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Tracing the Underlying Operations, Processes, and Path Dependencies: The Microfoundations of Dynamic Capabilities in Educational Institutions

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Abstract: The strategy of education institutions to adapt and renew their resources and capabilities has become an increasingly critical issue, particularly with demographic shifts, intensifying competition, and resource constraints that threaten school operations. This study examines how microfoundations contribute to school sustainability and unpacks operational practices that enable organizational sustainability in educational institutions. Adopting a qualitative multiple-case study design, the study investigates eight secondary private schools in Indonesia with varying operational capabilities and performance. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, the school's operational plan, and activity observations, which were studied using thematic multi-case analysis. The findings reveal that schools' sustainability depends on how quickly they reorganize and build their strategic assets, such as processes, capabilities, technologies, and community feedback, to become new competitive advantages. Schools with stronger human resources, functional operational systems, and adaptive leadership were better able to sense shifts in the external environment, innovate in educational services, and reconfigure organizational practices. In contrast, schools experiencing failure showed weak individual-level actions and routines, despite having had strong positions in the past. The study proposes a strategic model that conceptualizes schools as capability-driven, grounded in microfoundations, to ensure a successful, result-oriented path. Theoretically, the findings confirm and extend the application of Dynamic Capability Theory in non-profit education contexts. In practice, the study offers strategic insights for school leaders, foundations, and policymakers seeking to enhance the sustainability of private secondary schools through various managerial routines.

Keywords: *microfoundations, operations, processes, path dependencies, educational institutions, dynamic capabilities.*

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INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, private schools account for a substantial proportion of education institutions particularly at the secondary level, and play a critical role in accommodating diverse educational needs like as a strategic investment that decides a nation's competitiveness, social resilience, and capacity for innovation that led to long-term sustainable development thus has become an important part of the national education system (Sianturi & Samosir, 2023; Dzhamilya et al., 2025).

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Despite their significance, private schools are increasingly facing serious operational challenges, including funding, teacher quality, staffing, infrastructure, and materials (Stern & Smith, 2016). Empirical evidence indicates that many education institutions that starved in new applicants are among a significant proportion of secondary private schools in Indonesia which is due to several causes like choice of public school preferred relative to private school, quality preference, vicious cycle of management problems, teacher quality, and financial capacity which in turn effects the education mission, staff retention, and stakeholder trust (National Coordination of Churches and Education with MPK-BRC data, 2023).

Zoning policy and improved public school quality further constrained private schools' market position. Private schools with little strategic differentiation, located close to public schools and facing competition, have experienced accelerated enrollment declines and financial instability (Dharmawan, 2019; Zuhri & Najih, 2024). Post-pandemic disruptions have further exacerbated these challenges by accelerating digital transformation, increasing operational costs, and draining energetic resources in school operations management and strategic adaptability (Bakker & de Vries, 2020; Samad et al., 2023).

School's financial stability is not only a legitimate goal but also a primary objective and an intrinsic one, indicating high priority in whole-institution approaches (Holst, 2022). The strategic management literature has long offered the Dynamic Capabilities framework (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997; Teece, 2007) as a theoretical lens to explain organizational performance. With a focus on the organization's ability to sense environmental changes, seize opportunities, and reconfigure resources in response to turbulence, the formulations developed to locate the origin of organizational capabilities in microfoundations respond like individual actors through managerial operations, processes, and routines (Teece, 2007; Foss & Pedersen, 2014; Felin, Foss & Ployhart, 2015).

In this integrative framework for educational institutions, dynamic capabilities act as the linking mechanism (Ambrosini & Bowman, 2009) that enables schools to transform their resource endowments in response to declining enrollment, shifts in the external environment, and changing stakeholder expectations. The three layers of Dynamic Capabilities start with Sensing Capabilities, which allow schools to identify early warning signals of decline; Seizing Capabilities translate strategic insights into concrete actions in response to external change; and Reconfiguring Capabilities ensure long-term alignment between resources, organizational structures, and environmental demands (Ma et al., 2020; Gohr et al., 2023; Guerrero & Menter, 2024).

Microfoundations of Sensing, Seizing, and Reconfiguring in educational institutions involve routine assessments of internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external feedback and responses from industry, government, and the community. At the micro-level, this refers to the basic elements, allowable operations, activities, and managerial skills that constitute daily operations, including assessing the current state, coordination, and problem-solving. The condition of these processes decides whether strategies are translated into action and whether the reconfiguration leads to sustained competitive advantage (Muttaqin, 2022; Palmié, 2023; Guerrero & Menter, 2024; Elistia et al., 2024).

In the school context, sensing implicates recognizing changes in student demographics, parental expectations, educational policies, and technological developments. Schools that fail to sense declining enrollment trends or shifts in educational demand often respond too late, resulting in strategic inertia and

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organizational decline (Bush, 2020). For educational organizations, seizing may include fulfilling the educational mission by adopting an entrepreneurial and innovative paradigm, creating new value from the process with exploitation opportunities in investment and commercialization activities (Weaven et al., 2021; Frogeri et al., 2022; Guerrero & Menter, 2024). Reconfiguration is particularly important in educational organizations where resource constraints necessitate the flexible and innovative use of existing assets (Johan et al., 2021; Muttaqin et al., 2024), such as redesigning academic programs, introducing new curricula, investing in digital learning platforms, or repositioning the school's value proposition to attract students.

The lack of process-oriented theoretical discussion is especially evident in studies of educational organizations. Although schools operate in competitive, resource-constrained environments, strategic management theories have been predominantly developed and empirically tested at the macro level and in business settings (Bryson, 2018; Hitt, Ireland, & Hoskisson, 2020). Existing studies in the field of education tend to focus on resources, often neglecting the organizational processes covered in the development and use of Dynamic Capabilities and organizational adaptability as central determinants of sustainability (Takahashi et al., 2017; Bush, 2020). As a result, there remains limited understanding of how strategic management frameworks can be systematically adapted and integrated to explain organizational sustainability in educational institutions.

The micro-level operations refer to activities and skills that constitute daily routine, rest on managerial process and operations like the ability to integrate and combine assets including knowledge (Teece, 2007), doing the right things as evolutionary fitness and doing things right as technical fitness (Ambrosini & Bowman, 2009), manage the paradoxical tensions of contradictory demands in day-to-day activities (Frogeri et al., 2022), and adapts to challenges and support strategic changes with adoption of digital technologies (Gupta et al., 2024). Further, in these instances of micro-level operations, the sustainability-oriented innovation in educational organizations relies on explicit microfoundations embedded in managerial routines (Gohr et al., 2023).

This study aims to address a gap by precisely understanding how the microfoundations of Dynamic Capabilities can help schools achieve sustainable competitive advantage. This qualitative, case-based study explores how operations, processes, and path dependencies jointly operate in real educational organization settings, primarily in religious private secondary schools in Indonesia. The choice of case studies is crucial for uncovering complex causal mechanisms, in-depth explanations, contextual dynamics, and process-oriented insights that are often obscured in large-scale quantitative designs (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2018).

The objective of this study is to examine the underlying operations, processes, and path dependencies that cause schools to stagnate, leading some to decline and others to bounce back from setbacks. Rather than attributing decline solely to external factors such as competition, demographic change, or policy shifts, this research seeks to unbox the organizational and managerial processes, the school's programs, and the systems that reinforce the school's capabilities to address sustainability issues.

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RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study applied a qualitative approach to investigate, in depth, the subjective realities of participants in education organizations responsible for managing schools in Indonesia, and to understand the state of these schools based on their experiences rather than through experimental study. The approach emphasizes participants' views and contexts by exploring each individual's personal meaning within a multiple-case study design. As these meanings are plural and diverse, the study must explore the complexity of views rather than narrow them into confined categories or ideas.

Creswell & Poth (2018) see the relationship between the case study method and the qualitative approach as a viable option for conducting qualitative research. According to Yin (2018), explanatory case studies are best suited to address the how question, and this research aims to expound on complex phenomena to explain their causes and consequences. The research problems will then be explored by developing a detailed understanding of the central phenomena in each case that align with participants' experiences.

Research Context

The conditions that led to this study are the phenomena of some secondary religious schools in Indonesia experiencing stagnation and enrollment declines. However, they were popular schools in the past with no liability for newness, as new organizations need a learning curve and time to develop their capabilities, routines, and trust. The settings were identified with school leaders, who explained their lack of operational action in response to many strategic solutions introduced by parties seeking to help schools address the enrollment problem.

The schools that face enrollment problems were all of long operational age, as were the institutions that manage them. The scope of this study is secondary school, including both junior and senior high school, where most of the declines that led to the closure of classes occurred at this level. The number of enrollments dropped weresig, with a range of 75 to 83 percent compared to the initial number of students at peak performance. Although they have tried some initiatives to address the situation, such as implementing a turnaround or re-engineering strategy and a change management strategy, the results have been mixed. Some schools are still struggling to operationalize the new strategy, while others have succeeded.

Unit of Analysis

In the context above, the unit of analysis of this study is eight secondary schools, comprising four junior high schools, three senior high schools, and one senior vocational high school. All schools are located on Java Island, in central Java, where most cases of stagnation and decline have occurred. This study investigated those eight schools to represent the qualitative sampling that works with small samples nested in the context and studied in-depth (Miles et al., 2014), while multiple cases were identified (among those who claimed successful implementation with those who were still facing execution challenges with their new strategy, so that they can be compared. The selection of the unit of analysis is driven by objective research criteria, with none of the schools affiliated either with each other or with the researchers. Religious school is merely the organizational context, rather than the subject of the study, which is the operational processes of the educational setting.

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Selection of Participants

The selection of participants is conducted using a purposive sampling technique, namely selecting participants who are directly involved in running school operations, where they are rich in strategic information and therefore appropriate to be studied according to their nature and substance, which will be able to explain interview questions regarding the research problems being studied (Patton, 2014). This study relied on a planned, predetermined sample selection prior to data collection, although some data were collected prior to the interviews due to travel to the school locations. This study interviewed nine participants, including school principals and school operational coordinators or directors, some of whom also served as teachers at the schools studied.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection for this study began with pre-interviews and school information, followed by the case study interview. The pre-interviews are important for establishing a baseline of what was happening within the schools during the period of shocks that threatened their going concern, providing context in general, and checking that the draft of questions is relevant for the case and for the selected individuals to study or not, as they must be able to purposefully inform an understanding of the research phenomena in the study. The data consists of transcripts of interview results, school operational documents, notes, and archives regarding school activities and programs, as well as notes from direct observations during school visits.

This study ran recorded semi-structured interviews preceded by informal note-taking. A list of questions and an interview guide were provided to participants in advance to help them prepare for the interview, and some data had been provided to the study beforehand. This research obtained participant consent before distributing the questions and conducting interviews. All information about the study was provided at the outset, with formal written consent obtained, and the principles of confidentiality and a form of anonymity have been agreed upon for data collection.

Data Analysis Method

The data analysis method used in this study follows the qualitative data analysis steps outlined by Miles et al. (2014), which begin with converting raw field notes and interview recordings into write-ups and transcripts. The data were then condensed and simplified before creating codes. To analyze and interpret the data's meaning, this study assigned labels in words and put a special code to words that were repeatedly used and words of action. After that, a code pattern is generated, and the data is sorted to identify leads indicating important concepts. Themes, causes or explanations, relationships among people, and theoretical constructs categorize the patterns used.

Data is analyzed using the qualitative data analysis methods in Miles et al. (2014). Following data collection, the raw field notes and direct recordings were converted into write-ups and transcribed into text. This process requires careful reading and repeatedly playing back the voice recorder before typing the data directly for an accurate, straightforward summary. It also involved stimulation to remember the ideas and context when the information was spoken or explained. By carefully reviewing the data, the typed data is condensed and simplified, then ready to be displayed and analyzed. The first coding cycle involved analyzing and interpreting the data's meaning using the assigned labels. The labels of short phrases assign codes to information that participants repeatedly convey and to information that implies effort or work that occurs within the

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dynamic of time. The total number of order codes was 1, used to derive 277 explanations from interview transcripts and documents.

The categorization of data represents the second cycle of data analysis, in which patterns are generated by sorting the data into coded segments, with similar first-order codes grouped into broader categories; the display of these coded segments will suggest important concepts. Using the table of codes and patterns created in this study, the analysis continues by synthesizing to build extended narratives based on the data's reasoning process. At this step, analytic memos are developed alongside the research phenomena, the relevant existing theories, and the study's final report. The overall coding process has addressed the procedures for segmenting and classifying text to form explanations and inclusive themes in the data, as suggested by Creswell (2018).

The last step in data analysis is data drawing to identify major patterns and themes associated with a set of statements and to reflect the findings. This includes declaring a summative synthesis statement supported by data. The above analysis methods have supported this research by providing validity for the findings, offering descriptions and understandings that address the processes and results across several cases, and clarifying how their local conditions qualify them. Triangulation was achieved through multiple data sources and methods, including member checking, in which interpreted findings and research results are returned to participants. The triangulation strengthened the credibility of the findings by providing a comprehensive understanding of organizational operations, processes, and routines (Yin, 2018). Data source triangulation was conducted with an inter-rater reliability check. The participants were from different schools in several cities, which measures how consistent participants' views are on the same issues. The study then compared the interview data with data from other sources through participation in several educational seminars and conferences that also discussed school management and enrollment decline, to compare perspectives on the same phenomenon.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With the insights and themes that emerged from the data, this study will discuss the research findings, starting with an analysis of interview results that provide a diagnostic view of the school's current operational and workflow efficiency. The study will then map the actual state of internal operations and business processes during stagnation and decline, and, with that, also explain the transformation and showcase successes for some schools.

Following the above data analysis and through further analytical work following the Gioia Methodology (Gioia et al., 2013), this study added below Table 1. a data structure table which identified five aggregate dimensions depicting micro-level activities that fuel capability-driven organizations and its application: Decision making that stop financial bleeding, develop differentiation advantage, activate entrepreneurial agency for seizing opportunities, changing work culture, and escaping unfavorable path. These micro-actions collectively aggregate into the firm's core competencies, demonstrating that a capability-driven organization relies directly on a results-oriented path that empowers individuals to sense, seize, and reconfigure operational processes toward competitive advantage and sustainable competitive advantage.

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Table 1. Data Structure of the five aggregate dimensions

First-order codes	Second-order themes	Aggregate concepts
"The biggest problem is our finance, but behind that there is a leadership problem, which is why we treat every issue the same way" "The most influential root of the problem is the school management itself" "The principal must have two competencies in both managerial and administrative matters"	Managerial skills and leaders' choices	Decision-making drive to lower the costs and stop the financial bleeding
"Each school is developed based on its own unique characteristics" "Different problems and contexts require different strategies, and one cannot copy one strategy for another school" "Why does this school have special privileges but no outstanding programs?" "There really needs to be a special program to attract students, and those who want to go there will be willing to pay the price"	Need a unique value proposition to survive and bounce back	Differentiation advantages among schools with context-based approaches
"So the number of students may remain, but the rate continues to increase so that later there will be a benchmark that students will be used to" "With the new position, the Japanese language tuition fees have doubled, and the development fees have increased by 10%. If it is not reformed, it will be difficult to increase the price" "Creating a special program to seize opportunities, we cannot just say our school is good, it has to be truly different, we cannot just duplicate it"	Seizing and setting an upgraded value proposition and increasing the price	Entrepreneurial agency for seizing opportunities
"I see that our people have not yet taken quick action. When instructions are given, they still delay because they wait up to 2 weeks before carrying them out. These factors are the cause of failure" "We should be more frank now, the culture of reluctance and hesitation should be removed and replaced with honesty, it is okay to assess ourselves and assess others"	Actionable work culture with appraisal and improved competency	Work culture shift from hesitation and reluctance to evaluation and accountability
"This is the culture now, the special service has become a habit, if you do not do it, it is impossible because it is already part of the achievement culture and is formed in the school environment" "We hold technical guidance with homeroom teachers and vice principals to implement wholeness ministry" "We give students who have problems at KBM 3x treatment with 3 layers each, beginning with homeroom and subject teachers" "We have implemented multicultural, interreligious, inclusive vocational schools, and have an international class"	Transforming the strategy, leaving a setback situation, into actionable initiatives on a new path	Wholeness educational ministry with flexible options for each need-based student

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School as a Capability-Driven Organization

The results explain that schools with capability-driven strategy development develop themselves around what they do best first, and then around what their rapid market changes tell them. They deploy different strategies, developed proactively rather than reactively. The school builds its strategy around core strengths rather than products or programs, with an integrated mix of people, processes, knowledge, and tools that customers (students, parents, and community) value. Instead of every school operating the same program, the institution exists to feed and support these schools with three core capabilities: teaching (programs), student-focused (empathy), and learning process (solution), in the context of each school's strengths and differences.

These activities align with capability-driven, where the need for organizations to operate in volatile environments is handled by nominating an approach that integrates organizational development with the application of knowledge, technology, and tools like information system development, taking into account changes in the contextual needs of the solution for customers (Bērziša et al., 2015). While organizational frameworks are typically where capabilities are thought to reside (Felin et al., 2015), the empirical findings unpacked the organization, showing who runs the operations and processes, and the sets of knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics employed by the institution.

The interview revealed that the manager role had become challenging due to a shortage of human capital. This situation led to a dysfunctional organizational structure, structural inertia, and an absence of operational direction for workplace excellence, resulting in a culture of no consequences for poor results that prevented schools from operating at full capacity for innovation and seizing opportunities. The schools remained unaware of actual threats while remaining overly reliant on outdated routines and resources. Some schools shaped by a performative perspective eventually adopted an entrepreneurial leadership approach grounded in microfoundations and integrated their strategic plans with daily processes to sustain them.

As Gupta et al. (2024) discussed in their leadership support, some schools with leadership that adapts to market dynamics and supports strategic change and that are given operational autonomy provide sufficient conditions for fine-tuning operations. Here, the Dynamic Capabilities role is identified, which enabled schools to be flexible and adaptive to change (Takahashi et al., 2017; Guererro & Menter, 2024). When actors voiced concerns about schools' alignment with their changing environment, their voices served as a means of improvement, leading to action toward correction and sustainability goals (Engelmann, 2024). The patterned activities resulting from new routines and learning processes are prone to self-reinforcing and eventually become path-dependent over time (Keller et al., 2022).

The participant responses are synthesized into distinct operational categories, which are subsequently elevated into primary themes focused on operational abilities, step-by-step processes, and the role of rigid path dependencies that initially resist operational changes but then transform through dynamic alignment. The successful transformation schools implemented operational categories after suffering setbacks. In contrast, the same operational categories were not identified at the other two schools, which continue to struggle with a managerial emphasis on cost control, with programs relatively imitable, and with vision and values serving as the basis for policies but focusing more on boundaries than on new directions and possibilities.

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Table 2 below is the expansion table of operational categories and processes, conceptual categories that emerged from the data, and the degree to which those systems and connected tasks shaped different path dependencies in six of the eight schools studied in this research. The table also shows a cross-case summary: at the two schools studied (School G and H), some operational categories were present, while others were partially present or absent. The partially present situation refers to operational categories that occasionally disengage after experiencing decline, or that have just appeared in the immediate past and still require effort to continue improving. In contrast, the absent situation refers to operational categories that were unaccounted for.

Table 2. Operational and Process Conceptual Categories from six schools

No.	Operational Categories	Processes	Path Dependencies
1	Decision-making to lower the costs and stop the financial bleeding	Schools that are less or no longer competitive are closed to save costs and stop the financial burden	Past work that creates the school's ability to transform, exploiting how inertia is disrupted, once a setback becomes more resilient
2	Execute differentiation advantage among schools with context-based	Does a unique job that no one else does, segmenting students based on needs rather than cost-based	Become the preceding steps in this new route that induce further movement (more unique programs) in the same direction
3	Activate some degree of entrepreneurial agency for seizing opportunities	Increase attractiveness for international and special programs with various competition contents	Become path-dependent over time, thus allowing markets to be more enduring and connected to the present, and leading paths
4	Change the work culture of hesitation and reluctance to evaluation-based	Apply strengths-based appraisal to improve managerial skills and teachers' competency	Path shaping that explains educational reform with performance achievement indicators that bring high-level routines to dynamic capability
5	Scanning and new path dependencies with leaders create new paths	Introduce a holistic educational ministry with flexible options for each need-based student	Create a path with self-reinforcing for competitive advantage to minimize cost and better satisfy customer segment needs

Table 2.1. Operational and Process Conceptual Categories from six schools

Operational Categories	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Decision making	Present √	Present √	Present √	Present √	Present √	Present √	Partially Present ×	Partially Present ×
Differentiation advantage	Present √	Present √	Present √	Present √	Present √	Present √	Present √	Partially Present ×
Entrepreneurial agency	Present √	Present √	Present √	Present √	Present √	Present √	Absent ×	Absent ×
Work culture change	Present √	Present √	Present √	Present √	Partially Present ×	Partially Present ×	Partially Present ×	Partially Present ×
New path creation	Present √	Present √	Present √	Present √	Present √	Present √	Absent ×	Absent ×

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The Application of Microfoundations

Participants from six schools indicated that the five broad operational scopes, along with their specific processes, had helped them achieve a new competitive advantage. Specifically, the data highlights distinct concepts that aggregate into primary themes regarding how schools leverage their operational and process capabilities to adapt and transform. The school leadership restructured processes to get work done in line with the new strategic goals. It introduced reconfiguration and resource replacement to optimize educational delivery and deliberately dismantle legacy routines and path dependencies. Below are the applications of microfoundations in five conceptual categories:

Managerial Operations With Decision Making that Dictates Ability to Transform

With high-level routines managing daily operations, dynamic capabilities rely on human actions in the form of human capital resources that make economic decisionsdecisions (Coleman et al., 2013) and on the allotted role of resource orchestration (Freeman et al., 2021). This role becomes clear when faced with the church's long history of relationships with religious schools, which is not straightforward to navigate. Especially when managers decide to close some units that are no longer competitive to reduce the financial burden and avoid further burdening the overall expense, causing other schools that are still good to be affected due to a lack of financial capacity, in this situation, the hurdle to close a school is hindered due to regardless its condition, a school is perceived as carrying divine mission for education therefor should not be closed.

Closing schools that are no longer profitable or that non-profit organizations see as surplus operations was the only viable option to stop the financial bleeding. By sacrificing a particular losing unit or location, the school freed up the crucial financial assets needed to clear value chain backlogs and to invest innovatively in the survival of other healthy schools. As outlined by Mong et al. (2021), performance improvement needs to address the organization's overall performance and the broader system's performance towards performance-driven competence. Microfoundations indicate that the ability to act by adapting and integrating existing resources and capabilities in a timely and flexible manner is a condition for achieving competitive advantage (Rashid & Ratten, 2021; Elistia et al., 2024).

The application of microfoundations to lower costs by closing non-performing units occurred through processes that dynamically shift strategic intent and contextual factors to support the new strategy (Frogeri et al., 2022). One participant expressed this core microfoundations of decision making when they have to convince the church leaders and presented the new strategic goals:

> *We must be brave and take steps to save the school as a whole*; *otherwise, the deficit will only get bigger, and other school units will be affected* as well.
>
> While other participants added:
>
> *The church eventually took some over to manage rather than close*, *even though, in the end, these schools were also unable to compete*.

Project-Based Operations That Execute Differentiation Advantage

In transforming the schools, changes are made to learning and development operations, starting with the principal and working down to the teachers. The. The principal's duties are clarified to foster community trust in the school, and teachers' skills and competencies are improved. By emphasizing its unique resources, the school introduced project after project with a defined scope, timeline, and objective, rather than

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being repetitive, like the established interreligious learning module, and more focused on academic discipline than on dogmatic study, as in other religious schools. The school leveraged different strategies, including an AI survey that found that Mandarin language skills were not popular; rather, Japanese language skills attracted the interest of many prospective students. This was due to the popularity of Japanese anime films, so the school then introduced a concentration in Japanese language skills, with one native speaker as a tutor, and collaborated with one institution in Japan to place high school students in internships. One participantparticipant's related project-based operations are as follows: “Each school is developed based on its own unique characteristics, different problems and contexts require different strategies and cannot copy one strategy for another school."

Other schools implement fun learning as a creative, inspirational school, where students receive special attention to conduct research whose results can be useful for the community, such as creating a simple vacuum cleaner. Others operate inclusive schools as a differentiation. Students from various backgrounds, regardless of their intellectual, social, or linguistic backgrounds, such as those with intellectual disability, slow learning, or autism, are accepted and educated together in the same class with entrepreneurial learning, except for those with visual disabilities or quadriplegia due to limited facilities and infrastructure.

Context-based strategic planning was another distinguishing feature of more sustainable schools. Rather than adopting generic development plans, these schools tailored their strategies to local conditions, including looking at demographic trends, community expectations and feedback, and competitive landscapes. Strategic planning documents emphasized realistic goal setting, phased program development, and continuous evaluation. One participant explained: “We stopped copying models from other schools and started focusing on what our community actually needs”.

With these unique features, the school can compete as the only school to implement segmentation that meets user needs. The capabilities to assemble, integrate, and manage bundles of resources have favored innovation and change, making schools more competitive (Teece, 2007; Maritan & Peteraf, 2011; Hossain et al., 2020). These operations have created entry barriers, as new entrant schools or other competitor schools need time to develop their capabilities in specific processes, routines, and community trust. At the same time, the collaborative capabilities demonstrated by the transformed schools also contributed to their sustainability (Gupta et al., 2024).

Boundary-Breaking Operations That Activated Entrepreneurial Agency

School principals were given autonomy to disrupt routines, including replacing existing resources, engaging with partners and other stakeholders, and providing feedback mechanisms to execute the strategic plan. Every principal, rather than just being responsible for the academic role, must develop and run a sustainable program as a legacy success when they are no longer in that post, in the form of a specific activity, event, or institutionalized lineup that is self-sustaining. This innovation emerges from entrepreneurial behavior (Hossain et al., 2020). It proves that the management is running the school effectively, for example, by running an International or National Science Competition program with higher study fees that attracts many applicants, thereby requiring the school to expand its capacity.

Thinking and acting entrepreneurially is not the nature of past operations; there is reluctance and worry that if schools increase tuition fees, new student admissions will

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decline further. Lack of confidence also plays a role in inhibiting changes to improve the situation, such as the feeling of pity that leads to dismissing less competent human resources due to the sunk cost fallacy, legal risks, and termination expenses. Then the feeling of being unable to run academic and skills programs that are match expectation and perceive equivalent to the new price of study fees, and also with anxiety that this change will replace all processes that have been running along the time and are considered quite good, such as teachers who have to develop themselves to study further, the joining of new teachers, and partnering with other third parties to run a particular new program.

Boundary-breaking operations in a capability-driven organization not only specify the dismantling of rigid, traditional norms but also define new boundary conditions that can be contributed by management achievement (Ariefiantoro et al., 2026). The capacity of school principals, together with teachers, was pushed up against organizational limits to creatively remobilize resources and translate transformative ideas into active, strategic value creation through the intentional capacity for entrepreneurial agency. Hence, unpacking the micro-foundational mechanisms through which entrepreneurial agency is transformed into performance outcomes (Ayoub & Sopuru, 2026) also highlights the importance of understanding boundary conditions that lead to new scope.

The secondary school segmentation was pushed toward each level of school that must be a feeder for the next level and with engaging stakeholders, senior high has been able to map out student admission flow from all junior high within the schools' system and from serviceable available market, with 90% of the capacity being filled by the targeted junior high (so with the case of elementary to junior high) and the rest was fulfilled from other schools, with numbers of admitted student exceeding the set target.

The experience shows that dynamic and process-oriented capabilities directly enhance business success (Ariefiantoro et al., 2026), while lower-level operational capabilities emerge when teams and individuals apply their collective skills to blend and repurpose assets, driving the company beyond its old boundaries toward its core objectives (Nayernia, 2026).

One participant stated: "Our leaders provide direction and boundaries, and schools translate them; schools must understand their roadmap, both when planning and in implementing the approved vision and mission".

Furthermore, one manager participant added: "I have changed my mind from previously a social mission-oriented, I had to move to a self-sufficient school, so we have to be bold in setting prices, and those who want to go to a school with excellent programs must be prepared to pay."

Transformational Operations That Altered The Work Culture

Organizational decline is frequently linked to a school's inability to adapt its management and administrative systems. Schools that fail to transform often rely on informal or fragmented management practices with unclear role distribution. The interview revealed a focus on day-to-day operational issues, but the lack of adaptive capacity led to delayed responses or no action in response to enrollment decline.

One participant expressed: "I see that our people have not yet taken quick action. When instructions are given, they still delay, because they have waited a long time they wait up to 2 weeks, before doing it. These factors are the cause of failure".

The culture is shaped by past work practices, with a hard-line stance toward assessing observable behaviors, and it becomes an emotional embarrassment to give

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honest, critical feedback, including pushing to complete routine jobs and tasks without waiting until the last minute. The transformational operations pushed back and altered the work culture to professional operations, with process optimization and productivity, shifting from hesitancy to a results-oriented path. When daily habits evolved into shared behaviors, traditions, and unspoken rules, individuals naturally repeat actions, making the routine a seamless reflection of their values, unaware that normalizing the way things are done is eroding the competitive advantage. Peter Drucker's famous adage, "culture eats strategy for breakfast," holds that a brilliant plan is useless without the right team to execute it. A. A company's internal culture directly shapes employee behavior, turning strategic goals from mere paper concepts into real-world outcomes (Dodgson, 2021). Realizing this, the schools conducted assessments; some applied strength-based appraisal, and some stimulated learning and development with appreciation. When assessment is preceded by training and development, its transition reinforces a result-oriented path.

One participant conveyed: “We should be more frank now, the culture of reluctance and hesitation should be removed and replaced with honesty, it is okay to assess ourselves and assess others”.

The schools that were stuck in transformation faced what was perceived asperceived as relevant and right in the past, but had not changed due to a culture of reluctance and hesitation. There is a feeling that past processes and routines are still relevant and people are quite satisfied with what has been going on, treating it as the way things are done and carrying out operations as usual without taking any anticipatory measures. Organizational success is driven by individuals who champion a progressive culture, actively implement new technologies, and lead innovative initiatives (Palmié et al., 2023).

Strategic Change Operations With Escaping Unfavorable Path

Organizations fail not from mediocrity or outright bad decisions, but because they cling to historically successful strategies (Pfajfar et al., 2024). Strategic change operations have shaped a new path and boundaries through wholeness ministry, requiring many new activities and processes. This is a comprehensive way of caring, if there are problems in the teaching and learning process, students will receive 3x handling in 3 stages, involving; subject and homeroom teacher, subject coordinator, vice principal academic, principal, schools' chaplain and counsellor, to student affairs unit, and even engaging with cooperation and industrial relation where necessary, as a wholeness strategy designed to develop well-rounded graduates equipped with strong academic foundations, high moral integrity, digital fluency, and a deep commitment to environmental sustainability.

As one participant expressed: “We held technical guidance with homeroom teachers and vice-principals to implement wholeness ministry, which is not just a symbol but becomes actualization that students and parents see our seriousness in teaching and managing the school."

The vocational school introduced Triple-Track, a model that equips graduates to join the workforce, launch their own businesses, or pursue higher education. Schools conducted strategic change operations aimed at disrupting current behaviors that had led to an unfavorable path and shifting away from existing routines. Research has shown that past decisions affect future policy outcomes, making it difficult to adjust over time (Choi, 2022). The key to sustainable growth is the ability of the policy actors to combine, consolidate, and reconfigure assets and organizational structures that continually evolve

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in response to changing market and technological opportunities. Reconfiguration is necessary to maintain schools' evolutionary health, which may require a break from unfavorable path dependencies. Successful reconfiguration will generate new routines that transcend rigid resource allocations and outdated practices (Engelmann, 2024) toward new efficiencies.

Routines help maintain continuity only until environmental factors shift. When shifts occur, companies need to change their routines. These different routines are typically costly, such as the wholeness program, which approaches education in care settings to respond when the teaching and learning process goes wrong beyond conventional pastoral counseling. The counseling. The activities might increase schools' costs, but in the long run, they can improve financial performance. The schools see path dependencies as providing stability, but acquiring new knowledge and technologies (Mushangai, 2023), as well as overcoming past decision-making inertia and contextual features, are far more critical than stability itself. Leadership could create a new path by making considerable adjustments. The actions of the schools reflect the significance of policy actors' agency, which has been integrated into path-dependent theory to explain how organizations can escape unfavorable paths (Choi, 2022). The figure below synthesizes the findings and discussion from this study. It proposes a strategic model to explain how applying microfoundations in capability-driven schools enables successful, results-oriented path-following learning despite unfavorable path dependencies.

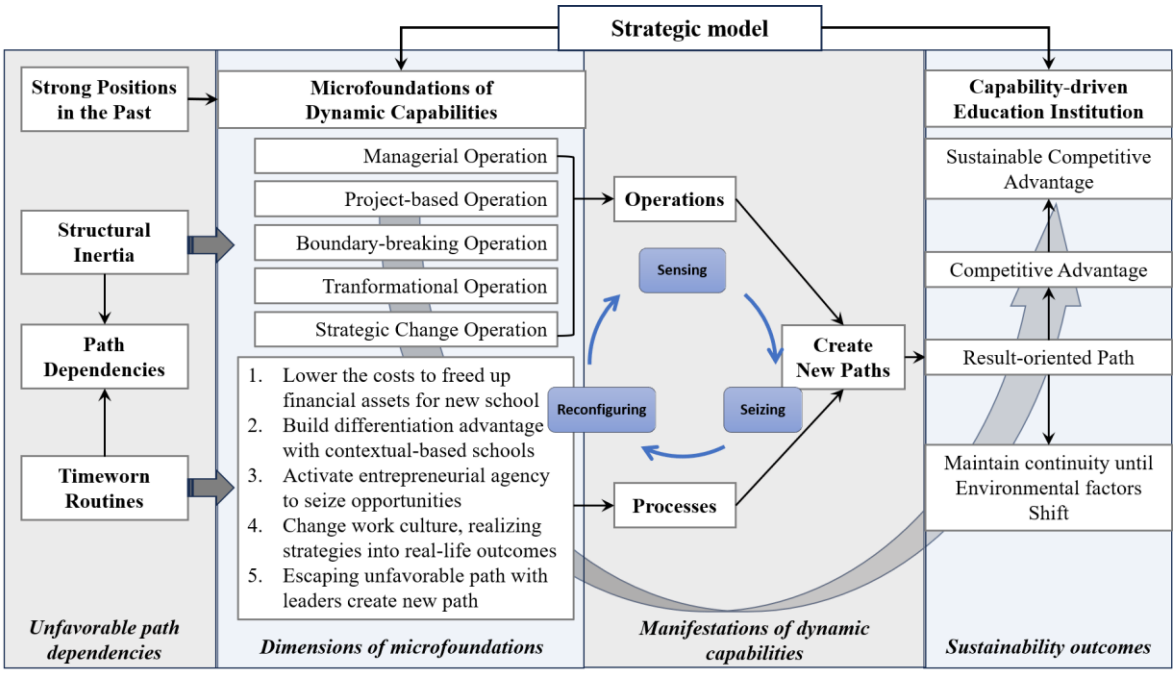

Figure 1. Strategic Model of Microfoundations in an Educational Institution

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that Dynamic Capabilities provide schools with a sustainable competitive advantage by allowing microfoundations to reinvent and execute their operations and processes. The threefold activities of operating, administering, and governing are broken down into three primary processes: sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring. The assumption of entrepreneurial agency downplays the role of

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routinization in sensing and seizing opportunities and threats. Once schools sensed a new opportunity, they addressed it through various processes to create new value for customers. Reconfiguration is taken as a response to threats and to escape unfavorable path dependencies.

The proposed strategic model advances understanding of the current Dynamic Capability Theory by showing that moving an organization away from unfavorable path dependencies requires a deliberate transition toward application microfoundations—the distinct skills, procedures, and work routines that comprise dynamic capabilities. By purposefully sensing opportunities, seizing resources, and reconfiguring organizational structures and resources, these dynamic capabilities break rigid forces. This continuous strategic renewal drives long-term sustainability and successfully aligns operations with economic outcomes.

The study offers an important theoretical contribution by providing empirical validation of Dynamic Capability Theory in an educational context. The results demonstrate how microfoundations perspectives interact and operate, involving cognitive and managerial in patterned activity resulting from routine and learning processes that eventually become path-dependent (Keller et al., 2022). Also emphasizes the role of resources, in the form of human capital, with its policy actors, and Dynamic Capabilities, which help schools recover from shock or exit routes (Rao et al., 2024). Either schools can bounce back from decline or have to stop operations. The education industry needs to employ and retain leaders who adapt to challenges and support strategic change. This creates sufficient conditions for schools' going concern as the intangible resources, which are human beings, are economic, and will make a larger contribution to schools' performance than that of tangible resources.

This study has limitations: the results still need to be tested with different research designs, namely quantitative or mixed-methods designs, and further studies can collect and analyze datasets on a larger scale to improve the generalizability of the findings. This study does not specifically address financial performance, institutional support for financial resources, resource availability and allocation, and reconfiguration of financial resources. Further studies examining financial resources are needed to yield more applicable findings, particularly regarding funding constraints in schools that have already closed some of their schools. Other factors that still require further research include schools' reputations and branding.

Based on the findings, the study recommends that secondary schools' management, which is responsible for performance, utilize the concepts in strategic management, especially the microfoundations of operations, processes, and path dependencies, so that it can provide actionable frameworks that explain why transformation could not take place and how to transform the schools, enhancing their sustainability, also saving time by preventing blind trial-and-error effort. By understanding underlying principles, school leaders can diagnose problems, predict outcomes, and adapt to new situations confidently.

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