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Microfoundations Asserted, Not Tested: A Scoping Review of Employee Dynamic Capabilities In Digitalised Work

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Abstract: Digital transformation depends on what individuals can do, yet dynamic capabilities theory was formulated at the level of the firm. Capability labels placing that capacity with employees and managers have spread rapidly through research on digitalised work, but whether they denote a shared construct is unknown, and existing reviews address only the organisational level or digital government. This review maps how a dynamic capability borne by an individual is defined, dimensioned, measured and linked to outcomes. Following scoping review guidance, we searched one citation database for peer-reviewed studies published between 2015 and 2026 in Asia and the Global South, screened 710 records in duplicate, and charted 14 eligible studies against 64 charting variables. Inductive coding of verbatim definitions produced seven conceptual families, two of them ontologically incompatible, and no two of the twelve quantitative studies shared a measurement instrument. Employee-bearer and manager-bearer studies drew on entirely separate intellectual sources. No study tested dispositional and organisational antecedents within one model, so the microfoundational claim this literature makes for itself remains untested. The review provides a systematic mapping of Employee Dynamic Capabilities and shows that their fragmented conceptualisation must be resolved before the proposed microfoundational and mediation mechanisms can be meaningfully tested.

Keywords: Employee Dynamic Capability, Dynamic Managerial Capabilities, Microfoundations, Construct Proliferation, Public Sector Digitalization.

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has moved from a technology programme to a reorganisation of work itself, and the evidence increasingly locates its returns in people rather than in systems (Trenerry et al., 2021). Reviews of workplace digitalisation converge on the individual as the level at which transformation succeeds or stalls, through skills, adaptability and attitudes toward technological change, and the pattern is starkest in government, where digital transformation is defined by changes in structures, processes and skills rather than by technology procurement (Mergel et al., 2019) and depends on the individuals who champion reform (Haug et al., 2024).

Dynamic capabilities theory is the dominant explanation of how organisations adapt to environmental change of this kind (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Teece, 2007; Teece et al., 1997).

In its canonical formulation the construct denotes the capacity to integrate, build and reconfigure competences in response to shifting environments, decomposed into sensing, seizing and transforming (Teece, 2007). Two boundaries are built into that definition: the capability is attributed to the firm rather than to any person within it, and its referent is a higher-order capacity to change ordinary operating routines rather than those routines themselves (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000). The theory's own reviews document persistent definitional heterogeneity and overlapping conceptualisations (Schilke et al., 2018), so the conceptual discipline available to any downward extension is limited from the outset.

Two developments push the construct downward, toward the individual. The microfoundations turn holds that organisational capabilities must ultimately be explained by the attributes, choices and interactions of individuals (Felin et al., 2015), and identifies managerial cognitive capabilities as a mechanism linking individuals to organisational change (Helfat & Peteraf, 2015). The dynamic managerial capabilities stream attributes firm-level heterogeneity in adaptation to individual managers (Adner & Helfat, 2003), continues to specify its microfoundations empirically (Hock-Doepgen et al., 2025), and now calls specifically for research that is explicit about the level at which a capability resides (Schilke & Helfat, 2025). Against this background, a set of individual-level capability labels has entered the empirical literature on digitalised work, among them *employee dynamic capability*. The diffusion has been rapid and terminologically uneven, and the individual level is not conceptually empty ground: adaptive performance and workforce agility already occupy adjacent territory with established measurement traditions (Alviani et al., 2024). A further label therefore carries a burden of justification, since a new construct should specify the attributes that distinguish it from what already exists and demonstrate discriminant validity rather than assert novelty (Podsakoff et al., 2016; Shaffer et al., 2016).

Whether the emerging literature has met that burden has not been established, and existing reviews cannot answer the question. Reviews of dynamic capabilities in public organisations examine the organisational level and do not treat individuals as bearers of capability (Miller & Ghaffarzadegan, 2025); general reviews of the theory take the firm as the unit whose capability is at issue (Schilke et al., 2018); and reviews of digital government identify employees and managers as the site of change without drawing on capability theory (Haug et al., 2024). Each is bounded either by its level of analysis or by its theoretical vocabulary, and the intersection of the two falls outside all of them. Without such a map it is not possible to tell whether this body of work is a cumulative literature or a set of unrelated studies sharing a vocabulary, and where the constructs, measures and populations of an emerging body of work are not yet known to be commensurable, a scoping review is indicated (Peters et al., 2020), because a systematic review with pooled estimation would presuppose precisely what is in doubt.

This review is, to our knowledge, the first to take the individually borne dynamic capability itself as the object of mapping. It contributes in four ways: a) it establishes empirically how far the individual-level construct is shared; b) it tests whether the literature is unitary by examining whether employee-bearer and manager-bearer studies draw on the same intellectual sources; c) it maps the nomological network that has been tested; and d) it produces an evidence gap map locating the empirically empty combinations of sector, region and design. We map peer-reviewed empirical studies published between 2015 and 2026 in which a construct is explicitly designated a dynamic capability, a dynamic managerial capability or a microfoundation thereof, is borne by an individual, is situated in a digitalised work setting in Asia or the Global South, and is linked to a performance outcome. Within these boundaries we ask four questions:

1. How is an individually borne dynamic capability defined, dimensioned and operationalised in the included studies?
2. How are digital-context performance outcomes conceptualised and measured, and what patterns of association with the capability are reported?

3. Which antecedents, mediators and moderators have been tested, and how is the relationship theorised?
4. How is the evidence distributed across country, sector and study design, and which combinations are empirically empty?

METHOD

Protocol, Reporting, and Eligibility criteria

The review follows the JBI methodology for scoping reviews (Peters et al., 2020), a design appropriate because the objective was to map how an emergent construct is defined, operationalised and linked to outcomes rather than to estimate pooled effects; reporting follows PRISMA-ScR (Tricco et al., 2018). The protocol was written a priori and frozen before any search, but was not prospectively registered. Two reviewers (R1, R2) screened and charted all records independently and a third (R3) arbitrated every disagreement. Charting was organised a priori by the sensing–seizing–transforming typology (Teece, 2007), and the individual level of analysis was defined following Helfat and Peteraf (2015). Eligibility was specified using the Population–Concept–Context (PCC) framework (Table 1): the decisive criterion was the bearer of the capability, so a study was eligible only if it explicitly designated a construct as a dynamic capability, a dynamic managerial capability or a microfoundation thereof and placed an individual as its bearer. The 2015 boundary reflects renewed attention to microfoundations following Helfat and Peteraf (2015).

Table 1. Eligibility criteria

Element	Included	Excluded
Population	Individuals performing work roles in an organisation (employees, managers, executives, owner-managers)	Firms, projects, regions, workloads, consumers, students, self-employed individuals without an organisational relationship
Concept	A construct explicitly designated as a dynamic (managerial) capability or a microfoundation thereof, borne by an individual, and linked to an outcome at any level	Capabilities borne by the firm, team or supply chain; "capability" used without reference to dynamic capabilities theory
Context	Digitalised work settings (digital transformation, ICT or AI adoption, e-government, Industry 4.0) in Asia or the Global South	Data collected exclusively in high-income non-Asian countries
Sources	Peer-reviewed journal articles in English, 2015 to 2026	Reviews, editorials, conference papers, book chapters; full text unobtainable after two attempts

Source: Authors' analysis of the included studies.

Information sources and search strategy

We searched Scopus in August 2026, combining four TITLE-ABS-KEY blocks covering dynamic-capability, individual-actor, digitalisation and performance terms, restricted to journal articles and reviews in English published between 2015 and 2026. Scopus was the sole database, a coverage limitation stated in Section 2.4. The search string was calibrated against an a priori target of 100 to 450 records using rules fixed in advance. The binding constraint was the outcome block rather than the geographical block: removing the geographical block raised the yield only from 16 to 27 records, whereas relaxing specific performance phrases to the general term performance raised it to 710. We accepted 710 records, exceeding the target, because scoping reviews of nascent fields should privilege sensitivity over precision (Peters et al., 2020). The final search string (v4) used for direct re-execution in Scopus Advanced Search was as follows:

Search String (Scopus)

Table 2. Search String (Scopus)

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TITLE-ABS-KEY (
  ( "dynamic capabilit*" OR "dynamic managerial capabilit*" OR "adaptive
  capabilit*"
    OR "individual ambidexterity" )
  AND
  ( employee* OR worker* OR staff OR personnel OR individual* OR manager*
    OR "civil servant*" OR "public servant*" OR "human resource*"
    OR microfoundation* OR "micro-foundation*" OR "micro-level" OR "individual
  level" )
)
AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (
  digital* OR digitis* OR digitiz* OR "information technology" OR ict
  OR "industry 4.0" OR "artificial intelligence" OR "e-government"
  OR "technological change" OR automation
)
AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (
  performance OR productivity OR "work behavio*r" OR "work outcome*" OR
  "employee outcome*"
)
AND PUBYEAR > 2014 AND PUBYEAR < 2027
AND ( DOCTYPE ( ar ) OR DOCTYPE ( re ) )
AND ( LANGUAGE ( english ) )
AND ( SRCTYPE ( j ) )

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Note: Search conducted in Scopus (title, abstract, and keyword fields), limited to English-language journal articles and reviews published between 2015 and 2026.

Selection of sources of evidence

R1 and R2 screened all 710 records independently and blind to each other's decisions, using deliberately different evidence thresholds so that agreement tested the criteria rather than a shared habit (Fig. 1). Title and abstract agreement was $\kappa = 0.415$ initially and $\kappa = 0.755$ after a documented calibration meeting reassigned two criteria to full-text verification; at full text, agreement rose from $\kappa = 0.276$ to $\kappa = 0.929$ once an explicit decision rule was applied, stating that a construct qualifies as individually borne only when the article designates it a dynamic capability and places an individual as its bearer.

We used a 64-variable charting form adapted from the JBI template (Peters et al., 2020), covering bibliographic identification, study context, design and sampling, capability and outcome constructs, nomological position, reported findings and methodological descriptors. R1 and R2 charted independently, discrepancies going to R3; consistent with PRISMA-ScR guidance, risk of bias was not appraised as an inclusion filter. Synthesis proceeded in three steps: frequencies and cross-tabulations producing an evidence gap map; a thematic synthesis in which verbatim construct definitions were extracted, coded inductively and grouped into conceptual families; and a Context–Intervention–Mechanism–Outcome matrix mapping the nomological network. To test whether the families corresponded to distinct intellectual lineages, each article's reference list was inspected for a fixed set of anchor works by author surname rather than by co-citation analysis.

Data Charting, Synthesis, and Protocol Deviations

Five deviations are reported: a) the protocol was not prospectively registered; b) the target of 100 to 450 records was exceeded, at 710; c) citation searching was not performed, so the review rests on a single database and makes no claim to comprehensiveness; d) the pilot on the

first 50 records could not yield an estimable κ , because both reviewers excluded all 50, so agreement was computed on the full corpus; and e) the thematic coding was performed by a single coder and is therefore provisional.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The search returned to 710 records, of which 14 met all eligibility criteria (Fig. 1); Table 2 summarises their characteristics. Although the eligibility window spanned 2015 to 2026, the earliest qualifying study was published in 2023 (Li & Fei, 2023), with four in 2024, six in 2025 and three in 2026: no study published between 2015 and 2022 designated an individually borne dynamic capability and linked it to an outcome. Evidence is concentrated geographically, with seven studies in China, two each in Indonesia and Malaysia, and one each in Bangladesh, Vietnam and Jordan; ten examined private-sector and four public-sector organisations. Eleven used single-wave cross-sectional surveys, one two waves three months apart (Chen & Li, 2026), one was qualitative (Hossain et al., 2025) and one combined bibliometrics with interviews (Yao et al., 2024). Analysed samples ranged from seven interviewees (Yao et al., 2024) to 1,380 civil servants (Aldhi et al., 2025). Authorship is also more concentrated than the study count suggests: three of the seven Chinese studies share an author group at a single Malaysian university (Wang, Mansor, & Leong, 2024a, 2024b; Wang, Niu, et al., 2024), a fourth shares two of those authors (Yao et al., 2024), and both Malaysian public-sector studies come from one team (Subramaniam et al., 2025a, 2025b).

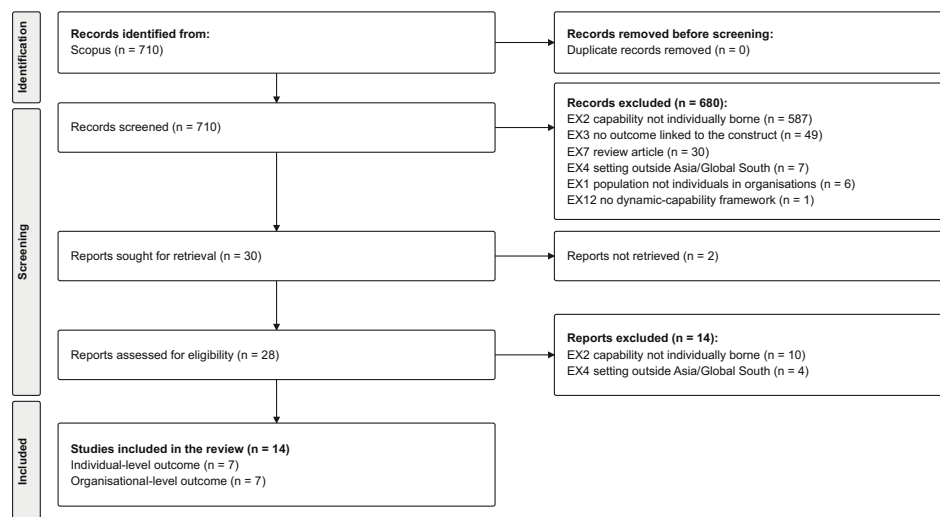


Fig. 1. Selection of sources of evidence (PRISMA-ScR flow diagram)

Source: Authors' analysis of the included studies.

Their key characteristics, including country, sector, study design, sample size, capability construct, and outcome level, are summarised in Table 2.

Table 3. Characteristics of the 14 included studies.

ID	Study	Country	Sector	Design	N	Capability construct	Outcome	Outcome level
1	Subramaniam et al. (2025a)	Malaysia	Public	Cross-sectional	276	Employee dynamic capability	Employee performance	Individual
2	Subramaniam et al. (2025b)	Malaysia	Public	Cross-sectional	NR	Employee dynamic capability	Employee performance	Individual
3	Zam et al. (2025)	Indonesia	Public	Cross-sectional	230	Dynamic capability (mediator)	Employee performance	Individual

ID	Study	Country	Sector	Design	N	Capability construct	Outcome	Outcome level
4	Aldhi et al. (2025)	Indonesia	Public	Cross-sectional	1,380	Managerial digital readiness	Public sector performance	Organisational
5	Wang, Niu, et al. (2024)	China	Private	Cross-sectional	300	Employee dynamic capability	Employee digital performance	Individual
6	Wang, Mansor, & Leong (2024a)	China	Private	Cross-sectional	366	Employee dynamic capability	Employee digital performance	Individual
7	Wang, Mansor, & Leong (2024b)	China	Private	Cross-sectional	600	Employee dynamic capability	Employee digital performance	Individual
8	Ye et al. (2026)	China	Private	Cross-sectional	415	Job crafting and innovative work behaviour as micro-level dynamic capabilities	Digital-enabled task performance	Individual
9	Li & Fei (2023)	China	Private	Cross-sectional	239	Top managerial cognition	Enterprise performance	Organisational
10	Chen & Li (2026)	China	Private	Two-wave	289	Managerial cognition within dynamic sustainable capabilities	Sustainability-oriented corporate performance	Organisational
11	Yao et al. (2024)	China	Private	Mixed methods	7	Dynamic managerial capabilities	Organisational performance	Organisational
12	Vo Thai et al. (2025)	Vietnam	Private	Cross-sectional	428	Dynamic managerial capabilities	Sustainable competitive performance	Organisational
13	Salih et al. (2026)	Jordan	Private	Cross-sectional	205	Global dynamic managerial capabilities	Firm innovativeness	Organisational
14	Hossain et al. (2025)	Bangladesh	Private	Qualitative	20	Dynamic managerial capabilities of leaders	Organisational performance	Organisational

Note. NR = not reported. Analysed sample size for Subramaniam et al. (2025b) is not stated in the article

Source: Authors' analysis of the included studies.

Conceptualisation and operationalisation of the construct

Six distinct label families were used for what is nominally one construct: five studies used the term employee dynamic capability literally (Subramaniam et al., 2025a, 2025b; Wang, Mansor, & Leong, 2024a, 2024b; Wang, Niu, et al., 2024), four used dynamic managerial capabilities or a variant (Hossain et al., 2025; Salih et al., 2026; Vo Thai et al., 2025; Yao et al., 2024), two centred on managerial cognition (Chen & Li, 2026; Li & Fei, 2023), and the remaining three each introduced a distinct label, namely managerial digital readiness (Aldhi et al., 2025), an unqualified dynamic capability used as a mediator (Zam et al., 2025), and job crafting with innovative work behaviour reframed as micro-level dynamic capabilities (Ye et al., 2026).

Inductive coding of the verbatim definitions produced seven conceptual families (Table 3). The two largest are the process family and the cognition family, with three studies each, but the most consequential division is one of ontology rather than frequency. The process family treats capability as something an individual does, as when Wang, Mansor and Leong (2024b) define it as “the integration, establishment, and reconfiguration of employee capabilities to

respond to rapidly changing environments”; the capital-stock family treats it as something an individual holds, as when Vo Thai et al. (2025) ground it in “three essential components: managerial human and social capital and managerial cognition.” Salih et al. (2026) combine both ontologies in one sentence, describing global dynamic managerial capabilities as capturing “the human capital, social capital, and cognitive capabilities” (stock) “that enable managers to sense opportunities, mobilize resources, and guide innovation under uncertainty” (process).

Two studies fall into a residual family in which no operational definition of the individual-level construct is provided: Zam et al. (2025) define the construct at the organisational level yet apply it to employees, and Subramaniam et al. (2025b) state the construct's position rather than its content. By contrast, Wang, Mansor and Leong (2024a) locate the distinction precisely, in the bearer rather than the content: “the main distinction between the two concepts lies in the entities responsible for achieving organizational performance goals, one being the organization itself, and the other being the employees.”

Table 4. Conceptual families of the individual-level capability construct

Family	Definitional core	Studies	n
F1. Process	Sensing, seizing and reconfiguring, or integrating, building and reconfiguring	Wang, Mansor, & Leong (2024b); Yao et al. (2024); Ye et al. (2026)	3
F2. Cognitionsss	Capacity to think and act, or cognition as the basis or regulator of capability	Chen & Li (2026); Hossain et al. (2025); Li & Fei (2023)	3
F3. Capital stock	Human capital, social capital and cognition held by managers	Salih et al. (2026); Vo Thai et al. (2025)	2
F4. Adaptive contribution	Employees' ability to adapt to, and contribute in, dynamic markets	Wang, Mansor, & Leong (2024a); Wang, Niu, et al. (2024)	2
F5. Skill and mindset bundle	Technical skills plus the mindset to experiment and absorb new knowledge	Subramaniam et al. (2025a)	1
F6. Psychological and behavioural readiness	Preparedness of managers to embrace and drive digital transformation	Aldhi et al. (2025)	1
F7. No operational definition at the individual level	Organisational definition applied to individuals, or position stated without content	Subramaniam et al. (2025b); Zam et al. (2025)	2

Source: Authors' analysis of the included studies.

Judged against established criteria for construct clarity, which require a definition to specify the necessary and sufficient attributes of a concept and to fix a single referent (Podsakoff et al., 2016), this is a failure on the most basic requirement rather than on a subtle one. The process family and the capital-stock family are not variants of one definition: one treats the capability as a set of activities an individual performs, the other as an endowment an individual holds. The slippage in Zam et al. (2025), who define the construct organisationally and then apply it to employees, is precisely what the microfoundations programme was formulated to prevent (Felin et al., 2015; Helfat & Peteraf, 2015).

The corpus divides evenly on who bears the capability: seven studies place it with employees, including one with civil servants (Subramaniam et al., 2025a, 2025b; Wang, Mansor, & Leong, 2024a, 2024b; Wang, Niu, et al., 2024; Ye et al., 2026; Zam et al., 2025), and seven with managers, executives or leaders (Aldhi et al., 2025; Chen & Li, 2026; Hossain et al., 2025; Li & Fei, 2023; Salih et al., 2026; Vo Thai et al., 2025; Yao et al., 2024).

Reference-list inspection indicates that this split corresponds to two largely separate intellectual lineages (Fig. 2). The Teece anchor, comprising Teece et al. (1997) and Teece (2007), is the only one cited by both, appearing in six studies in each stream; beyond it the

streams barely overlap. Adner and Helfat (2003), the founding statement of dynamic managerial capabilities, is cited by four manager-stream studies and none in the employee stream, whereas Bienkowska and Tworek (2020), a conceptual foundation of employee dynamic capability, is cited by four employee-stream studies and none in the manager stream. The resource-based view appears only in the employee stream, while Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) and Felin et al. (2015) appear only in the manager stream.

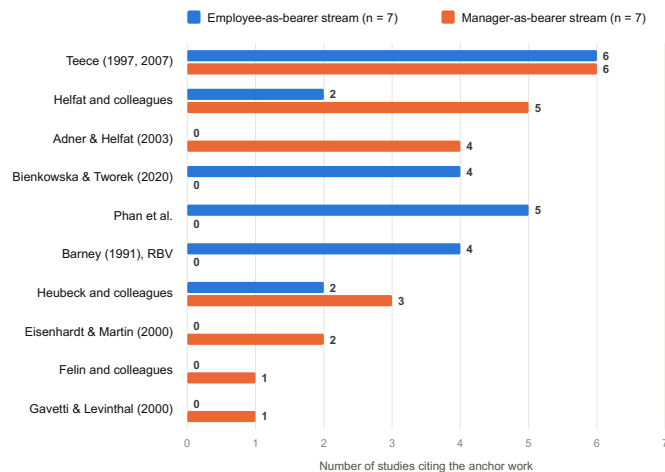


Fig. 2. Citation of anchors works by capability-bearer stream.
Source: Authors' analysis of the included studies.

The asymmetry between the two streams is instructive. The manager stream inherits a defensible warrant, since dynamic managerial capabilities were introduced to explain firm-level heterogeneity attributable to individual managers (Adner & Helfat, 2003) and recent work continues to specify microfoundations at that level (Hock-Doepgen et al., 2025). The employee stream cites no founding statement of comparable standing within dynamic capabilities theory itself, and this asymmetry explains the definitional disarray documented above rather than merely accompanying it: a stream without a canonical statement of what the construct is has nothing against which a new definition can be tested.

Only four of the 14 studies mapped their construct explicitly onto the sensing, seizing and transforming typology (Aldhi et al., 2025; Chen & Li, 2026; Hossain et al., 2025; Ye et al., 2026), two specified a four-dimension structure citing the same conceptual source (Wang, Mansor, & Leong, 2024b; Wang, Niu, et al., 2024), and the remainder used the framework without mapping their dimensions to it. No measurement instrument was shared by any two studies: each quantitative study adapted its own scale, with item counts from six (Wang, Niu, et al., 2024) to 13 (Aldhi et al., 2025), and Ye et al. (2026) measured no capability scale at all, relabelling established job crafting and innovative work behaviour instruments as micro-level dynamic capabilities. Aldhi et al. (2025) also describe managerial digital readiness theoretically as digital role, digital transformation and digital strategy readiness, whereas their measurement section reports digital structure, digital strategy and digital technology readiness.

The consequence of this heterogeneity is empirical, not merely semantic. Discriminant validity cannot be assessed for a construct defined by its position in a nomological network rather than by its attributes (Shaffer et al., 2016), and Ye et al. (2026) mark the limiting case. Zero instrument overlap across the twelve quantitative studies means that each reported association is a statement about a differently measured object. Schilke et al. (2018) documented the same heterogeneity at the organisational level; what these findings add is that the individual-level literature is reproducing it earlier in its life cycle, before any instrument tradition has consolidated.

Outcome constructs, reported associations and the indirect-path signature

Outcome level divides the corpus exactly in half: seven studies measured an outcome at the individual level and seven at the organisational level (Table 2), with all seven individual-level outcomes coming from the employee-bearer stream and all seven organisational-level outcomes from the manager-bearer stream. Only six studies theorised how a capability held by an individual produces an outcome at a higher level (Aldhi et al., 2025; Hossain et al., 2025; Wang, Mansor, & Leong, 2024a, 2024b; Wang, Niu, et al., 2024; Ye et al., 2026); the remaining eight moved between levels without stating a mechanism. Twelve studies tested the association empirically, and of these nine reported a positive significant association, two significance only through indirect paths, and one a mixed result (Table 4).

The most consistent pattern in the corpus concerns indirect rather than direct effects: four studies, spanning two countries and both sectors, report that the direct path from a technological or leadership antecedent to performance is non-significant while the path through an individual-level capability is significant. Wang, Niu, et al. (2024) found no direct effect of digital capability on employee digital performance ($\beta = -0.031$, ns) but a significant effect through employee dynamic capability ($\beta = 0.329$, $p < 0.001$); Wang, Mansor and Leong (2024a) found digital leadership unrelated to employee digital performance and to employee dynamic capability, the effect instead running through high-involvement human resource practices ($\beta = 0.353$, $p < 0.001$); Zam et al. (2025) found no direct effect of digital leadership on civil servants' performance, with significant indirect effects through dynamic capability, organisational learning and digital capability; and Ye et al. (2026) report the leadership effect operating through job crafting and innovative work behaviour.

A parallel pattern appears at the managerial level: Aldhi et al. (2025) found that information technology capability affected managerial digital readiness only weakly ($\beta = 0.094$, $p = 0.004$), whereas individual digital skills had an effect roughly six times larger ($\beta = 0.547$, $p < 0.001$), and readiness in turn was the strongest predictor of public sector performance ($\beta = 0.633$, $p < 0.001$). Salih et al. (2026) provide the one mixed result: none of the three components of global dynamic managerial capabilities reached significance individually (all ns), yet the combined construct was significant, explaining 27.6% of variance in firm innovativeness.

Table 5. Reported associations between the individual-level capability and the outcome.

Direction	Studies	n
Positive and significant	Aldhi et al. (2025); Chen & Li (2026); Li & Fei (2023); Subramaniam et al. (2025a, 2025b); Vo Thai et al. (2025); Wang, Mansor, & Leong (2024a, 2024b); Wang, Niu, et al. (2024)	9
Significant through indirect paths only	Ye et al. (2026); Zam et al. (2025)	2
Mixed (components non-significant, composite significant)	Salih et al. (2026)	1
Not tested (qualitative or mixed methods)	Hossain et al. (2025); Yao et al. (2024)	2

Source: Authors' analysis of the included studies

This indirect-path signature is consistent with the argument that the returns to digital transformation are realised through human and organisational change rather than through technology itself (Trenerry et al., 2021). The alignment is suggestive, but the designs do not license the causal reading the primary studies give it: thirteen of the 14 studies are single-wave, and mediation estimated from cross-sectional data can be biased in unknown magnitude and even in sign relative to the longitudinal process it represents (Maxwell & Cole, 2007), while twelve use single-source perceptual outcomes, so the same respondent supplies the mediator and the outcome attributed to it (Podsakoff et al., 2012). The pattern is therefore best treated as a hypothesis with unusual cross-study consistency rather than as an established mechanism,

particularly given that two of the four studies exhibiting it involve the overlapping author group identified above.

Antecedents, mechanisms and boundary conditions

Antecedents cluster into two groups that are never combined (Table 5). Two studies tested individual dispositions, namely Big Five personality traits, cognitive capability and intrinsic motivation (Subramaniam et al., 2025a, 2025b), and nine tested organisational or leadership antecedents, chiefly digital leadership (Wang, Mansor, & Leong, 2024a; Ye et al., 2026; Zam et al., 2025), organisational resources and capabilities (Aldhi et al., 2025; Chen & Li, 2026; Wang, Niu, et al., 2024; Zam et al., 2025), organisational learning, high-involvement human resource practices, network embeddedness (Li & Fei, 2023) and organisational digital transformation (Yao et al., 2024). Three treated the capability itself as the independent variable (Hossain et al., 2025; Salih et al., 2026; Vo Thai et al., 2025), and no study tested dispositional and organisational antecedents within the same model.

The individual-level capability is most often positioned as a mediator, in seven studies (Aldhi et al., 2025; Subramaniam et al., 2025a, 2025b; Wang, Mansor, & Leong, 2024a, 2024b; Wang, Niu, et al., 2024; Zam et al., 2025); other mediators include employee attitudes and behaviours, organisational innovation constructs and digital transformation itself (Table 5). Boundary conditions are the least developed element of the network: eight of the 14 studies tested no moderator, and the six that did used five different constructs, only one of which appears more than once. Managerial cognition itself occupies three mutually inconsistent positions across the corpus: a component of the capability (Vo Thai et al., 2025), a moderator of the capability process (Chen & Li, 2026), and the basis of capability (Li & Fei, 2023).

Table 6. Position of constructs in the nomological network.

Position	Categories tested (number of studies)
Antecedent	Organisational resources and capabilities (4); digital leadership (3); none, capability is the independent variable (3); organisational learning (2); high-involvement human resource practices (2); individual dispositions (2); network embeddedness (1); organisational digital transformation (1)
Mediator	Individual-level capability (7); employee attitudes and behaviours (2); digital transformation (2); organisational innovation constructs (2)
Moderator	None tested (8); managerial cognition (2); climate or environment (2); digital leadership (1); psychological support (1)

Source: Authors' analysis of the included studies

In literature with a shared referent, the three positions managerial cognition occupies would be competing hypotheses that evidence could adjudicate; here they are not competing, because the three studies are not describing the same object, so calls to specify the level at which a capability resides are necessary but not sufficient (Schilke & Helfat, 2025). A related gap concerns integration: no study tested dispositional and organisational antecedents within one model, although the microfoundations argument is precisely about how individual attributes interact with organisational structure and process (Felin et al., 2015). A literature that examines the two in separate studies cannot deliver microfoundations; it produces two parallel main-effect literatures that share a vocabulary.

Distribution of the evidence and the empty public-sector cell

Cross-tabulating sector against region reveals a structurally empty region of the evidence space (Fig. 3). All four public-sector studies are located in Southeast Asia, two in Malaysia and two in Indonesia; there is no public-sector evidence in East Asia, South Asia, or West Asia and MENA, and the seven East Asian studies are all private sector. The public-sector evidence is also methodologically uniform, all four being single-wave self-report surveys. Outcome level

varies with sector: three of the four public-sector studies measured an individual-level outcome, whereas six of the ten private-sector studies measured an organisational-level outcome.

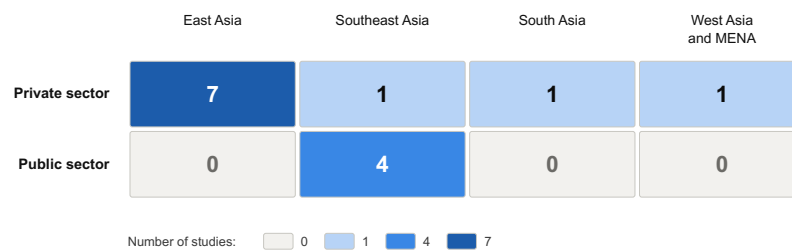


Fig. 3. Evidence gap map: number of studies by sector and region.
Source: Authors' analysis of the included studies

This is not only a coverage gap. Reviews of dynamic capabilities in public organisations have consistently examined the organisational level and have not addressed individual bearers (Miller & Ghaffarzadegan, 2025), while public administration research identifies employees and middle managers as the site at which digital change succeeds or fails (Haug et al., 2024; Mergel et al., 2019); the two literatures that ought to meet do not. Because civil service employment rules, incentive structures and mobility differ sharply from those of firms, generalising from private-sector evidence is not defensible. A further concern is discriminant: adjacent constructs such as workforce agility already possess measurement traditions (Alviani et al., 2024), and no study in our corpus establishes that the capability construct adds explanatory value beyond them.

Methodological characteristics of the evidence base

Charted descriptively rather than as an appraisal filter, the methodological profile is uniform in ways that bound what the corpus can support. Thirteen of the 14 studies collected data at a single point in time, one separating measurement into two waves (Chen & Li, 2026); no study used a longitudinal panel, an experimental design, or objective outcome data. Twelve used self-reported perceptual outcome measures and one collected data from both supervisors and subordinates (Aldhi et al., 2025), so in most studies the same respondent rated both the capability and the performance attributed to it. Nine reported a procedure for addressing common method bias, and six reported a response rate, ranging from 7.02% (Salih et al., 2026) to 76.4% (Li & Fei, 2023).

Implications for research and practice

Five priorities follow, shown in Fig. 4. 1) Definitional adjudication should precede further mediation models: authors should state the referent, the bearer and the ontology of their construct explicitly (Podsakoff et al., 2016). 2) Discriminant validity should be tested against workforce agility, adaptive performance and job crafting before new labels are introduced (Alviani et al., 2024; Shaffer et al., 2016). 3) The indirect-path claim requires multi-wave and multi-source designs (Maxwell & Cole, 2007; Podsakoff et al., 2012). 4) Cross-level theorising is needed to specify how an individual capability aggregates to a firm-level effect (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Helfat & Peteraf, 2015). 5) Public-sector replication outside Southeast Asia, in the cells left empty in Fig. 3, is the highest-value empirical extension. For practice, the one large public-sector study in the corpus suggests that investment in individual digital skills predicts readiness far more strongly than investment in technology infrastructure (Aldhi et al., 2025); we report this as the most policy-relevant association we located, not as a warranted prescription, since it rests on a single cross-sectional sample.

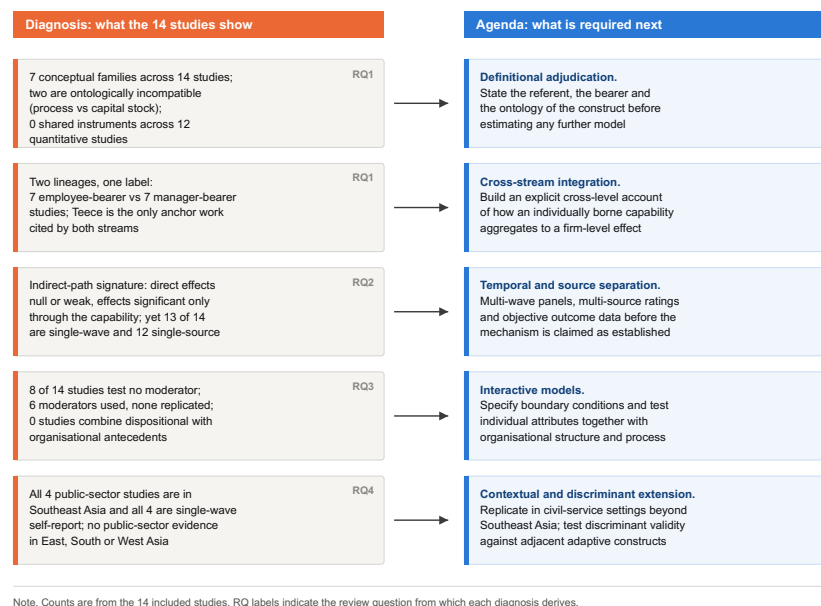


Fig. 4. Diagnosis and research agenda for individually borne dynamic capabilities in digitalised work.

Source: Authors' analysis of the included studies

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

This scoping review charted 14 empirical studies, all indexed in Scopus and all published from 2023 onward, in which a dynamic capability is borne by an individual and linked to performance in a digitalised work setting in Asia and the Global South. Within this corpus the microfoundational claim the literature makes for itself is asserted rather than tested, a judgement that rests on three conclusions.

1. The construct is shared in name rather than in content. Six label families and seven conceptual families are in use for what is nominally one construct, two of them ontologically incompatible; two studies supply no individual-level definition at all; and no measurement instrument is shared by any two of the twelve quantitative studies. The bearer divides the corpus exactly in half, and the employee and manager streams draw on almost entirely separate intellectual sources.
2. The evidence on outcomes and on the surrounding network is correspondingly thin. Outcome level splits evenly, yet only six studies theorise how a capability held by a person produces an effect at a higher level. The most consistent pattern is negative in form, with technological and leadership antecedents showing null or weak direct effects and significant effects only through an individual-level capability; because 13 of the 14 studies are single-wave and 12 rely on single-source perceptual outcomes, it is best carried forward as a hypothesis rather than an established mechanism. Eight studies tested no moderator, and none combined dispositional and organisational antecedents in one model.
3. The evidence is structurally uneven. Seven of the 14 studies were conducted in China and ten examined private-sector organisations; all four public-sector studies are located in Southeast Asia and all four are single-wave self-report surveys, so the cell in which capability theory and digital government research would meet is methodologically uniform as well as thin.

Two findings are secure in a way the others are not, because they are counts rather than interpretations: no instrument is shared across the twelve quantitative studies, so the reported

associations are not yet comparable; and no study tests dispositional and organisational antecedents in one model, so the microfoundational claim this literature makes for itself has not been tested. The corrective is definitional before it is empirical: until authors specify the referent, the bearer and the ontology of the construct they measure, and show that it is distinguishable from adaptive performance, workforce agility and job crafting, further mediation models are unlikely to add knowledge in proportion to their volume.

Limitations

Five limitations bear on interpretation rather than on procedure: a) the review rests on a single database without citation chasing, so the 14 studies are a lower bound and the absence of pre-2023 studies should be read as absence within Scopus; b) the lineage separation in Fig. 2 rests on reference-list inspection by author surname rather than formal co-citation analysis; c) the thematic coding is provisional pending independent double coding; d) the search was restricted to English-language journal articles, excluding non-journal and non-English evidence; and e) the 14 studies represent fewer independent research programmes than their number implies.

Recommendations

Future research should empirically test whether the conceptual families identified in this review represent distinct constructs or manifestations of a broader individual-level dynamic capability. Studies should establish clearer construct boundaries and develop harmonised measurement instruments to enable cross-study comparison. Longitudinal and multi-source designs should then examine antecedents, mediators, moderators, and cross-level mechanisms. Comparative research involving employees and managers, particularly in underrepresented public-sector contexts beyond Southeast Asia, is also needed to address the conceptual, methodological, and geographical gaps identified in this review.

Author Contributions

All authors made substantial contributions to this study. These contributions included conceptualisation of the research, development of the theoretical framework, formulation of the review questions and methodology, literature search and study selection, data charting and analysis, interpretation of findings, manuscript preparation, critical revision, and final approval of the manuscript for publication. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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