

Extending the Natural Resource-Based View: A Configuration of Organizational Capabilities for CSR Implementation - Evidence from Moroccan Automotive Suppliers

Achraf IMAOUNEN, (PhD candidate)

*National School of Business and Management of Kenitra,
Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco*

Rhita SABRI, (Associate Professor)

*National School of Business and Management of Kenitra,
Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco*

Wafaa EL ADLOUNI, (Full Professor)

*National School of Business and Management of Kenitra,
Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco*

Correspondence address:	National School of Business and Management of Kenitra, Ibn Tofail University, University Campus, P.O. Box 1420, Kenitra 14000, Morocco.
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Abstract

This article examines how Moroccan automotive suppliers develop the organizational capabilities required to translate global environmental requirements into operational practices under externally imposed standards and constrained organizational resources. The study draws on fourteen semi-structured interviews conducted with managers and executives involved in environmental management, quality, CSR implementation, operations, industrial performance, and strategic decision-making. It adopts an abductive qualitative design oriented toward theory elaboration, allowing empirical observations to be iteratively confronted with the Natural Resource-Based View (NRBV) and the broader organizational capabilities literature.

The findings reveal a sequential capability formation process structured around four interdependent components: interface capability, Normative Bricolage, structuring, and strategic anchoring. Interface capability enables firms to interpret and translate external requirements; Normative Bricolage allows them to adapt implementation pathways to local resource constraints while preserving the underlying objectives of those requirements; structuring formalizes the selected responses into routines and organizational arrangements; and strategic anchoring integrates these practices into managerial decision-making and organizational priorities. The results therefore suggest that these capabilities do not operate as isolated organizational resources, but as a cumulative configuration whose effectiveness depends on their articulation.

Theoretically, the study extends the NRBV by shifting attention from capability possession to the organizational processes through which environmental capabilities are formed. It also introduces Normative Bricolage as a specific adaptation mechanism for situations in which requirements originate outside the firm and implementation must proceed under constrained resources. From a managerial perspective, the proposed process offers a diagnostic lens for identifying where capability formation may break down and where targeted organizational support may be required. The findings remain contextually bounded to Moroccan automotive suppliers operating within global value chains.

Keywords: CSR Implementation; Organizational Capabilities; Natural Resource-Based View; Normative Bricolage; Automotive Suppliers.

Classification JEL: M14, Q56, L62, F23

Paper type: Empirical Research

1. Introduction

Global value chains increasingly transmit environmental requirements from international markets to local production sites. Lead firms and multinational OEMs extend sustainability expectations to suppliers as conditions of chain participation rather than purely voluntary commitments (Lund-Thomsen & Lindgreen, 2014). International frameworks such as the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises reinforce these expectations across supplier networks (OECD, 2023). In Morocco, this dynamic is reinforced by national ESG initiatives and the automotive sector's growing integration into OEM-driven sustainability requirements (Association Marocaine pour l'Industrie et la Construction de l'Automobile [AMICA], 2025; Ministère de l'Industrie et du Commerce, 2025). According to the latest available sectoral data, the Moroccan automotive industry comprises more than 260 suppliers, employs over 280,000 people, has reached a local integration rate of 69%, and operates an installed production capacity of approximately one million vehicles (AMICA, 2025). Automotive exports reached MAD 157.6 billion in 2024, an increase of 6.3%, consolidating the industry's position as Morocco's leading export sector (Office des Changes, 2025).

This pressure is particularly demanding for suppliers in emerging economies, where externally defined requirements encounter institutional and resource conditions different from those in which they were formulated. CSR research in developing-country contexts shows that this tension can produce outcomes ranging from substantive adoption to diluted compliance (Jamali, 2010). Firms must therefore reconcile global expectations with constrained managerial, financial, and technical capacities (Jamali & Karam, 2018), making implementation an organizational rather than merely procedural challenge.

Despite sustained attention to CSR implementation, the literature explains implementation practices and outcomes more extensively than the organizational processes through which implementation capacity is built. Integrative frameworks emphasize managerial design and institutionalization (Maon et al., 2009), while recent reviews confirm that the mechanisms through which implementation unfolds remain comparatively underexplored (Fatima & Elbanna, 2023). Related work examines how employees make sense of CSR once introduced (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019), but pays less attention to the antecedent process through which organizations develop the capacity to act on environmental requirements.

The Natural Resource-Based View (NRBV) offers a relevant starting point because it links environmental capabilities to superior environmental performance and competitive advantage (Hart, 1995). Yet subsequent work has focused more on the deployment and performance effects of capabilities than on how they are formed, a limitation acknowledged in retrospective assessments of the framework (Hart & Dowell, 2011). This reflects a broader capabilities literature in which capability possession has received more systematic attention than capability formation (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000).

Taken together, these limitations reveal a specific theoretical gap. CSR implementation research explains drivers, practices, and outcomes more extensively than the organizational process through which implementation capacity is formed. The NRBV identifies environmentally relevant capabilities but does not sufficiently explain how such capabilities emerge, particularly when requirements are externally imposed and organizational resources are constrained. The capability literature, meanwhile, provides only limited insight into how multiple capabilities develop as an interconnected configuration under such conditions. This unresolved intersection constitutes the theoretical gap addressed in this study.

Within this process, the study pays particular attention to a specific adaptation mechanism termed Normative Bricolage, through which firms recombine available organizational resources and procedures to make externally imposed environmental requirements locally workable while preserving their underlying objectives.

This article addresses the following research question: how do Moroccan automotive suppliers develop the organizational capabilities that enable the translation of global environmental requirements into concrete organizational practices under externally imposed standards and resource constraints? Its objective is to explain how firms develop and configure these capabilities so that externally imposed requirements become embedded in locally workable practices under resource constraints. The article extends the NRBV through a capability-formation perspective, theorizing CSR implementation as the construction of an interconnected configuration of organizational capabilities. Empirically, it draws on qualitative interviews with automotive suppliers exposed to externally imposed environmental requirements. From a managerial perspective, the study also provides a diagnostic lens for supplier managers and OEM functions by identifying where capability formation may break down and where targeted organizational support may be required.

2. Literature review

2.1 CSR Implementation: From Adoption Outcomes to Organizational Processes

Research on corporate social responsibility has long explained why firms adopt CSR practices and what results follow. Less attention has gone to the organizational work between adoption and outcome, the process through which a CSR commitment becomes something a firm can actually do. Maon et al. (2009) propose a staged model in which firms move from internalization to commitment to institutionalization, but treat the capacity to execute that sequence as already available rather than as something to be built. Fatima and Elbanna (2023) similarly show that CSR implementation research has developed substantial knowledge of implementation practices and outcomes, while the organizational processes through which implementation unfolds remain comparatively underexplored. Aguinis and Glavas (2019) examine how employees make sense of CSR once it is introduced, usefully complicating the idea that CSR translates directly from policy into practice, though this account begins after the capacity to act already exists, not before it.

The difficulty sharpens where requirements are externally imposed and resources are constrained. Jamali (2010) shows that CSR outcomes among multinational subsidiaries in developing economies range from substantive adoption to diluted compliance, depending on how the requirement is absorbed locally. Jamali and Karam (2018) identify this as a structural feature of CSR research in developing-country contexts: firms must reconcile global expectations with local resource conditions, and the literature documents this tension more thoroughly than it explains how organizations resolve it operationally. Wijen (2014) adds that compliance with a standard's formal requirements and genuine achievement of its objective are not the same outcome, particularly in opaque institutional fields, implying that this is exactly where organizational capacity does its work and exactly what implementation research describes least.

Global value chain settings amplify this pattern, since the requirement is typically designed elsewhere and imposed as a condition of market access. Lund-Thomsen and Lindgreen (2014) observe that supplier-level implementation in GVC research has been studied mainly through compliance and audit outcomes, with limited attention to whether a supplier can sustain a standard rather than merely document it once. Recent evidence confirms that GVC membership continues to function as a structuring institutional lever for supplier sustainability practices, while the internal organizational processes enabling suppliers to respond to these pressures remain underexplored (Caemmerer et al., 2026). Implementation outcomes vary widely under comparable external pressure, while available analytical tools describe that variation more than they explain the process producing it.

2.2 The Natural Resource-Based View and Environmental Capabilities

A process-oriented account of this variation would plausibly come from the capabilities literature, and the Natural Resource-Based View offers the most direct link to environmental performance. Hart (1995) extends the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991) to the natural environment, arguing that firms' relationships with ecological constraints generate distinct capabilities tied to pollution prevention, product stewardship, and sustainable development. Its core move is to treat environmental performance as a matter of capability rather than compliance: firms perform differently because they have built different organizational capacities, not because they face different rules.

This framing makes the NRBV relevant to the implementation problem identified above, since a capability-based framework should explain why some suppliers translate external requirements into durable practice while others do not. In practice, the NRBV's contribution has remained concentrated on identifying which capabilities matter rather than how firms come to possess them. Hart and Dowell (2011) note that the empirical research it generated has been more successful at correlating capabilities with performance than at opening up the processes through which they form. This orientation persists in recent work: Essuman et al. (2026) confirm the relevance of the NRBV for explaining environmental performance in emerging-economy manufacturing contexts, while the capability formation process itself remains outside the scope of analysis. The capabilities function as the unit of measurement rather than the unit of explanation, a gap that matters directly here, since a framework explaining which capabilities matter without explaining how they form cannot account for the variation documented in 2.1. The NRBV supplies the right vocabulary; it does not yet supply the process account that vocabulary calls for.

2.3 Organizational Capability Formation Under Resource Constraints

This limitation reflects a broader pattern in the capabilities literature, where formation has received less attention than possession. Teece et al. (1997) define dynamic capabilities as the firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure competencies in response to a changing environment, placing formation at the center of the concept, at least nominally. Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) find that most empirical studies treat dynamic capabilities as routines whose presence is measured, rather than tracing how a given routine came into being. Helfat and Peteraf (2003) address this through capability lifecycles, in which capabilities pass through founding, development, and maturity, though this account is built for capabilities emerging from a firm's own strategic initiative, where the firm controls the pace of development, not for capabilities whose impetus originates outside the firm.

A tension nevertheless exists within the dynamic capabilities literature. Teece et al. (1997) emphasize firm-specific processes of integration, building, and reconfiguration as sources of competitive advantage, whereas Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) portray dynamic capabilities as more identifiable and recurrent organizational processes, particularly in moderately dynamic environments. This distinction matters for the present study because capability formation under externally imposed requirements may combine context-specific organizational trajectories with more recurrent mechanisms of adaptation and routinization.

This is where the formation question becomes most acute. When a capability must be built in response to an externally imposed requirement under resource constraints the firm did not choose, its formation cannot simply mirror the deliberate, internally paced trajectories the dynamic capabilities literature describes. Adjacent work suggests an alternative pattern: firms facing scarcity tend to recombine whatever is locally available rather than acquire what an ideal response would require, and this adaptive behavior has its own internal logic rather than being an improvised exception (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Duymedjian & Rüling, 2010). Recent

empirical work further confirms that resource constraints and environmental turbulence function as active moderators of the organizational processes through which this adaptive behavior is activated (Lee & Park, 2026). Neither the NRBV nor the dynamic capabilities literature has absorbed this distinction; both continue to treat capability formation as though firms generally retain latitude to build capabilities on their own terms, precisely the condition that does not hold for suppliers facing externally imposed requirements under constrained resources.

This literature provides the conceptual basis for what this study later develops as Normative Bricolage. In the present context, bricolage does not refer merely to improvisation under scarcity, but to the recombination of available organizational resources and procedures in order to preserve the objective of an externally imposed environmental requirement while adapting its implementation pathway to local constraints.

2.4 Toward a Capability Configuration Perspective for CSR Implementation

These three subsections converge on one gap. CSR implementation research shows that outcomes vary widely under comparable pressure but does not explain the process generating that variation. The NRBV supplies a capability-based vocabulary suited to environmental performance but stops short of theorizing how capabilities form. The broader capabilities literature confirms that formation has been studied mainly under firm-initiated, resource-adequate conditions, leaving formation under externally imposed, resource-constrained conditions largely untheorized.

A further limitation follows from how this literature treats multiple capabilities: typically as separate variables assessed independently rather than as elements that might operate jointly. Whether environmental capabilities form individually or as an interconnected configuration is a question this literature has not addressed.

A configurational perspective offers a useful basis for addressing this issue. Fiss (2007) argues that organizational outcomes are often better understood through interdependent configurations of conditions than through the isolated effects of individual variables. Applied to capability formation, this perspective suggests that environmental capabilities may derive their effectiveness from the way they combine and depend on one another rather than from their independent presence.

This is the gap the article addresses. The unresolved question is not whether firms possess environmental capabilities, but how those capabilities come into being under externally imposed, resource-constrained conditions. Accordingly, this article asks: how do firms develop the organizational capabilities that enable the translation of global environmental requirements into concrete organizational practices? Its objective is to explain how firms develop and configure these capabilities so that externally imposed requirements become embedded in locally workable practices under resource constraints, a contribution the literature reviewed above has not yet provided. Institutional sources, including OECD (2023), AMICA (2025), and the Moroccan Ministry of Industry and Commerce (2025), are mobilized exclusively to characterize the institutional and sectoral context of the study. The theoretical argument itself is grounded in the academic literature reviewed above.

Table 1 summarizes the principal streams of literature mobilized in the study and the gap addressed by the article.

Table 1. Summary of Key Literature and Research Gap

Literature Stream	Key Insight	Limitation Identified	Relevance to This Study	Key References
CSR Implementation	CSR implementation involves organizational processes and practices	Limited attention to capability formation mechanisms	Motivates a process-oriented perspective	Maon et al. (2009); Aguinis & Glavas (2019); Fatima & Elbanna (2023)
Organizational Capabilities	Capabilities enable organizational adaptation and performance	Formation processes remain underexplored	Supports the capability formation perspective	Teece et al. (1997); Eisenhardt & Martin (2000); Helfat & Peteraf (2003)
Natural Resource-Based View (NRBV)	Environmental capabilities drive environmental performance	Limited explanation of capability emergence	Provides the theoretical foundation of the study	Hart (1995); Hart & Dowell (2011)
Bricolage Literature	Organizations adapt under resource constraints through recombination	Limited application to CSR implementation	Supports the concept of Normative Bricolage	Baker & Nelson (2005); Duymedjian & Rüling (2010)
Capability Configuration Literature	Organizational outcomes emerge from interdependent configurations	Limited application to environmental capability formation	Supports the sequential capability configuration argument	Fiss (2007)

Source: authors' elaboration

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to address a question that is inherently processual: how firms develop the organizational capabilities that allow them to translate global environmental requirements into concrete practices. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the phenomenon under investigation is not the presence or absence of a capability at a given point in time, but the organizational process through which that capability comes into being. Quantitative designs are well suited to testing relationships between variables whose meaning is already established; they are less suited to a question that requires first establishing what the relevant process looks like, how its stages connect, and which organizational mechanisms drive the transition from one stage to the next.

The study follows an abductive logic. Abduction differs from both induction and deduction in that it neither derives categories purely from the data nor imposes them purely from theory; it moves iteratively between empirical observations and existing theoretical concepts, using each to refine the other (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Tavory & Timmermans, 2014; Wickert, 2026). This logic was chosen because the Natural Resource-Based View supplies a relevant vocabulary of environmental capabilities but does not specify how these capabilities form under externally imposed requirements and resource constraints, as established in the literature review. A purely deductive design would have required hypothesizing a formation process in advance of the evidence, which the existing literature does not yet support. A purely inductive design, by contrast, would have set aside the theoretical vocabulary the NRBV already provides, discarding a useful point of departure. Abduction allows the analysis to use the NRBV as an entry point while remaining open to organizational mechanisms that the existing framework does not anticipate.

Consistent with this logic, the study is positioned as theory elaboration rather than theory testing. The aim is not to confirm or disconfirm a prespecified hypothesis about capability formation, but to extend an existing theoretical framework by developing constructs and

relationships that respond to a gap the framework itself does not resolve (Eisenhardt, 1989). This positioning has direct implications for how the empirical material is treated throughout the study: interview data are read not merely as instances confirming or contradicting an established model, but as the material from which a more adequate account of capability formation can be built in dialogue with the NRBV.

3.2 Research Context and Sample

The empirical setting is the Moroccan automotive supplier sector, integrated into global value chains anchored by multinational original equipment manufacturers, principally within the Renault–Stellantis ecosystem. This setting offers a relevant terrain for the research question because suppliers within it are systematically exposed to environmental requirements set by OEMs operating under international standards, while themselves operating under resource conditions that are considerably more constrained than those of the lead firms imposing the requirements. The combination of externally imposed standards and constrained local resources is precisely the condition under which the formation of environmental capabilities, rather than their mere possession, becomes analytically visible. The Moroccan automotive sector has experienced sustained growth in recent years, consolidating its position as a central pillar of the country's industrial base (AMICA, 2025), while national initiatives increasingly emphasize ESG accountability across manufacturing industries (Ministère de l'Industrie et du Commerce, 2025).

The empirical material consists of fourteen semi-structured interviews conducted with managers and executives directly involved in environmental management, quality management, CSR implementation, operations, industrial performance, or strategic decision-making within their organizations. Respondents occupied positions including general manager, plant manager, site manager, HSE manager, QHSE manager, quality manager, continuous improvement manager, production manager, supply chain manager, industrialization manager, and sustainability or environment manager. The sample included respondents from Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 suppliers located in the principal Moroccan automotive hubs of Tangier, Kénitra, and Casablanca. A detailed profile of the interviewees and interview characteristics is presented in Section 3.3.

To provide an immediate overview of sample diversity, Table 2 summarizes the distribution of respondents across value-chain positions, functional areas, and locations.

Table 2. Cross-Distribution of the Interview Sample

Value Chain Position	Functional Areas Represented	Tangier	Kenitra	Casablanca	Total
OEM	Environment, Quality	1	1	0	2
Tier 1	QHSE, Quality, Production, Supply Chain, HSE, Continuous Improvement, Industrial Management	3	3	1	7
Tier 2	Quality, Production, QHSE, Operations	2	1	1	4
Tier 3	Site Management	0	0	1	1
Total		6	5	3	14

Source: authors' elaboration

Interviewees were selected through purposive sampling. Selection criteria centered on direct responsibility for environmental requirements, CSR implementation, quality systems, operational performance, or strategic decisions connected to environmental management, rather than on demographic or organizational representativeness. This criterion reflects the study's objective: the aim was not to generalize the frequency of a given practice across the supplier population, but to gain access to information-rich respondents positioned to describe, from direct experience, how environmental requirements are received, interpreted, and translated into organizational practice. Diversity across supplier tiers and functional roles was sought

deliberately, since capability formation was expected to look different depending on a respondent's position relative to the OEM and relative to the operational core of the organization; a quality manager and a plant manager, for instance, occupy different vantage points on the same organizational process. Interviews continued until theoretical saturation was reached. The final interviews largely confirmed patterns that had already emerged from earlier interviews and did not generate additional capability categories or substantially new interpretations regarding the organizational processes under investigation. This repetition of themes suggested that sufficient thematic saturation had been achieved for the purposes of the analysis.

Saturation was assessed iteratively during coding by comparing each successive interview with the emerging thematic structure. Particular attention was paid to whether new interviews generated additional first-order codes, modified the interpretation of existing themes, or revealed organizational mechanisms not previously identified. In the final stage of data collection, successive interviews primarily reinforced existing categories and relationships rather than producing substantively new analytical dimensions. Saturation was therefore evaluated in terms of diminishing conceptual novelty rather than solely by the number of interviews conducted.

3.3 Qualitative Study

3.3.1 Interview Procedure

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, a format chosen for its capacity to combine a stable thematic structure across respondents with sufficient flexibility to follow up on organization-specific practices and examples as they arose. The interview guide was organized around six themes: respondent profile; environmental pressures and requirements; organizational filtering mechanisms; organizational translation mechanisms; development of organizational capabilities; and environmental performance outcomes. This structure was designed to move respondents progressively from the origin of environmental requirements toward the organizational responses they generate, without presupposing in advance what form those responses would take or how many distinct capabilities would be involved.

To strengthen the analytical traceability between data collection and the capability formation process identified in the findings, Table 3 maps the principal interview guide themes onto the four emerging capabilities.

Table 3. Correspondence Between Interview Guide Themes and Emerging Capabilities

Interview Guide Theme	Link to Emerging Capability
Environmental Requirements and Pressures	Contextual input to Interface Capability
Organizational Filtering Mechanisms	Interface Capability
Organizational Translation Mechanisms	Normative Bricolage
Organizational Capabilities	Structuring Capability and Strategic Anchoring
Environmental Performance Outcomes	Consequences of the capability formation process

Source: authors' elaboration

Table 4 complements this thematic mapping by presenting the individual characteristics of the interviewees.

Interviews lasted between approximately forty-five and ninety minutes, with variation reflecting differences in respondents' tenure, scope of responsibility, and willingness to elaborate on specific organizational episodes. All interviews were conducted in French, the working language shared across the supplier organizations included in the sample. With the consent of each participant, interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed in full. Transcripts were anonymized prior to analysis, with respondent names, firm names, and

other potentially identifying details replaced by neutral codes, to protect participant confidentiality while preserving the analytical content of each statement.

Table 4. Profile and Interview Characteristics of Respondents

Interviewee Code	Position / Status	Years of Experience	Interview Duration
I1	CSR / Environment Manager	7 years	59 min
I2	Quality and Compliance Director	11 years	86 min
I3	QHSE Manager	8 years	72 min
I4	Quality Engineer	4 years	54 min
I5	Production Manager	7 years	63 min
I6	Supply Chain Manager	6 years	59 min
I7	HSE Manager	7 years	71 min
I8	Continuous Improvement Manager	5 years	88 min
I9	Industrial / Technical Director	12 years	60 min
I10	Quality Manager	7 years	66 min
I11	Production Manager	6 years	55 min
I12	QHSE Manager	5 years	61 min
I13	Process Manager	4 years	52 min
I14	Site Director	10 years	51 min

Source: Authors' fieldwork.

3.3.2 Data Processing and Analysis

The interview material was analyzed using thematic analysis within an abductive analytical logic. Data analysis followed the abductive logic established in the research design, proceeding through iterative movement between the empirical material and the theoretical vocabulary supplied by the Natural Resource-Based View, rather than through a single linear pass from data to conclusions. NVivo software was used to support coding and the organization of empirical material throughout this process.

The analytical process began with open coding of meaningful statements across the fourteen transcripts, in which segments of text describing how respondents and their organizations encountered, interpreted, or acted on environmental requirements were identified and labeled close to the language used by respondents themselves. These open codes were then grouped into higher-order themes through comparison across transcripts, following the iterative logic of qualitative data condensation and pattern development described by Miles et al. (2014). This process allowed codes describing similar organizational activities under different surface wording to be consolidated. This grouping was conducted iteratively: emerging thematic groupings were checked against additional transcripts, and where a transcript did not fit comfortably within an existing grouping, the grouping itself was revised rather than the data forced to fit it.

To strengthen inter-coder reliability, a second researcher independently reviewed the coding of a subset of transcripts using the same coding framework. Coding decisions were then compared, with particular attention to divergences in the assignment of first-order codes and their grouping into higher-order themes. Disagreements were discussed through a return to the corresponding transcript segments until a shared interpretation was reached. This process contributed to refining the coding framework and improving the consistency of the thematic structure subsequently consolidated into the four capability categories presented in the findings.

Analytical consolidation proceeded through continued movement between this empirical material and relevant theoretical concepts, particularly the capability vocabulary established by the NRBV and the broader capabilities literature discussed in the literature review. Theoretical concepts were used to interrogate whether the thematic groupings identified in the data corresponded to recognizable organizational capabilities, while the empirical material was

simultaneously used to assess whether existing theoretical categories were adequate to what respondents actually described, or whether they required adjustment.

This iterative consolidation is the means through which the organizational mechanisms underlying the development of environmental capabilities were identified, and through which the relationships among these mechanisms were established as a connected process rather than as a set of independent themes. While all fourteen interviews contributed to the coding process and to thematic saturation, the illustrative excerpts presented in Section 4 draw primarily on the respondents whose accounts most directly articulated each phase of the sequence; the remaining interviews corroborated the same pattern without introducing additional analytical content beyond what is already represented.

The analytical progression from initial coding to the identification of the four capability phases followed an iterative process of comparison, refinement, and abstraction. First-order codes capturing concrete organizational practices and managerial actions were progressively grouped into higher-order themes, which were subsequently consolidated into the four capability categories presented in the findings section.

3.4 Trustworthiness of Findings

The study's trustworthiness is assessed primarily through the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, while also drawing on Tracy's (2010) broader framework of qualitative quality, particularly its emphasis on credibility, sincerity, transparency, and meaningful coherence.

Credibility was supported through sustained engagement with the empirical material and the iterative interpretation procedure described in section 3.3.2, in which thematic categories were repeatedly checked against the full set of transcripts rather than fixed after an initial pass. This iterative checking reduced the likelihood that early interpretations would be retained simply because they were formed first, and ensured that the categories used in the analysis remained answerable to the range of accounts provided by respondents across different supplier tiers and functional roles.

Transferability was supported through detailed contextual description of the research setting, including the structure of the Moroccan automotive supplier sector, its integration into the Renault-Stellantis value chain, and the range of supplier tiers and functional positions represented in the sample. This contextual detail allows readers to assess the extent to which the organizational mechanisms identified in this study are likely to operate in other supplier contexts characterized by similar conditions of externally imposed environmental requirements and constrained resources, without claiming that the findings generalize automatically beyond the setting studied.

Dependability was strengthened through a documented and consistently applied coding procedure, proceeding from open coding through thematic grouping to analytical consolidation, supported by NVivo throughout. The use of a structured interview guide applied consistently across all fourteen interviews further supports the stability of the data collection process across respondents.

Confirmability was ensured through systematic linkage between empirical evidence and analytical interpretation at each stage of the analysis, such that thematic groupings and the organizational mechanisms derived from them remain traceable back to specific statements in the transcripts rather than resting on interpretation detached from the empirical record.

4. Findings

4.1 Interpreting Environmental Requirements Through Interface Capability

Across the fourteen interviews, the first capability to surface in the data concerns the way firms

receive, interpret, and translate environmental requirements coming from corporate headquarters, OEM audits, or international standards. This work does not happen automatically once a requirement is issued. It is performed by specific actors, including HSE, QHSE, quality, environment, supply chain, and operations managers, who occupy a position between the logic that produces the requirement and the logic that has to act on it.

I1, a CSR/environment manager at an OEM site in Tangier, described this position directly: "My role consists in managing all issues related to the environment, from regulatory compliance to the monitoring of objectives set by the group and by certain customers. I also have to act as a link between requirements defined at corporate level and field reality, because between what is requested and what is immediately feasible in the plant, things often need to be organized progressively." The requirement, in this account, arrives already carrying a gap between what is asked and what the plant can immediately do, a gap the interface role exists to manage rather than resolve outright.

This pattern was not specific to environmental roles alone. I2, a quality and compliance director, described an equivalent function from a different vantage point, framing the work as ensuring that "requirements are properly integrated into our system and that they are translated into controllable requirements." I2 added a further dimension to this role, preventing the same requirement from drifting into different meanings as it moved across departments: "I am in a coordination function but also a stabilization function. It is not enough to transmit a requirement; it is necessary to ensure that it keeps the same meaning across the different levels of the organization." Interface work, on this account, is not only translation but the maintenance of a shared interpretation once translation has occurred.

I4, a customer quality engineer, similarly described continuous boundary-spanning work aimed at maintaining a shared understanding of customer requirements across departments. I6 extended this interface function beyond the plant itself, emphasizing coordination with suppliers to maintain conformity throughout incoming supply flows.

Taken together, these accounts establish interface capability as the initial activity in the sequence: the means by which an externally formulated requirement becomes something internally legible. What this activity does not yet resolve is what the firm can actually do with the requirement once it has been understood, given its own resources and constraints, a limitation visible already in I1's reference to feasibility, and one the next phase addresses directly.

4.2 Adapting Global Standards Through Normative Bricolage

Once a requirement has been interpreted, the data show firms rarely applying it exactly as formulated. Instead, respondents described a recurring activity of adjustment: requirements are not rejected, but the path to meeting them is reshaped to fit local resources, production rhythms, and technical conditions.

I1 stated the underlying logic with particular clarity: "We do not adapt the final objective, but the way of reaching it. Some requirements are formulated from industrial contexts that are not exactly ours, or assume resources and deployment rhythms that are not always immediately available. In this case, we work on intermediate solutions." The same respondent specified what this adaptation could look like in practice, such as revising a deployment sequence, proposing a technical adjustment, or introducing a compensatory control while a more stable solution is developed, and was explicit that this should not be read as evasion: "This adaptation is not a bypass. It is a way of making the requirement practicable without losing its final purpose."

These accounts reveal two analytically distinct but interdependent components of Normative Bricolage: the adaptation of implementation means to local constraints and the preservation of the underlying objective of the external requirement. Table 5 makes this empirical-conceptual correspondence explicit.

Table 5. Empirical Operationalization of Normative Bricolage

Conceptual Component	Empirical Manifestations	Illustrative Evidence
Adaptation of implementation means	Revised deployment sequences; intermediate controls; procedural adjustments; technical modifications; compensatory measures	Respondents describe adapting how requirements are implemented when resources, production rhythms, or technical conditions prevent direct application
Preservation of the normative objective	Maintaining compliance intent; preserving customer or environmental requirements despite modified implementation pathways	Respondents explicitly distinguish adapting the means from changing the final objective
Combination of both components	Locally feasible solutions that remain aligned with the original requirement	Intermediate or adjusted solutions are used to make requirements practicable without abandoning their intended purpose

Source: Authors' elaboration based on qualitative findings

I2 described this adaptive work in terms of implementation rather than substance, drawing a boundary that recurred across several accounts: "We do not modify a requirement in the strict sense; we adapt the way of implementing it. For example, when a requirement assumes a level of traceability or a control device that is not immediately available, we put in place a transitional solution." I3 reported a similar pattern, noting that requirements are sometimes "formulated in a very theoretical way" without regard to site-specific constraints, prompting responses such as step-by-step implementation, compensatory devices, or reformulated deployment terms.

This adaptive logic was observed across supplier tiers. Respondents from Tier 2 and Tier 3 firms similarly described the use of intermediate controls, revised procedures, and simplified implementation pathways to reconcile customer requirements with local operational constraints. Although resource limitations were more visible among lower-tier suppliers, the underlying objective remained the same: preserving the intent of environmental requirements while making their implementation feasible.

I13, a process manager in a lower-tier supplier, illustrated this mechanism particularly clearly: "Some requirements do not take into account the real constraints of machines or processes. In that case, we adapt. For example, we can modify a parameter, change a sequence, or implement an intermediate solution. The objective is to remain compliant, but with a feasible solution."

Across these respondents, adaptation does not appear as a workaround applied occasionally under pressure. It appears as a standing organizational activity, present at every tier, that converts an interpreted but not-yet-actionable requirement into something the firm can actually execute given what it currently has. What the data also show, however, is that adaptations of this kind remain exposed: an intermediate solution or a compensatory control, introduced once for a specific requirement, does not by itself guarantee that the same response will be available the next time, or that it will be applied consistently across the organization. This is the limitation the next phase addresses.

4.3 Structuring Environmental Practices into Organizational Routines

Adapted practices, once repeated, begin to take a more durable form in the data. Respondents described a distinct activity of converting these adaptations into procedures, indicators, audits, and documented systems, work that shifts environmental practice from something dependent on a given moment or a given individual's judgment to something the organization can reproduce on its own.

I1 described this shift through the firm's broader environmental management infrastructure: "We have a structured environmental management system, based on ISO 14001, with procedures, periodic reviews, indicators, internal audits and action plans. This system provides a framework. It prevents environmental issues from being managed only reactively." The same respondent was careful to distinguish formal documentation from operational use, locating the real effect of structuring in its connection to ongoing management routines rather than in the

documents themselves: "What is important is that this structuring does not remain documentary. It is connected to steering routines. Indicators are discussed, deviations are analyzed, and actions are assigned to identified managers. Without this structuring, requirements would remain occasional. With it, they become part of a more stable logic."

I2 framed the same transition in terms of what structuring does to the requirement's organizational status: "We have documented systems, internal standards, periodic audits, indicators, reviews and mechanisms for monitoring actions. This structuring is important because it transforms requirements into manageable objects." I2 went further, contrasting the structured state with what precedes it: "Without this, they remain dependent on actors' goodwill. With a formalized system, they become traceable, auditable and stabilized."

The strength of this structuring was not uniform across the sample. Respondents from Tier 2 and Tier 3 firms reported the presence of procedures, audits, and monitoring mechanisms, but also emphasized that formalization remained less developed than in OEM and Tier 1 organizations. In these firms, environmental management continued to rely more heavily on accumulated experience, informal coordination, and adaptive practices than on fully institutionalized systems. I10, a Tier 2 quality manager, captured this partial structuring directly: "We have procedures, audits and a management system. But I would say that structuring is less developed than among the major customers. We work with the resources available to us."

Read together, these accounts show structuring operating along a gradient rather than as a uniform outcome: strongest among OEM and Tier 1 respondents, where documented systems are tightly coupled to recurring management routines, and weakest among Tier 2 and Tier 3 respondents, where adaptation continues to rely more heavily on individual experience even after some procedures have been put in place. What structuring accomplishes, where it is present, is durability. Durability of a routine at the level of environmental or quality management does not, on its own, determine whether that routine carries weight in the firm's broader decisions; that connection is the subject of the final phase.

4.4 Anchoring Environmental Requirements in Strategic Decision-Making

In the more developed configurations within the sample, respondents described environmental requirements as having moved beyond technical or procedural management and into the territory of managerial and strategic decision-making. This shift did not appear automatically alongside structuring; it depended on whether structured routines were taken up by management attention and resource allocation.

I1 described this movement explicitly as a transformation in how the organization is steered, contrasting current practice with an earlier, more occasional treatment of environmental issues: "Beyond equipment, there has been a transformation in the way of steering. Previously, some environmental issues were handled more occasionally. Today, they are more integrated into management decisions and industrial trade-offs." The same respondent located this shift in the organization's internal discourse as much as in its formal decisions: "The environment has become a more legitimate subject in internal exchanges. It is no longer treated as a parallel theme. It is gradually integrated into the performance logic of the site."

I2 described a comparable integration, framing environmental considerations as no longer separable from other dimensions of firm performance: "It must be understood that the environment is no longer a separate subject. It interferes with quality, cost and industrial performance." I2 connected this directly to governance: "The major result is the growing integration of environmental requirements into the overall compliance system. It is less and less treated as a separate domain."

I9, an industrial and technical director at a Tier 1 supplier, offered the most direct statement of this integration from a strategic vantage point: environmental requirements, in this account, "are

integrated into the industrial strategy and decision-making processes," with the respondent's own role defined as ensuring "alignment between requirements and the strategy of the site." I9 linked this alignment to a broader performance outcome, describing "an overall improvement in performance and better integration of the environment into strategy."

This degree of integration was not present uniformly across the sample. A similar limitation was visible among Tier 2 respondents. I10 explained that investment remained incremental: 'We do not always have the resources to invest quickly, so we prioritize internal solutions or gradual improvements.' This account indicates that adaptation and partial structuring may be present without being fully converted into strategic resource commitments.

I14, the Tier 3 site manager already cited in connection with bricolage and weak structuring, described a strategic posture defined primarily by the absence of resources to anchor environmental considerations more deeply: "We have very few investments. We do not always have the means to invest. We prioritize simple and internal solutions." The same respondent characterized the firm's overall position in terms that link strategic anchoring directly back to resource constraint: "We manage to satisfy customers, which is already essential. In terms of environmental performance, there are improvements, but they remain limited by our means."

Across the sample, strategic anchoring therefore appears as the phase most clearly conditioned by firm position and resource availability. Where it is present, environmental requirements function as inputs to genuine trade-offs at the level of investment, strategy, and site performance, as in the OEM, Tier 1, and I9's Tier 1 accounts. Where management attention and resources remain limited, as in I14's account, structured routines persist at an operational level without acquiring this strategic weight, and the firm's environmental response remains bounded by what its current means allow.

4.5 A Sequential Capability Formation Process

Read across the fourteen interviews, the four patterns described above do not function as independent organizational themes. Each addresses a specific limitation left open by the one preceding it, and the same progression recurs across respondents regardless of tier position, even though the strength of each phase varies with that position.

The sequence begins with interface activity: before a firm can act on an environmental requirement, the requirement must be received and made intelligible inside the organization. This produces a legible requirement but does not by itself determine what the firm will do with it given its own resources, a limitation that adaptation resolves. Once a requirement has been interpreted, respondents described evaluating what was achievable given current resources and adjusting the implementation path accordingly, without abandoning the requirement's underlying objective. This leaves unresolved, however, the durability of the response: an adaptation introduced once for a specific situation does not guarantee that the same response will recur consistently.

Structuring supplies that durability, converting adapted responses into documented procedures, indicators, and assigned responsibilities, and stabilizing what had previously depended on individual judgment into something the organization can reproduce on its own. This was achieved most fully among OEM and Tier 1 respondents, and only partially, with continued reliance on experience and informal adjustment, among Tier 2 and Tier 3 respondents. Strategic anchoring then connects these structured routines to the firm's broader decision-making; where it is absent, as among Tier 3 respondents, routines persist at an operational level but remain disconnected from strategic resource allocation. Anchoring resolves the limitation left by structuring alone: a routine confined to environmental or quality functions remains exposed to being deprioritized whenever it competes with other organizational demands.

This progression of interpretation, adaptation, structuring, and anchoring was not described by any single respondent in full, since each respondent's account was shaped by their own position

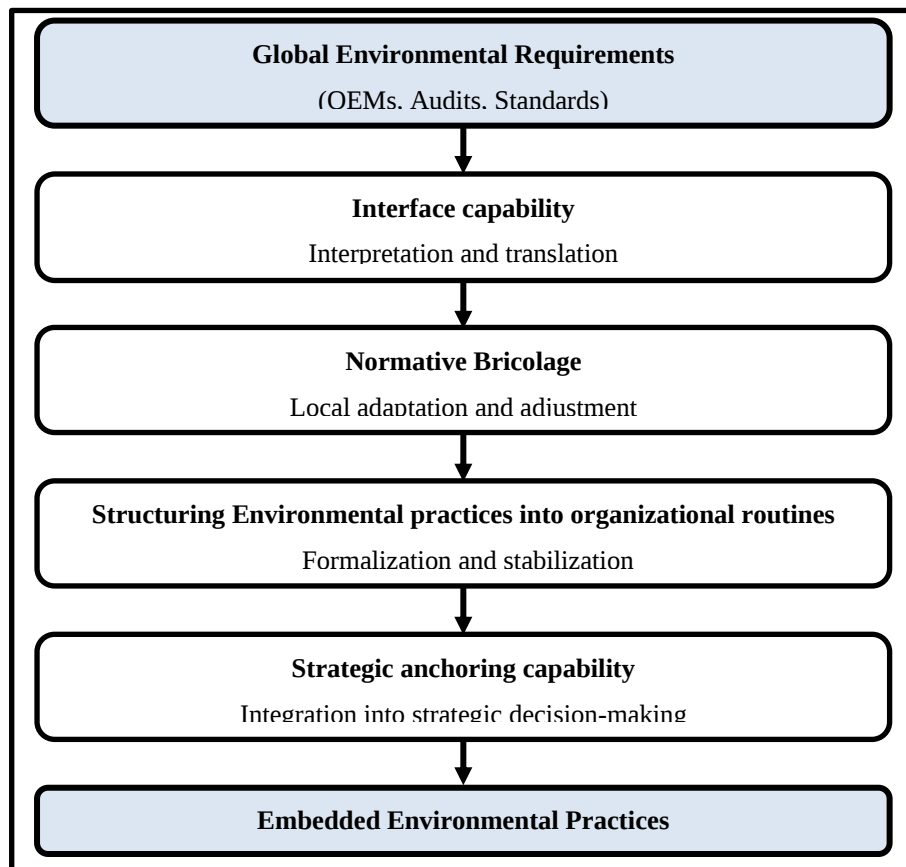
in the organization: interface-facing roles spoke most directly to the first two phases, while director-level and industrial-management roles spoke more directly to the latter two. Read together across roles and tiers, the fourteen accounts converge on the same sequence, with the strength of each phase varying systematically by tier position.

The analysis also considered cases in which the sequence remained incomplete rather than fully developed. These cases did not reveal an alternative ordering of the four capabilities, but rather interruptions in their progression. Among several Tier 2 respondents, adaptation was clearly present while structuring remained only partial, leaving environmental responses dependent on pragmatic adjustment and available resources. The Tier 3 case showed an even more pronounced interruption, with strong reliance on informal adaptation but weak structuring and limited strategic anchoring. These cases therefore qualify the sequential model by showing that progression through the four phases is neither automatic nor uniform: the process may stall when organizational resources and formalization mechanisms are insufficient.

OEM and Tier 1 firms show the strongest interface and structuring capabilities; Tier 2 firms rely more heavily on pragmatic adaptation alongside partial structuring; Tier 3 firms show the strongest dependence on informal adaptation and the weakest strategic anchoring, constrained throughout by limited means.

Taken together, the findings suggest that CSR environmental implementation does not occur through the direct adoption of external requirements, but through a sequential capability formation process in which firms progressively interpret, adapt, structure, and strategically anchor environmental requirements within their organizational systems. Figure 1 summarizes the sequential capability formation process identified across the interviews.

Figure 1. Sequential Capability Formation Process for CSR Environmental Implementation



Source: Authors' elaboration based on qualitative findings.

To facilitate interpretation, Table 6 summarizes the four capability phases and their primary organizational functions within the overall process.

Table 6. Summary of Capability Formation Phases

Phase	Capability	Main Organizational Activity
Phase 1	Interface Capability	Interpretation and translation of environmental requirements
Phase 2	Normative Bricolage	Adaptation of global standards to local constraints
Phase 3	Structuring Capability	Formalization and routinization of environmental practices
Phase 4	Strategic Anchoring Capability	Integration of environmental requirements into strategic decision-making

Source: authors' elaboration

5. Discussion

5.1 CSR Implementation as a Capability Formation Process

The findings indicate that environmental requirements moving through the supplier organizations studied here do not settle into practice in a single step. They pass through interpretation, adaptation, structuring, and, where conditions allow, strategic integration: four distinct organizational activities rather than one act of adoption. This pattern is difficult to accommodate within a view of CSR implementation centered on managerial decision and deployment.

Staged models of CSR implementation, such as the one developed by Maon et al. (2009), specify what implementation should accomplish, moving firms from internalization to institutionalized commitment. What the findings add is a more granular account of what occurs inside each stage, particularly at its outset. The interface activity documented across respondents, the reformulation of OEM and corporate requirements into operationally legible terms and the stabilization of meaning across departments, is not addressed by models that assume a requirement is already understood similarly by the actors responsible for acting on it. The data instead show this shared understanding as something actively produced and maintained, locating organizational work upstream of where implementation models typically begin.

A similar gap appears in research on how members engage with CSR once introduced. Aguinis and Glavas (2019) treat sensemaking as the central process linking individual engagement to organizational outcomes. The findings are compatible with this emphasis but extend its scope earlier: the interface and adaptation activities documented here concern organizational actors determining, often under resource pressure, what an external requirement will mean operationally before any program exists for employees to interpret. Sensemaking, on this account, presupposes a degree of organizational stabilization that the data show is itself the outcome of prior capability work.

Fatima and Elbanna (2023) identify organizational processes and mechanisms as a comparatively underexplored dimension of CSR implementation. The four-phase sequence identified here addresses this gap by showing how externally imposed environmental requirements become progressively actionable under resource constraints. Cross-tier variation therefore reflects differences in how far capability formation has advanced rather than different degrees of commitment to a single compliance decision.

5.2 Extending the Natural Resource-Based View Through a Capability Formation Perspective

This reframing has direct consequences for how the findings relate to the Natural Resource-Based View. Hart (1995) identifies capabilities associated with pollution prevention, product stewardship, and sustainable development that link environmental performance to competitive advantage, establishing capability rather than mere compliance as the relevant unit of analysis. What this formulation does not specify is how a firm exposed to externally imposed

requirements comes to possess these capabilities. Hart and Dowell (2011), revisiting the framework, attribute this gap to empirical research that has measured the presence and effects of capabilities more thoroughly than the process of their formation.

The Moroccan automotive industry provides a particularly relevant context for observing this process because suppliers operate under demanding environmental requirements imposed by multinational OEMs while exhibiting heterogeneous levels of organizational maturity, resource availability, and managerial formalization. These conditions make capability formation processes especially visible, as firms must develop organizational responses to environmental requirements under constraints that are often less pronounced in the resource-rich settings where the NRBV has traditionally been examined.

The findings specify how environmental capabilities emerge when requirements are externally imposed and resources are constrained. Interface capability renders external standards organizationally intelligible; Normative Bricolage adapts implementation pathways to available resources; structuring stabilizes these responses; and strategic anchoring connects them to resource-allocation decisions. Together, these mechanisms provide the process account that the NRBV largely presupposes rather than explains.

These mechanisms do not modify the NRBV's claim that environmental capability matters for performance. They specify the organizational process by which such capability comes to exist, under conditions of external imposition and resource constraint that the original framework treats as already resolved. The findings extend the NRBV along the dimension Hart and Dowell (2011) identify as underdeveloped, not by adding a new capability to the framework's inventory, but by supplying a process account of how the capabilities it already names come into being.

5.3 Normative Bricolage as a Capability Formation Mechanism

The adaptation activity documented in Section 4.2 carries particular theoretical weight, since it identifies the mechanism through which the gap between an externally formulated standard and a firm's local resource conditions gets resolved. Respondents across tiers described this mechanism consistently: not modifying the requirement itself, but adjusting the means of reaching it through intermediate controls, revised deployment sequences, and recombined existing procedures, while preserving the requirement's underlying purpose. This pattern is conceptualized here as Normative Bricolage: the pragmatic recombination of available organizational resources and procedures to render an externally imposed environmental requirement locally workable, without abandoning its intended objective.

The term draws on Lévi-Strauss's (1962) distinction between the engineer, who designs a solution from purpose-built resources, and the bricoleur, who builds a workable solution from whatever is at hand. Baker and Nelson (2005) extend this distinction into organizational contexts, showing that firms facing severe resource constraints construct solutions through recombination rather than through acquiring resources an ideal response would require. Duymedjian and Rüling (2010) establish that this recombinant behavior is a recognizable organizational logic rather than an improvised exception. Garud and Karnøe (2003) add that actors with limited resources often achieve outcomes comparable to better-resourced actors because bricolage allows locally embedded knowledge to substitute for resources they lack.

What the present findings add to this lineage is a specific application: bricolage directed at adapting an externally formulated normative standard, an environmental requirement defined by an OEM, a corporate parent, or an international standard-setting body, to the conditions of a supplier that did not participate in defining it. The mechanism is normative in this precise sense: what is being recombined is the implementation pathway of a rule the firm must satisfy but did not author.

Halme et al. (2012), examining bricolage inside multinationals pursuing inclusive business innovation, document a structurally similar pattern of adapting global corporate intentions to

resource-scarce local contexts while preserving the parent objective, which supports treating this normative adaptation as a recognizable variant of organizational bricolage rather than an artifact specific to the automotive sector.

Normative Bricolage differs from generic organizational adaptation because it concerns an externally imposed requirement whose underlying objective remains non-negotiable. Its distinctive logic therefore lies in adapting implementation means rather than ends: firms reconstruct locally feasible pathways while preserving the requirement's normative intent.

The findings suggest that Normative Bricolage may constitute the mechanism through which interface capability's output, a requirement interpreted but not yet actioned, becomes something the firm can implement given its own constraints, without losing the requirement's purpose. Nearly all respondents emphasized that adaptation preserved the requirement's objective even as it altered the path to reaching it. This proposition should be understood as a theoretical interpretation emerging from this empirical setting, suppliers operating under externally imposed standards and constrained resources within global value chains, rather than a claim that the same mechanism necessarily operates identically elsewhere.

5.4 From Isolated Capabilities to Capability Configuration

A further implication concerns how the four capabilities relate to one another. Each phase addresses a specific problem: making sense of an external requirement, adjusting it to local conditions, stabilizing the adjustment, and connecting it to strategic decision-making. The findings do not support treating these as four separate capabilities whose presence could be assessed independently. Each phase's output makes the next phase's activity possible, and a capability that is strong in isolation does little if the capability preceding or following it is absent.

This is visible in the cross-case pattern reported in Section 4.5. Tier 3 respondents showed the strongest reliance on informal adaptation precisely because their structuring capability remained weak, leaving bricolage solutions without the infrastructure to become durable routines. The same respondents showed the weakest strategic anchoring, not because environmental concerns were absent from their priorities, but because routines insufficiently structured to begin with had little to anchor. OEM and Tier 1 respondents' stronger structuring and anchoring capabilities were themselves traceable to an interface function operating with more resources and more direct access to corporate-level requirement-setting. The capabilities covary across the sample because each one's development is conditioned by the one before it. This interdependence is consistent with Fiss's (2007) argument that organizational phenomena are often better explained by configurations of interdependent conditions than by the additive effect of separately measured variables. Classical configurational approaches similarly conceptualize organizations as coherent *gestalts* composed of mutually reinforcing elements, without necessarily assuming a temporal ordering among those elements (Meyer et al., 1993). However, the configuration identified in this study differs from a non-sequential perspective in which organizational elements are mainly understood as operating together at the same time. The findings instead reveal an ordered process in which each capability creates the conditions for the development of the next. Interface capability makes external requirements understandable within the organization, Normative Bricolage adapts their implementation to local constraints, structuring transforms these adaptations into stable routines, and strategic anchoring connects these routines to managerial and strategic decision-making. The contribution therefore lies not only in showing that these capabilities are interdependent, but also in identifying the specific sequence through which this interdependence develops. What generates embedded environmental practice is not the sum of four independently valuable capabilities, but their sequential interlocking, in which the value of any one capability is conditional on the prior development of the capability that supplies its input. Recent work on

ESG capability building corroborates this configurational logic, showing that sustainability-oriented capabilities co-evolve through distinct configuration patterns rather than developing independently (Hu & Othman, 2026). This also clarifies a limitation in the dynamic capabilities literature: Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) treat such capabilities as discrete, measurable routines, and Helfat and Peteraf (2003) model formation as stages a single capability passes through on its own trajectory. Neither account anticipates several capabilities developing in a specific order because each depends on its predecessor's output, which is the structure the findings document and which Figure 1 represents as a unidirectional sequence rather than a set of parallel processes.

This configurational property justifies treating the four phases as a single theoretical object, a capability configuration for environmental CSR implementation, rather than as practices that happen to co-occur. It also explains why the cross-tier variation documented in Section 4.5 is cumulative rather than scattered: a firm with underdeveloped interface capability shows constrained development across every later stage that depends on it. The theoretical weight of the findings rests not on any single capability described in Section 4, but on the sequential architecture connecting all four.

6. Conclusion

This article explains how suppliers facing externally imposed environmental requirements and constrained resources develop the organizational capabilities required to translate those requirements into operational practice. The findings show that CSR environmental implementation is better understood as a sequential capability formation process than as a discrete adoption decision. Firms progressively interpret external requirements through interface capability, adapt their implementation pathways through Normative Bricolage, stabilize these adaptations through structuring, and, where organizational conditions allow, anchor them in strategic decision-making. This process extends the Natural Resource-Based View by shifting analytical attention from capability possession toward capability formation. It also identifies Normative Bricolage as the mechanism through which implementation means are adapted to local constraints while the objective of the external requirement is preserved. Finally, the study advances a configurational perspective in which the four capabilities are sequentially interdependent rather than independently valuable.

These contributions carry practical implications. Supplier managers can treat environmental capability building as strengthening an existing organizational sequence rather than acquiring new resources: giving interface roles real standing, treating adaptation as legitimate rather than something to conceal, formalizing adapted practices deliberately, and connecting routines to resource-allocation decisions. A stalled environmental practice is best diagnosed by locating the underdeveloped phase, not treated as a general lack of commitment.

From a managerial perspective, implementation difficulties should be diagnosed according to the phase of the capability formation process in which breakdowns occur. Environmental implementation problems do not necessarily reflect a generalized lack of commitment. They may instead originate from weaknesses in requirement interpretation, local adaptation, practice formalization, or strategic anchoring. Viewing implementation through this diagnostic lens may help managers identify more targeted and effective interventions.

For practical use, this diagnostic logic can be translated into a simple capability maturity grid. Suppliers can assess whether environmental implementation difficulties arise primarily at the interface stage, the adaptation stage, the structuring stage, or the strategic anchoring stage. Weak interface capability would be reflected in difficulties interpreting or coordinating external requirements; weak Normative Bricolage in limited ability to adapt implementation pathways to local constraints; weak structuring in the absence of stable procedures, indicators, or routines;

and weak strategic anchoring in the limited integration of environmental issues into investment and managerial decision-making.

OEM purchasing and sustainability managers should note that supplier performance depends on internal capability configuration as much as on requirement stringency. Audit-based oversight often misses where a supplier's formation process is actually constrained, typically in structuring and anchoring among smaller suppliers, where targeted support outperforms uniform pressure.

Public policymakers supporting industrial sustainability should design capacity-building programs around this sequential logic. Programs that raise requirement stringency without building Tier 2 and Tier 3 suppliers' structuring and anchoring capacities risk widening the gap this study documents between OEM-level and lower-tier suppliers.

These contributions hold within the boundaries of the study. More specifically, the theoretical extension proposed here is expected to be most relevant in organizational settings characterized by externally imposed environmental requirements, asymmetric buyer-supplier relationships, and constrained local resources. Its applicability may therefore be more limited in firms that retain substantial autonomy over environmental standard-setting or possess sufficient resources to implement external requirements without significant adaptation. The proposed capability formation sequence should thus be understood as context-sensitive rather than universally applicable across all industries and organizational settings. The empirical setting is the Moroccan automotive sector within the Renault–Stellantis value chain. The fourteen qualitative interviews support a detailed process account but not claims regarding frequency, statistical generalizability, or causal magnitude. Moreover, reliance on retrospective accounts prevents direct observation of capability development over time. A further limitation concerns potential social desirability bias. Because the interviews were conducted with managers directly involved in environmental, quality, production, and compliance activities, respondents may have tended to present organizational practices in a more favorable or coherent manner. This possibility should be considered when interpreting the accounts of capability development and environmental implementation.

Future research should test the proposed relationships quantitatively across larger samples, examine their transferability across countries, and extend the analysis to global value chains beyond automotive manufacturing. A further priority is longitudinal research following suppliers over time to observe directly how interface capability, Normative Bricolage, structuring, and strategic anchoring emerge and develop in sequence. Such designs would make it possible to assess whether the ordering identified retrospectively in this study is reproduced through observable capability development trajectories. Comparative research in other resource-constrained industry contexts provides a useful basis for such extensions (Phan et al., 2026).

Global value chains will continue to carry environmental requirements to firms that did not design them. Understanding how firms build the capacity to respond, not only whether they comply, is what a theory of sustainability in global production needs to explain practice rather than merely measure it.

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