# CHOICES THAT MATTER:
# A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING STRATEGY COHERENCE

Eric C. Mota
Wichita State University
eric.mota@wichita.edu

Peter G. Klein
Baylor University and Norwegian School of Economics
peter_klein@baylor.edu

## ABSTRACT

Strategy coherence—the extent to which an organization's strategic choices reinforce one another—has long been associated with superior organizational performance. Although this concern has been examined under multiple labels, including alignment, consistency, congruence, and integration, prior research has offered limited guidance on how coherence is constructed and sustained, treating it largely as an outcome to be observed rather than deliberately shaped through strategic choice. We develop an integrated framework of strategy coherence based on an interpretive synthesis of research spanning strategic management, marketing, product development, and resource allocation. We identify a core set of strategic choices that establish coherence, specify their sequential ordering, and explain how later choices reinforce earlier commitments. We further articulate the mechanisms through which these choices shape stakeholder interpretation and organizational action, clarifying how coherence becomes a cumulative strategic property rather than the absence of inconsistency. We offer three contributions to strategic management. The first, a unified account that integrates fragmented research streams into a coherent explanation of how strategy coherence is built and sustained across organizational domains. The second, a mechanism-based explanation of how coherence generates advantage—spanning stakeholder interpretation, cross-domain reinforcement, and resource commitment—showing how aligned choices amplify one another rather than simply co-exist. The third, a process-based specification that moves coherence theory from pattern recognition to construction by identifying which strategic choices matter and how they are connected. For practitioners, we describe how to sequence and evaluate strategic choices to achieve coherence deliberately rather than diagnose it retrospectively.

Corresponding Author: Eric C. Mota (eric.mota@wichita.edu) +1 (254) 722-0719. W. Frank Barton School of Business, Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount St, Wichita, KS 67260, U.S.A., (316)978-7584.

## INTRODUCTION

Why do organizations with similar resources and capabilities differ in performance (Barney, Mackey, & Mackey, 2023; Hoopes, Madsen, & Walker, 2003)? A recurring explanation points not to any single strategic choice but to whether an organization's choices amplify one another or merely accumulate.

Since Hofer and Schendel's (1978) early work, researchers have recognized that organizational choices influence and limit one another in ways that affect performance. Porter's (1980) work on competitive strategy emphasized that competitive advantage requires not only choosing a clear positioning—cost leadership or differentiation—but ensuring that the firm's activities align with that choice to avoid being "stuck in the middle" and underperforming. This interest in coherent strategic choices appears in research on strategic alignment (Baier, Hartmann, & Moser, 2008; Kaplan & Norton, 2006; Sabherwal, Sabherwal, Havakhor, & Steelman, 2019) and studies examining strategic consistency (Lamberg, Tikkanen, Nokelainen, & Suur-Inkeroinen, 2009; Venkatraman & Walker, 1989), both exploring how alignment of strategic elements contributes to organizational performance and survival (Mintzberg, 2022).

Recent theoretical developments have renewed scholarly interest in how coherent strategic choices influence organizational outcomes. Van den Steen's (2018: 4533) view of strategy as "the smallest set of choices to optimally guide other choices" offers a framework for understanding these relationships. Research on business model fit shows that firms whose value-creation, delivery, and capture elements reinforce one another outperform those with fragmented models (Novelli & Spina, 2024; Teece, 2018). Configurations of strategic choices similarly predict performance. Firms combining choices coherently outperform those whose choices operate in isolation (Greckhamer & Gur, 2021; Horner, Jayawarna, Giordano, & Jones, 2019; Perrigino & Raveendhran, 2025).

Despite decades of research linking alignment among strategic choices to performance, theoretical fragmentation has hindered cumulative progress and organizational implementation efforts (McGahan, 2022; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). This concern has been examined under partially overlapping labels—including strategic alignment, strategic consistency, strategic congruence, strategic integration, and strategy coherence—which direct attention to different facets of coordination but complicate integration into a cumulative explanatory account. As a result, prior work has offered limited clarity on which strategic decisions are most critical for establishing coherence and how those decisions are connected to one another. More broadly, coherence is often invoked as a property organizations exhibit, rather than explained as a set of choices managers assemble and sustain (Leinwand & Mainardi, 2010; Miller, 1996; Siggelkow, 2002; Van den Steen, 2018). This lack of specification mirrors the practical challenges organizations face when attempting to achieve strategy coherence, as they struggle to identify which decisions truly matter and in what sequence they should be made. When such guidance is absent, organizations often find themselves pulled in multiple directions—shifting positioning, sending mixed signals, and diluting effort—ultimately eroding performance (Lieberman, 2021).

To address these issues, we develop an integrated framework that identifies the core strategic choices underpinning strategy coherence, drawing on an interpretive synthesis of coherence-related literatures (Kunisch, Denyer, Bartunek, Menz, & Cardinal, 2023; Torraco, 2005). Drawing on perspectives from strategic management, marketing, product development, and finance, we integrate insights from previously fragmented streams. This synthesis consolidates how prior work explains coherence achievement and breakdown in concrete organizational settings, allowing us to specify how those choices are structured and connected.

We offer three contributions to strategic management. The first, a framework that identifies the strategic choices that anchor coherence and shows how they are sequenced and mutually reinforcing. Prior work recognizes interdependence among a firm's choices but offers limited guidance on which choices establish coherence or how others connect to them. We show that a small set of strategic commitments functions as antecedent choices that organize downstream decisions (Gorman & Harrigan, 2022). This account is primarily descriptive, documenting the sequence associated with coherent organizations, though it carries normative implications for firms seeking to build coherence deliberately. The second, a mechanism-based account of how strategy coherence generates advantage. Existing research links coherence to performance (Powell, 1992; Venkatraman & Prescott, 1990) but provides little insight into how coherence is produced. We specify mechanisms—spanning stakeholder interpretation, reinforcement across organizational domains, and resource commitment—through which coherent choices amplify one another. This clarifies why coherence is not merely the absence of inconsistency, but a source of cumulative strategic advantage. The third, a process-based specification that moves coherence theory from pattern recognition to construction. Prior work has largely described coherent organizations through configurations or retrospective narratives (Miller, 1996; Siggelkow, 2002), offering limited guidance on how coherence is built. Our framework explains how coherence emerges through a sequenced set of strategic choices, enabling theorizing about coherence as something organizations construct and sustain rather than merely display ex post.

Beyond these contributions, our framework integrates insights across research streams that have progressed in parallel. Positioning research has traditionally focused on competitive advantage while abstracting from implementation (Porter, 1996; Rivkin, 2000; Siggelkow, 2002), whereas strategy process and implementation research has examined execution while often treating positioning as given (Bower, 1970; Burgelman, 1991; Johnson, Melin, & Whittington, 2003; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). By linking market-facing commitments to downstream choices in communication, product development, and resource allocation, we connect micro-level decisions with macro-level strategic outcomes (Gupta & Govindarajan, 1984; Noda & Bower, 1996).

## CONCEPTUAL LANDSCAPE: MAPPING STRATEGY COHERENCE TERMINOLOGY

A longstanding concern in strategy research is how organizational decisions relate to one another and jointly shape firm outcomes. This concern has given rise to a family of closely related constructs—strategic fit, strategic alignment, strategic consistency, strategic congruence, strategic integration, and strategy coherence—that address coordination among strategic elements from different theoretical perspectives (Bourgeois & Brodwin, 1984; Miller, 1996; Porter, 1996; Teece, Rumelt, Dosi, & Winter, 1994; Venkatraman & Camillus, 1984; Venkatraman & Prescott, 1990). Although these concepts are often used interchangeably, they differ systematically in their assumptions about how strategies are formed, evaluated, and sustained. Clarifying these differences is necessary not to introduce a new construct, but to identify which existing concept is best suited to advance theory on how strategic choices are structured, ordered, and reinforced over time.

Table 1 synthesizes the core concepts most frequently used to examine coordination among strategic choices, along with their dominant definitions, key references, and primary analytical contexts. The comparison highlights both the conceptual crowding in this space and the distinct analytical limits associated with each construct.

*[Table 1 here]*

*Strategic fit* and *strategic alignment* focus primarily on correspondence. Strategic fit emphasizes the degree of match between organizational strategy and its external environment or internal capabilities (Miles & Snow, 1984; Venkatraman & Camillus, 1984). Strategic alignment extends this logic inward, emphasizing the synchronization of strategy with organizational structures, processes, and systems to support performance goals (Kaplan & Norton, 2006; Sabherwal et al., 2019; Venkatraman & Prescott, 1990). These constructs have been central in contingency-based explanations of performance differences. However, their analytical strength lies in evaluating whether strategic elements correspond, not in explaining how such correspondence is achieved. Strategic decisions are implicitly treated as simultaneous or equilibrium outcomes, leaving the ordering, precedence, and interdependence of choices largely unspecified.

A second set of constructs—*strategic consistency*, *strategic congruence*, and *strategic integration*—moves closer to a systems-oriented understanding of strategy. Strategic consistency emphasizes the maintenance of stable strategic patterns over time and the avoidance of contradictory actions, often in the context of organizational hierarchy and adaptation (Bourgeois & Brodwin, 1984; Burgelman, 1983; Lamberg et al., 2009; Venkatraman & Walker, 1989). Strategic congruence highlights harmony among interdependent strategic elements within an integrated configuration (Drazin & Van de Ven, 1985; Miller, 1996). Strategic integration focuses on coordinating diverse initiatives across functions and business units, particularly in complex or multi-business firms (Porter, 1996; Powell, 1992). While these constructs acknowledge interdependence across activities and over time, they typically remain non-hierarchical. They describe desirable system properties without specifying which choices are foundational, how conflicts among choices are resolved, or how coordination is sustained when tradeoffs intensify.

This comparison clarifies the distinctive but underdeveloped position of strategy coherence. As Table 1 shows, the concept is already present in the literature (Leinwand & Mainardi, 2010; Nath & Sudharshan, 1994), but it has often been invoked as an evaluative descriptor rather than a fully specified theoretical construct. What distinguishes coherence from adjacent concepts is not definitional breadth, but its implicit commitment to a stronger internal logic of strategy. Coherence suggests that an organization's choices form an ordered and mutually reinforcing system, rather than a set of merely compatible or coordinated elements.

**Adjacent Perspectives on Organizational Harmony**

In addition to the core constructs summarized in Table 1, several adjacent research streams address related concerns with organizational harmony and unity. Configuration and Gestalt approaches provide analytical frameworks for recognizing holistic organizational patterns (Miller & Friesen, 1984; Siggelkow, 2002). Business model research, particularly work on business model coherence, examines the internal consistency of value creation, delivery, and capture logics (Novelli & Spina, 2024; Teece, 2018). Brand-strategy and identity-strategy alignment research explores the coherence between strategic intent, organizational identity, and external expressions (e.g., Beverland, 2005; Lang, 2022; Ravasi & Phillips, 2011; Urde, 1999).

These streams offer insights into different facets of coherence, but they serve different theoretical purposes. Configuration approaches function primarily as taxonomic tools for pattern recognition rather than as process theories of strategic choice. Business model research focuses on value architecture rather than on how strategic decisions are sequenced and connected. Brand and identity research addresses components of coherence, but, like configuration and business model perspectives, does not theorize coherence as a relationally ordered decision architecture. For this reason, these perspectives inform, but do not anchor, the present review.

**Delimiting Strategy Coherence**

We anchor this review in strategy coherence—rather than strategic alignment, fit, consistency, congruence, or integration—because coherence is uniquely suited to explain how strategic choices are structured, sequenced, and sustained.

First, strategy coherence privileges decisions over structures. Whereas alignment research has generated valuable insights into supportive infrastructures and systems (Kaplan & Norton, 2006; Sabherwal et al., 2019), it often treats strategy as fixed and implementation as derivative. Coherence instead foregrounds the ordering of strategic choices themselves, directing attention to which commitments establish the foundation upon which alignment is subsequently built.

Second, strategy coherence integrates insights that remain fragmented across adjacent constructs. Strategic fit emphasizes external matching but underspecifies internal mechanisms (Venkatraman & Camillus, 1984). Strategic consistency highlights temporal persistence but provides limited guidance on how choices connect to one another (Lamberg et al., 2009). Strategic integration addresses multi-unit coordination while often assuming rather than explaining intra-unit coherence (Porter, 1996). Strategic congruence recognizes holistic patterns but operates primarily as a classificatory framework (Miller, 1996). Coherence synthesizes these partial perspectives into a unified account of how strategic choices reinforce one another over time.

Third, strategy coherence supports prescriptive theorizing in ways that adjacent concepts do not. Much prior work has remained descriptive or diagnostic, identifying coherent organizations or explaining coherence ex post (Nath & Sudharshan, 1994). By contrast, coherence provides a conceptual basis for specifying which choices matter, how they should be ordered, and through what mechanisms alignment generates advantage.

A central boundary delimits this approach. Strategy coherence, as we employ, emphasizes internal alignment of strategic decisions, rather than organization–environment correspondence. This distinguishes it from strategic fit, which explicitly foregrounds environmental matching (Venkatraman & Camillus, 1984).

## LITERATURE REVIEW: STRATEGIC CHOICES ESTABLISHING COHERENCE

We identify a set of strategic choices that appear central to the establishment of strategy coherence. These choices emerge from an interpretive reading of literatures associated with established coherence-related constructs, including strategic alignment, fit, consistency, congruence, integration, configuration, business model coherence, strategy coherence, and identity- and brand-strategy alignment (e.g., Torraco, 2005; Kunisch et al., 2023). Because these constructs are distributed across multiple research streams and often discussed without consistent terminology, our review incorporates both keyword-identified works and conceptually central studies that surfaced through iterative corpus expansion. This approach reflects interpretive review conventions in which theoretical relevance, rather than lexical matching alone, guides inclusion.

Rather than treating coherence-related constructs as abstract properties of organizations, we examine how scholars explain when and why coherence is achieved or lost in concrete organizational settings. Across these literatures, explanations of coherence repeatedly hinge on a limited set of strategic decisions that play an organizing role: decisions that resolve tradeoffs, orient activity across functions, and provide reference points against which other choices are evaluated.

Abstracting from differences in terminology, this interpretive synthesis reveals a recurring set of such commitments that are consistently implicated in explanations of coherent strategy (Dixon-Woods, Agarwal, Jones, Young, & Sutton, 2006; Kunisch et al., 2023; Post, Sarala, Gatrell, & Prescott, 2020). These are the decisions that prior work treats as antecedent commitments. Once made, they shape and constrain downstream choices, while more contingent or context-specific decisions vary without undermining coherence (Camuffo, Gambardella, & Pignataro, 2023; Van den Steen, 2017; 2018). These choices are visible in organizational artifacts and practices, consequential for multiple domains simultaneously, and treated by prior work as points at which coherence is either established or undermined. As a result, they surface repeatedly, implicitly or explicitly, as the decisions through which broader alignment is enabled.

These choices recur across multiple research streams, but each stream typically examines how positioning relates to a single class of downstream decisions rather than to the full set of choices we identify. Porter (1996) and Markides (1999) treat positioning as anchoring competitive strategy generally. Fuchs and Diamantopoulos (2010) show that positioning precedes and shapes marketing and operational decisions specifically. Siggelkow (2002) documents recursive reinforcement within a single organization's evolving configuration. No account assembles these pairwise findings into a single architecture spanning communication, product development, and resource allocation, or specifies the mechanisms through which such an architecture would operate.

**Positioning**

Research consistently identifies positioning as the initiating choice in coherent strategy systems (e.g., Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart, 2010; Ghemawat, 1991; Porter, 1996; Rivkin, 2000; Zott & Amit, 2008; Van den Steen, 2018). Positioning is the mental territory a firm occupies in customers' minds, earned by committing to a particular set of organizational choices—about whom to serve, how to compete, and what not to do. In this sense, positioning encompasses classic generic strategies such as cost leadership or differentiation (Besanko, Dranove, & Shanley, 1999; Porter, 1980), but also more nuanced competitive logics—such as ALDI's extreme cost discipline, Whole Foods Market's values-based differentiation, Zara's accessible fashion, or Amazon's commitment to comprehensive assortment—that are intelligible to customers precisely because they are sustained through coherent patterns of organizational choice (Porter, 1996; Ries & Trout, 1972). Although positioning is ultimately realized through stakeholder interpretation, it originates in deliberate strategic tradeoffs that discipline subsequent decisions across the organization.

Porter's (1980) original formulation emphasized positioning along the cost–differentiation continuum, warning that firms failing to commit clearly to one direction risk becoming "stuck in the middle." This insight revealed positioning's constraining function: once a position is chosen, certain options become infeasible without undermining credibility. Kaplan and Norton (2000) similarly treat positioning as a foundational choice that anchors the broader set of decisions an organization makes.

Positioning's anchoring function extends beyond this competitive logic to its perceptual dimension. IKEA's "accessible design" positioning established a distinct mental territory that subsequently guided decisions about product modularity, flat-pack logistics, store layout, communication tone, and pricing discipline. These downstream choices did not define the position; they expressed and reinforced it. Organizations making distinctive positioning commitments establish an anchor that orients alignment across operational domains by narrowing the range of acceptable subsequent choices.

This constraining logic also shapes coordination, product development, and the pace at which positioning's benefits materialize. Walker and Ruekert (1987) find that cross-functional coordination improves when organizational units orient toward a clear competitive position. Wind and Robertson (1983) show that positioning decisions precede and constrain product development portfolios, with superior performance achieved when new offerings consistently reflect established positioning. Longitudinal evidence further suggests that organizations maintaining positioning consistency over time achieve stronger market outcomes than those frequently shifting positions, indicating recursive reinforcement through sustained commitment (Hoskins & Griffin, 2023).

Positioning also shapes resource allocation. Christensen and Bower (1996) demonstrate that established positioning creates path dependencies in funding decisions, with organizations systematically supporting initiatives consistent with positioning while rejecting misaligned opportunities. In this sense, positioning operates not merely as market communication but as an organizational decision filter through which subsequent choices must pass.

**Customer Identity**

A second coherence-relevant choice concerns customer identity: how organizations envision customers transforming through engagement with their offerings (e.g., Belk, 1988; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Hatch & Schultz, 2001; Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986; Ravasi & Phillips, 2011). This choice extends beyond segmentation to define an aspirational identity that customers can plausibly adopt through interaction with the firm. Tesla frames customers as automotive sophisticates; Etsy enables creative entrepreneurs; YouTube positions users as content creators—or YouTubers.

Empirical research suggests that when positioning supports a specific identity pathway, customers form stronger attachments and maintain more durable relationships with the firm (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Fournier, 1998; Oyserman, 2009; Reed, Forehand, Puntoni, & Warlop, 2012). When positioning is ambiguous or inconsistent, these identity connections weaken (Berger & Heath, 2007). Ethnographic studies similarly show that identity adoption occurs when offerings are framed as meaningful pathways rather than neutral consumption experiences (Arnould & Price, 1993).

Research further indicates that identity adoption depends on whether the firm presents a coherent narrative that customers can integrate into their sense of self (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Escalas & Bettman, 2003). When organizations consistently signal the identity they intend to enable, customers incorporate that identity into ongoing relationships and privilege the firm's products and services over alternatives (Fournier, 1998; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Studies linking strategy coherence to identity choices find that alignment between positioning and intended customer identity supports broader organizational integration (Beverland, Napoli, & Yakimova, 2007; Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986; Schau, Muñiz Jr, & Arnould, 2009). Tesla again illustrates this alignment. Its sophistication positioning is reinforced by design, performance cues, and communication that consistently frame ownership as participation in a technologically advanced future (Gehman & Soublière, 2017). Scholars note that such alignment between positioning and identity establishes a stable reference that guides subsequent operational decisions (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; Beverland, 2005; Urde, 1999).

### Corporate Visual Identity

Strategic communication choices, particularly corporate visual identity, also feature prominently in the coherence literature. Visual identity elements—symbols, color systems, typography, and imagery—operate as visible expressions of organizational positioning (Keller, 1993; Walsh & Mitchell, 2010). Research suggests that visual systems contribute to coherence when they reflect, rather than precede, established positioning (e.g., Balmer & Greyser, 2003; Kapferer, 2008; Olins, 1995; Stuart & Muzellec, 2004; Wheeler, 2017).

Pittard, Ewing, and Jevons (2007) show that visual identity shapes stakeholder interpretation effectively only when aligned with prior positioning; premature or misaligned visual development generates conflicting signals. Longitudinal studies indicate that organizations with strong brand performance typically clarified positioning before formalizing visual identity, allowing visual elements to express strategic intent rather than substitute for it (Coleman, de Chernatony, & Christodoulides, 2011).

Once aligned, visual identity reinforces positioning through repeated symbolic expression. Van den Bosch, De Jong, and Elving (2005) find that consistent visual systems across touchpoints strengthen stakeholder understanding, while fragmented systems dilute it. Experimental work shows that designs echoing positioning themes improve recognition and recall relative to unaligned designs (Henderson, Cote, Leong, & Schmitt, 2003).

Evidence from visual identity change further underscores coherence implications. Balmer's (2010) analysis of British Airways' 1997 rebranding illustrates how visual changes misaligned with business positioning generated stakeholder resistance and strategic confusion. Similar challenges are documented in international contexts, where standardization versus localization decisions significantly affect coherence across geographies (Melewar & Saunders, 1999).

**Stakeholder Messaging**

Complementing visual identity, stakeholder messaging choices shape how positioning is interpreted and maintained. Research shows that rhetorical elements influence how organizations establish and sustain their intended mental territory (e.g., McQuarrie & Mick, 1996; Navis & Glynn, 2010; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2004; Rindova, Pollock, & Hayward, 2006). Consistent reinforcement of positioning themes across communication channels is associated with greater strategic integration (Christensen, Firat, & Torp, 2008; Keller, 2001; Madhavaram, Badrinarayanan, & McDonald, 2005; Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn, 1993).

Reid (2005) demonstrates that absent a clear positioning strategy, messaging efforts become fragmented across organizational functions. Conversely, organizations that maintain core themes while adapting expression to stakeholder needs achieve greater coherence (Porcu, del Barrio-Garcia, Kitchen, & Tourky, 2020; Wenzel, Cornelissen, Koch, Hartmann, & Rauch, 2020). Such messaging choices allow communication to vary tactically while remaining anchored to a stable strategic reference.

Nike illustrates this pattern. Its visual identity centered on the swoosh symbol consistently references achievement and victory, while its messaging narratives emphasize perseverance and excellence. Together, these choices sustain a coherent interpretation across audiences and contexts (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; Holt, 2003; Von Wallpach, Hemetsberger, & Espersen, 2017).

**Salient Features**

Product development research identifies salient feature choices as a strategic decision central to the establishment of coherence. Salient features are the distinctive attributes that define how an offering is evaluated and differentiated, and they often serve as the most tangible expression of an organization's positioning (Bloch, 1995; Crawford & Di Benedetto, 2015; Verganti, 2009; Veryzer, 1998). Rather than reflecting incremental design decisions, choices about salient features commit the organization to a particular interpretation of value, thereby shaping how the offering is categorized and compared in the market (Clark & Fujimoto, 1991; Krishnan & Ulrich, 2001).

Verganti's (2009) work on design-driven innovation shows that organizations frequently compete through meaning rather than technology alone, with feature choices expressing distinctive value propositions that can redefine market categories. His cases illustrate that when features coherently express positioning, they do more than signal differentiation—they stabilize how the product is understood (Norman, 2004; Rindova & Petkova, 2007). Berry, Hill, and Klompmaker (1999) similarly demonstrate that firms aligning salient feature choices with positioning strategies achieve superior performance, suggesting that coherence between positioning and feature emphasis is a critical determinant of competitive advantage.

Research on platform ecosystems reinforces this insight. Gawer and Cusumano (2014) show that platform design decisions—specifically which features are emphasized, opened, restricted, or standardized—shape innovation trajectories by signaling the platform's intended position. These choices attract complementors whose offerings reinforce, rather than dilute, the platform's strategic orientation. In this sense, salient feature choices operate as boundary-setting commitments that structure not only user experience but also ecosystem participation.

Apple's iPhone illustrates this sequential logic. Its usability positioning preceded and guided feature choices emphasizing intuitive interfaces, ecosystem integration, and minimalist design (Gawer & Cusumano, 2014). These features consistently expressed the intended position, creating a coherent product character that distinguished the iPhone from competitors. The case demonstrates how salient features function as strategic choices that translate positioning into concrete, repeatable product attributes.

**Feature Exclusion**

Complementing salient features, feature exclusion emerges as a distinct strategic choice shaping coherence. Product development research shows that decisions about what not to include are as consequential as inclusion decisions, particularly when they reinforce positioning and clarify strategic focus (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1995; Crawford & Di Benedetto, 2015; Krishnan & Ulrich, 2001; Thomke & Reinertsen, 1998; Ulrich & Eppinger, 2016). Feature exclusion constrains the product's scope, limiting ambiguity about its intended role and preventing dilution of strategic intent.

Empirical research on choice simplification demonstrates that removing nonessential options improves outcomes when exclusions align with the product's positioning. Iyengar and Lepper (2000) show that reduced choice sets often yield higher satisfaction, while Thompson, Hamilton, and Rust (2005) find that products overloaded with capabilities generate lower post-use evaluations. Design research similarly indicates that eliminating peripheral elements improves usability and clarity of purpose when exclusions are consistent with the product's strategic identity (Lidwell, Holden, & Butler, 2010; Maeda, 2006; Norman, 2013).

These findings suggest that feature exclusion is most effective when it follows and reinforces positioning, helping the product deliver on its promise by narrowing attention to what the offering is intended to do well (Rindova & Petkova, 2007; Veryzer, 1998). Rather than representing cost-cutting or minimalism per se, exclusion operates as a commitment to focus.

Tesla exemplifies this logic through its minimalist interior design, which excludes traditional physical controls in favor of touchscreen interfaces consistent with its sophistication positioning. Nintendo's Switch similarly excluded high-end graphics capabilities common in competing consoles, reinforcing its positioning around accessibility and portability while enabling improved battery life. Kim and Mauborgne's (2005) analysis of Nintendo's strategy shows how such exclusionary choices enabled the creation of distinct value curves, demonstrating that feature exclusion can reinforce positioning by systematically removing elements inconsistent with strategic intent.

**Strategic Expenses (STRATEX)**

Resource allocation for strategy implementation emerges as a final strategic choice in establishing coherence. Kaplan and Norton (2008) define STRATEX (Strategic Expenditures) as investments directed toward long-term competitive advantage rather than routine operational needs, distinguishing them from conventional CAPEX or OPEX. Research suggests that STRATEX choices translate strategic intent into organizational commitment, linking planning and execution (e.g. Burgelman & Grove, 2007; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1984; Noda & Collis, 2001).

Classic work by Bower (1970) shows that resource allocation patterns reveal an organization’s true strategic priorities regardless of formal statements, underscoring the role of funding decisions as expressions of strategy. Noda and Bower (1996) further demonstrate that strategy emerges through iterative allocation processes, with each funding decision either reinforcing or undermining coherence (Burgelman, 1983; Lovas & Ghoshal, 2000). Their longitudinal analyses indicate that organizations exhibiting sustained coherence maintain allocation patterns aligned with positioning even during periods of performance pressure.

Process research highlights the consequences of misalignment (Siggelkow, 2001; Sull, 1999). Burgelman (1994) documents how organizations that articulate clear positioning but allocate resources inconsistently experience fragmented execution, creating gaps between intended and realized strategy. Raynor and Bower (2001) extend this insight, showing that short-term performance pressures frequently erode commitments necessary to sustain positioning, producing temporal incoherence even when initial alignment exists.

Research on dynamic capabilities adds a temporal dimension to STRATEX choices (Danneels, 2011; Karim & Mitchell, 2000). Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) argue that resource reconfiguration processes themselves constitute capabilities enabling organizations to sustain coherence amid change. Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997) similarly emphasize that competitive advantage depends not only on resource accumulation but on the ability to redeploy resources as strategic requirements evolve. Together, these studies suggest that STRATEX decisions play a role in sustaining coherence by enabling earlier strategic commitments to persist and adapt over time.

## INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK: THE LOGIC OF STRATEGY COHERENCE

The literatures reviewed above examine strategic choices largely in isolation. Research on positioning proceeds independently from studies of resource allocation; work on corporate communication develops separately from product development inquiry. Yet organizations must make choices across all these domains, and those choices either reinforce one another or work at cross-purposes. In this section, we integrate insights from previously disconnected research streams into a unified framework explaining how strategic choices jointly establish strategy coherence.

Our central claim is that coherence emerges through an architectural logic where choices occupy distinct positions within a system, defined by their relationships to one another rather than by their location within a firm's formal structure. This departs from Hofer and Schendel's (1978) framework, which categorizes strategic decisions by hierarchical level. We retain their insight that strategic decisions constrain one another while replacing level by relationship as the organizing principle (Leiblein, Reuer, & Zenger, 2018). Positioning functions as the foundational choice that orients subsequent decisions, while later choices both depend on and recursively reinforce this anchoring commitment.

### Locus Across Firm Structures

Where each choice is made varies with how a firm is organized, though the underlying logic does not. In single-business or related-diversified firms, positioning and customer identity typically sit at the corporate level. One value proposition governs the firm's offerings, and communication choices are coordinated centrally to avoid contradictory signals across units. In unrelated-diversified, multidivisional firms, positioning is more often a business-unit prerogative, with corporate's role limited to portfolio logic and the architecture of the corporate brand across units (Rumelt, 1974; Williamson, 1975). Communication is then coordinated at that same business-unit level, with corporate retaining only shared conventions. Salient features and feature exclusion are often business-level decisions across both structures because competitive dynamics and customer use vary by offering. Strategic expense allocation shows a similar bounded pattern. Capital allocated across businesses is typically a corporate decision, while allocation within a business unit's operating budget generally is not (Bower, 1970; Chandler, 1962).

Mismatches between locus and anchor, not level itself, produce incoherence. Business units that set positioning without reference to corporate identity generate conflicting images. Corporate mandates on product features made without business-level input often produce commitments inconsistent with competitive realities. What remains constant across these structures is not the level at which a choice is made, but that each choice is made with reference to the one that anchors it.

### Sequential Architecture: Positioning as the Foundational Choice

Across the literatures reviewed, positioning consistently appears as the first-order strategic choice. Porter (1996) argued that strategy begins with deciding what the organization will and will not be, before questions of execution can be meaningfully addressed. Markides (1999) similarly emphasized that strategic positions establish decision criteria guiding choices in other domains. Empirical evidence supports this sequencing. Fuchs and Diamantopoulos (2010) show that positioning choices temporally precede and shape decisions across marketing, operations, and resource allocation.

Positioning establishes the reference point against which all subsequent choices are evaluated. Without it, organizations lack criteria for prioritization and produce inconsistent signals. By defining the mental territory the firm seeks to occupy, and the tradeoffs required to sustain it, positioning resolves this ambiguity and enables coherent downstream choice.

The sequence continues beyond positioning. Customer identity must follow positioning because identity claims must be credible given the position occupied. Organizations cannot plausibly enable customers to become experts while positioning as accessible, or rebels while positioning as traditional. Communication architecture must follow positioning and identity because organizations cannot consistently express what has not yet been defined. Visual systems and messages operationalize prior choices; they do not substitute for them. Product development follows communication because it plays a different role in establishing positioning. Communication articulates what the organization claims to stand for. Product development follows because features and exclusions supply the evidence for that claim, translating it into an experience customers can verify directly. Finally, resource allocation must align with all prior choices, funding their execution and signaling organizational commitment.

Consider IKEA's "democratic design" positioning—making good design accessible to many. This positioning preceded and shaped product development (modular furniture customers assemble themselves), retail operations (warehouse-style stores), and communication (emphasizing value and accessibility). Each choice makes sense given the positioning anchor. Had IKEA reversed the sequence—first designing premium, fully-assembled furniture, then trying to position around accessibility—the choices would not cohere.

Positioning may be deliberate or, as Mintzberg and Waters (1985) show, recognized only in retrospect as a pattern in a stream of decisions. Either way, the sequence we describe begins once positioning functions as the reference point for subsequent choices. Penrose (1959) points to a related risk. Firms with slack resources can expand features or capacity simply because they can afford to, independent of whether that expansion reinforces their positioning, as when added features dilute rather than express a firm's usability or sophistication commitments. This is not an alternative path to coherence. It is what incoherence looks like when resource allocation is undisciplined by positioning.

**Recursive Reinforcement: Beyond Alignment**

Recursive reinforcement distinguishes coherence from generic fit or consistency. Fit and consistency require only that choices avoid contradicting one another. Recursive reinforcement requires that later choices actively strengthen positioning. Research documents this pattern. Siggelkow (2002) showed how successful organizations make choices across domains that consistently reinforce core strategic themes. Miller's (1996) configurations represent such reinforcement crystallized into recognizable gestalts. Rivkin and Siggelkow (2003) demonstrated that complementarities create systems in which altering one element undermines the entire configuration.

Recursive reinforcement operates through several observable pathways. Later choices provide proof of positioning claims (features and endorsements demonstrate what the organization stands for), amplification (communication increases salience), constraint escalation (resource commitments raise the cost of reversal), and credibility locking (choices make opportunistic repositioning implausible). When these pathways operate together, positioning becomes more credible and more difficult to reinterpret opportunistically, consistent with how isolating mechanisms protect positioning from imitation (Hoopes & Madsen, 2022; Rumelt, 1984).

Nike exemplifies recursive reinforcement. Their "winners' attitude" positioning is not merely expressed but actively strengthened by each choice domain. Sponsoring elite athletes (communication choice) and emphasizing leadership in product innovation (feature choice) provide proof of the positioning. Allocating substantial resources to athlete endorsements and product technology (STRATEX choice) signals that winning is not rhetoric but organizational priority. Each choice circles back to make positioning more credible, more distinctive, more defensible.

Recursive reinforcement clarifies why coherence matters. When every major choice strengthens the same strategic commitment, stakeholders develop clear expectations about what the organization represents. Employees can prioritize initiatives by evaluating whether they reinforce core positioning; customers encounter consistent signals across touchpoints. This clarity shapes how stakeholders interpret and respond to the organization (Leinwand & Mainardi, 2010).

Figure 1 summarizes our framework above. Solid arrows depict sequence, and dashed arrows depict recursive reinforcement. Positioning and Customer Identity carry an internal arrow because positioning shapes which customer identity a firm can credibly enable. Visual identity and messaging, and salient features and feature exclusion, carry no internal arrow because neither choice in each pair is established as preceding the other. The figure depicts each domain's relationship to positioning. It does not depict domains interacting with one another directly, as when a product team negotiates feature scope against a resource allocation decision still in progress. That kind of concurrent interaction is plausible in practice but not a relationship this synthesis establishes.

*[Figure 1 Here]*

## Mechanisms: How Strategic Choices Create Coherence

We explain how these choices contribute to coherence by identifying six mechanisms through which they shape stakeholder interpretation and organizational action. Each mechanism is anchored in a focal category of strategic choice, sometimes spanning closely related decisions, and clarifies the specific perceptual, psychological, or operational effect through which those choices strengthen coherence. These mechanisms interact rather than operate in isolation, jointly producing coherence across the choice architecture .

### *Perceptual Distinctiveness*

ALDI does not merely compete on low prices; it presents itself as a radically disciplined grocer. Sparse stores, limited assortments, private labels, and functional layouts consistently signal what kind of organization it is—and what it is not. For both employees and customers, these repeated cues establish a clear expectation: efficiency over abundance, discipline over choice. Individual actions are not interpreted in isolation; they are read as expressions of the same strategic stance.

Perceptual distinctiveness explains how positioning produces coherence by becoming the interpretive frame through which stakeholders categorize the firm. Positioning does not simply signal difference; it establishes the basis on which actions are compared, evaluated, and recognized as belonging to the same strategic type (Porac, Thomas, & Baden-Fuller, 2011; Porter, 1980). Once such a frame is established, diverse organizational choices are interpreted relationally rather than independently.

Internally, this frame compresses judgment. Employees rely on positioning as a shared shorthand for decision-making, guiding customer interactions, initiative evaluation, and tradeoff resolution without continual recalibration (Gavetti & Rivkin, 2007). Externally, the accumulation of internally consistent actions produces recognizable patterns of behavior that allow customers to distinguish the firm reliably from alternatives (Fuchs & Diamantopoulos, 2010). Distinctiveness thus emerges not from any single choice, but from the repeated enactment of choices that are intelligible as expressions of the same positioning logic.

***Self-Congruity***

Tesla does not merely sell cars; it frames its customers as automotive sophisticates. Etsy does not position its users as online retailers, but as creative entrepreneurs. In each case, the firm deliberately elevates its audience by defining a specific role the strategy is meant to enable.

This intentional choice contributes to strategy coherence through self-congruity, understood as the alignment between what customers aspire to be and the meanings they associate with an organization through repeated interaction (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Sirgy, 1982; Sirgy et al., 1997). Once a customer identity is defined, organizational decisions are evaluated by a simple question: does this choice plausibly help customers perform that role well? Product features, interfaces, communication, community design, and service practices are no longer independent decisions; they are judged by whether they reinforce the same role expectations (Beverland, 2005; Urde, 1999).

Coherence emerges because experiences accumulate toward a shared way of engaging with the organization. When Tesla's design, technology, and ownership experience consistently affirm sophistication, or when Etsy's tools and narratives consistently support entrepreneurial creativity, organizational actions reinforce one another rather than compete for meaning (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Ravasi & Phillips, 2011).

***Perceptual Consistency***

Apple's bitten apple, Nike's swoosh, and IKEA's blue-and-yellow storefronts do more than identify the firm; they make the organization immediately recognizable across situations. Corporate visual identity contributes to strategy coherence by stabilizing interpretation across repeated encounters and creating perceptual consistency, allowing stakeholders to recognize the same organization—and the same strategic intent—without re-evaluating it each time.

This mechanism operates by reducing interpretive effort. Once a visual system is established and consistently applied, stakeholders no longer need to infer meaning anew from each interaction. Instead, visual cues act as perceptual anchors that signal continuity across products, channels, and contexts. Research shows that systematic visual identity enhances recognition and evaluative clarity precisely because it lowers cognitive processing demands and reinforces associative memory (Henderson & Cote, 1998; Keller, 1993; van den Bosch, de Jong, & Elving, 2005).

Coherence emerges because visual encounters accumulate rather than reset interpretation. When interfaces, environments, and symbols consistently reflect the same strategic commitments, stakeholders experience the organization as unified rather than episodic. Visual identity thus contributes to coherence not by defining strategy, but by ensuring that strategic meaning is repeatedly encountered as the same organization over time rather than as a series of disconnected impressions.

### *Rhetorical Reinforcement*

Patagonia repeatedly frames itself as an environmental actor first and a retailer second. Its messaging consistently emphasizes repair, restraint, activism, and responsibility rather than product novelty or seasonal promotion. Over time, this repetition teaches stakeholders how to interpret the firm: new initiatives, products, and even controversial decisions are read through the same environmental lens rather than evaluated independently.

This illustrates rhetorical reinforcement. Strategic messaging contributes to coherence by repeatedly activating the same strategic meaning across encounters. Communication does not persuade by novelty; it stabilizes interpretation through recurrence. When organizations articulate the same commitments across channels and over time, stakeholders learn what the organization "sounds like," and use that familiarity to interpret subsequent actions (Keller, 2001; McQuarrie & Mick, 1996).

Rhetorical reinforcement matters because strategy is fragile in interpretation. Without repeated articulation, even well-defined positioning and identity claims fade into background noise. Sustained messaging turns strategic intent into an interpretive default: stakeholders no longer ask what the organization means, but recognize it immediately. Coherence emerges because organizational actions are continuously framed by the same narrative rather than reintroduced as isolated signals (Hatch & Schultz, 2001; Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn, 1993).

### *Experiential Reinforcement*

Apple does not merely claim to value simplicity; it commits to a positioning centered on effortless usability and controlled elegance. That positioning is reinforced experientially through product choices that privilege constrained interaction over flexibility: limited customization, tightly integrated hardware–software systems, and interfaces designed to minimize decision-making at the point of use. What customers encounter repeatedly is not technological breadth, but ease, predictability, and fluency. Simplicity is not asserted; it is enforced through use.

Experiential reinforcement captures how such feature choices create coherence by structuring what customers can experience. Salient features enable specific forms of interaction aligned with strategic intent, while deliberate feature exclusions foreclose alternative experiences that would undermine it. In this way, product architecture functions as a strategic commitment device: it channels behavior toward experiences consistent with positioning and prevents drift toward incompatible meanings (Porter, 1996; Verganti, 2009).

This logic explains why salient features and feature exclusion are coherence-critical choices rather than downstream refinements. When features align with positioning and customer identity, strategy becomes credible through enactment. When they do not, inconsistency is revealed immediately in use. Experiential reinforcement thus converts alignment into coherence by embedding strategic commitments directly into lived interaction rather than leaving them at the level of claims or interpretation.

***Resource–Strategy Alignment***

Southwest Airlines does not merely claim to compete on low cost and operational simplicity; it funds that position relentlessly. It invests disproportionately in a single aircraft type, standardized training, fast turnaround routines, and employee profit-sharing, while systematically avoiding expenditures associated with complexity—premium cabins, interline baggage systems, or global alliances. The result is not just cost efficiency, but strategic clarity: what the airline can and cannot do is made explicit through where money flows.

Resource–strategy alignment captures how such funding decisions create coherence by making strategic commitments consequential. Strategic expenditures (STRATEX) translate prior choices—positioning, customer identity, communication, and product design—into organizational reality. Because resources are finite, allocating them in one direction necessarily forecloses others. Funding thus operates as a commitment device: it raises the cost of deviation and stabilizes strategic intent over time (Bower, 1970; Noda & Bower, 1996).

This logic explains why STRATEX must follow other strategic commitments. Resources cannot define what the strategy is, but they determine whether it is enacted or undermined. When funding reinforces established choices, execution consolidates coherence; when it contradicts them, organizations experience strategic dissonance—gaps between articulated intent and lived practice (Burgelman, 1994). Resource–strategy alignment therefore converts alignment into coherence by ensuring that strategy is not merely expressed or experienced, but materially enforced.

## DISCUSSION

A central premise in strategic management is that superior performance often stems from the mutual reinforcement of strategic choices. Firms rarely fail because a single decision is wrong; they fail because decisions that are individually defensible pull in different directions, leaving stakeholders, and the organization itself, uncertain about what the strategy is. Strategy coherence has long served as a label for this problem, yet the literature has tended to treat coherence as an observed property (of configurations, systems, or high-performing exemplars) more than as a constructible choice architecture.

## Theoretical Contributions

### *From pattern recognition to choice architecture*

A large share of coherence research proceeds retrospectively. It identifies coherent gestalts or configurations (Miller, 1996), traces how it emerges (Siggelkow, 2002), or documents associations between coherence and performance (Nath & Sudharshan, 1994; Leinwand & Mainardi, 2010). This work is indispensable, but it often leaves underspecified the decision architecture that makes coherence possible.

Our contribution is to specify that architecture. First, we move beyond generic alignment language by identifying a bounded set of strategic choices that repeatedly function as coherence-relevant constraints across literatures. Second, we show that these choices are not simply complementary; they exhibit sequential interdependence (positioning as an anchor that orients downstream commitments) and recursive reinforcement (downstream choices feeding back to strengthen—or weaken—the credibility of the anchoring commitment). Third, we link each choice to a coherence-relevant channel (mechanism), clarifying how coherence is produced through stakeholder interpretation and organizational action rather than assumed as an abstract system property.

### *Integrating fragmented research streams into a single coherence problem*

Coherence-relevant insight is dispersed across literatures that rarely speak to each other: positioning and distinctiveness (Porter, 1980, 1996), customer identity and self-related meaning (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Sirgy, 1982), visual identity and recognition (Henderson & Cote, 1998; van den Bosch et al., 2005), rhetoric and messaging consistency (McQuarrie & Mick, 1996; Keller, 2001), product architecture and experience (Gawer & Cusumano, 2014; Verganti, 2009), and resource allocation as revealed strategy (Bower, 1970; Burgelman, 1994; Noda &

Bower, 1996). Each stream captures a real part of coherence. But in isolation, it becomes easy to treat coherence as a local issue (a marketing issue, a design issue, a finance issue) rather than a systemic consequence of interacting choices.

Our framework integrates these streams by treating them as components of one underlying problem: how organizations sustain a legible strategic logic when choices are made in different places, by different actors, under different pressures. This makes visible the cross-stream dependencies that single-stream research typically brackets, for example, how resource commitments can stabilize or destabilize positioning, or how product architecture can validate or contradict identity claims.

***Specifying coherence channels without collapsing into tautology***

A persistent weakness in coherence research is that it can become circular: coherence explains performance because coherent firms perform well. We reduce that risk by treating mechanisms as channels linking particular choices to coherence-relevant effects. Perceptual distinctiveness clarifies how positioning becomes an interpretive frame (Porac et al., 2011; Porter, 1980). Self-congruity clarifies how customer identity choices align aspiration and meaning through repeated interaction (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Sirgy, 1982; Sirgy et al., 1997). Perceptual consistency clarifies how visual systems stabilize recognition (Henderson & Cote, 1998; Keller, 1993). Rhetorical reinforcement clarifies how repeated messaging teaches stakeholders how to interpret actions (Hatch & Schultz, 2001; McQuarrie & Mick, 1996). Experiential reinforcement clarifies how feature inclusion and exclusion embed strategic intent into use (Porter, 1996; Verganti, 2009). Resource–strategy alignment clarifies how allocation makes commitments consequential (Bower, 1970; Burgelman, 1994; Noda & Bower, 1996).

Importantly, these channels are not assumed to operate independently. Coherence is produced by their cumulative and overlapping effects. Visual identity may stabilize recognition, but it will not rescue incoherent product experience; product experience may validate positioning, but it will be undermined by resource allocation that funds contradictory initiatives. Mechanisms specify how choices matter; the framework specifies why they must be treated as a system.

## Managerial Implications

### *Coherence begins with an anchoring commitment*

Our framework reframes coherence as a managerial problem of choice discipline, not of coordination or consistency. The central implication is that coherence begins with an explicit anchoring commitment—positioning—that provides direction for all subsequent choices. Positioning is not simply a statement of intent or market aspiration; it is a small set of commitments and exclusions that reliably guide prioritization when tradeoffs arise. When positioning performs this function, it resolves disagreement by reference to what the organization is committed to being, rather than by negotiation among competing local objectives. Where positioning remains ambiguous, downstream domains are forced to improvise, and coherence cannot be sustained.

### *Coherence depends on sequence, not simultaneity*

A second implication is that coherence requires respect for the order in which choices are made. Organizations often attempt to resolve strategic issues in parallel—designing products, allocating resources, and crafting messages before upstream commitments are settled. Our framework shows why this approach generates incoherence: downstream choices depend on upstream ones for meaning. Customer identity, communication architecture, product architecture, and resource allocation do not substitute for positioning; they presuppose it. Coherence therefore hinges less on aligning all choices at once than on ensuring that earlier commitments are sufficiently clear to orient later ones. Many coherence failures are not execution failures but sequencing failures.

#### ***Coherence is maintained through recursive discipline under pressure***

A third implication concerns how coherence is preserved over time. Coherence is not threatened by inconsistency alone, but by accumulation of locally attractive exceptions that gradually erode the anchoring commitment. Maintaining coherence requires recursive discipline: the repeated use of positioning as a criterion for evaluating initiatives, especially under conditions of uncertainty or performance pressure. Organizations that sustain coherence appear focused not because they resist change, but because they systematically reject options that would dilute their strategic commitments. The framework clarifies that such discipline is not rigidity, but a condition for cumulative meaning across choices.

#### ***Coherence can be managed diagnostically***

Finally, our framework enables managers to treat coherence as a system that can be monitored rather than as a virtue to be asserted. The mechanisms identified in the paper offer a diagnostic lens for detecting drift: where stakeholders struggle to interpret what the organization stands for, where experiences fail to validate stated commitments, or where resource patterns contradict strategic intent. Managing coherence in this way shifts attention from abstract alignment to concrete interpretive consequences. Coherence improves not by exhortation, but by correcting the specific channels through which choices cease to add up.

### Research Directions

#### ***Temporal dynamics and sequence contingencies***

Our framework specifies coherence as an architecture, but not as a full longitudinal process theory. This motivates research on when sequence is tight versus when choices co-emerge (e.g., early-stage ventures; platform transitions; post-merger integration), and how firms manage temporary incoherence during repositioning or renewal (Agarwal & Helfat, 2009; Rajagopalan & Spreitzer, 1997). An empirical test would track firms through a known transition event, such as post-merger integration or platform transition, and measure how long recursive reinforcement takes to re-stabilize after positioning is reset, comparing firms that resequence choices in a concentrated episode against those that allow choices to co-emerge gradually.

***Measurement aligned to the architecture***

Existing coherence measures (e.g., indices or expert ratings) do not map cleanly onto the choice relations specified here (Leinwand & Mainardi, 2010; Nath & Sudharshan, 1994). Future work can operationalize coherence more directly by measuring (i) choice alignment (e.g., positioning–identity; positioning–feature architecture; positioning–resource patterns) and (ii) mechanism activation (e.g., interpretive clarity, validation in use, allocation commitment). An empirical test would code a sample of firms on these choice-alignment and mechanism-activation measures and use configurational methods (Fiss, 2007, 2011) to test whether distinct combinations, or "coherence profiles," predict performance as reliably as the overall coherence indices used in prior research.

***Authority Dispersion and Coherence***

Locus Across Firm Structures describes where reinforcing choices typically sit, not how concentrated or dispersed that authority becomes as firms grow. Growth plausibly disperses it. Business units and functional areas accumulate authority over reinforcing choices, often justified as responsiveness to local customers. Whether this dispersion weakens coherence is an open, testable question, distinct from whether any single reinforcing choice succeeds or fails. An empirical test would compare firms of similar scale that concentrate versus disperse authority over reinforcing choices and ask whether concentration predicts coherence independent of firm performance.

## Limitations

### *Conceptual and interpretive scope*

Our framework is conceptual and integrative. It synthesizes findings from multiple empirical literatures but does not present new empirical tests. While each choice and mechanism is grounded in prior evidence, the architecture itself requires validation in settings where the full sequence of choices and their interdependencies can be observed directly.

### *Internal coherence, not environment–strategy fit*

Our framework explains how strategic choices reinforce one another; it does not address whether the resulting strategy matches environmental conditions (Venkatraman & Prescott, 1990). Coherence and fit are analytically distinct problems. A coherent strategy may still be poorly matched to its environment, just as an environmentally appropriate strategy may fail due to internal incoherence. Our paper addresses the former, not the latter.

### *Temporal process under-specification*

We specify a sequential architecture and recursive reinforcement logic, but we do not model the full temporal dynamics through which coherence is built, disrupted, and reconstituted under environmental change. In particular, we do not theorize the speed, pacing, or reversibility of choice adjustments. This boundary is intentional: our paper offers an architectural foundation rather than a dynamic process model.

### *Scope of organizational complexity*

Our framework abstracts from certain forms of organizational complexity, including multi-sided platforms with partially decoupled value propositions, highly autonomous business units, and organizations pursuing intentionally plural or paradoxical strategies. In such settings, coherence may be locally constructed within subdomains rather than globally imposed. The framework is therefore best interpreted as explaining how coherence is achieved when organizations seek a shared strategic logic, not when fragmentation or ambiguity is itself strategic.

## REFERENCES


Aaker, D. A., & Joachimsthaler, E. (2000). *Brand leadership*. Free Press.

Agarwal, R., & Helfat, C. E. (2009). Strategic renewal of organizations. *Organization Science, 20*(2), 281–293.

Arnould, E. J., & Price, L. L. (1993). River magic: Extraordinary experience and the extended service encounter. *Journal of Consumer Research, 20*(1), 24–45.

Baier, C., Hartmann, E., & Moser, R. (2008). Strategic alignment and purchasing efficacy: An exploratory analysis. *Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management, 14*(1), 15–26.

Balmer, J. M. T. (2010). Explicating corporate brands and their management. *Journal of Brand Management, 18*(3), 180–196.

Balmer, J., & Greyser, S. (2003). *Revealing the corporation: Perspectives on identity, image, reputation, corporate branding and corporate level marketing*. Routledge.

Barney, J. B., Mackey, T. B., & Mackey, A. (2023). Why has it been so hard to define competitive advantage? *Strategic Management Review*, *4*(1), 1-13.

Bloch, P. H. (1995). Seeking the ideal form: Product design and consumer response. *Journal of Marketing*, *59*(3), 16-29.

Belk, R. W. (1988). Possessions and the extended self. *Journal of Consumer Research, 15*(2), 139–168.

Berger, J., & Heath, C. (2007). Where consumers diverge from others. *Journal of Consumer Research, 34*(2), 121–134.

Besanko, D., Dranove, D., Shanley, M. T., & Schaefer, S. J. (1999). *Economics and Strategy*. John Wiley & Sons.

Beverland, M. (2005). Managing the design innovation–brand marketing interface. *Journal of Product Innovation Management, 22*(3), 193–212.

Beverland, M., Napoli, J., & Yakimova, R. (2007). Branding the business marketing offer: exploring brand attributes in business markets. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, *22*(6), 394-399.

Bhattacharya, C. B., & Sen, S. (2003). Consumer–company identification. *Journal of Marketing, 67*(2), 76–88.

Bourgeois, L. J., & Brodwin, D. R. (1984). Strategic implementation. *Strategic Management Journal, 5*(3), 241–264.

Bower, J. L. (1970). *Managing the resource allocation process*. Harvard Business School Press.

Brown, S. L., & Eisenhardt, K. M. (1995). Product development. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 40*(2), 343–378.

Burgelman, R. A. (1983). A model of the interaction of strategic behavior, corporate context, and the concept of strategy. *Academy of management Review*, *8*(1), 61-70.

Burgelman, R. A. (1991). Intraorganizational ecology of strategy making and organizational adaptation: Theory and field research. *Organization Science*, *2*(3), 239-262.

Burgelman, R. A. (1994). Fading memories. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 39*(1), 24–56.

Burgelman, R. A., & Grove, A. S. (2007). Let chaos reign, then rein in chaos—repeatedly: Managing strategic dynamics for corporate longevity. *Strategic Management Journal, 28*(10), 965–979.

Camuffo, A., Gambardella, A., & Pignataro, A. (2023). Framing strategic decisions in a digital world. *Strategic Management Review*, 4(2), 127–160.

Casadesus-Masanell, R., & Ricart, J. E. (2010). From strategy to business models and onto tactics. *Long Range Planning*, *43*(2-3), 195-215.

Chandler, A.D., 1962. *Strategy and structure: Chapters in the history of the American industrial enterprise*. MIT Press.

Christensen, C. M., & Bower, J. L. (1996). Customer power and the value network. *Strategic Management Journal, 17*(3), 197–218.

Christensen, L. T., Firat, A. F., & Torp, S. (2008). The organization of integrated communications: Toward flexible integration. *European Journal of Marketing, 42*(3/4), 423–452.

Clark, K. B., & Fujimoto, T. (1991). *Product development performance: Strategy, organization, and management in the world auto industry*. Harvard Business School Press.

Coleman, D. A., de Chernatony, L., & Christodoulides, G. (2011). B2B service brand identity. *Industrial Marketing Management, 40*(7), 1063–1071.

Cornelissen, J. (2014). *Corporate communication* (4th ed.). Sage.

Crawford, M., & Di Benedetto, C. A. (2015). *New products management* (11th ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Danneels, E. (2011). Trying to become a different type of company: Dynamic capability at Smith Corona. *Strategic Management Journal, 32*(1), 1–31.

Dixon-Woods, M., Agarwal, S., Jones, D., Young, B., & Sutton, A. (2006). Synthesising qualitative and quantitative evidence. *Journal of Health Services Research & Policy, 11*(1), 45–53.

Drazin, R., & Van de Ven, A. H. (1985). Alternative forms of fit in contingency theory. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 514-539.

Eisenhardt, K. M., & Martin, J. A. (2000). Dynamic capabilities. *Strategic Management Journal, 21*(10–11), 1105–1121.

Escalas, J. E., & Bettman, J. R. (2003). You are what they eat. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 13*(3), 339–348.

Fiss, P. C. (2007). A set-theoretic approach to organizational configurations. *Academy of Management Review*, *32*(4), 1180-1198.

Fiss, P. C. (2011). Building better causal theories: A fuzzy set approach to typologies in organization research. *Academy of Management Journal*, *54*(2), 393-420.

Fournier, S. (1998). Consumers and their brands. *Journal of Consumer Research, 24*(4), 343–373.

Fuchs, C., & Diamantopoulos, A. (2010). Brand positioning effectiveness. *European Journal of Marketing, 44*(11–12), 1763–1786.

Gawer, A., & Cusumano, M. A. (2014). Industry platforms. *Journal of Product Innovation Management, 31*(3), 417–433.

Gavetti, G., & Rivkin, J. W. (2007). On the origin of strategy. *Organization Science, 18*(3), 420–439.

Gehman, J., & Soublière, J. F. (2017). Cultural entrepreneurship: from making culture to cultural making. *Innovation*, *19*(1), 61-73.

Ghemawat, P. (1991). *Commitment: The dynamic of strategy*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Greckhamer, T., & Gur, F. A. (2021). Disentangling combinations and contingencies of generic strategies: A set-theoretic configurational approach. *Long Range Planning*, 54(2), 101951.

Gorman, J., & Harrigan, K. (2022). Principles of strategy: A practice-based view. *Strategic Management Review*, 3(1), 145–156.

Gupta, A. K., & Govindarajan, V. (1984). Business unit strategy, managerial characteristics, and business unit effectiveness at strategy implementation. *Academy of Management Journal*, *27*(1), 25-41.

Hatch, M. J., & Schultz, M. (2001). Are the strategic stars aligned? *Harvard Business Review, 79*(2), 128–134.

Henderson, P. W., & Cote, J. A. (1998). Guidelines for selecting logos. *Journal of Marketing, 62*(2), 14–30.

Henderson, P. W., Cote, J. A., Leong, S. M., & Schmitt, B. (2003). Building strong brands in Asia. *International Journal of Research in Marketing, 20*(4), 297–313.

Hrebiniak, L. G., & Joyce, W. F. (1984). *Implementing strategy*. Macmillan.

Hofer, C. W., & Schendel, D. (1978). *Strategy formulation*. West Publishing.

Holt, D. B. (2003). What becomes an icon most? *Harvard Business Review*, 81(3), 43–49.

Hoopes, D., & Madsen, T. L. (2022). A dynamic theory of the strategic firm. *Strategic Management Review*, *3*(2), 209-234.

Hoopes, D. G., Madsen, T. L., & Walker, G. (2003). Guest editors' introduction to the special issue: why is there a resource-based view? Toward a theory of competitive heterogeneity. *Strategic Management Journal*, *24*(10), 889-902.

Horner, S., Jayawarna, D., Giordano, B., & Jones, O. (2019). Strategic choice in universities: Managerial agency and effective technology transfer. *Research Policy*, 48(5), 1297-1309.

Hoskins, J. D., & Griffin, A. (2023). Market selection and product positioning decisions' implications for short-and long-term performance: evidence from the US music industry. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *32*(4), 582-599.

Iyengar, S. S., & Lepper, M. R. (2000). When choice is demotivating. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 79*(6), 995–1006.

Johnson, G., Melin, L., & Whittington, R. (2003). Micro strategy and strategizing: towards an activity-based view. *Journal of Management Studies*, *40*(1), 3-22.

Kapferer, J. N. (2008). *The new strategic brand management: Creating and sustaining brand equity long term*. Kogan Page Publishers.

Kaplan, R. S., & Norton, D. P. (2000). Having trouble with your strategy? Then map it. *Focusing Your Organization on Strategy—with the Balanced Scorecard*, *49*(5), 167-176.

Kaplan, R. S., & Norton, D. P. (2006). *Alignment*. Harvard Business School Press.

Kaplan, R. S., & Norton, D. P. (2008). Mastering the management system. *Harvard Business Review, 86*(1), 62–77.

Karim, S., & Mitchell, W. (2000). Path-dependent and path-breaking change: Reconfiguring business resources following acquisitions in the U.S. medical sector, 1978–1995. *Strategic Management Journal, 21*(10–11), 1061–1081.

Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing brand equity. *Journal of Marketing, 57*(1), 1–22.

Keller, K. L. (2000). The brand report card. *Harvard Business Review, 78*(1), 147–157.

Keller, K. L. (2001). Building customer-based brand equity: A blueprint for creating strong brands.

Kim, W.C., & Mauborgne, R. (2005). Blue Ocean Strategy: How to create uncontested market space and make the competition irrelevant. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Krishnan, V., & Ulrich, K. T. (2001). Product development decisions: A review of the literature. *Management Science*, *47*(1), 1-21.

Kunisch, S., Denyer, D., Bartunek, J. M., Menz, M., & Cardinal, L. B. (2023). Review research as scientific inquiry. *Organizational Research Methods, 26*(1), 3–45.

Lamberg, J.-A., Tikkanen, H., Nokelainen, T., & Suur-Inkeroinen, H. (2009). Competitive dynamics. *Strategic Management Journal, 30*(1), 45–60.

Lang, M. (2022). Strategy–identity coherence. *Strategic Organization, 20*(2), 235–262.

Leiblein, M. J., Reuer, J. J., & Zenger, T. (2018). What makes a decision strategic? *Strategy Science*, *3*(4), 558-573.

Leinwand, P., & Mainardi, C. (2010). The coherence premium. *Harvard Business Review, 88*(6), 86–92.

Lieberman, M. (2021). Is competitive advantage intellectually sustainable? *Strategic Management Review*, 2(1), 29–46.

Lidwell, W., Holden, K., & Butler, J. (2010). *Universal principles of design* (2nd ed.). Rockport.

Lovas, B., & Ghoshal, S. (2000). Strategy as guided evolution. *Strategic Management Journal, 21*(9), 875–896.

Maeda, J. (2006). *The laws of simplicity*. MIT Press.

Madhavaram, S., Badrinarayanan, V., & McDonald, R. E. (2005). Integrated marketing communication (IMC) and brand identity as critical components of brand equity strategy: A conceptual framework and research propositions. *Journal of Advertising*, *34*(4), 69-80.

Markides, C. C. (1999). A dynamic view of strategy. *Sloan Management Review, 40*(3), 55–63.

McGahan, A. (2022). The state of the union in the field of strategic management. *Strategic Management Review, 3*(1), 25–34.

McQuarrie, E. F., & Mick, D. G. (1996). Figures of rhetoric. *Journal of Consumer Research, 22*(4), 424–438.

Melewar, T. C., & Saunders, J. (1999). International corporate visual identity: standardization or localization? *Journal of International Business Studies*, *30*(3), 583-598.

Miles, R. E., & Snow, C. C. (1984). Fit, failure, and the hall of fame. *California Management Review, 26*(3), 10–28.

Miller, D. (1996). Configurations revisited. *Strategic Management Journal, 17*(7), 505–512.

Miller, D., & Friesen, P. H. (1984). *Organizations: A quantum view*. Prentice Hall.

Mintzberg, H. (2022). An underlying theory for strategy, organization, and management: Bridging the divide between analysis and synthesis. Strategic Management Review, 3(1), 125–144.

Mintzberg, H., & Waters, J. A. (1985). Of strategies, deliberate and emergent. *Strategic Management Journal*, *6*(3), 257-272.

Muniz, A. M., Jr., & O'Guinn, T. C. (2001). Brand community. *Journal of Consumer Research, 27*(4), 412–432.

Nath, D., & Sudharshan, D. (1994). Measuring strategy coherence. *Strategic Management Journal, 15*(1), 43–61.

Navis, C., & Glynn, M. A. (2010). How new market categories emerge: Temporal dynamics of legitimacy, identity, and entrepreneurship in satellite radio, 1990–2005. *Administrative science quarterly*, *55*(3), 439-471.

Noda, T., & Bower, J. L. (1996). Strategy making as resource allocation. *Strategic Management Journal, 17*(S1), 159–192.

Noda, T., & Collis, D. J. (2001). The evolution of intraindustry firm heterogeneity: Insights from a process study. *Academy of Management Journal, 44*(4), 897–925.

Norman, D. A. (2004). *Emotional design: Why we love (or hate) everyday things*. Basic Books.

Norman, D. A. (2013). *The design of everyday things* (Rev. ed.). Basic Books.

Novelli, E., & Spina, C. (2024). Making business model decisions like scientists: Strategic commitment, uncertainty, and economic performance. *Strategic Management Journal, 45*(13), 2642-2695.

Olins, W. (1995). *The new guide to identity*. Gower.

Oyserman, D. (2009). Identity-based motivation: Implications for action-readiness, procedural-readiness, and consumer behavior. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *19*(3), 250-260.

Park, C. W., Jaworski, B. J., & MacInnis, D. J. (1986). Strategic brand concept-image management. *Journal of Marketing, 50*(4), 135–145.

Penrose, E. T. (1959). *The Theory of the Growth of the Firm*. Oxford university press.

Perrigino, M. B., & Raveendhran, R. (2025). A theory of strategic boundary control for remote work. *Academy of Management Review, 0*(0), 1–23.

Phillips, B. J., & McQuarrie, E. F. (2004). Beyond visual metaphor: A new typology of visual rhetoric in advertising. *Marketing Theory*, *4*(1-2), 113-136.

Pittard, N., Ewing, M., & Jevons, C. (2007). Aesthetic theory and logo design: examining consumer response to proportion across cultures. *International Marketing Review*, *24*(4), 457-473.

Porac, J. F., Thomas, H., & Baden-Fuller, C. (2011). Competitive groups as cognitive communities: The case of Scottish knitwear manufacturers revisited. *Journal of Management Studies*, *48*(3), 646-664.

Porcu, L., del Barrio-Garcia, S., Kitchen, P. J., & Tourky, M. (2020). The antecedent role of a collaborative vs. a controlling corporate culture on firm-wide integrated marketing communication and brand performance. *Journal of Business Research*, *119*, 435-443.

Porter, M. E. (1980). *Competitive strategy*. Free Press.

Porter, M. E. (1996). What is strategy? *Harvard Business Review, 74*(6), 61–78.

Post, C., Sarala, R., Gatrell, C., & Prescott, J. E. (2020). Advancing theory with review articles. *Academy of Management Review, 45*(2), 351–376.

Powell, T. C. (1992). Organizational alignment. *Strategic Management Journal, 13*(2), 119–134.

Rajagopalan, N., & Spreitzer, G. M. (1997). Toward a theory of strategic change: A multi-lens perspective and integrative framework. *Academy of Management Review*, *22*(1), 48-79.

Ravasi, D., & Phillips, N. (2011). Strategies of alignment. *Strategic Organization, 9*(2), 103–135.

Raynor, M. E., & Bower, J. L. (2001). Lead from the center. *Harvard Business Review, 79*(5), 92–100.

Reed II, A., Forehand, M. R., Puntoni, S., & Warlop, L. (2012). Identity-based consumer behavior. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 29(4), 310-321.

Ries, A., & Trout, J. (1972). The positioning era cometh. *Advertising Age*, *24*(4), 35-38.

Rindova, V., & Petkova, A. (2007). When is a new thing a good thing? Technological change, product form design, and perceptions of value. *Organization Science, 18*(2), 217–232.

Rindova, V. P., Pollock, T. G., & Hayward, M. L. (2006). Celebrity firms: The social construction of market popularity. *Academy of Management Review*, *31*(1), 50-71.

Rivkin, J. W. (2000). Imitation of complex strategies. *Management science*, *46*(6), 824-844.

Rivkin, J. W., & Siggelkow, N. (2003). Balancing search and stability. *Management Science, 49*(3), 290–311.

Rumelt, R. P. (1974). *Strategy, structure, and economic performance*. Harvard Business School Press

Rumelt, R. P. (1984). Towards a strategic theory of the firm. In R. Lamb (Ed.), *Competitive Strategic Management* (pp. 556–570). Prentice-Hall.

Sabherwal, R., Sabherwal, S., Havakhor, T., & Steelman, Z. (2019). Strategic alignment and performance. *MIS Quarterly, 43*(2), 453–A13.

Schau, H. J., Muñiz Jr, A. M., & Arnould, E. J. (2009). How brand community practices create value. *Journal of Marketing*, *73*(5), 30-51.

Schultz, D.E., Tannenbaum, S. and Lauterborn, R.F. (1993), Integrated Marketing Communications, NTC Business Books, Chicago.

Siggelkow, N. (2001). Change in the presence of fit: The rise, the fall, and the renaissance of Liz Claiborne. *Academy of Management Journal, 44*(4), 838–857.

Siggelkow, N. (2002). Evolution toward fit. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 47*(1), 125–159.

Sirgy, M. J. (1982). Self-concept in consumer behavior. *Journal of Consumer Research, 9*(3), 287–300.

Sirgy, M. J., Grewal, D., Mangleburg, T. F., Park, J. O., Chon, K. S., Claiborne, C. B., Johar, J. S., & Berkman, H. (1997). Assessing the predictive validity of two methods of measuring self-image congruence. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *25*(3), 229-241.

Stuart, H., & Muzellec, L. (2004). Corporate makeovers: Can a hyena be rebranded? *Journal of Brand Management*, *11*(6), 472-482.

Sull, D. (1999). Why good companies go bad. *Harvard Business Review, 77*(4), 42–52.

Teece, D. J. (2018). Business models and dynamic capabilities. *Long Range Planning, 51*(1), 40–49.

Teece, D. J., Pisano, G., & Shuen, A. (1997). Dynamic capabilities. *Strategic Management Journal, 18*(7), 509–533.

Teece, D. J., Rumelt, R., Dosi, G., & Winter, S. (1994). Understanding corporate coherence: Theory and evidence. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, *23*(1), 1-30.

Thomke, S., & Reinertsen, D. (1998). Agile product development: Managing development flexibility in uncertain environments. *California Management Review, 41*(1), 8–30.

Thompson, D. V., Hamilton, R. W., & Rust, R. T. (2005). Feature fatigue: When product capabilities become too much of a good thing. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *42*(4), 431-442.

Torraco, R. J. (2005). Writing integrative literature reviews. *Human Resource Development Review, 4*(3), 356–367.

Trevor, J., & Varcoe, B. (2017). How aligned is your organization. *Harvard Business Review*, *95*(1), 2-6.

Urde, M. (1999). Brand orientation. *Journal of Consumer Marketing, 16*(2), 117–133.

Ulrich, K. T., & Eppinger, S. D. (2016). *Product design and development* (6th ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Van den Bosch, A. L., De Jong, M. D., & Elving, W. J. (2005). How corporate visual identity supports reputation. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, *10*(2), 108-116.

Van den Steen, E. (2017). A formal theory of strategy. *Management Science, 63*(8), 2616–2636.

Van den Steen, E. (2018). Strategy and the strategist: How it matters who develops the strategy. *Management Science, 64*(10), 4533-4551.

Van de Ven, A. H., & Johnson, P. E. (2006). Knowledge for theory and practice. *Academy of Management Review*, *31*(4), 802-821.

Venkatraman, N., & Camillus, J. C. (1984). Exploring the concept of "fit" in strategic management. *Academy of Management Review, 9*(3), 513-525.

Venkatraman, N., & Prescott, J. E. (1990). Environment-strategy coalignment: An empirical test of its performance implications. *Strategic Management Journal*, 11(1), 1-23.

Venkatraman, N., & Walker, G. (1989). *Strategic consistency and business performance: Theory and analysis*. Ulan Press.

Verganti, R. (2009). *Design-driven innovation*. Harvard Business Press.

Veryzer, R. W. (1998). Key factors affecting customer evaluation of discontinuous new products. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, *15*(2), 136-150.

Von Wallpach, S., Hemetsberger, A., & Espersen, P. (2017). Performing identities: Processes of brand and stakeholder identity co-construction. *Journal of Business Research*, *70*, 443-452.

Zott, C., & Amit, R. (2008). The fit between product market strategy and business model: Implications for firm performance. *Strategic Management Journal*, *29*(1), 1-26.

Walker Jr, O. C., & Ruekert, R. W. (1987). Marketing's role in the implementation of business strategies: a critical review and conceptual framework. *Journal of Marketing*, *51*(3), 15-33.

Walsh, G., & Mitchell, V. W. (2010). The effect of consumer confusion proneness on word of mouth, trust, and customer satisfaction. *European Journal of Marketing*, *44*(6), 838-859.

Wenzel, M., Cornelissen, J. P., Koch, J., Hartmann, M., & Rauch, M. (2020). (Un) Mind the gap: How organizational actors cope with an identity–strategy misalignment. *Strategic Organization*, *18*(1), 212-244.

Wheeler, A. (2017). *Designing brand identity: an essential guide for the whole branding team*. John Wiley & Sons.

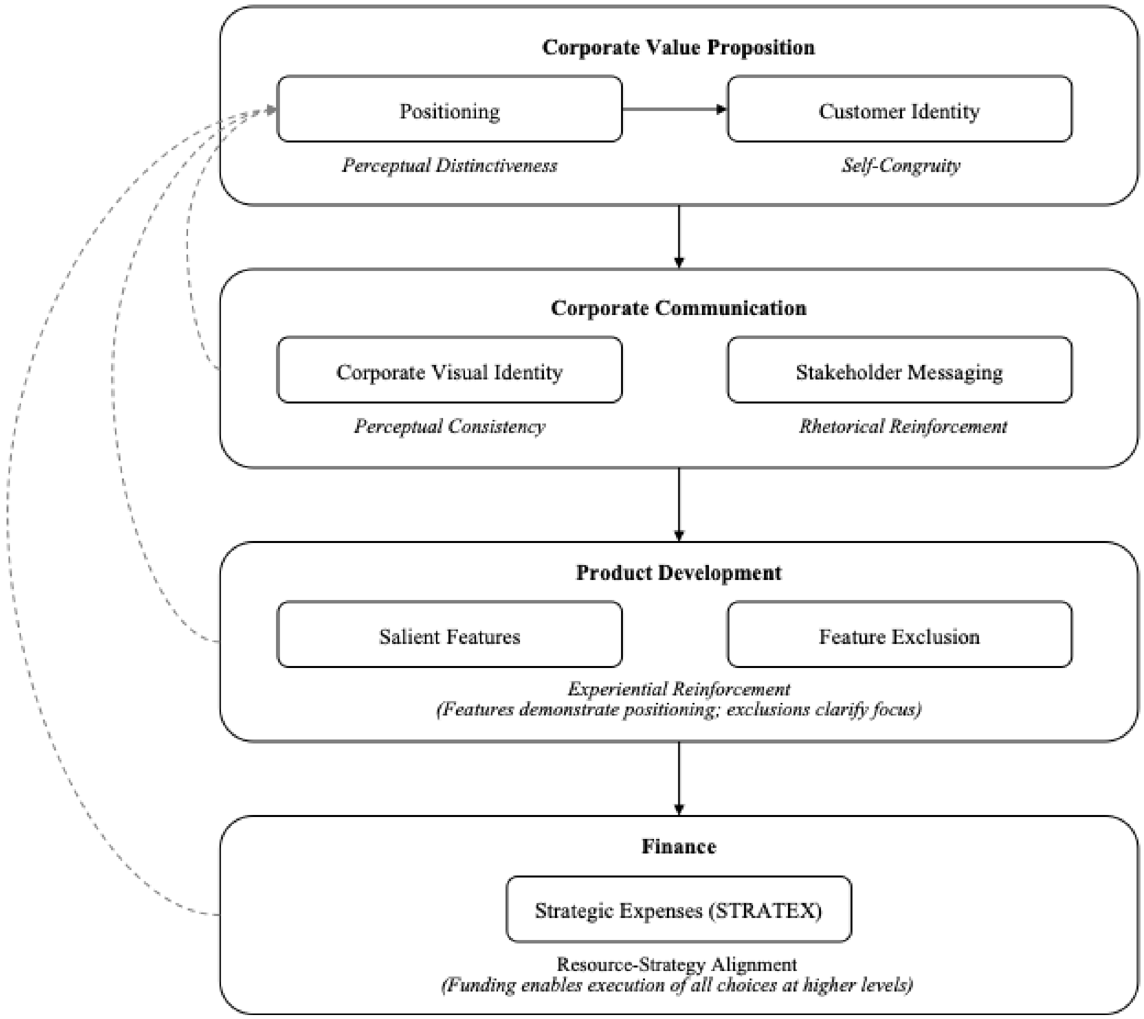
Williamson, O. E. (1975). *Markets and hierarchies: Analysis and antitrust implications*. Free Press.

Wind, Y., & Robertson, T. S. (1983). Marketing strategy: new directions for theory and research. *Journal of Marketing*, *47*(2), 12-25.

**Table 1: Core Concepts in Coherence-Related Research**

| Concept | Definition | Key References | Primary Context |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Strategic Alignment** | The fit between business strategy and organizational dimensions (structure, processes, IT) to achieve performance goals | Kaplan & Norton (2006); Sabherwal et al. (2019); Trevor & Varcoe (2017); Venkatraman & Prescott (1990) | General strategy; IT-business alignment; Performance management |
| **Strategic Fit** | The degree of match between organizational strategy and its external environment or internal capabilities | Miles & Snow (1984); Venkatraman & Camillus (1984) | Contingency theory; Environment-strategy matching |
| **Strategic Consistency** | Maintenance of stable strategic patterns and direction over time; avoiding contradictory strategic moves | Bourgeois & Brodwin (1984); Burgelman (1983); Lamberg et al. (2009); Venkatraman & Walker (1989) | Organizational survival; Strategic persistence; Hierarchy |
| **Strategic Congruence** | Harmony among strategic elements within an integrated system | Drazin & Van de Ven, (1985); Miller (1996) | Configuration theory; Systems thinking |
| **Strategic Integration** | Coordination of diverse strategic initiatives across business units and functions | Porter (1996); Powell (1992) | Multi-business firms; Corporate strategy |
| **Strategy Coherence** | The extent to which an organization's strategic choices reinforce one another | Leinwand & Mainardi (2010); Nath & Sudharshan (1994) | Decision architecture; Organizational performance |

## Figure 1: The Structure of Strategy Coherence




**Legend**

→ Sequential flow (choices constrain subsequent choices)

⇢ Recursive reinforcement (choices strengthen positioning)

**Mechanisms (how choices create coherence)**

- Perceptual Distinctiveness: Positioning creates cognitive category
- Self-Congruity: Identity enables psychological attachment
- Perceptual Consistency: Visual elements create recognition
- Rhetorical Reinforcement: Messages strengthen through repetition
- Experiential Reinforcement: Features validate strategic claims
- Resource-Strategy Alignment: Funding enables execution