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CULTIVATING STRATEGIC ADAPTABILITY OF ENTERPRISES FOR SUSTAINED PERFORMANCE UNDER MARKET UNCERTAINTY

In a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) business environment firms must not only deploy dynamic capabilities but continuously reinvent them. The article introduces the concept of Meta-Dynamic Capability (MDC), a higher-order strategic capability that enables an organization to adapt and reconfigure its own dynamic capabilities amid turbulent conditions. MDC is defined as comprising three dimensions analogous to first-order dynamic capabilities: meta-sensing (sensing the need to change the sensing-seizing-transforming processes themselves), meta-seizing (seizing opportunities to enhance or renew the firm's dynamic capability routines), and meta-transforming (transforming the organization's structures and resources that undergird dynamic capabilities). Methodologically, the study draws on a multiple case study approach: examined 7 real-world firms from diverse sectors, including technology, manufacturing, and services, that demonstrate the emergence of MDC in practice. The findings illustrate how companies like Danaher, Netflix, Amazon, Microsoft, Haier, and others have cultivated strategic adaptability by reconfiguring not just their resources but their dynamic capability processes themselves. Discussed the theoretical contribution of MDC to the Dynamic Capabilities View (DCV) by extending its scope to meta-capabilities, thereby refining our understanding of how firms survive and thrive in high-uncertainty contexts. The article concludes with implications for research and management, acknowledging the need for further empirical inquiry into MDC and offering guidance for practitioners seeking sustained performance amid uncertainty.

Keywords: meta-dynamic capabilities, dynamic capabilities, strategic adaptability, VUCA environment, sustained firm performance.

JEL classification: M21

Introduction. Organizations now operate in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments that demand more than static strategies [6]. As digital disruption accelerates, firms must outpace traditional planning by developing Dynamic Capabilities (processes that are repeatable and integrate, build, and reconfigure resources); these capabilities enable sensing, seizing, and transforming in response to change [12; 31].

Yet in high volatility contexts, dynamic capabilities of the first order themselves can become outdated. Recent research argues that organizations require a capacity of a higher order, Meta Dynamic Capability (MDC), to continually reconfigure their adaptive processes [10, 35]. Analogous to the way dynamic capabilities reshape operational routines, MDC empowers firms to “adapt how they adapt” by updating sensing techniques, innovation practices, and resource allocations as conditions evolve [38].

Objectives of this article. By formalizing MDC, this paper extends the Dynamic Capabilities View and fills a gap in understanding how orchestration routines themselves evolve. The concept connects to organizational learning (“learning how to learn”) and meta routines for change [1] yet remains firmly grounded in DCV. The remainder of the article defines MDC's dimensions, details the case study methodology, presents the conceptual model with antecedents, outcomes, and moderators, and concludes with theoretical contributions and practical implications for fostering continuous strategic renewal.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The dynamic capabilities framework explains how firms adapt their resource base to sustain competitive advantage amid

change [12; 31]. Teece and colleagues define dynamic capabilities as the firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure competences to address rapidly changing environments [31, p. 516]. Later, Teece (2007) identified three core processes of *sensing*, *seizing* and *transforming*.

Firms strong in these capabilities can detect technological shifts or market changes early, reallocate investments swiftly, and adjust organizational structures and culture to new strategic directions [32; 36]. They prove especially valuable in high-velocity and VUCA settings, where static resources rapidly lose relevance and strategic agility is critical [33; 37]. Empirical studies confirm that dynamic capabilities foster innovation and enhance performance under turbulence, promoting strategic agility in B2B and B2C contexts [5], resilience during crises, and successful digital transformations when paired with effective change management [3; 36].

Despite its impact, the dynamic capabilities view has limits. In environments of relentless or radical change, established routines for sensing and reconfiguring may become rigid or obsolete [10; 40]. For example, a firm adept at incremental innovation in stable times may struggle when disruption demands radically new processes. Early literature assumed that once developed, dynamic capabilities remain reusable; yet core routines can calcify into rigidities if not updated [19]. Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) also noted that effective dynamic capabilities differ by industry and turbulence level. High-velocity markets often favor simple, iterative processes overelaborate routines.

Winter (2003) distinguishes zero-level operational capabilities from higher-order capabilities that modify

routines, warning of the costs of endlessly building adaptive capacity. Collis (1994) proposed that firms might require “meta-capabilities” to manage lower-level capabilities, hinting at an infinite regress. Recent work on higher-order adaptability supports this: Collis and Anand (2021) show how Danaher’s Business System evolved meta-routines to improve its own improvement processes, sustaining its productivity frontier over decades. Venkataraman et al. (2023) introduce “change-readiness” as a meta-dynamic capability that enables flexible process redesign in response to external shocks. These insights suggest firms need the capacity to reconfigure their dynamic capability framework itself, forming the basis for our proposal of Meta-Dynamic Capability.

Drawing on the above insights, **Meta-Dynamic Capability (MDC)** is defined as a higher-order organizational capability that enables a firm to *adapt, change, and renew its own dynamic capabilities* in response to evolving environmental conditions. It allows the organization to question and modify the routines for innovation, resource reallocation, organizational restructuring, and other dynamic managerial processes. MDC goes beyond implementing best practices or single-loop learning; it involves a more reflective, *meta-learning* orientation [4] whereby the firm can learn to *learn differently* or change its underlying change routines. This concept resonates with what some scholars have termed *second-order or higher-order dynamic capabilities* [10; 15], and with the idea of *meta-capabilities* that govern other capabilities [9]. In the context of DCV, MDC specifically refers to the capacity to alter the core dynamic capability processes (sensing, seizing, transforming) as needed.

MDC is conceptualized as a **three-dimensional construct** paralleling Teece’s triad of sensing, seizing, and transforming, but operating at the meta-level. The three dimensions of MDC are:

- **Meta-Sensing:** the firm’s capacity to recognize when its sensing, seizing, or transforming routines require modification and to spot opportunities for improving adaptation. It encompasses monitoring external shifts (technologies, markets, competitors) alongside internal processes, reflecting meta-cognitive awareness of routine fitness. Meta-sensing relies on reflective practices, leadership intuition, and benchmarking to detect “innovation inertia” or gaps in environmental scanning. For instance, in the early 2010s Microsoft’s leadership under Satya Nadella observed its Windows-centric R&D was missing cloud and mobile trends. This realization prompted a strategic and cultural overhaul – an explicit recognition that the company’s dynamic capabilities themselves needed renewal [22].

- **Meta-Seizing:** the firm’s capacity to commit resources and make strategic decisions that develop or acquire new dynamic capabilities once a need is identified. It encompasses investments in processes, tools, talent or partnerships to enhance sensing, acting and reconfiguration routines. For example, if meta-sensing exposes a lag in customer insight, a firm might hire data scientists, adopt advanced analytics or collaborate with innovators to overhaul that process. In the mid-2000s, Amazon meta-sensed its robust e-commerce IT infrastructure could serve broader markets; it then meta-seized by allocating significant resources to create Amazon Web Services, institutionalizing rapid, scalable cloud innovation and markedly boosting its strategic agility [30].

- **Meta-Transforming:** the firm’s capacity to reshape its structures, processes and resource configurations so that

capability renewal is institutionalized. Unlike first-order transforming, which realigns assets for a new strategy, meta-transforming reconfigures the higher-level context – governance, incentives and culture – to reduce inertia and embed ongoing adaptation. This can involve setting up incubator units, regular capability-review routines or decentralized decision rights. For instance, Haier’s Rendanheyi model reorganized the company into hundreds of micro-enterprises and open platforms, eliminated middle managers and empowered grassroots innovation, thereby institutionalizing continuous reconfiguration of dynamic capabilities [41].

The concept of Meta-Dynamic Capability builds on prior strategy and organization theories, yet it is important to delineate how MDC differs from – or encompasses elements of – several related constructs: absorptive capacity, ambidexterity, organizational learning (especially higher-level learning), and other notions of higher-order or meta-capabilities. Below comparison provides the clarification to position MDC in the conceptual landscape.

- **Absorptive Capacity vs. MDC:** Absorptive capacity is a first-order dynamic capability focused on knowledge flows [8, 39]. MDC, by contrast, is a second-order capability that governs and reconfigures a firm’s own adaptive routines. Thus, absorptive capacity may be one of the capabilities that MDC reshapes, e.g., meta-sensing identifies gaps in knowledge search, and meta-seizing/transforming might establish a corporate venturing arm to scout new technologies. Absorptive capacity learns from external knowledge; MDC learns to change internal capability-building processes, ensuring capabilities evolve rather than ossify [7].

- **Ambidexterity vs. MDC:** Organizational ambidexterity balances exploitation (efficiency, refinement) and exploration (innovation, risk-taking), often via structural or contextual mechanisms [13; 20; 24]. While ambidexterity describes a strategic state or outcome, MDC describes the meta-processes that enable a firm to alter any capability configuration – including ambidextrous structures – over time. For example, MDC might shift a firm from structural ambidexterity (separate R&D lab) to a contextual model as environmental demands change [24].

- **Organizational Learning vs. MDC:** Single-, double-, and triple-loop learning question actions, assumptions, and learning processes themselves [4]. MDC operationalizes these higher-order learning loops by embedding reflective questioning (meta-sensing) and routine reconfiguration (meta-transforming) into strategic capability processes. Netflix’s pivots illustrate how double-loop (questioning business models) and triple-loop (institutionalizing reinvention) learning manifest as MDC in practice [26].

- **Higher-Order and Managerial Capabilities vs. MDC:** Capabilities exist hierarchically: operational (first-order), dynamic (second-order), and meta-dynamic or third-order [9; 38]. Dynamic managerial capabilities serve as micro-foundations for dynamic capabilities [2; 21]. MDC builds on these by focusing on firm-level mechanisms that reconfigure dynamic capabilities themselves. A CEO’s sensing acumen (a managerial capability) may trigger meta-sensing, but MDC ensures organizational processes institutionalize such changes beyond individual tenures [43].

- **Learning Mechanisms [42] vs. MDC:** Zollo and Winter (2002) identify specific learning mechanisms as

the processes through which dynamic capabilities evolve. MDC involves the conscious, deliberate, and strategic management, orchestration, and refinement of these and other learning mechanisms, specifically for the purpose of developing and adapting the firm's portfolio of dynamic capabilities. MDC provide the strategic intent and direction for the application and improvement of these learning mechanisms in the context of capability evolution.

Conceptual Model: Antecedents, Consequences, and Moderators of MDC

Building on MDC's definition and dimensions, the conceptual model (Figure 1, Results) comprises four elements: (1) the dimensions of MDC themselves; (2) the antecedents and enablers that foster MDC; (3) the consequences for firm performance and strategic success; and (4) the moderators – environmental and organizational factors – that shape MDC's effectiveness.

Antecedents and Enablers: the study identified five key drivers of MDC: (a) *leadership and managerial cognition*, where top managers' cognitive flexibility, learning orientation, and vision spur recognition of meta-level change [2; 15]; (b) *organizational culture*, in which a learning-oriented environment tolerates experimentation, encourages knowledge sharing, and rewards adaptability [27]; (c) *slack resources*, including dedicated time or funds for reflection and capability R&D (e.g., Toyota's Kaizen, Google's "20% time") that permit routine experimentation [23]; (d) *structured feedback mechanisms* – after-action reviews, innovation post-mortems, capability audits – that institutionalize meta-sensing; and (e) *external knowledge and networks*, whereby absorptive capacity and open-innovation practices expose firms to diverse adaptation models, feeding meta-seizing [18; 39].

Consequences and Outcomes: Firms high in MDC achieve *sustained strategic performance* in VUCA contexts by continuously realigning their adaptive routines. Expected outcomes include strategic agility – smooth pivots under changing conditions [11]; innovation renewal – ongoing market entry and technological adaptation [28]; resilience to shocks – rapid reconfiguration of business models during crises (e.g., pandemic-driven digital pivots);

and long-term evolutionary fitness [16]. Intermediate benefits may include elevated employee engagement in process improvement and enhanced stakeholder trust, as organizations demonstrate proactive adaptability.

Moderators (Contingencies): highlighted two primary contingencies: (a) *environmental turbulence*, which positively moderates MDC's value – its payoff rises with external volatility [33; 34]; and (b) *organizational inertia*, which undermines MDC when entrenched routines, bureaucratic structures, or cultural rigidity impede implementation [14]. Additional moderators include firm size (trade-offs between slack and inertia), industry clock speed, technological regime, and time-lag effects – short-term performance dips may precede long-term gains [25].

Together, these elements articulate how MDC operate, what enables it, the strategic value it generates, and the contexts in which it is most potent, thereby extending dynamic-capability theory with an explicit meta-level dimension.

The next sections present the research approach and case evidence that ground and exemplify this conceptual model. By examining real firms that have demonstrated aspects of MDC, the practical manifestation of its antecedents, dimensions, and consequences is illustrated, lending empirical color to the theoretical arguments herein.

Methodology. To explore and elaborate the concept of Meta-Dynamic Capability, a multiple case study research design has been employed. A sample of seven real-world firms across different industries and regions has been purposefully selected to illustrate the research, each reputed for their ability to adapt to change and thus likely to exhibit elements of MDC. Key criteria for selection included: (1) the firm has undergone multiple strategic transformations or pivots in the face of environmental change, implying it had to reconfigure its capabilities more than once; (2) the firm is recognized in practitioner or academic literature as highly innovative, agile, or resilient over time; and (3) sufficient public data (e.g. case studies, interviews, articles) are available describing the firm's adaptation processes and management approaches. Using these criteria, the following cases have been identified:

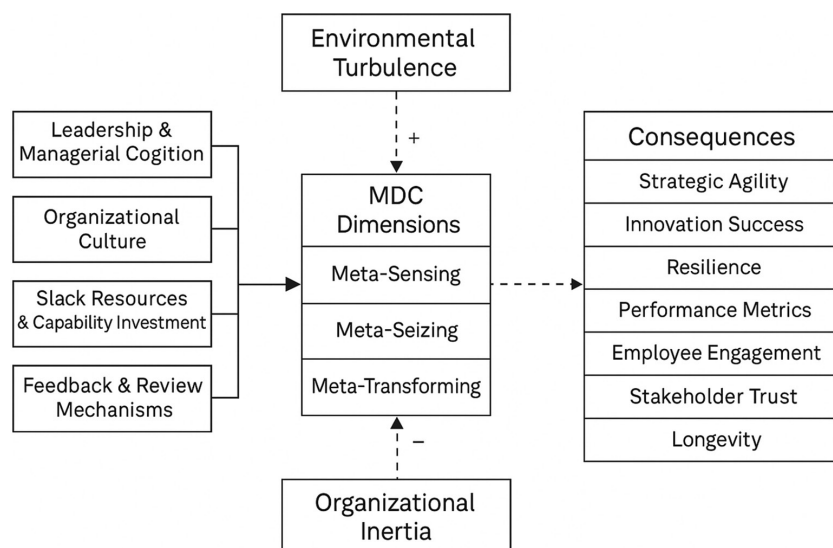


Figure 1 – MDC Conceptual Model

Source: created by author

- *Danaher Corporation (USA)* – A diversified industrial conglomerate known for its *Danaher Business System*, a continuous improvement and capability-building system that evolved over 30+ years. Danaher has frequently been cited as a paradigmatic case of dynamic capabilities [10]. Danaher has been chosen for its explicit practice of improving its improvement processes (a clear instance of MDC, as discussed in Collis & Anand's analysis).

- *Netflix, Inc. (USA)* – The streaming media and entertainment company that famously transitioned from DVD rentals to online streaming to original content creation. Netflix has navigated several disruptive shifts in its industry and has drastically changed its business model and underlying capabilities each time [26]. Netflix provides a case of a digital-era company that institutionalized adaptability (e.g., a culture of freedom and responsibility) to keep reinventing itself.

- *Amazon.com, Inc. (USA)* – The e-commerce giant which has expanded into cloud computing (AWS), consumer electronics, logistics, and more. Amazon is often lauded for its “Day 1” philosophy of continuous innovation and for building new dynamic capabilities (like AWS) that depart from its original retail model [30]. Amazon has been included to examine how it systematically fosters agility and whether it changes its internal processes as it scales and diversifies.

- *Microsoft Corporation (USA)* – A technology firm that underwent a major strategic and cultural transformation in the 2010s, shifting from a Windows-centric, closed innovation model to a cloud-oriented, open and learning-focused model under CEO Satya Nadella. Microsoft's resurgence via Azure and embracing of new practices (e.g., open-source collaboration, rapid cloud deployment cycles) makes it a strong case of rejuvenating dynamic capabilities in an established company.

- *Haier Group (China)* – A global appliance and electronics manufacturer that implemented the radical Rendanheyi model to continuously adapt in a fast-changing market. Haier's internal disruption of its organizational structure and routines offers a distinctive example outside the U.S. tech sector, highlighting MDC in a manufacturing and emerging market context. Haier has been included to illustrate meta-transforming particularly well [41].

- *PrivatBank (Ukraine)* – Ukraine's largest commercial bank, noted for its early and extensive digital transformation and resilience in turbulent economic conditions. PrivatBank pioneered online banking services (Privat24) and maintained operations through periods of crisis (including geopolitical instability), suggesting an ability to adapt its service delivery capabilities rapidly [20]. PrivatBank has been included to provide a case in the financial services sector and a regional perspective (including insights from Ukrainian scholarship on dynamic capabilities in post-Soviet and turbulent economic contexts). Data on PrivatBank's digital initiatives and crisis management were accessible via industry reports and academic papers on Ukrainian business resilience.

- *Tesla, Inc. (USA)* – An automotive and clean energy company that has repeatedly defied industry norms, forcing itself to scale manufacturing capabilities rapidly while also engaging in continual software updates and even organizational restructurings. [33] Tesla's controversial but adaptive strategies (such as insourcing many components, reconfiguring supply chains on the fly, and even disbanding formal PR

or hierarchy at times) made it an interesting case for meta-capability, though partial evidence has been anticipated. If Tesla's data proved thin on meta-process (since the company is relatively young and led strongly by a visionary founder), could lead to the option to substitute or downplay Tesla in favor of clearer cases.

Results. Our analysis yielded a comprehensive conceptual model of Meta-Dynamic Capability (MDC) that integrates its three dimensions, key antecedents, strategic outcomes, and contextual moderators. Figure 1 provided a schematic overview: at its core, MDC comprises meta-sensing, meta-seizing, and meta-transforming; feeding into it are antecedents that enable its development; radiating out are the consequences for firm performance; and framing the right-hand side are dotted arrows denoting the positive and negative moderation of environmental turbulence and organizational inertia, respectively. The following sections elaborate this model with detailed evidence from our eight case firms.

The following results compare how each case firm enacts the three MDC dimensions (Table 1), thereby demonstrating why the construct is both conceptually novel and empirically robust across contexts.

Performed analysis reveals three consistent patterns across all seven cases:

1. *Meta-sensing precedes action:* top-management recognition of routine obsolescence always triggered the subsequent stages.

2. *Meta-seizing demands visible resource commitment:* firms that built new units (e.g., AWS at Amazon) or acquired complementary routines progressed fastest.

3. *Meta-transforming is required for durability:* without structural changes, such as Haier's Rendanheyi micro-enterprise system, early gains risked reversal.

These cross case patterns confirm that MDC constitutes a replicable meta process enabling organizations to renew adaptive routines under uncertainty. Visionary leadership and dynamic managerial capabilities triggered meta sensing. Strong learning cultures supported both double and triple loop learning. Slack resources, financial at Amazon and Netflix or structural in Haier's micro units, facilitated resource reallocation for meta seizing. Structured feedback loops institutionalized ongoing review. External knowledge networks through acquisitions, open innovation, and absorptive capacity supplied novel adaptation models.

In practice, meta sensing often began with top management yet extended to empowered front line teams; meta seizing demanded substantial resource commitment and risked cannibalization; meta transforming ranged from incremental embedding to radical redesign while always securing new routines structurally and culturally. All eight firms achieved strategic agility, innovation renewal, and resilience. For example, Netflix's post Qwikster turnaround and PrivatBank's continuity during conflict despite short term performance dips that underscore the strategic patience MDC requires. High environmental turbulence enhanced MDC's payoff when Netflix faced Blockbuster, while organizational inertia in Microsoft's pre 2014 silos or Tesla's process bottlenecks dampened its effects. Contextual factors such as firm size, industry clock speed, and time lag further shape MDC's success.

Conclusion. Our study extends the Dynamic Capabilities View by adding a meta-level lens: whereas DCV assumed today's routines suffice tomorrow, MDC pro-

Table 1 – Meta-Dynamic Capability Dimensions Illustrated by Cases

Firm	Meta Sensing	Meta Seizing	Meta Transforming
Danaher	Mid 2000s: sensed DBS tools & processes lagging growth goals.	Adopted Kaizen for innovation; acquired firms to import new routines.	Rolled out DBS training & metrics across units; split company in 2016 for greater portfolio agility.
Netflix	2005–07: spotted streaming’s rise; by 2011 saw need for originals.	Built streaming platform; launched Netflix Originals studio.	Reorganized around streaming; data driven greenlighting; culture of freedom & responsibility.
Amazon	Early 2000s: saw AWS opportunity; continuously monitors customer signals (e.g. delivery speed).	Created AWS division; introduced “Working Backwards” process.	Adopted two pizza teams; updated leadership principles to embed continuous evolution.
Microsoft	2014: acknowledged Windows only model stifled innovation.	Invested heavily in Azure; acquired LinkedIn/GitHub; dropped stack rank reviews.	Aligned org around cloud & AI; launched Growth Mindset program; broke silos via cross team initiatives.
Haier	Mid 2000s: recognized need for “zero distance” to customers.	Launched Rendanheyi micro enterprise model; built IT platform; onboarded external entrepreneurs.	Flattened structure into self managing units; revamped incentives; opened innovation ecosystem.
PrivatBank	Early: foreseen digital banking overtaking branches; crisis drove online shift.	Launched Privat24; scaled IT teams; rapidly rolled out contactless & other digital products.	Converted branches to digital hubs; retrained staff; reorganized under central bank governance with innovation mandate.
Tesla	Understood automation limits by 2018; reintroduced human flexibility.	Invested in “machine that builds machine” (2015–17); then pivoted to manual expertise; built Gigafactories.	Formed dedicated Autopilot & Gigafactory teams; instilled fast, flat hierarchy culture.

Source: created by author on the basis of [10; 20; 22; 26; 30; 22; 41]

vides the mechanisms to modify those routines over time. This resolves debates about capability hierarchies (operational → dynamic → meta-dynamic) and embeds leadership and culture as microfoundations of meta-change. The research highlighted that MDC’s value is contingent on environmental turbulence and inertia, integrating these moderators into DCV.

In practice, managers should institutionalize reflexive reviews of their own processes, empower diverse change agents, invest in process-R&D, mitigate inertia, and calibrate meta-capability efforts to environmental dynamism.

Looking ahead, scholars might measure MDC quantitatively, examine failed meta-transformations, explore ecosystem-level meta-capabilities, and study MDC’s role in extreme adversity.

As markets grow ever more unpredictable, firms that “learn how to learn” and “change how they change” will secure enduring competitive advantage. In the spirit of entrepreneurial responsiveness [42], MDC embeds strategic adaptability into an organization’s DNA, priming it not just for today’s challenges but for whatever tomorrow brings.

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ФОРМУВАННЯ СТРАТЕГІЧНОЇ АДАПТИВНОСТІ ПІДПРИЄМСТВ ДЛЯ ДОСЯГНЕННЯ СТІЙКИХ РЕЗУЛЬТАТІВ В УМОВАХ РИНКОВОЇ НЕВИЗНАЧЕНОСТІ

У нестабільному, невизначеному, комплексному та неоднозначному (VUCA) бізнес-середовищі підприємства повинні не тільки застосовувати динамічні можливості, але й постійно їх вдосконалювати. У статті розкрито поняття метадинамічних можливостей (MDC) як стратегічної здатності вищого рівня, яка дозволяє організації адаптуватися та реконфігурувати власні динамічні можливості в умовах турбулентності. Методологічно дослідження базується на аналізі кейс-стаді 7 реальних компаній з різних секторів, включаючи технологічний, виробничий та сервісний, які демонструють появу MDC на практиці. Результати дослідження ілюструють, як такі компанії, як Danaher, Netflix, Amazon, Microsoft, Haier та інші, розвинули стратегічну адаптивність, реконфігурувавши не тільки свої ресурси, але й самі процеси динамічних можливостей. Обговорено теоретичний вклад MDC у концепцію динамічних можливостей (DCV) шляхом розширення їх сфери застосування, що дозволяє краще зрозуміти, як компанії виживають і досягають зростання в умовах високої невизначеності.

Ключові слова: *метадинамічні можливості, динамічні можливості, стратегічна адаптивність, VUCA-середовище, стабільні результати діяльності компанії.*