

Navigating the Polycrisis

A Systematic Literature Review of Strategic Agility and Organizational Resilience in Times of War and Global Instability

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ABSTRACT

The global business landscape in the last five years has been defined by a "polycrisis"—the simultaneous convergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the armed conflict in Ukraine, and escalating climate risks. This article provides a systematic literature review (SLR) of 173 Scopus-indexed contributions and supplemental academic texts to map how organizations navigate these disruptions through strategic movement and agility. Grounded in Dynamic Capabilities Theory and the Resource-Based View, this study identifies a significant "innovation readiness gap," where 83% of firms prioritize innovation while only 3% are prepared to execute it. The results highlight the emergence of "Digitainability" as a core resilience mechanism and provide a comprehensive mapping of research methods, geographic focus, and findings. This study offers a new perspective on "Radical Incrementalism" and "Weak Ties" as essential tools for business survival in volatile environments.

Keywords: Crisis, War, Dynamic Capabilities, Business Survival, Volatile Environment

1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary business environment has transitioned from predictable competition to chronic instability. The urgency of this phenomenon is rooted in two "black swan" events: the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced a rapid virtualization of work, and the war in Ukraine, which triggered a global energy crisis and unprecedented economic policy uncertainty. Organizations now face a "shattered reality" where traditional linear strategies are insufficient for survival.

The core problem identified in recent literature is Managerial Inertia—a psychological barrier where leaders fail to update their mental models as the environment shifts. Data indicates that the stakes of failure have escalated; for instance, 60% of companies that suffer a significant cyberattack during these crises fail within six months. Despite the high priority placed on innovation, most firms remain stuck in "Short-termism," prioritizing quarterly profits over the long-term structural changes required for Sustainable Industry 4.0.

1.1. The Four Pillars of Management Crisis

The polycrisis of the last five years, characterized by the convergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the armed conflict in Ukraine, and escalating climate-related health challenges, has functioned as a global "stress test" that shattered the traditional reality of management. This phenomenon has exposed a critical "innovation readiness gap," where 83% of global companies claim to prioritize innovation while only 3% demonstrate the readiness to execute it under pressure. Within the financial pillar, firms are increasingly paralyzed by "Short-Termism," often prioritizing immediate quarterly returns over the substantial, long-term capital investments required for Enterprise Systems (ES) or sustainable infrastructure. This financial strain is exacerbated by an environment of high economic policy uncertainty, where the "law of nature" for management has permanently shifted, making past success formulas a recipe for failure. (Thorgren & Williams, 2020)(Makkonen et al., 2014)

Operationally, the crisis has revealed the profound fragility of traditional linear "take-make-waste" supply chains, which proved brittle when faced with global disruptions and resource scarcity. While transitioning to Circular Business Models or Reverse Logistics offers a more resilient path, organizations face massive integration risks due to fragmented, outdated, and highly customized legacy IT systems that lack the advanced analytics needed to avoid "analysis paralysis". In the Human Capital Management (HCM) pillar, the primary internal bottleneck is "Managerial Inertia"—a psychological barrier where leaders fail to update their mental models as the market shifts—compounded by cultural resistance to the transparency that centralized digital systems provide. Furthermore, many SMEs suffer from profound

"Succession Gaps" and a lack of consistent leadership preparation, which threatens long-term organizational longevity and leadership continuity during periods of economic recession (Zuzul & Tripsas, 2020).

Finally, the marketing pillar is currently navigating a profound "Crisis of Trust" driven by the practice of greenwashing, or "tactical greening," which triggers severe negative consumer reactions and loss of credibility. Modern savvy "LOHAS" (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability) consumers no longer accept mere rhetoric; they demand authentic, transparent, and evidence-based commitments to social responsibility and ecological restoration. Survival in this era requires Strategic Agility and the development of Dynamic Capabilities to sense, seize, and reconfigure resources in real-time, essentially moving from a reactive "technology fix" to a core business strategy defined by "Digitainability" (Teece, 2017, 2018; Wu, 2010; Zhang et al., 2020).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY MAPPING

2.1. Grand Theory Mapping

The reviewed literature primarily utilizes four grand theories to explain resilience: Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT). This is the predominant framework, focusing on the ability to sense (identify threats), seize (capture opportunities), and reconfigure (restructure assets). Resource-Based View (RBV): This theory argues that competitive advantage stems from resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN), with Human Capital and Digital Literacy now serving as the most critical VRIN resources. Institutional Theory: This explains how firms adopt sustainability and digital transformation due to coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures (e.g., the Paris Agreement or competitor trends). Open Innovation Theory: In times of war-induced resource scarcity, firms must use the "purposeful inflow and outflow of knowledge" through collaborations with universities, startups, and even competitors. (Brink, 2019; Easterby-Smith et al., 2009) (Halim et al., 2014; Hanifah et al., 2017)

2.2. Novelty Wrap: The "Digitainability" Paradigm

The systematic review identifies a critical novelty: Digitainability. This concept represents the strategic synergy between Digital Transformation and Sustainability. Rather than viewing these as separate silos, resilient firms use Big Data Analytics Capabilities (BDAC) and AI as the digital backbone for Sustainability Reporting and real-time risk monitoring. This shift allows firms to move from "Eco-efficiency" (doing less bad) to "Eco-effectiveness" (restorative/regenerative business).

3. RESEARCH METHODS: SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

This SLR followed the **PRISMA 2020 protocol**, mapping 173 Scopus articles see appendix. Appendix Table 1. Detailed Mapping of Selected Articles Appendix Table 1 presents the detailed mapping of the Scopus-indexed articles included in the systematic literature review. Each article was assigned a source index and classified according to publication year, journal quartile, country or regional context, Asia/non-Asia grouping, research method, sample or informant characteristics, sector or research object, key findings derived from the abstract, and relevant keywords. This table functions as the audit trail of the review process, allowing the reader to trace how each article was interpreted and coded within the context–mechanism–outcome framework. The context dimension is represented through geographical coverage, publication characteristics, and research setting; the mechanism dimension is captured through variables such as digital transformation, transformational leadership, innovation capability, governance, sustainability strategy, and organizational culture; while the outcome dimension is reflected in findings related to resilience, sustainability, performance, innovation, stability, and adaptive capacity. The mapping shows that the reviewed literature is multidisciplinary and methodologically diverse. Most studies rely on quantitative approaches, particularly surveys, SEM/PLS-SEM, and regression or econometric techniques, while a smaller number use qualitative methods, systematic reviews, Delphi studies, or mixed methods. The objects of analysis also vary, covering employees and managers, SMEs/MSMEs, entrepreneurs, banking and finance, supply chains, healthcare, education, manufacturing, tourism, and family firms. By presenting this article-by-article coding, the appendix strengthens the transparency and replicability of the SLR, as readers can observe the basis on which patterns and thematic conclusions were developed.

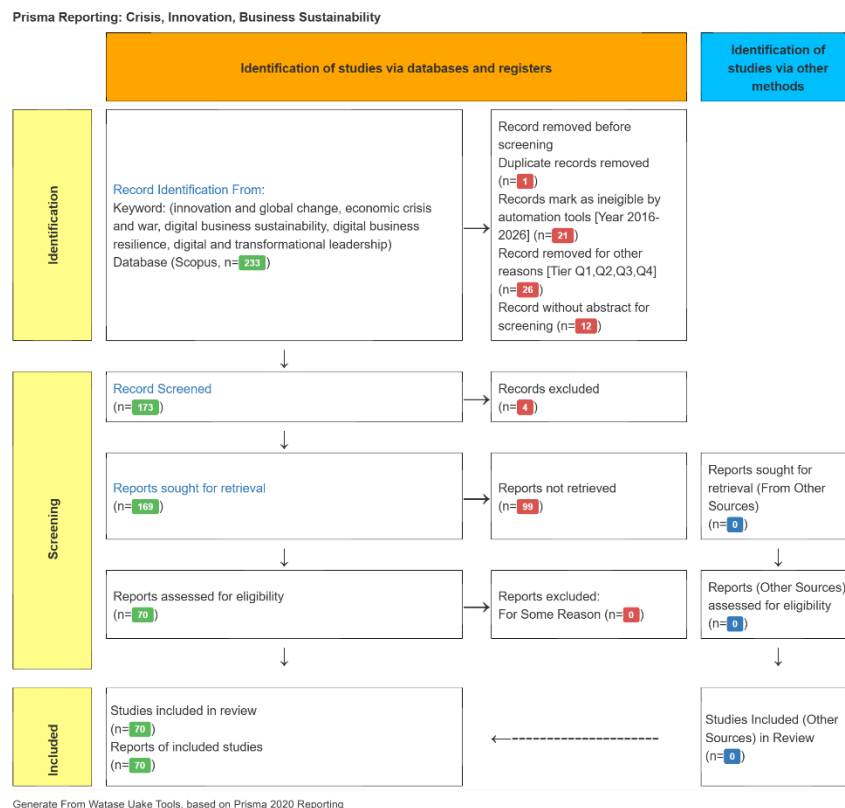


Figure 1. Prisma 2020 Protocol

Appendix Table 2 summarizes the distribution of articles across the major mapping categories derived from Appendix Table 1. The table aggregates the number of articles according to geographical classification, most frequently studied countries or regions, research methods, sample or object of analysis, and dominant findings. In terms of geographical context, Asia represents the largest group of studies, followed by global or mixed-context studies, non-Asian contexts, unspecified locations, and cross-regional Asia–non-Asia studies. Among specific locations, Indonesia, China, and the United States appear most frequently, indicating that research on digital transformation, leadership, sustainability, innovation, and resilience is strongly represented in both Asian and Western contexts.

The methodological summary indicates that survey-based quantitative research is the most common approach, followed by SEM/PLS-SEM and regression or econometric analysis. This suggests that the existing body of literature tends to emphasize empirical testing of relationships among constructs such as digital capability, leadership, innovation, governance, sustainability orientation, and organizational outcomes. In terms of samples and research objects, many studies focus on employees or managers, SMEs/MSMEs, entrepreneurs or startups, supply chains, banking and finance, and literature-based reviews. The findings are dominated by themes showing that digital transformation and technology contribute to resilience and sustainability, sustainability orientation and ESG-related strategies strengthen organizational performance, governance and business model innovation support stability, and transformational or digital leadership plays an important enabling role. Overall, this summary table provides a synthesized view of the reviewed literature and supports the identification of dominant research trends, methodological tendencies, and thematic gaps for future studies.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: DEEP ANALYSIS AND NEW PERSPECTIVES

The systematic literature review reveals that resilience during the last five years cannot be understood merely as an organization's ability to survive disruption. Instead, the reviewed studies suggest that crises have pushed firms, institutions, and ecosystems to redesign their strategic assumptions, technological foundations, sustainability commitments, leadership models, and inter-organizational relationships. The appendix shows that digital transformation and technology are the most dominant themes, appearing in 92 mapped articles, followed closely by sustainability orientation, ESG, and green strategy in 89 articles. Governance, strategy, and business model adaptation also appear strongly across 65 articles, while transformational or digital leadership is identified in 56 articles. These patterns indicate that resilience is not a single capability, but an integrated process involving technology, sustainability, innovation, governance, and human-centered leadership.

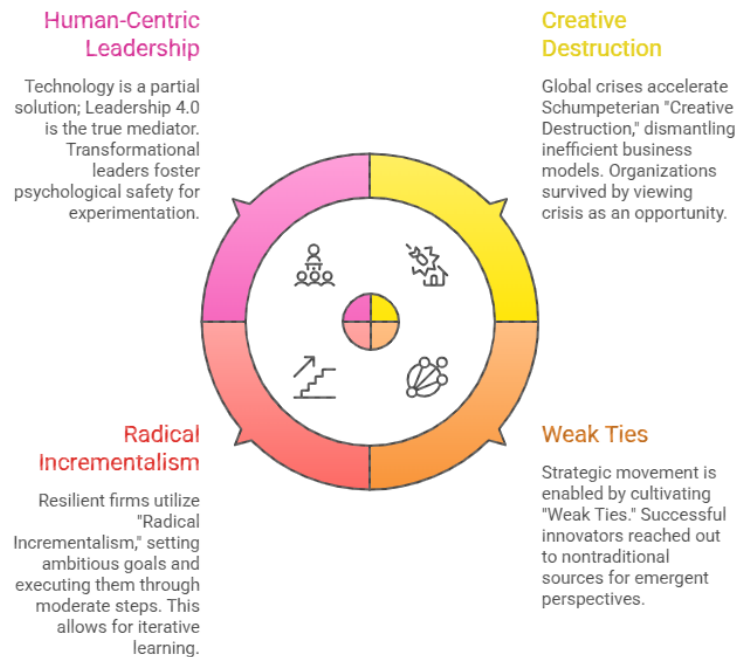


Figure 2. Business Strategies

4.1. Crisis as a Catalyst for "Creative Destruction"

The findings suggest a new perspective: global crises operate as an accelerator of Schumpeterian "creative destruction." War, pandemic disruption, climate uncertainty, energy instability, supply chain breakdowns, and digital turbulence produce severe economic pressure, yet they also dismantle inefficient and linear business models. The appendix indicates that many studies associate digital transformation, sustainability strategy, innovation capability, and business model redesign with organizational resilience and performance. This suggests that crisis does not only threaten existing organizations; it also exposes which organizational logics are no longer adaptive.

Firms that survived and improved their performance during the last five years were not necessarily those with the largest resources, but those able to reinterpret crisis as a strategic opening. The review shows that resilience is repeatedly linked with digital transformation, green innovation, ESG orientation, business model innovation, and strategic adaptation. These mechanisms function as instruments of renewal. In this sense, crisis becomes a selection environment: rigid organizations remain locked in outdated routines, while adaptive organizations reconfigure how they create, deliver, and capture value.

This perspective expands the conventional view of resilience. Rather than seeing resilience as "bouncing back" to a pre-crisis condition, the reviewed literature suggests that resilient organizations "bounce forward" by replacing obsolete routines with new configurations. Digital platforms replace fragmented manual processes; green innovation replaces extractive and linear production models; data-driven governance replaces reactive decision-making; and sustainable business models replace short-term efficiency logic. Therefore, creative destruction is not only a macroeconomic phenomenon but also an organizational process through which crisis accelerates transformation.

4.2. The Power of "Weak Ties" in Unfamiliar Terrain

The review also highlights the importance of "weak ties" as a strategic resource in uncertain environments. In stable periods, organizations tend to rely on strong ties, such as long-term suppliers, established partners, internal experts, and familiar industry networks. These ties provide trust and efficiency, but they often circulate similar information. During crisis, however, firms face unfamiliar problems: disrupted logistics, shifting energy systems, climate risks, digital security threats, changing consumer expectations, and regulatory pressure related to sustainability. In such contexts, existing networks may not provide enough novelty.

The appendix shows that studies cover diverse sectors and actors, including SMEs, manufacturing firms, supply chains, banking and finance, healthcare, education, tourism, family firms, public firms, and literature-based studies. This diversity indicates that resilience increasingly depends on cross-sectoral learning. Successful innovators are those that reach beyond traditional business partners and engage with nontraditional sources of knowledge, such as academic

researchers, technology providers, NGOs, environmental activists, public institutions, local communities, and sustainability experts.

Weak ties are valuable because they introduce new information from outside the organization's usual cognitive boundary. For example, environmental activists may help firms understand emerging ecological risks; academic researchers may provide insight into digital transformation or climate resilience; NGOs may reveal social vulnerabilities in supply chains; and public-sector actors may provide guidance on regulatory adaptation. These weak ties help organizations detect weak signals before they become major threats. Thus, resilience is not only built from internal resources but also from the ability to connect with unfamiliar knowledge ecosystems.

This finding offers a new perspective on strategic movement. In crisis conditions, innovation is not produced solely by internal R&D or formal partnerships. It emerges from the recombination of diverse knowledge sources. The more turbulent the environment, the more valuable weak ties become, because they allow organizations to access perspectives that are not available within their established networks.

4.3. Agility Through “Radical Incrementalism”

The review challenges the binary distinction between incremental and radical change. The mapped studies suggest that resilient organizations do not always transform through sudden, large-scale disruption. Instead, many adopt what can be called “radical incrementalism”: they define an ambitious long-term transformation goal, such as digital autonomy, climate resilience, carbon neutrality, green innovation, ESG integration, or sustainable business model redesign, but implement it through moderate, iterative, and integrated steps.

This pattern is visible in the appendix through the strong presence of digital transformation, sustainability orientation, governance, business model innovation, and innovation capability. These themes indicate that transformation is rarely a one-time strategic decision. It is a continuous learning process. Organizations experiment with new technologies, adjust governance structures, develop innovation capabilities, monitor sustainability performance, and refine business models based on feedback from the external environment.

Radical incrementalism is especially relevant under crisis because uncertainty makes large irreversible decisions risky. Firms cannot always predict how war, pandemic effects, climate events, energy transitions, or market volatility will unfold. Therefore, they need a strategic approach that combines direction and flexibility. The “radical” element provides a clear transformational ambition, while the “incremental” element allows the organization to learn, adjust, and reduce risk over time.

This perspective also explains why digital transformation and sustainability are frequently connected in the reviewed literature. Digital tools enable organizations to monitor operations, collect data, improve coordination, and scale innovation, while sustainability goals provide the strategic direction for long-term legitimacy and resilience. When combined, they allow firms to pursue major transformation through continuous adaptation rather than disruptive overextension.

4.4. Human-Centric Leadership 4.0

Although technology is the most dominant theme in the appendix, the review suggests that technology alone is not sufficient. Leadership 4.0 becomes the true mediator between digital capability and organizational resilience. Transformational and digital leadership appear as important themes across 56 articles, while human capital, employee engagement, and competence are also identified as mechanisms in the reviewed literature. This indicates that digital transformation depends heavily on people's willingness and ability to adopt, experiment, collaborate, and learn.

Human-centric Leadership 4.0 refers to leadership that combines technological orientation with psychological, cultural, and relational capability. Transformational leaders are important because they create vision, inspire commitment, and encourage employees to experiment with new ways of working. In uncertain environments, psychological safety becomes essential. Employees must feel that they can propose ideas, test solutions, report problems, and make mistakes without excessive fear of punishment. Without psychological safety, digital transformation becomes a compliance exercise rather than a learning process.

However, the review also suggests that transformational leadership alone is not enough. During the reconfiguring stage, organizations need structure, discipline, and clear performance expectations. This is where transactional leadership remains relevant. When firms redesign processes, introduce digital systems, change supply chain arrangements, or implement sustainability targets, employees may resist because the change disrupts routines and creates uncertainty. Clear KPIs, contractual rewards, monitoring systems, and accountability mechanisms help translate strategic ambition into operational execution.

Therefore, Leadership 4.0 is not purely inspirational or purely managerial. It is ambidextrous. It requires transformational leadership to open space for creativity and experimentation, while also requiring transactional leadership to stabilize implementation and reduce resistance. This combination allows organizations to move from sensing crisis signals, to seizing new opportunities, and finally to reconfiguring resources, structures, and routines.

4.5. *Synthesis: Toward a New Resilience Logic*

Overall, the review suggests that resilience should be understood as a dynamic and integrative capability. The dominant patterns in the appendix show that resilient organizations combine digital transformation, sustainability orientation, innovation capability, governance reform, business model adaptation, and leadership renewal. The new perspective offered by this review is that crisis does not merely test resilience; it produces the conditions under which resilience is reconstructed.

Creative destruction explains why outdated models collapse and adaptive models emerge. Weak ties explain how organizations access unfamiliar knowledge during uncertainty. Radical incrementalism explains how firms pursue ambitious transformation without losing flexibility. Human-centric Leadership 4.0 explains why technology and strategy only produce resilience when people are psychologically, culturally, and operationally prepared to act.

Thus, the post-crisis organization is not simply more digital, more sustainable, or more innovative. It is more adaptive in its core logic. It learns from disruption, collaborates beyond traditional boundaries, experiments through manageable steps, and uses leadership to connect technological transformation with human capability. This integrated resilience logic provides a stronger foundation for understanding how organizations navigate crises and generate long-term strategic renewal.

5. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the systematic mapping of 173 Scopus-indexed articles (in screened as listed at appendix), this review identifies several important directions for future research. Although existing studies have extensively discussed digital transformation, sustainability, innovation capability, leadership, and organizational resilience, several underexplored issues remain. Future research should move beyond general discussions of agility and resilience by examining the social, ethical, regional, and ecological consequences of crisis-driven transformation.

First, future studies should examine **post-pandemic burnout and agility**, particularly the long-term human capital management impacts of forced digital acceleration. During the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent crisis period, many organizations rapidly adopted digital work systems, remote collaboration tools, automation, and agile operating models. While these changes improved flexibility and continuity, they may also have intensified work pressure, blurred work-life boundaries, increased digital fatigue, and weakened employee attachment to organizations. Therefore, future research should investigate how forced digital agility affects employee retention, psychological well-being, mental health, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, especially in high-stress sectors such as healthcare, education, logistics, finance, public services, and technology-intensive industries. This research direction is important because strategic agility cannot be considered sustainable if it is achieved at the expense of employee resilience.

Second, future studies should explore **the dark side of crisis innovation**. The review shows that digital transformation and technology are dominant mechanisms for resilience, but rapid digital adoption may also create unintended ethical risks. Crisis conditions often push organizations to implement artificial intelligence, big data analytics, digital monitoring systems, and platform-based decision-making without sufficient governance. This may increase the risk of AI bias, data privacy violations, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, algorithmic discrimination, and excessive employee surveillance. Future research should therefore examine how organizations can balance speed and responsibility in crisis-driven innovation. More studies are needed on digital ethics, responsible AI, data governance, employee consent, and accountability mechanisms during periods of emergency transformation.

Third, future research should pay greater attention to **regional resilience in the Global South**. The systematic mapping indicates that a significant portion of the reviewed literature is concentrated in relatively dominant research contexts such as China, Europe, and other highly studied economies. However, MSMEs in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America often face different forms of crisis, including local political conflicts, weak institutional support, infrastructure limitations, informal market structures, climate vulnerability, and restricted access to digital technology or finance. Comparative studies are needed to understand how strategic agility and resilience operate in these underrepresented regions. Such studies would enrich the literature by showing whether current theories of digital transformation, sustainability, and resilience are globally applicable or whether they need to be adapted to local institutional and socio-economic realities.

Fourth, future studies should investigate **regenerative business models as a development beyond sustainable business models**. Much of the existing literature focuses on sustainability, ESG, green innovation, and carbon neutrality. However, future crises—especially those related to climate change, food security, biodiversity loss, and energy transition—require business models that do more than reduce harm. Regenerative business models aim to actively restore ecosystems, improve community well-being, rebuild natural capital, and create positive environmental value. Future research should examine the financial viability, scalability, and strategic risks of regenerative models, particularly during global energy crises. This includes studying whether regenerative strategies can improve long-term competitiveness, attract investment, strengthen legitimacy, and create new forms of value beyond conventional sustainability performance.

Overall, future research should deepen the discussion of strategic agility by integrating human, ethical, regional, and ecological perspectives. The next stage of resilience research should not only ask how organizations survive crises, but also how they transform responsibly, inclusively, and regeneratively.

6. CONCLUSION

The systematic mapping of 173 Scopus-indexed articles confirms that strategic agility is no longer a managerial luxury but a survival mechanism in the era of polycrisis. The reviewed literature shows that organizations are increasingly exposed to overlapping disruptions, including pandemics, war, energy instability, supply chain shocks, digital turbulence, climate pressure, and institutional uncertainty. In this environment, resilience cannot be achieved through stability alone. It requires the ability to sense change, seize emerging opportunities, and reconfigure resources, routines, technologies, and business models.

This review demonstrates that long-term resilience is built through the integration of digital capabilities and sustainability targets. Digital transformation provides organizations with speed, connectivity, data-driven decision-making, and operational flexibility, while sustainability orientation provides long-term legitimacy, environmental responsibility, and strategic direction. The combination of these two dimensions may be understood as **Digitainability**, namely the alignment of digital transformation with sustainability-driven value creation. Organizations that are digitally capable but lack sustainability orientation may become efficient but fragile, while organizations that pursue sustainability without digital capability may struggle to scale and adapt. Therefore, the bridge between digital capability and sustainability ambition is central to future competitiveness.

The findings also show that organizations must address the **Innovation Readiness Gap**. Many firms recognize the importance of innovation, digitalization, and sustainability, but not all possess the leadership, culture, governance, human capital, and ecosystem relationships required to implement them effectively. This gap explains why some organizations transform crisis into growth, while others remain trapped in reactive survival. To close this gap, organizations need human-centric leadership, psychological safety, cross-sector collaboration, adaptive governance, and iterative learning mechanisms.

Furthermore, this review highlights the importance of weak ties and radical incrementalism. Weak ties allow organizations to access unfamiliar knowledge from nontraditional actors such as researchers, NGOs, communities, technology partners, and environmental stakeholders. These relationships help firms navigate uncertain terrain and detect emerging risks earlier. Radical incrementalism, meanwhile, enables organizations to pursue ambitious transformation goals through manageable and continuous steps. This approach is particularly relevant in crisis conditions because it combines strategic boldness with operational flexibility.

In conclusion, the shocks of war, pandemic disruption, energy crisis, and global uncertainty should not be understood only as threats. For agile and forward-looking organizations, crisis can become a catalyst for strategic renewal. Business owners and managers who integrate digital capability with sustainability targets, leverage weak ties, and adopt radically incremental transformation can convert disruption into a foundation for future growth. The central implication of this review is clear: in the era of polycrisis, resilience belongs not to organizations that merely endure change, but to those that learn, reconfigure, and create new value from it.

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Appendix: [Appendix INSYMA 2026 - Google Sheets](#)