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Declaration

All papers in this publication have been through a review process involving a review of abstracts, peer review of full papers by at least two referees, reporting of comments to authors, revision of papers by authors and re-evaluation of the revised papers to ensure quality of content.

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FOSTERING CONSTRUCTION FIRM RESILIENCE THROUGH PERSUASIVE NARRATIVES OF STRATEGY: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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Amid macroeconomic, political, environmental and technological disruptions that have previously led to the failure of contracting firms, the construction industry faces the imperative to foster organisational resilience. While contemporary literature proposes diverse strategies to manage these disruptions effectively, it lacks clarity on how these strategies are conceptualised and practically mobilised within contracting organisations. However, a notable deficiency of the literature is that the manner in which these strategies are conceptualised and mobilised persuasively within contracting organisations remain unidentified. This study fills this void by conducting a comprehensive literature review, proposing a conceptual framework on the persuasive mobilisation of organisational resilience strategies within the construction sector. Through the lens of the strategy-as-practice perspective and drawing upon theoretical insights from narrative theory, this research intricately examines the interplay between contextual factors such as industry dynamics, organisational resilience strategies, narrative building blocks, strategic discourse and narrative persuasion. Specifically, this study underscores the significance of narrative infrastructure as the contextual canvas upon which strategic narratives are crafted and enacted. By elucidating the impact of narrative infrastructure on organisational actions and member perceptions, this framework not only advances theoretical understanding but also offers actionable insights for enhancing organisational resilience through strategic narratives. This research contributes to both academia and industry by shedding light on the pivotal role of narrative infrastructure in construction firms and providing pragmatic pathways for leveraging it effectively.

Keywords: construction firms, narrative infrastructure, narrative persuasion, organisational resilience strategies, strategy-as-practice

INTRODUCTION

The survival of contracting firms has long been a central concern in construction management research. The significance of addressing this concern in the context of strategic narratives of construction firms has been increasingly gaining traction in competitive strategy literature (Duman & Green, 2018; Duman, et al., 2017; Kao, et al., 2009; Green, et al., 2008b). In this era, characterised by macroeconomic fluctuations, political instability, environmental crises and rapid technological advancements, the need for resilience is more pronounced (World Economic Forum, 2024; Ma & Liu, 2024; Hillman & Guenther, 2021). The construction industry, inherently vulnerable to these multifaceted disruptions, faces heightened risks that can precipitate the failure of contracting firms (Wang, et al., 2024; Malik, et al., 2022; Aghimien, et al., 2018). Consequently, organisational resilience has emerged as a critical attribute for contracting firms striving not only to sustain operations but also to thrive amid such disruptions (Ma & Liu, 2024; Danso, et al., 2024).

To date, there has been no universally recognised definition of organisational resilience within the literature. However, contemporary conceptualisations converge on the idea that organisational resilience is rooted in the ability to positively adjust and remain functional by anticipating, coping with, and adapting to challenges and disruptions (Caza, et al., 2020; Duchek, 2020; Williams, et al., 2017). Organisational resilience is viewed as a dynamic concept evolving over time within an organisation, influenced by various interactions and exchanges within the organisational context (Ruiz-Martin, et al., 2018; Denyer, 2017). This evolution is path-dependent, emerging from various interactions and exchanges within the organisational context and contingent upon organisational processes, structures, and practices (Burnard & Bhamra, 2019).

Despite the widespread recognition of the importance of organisational resilience, this concept is underexplored in the context of the construction industry (Zungu & Laryea, 2023). Existing research has largely focused on conceptualising and measuring resilience, identifying essential organisational characteristics, and developing operational strategies for recovery from disruptions (Hernandez, et al., 2020). However, a substantial gap remains in understanding how contracting organisations effectively mobilise strategies to achieve resilience (Jayalath, 2023). Addressing this gap is crucial as it offers practical insights into how contracting organisations can strategically achieve resilience, enhancing their survival and success amid disruptions.

There is a lack of consensus on how contracting firms, and the individuals within them, develop and implement strategy (Green, et al., 2008a). Traditional views of competitive strategy research include the strategic positioning view (Porter, 1985; Porter, 1980), the resource-based view (Barney, 1991), the strategy process view (Pettigrew, 1997), the dynamic capabilities view (Teece, et al., 1997) and the strategy-as-practice view (Whittington, 2003; Mintzberg, 1973). This study adopts the strategy-as-practice perspective, which emphasises integrating human activity into organisational resilience strategies. According to this perspective, strategy is "not something that an organization has but something its members do" (Jarzabkowski, et al., 2007). Recognising that strategy formulation and implementation are social constructs, shaped by the interactions, beliefs, and narratives of organisational members (Barry & Elms, 2017), this study employs a narrative approach within the strategy-as-practice framework.

This paper aims to propose a conceptual framework for the persuasive mobilisation of organisational resilience strategies within contracting organisations. Initially, this study is positioned against a background of the existing strategic management literature. A representative sample of the literature on the narrative turn in strategy is also reviewed and critiqued. The core ideas of narrative persuasion from narrative theory are then introduced and discussed. A conceptual framework for the persuasive mobilisation of organisational resilience strategies within contracting firms is proposed. The paper concludes with the practical implications of the proposed framework and suggestions for future research.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative, exploratory approach to develop a conceptual framework for fostering construction firm resilience through persuasive strategic narratives. A comprehensive literature review was conducted, using keywords related to construction resilience and strategic narratives, across the Scopus and Web of Science databases. Relevant studies were screened and thematically analysed to identify key concepts and empirical findings. The framework was constructed by mapping relationships between identified themes and integrating these insights into a cohesive model. This methodology provides a structured foundation for understanding and enhancing resilience in construction firms through strategic narratives.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND LITERATURE SYNTHESIS

The construction industry plays a vital role in national social and economic advancement (Ofori, 2012; Hillebrandt, 2000). However, it encounters several contextual challenges due to its complex nature and vulnerability to economic fluctuations (Wang, et al., 2024). Firstly, technological advancements in related sectors exert considerable influence on the construction industry, compelling construction firms to adapt strategies to remain competitive (Abu Bakar, et al., 2008). Financial market fluctuations also impact strategic decisions, particularly concerning investments and risk management (Wang, et al., 2024). Additionally, shifts in client preferences, aspirations, and purchasing power necessitate adjustments in strategic narratives to cater to evolving client needs (Abu Bakar, et al., 2008). The management and planning philosophies of leaders in contracting organisations emerge as significant determinants, greatly impacting a firm's strategic trajectory (Maik, 2017). Environmental uncertainty adds another layer of complexity, urging firms to devise flexible strategies to adapt promptly to changes (Maik, 2017). Finally, task interdependence within the firm influences coordination and communication, which are crucial for effective strategy implementation (Maik, 2017; Wang, et al., 2024).

To understand how construction firms navigate these challenges, it is essential to understand both industry dynamics and firm-specific factors influencing organisational strategy. This study adopts the contingency theory of organising and views contracting organisations as open systems, recognising that there is no universal approach to strategy (Morgan, 2006 p.40), Recognising that there is no universal approach to strategy, it emphasises that strategy's effectiveness depends on various internal and external factors (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967).

Dominant narratives in competitive strategy research

Historically, narratives of competitive strategy have drawn heavily from Porter's (1980, 1985) strategic positioning perspective, which views competitiveness primarily as a matter of market positioning at the industry level. According to this perspective which considers exogenous factors in strategy making, firms achieve competitive advantage by aligning themselves with market dynamics (Porter, 1985).

However, the introduction of the resource-based view by Barney (1991), influenced a noticeable shift from Porter's (1985) industry-level analysis, towards focusing on firm-level resource configurations that drive competitive advantage. The fundamental tenets of the resource-based view posit that organisational resources exhibit heterogeneity among firms and that this diversity can endure over time (Ambrosini & Bowman, 2009). Teece & Pisano (1994) challenged the resource-based view for its static approach, arguing that the attributes of the resource-based view are context-dependant and that contexts are not static.

Expanding on the resources-based view, Teece et al. (1997) introduced the narrative of dynamic capabilities, proposing an explanation of how firms navigate dynamic environments to attain sustained competitive advantage. Teece, et al. (1997, p.516) defined dynamic capabilities as "a firm's ability to integrate, build and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address rapidly changing environments". Dynamic capabilities have also been heralded as antecedents of organisational resilience (Akpan, et al., 2021). While studies suggest positive impacts of dynamic capabilities on firm performance and survival (Bitencourt, et al., 2019), criticisms abound regarding its ambiguity, elusive nature, and lack of insight into causal mechanisms (Kurtmollaiev, 2020; Bendig, et al., 2018; Green, et al., 2008a). The discourse surrounding dynamic capabilities exhibits significant variations, particularly regarding their functions, advantages, and environmental contexts (Kurtmollaiev, 2020; Di Stefano, et al.,

2014; Peteraf, et al., 2013). The elusive nature of the dynamic capabilities narrative in providing fresh insights to regional contractors was confirmed by Green et al. (2008a), who conducted an exploratory case study on a regional contractor. Moreover, research on dynamic capabilities tends to focus on firm-level analysis, neglecting individual behaviours and interactions (Durán & Aguado, 2022; Bendig, et al., 2018).

The strategy-as-practice perspective offers a pragmatic approach to understanding contested concepts like competitive strategy and organisational resilience, emphasising the micro-level practices of individuals within organisations (Duman & Green, 2018). This approach views strategy as an ongoing process shaped by social constructions within organisational narratives (Whittington, 2006; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Recent discussions in competitive strategy research underscore the ongoing, socially constructed nature of strategy within organisational narratives (Duman & Green, 2018). By examining strategy enactment through discursive and narrative lenses, the strategy-as-practice perspective illuminates how strategy is formulated, communicated, and mobilised within organisations (de La Ville & Mounoud, 2015).

Strategy-as-narrative

Organisational strategies are dynamic constructs that evolve through the intricate interplay of various organisational levels over time (Fenton & Langley, 2011). The strategic narrative of an organisation conveys the alignment of its past, present, and future within a broader strategic framework (Tovstiga, 2023). While this narrative may involve a rhetorical and discursive reconstruction of the organisation's past strategy and a rationalisation of current circumstances, its primary aim is to establish the groundwork for addressing future challenges (Vaara & Fritsch, 2022).

The narrative approach in organisational studies considers organisations as discursive arenas where various narratives vie for dominance in making sense of the environment (Fenton & Langley, 2011). Narratives are defined as distinctive discursive constructs or stories that serve as fundamental tools for preserving or perpetuating stability and/or advocating for or against change within and surrounding organisations (Vaara, et al., 2016). Deutin & Rip (2000) introduced the concept of narrative infrastructure as a framework supporting the creation, dissemination, and reception of narratives that aggregate over time to form grand narratives (also known as master narratives or meta-narratives) within a particular context or society. Narrative infrastructure development involves engagement with narrative building blocks (Deutin & Rip, 2000), which are grand narratives providing meaning to society (Fenton & Langley, 2011). These narrative building blocks encompass plotlines, characters, settings, themes, symbols and conflict, and contribute to the structure, coherence, and meaning of narratives (Blas, 2023). Recognised as discursive resources (Duman, et al., 2017), narrative building blocks shape emotional impact and rhetorical effectiveness of an organisation’s strategic narrative. By manipulating the elements of narrative building blocks through strategic discourse, storytellers can create compelling narratives that engage audiences and convey complex ideas or strategic messages persuasively (Barry & Elms, 2017). Narrative infrastructure serves as the foundation of an organisation's identity, encapsulating a collection of ideas, stories, and metaphors that delineate what is deemed important within its culture (Barry & Elms, 2017). Aligned with the narrative paradigm theory, narrative infrastructure shapes collective beliefs and identities, influencing perceptions of individuals (Herman, et al., 2012).

When individuals engage with a narrative, they initially invest cognitive effort to construct a mental representation of the narrative, followed by the process of deriving meaning from the message, and ultimately, accepting and being persuaded by it (Hamby, et al., 2018). The

narrative paradigm theory provides insights into how narratives influence human behaviour and decision-making processes by emphasising the central role of storytelling in human communication (van der Waldt, 2019). According to this theory, humans are essentially storytellers and meaning-makers, and they interpret the world around them through the lens of narratives rather than through logical argumentation or empirical evidence alone.

Additionally, the narrative paradigm theory suggests that individuals evaluate the persuasiveness of messages based on coherence and fidelity, highlighting the role of storytelling in appealing to emotions and values (Barker & Gower, 2010). Coherence refers to how well the narrative fits together and makes sense, while fidelity relates to how well the narrative aligns with the values and beliefs of the audience (Barker & Gower, 2010). In order for narratives to be appealing and persuasive to organisational members, they should contain elements that resonate emotionally with organisational members (van der Waldt, 2019; Herman, et al., 2012).

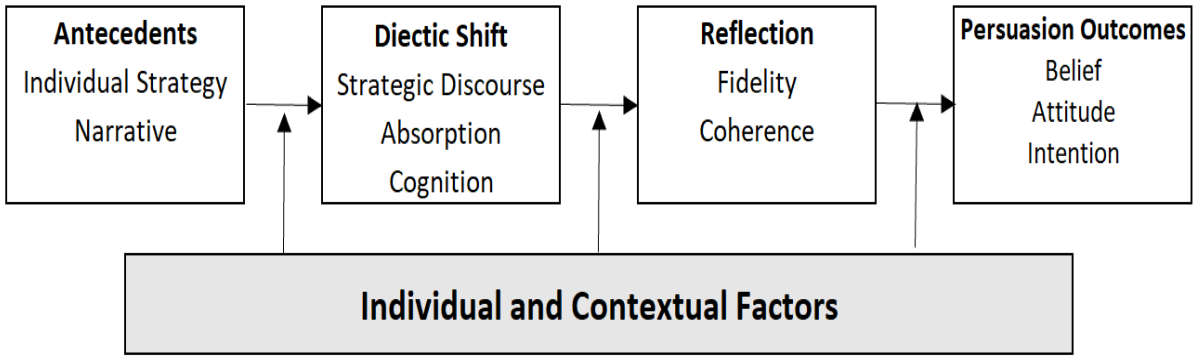


Figure 1. The narrative persuasion process (Adapted from Hamby, et al., 2018)

Hamby, et al. (2018) argue that a positive conclusion to a narrative may foster greater commitment to its holistic interpretation. Organisational resilience is conceptualised in this research as the idealised endpoint in the strategy making of contracting organisations. Understanding the emotional and value-based appeal of organisational resilience will elucidate the influence of strategic discourse on organisational members' actions towards strategic objectives.

TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The proposed conceptual framework is presented in Figure 2, outlining a sequence of logical propositions regarding the persuasive nature of strategic narratives in mobilising organisational members towards fostering organisational resilience.

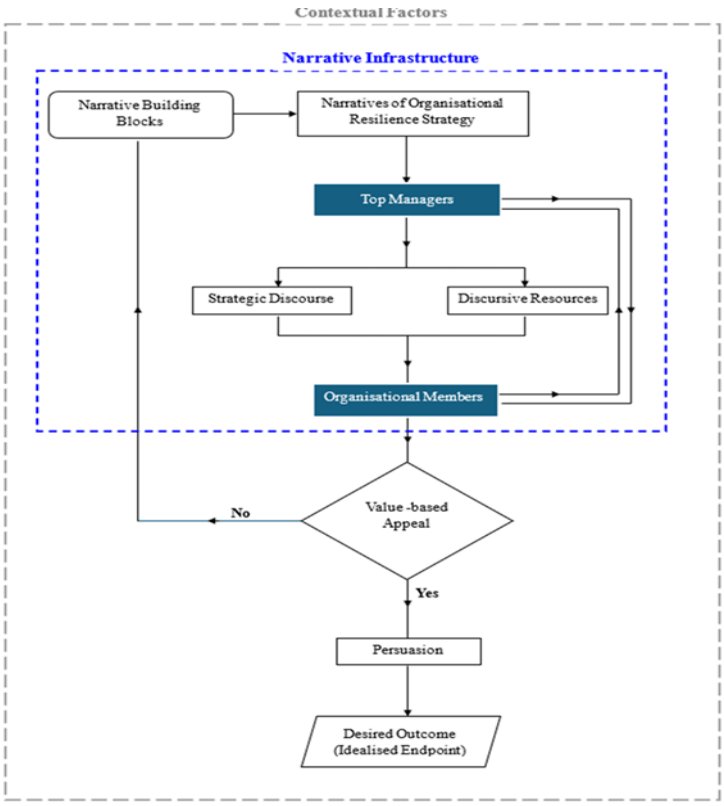


Figure 2. Framework for persuasive mobilisation of organisational resilience strategies (Source: Author's own)

This framework offers a structured representation of how organisational resilience strategies gain persuasiveness among organisational members through strategic discourse. At the core of this framework lies the narrative infrastructure of construction firms, which is encapsulated by the overarching narratives of endogenous and exogenous contextual factors affecting construction firms. Within the narrative infrastructure, narrative building blocks combine to form meta-narratives of the firm (Fenton & Langley, 2011). The framework focuses on organisational resilience as a meta-narrative emphasising the organisation's ability to adapt, innovate, and respond to change.

Essential to this framework is the role of top managers and organisational members. These individuals are directly exposed to and engaged with the narratives of strategies through strategic discourse and discursive resources utilised by top managers (Bendig, et al., 2018). As organisational members interact with these narratives, the process of persuasion becomes evident. Persuasion serves as the mechanism through which the narrative of strategy shapes organisational members' beliefs, attitudes, and intentions towards embracing the concept of organisational resilience (Hamby, et al., 2018).

Ultimately, the desired outcome of the process indicated in this framework is the fostering of organisational resilience by organisational members of construction firms. This signifies their acceptance and commitment to the idea of organisational resilience as promoted by the narratives of strategy. By understanding the interplay between contextual factors, narrative infrastructure, and persuasion, constructions can better leverage storytelling to foster resilience and adaptability in the face of challenges. The conceptual framework proposed outlines the dynamics involved in shaping organisational resilience through the lens of narrative infrastructure and persuasion.

DISCUSSION

The proposed conceptual framework offers a structured pathway for contracting firms to strategically mobilise organisational resilience through persuasive narratives. To ensure the effective application of this framework, it is essential to discuss the practical steps and the roles of various stakeholders involved.

Managers play a pivotal role in crafting and communicating the strategic narratives and they must be equipped with the necessary skills in narrative building and strategic discourse (Fenton & Langley, 2011). Engaging organisational members is also crucial. Regular meetings, feedback sessions, and interactive platforms should be established to facilitate the dissemination and discussion of strategic narratives. This ensures that the narratives are understood, internalised, and embraced by all members (Hamby, et al., 2018). Additionally, creating platforms for ongoing strategic discourse is vital. These can include internal communication tools, collaborative workshops, and storytelling sessions where narratives are continuously refined and reinforced (Jarzabkowski, et al., 2007).

The expected outcomes of implementing this framework include enhanced resilience, improved engagement, and strategic alignment. By internalizing the narratives of strategy, organisational members are expected to develop a stronger sense of resilience, reflected in their ability to anticipate, cope with, and adapt to challenges and disruptions. A well-implemented narrative strategy will likely result in higher levels of engagement and commitment among organisational members, crucial for the successful execution of strategic objectives (Blas, 2023). Furthermore, aligning individual and organisational goals through persuasive narratives will foster a cohesive and unified approach towards achieving organisational resilience (Barker & Gower, 2010).

While the framework provides a structure for fostering resilience narratives, several challenges may arise during its implementation. Organisational members may resist new narratives, especially if they contradict long-standing beliefs or practices (Blas, 2023; Fenton & Langley, 2011). This can be mitigated through the gradual introduction of narratives, ensuring they are relevant and resonate with the existing organisational culture (Vaara, et al., 2016). Involving members in the narrative-building process can also enhance buy-in (Deutin & Rip, 2000). Another challenge is ensuring consistency in the narratives across different levels of the organisation. Developing clear guidelines and frameworks for narrative creation and dissemination can help maintain consistency (Barry & Elms, 2017; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Additionally, assessing the impact of strategic narratives on organisational resilience can be complex. Implementing metrics and feedback mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of the narratives, such as surveys, performance indicators, and resilience assessments, can provide insights into the success of the narrative strategy.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to propose a conceptual framework for the persuasive mobilisation of organisational resilience strategies within contracting firms in the construction industry. The study offers practical insights through a framework on the application of narratives in strategy formulation, implementation process, and the potential outcomes. By integrating narrative theory with the strategy-as-practice perspective, the study contributes to the theoretical discourse on organisational resilience. It offers a novel approach by examining the role of strategic narratives in fostering organisational resilience in the construction industry.

Furthermore, the study opens avenues for future research to empirically test and refine the proposed framework. Researchers can explore the practical implementation of the framework in different organisational contexts and assess its impact on resilience outcomes. Future researchers could examine the role of leadership in shaping and disseminating strategic narratives within construction firms, particularly how top managers influence narrative building blocks and narrative infrastructure. Such research could be strongly informed by strategic management literature related to the 'narrative turn'. By adopting a narrative perspective to strategizing, this research does not seek to replace current strategic thinking but aims to provide theorists and practitioners with an additional interpretive lens for understanding organisational resilience.

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