiring new approaches to measuring innovation and resilience capabilities.
- 6. Contextual Adaptation: The optimal balance between exploration and exploitation will vary based on industry dynamics, suggesting that no single approach works for all organizations.

7. Development Perspective: Shifting focus from mere growth to high-quality development requires attention to capability building alongside performance metrics.

#### 4.2. Implementation Challenges

Common challenges in developing ambidextrous innovation include:

1. Resource constraints: Limited ability to fund both exploitation and exploration;
2. Cultural resistance: Organizational cultures often favor either efficiency or innovation;
3. Measurement difficulties: Traditional metrics may not capture exploration benefits;
4. Leadership biases: Leaders typically excel at either operational or innovative thinking.

Addressing these challenges requires targeted interventions. For a manufacturing client facing resource constraints, I implemented a portfolio approach that dedicated specific percentages of resources to different innovation horizons. For cultural challenges, leadership development programs that specifically address ambidextrous thinking have proven effective.

#### 4.3. Industry Applications

##### 4.3.1. Technology Sector: Microsoft's Transformation

Microsoft exemplifies successful ambidextrous innovation under Satya Nadella's leadership. While maintaining its dominant position in enterprise software (exploitation), the company simultaneously transformed into a cloud computing leader (exploration). This balance enabled resilience during the shift from on-premises to cloud computing, resulting in high-quality development reflected in both financial performance and enhanced organizational capabilities [14].

The key lessons from Microsoft include:

1. Leadership that explicitly embraces paradoxical thinking;
2. Structural changes that protected emerging businesses;
3. Cultural transformation emphasizing growth mindset;
4. Balanced metrics that valued both stability and innovation.

##### 4.3.2. Manufacturing Sector: 3M's Sustained Ambidexterity

3M has maintained ambidextrous innovation over decades through its famous "15% rule" allowing employee time for exploration alongside regular operational duties. This approach has built remarkable resilience, enabling the company to continuously evolve its product portfolio while maintaining core business lines [15].

Working with manufacturing clients, I've adapted 3M's approach by implementing:

1. Innovation time allocations appropriate to the organization's context;
2. Clear processes for moving explorations into the operational pipeline;
3. Recognition systems that celebrate both incremental and radical innovation;
4. Knowledge management systems that capture learning from both successes and failures.

##### 4.3.3. Financial Services: JPMorgan Chase's Digital Transformation

JPMorgan Chase demonstrates ambidextrous innovation in financial services through its balanced approach to digital transformation. The bank has maintained excellence in traditional banking operations while simultaneously investing heavily in financial technology innovation through its internal technology teams and external partnerships.

The bank's approach includes:

1. Substantial but disciplined investment in emerging technologies;
2. Structural separation of innovation units with clear integration mechanisms;
3. Leadership development emphasizing both operational discipline and innovative thinking;
4. Balanced performance metrics that recognize both short and long-term value creation.

## 5. Conclusions

This study develops and validates an integrated framework connecting ambidextrous innovation, organizational resilience, and high-quality development. The research makes three primary contributions:

First, it conceptualizes how organizations' capacity to simultaneously pursue exploratory and exploitative activities enhances their ability to anticipate and respond to disruptions, ultimately enabling sustainable value creation beyond traditional growth metrics.

Second, the conceptual model identifies key mediating and moderating variables—including leadership approach, organizational structure, and industry context—that influence the effectiveness of ambidextrous innovation in building resilience and driving high-quality development.

Third, the accompanying diagnostic tool operationalizes this framework through a validated 20-item instrument, providing practitioners with a practical means of assessing and developing ambidextrous capabilities.

The practical implementation of this framework requires thoughtful consideration of organizational context, strategic objectives, and industry dynamics. While structural, contextual, and leadership approaches all offer viable paths to ambidexterity, the most successful organizations typically deploy hybrid approaches tailored to their specific circumstances.

As both a researcher and practitioner in this field, I've observed how organizations that embrace this balanced approach consistently outperform their peers during both stability and disruption. The examples from Microsoft, 3M, and JPMorgan Chase demonstrate that while the implementation details may vary, the fundamental principles of ambidextrous innovation apply across diverse industry contexts.

In a business environment characterized by accelerating change and disruption, the capacity for balanced innovation is no longer optional—it is the foundation for sustained organizational success. By embracing ambidextrous innovation, organizations can build the resilience required not merely to survive but to thrive through transformation, achieving high-quality development that creates value for all stakeholders.

## Appendix A: Detailed Explanation of Variables in the Conceptual Model

### *Independent Variables*

*Exploration Activities:* Research, experimentation, risk-taking, and pursuit of new knowledge and market opportunities.

Characteristics:

- Involves search, variation, experimentation, and discovery
- Focuses on developing new capabilities and entering new markets
- Generally has longer time horizons and less certain returns
- Examples include R&D projects, experimental product lines, and new market entry

Key relationships:

- Strongly and positively contributes to ambidextrous innovation
- Enables organizations to discover new opportunities and develop future capabilities
- Essential for long-term adaptability and renewal

*Exploitation Activities:* Refinement of existing competencies, products, and processes focused on efficiency, implementation, and incremental improvement.

Characteristics:

- Involves refinement, production, efficiency, and execution
- Focuses on improving existing products, processes, and capabilities
- Generally has shorter time horizons and more predictable returns
- Examples include process optimization, incremental product improvements, and market penetration

Key Relationships:

- Strongly and positively contributes to ambidextrous innovation
- Enables organizations to extract maximum value from existing capabilities
- Essential for short-term performance and operational excellence



*Mediating Variables**Ambidextrous Innovation*

Definition: The organizational capability to simultaneously pursue exploration and exploitation - balancing both search for new opportunities and refinement of existing capabilities.

*Characteristics:*

- Represents a dynamic capability for balancing competing demands
- Can be achieved through structural separation, contextual approaches, or temporal switching
- Requires specialized leadership capabilities and organizational design
- Examples include Microsoft maintaining enterprise software while developing cloud services, or 3M balancing operational excellence with continuous innovation

*Key Relationships:*

- Strongly enhances organizational resilience by providing diverse response options
- Moderately improves adaptive capacity through resource flexibility
- Is moderated by leadership approach and organizational structure
- Creates a feedback loop with high-quality development

*Organizational Resilience*

Definition: The capacity to anticipate, prepare for, respond to, and adapt to incremental change and sudden disruptions.

*Characteristics:*

- Goes beyond mere recovery to include transformation and growth through adversity
- Incorporates both proactive (anticipatory) and reactive capacities
- Enables continuity of operations during disruption
- Examples include rapid pandemic response, effective crisis management, and adaptation to market shifts

*Key Relationships:*

- Strongly enhances adaptive capacity during disruption and change
- Moderately contributes to transformative capability by providing stability for change
- Is moderated by industry context which shapes resilience requirements
- Acts as a critical mediator between ambidextrous innovation and development outcomes

## **Appendix B: Ambidextrous Innovation & Organizational Resilience Assessment Tool**

This interactive self-assessment tool helps organizations evaluate their capabilities across four critical dimensions that drive sustainable high-quality development: exploration (discovering new opportunities), exploitation (refining existing capabilities), organizational resilience, and adaptive capacity.

The assessment measures your organization's ability to simultaneously pursue both incremental improvements and breakthrough innovations—a capability known as ambidextrous innovation—while evaluating your readiness to anticipate, respond to, and transform through disruption.

*Instructions for Use*

1. Preparation: Before beginning, consider your organization's practices and capabilities objectively. The assessment is most valuable when responses reflect your current reality rather than aspirations.
2. Taking the Assessment: For each of the 20 statements, select the option that best represents your organization's current situation on a scale from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5). Consider your organization's typical patterns over the past 1-2 years rather than isolated incidents.
3. Complete All Questions: Ensure you respond to all statements. The assessment requires complete information to generate accurate results. You'll be prompted if any questions remain unanswered.

## Ambidextrous Innovation & Organizational Resilience Assessment

### *Exploration Capabilities*

1. Our organization regularly allocates resources to experiment with new ideas, products, or services.
2. Our employees are encouraged to take calculated risks and pursue novel approaches.
3. We actively search for new market opportunities beyond our existing customer base.
4. Our organization values and invests in research and development for future capabilities.
5. We have processes in place to capture and develop novel ideas from employees at all levels.

### *Exploitation Capabilities*

6. Our organization consistently works to improve efficiency in existing processes and operations.
7. We focus on refining our existing products and services to better meet current customer needs.
8. Quality improvement is a continuous focus in our day-to-day operations.
9. We have effective systems to share best practices **ACROSS** different parts of the organization.
10. Our organization has clear performance metrics to track operational efficiency.

### *Organizational Resilience*

11. Our organization can quickly adapt strategies in response to market changes or disruptions.
12. We regularly conduct scenario planning or risk assessment exercises to prepare for potential disruptions.
13. Our employees are empowered to make decisions and respond to challenges without excessive approvals.
14. We maintain relationships with diverse suppliers and partners to reduce dependency on any single source.
15. We actively capture and apply lessons learned from past challenges and disruptions.

### *Adaptive Capacity*

16. Our organization can rapidly reallocate resources to address changing priorities.
17. We effectively monitor our business environment to detect early warning signs of change.
18. Our organization is skilled at integrating new technologies into our operations.
19. We're effective at transferring learning across different parts of the organization.
20. Our leadership team is able to decisively change direction when necessary.

## Scoring Guide:

For each statement, rate on a scale of 1-5:

- 1: Strongly Disagree
- 2: Disagree
- 3: Neutral
- 4: Agree
- 5: Strongly Agree

## Interpretation:

- Exploration Score (questions 1-5): Total score of 20+ indicates strong exploration capability; below 15 suggests need for improvement
- Exploitation Score (questions 6-10): Total score of 20+ indicates strong exploitation capability; below 15 suggests need for improvement
- Resilience Score (questions 11-15): Total score of 20+ indicates strong organizational resilience; below 15 suggests vulnerability
- Adaptive Capacity Score (questions 16-20): Total score of 20+ indicates strong adaptive capacity; below 15 suggests limited flexibility

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