Transformational Leadership, Organizational Resilience, and Business Performance in Contexts of Social Uncertainty: A Conceptual Proposal for SMEs in Portugal

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Abstract: Growing social and environmental uncertainty—marked by economic volatility, technological change, skills shortages, institutional pressure, and shifting social expectations—has posed new challenges to companies' ability to maintain performance, adapt, and remain sustainable. In this context, this article presents a conceptual analysis of the role of transformational leadership in building organizational resilience and improving business performance in Portugal. Based on a critical and integrative review of the literature, it is argued that transformational leadership contributes to more adaptive organizational cultures through shared vision, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The proposed model suggests that organizational resilience plays a mediating role, translating leadership into observable capabilities of anticipation, absorption, response, adaptation, and renewal. The article also identifies explanatory mechanisms, such as sensemaking, organizational learning, trust, employee engagement, innovation, and resource reconfiguration, as well as complementary conditions associated with digital capabilities, information quality, management system maturity, and skilled human capital. The study contributes to integrating leadership, resilience, and performance into a conceptual framework applicable to the Portuguese business context.

Keywords: Transformational leadership, Organizational resilience, Dynamic capabilities, Business performance, Social uncertainty, SMEs, Portugal

1. Introduction

Organizations operate in an environment marked by technological acceleration, geopolitical fragmentation, market volatility, skills shortages, demographic changes, and increasing regulatory and social pressure. These conditions require the ability to interpret uncertain signals, make rapid decisions, and maintain sustainable levels of performance. In this context, social uncertainty extends beyond external turbulence, encompassing pressures that affect consumer expectations, talent availability, work arrangements, and the legitimacy of business decisions.

The literature has addressed this scenario through three complementary perspectives: transformational leadership, associated with the creation of vision, mobilization, and commitment during periods of change (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Banks et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2011); organizational resilience, understood as the capacity to anticipate, cope with, recover from, and learn from adverse events (Duchek, 2020; Hillmann & Guenther, 2021; Linnenluecke, 2017; Williams et al., 2017); and dynamic capabilities, which explain how organizations adjust resources, routines, and competencies in response to change (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Teece, 2007; Teece et al., 1997).

Despite these advances, the relationship between transformational leadership, organizational resilience, and business performance remains fragmented. Research does not always clarify the mechanisms through which leadership behaviors are translated into adaptive capacity, nor the role of leadership as a microfoundation of resilience. This gap is particularly relevant in contexts of uncertainty, where performance depends not only on the resources available but also on the ability to interpret, mobilize, and reconfigure them.

This discussion is relevant in Portugal, given the role of SMEs and their exposure to limitations in scale, skills, and digital capabilities. Although Portuguese SMEs recorded a recovery in employment and real value added in 2024, challenges associated with global uncertainty, digital transformation, skills, and productivity persist (European Commission, 2025; OECD, 2026). Understanding how leadership can strengthen organizational resilience is therefore relevant both for research and for business competitiveness.

The aim of this article is to develop a conceptual framework on the influence of transformational leadership on organizational resilience and business performance in contexts of social uncertainty, with particular attention to Portuguese firms. Specifically, it seeks to understand how transformational leadership contributes to organizational resilience, how resilience may mediate the relationship between leadership and performance, and how social and environmental uncertainty influences the relevance of SMEs' adaptive capabilities.

The article makes three main contributions: it integrates transformational leadership, organizational resilience, and dynamic capabilities, treating leadership as a microfoundation of strategic adaptation; it proposes resilience as a mediating mechanism between leadership and performance; and it contextualizes these relationships within Portuguese firms, highlighting the importance of anticipation, learning, innovation, and response capabilities in the face of social, technological, and economic pressures.

2. Methodology

This study follows a conceptual and integrative approach, which is appropriate when the objective is not to estimate immediate empirical effects, but rather to clarify constructs, integrate partially disparate lines of research, and propose theoretical relationships susceptible to future empirical validation. (Snyder, 2019; Paul & Criado, 2020) The choice of an integrative review, rather than a systematic review guided by a protocol such as PRISMA (Tranfield et al., 2003), stems from the objective of synthesizing contributions from different theoretical domains — namely transformational leadership, organizational resilience, dynamic capabilities, environmental uncertainty, and business performance — to develop a synthesis geared toward conceptual construction and the formulation of propositions.

The literature review was conducted in the Scopus and Web of Science databases, in the fields of Business, Management and Accounting, and Social Sciences, using combinations of keywords such as "transformational leadership," "organizational resilience," "business performance," "environmental uncertainty," "social uncertainty," "dynamic capabilities," "organizational learning," "innovation," "digital capabilities," "human capital," and "SMEs." The selection prioritized the conceptual relevance of studies and articles published in journals classified as 3, 4, and 4* in the Chartered Association of Business Schools (ABS) Academic Journal Guide 2024, supplemented by seminal works relevant to the theoretical framework.

Fifteen articles were included for in-depth analysis. The analysis considered the thematic focus, theoretical frameworks, identified gaps and tensions, and the positioning and contribution of each study, resulting in the identification of 45 themes. These were subsequently organized and synthesized according to their relevance to the constructs and relationships under analysis.

The synthesis of the themes allowed us to identify the following as the main areas of convergence: (i) transformational leadership and organizational adaptation; (ii) organizational resilience and dynamic capabilities; (iii) learning, innovation, and resource reconfiguration; (iv) resilience and business performance; (v) social and environmental uncertainty; and (vi) digital capabilities and human capital. The interconnection of these areas made it possible to identify the relevant explanatory mechanisms and contextual conditions, providing the basis for the formulation of the six theoretical propositions and the construction of the conceptual model presented in the following sections.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Transformational Leadership as a Microfoundation of Organizational Adaptation

Transformational leadership seeks to enhance employees' motivation, commitment, and performance through four main dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006). By influencing how employees interpret goals, challenges, and opportunities for change, it becomes particularly relevant in contexts of uncertainty, where ambiguity hinders coordinated action.

The literature associates transformational leadership with individual, team, and organizational performance (Banks et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2011). However, this relationship is not necessarily direct, as it depends on organizational mechanisms and conditions that enable leadership behaviors to be translated into adaptive capacity (Bakker et al., 2023; Vera & Crossan, 2004). This perspective brings transformational leadership closer to the notion of the microfoundations of dynamic capabilities by recognizing the role of leaders in interpreting change, mobilizing resources, and promoting organizational adaptation (Teece, 2007; Teece et al., 1997).

In this sense, transformational leadership can contribute to building organizational resilience, although its effectiveness depends on the organizational and contextual conditions in which it is exercised. The mechanisms through which this relationship develops are further explored in the theoretical propositions presented below.

3.2 Organizational Resilience as a Dynamic Metacapacity

Organizational resilience is no longer understood solely as the ability to recover after a shock, but is currently conceptualized as a process-oriented and strategic capacity to anticipate threats, absorb impacts, respond to adverse events, adapt routines, and transform practices in response to external changes (Duchek, 2020; Hillmann & Guenther, 2021; Linnenluecke, 2017; Williams et al., 2017). From this perspective, resilient organizations go beyond recovery by learning from adversity and developing new capabilities (Conz & Magnani, 2020; Sutcliffe & Vogus, 2003; Mithani, 2020).

Duchek (2020) structures resilience into three stages: anticipation, coping, and adaptation, corresponding to preparation and the interpretation of signals, response during disruption, and subsequent learning and transformation. Resilience thus assumes the nature of a meta-capacity that integrates different organizational resources. This interpretation aligns with the dynamic capabilities perspective, according to which adaptation in volatile environments depends not only on the possession of resources but also on the ability to reconfigure them in response to environmental changes (Barney, 1991; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Teece, 2007; Zahra et al., 2006).

Resilience is also multilevel in nature, depending on individual competencies, trust, leadership, structural flexibility, access to information, external networks, and learning (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011; Stoverink et al., 2020; Su & Junge, 2023; Williams et al., 2017). This dimension is particularly relevant for Portuguese SMEs, which are often characterized by close interpersonal relationships, reliance on tacit knowledge, and decision-making concentrated at the top management level, conditions under which leadership can facilitate or hinder the transformation of external signals into effective organizational responses.

3.3 Social Uncertainty, Environmental Turbulence, and the Specificity of the Portuguese Context

In this article, “social uncertainty” refers to external conditions that make it more difficult to predict behaviors, resources, expectations, and constraints that affect business activity, including economic instability, changes in the labor market, shifts in consumer preferences, geopolitical tensions, technological pressure, demographic aging, and skills shortages. Although the literature frequently uses the concept of environmental uncertainty, the social perspective also considers changes in labor relations, available skills, and societal expectations. Recent transformations in work arrangements illustrate this dimension, highlighting how technological and organizational changes, as well as shifts in employee expectations, may require adaptations in leadership, coordination, and organizational structures (Nunes et al., 2025).

In Portugal, this discussion is particularly relevant given the significant role of SMEs and microenterprises. Despite the recovery recorded in 2024 in employment and real value added among Portuguese SMEs, challenges related to global uncertainty, skills, and productivity persist (European Commission, 2025; OECD, 2026), reinforcing the need for adaptive capabilities, particularly in firms with limited resources.

The digital transition adds another dimension of uncertainty. Although it can improve efficiency, analytical capabilities, market access, and innovation, it requires skills, investment, process changes, and strategic alignment (Matarazzo et al., 2021; Verhoef et al., 2021). In the Portuguese context, challenges persist regarding the adoption of artificial intelligence by companies and the development of digital skills (European Commission, 2025), making leadership and adaptive capabilities relevant in facilitating the integration of digital transformation into organizational routines.

Thus, social and environmental uncertainty constitutes a relevant contextual condition for the relationships between leadership, resilience, and performance. Its influence, however, depends on the intensity of uncertainty and the resources available, potentially increasing the need for adaptive capabilities without guaranteeing their effectiveness.

3.4 Business Performance: Beyond the Financial Perspective

Business performance is a multidimensional construct that encompasses financial, operational, competitive, innovative, and survival dimensions and should not be assessed through a single indicator (Richard et al., 2009). This perspective is particularly relevant in contexts of uncertainty, where the preservation of short-term financial results may coexist with losses in innovation capacity or organizational learning.

In this article, business performance is understood as a multidimensional outcome that includes operational continuity, decision-making quality, efficiency, innovation, market responsiveness, customer satisfaction, talent retention, and economic and financial sustainability. This approach is consistent with the literature on resilience, which considers not only recovery from shocks but also the preservation of critical functions and the capacity for organizational renewal (Garrido-Moreno et al., 2024; Williams et al., 2017).

Whenever possible, its operationalization should combine objective indicators, such as sales growth, profitability, and productivity, with process-based and subjective performance measures, which are particularly relevant in SMEs when comparable financial data are limited. Table 1 summarizes the core constructs considered in the conceptual model.

Table 1: Conceptual overview of the core constructs

Construct	Proposed operational definition	Main dimensions	Key References
Transformational leadership	The ability of leadership to create meaning, commitment, and learning around a shared vision, especially during times of change.	Idealized influence; inspirational motivation; intellectual stimulation; individualized consideration.	Bass (1985); Bass and Riggio (2006); Banks et al. (2016); Wang et al. (2011).
Organizational Resilience	A dynamic meta-capacity that enables an organization to anticipate, absorb, respond to, adapt to, and renew itself in the face of external shocks or changes.	Anticipation; coping; adaptation; learning; transformation.	Duchek (2020); Hillmann and Guenther (2021); Linnenluecke (2017); Williams et al. (2017).
Social and Environmental Uncertainty	The degree of unpredictability in the social, economic, technological, and institutional conditions that influence decisions and performance.	Volatility; ambiguity; skills shortages; market changes; technological pressure.	Milliken (1987); Packard and Clark (2020); OECD (2026); European Commission (2025).
Business performance	A multidimensional outcome that combines financial, operational, competitive, innovative, and organizational continuity indicators.	Productivity; growth; profitability; innovation; market responsiveness; survival.	Richard et al. (2009); Garrido-Moreno et al. (2024); Do et al. (2022).

4. Development of Theoretical Proposals

4.1 Transformational Leadership and Organizational Resilience

The first central relationship in the proposed model links transformational leadership to organizational resilience. In contexts of uncertainty, employees need to interpret ambiguous information, accept change, coordinate responses, and maintain collective energy even under pressure. Transformational leadership can facilitate this process by building a shared vision, reinforcing trust, providing intellectual stimulation, and offering individualized consideration (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006).

The literature suggests that the effects of transformational leadership on organizational adaptation occur through mechanisms such as learning, innovation, engagement, and trust (Bakker et al., 2023; Vera & Crossan, 2004). Transformational behaviors can also reinforce employees' trust and civic-minded behaviors, creating social conditions conducive to collective adaptation (Podsakoff et al., 1990). This relationship aligns transformational leadership with the dynamic capabilities perspective, according to which adaptation requires the ability to interpret changes, mobilize resources, and transform routines (Teece, 2007; Teece et al., 1997).

In the face of unexpected events, leadership also contributes to processes of *sensemaking* and *sensegiving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991)*, helping to build shared meaning and coordinate action. This function becomes particularly relevant in extreme contexts, where leadership helps groups maintain direction and coordinated, y action under pressure (Hannah et al., 2009). Thus, the interplay between transformational leadership, learning mechanisms, and adaptive capacities supports the following proposition:

> ***Proposition 1:*** *Transformational leadership positively influences organizational resilience by reinforcing shared vision, trust, learning, and responsiveness to uncertainty.*

4.2 Learning, Innovation, and Dynamic Capabilities as Explanatory Mechanisms

The relationship between transformational leadership and organizational resilience should not be understood as direct and linear. The effects of leadership translate into adaptive capacities through organizational mechanisms, notably learning, innovation, knowledge sharing, structural flexibility, and the ability to reconfigure resources (Bakker et al., 2023; Vera & Crossan, 2004).

The dynamic capabilities perspective supports this argument by demonstrating that, in changing environments, organizations need to identify opportunities and threats, mobilize resources, and transform routines to maintain their competitive capacity (Teece, 2007; Teece et al., 1997). Resilience thus depends not only on the availability of resources but also on the ability to recombine and adapt them in the face of new circumstances, aligning with the logic of reconfiguration underlying dynamic capabilities (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Zahra et al., 2006).

Transformational leadership can foster these mechanisms by encouraging experimentation, cross-functional learning, innovation, and openness to change. In SMEs, this relationship is particularly relevant, as the proximity between leaders and employees can facilitate the flow of knowledge and accelerate the transformation of learning into organizational responses. Thus, learning, innovation, and the reconfiguration of resources constitute mechanisms through which transformational leadership can contribute to the development of organizational resilience. On a broader level of innovation ecosystems, recent evidence based on the Global Innovation Index reinforces the importance of knowledge creation and innovation for the performance of innovation systems (Semião, Farinha, et al., 2026).

> ***Proposition 2:*** *The relationship between transformational leadership and organizational resilience is reinforced by mechanisms of organizational learning, innovation, and resource reconfiguration.*

4.3 Organizational Resilience and Business Performance

Organizational resilience can contribute to business performance by enabling organizations to anticipate threats, preserve critical operations, adjust processes, and mobilize responses to changes in the environment. As a dynamic capability, resilience is not limited to recovery after a disruption; it also involves learning, adaptation, and the transformation of organizational practices (Duchek, 2020; Hillmann & Guenther, 2021; Williams et al., 2017).

These capabilities can translate into business results through operational continuity, the protection of relationships with customers and suppliers, responsiveness to the market, and the exploitation of new opportunities. Recent studies suggest that resilience and innovation can function as strategic capabilities associated with performance in changing environments (Do et al., 2022; Garrido-Moreno et al., 2024). Organizations capable of adapting and reconfiguring resources under adversity are better positioned to preserve value and sustain performance.

However, resilience should not be automatically equated with superior performance. Excessive preservation of existing structures can hinder necessary transformations, and adaptive responses may entail short-term costs. The positive effect of resilience therefore depends on the ability to balance continuity and change, efficiency and exploration, allowing the organization to preserve essential functions while learning and renewing itself. Based on this argument, we propose:

> ***Proposition 3:*** *Organizational resilience positively influences business performance, especially when it enables the combination of operational continuity, learning, and strategic renewal.*

4.4 The Mediating Role of Organizational Resilience

The relationship between transformational leadership and business performance should not be understood as automatic. Although transformational leadership is associated with different levels of performance (Banks et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2011), its effects tend to occur through intermediate organizational mechanisms, such as learning, innovation, engagement, trust, and the capacity for change (Bakker et al., 2023; Vera & Crossan, 2004). In this sense, leadership creates social, cognitive, and behavioral conditions that foster the development of adaptive capacities.

Organizational resilience may serve as the mechanism through which these conditions translate into performance. By integrating capabilities for anticipation, response, and adaptation (Duchek, 2020), it enables the transformation of shared vision, learning, and resource mobilization into operational continuity, flexibility, and strategic renewal. This interpretation is consistent with the dynamic capabilities perspective, according to

which advantage in changing environments depends on the ability to identify changes, mobilize resources, and reconfigure routines (Teece, 2007; Teece et al., 1997).

Thus, the model proposes a theoretical sequence in which transformational leadership fosters organizational resilience, which, in turn, contributes to business performance. Resilience functions as the mediating mechanism through which leadership practices are converted into organizational capabilities that impact performance.

> ***Proposition 4:*** *Organizational resilience positively mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and business performance.*

4.5 Social Uncertainty as a Moderating Condition

Social and environmental uncertainty constitutes a contextual condition that can alter the relevance of transformational leadership and organizational resilience to business performance. In relatively stable environments, organizations can rely more heavily on existing routines, formal planning, and operational efficiency. As unpredictability increases, however, capabilities related to interpretation, learning, flexibility, and adaptation become more relevant, since organizations face greater difficulty in anticipating changes and defining appropriate responses (Milliken, 1987; Packard & Clark, 2020).

In this context, transformational leadership may take on greater importance by facilitating the interpretation of change, mobilizing employees, and promoting adaptive responses, while resilience enables organizations to absorb disruptions, adapt routines, and preserve critical organizational functions. Uncertainty may thus increase the relevance of the adaptive capabilities that underpin the proposed relationships between transformational leadership, organizational resilience, and business performance.

However, this effect should not be viewed as unlimited. Extreme levels of uncertainty can reduce available resources, increase pressure on employees, and hinder the ability to respond. This condition is particularly relevant in SMEs, where financial, human capital, or organizational capacity constraints may limit the translation of leadership and resilience into results. Thus, uncertainty can increase the need for adaptive capacities without, in and of itself, guaranteeing their effectiveness.

> ***Proposition 5:*** *Social and environmental uncertainty moderates the relationship between transformational leadership, organizational resilience, and business performance, increasing the relevance of adaptive capacities but potentially limiting their effects when pressure exceeds available resources.*

4.6 Digital Capabilities and Human Capital as Complementary Conditions

Digital transformation adds a significant dimension to the relationship between leadership, resilience, and performance. Digital technologies can improve environmental monitoring, data analysis, communication, operational flexibility, and customer proximity, thereby enhancing the organization's ability to identify changes and respond quickly. However, the adoption of technology does not automatically produce these effects; it depends on the existence of skills, organizational processes, and a learning-oriented culture (Matarazzo et al., 2021; Verhoef et al., 2021).

In this context, skilled human capital complements digital capabilities by enabling information and technology to be transformed into knowledge, learning, and organizational action. Transformational leadership can facilitate this process by reducing resistance to change, encouraging experimentation, and promoting alignment between technology, skills, and strategic objectives. In this way, digital capabilities and human capital reinforce the conditions through which leadership can contribute to organizational adaptation and resilience.

This relationship takes on particular importance in the Portuguese context, where challenges persist regarding the adoption of artificial intelligence by companies and the development of digital skills (European Commission, 2025). Thus, the ability to transform digitalization and human knowledge into learning and strategic response constitutes a complementary condition for organizational resilience to translate into performance.

> ***Proposition 6:*** *Digital capabilities and skilled human capital reinforce the effect of transformational leadership on organizational resilience and increase the likelihood that resilience will translate into business performance.*

5. Proposed Conceptual Model

Figure 1 summarizes the relationships outlined in the six theoretical propositions. The model begins with transformational leadership as a precursor to organizational resilience (P1), a relationship supported by

explanatory mechanisms, including *sensemaking*, organizational learning, trust, employee engagement, innovation, and resource reconfiguration (P2). Organizational resilience, in turn, contributes to business performance (P3) and plays a mediating role in the relationship between transformational leadership and performance (P4).

The model also incorporates social and environmental uncertainty as a contextual factor that influences the relationships among leadership, resilience, and performance (P5). Digital capabilities, information quality, the maturity of management systems, and skilled human capital emerge as complementary conditions that support the explanatory mechanisms and the capacity for organizational adaptation, with digital capabilities and skilled human capital specifically addressed in P6.

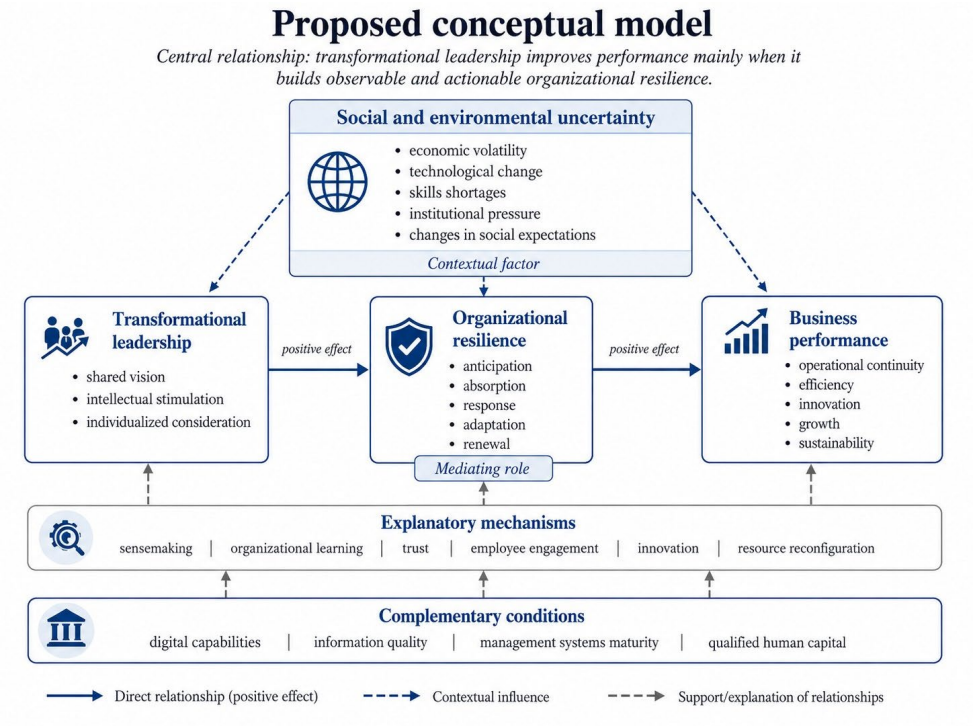


Figure 1: Proposed conceptual model

The conceptual model organizes the main pathways through which transformational leadership can contribute to business performance in contexts of uncertainty.For this proposal to be developed in future research, it is important to translate the central concepts into observable and empirically testable dimensions. Table 2 therefore systematizes some possibilities for operationalizing the constructs, serving as a starting point for quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods studies.

Table 2: Suggestions for Future Empirical Operationalization

Variable	Role in the model	Examples of indicators	Analytical suggestion
transformational leadership	Antecedent	MLQ scales/adapted; vision; intellectual stimulation; individual support; communication of change.	CFA/PLS-SEM; analysis of reliability and validity.
Organizational resilience	Mediator	Risk anticipation; response speed; operational continuity; post-crisis learning; process adaptation.	Mediation; bootstrapping; hierarchical or multidimensional model.
Social/environmental uncertainty	Moderator/context	Perception of volatility; market ambiguity; skills shortage; technological/regulatory pressure.	Moderation; multi-group analysis by uncertainty intensity.
Digital capabilities and human capital	Complementary conditions	Digital adoption; data usage; digital skills; employee qualifications; continuing education.	Moderation or sequential mediation.
Business performance	Outcome	Sales growth; productivity; profitability; innovation; customer satisfaction; operational continuity.	Combination of objective data and subjective scales.

6. Discussion

The proposed model positions transformational leadership not only as an interpersonal style but as a capability that fosters organizational adaptation. This is consistent with literature linking transformational leadership to mobilization, learning, trust, and change (Banks et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2011; Bakker et al., 2023; Vera & Crossan, 2004). Under high social uncertainty, its relevance lies in transforming ambiguity into shared interpretation and organized action.

The first theoretical contribution integrates transformational leadership and organizational resilience through dynamic capabilities. Resilience involves anticipation, response, learning, and adaptation (Duchek, 2020; Hillmann & Guenther, 2021; Williams et al., 2017), while dynamic capabilities emphasize identifying change, mobilizing resources, and reconfiguring routines (Teece, 2007; Teece et al., 1997). The model links these perspectives by proposing transformational leadership as a microfoundation of learning, experimentation, trust, and reconfiguration that supports organizational resilience.

The second contribution consists of clarifying the mediating role of resilience. Rather than assuming that leadership directly produces better results, the model proposes that its effects on performance depend on the development of organizational capacities for anticipation, response, learning, and renewal. This interpretation complements the evidence linking transformational leadership to performance (Banks et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2011) and aligns it with the literature that relates resilience and adaptive capacities to performance in changing environments (Do et al., 2022; Garrido-Moreno et al., 2024).

The third contribution contextualizes these relationships within Portuguese SMEs. Global uncertainty, productivity demands, digital transformation, and skills remain relevant to the Portuguese business landscape (European Commission, 2025; OECD, 2026). Proximity between leadership and operations can facilitate rapid responses, whereas centralized decision-making, skills shortages, and limited process formalization may hinder learning and adaptation. Digital capabilities and human capital are therefore important complementary conditions because digital transformation depends on the interplay between technology, skills, processes, and organizational change (Matarazzo et al., 2021; Verhoef et al., 2021). Recent evidence also indicates that public funding for R&D&I can facilitate open innovation and collaboration with universities and research centers, expanding access to external knowledge and networks in Portuguese SMEs (Semião, Nunes, et al., 2026).

From a practical standpoint, the model suggests four complementary priorities for Portuguese managers: develop leaders who communicate vision, engage employees, and foster critical thinking; establish resilience routines for risk identification, post-incident review, and structured learning; strengthen digital capabilities and information quality for situational awareness and faster decisions; and evaluate performance multidimensionally, combining financial indicators with response, learning, innovation, and operational continuity.

Finally, the model does not assume that transformational leadership or resilience produce positive effects in all circumstances. The effectiveness of leadership depends on organizational and contextual conditions, while resilience implies adaptation and renewal—not merely a return to the previous state (Duchek, 2020; Williams et al., 2017). The strategic challenge, therefore, lies in balancing stability and transformation, preserving essential functions while changing routines, competencies, and business models when the context demands it.

7. Conclusion

This article proposes a conceptual framework on the relationship between transformational leadership, organizational resilience, and business performance in contexts of social uncertainty, with a special focus on Portuguese companies. The analysis suggests that transformational leadership can contribute to building resilience through a shared vision, trust, learning, innovation, and the reconfiguration of resources. Resilience, in turn, plays a mediating role between leadership and performance by transforming these mechanisms into capacities for anticipation, response, adaptation, and renewal.

The model adds two relevant dimensions to this relationship. On the one hand, social and environmental uncertainty functions as a contextual condition, increasing the relevance of adaptive capabilities, although extreme levels of pressure may limit their effectiveness. On the other hand, digital capabilities and skilled human capital function as complementary conditions that reinforce the organization’s ability to transform leadership and learning into resilience and performance.

Organizational resilience is thus conceptualized as a dynamic meta-capacity balancing stability and change, extending beyond recovery to emphasize learning from adversity, resource reconfiguration, and sustained performance in unstable environments. In the Portuguese context, this perspective takes on particular relevance given the significant role of SMEs, productivity challenges, the digital transition, and exposure to social, economic, and technological pressures.

In summary, in contexts of uncertainty, business performance depends not only on the ability to anticipate change but also on building organizations prepared to learn, adapt, and act quickly. Transformational leadership can contribute to this process when combined with organizational capabilities, human capital, digital resources, and management practices that enable resilience to be transformed into an effectively actionable capability.

8. Limitations and Future Research Agenda

The main limitation of this study stems from the integrative review approach adopted. Although oriented toward conceptual construction, with an in-depth analysis of 15 articles and the identification of 45 themes, it did not follow a systematic protocol for literature identification, screening, and selection, such as PRISMA, limiting the scope, replicability, and exhaustive coverage of the relevant literature.

A second limitation stems from the conceptual nature of the model, which requires empirical validation. Future research could test it in Portuguese companies, particularly SMEs, using PLS-SEM or covariance-based SEM to analyze the mediation of organizational resilience and the moderation of social uncertainty. Longitudinal studies would also be relevant, considering the temporal nature of resilience.

Multiple case studies could deepen the understanding of how leaders of Portuguese SMEs interpret shocks, mobilize employees, and alter processes, allowing mechanisms such as sensemaking, trust, improvisation, informal learning, and the use of external networks to be observed. Comparisons across sectors with different levels of exposure to uncertainty could test the robustness of the proposed relationships.

Future research should also clarify the operationalization of performance by combining objective measures of sales growth, productivity, profitability, and survival with validated subjective measures of performance, innovation, responsiveness, and customer satisfaction, particularly relevant in SMEs when financial data are less accessible or comparable.

Ethics Declaration: I, Norberto Semião, as co-author of the article “Transformational Leadership, Organizational Resilience, And Business Performance In Contexts Of Social Uncertainty: A Conceptual Proposal For Smes In Portugal”, declare that no ethical authorization was used to carry out the same.

AI Declaration: I, Norberto Semião, as co-author of the article “Transformational Leadership, Organizational Resilience, And Business Performance In Contexts Of Social Uncertainty: A Conceptual Proposal For Smes In Portugal” declare that no AI was used to carry out the same.

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