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THE CONJUNCTURAL HYBRIDIZATION THEORY (CHT): A CONFIGURATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR SME COMPETITIVENESS AND RESILIENCE IN EMERGING ECONOMIES: THE CASE OF KINSHASA, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

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Abstract: In emerging economies, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face challenges such as institutional unpredictability, limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and intense competitive pressure. This research introduces the Conjunctural Hybridization Theory (CHT), a framework that elucidates how SMEs integrate scattered resources, adaptive skills, partnerships, and institutional frameworks to maintain their competitiveness and resilience. The theory is based on three core principles: Synsome, which involves the organization of scattered resources, capabilities, opportunities, and networks; Adaptive Institutional Reconfiguration (AIR), focusing on the flexible management of both formal and informal institutional structures; and configurational equifinality, indicating that various combinations can lead to similar results. By employing fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) on a sample of 84 SMEs in Kinshasa, the study uncovers several configurations linked to elevated levels of competitiveness and resilience. The results affirm the concepts of conjunctural causation, equifinality, and causal asymmetry. Synsome appears consistently across all configurations marked by high competitiveness and most pathways to resilience, while AIR, along with networks, innovation, and entrepreneurial experience, contributes in complementary ways. Moreover, competitiveness and resilience are found to be interconnected yet distinct outcomes. Consequently, the CHT emphasizes the importance of resource coordination over mere resource ownership, highlighting the need for institutional adaptation and context-specific combinations of conditions.

Keywords: Conjunctural Hybridization Theory; SME competitiveness; organizational resilience; fsQCA; Synsome; Adaptive Institutional Reconfiguration; equifinality; causal asymmetry; emerging economies; Democratic Republic of the Congo.

LA THÉORIE DE L'HYBRIDATION CONJONCTURELLE (THC) : UN CADRE CONFIGURATIONNEL POUR LA COMPÉTITIVITÉ ET LA RÉSILIENCE DES PME DANS LES ÉCONOMIES ÉMERGENTES – LE CAS DE KINSHASA, RÉPUBLIQUE DÉMOCRATIQUE DU CONGO

Résumé : Dans les économies émergentes, les petites et moyennes entreprises (PME) sont confrontées à des défis tels que l'imprévisibilité institutionnelle, la limitation des ressources, l'insuffisance des infrastructures et une pression concurrentielle intense. Cette recherche présente la Théorie de l'hybridation conjoncturelle (THC), un cadre analytique expliquant comment les PME intègrent des ressources dispersées, des compétences adaptatives, des partenariats et des cadres institutionnels pour préserver leur compétitivité et leur résilience. La théorie repose sur trois principes fondamentaux : le « Synsome », qui implique l'organisation de ressources, de capacités, d'opportunités et de réseaux dispersés ; la Reconfiguration institutionnelle adaptative (RIA), axée sur la gestion flexible des structures institutionnelles formelles et informelles ; et l'équifinalité configurationnelle, indiquant que diverses combinaisons peuvent conduire à des résultats similaires. En appliquant l'analyse comparative qualitative par ensembles flous (fsQCA) à un échantillon de 84 PME à Kinshasa, l'étude met en évidence plusieurs configurations associées à des niveaux élevés de compétitivité et de résilience. Les résultats confirment les concepts de causalité conjoncturelle, d'équifinalité et d'asymétrie causale. Le Synsome apparaît systématiquement dans toutes les configurations caractérisées par une forte compétitivité ainsi que dans la plupart des trajectoires menant à la résilience, tandis que la RIA, combinée aux réseaux, à l'innovation et à l'expérience entrepreneuriale, y contribue de manière complémentaire. Par ailleurs, l'étude révèle que la compétitivité et la résilience sont des résultats interconnectés mais distincts. En conséquence, la THC souligne l'importance de la coordination des ressources par rapport à leur simple détention, mettant en exergue la nécessité d'une adaptation institutionnelle et de combinaisons de conditions spécifiques au contexte.

Mots-clés : Théorie de l'hybridation conjoncturelle ; compétitivité des PME ; résilience organisationnelle ; fsQCA ; Synsome ; Reconfiguration institutionnelle adaptative ; équifinalité ; asymétrie causale ; économies émergentes ; République démocratique du Congo.

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Introduction

SMEs contribute in a substantial way to employment, innovation, and economic development. Their performance in developing economies, though, tends to be shaped by institutional uncertainty, insufficient resources, deficient infrastructure, and competitive pressure (Bruton et al., 2021; Simba et al., 2021). Performance hinges not merely on what firms hold in their possession; it depends on how available resources get mobilized, combined, and adapted (Teece, 2007). Resilience matters just as much, since firms must absorb disruptions without losing operational continuity (Duchek, 2020). Several perspectives offer complementary explanations. The Resource-Based View (RBV) foregrounds valuable and difficult-to-imitate resources (Barney, 1991). Dynamic capabilities, for their part, account for resource renewal and

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reconfiguration (Teece, 2007), while institutional theory points to formal and informal rules (North, 1990; Greenwood et al., 2011). Configurational research demonstrates something else again: that different combinations of conditions can produce similar outcomes (Fiss, 2011; Misangyi et al., 2017). None of these perspectives, however, has been sufficiently woven together for SMEs operating in contexts where formal institutional support remains incomplete and resources stay tightly constrained (a gap that matters especially in fragile markets). This study addresses that gap. It draws on the Conjunctural Hybridization Theory, a framework that treats competitiveness and resilience as outcomes dependent on configuration, produced through the interaction of resource coordination, adaptive institutional responses, relational instruments, and organizational capabilities; the framework is tested through fsQCA, relying on data collected from 84 SMEs in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Three contributions follow. First, resource-based, dynamic-capability, institutional, and configurational perspectives get integrated into a single analytical lens. Second, Synsome and AIR are conceptualized as mechanisms through which heterogeneous resources and institutional arrangements become jointly actionable, at least in the cases examined here. Third, and this is arguably the most striking point, empirical evidence shows that multiple pathways can lead toward favorable outcomes even within a structurally constrained African context.

1. Theoretical background

Four perspectives together underpin the theoretical foundation of the Conjunctural Hybridization Theory. RBV accounts for why competitive advantage tends to rest on resources that are valuable, rare, hard to imitate, and non-substitutable (Barney, 1991). Dynamic capabilities theory builds on that logic; it adds an emphasis on sensing, seizing, learning, and reconfiguring within shifting environments (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Teece, 2007). Institutional theory clarifies something else entirely: how organizational action is shaped by both formal rules and informal norms, especially where institutional arrangements remain incomplete or uncertain (North, 1990; Greenwood et al., 2011). Configurational theory, finally, foregrounds conjunctural causation, equifinality, and causal asymmetry; attention shifts away from isolated net effects (Ragin, 2008; Fiss, 2011; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). Applied to SMEs operating in evolving economies, these perspectives point toward a different source of advantage. It is not so much the accumulation of resources that matters as the way coordination and recombination are handled, in practice, day to day. Informal networks and adaptive practices can help firms work around institutional incompleteness. They should not, however, be mistaken for substitutes for well-functioning formal institutions (Meyer et al., 2009; Bruton et al., 2021). Competitiveness and resilience, though related, are not the same thing. Competitiveness has to do with a firm's capacity to hold a favorable market position; resilience concerns something else, namely the ability to absorb disruption, adapt to it, and recover afterward (Ponomarov & Holcomb, 2009; Duchek, 2020). A configurational approach makes it possible, precisely because of this distinction, to examine separately the conditions that support each outcome.

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Read together, these perspectives indicate that SME competitiveness and resilience in emerging economies emerge from the particular way resources, capabilities, institutional arrangements, and relationships are combined and reconfigured within context (rather than from any single universal formula). The CHT accordingly takes a configurational stance in which different combinations of conditions can lead to similar outcomes. The analysis, on that basis, turns next to how such combinations actually operate among SMEs in Kinshasa.

2. Conjunctural Hybridization Theory (CHT)

The Conjunctural Hebraization Theory proposes that SME competitiveness and resilience emerge from the conjunctural interaction of heterogeneous organizational and institutional conditions. Its architecture rests on three principles. Synsome. Synsome is the capacity to synchronize and coordinate dispersed resources, capabilities, opportunities, and networks into a coherent response. It shifts the analytical focus from resource possession to resource orchestration. Adaptive Institutional Reconfiguration (AIR). AIR refers to the capacity to adjust organizational routines, stakeholder relationships, compliance practices, and other interactions with formal and informal institutional arrangements in response to uncertainty. It describes adaptation to institutional incompleteness rather than a replacement of formal institutions. Configurational equifinality. Different combinations of conditions may lead to similar outcomes. The CHT therefore rejects a single universal route to competitiveness or resilience.

Together, these principles imply four forms of causal complexity: outcomes arise from combinations of conditions; several mechanisms may operate simultaneously; high and low outcomes may follow different causal logics; and alternative configurations may produce comparable outcomes.

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Table 1. The CHT conceptual architecture

Component	Core meaning	Function
Strategic resources	Financial, human, technological, informational and relational assets	Provide the resource base
Adaptive capabilities	Sensing, learning, reconfiguring and innovating	Transform available resources
Synsome	Coordination of dispersed resources, capabilities, opportunities and networks	Creates organizational coherence
AIR	Adaptive combination of formal and informal institutional mechanisms	Manages institutional uncertainty
Equifinality	Multiple combinations leading to similar outcomes	Explains alternative pathways
Outcomes	Competitiveness and resilience	Capture favorable SME performance

Source: *Author's conceptual synthesis based on Barney (1991), Eisenhardt and Martin (2000), Teece (2007), North (1990), Ragin (2008), and Fiss (2011).*

3. Research Propositions

Because the CHT is configurational, its propositions are formulated in set-theoretic terms rather than as simple linear effects.

1. **P1**: High Synsome is associated with high SME competitiveness and resilience under structural constraint.
2. **P2**: High AIR contributes to favorable SME outcomes under institutional uncertainty, but its role is expected to vary across configurations.
3. **P3**: Configurations combining Synsome, AIR, and complementary organizational conditions are sufficient for high competitiveness and/or resilience.
4. **P4**: Competitiveness and resilience emerge through conjunctural, context-dependent configurations whose composition varies across SMEs.

5. Methodology

The current study uses a neo-configurational design based on fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA), appropriate for identifying combinations of conditions associated with an outcome rather than estimating isolated net effects (Ragin, 2008; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). The empirical setting is Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, with primary attention to SMEs operating in distribution and retail. Eligible firms had operated for at least three years. After screening, 84 valid observations were retained. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire from SME owners or senior managers. The principal fsQCA conditions were Synsome (SYN), Adaptive Institutional Reconfiguration (AIR), Networks (NET), Innovation (INO), and Entrepreneurial Experience (EXP). Competitiveness (COMP) and

Resilience (RES) were treated as outcomes. Items were measured on five-point Likert scales. Calibration followed the direct method using full-membership, crossover, and full-non-membership anchors. The analysis comprised calibration, necessity analysis, truth-table construction, sufficiency analysis, interpretation of intermediate solutions, low-outcome analysis, and robustness checks. Scale diagnostics reported in the source indicate acceptable internal consistency and convergent validity for SYN, AIR, COMP, and RES. Ragin (2008) et Schneider & Wagemann (2012). The main features of the empirical design are summarized in the following table, including the sample, study setting, respondents, measurement instrument, and analytical approach. These elements provide the basis for assessing the configurations associated with SME competitiveness and resilience. The next subsection presents the main empirical results.

Table 2. Sample and analytical design

Item	Description
Sample	84 SMEs
Location	Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo
Sector	Distribution and retail
Eligibility	At least 3 years of operation
Respondents	SME owners/senior managers
Instrument	Structured questionnaire
Analytical method	fsQCA

Source: *Author's survey data (N = 84 SMEs) and analytical design.*

6. Results

The descriptive results show relatively high reported levels across the principal constructs: SYN (M=4.12, SD=0.71), AIR (M=3.98, SD=0.76), NET (M=4.05, SD=0.68), INO (M=3.67, SD=0.81), EXP (M=3.89, SD=0.74), COMP (M=3.94, SD=0.73), and RES (M=4.01, SD=0.69). These statistics are descriptive and do not establish causal importance.
In the pooled necessity analysis, SYN is the only condition above the specified 0.90 threshold (consistency=0.92; coverage=0.79). AIR is near-necessary (0.89), while NET (0.87), INO (0.81), and EXP (0.79) do not meet the threshold. For high competitiveness, four configurations were identified. SYN is present in all four pathways. The configurations combine SYN with different combinations of AIR, NET, INO, and EXP, demonstrating equifinality. The overall solution has consistency of 0.88 and coverage of 0.71. For high resilience, four configurations were also identified. The first three combine SYN and AIR with different complementary conditions. A fourth pathway achieves high resilience without SYN when AIR, NET, INO, and EXP are jointly present. The overall solution has consistency of 0.89 and coverage of 0.73. Low-outcome analysis provides evidence of causal asymmetry. The configurations associated with low performance are not mirror images of the high-performance pathways; institutional constraints

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combined with absent capabilities can produce unfavorable outcomes. Overall, the results support a configurational interpretation: no single condition operates as a universal recipe, and the contribution of a condition depends on the other conditions with which it is combined.

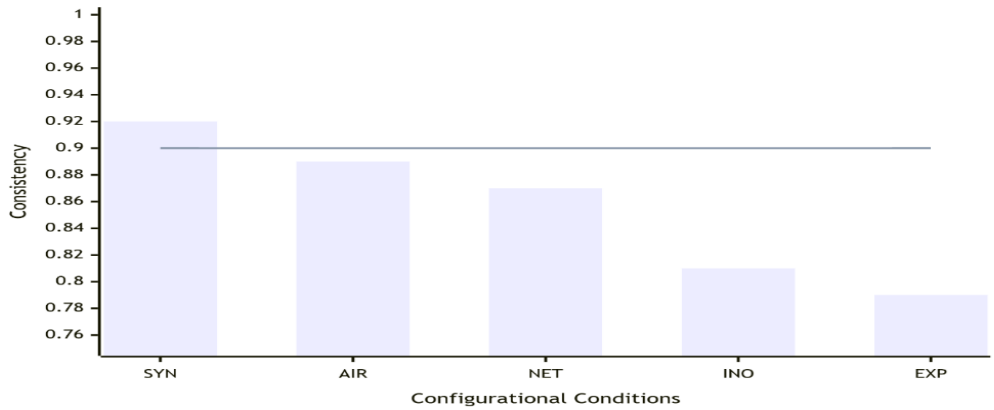
Table 3. High-outcome configurations

Outcome	Configuration	Consistency	Raw coverage
Competitiveness	C1 : SYN*AIR*NET*INO	0.91	0.34
Competitiveness	C2 : SYN*AIR*NET*EXP	0.89	0.28
Competitiveness	C3 : SYN*AIR*INO*EXP	0.88	0.24
Competitiveness	C4 : SYN*NET*INO*EXP	0.86	0.20
Resilience	R1 : SYN*AIR*NET*EXP	0.92	0.31
Resilience	R2 : SYN*AIR*INO*EXP	0.90	0.29
Resilience	R3 : SYN*AIR*NET*INO	0.89	0.27
Resilience	R4 : AIR*NET*INO*EXP	0.85	0.19

Source: *Author, based on the results of the fsQCA analysis (field survey, 2026).*

The figure below provides a visual overview of the main configurations identified by the fsQCA analysis as associated with SME competitiveness and resilience. By comparing their consistency and raw coverage, it highlights how different combinations of conditions can lead to these outcomes, while also illustrating the configurational diversity underlying entrepreneurial performance.

Figure 1. Consistency scores of configurational conditions in the necessity analysis



Source: *Author, based on the fsQCA necessity analysis of field survey data (2026).*

7. Discussion

The findings support the central proposition of the Conjunctural Hebraization Theory: SME competitiveness and resilience in institutionally constrained environments are better understood as configurational achievements than as consequences of isolated resources or capabilities. First, the recurrence of Synsome across all competitiveness pathways and most resilience pathways suggests that coordination is a central mechanism through which dispersed resources become strategically actionable. This extends the RBV by moving from resource possession toward resource orchestration and complements dynamic capabilities by emphasizing how available resources are synchronized around opportunities and constraints. Second, AIR incorporates the institutional environment directly into the explanation of SME adaptation. Its presence in several pathways indicates that firms do not simply absorb institutional pressures; they adjust their organizational and relational interface with those pressures. Such adaptive hybridization should nevertheless be understood as a response to institutional incompleteness, not as a substitute for institutional reform. Third, the different configurations for competitiveness and resilience confirm equifinality while preserving the distinction between the two outcomes. Competitiveness concerns market positioning, whereas resilience concerns continuity and adaptation under disruption. The R4 pathway is particularly informative because it shows that high resilience can emerge without Synsome when AIR, networks, innovation, and experience are jointly present. The theoretical contribution of the Conjunctural Hebraization Theory therefore lies in connecting resource coordination, adaptive institutional response, and configurational causality. Its central question is not simply what resources an SME possesses, but how those resources are synchronized, how the institutional interface is adapted, and which combinations fit particular circumstances.

-Managerial and Policy Implications

For managers, the findings suggest that stronger performance does not necessarily require large resource stocks. SMEs can improve their position by coordinating financial, human, technological, informational, and relational resources more effectively, strengthening information sharing, aligning opportunities with available capabilities, and maintaining adaptive stakeholder relationships. For policymakers, isolated interventions are unlikely to address the complexity of SME constraints. Financial access should be complemented by infrastructure, regulatory simplification, digitalization, managerial development, and business-support ecosystems. Entrepreneurial adaptation can mitigate institutional weaknesses, but it cannot replace effective institutions.

-Limitations and Future Research

The study has four principal limitations. First, the sample is restricted to 84 SMEs in Kinshasa, which limits transferability to other contexts. Second, the cross-sectional design does not show how configurations evolve over time. Third, Synsome and AIR are newly introduced

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constructs and require further validation. Fourth, fsQCA identifies set-theoretic relationships rather than average independent effects. Future research should test the Conjunctural Hebraization Theory with larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, complementary qualitative or quantitative methods, and comparative studies across African and other emerging economies.

Conclusion

This research developed and empirically examined the Conjunctural Hybridization Theory to explain how SMEs achieve competitiveness and resilience under institutional and resource constraints. Evidence from 84 SMEs in Kinshasa shows that favorable outcomes arise through multiple configurations rather than a single causal pathway. Synsome is especially recurrent, while AIR, networks, innovation, and experience assume complementary roles that vary by configuration. The findings support equifinality and causal asymmetry and show that competitiveness and resilience, although related, should not be treated as identical outcomes.

The CHT consequently shifts the analysis from resource possession to the coordination of heterogeneous resources, adaptation of the institutional interface, and context-dependent combination of capabilities. Its contribution remains contextual and requires further empirical validation, but it provides a concise framework for studying SME adaptation in emerging and institutionally constrained economies.

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