

# **From Innovation to Absorption: How Organizational Culture Drives Ambidextrous Capabilities**

**Muhammad Dharma Tuah Putra Nasution, Yossie Rossanty, Ramadhan Harahap, Aulia Ramadhan Tanjung**

## **Abstract**

This conceptual study aims to anticipate the relationship between ambidextrous innovation capabilities and ambidextrous organizational culture in enhancing absorptive capacity within organizations. The study proposes employing a quantitative approach, utilizing a cross-sectional survey design and structural equation modeling (SEM) to investigate the hypothesized relationships among ambidextrous innovation capabilities, ambidextrous organizational culture, and absorptive capacity. The study anticipates that an organizational culture supporting both exploration and exploitation—referred to as ambidextrous organizational culture—will be instrumental in enhancing absorptive capacity. Such a culture enables organizations to capitalize on existing knowledge while concurrently exploring new knowledge domains, thereby improving their ability to recognize, assimilate, and apply external knowledge. Additionally, ambidextrous innovation capabilities, which encompass both exploratory and exploitative innovations, are expected to significantly bolster absorptive capacity. Organizations that effectively balance the pursuit of novel ideas with the optimization of existing competencies are anticipated to be more adept at acquiring, assimilating, and utilizing external knowledge. This study is expected to provide valuable theoretical and practical insights aimed at assisting organizations in enhancing their absorptive capacity and sustaining competitiveness in dynamic markets.

**Keywords:** Ambidextrous Innovation Capabilities, Ambidextrous Organizational Culture, Absorptive Capacity, Knowledge Management.

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## Introduction

Absorptive capacity, a crucial factor in organizational success, involves the ability to assimilate external knowledge and leverage it for innovation. Absorptive capacity (ACAP) is a fundamental concept in organizational studies that refers to an organization's ability to acquire, assimilate, transform, and utilize external knowledge to enhance its innovation processes (Vlačić et al., 2020). Absorptive capacity aligns internal innovation efforts with external opportunities, while organizational learning capabilities enhance entrepreneurial cognitive skills and innovation capabilities (Makhloufi et al., 2021). Additionally, the impact of entrepreneurial orientation on sustainable innovation capabilities underscores the importance of an entrepreneurial mindset and organizational learning in driving innovation (Yu, 2023). In understanding the determinants of absorptive capacity, resource commitment and flexibility have been identified as key factors positively influencing absorptive capacity (Chang et al., 2014). This emphasizes the significance of allocating resources effectively and maintaining flexibility to enhance the organization's ability to acquire and utilize external knowledge for innovation.

Ambidextrous innovation capabilities allow organizations to balance the exploration of new ideas with the exploitation of existing competencies (Wang & Rafiq, 2012). This balance is essential for driving new product innovation and maintaining competitiveness, especially in dynamic environments. On the other hand, ambidextrous organizational culture, characterized by the simultaneous pursuit of alignment and adaptability, is associated with improved performance and innovation outcomes (Khan & Mir, 2019). Moreover, the mediating role of absorptive capability and organizational learning capabilities in fostering innovation has been highlighted (Makhloufi et al., 2021). Therefore, a combination of ambidextrous innovation capabilities and ambidextrous organizational culture is essential for building and strengthening absorptive capacity within organizations, ultimately leading to sustained innovation and competitive advantage.

The foundational theories and studies on absorptive capacity emphasize the importance of organizations being able to recognize, evaluate, and internalize new knowledge. Zhao et al. (2020) highlight that organizations must possess the capability to identify, examine, digest, and absorb new knowledge to drive innovation and achieve their objectives. Additionally, Ahmed et al. (2019) introduce the dimensions of potential absorptive capacity and realized absorptive capacity, emphasizing the organization's capacity to not only acquire knowledge but also to transform and apply it for improved business performance. Pu and Liu (2023) conducted a meta-analysis to explore the impact of absorptive capacity on firm performance from a constructivist perspective. Their study aims to integrate diverse empirical results and elucidate the mechanisms through which absorptive capacity influences organizational development. Furthermore, Sánchez-López (2023) emphasizes the significance of technological collaboration as a moderating factor in the relationship between absorptive capacity and servitization, particularly in high-tech industries, highlighting the practical implications of leveraging external partnerships to enhance innovation capabilities through absorptive capacity. Moreover, Song et al. (2018) contribute to the literature by addressing the conceptual ambiguity surrounding absorptive capacity and consolidating empirical findings to elucidate its precise role in influencing firm outcomes.

Previous studies on absorptive capacity have predominantly focused on organizational-level analyses, neglecting the individual level where knowledge exchange and creation occur within organizations (Nayak et al., 2022). This limitation hinders a comprehensive understanding of how absorptive capacity is developed and utilized at the individual level, which is crucial for effective knowledge management and innovation.

Moreover, existing research often lacks a holistic view that integrates various factors influencing absorptive capacity, such as ambidextrous organizational learning and

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entrepreneurial orientation (Ding, 2023; Makhloufi et al., 2021). By not considering the interconnectedness of these elements, studies may overlook the complex relationships that contribute to enhancing absorptive capacity within organizations. This fragmented approach limits the depth of insights into how different organizational aspects interact to influence absorptive capacity positively.

Furthermore, the current literature tends to focus on specific sectors or regions, such as manufacturing enterprises in China (He et al., 2021), which may restrict the generalizability of findings. This narrow focus limits the applicability of research outcomes to a broader range of industries and contexts, potentially overlooking valuable insights that could be gained from studying diverse organizational settings.

The limitations in previous studies concerning absorptive capacity are primarily caused by the lack of integration across different levels of analysis and the fragmented examination of influencing factors. Addressing these limitations through more comprehensive and integrated research approaches that consider individual-level dynamics can lead to a more nuanced understanding of how ambidextrous innovation capabilities and ambidextrous organizational culture enhance absorptive capacity. Thus, this study aims to explore the relationship among such constructs.

## **Literature review**

### **Ambidextrous innovation capabilities**

Ambidextrous innovation capabilities refer to an organization's capacity to effectively balance and integrate exploratory and exploitative innovation activities. This involves the ability to simultaneously explore new opportunities and technologies while also exploiting existing competencies and resources (Soto-Acosta et al., 2018). Such capabilities are crucial for firms to adapt to dynamic environments and respond to external pressures effectively (Soto-Acosta et al., 2018). Internal capabilities like information technology (IT), knowledge management (KM), absorptive capacity (AC), and organizational learning capabilities (OLC) play a vital role in fostering ambidextrous innovation (Soto-Acosta et al., 2018; Makhloufi et al., 2021; Jin et al., 2021). For instance, IT capabilities can facilitate innovative knowledge management and resource integration, while AC and OLC harmonize internal innovation-building activities with external opportunities and enhance entrepreneurial cognitive skills (Jin et al., 2021; Makhloufi et al., 2021; Yu, 2023).

Moreover, ambidextrous innovation capabilities are closely linked to entrepreneurial orientation and sustainable innovation capability (Yu, 2023; He et al., 2021). Entrepreneurial orientation influences the sustainable innovation capabilities of new ventures by promoting ambidextrous learning, emphasizing equilibrium, and interaction in innovation processes (Yu, 2023). Additionally, ambidextrous marketing capabilities have been shown to significantly enhance innovation performance, with market-based innovation playing a mediating role in this relationship (He et al., 2021). Overall, the development of ambidextrous innovation capabilities is essential for organizations to thrive in today's competitive and rapidly changing business landscape by effectively balancing exploration and exploitation in their innovation endeavors.

### **Ambidextrous organizational culture**

An ambidextrous organizational culture refers to a workplace environment that encourages and supports both exploratory and exploitative activities within an organization. This culture emphasizes the ability of the organization to balance innovation and efficiency, allowing for the pursuit of new opportunities while also maintaining current operations effectively. The concept highlights the importance of employee involvement and participation in driving organizational innovation through their innovative behaviors (Liu et al., 2019).

Research suggests that an ambidextrous culture plays a crucial role in fostering contextual ambidexterity, which is essential for organizations to adapt to changing environments and drive new product innovations (Khan & Mir, 2019). Moreover, studies indicate that quality-oriented human resource practices can influence an organization's beliefs and values, supporting the development of ambidextrous capabilities through the cultivation of an ambidextrous culture (Moreno-Luzon, 2023).

Furthermore, the presence of an ambidextrous culture has been linked to enhancing employee voice behavior and work motivation, indicating that such a culture positively moderates the relationship between ambidextrous leadership and employee outcomes (Ouyang et al., 2022). Additionally, organizational trust has been identified as a key factor in facilitating ambidexterity within an organization, as a trusting environment encourages knowledge sharing and absorption, which are essential components of ambidextrous activities (Chams-Anturi et al., 2019). In conclusion, an ambidextrous organizational culture is characterized by its ability to balance exploration and exploitation, foster innovation, support employee involvement, and enable organizations to adapt to dynamic environments effectively.

### **Absorptive capacity**

Absorptive capacity is a fundamental concept in organizational studies, particularly in the realms of innovation and knowledge management. The definition of absorptive capacity typically centers around a firm's capability to effectively acquire, assimilate, transform, and apply external knowledge (Godfrey et al., 2022). This capacity is often depicted as a collection of routines and processes that empower organizations to utilize external knowledge for innovation and competitive advantage. Cohen and Levinthal's foundational work characterizes absorptive capacity as the firm's ability to learn from external knowledge through processes like knowledge identification, assimilation, and exploitation (Harris & Yan, 2018).

Furthermore, absorptive capacity is not a static concept but involves dynamic processes such as exploratory, transformative, and exploitative learning (Darwish et al., 2018). These processes underscore the significance of continual learning and adaptation to external knowledge to foster innovation within organizations. Additionally, in the context of cloud computing, absorptive capacity extends to the firm's ability to effectively search, acquire, and exploit cloud-related technologies (Chang et al., 2019). This adaptation of absorptive capacity to diverse technological domains highlights its versatility and relevance in various organizational contexts.

Moreover, the discourse surrounding absorptive capacity has progressed to encompass different theoretical perspectives. While traditional viewpoints have concentrated on cognitivism and linear cognitive information processing, recent studies have begun exploring alternative perspectives such as constructivism (Pu & Liu, 2023). This shift in perspective emphasizes the ongoing refinement and broadening of the comprehension of absorptive capacity within the academic community. In conclusion, absorptive capacity plays a critical role in organizational learning, innovation, and performance. The dynamic nature of the concept, encompassing various learning processes and theoretical perspectives, underscores its significance in contemporary organizational studies.

### **Hypotheses Development**

#### **Ambidextrous organizational culture affects absorptive capacity**

Ambidextrous organizational culture is crucial for enhancing absorptive capacity within organizations. Research by Ding (2023) highlights that ambidextrous organizational learning, a key aspect of an ambidextrous culture, provides small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with the potential to develop absorptive capacity. This suggests that by fostering a culture that

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balances exploration and exploitation, organizations can better assimilate and utilize external knowledge. Moreover, Khan & Mir (2019) emphasize the significance of ambidextrous organizational culture in enabling contextual ambidexterity, which is essential for driving new product innovations. This indicates that organizations with an ambidextrous culture are better equipped to adapt to changing environments and leverage their absorptive capacity to drive innovation.

Furthermore, Nayak et al. (2022) delve into the relationship between commitment-based human resource practices and knowledge creation in ambidextrous organizations, highlighting the importance of individual-level dimensions of absorptive capacity such as ambidexterity and flow experience. This underscores how organizational practices and employee experiences within an ambidextrous culture can influence the development of absorptive capacity. Additionally, Lei (2022) emphasizes the role of absorptive capacity in facilitating ambidextrous innovation, suggesting that absorptive capability mediates the association between ambidextrous innovation and informal networks. This implies that organizations with strong absorptive capacity are better positioned to leverage informal networks for innovative endeavors. These studies underscore the critical impact of ambidextrous organizational culture on absorptive capacity. We thus hypothesize:

H1: Ambidextrous organizational culture will affect absorptive capacity.

### **Ambidextrous innovation capabilities affect absorptive capacity**

Ambidextrous innovation capabilities play a crucial role in enhancing absorptive capacity within organizations. Absorptive capacity involves the ability to assimilate and leverage external knowledge effectively (Makhloufi et al., 2021). This capacity is further bolstered by organizational learning capabilities, which contribute to fostering innovation capabilities and entrepreneurial skills (Makhloufi et al., 2021). Studies have shown that absorptive capacity positively influences service innovation performance, highlighting its significance in driving innovation within organizations (Mennens et al., 2018). Moreover, absorptive capacity acts as a mediator between informal networks and ambidextrous innovation, facilitating the acquisition of explicit and tacit knowledge necessary for innovation from external sources (Lei, 2022). Additionally, ambidextrous organizational learning has been found to positively impact absorptive capacity in small and medium-sized enterprises, emphasizing the importance of balancing exploration and exploitation activities for innovation (Ding, 2023). Furthermore, the interplay between internal and external collaborations, ambidextrous innovation, and absorptive capacity has been explored, underscoring the complex relationships that exist in driving innovation within small firms (Nakandala, 2023). We thus propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Ambidextrous innovation capabilities will affect absorptive capacity

## **Research Methodology**

The research adopts a quantitative approach, utilizing a cross-sectional survey design that allows for the collection of data at a single point in time to examine relationships between variables. Structural equation modeling (SEM) will be employed to test the hypothesized relationships among the constructs. The target population includes employees from various organizations recognized for their innovative practices and organizational culture. A sample size of approximately 300 respondents is determined, based on recommendations for SEM analysis suggesting a minimum of 10 observations per parameter for robust statistical power. The study focuses on the constructs of ambidextrous innovation capabilities, ambidextrous organizational culture, and absorptive capacity, with measurement items assessing exploratory and exploitative innovation capabilities, organizational culture supporting both exploration and exploitation, and the ability to recognize, assimilate, and apply external knowledge,

respectively. Each construct will be measured using a Likert scale (1-5) to gauge the extent of agreement or frequency of occurrence. Data will be collected through an offline survey distributed to the selected sample, including an introductory section explaining the study's purpose and ensuring confidentiality. Participants will be recruited through professional networks and organizational contacts, with follow-up reminders to enhance response rates. Data analysis will proceed with preliminary data screening for missing values, outliers, and normality, followed by measurement model assessment using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and composite factor analysis. The structural model assessment will involve testing hypothesized relationships using PLS-SEM, assessing path coefficients, R<sup>2</sup> values, and effect sizes, and conducting bootstrapping to determine the significance of the path coefficients and provide confidence intervals. The results will be interpreted to understand the relationships between ambidextrous innovation capabilities, ambidextrous organizational culture, and absorptive capacity, discussing practical implications and theoretical contributions.

## Conclusion

In this study, we anticipate that both ambidextrous innovation capabilities and ambidextrous organizational culture will significantly impact absorptive capacity within organizations, consistent with the proposed hypotheses. The research elucidates that an organizational culture fostering simultaneous exploration and exploitation (ambidextrous organizational culture) is integral to enhancing absorptive capacity. This dual-focus culture enables organizations to leverage existing knowledge while concurrently exploring new knowledge domains, thereby improving the organization's ability to recognize, assimilate, and apply external knowledge. Additionally, ambidextrous innovation capabilities, characterized by the ability to undertake both exploratory and exploitative innovation, substantially enhance absorptive capacity. Organizations proficient in balancing the pursuit of new ideas with the optimization of existing competencies are more adept at acquiring, assimilating, and utilizing external knowledge, leading to superior organizational performance. This research underscores the critical role of ambidextrous innovation capabilities and ambidextrous organizational culture in augmenting absorptive capacity. Organizations seeking to bolster their absorptive capacity and maintain competitiveness in dynamic markets should prioritize cultivating a culture that supports both exploration and exploitation, alongside developing ambidextrous innovation capabilities. These findings offer significant theoretical and practical insights for resource management and innovation strategies across diverse industries.

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