Decoupling Institutional Isomorphism from Competitive Heterogeneity: A Re-examination of Resource-Based Logic Under Stakeholder Capitalism Regimes

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Abstract. The resource-based view (RBV) has long anchored strategic management theory by positing that sustained competitive advantage derives from firm-specific, inimitable resources. However, the ascendance of stakeholder capitalism and polycentric governance structures in post-pandemic economies fundamentally challenges this orthodoxy. This study employs a mixed-methods triangulation design across 312 multinational enterprises operating in OECD jurisdictions to empirically interrogate whether institutional isomorphic pressures systematically erode the heterogeneity assumptions underpinning RBV logic. Structural equation modelling and configurational analysis via fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) reveal that coercive and normative isomorphism significantly mediates the resource–performance relationship, particularly in ESG-mandated regulatory environments. The findings necessitate a recalibration of canonical RBV propositions, offering a hybrid integrative framework that reconciles institutional theory with dynamic capability development under contemporary stakeholder governance architectures.

Keywords: resource-based view, institutional isomorphism, stakeholder capitalism, dynamic capabilities, competitive heterogeneity, fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis, ESG governance, polycentric institutional environments, strategic management theory

Introduction

The resource-based view (RBV), originally systematized by Barney (1991) and subsequently extended through Teece et al.'s (1997) dynamic capabilities framework, has constituted one of the most enduring and widely cited theoretical pillars in strategic management scholarship. At its ontological core, RBV predicates sustained competitive advantage upon the existence of valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) firm-specific resources, a logic premised on the persistent heterogeneity of resource endowments across competing organizations. Yet, as the global business environment navigates the compounding dislocations of post-pandemic institutional restructuring, accelerating ESG regulatory mandates, and the ideological reorientation from shareholder primacy toward stakeholder capitalism, a critical paradox has emerged: the very institutional forces designed to promote organizational accountability and systemic resilience may be fundamentally undermining the conditions under which competitive heterogeneity can be sustained. By 2025, over 60 jurisdictions within the OECD have enacted or proposed mandatory non-financial disclosure and due diligence legislation, compelling multinational enterprises to converge around standardized governance architectures, reporting taxonomies, and stakeholder engagement protocols. This regulatory convergence constitutes a potent source of coercive isomorphism, as theorized within DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) new institutionalist framework, wherein organizations operating within the same organizational field are subjected to homogenizing pressures that progressively attenuate resource-level differentiation. Concurrently, the proliferation of global management certification systems, ESG rating methodologies, and transnational professional networks generates normative isomorphic pressures that further constrain strategic discretion. The tension between these institutional dynamics and the heterogeneity assumptions of RBV represents not merely a theoretical inconsistency but a substantive challenge to managerial practice. Executives confronting simultaneous obligations to institutional conformity and competitive differentiation find themselves navigating a strategic paradox with limited prescriptive guidance from prevailing theoretical models. Extant literature has addressed elements of this tension in isolation—examining, for instance, institutional pressures on organizational routines (Kostova et al., 2008), or the compatibility of dynamic capabilities with legitimacy-seeking behavior (Oliver, 1997)—yet no integrative empirical framework has systematically interrogated the interactive effect of isomorphic mechanisms on the resource–performance relationship across diverse regulatory contexts. This paper addresses this gap through a large-scale, multi-jurisdictional empirical investigation. The study proceeds as follows: Section 2 develops the theoretical framework, elaborating the conceptual intersections between institutional theory and RBV under stakeholder capitalism. Section 3 details the research methodology, including sample composition, variable operationalization, and analytical procedures. Section 4 presents quantitative and configurational findings derived from SEM and fsQCA analyses. Section 5 discusses theoretical and managerial implications, before Section 6 concludes with propositions for a revised integrative model and directions for future inquiry.

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