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Conceptualising Supply Chain Resilience Within Social Enterprises

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ABSTRACT

This research seeks to conceptualise supply chain resilience (SCRes) in a social enterprise (SE) context, focusing on SEs with a social mission to tackle food insecurity and food poverty. Despite the increasingly mature field of SCRes and awareness of the critical role SEs play in tackling social challenges such as food poverty, no studies have explored what SCRes entails in an SE context and whether SEs build their SCRes differently. An in-depth review of literature was conducted, adopting a narrative approach due to the interdisciplinary nature of the study. The analysis shows that when faced with supply chain disruptions, SEs may be at a disadvantage compared to commercial firms, as they lack access to financial resources to absorb shocks and do not have spare management capacity for planning and risk management. SEs compensate by drawing on their network connections and engage in diagonal cross-sector networking with a wide variety of actors. SEs leverage their unique qualities, such as being embedded in the local community, utilising their social capital and adopting flexible ways of working. These practices enable them to build SCRes differently to commercial firms. We develop a conceptual framework that encapsulates SE-led SCRes.

1 | Introduction

Social enterprises (SEs) have become an increasingly important and visible contributor to a range of markets across many societies (Doherty et al. 2014). SEs are organisations whose primary activity involves the trading of goods and services to achieve primarily social and/or environmental objectives (Peattie and Morley 2008a). SEs are prevalent in service sectors such as health and education; the arts, sports and heritage; finance and financial exclusion; and transport and tourism. SEs often provide support for a range of disadvantaged groups such as vulnerable children and young people, women and girls, those with disabilities and those facing some form of discrimination (Social Enterprise UK 2021, 2023). The literature on SEs tends to be skewed towards service sectors, where issues of supply chain management (SCM) are rarely attended to. There are however certain types of SE that have physical supply chains to meet material needs, such as SEs that play a role in the provision of social housing or food provisioning systems. There is a lack of SE research in this physical SCM context, which this study aims to address. This study focuses on SEs with a social mission to tackle food insecurity and food poverty through food provisioning systems. In 1996, the World Food Summit defined 'food security' as the state in which 'all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life' (Food and Agriculture Organization 1996). Yet, nearly 30 years on, more than 14 million people are believed to be experiencing food insecurity (also referred to as 'food poverty') in the United Kingdom alone (Trussell 2025). In the United Kingdom, the SE sector has grown in prominence as a vehicle for tackling food insecurity, with an extensive network of SE food provision services being established (Wang et al. 2018).

Further, our study seeks to understand supply chain resilience (SCRes) in this SE food provisioning context. Ensuring security of supply is particularly important, as millions of people depend on food provisioning from SEs, with increasing dependence on

food banks. A number of challenges can affect SCRes, such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic, rising inflation and energy prices. We explore how SE supply chains can become more resilient.

SE-led supply chains (SESCs) are likely to operate differently to for-profit food company supply chains, as SEs typically face resource disparities compared to their commercial counterparts (Doherty et al. 2014). Understanding how to make SESCs resilient may not simply be a question of doing what their commercial counterparts do. Research on SCRes has been predominantly set in for-profit contexts. We address the gap in understanding SCRes in an SE context as 'conventional models of enterprise are not well suited to explaining social enterprise' (Diochon and Anderson 2011, 109).

This study explores SCRes in an SE context by reviewing relevant literatures and developing a conceptual framework, addressing the research question:

- What does supply chain resilience mean in a social enterprise-led supply chain context, and how can it be attained?

This paper makes three contributions. First, studies of SEs have predominantly been skewed towards service sectors, whereas this study focuses on the physical supply chain context of food provisioning. Second, we explore SCRes in an SE context, in contrast to the majority of SCRes studies, which are conducted in a 'for profit' context. Third, we offer a conceptual framework of SCRes in an SE context, to help guide future research in the field and to help counter the lack of SE research more generally across operations and SC management research (Pullman et al. 2018; Longoni et al. 2019).

The paper proceeds by introducing the key concepts in the study, then discussing our narrative literature review methodological approach, then presenting our findings and developing a framework conceptualising SCRes within SE. We conclude the paper by discussing its contributions and limitations as well as future research opportunities.

2 | Introducing SEs and SCRes

SEs are often spoken about as if they were a single organisational type, but they include a variety of organisations. SEs include cooperatives, trading arms of charities, community businesses, employee-owned organisations, fair-trade organisations, credit unions, housing associations and a variety of other nonprofit organisations including certain types of societies and trusts (Young and Lecy 2014). SEs deliver their social benefits either through the internal provision of employment opportunities (Social Enterprise UK 2023) or by meeting the needs of external target beneficiaries (which can involve directly meeting their needs or by raising money for them). SEs differ from 'for profit' organisations in a number of ways. Most obviously, SEs are not seeking to make profits, and any surplus is reinvested in the SE. SEs answer to a range of stakeholders, such as local government, charities and service users; by contrast, 'for profit' organisations are predominantly accountable to their shareholders.

SCRes involves the ability to 'prepare for unexpected events, respond to disruptions, and recover from them by maintaining continuity of operations at the desired level' (Ponomarov and Holcomb 2009, 131). SCRes is important because the ability to adapt and manage SC disruptions can ensure that organisations can continue to operate due to the security of the supply of products that they require. SCRes research emerged in the 2000s, bringing together research on capabilities, managing risk in supply chains and adaptation. Although there are varying definitions of SCRes, most authors agree that it entails how organisations in a supply chain deal with unanticipated events and includes phases of readiness, response and recovery. SCRes research has been conducted almost exclusively in 'for-profit' settings and how SCRes operates in an SE context remains underexplored and is the focus of this study.

3 | Methodological Approach

In order to explore SCRes in SEs, we adopted a narrative methodological approach to the literature review process, that is, a 'comprehensive narrative synthesis of previously published information' (Green et al. 2006, 103). This approach is particularly useful in interdisciplinary studies and underexplored areas (Sukhera 2022) and when evaluating and seeking connections across bodies of literature (Hammersley 2001). This approach is appropriate, as our study applies a well-established concept (SCRes) to an unexplored context (SE). To ensure both the external validity and reliability of this study, the literature review process adopted elements of Tranfield et al. (2003) and PRISMA 2020 (Page et al. 2021).

The search process for relevant articles was conducted and structured sequentially; however, the overarching narrative review process was iterative and reflective, allowing us to visit and revisit the data and connect them with emerging insights, progressively leading to refined understanding. A review panel was formed of academic specialists in applicable fields and was consulted to guide the search and analysis process (Green et al. 2006). The larger and more mature SCRes literature was reviewed first to establish a well-supported model for SCRes, followed by a review of the more emergent SE literature to identify the aspects of SEs that are most relevant to SCRes. Each decision made in the search process was documented in the review protocol, below (Table 1).

The search process (Table 1) began with the identification of key words and search strings. These were agreed upon following an initial scoping review of the literature and discussion among the review panel. A total of 12 search strings were used, six relating to each literature (Table 1). Each search string was used across three databases, namely, (1) Google Scholar, (2) Emerald Insight and (3) Wiley Online Library. Google Scholar was used for its ability to maximise precision and its ability to retrieve unique references not found in other databases, attributed to its indexing of full texts (Bramer et al. 2017). This was deemed useful due to the complex nature of resilience, consisting of multiple subthemes and concepts, which may be the focus of relevant literature. To enhance comprehensiveness and to maximise recall (Bramer et al. 2013, 2017), Google Scholar was used in combination with two

TABLE 1 | Review protocol.

Inclusion criteria	Details	Total papers
Database (D)	1. Google Scholar 2. Emerald Insight 3. Wiley Online Library	
Search strings	SCRes literature: 'Supply chain resilience'; 'resilient supply chains'; 'building supply chain resilience'; 'building resilient supply Chains'; 'creating supply chain resilience'; 'creating resilient supply chains'. Total search strings (TSS) = 6	1800 (6 [TSS] × 3 [D] × 100 [results based on relevance])
	SE Literature: 'Social enterprise'; 'conceptualising social enterprise'; 'social enterprise concept'; 'social enterprise success'; 'social enterprise failure'; 'not-for-profit'. Total search strings (TSS) = 6	1800 (6 [TSS] × 3 [D] × 100 [results based on relevance])
Applicability	Title and abstract review	
	SCRes: Literature illustrating concepts and elements of SCRes.	66
	SE: Literature illustrating concepts and elements of SEs.	36
Exclusion criteria	Details	
No relevance	The scope of this LR was the top 100 results for each database search based on relevance. Therefore, those outside of the top 100 were disregarded.	
Duplicates	Duplicate results were removed.	
Language	Studies published in languages other than English were removed.	

other databases. Emerald Insight and Wiley Online Library were used as established databases for conducting reviews of the SCRes literature (Hohenstein et al. 2015; Tukamuhabwa et al. 2015; Kamalahmadi and Parast 2016; Ali, Mahfouz, and Arisha 2017; Kochan and Nowicki 2018). The scope of these searches was restricted to the first 100 results, based on relevance. This generated 3600 results (including duplicate papers), 1800 papers pertaining to each literature. These papers then went through a title and abstract screen to determine applicability, and we applied inclusion and exclusion criteria to identify papers relating to our research question. This saw a total of 66 papers related to SCRes and 36 to SE reviewed in full. The date range of identified papers was 2004–2025.

The findings are divided into two sections; the first section provides the analysis of SCRes literature, and the following section reviews studies on SEs.

4 | Findings—SCRes

4.1 | Strategies for Developing SCRes

There is general agreement within the literature that there are three phases of SCRes in coping with disruptions and uncertainties (Ponomarov and Holcomb 2009; Tukamuhabwa et al. 2015; Chowdhury and Quaddus 2016; Kamalahmadi and Parast 2016; Sawyerr and Harrison 2020):

1. *Readiness*: the capabilities of monitoring for environmental changes and preparing for unforeseen events, reducing the likelihood of disruptions occurring and laying the foundations for later phases of SCRes.

2. *Response*: to limit the impact of disruptions.

3. *Recovery*: to swiftly restore lost functions.

A fourth growth phase has been proposed by Hohenstein et al. (2015), where postdisruption recovery is not to a previous state but rather a new and improved one.

Four specific strategies for developing SCRes emerge (Tukamuhabwa et al. 2015), which are discussed below (see Table S1A): collaboration, flexibility and redundancy (which tend to be discussed together), and agility.

4.1.1 | Collaboration

The most widely cited SCRes antecedent, collaboration (Sawyerr and Harrison 2020), involves 'the ability to respond to supply chain disruptions with partners through collaborative planning and information-and intelligence-sharing' (Ali, Mahfouz, and Arisha 2017, 27). Information sharing typically relates to the physical structure of the SC, coupled with the location of its members, alternative suppliers, inventory levels, expertise, sales statistics, forecasts and trends (Scholten et al. 2014). SC information and intelligence sharing is considered essential for inherent risk reduction (Christopher and Peck 2004) and crises response (Sawyerr and Harrison 2020). Noninformational forms of collaboration to facilitate SCRes include 'joint relationship effort' through sharing resources,

such as workers and transport, and the synchronisation of decision making; 'mutual dependency' involving combined investments; and 'joint knowledge creation' relating to day-to-day operations or specific disruptions (Scholten and Schilder 2015). If collaboration becomes excessive to the point of mutual dependency, it can hinder SC agility and flexibility and compromise SCRes in practice (Datta 2017).

4.1.2 | Flexibility and Redundancy

The two most utilised strategies for SC disruption mitigation are flexibility and redundancy, are widely cited antecedents of SCRes (Sawyerr and Harrison 2020) and often discussed in combination (Sa et al. 2020). Flexibility is defined as 'the ability of an enterprise to adapt to the changing requirements of its environment and stakeholders with minimum time and effort' (Erol et al. 2010, cited in Tukamuhabwa et al. 2015, 5604) and enables SCs to reduce costs and lead times (Carvalho et al. 2012) and manage disruptions (Juttner and Maklan 2011). Sourcing flexibility is achievable through multisourcing (Ivanov 2024). Operational flexibility includes process flexibility (achievable through standardisation of processes, materials and products; Polyviou et al. 2020); transport flexibility (Stone and Rahimifard 2018); and workforce flexibility (Kamalahmadi and Parast 2016; Johnson et al. 2013).

Redundancy is defined as the 'concept of keeping some resources in reserve to be used in case of a disruption' (Sheffi and Rice 2005, 44) can involve tangible resources, involving safety stock, multiple suppliers, back-up premises, alternative modes and routes of transport and low-capacity utilisation (Chowdhury and Quaddus 2017; Sawyerr and Harrison 2020). However, the holding of surplus stock may not always be an appropriate strategy in food supply chains due to the perishable nature of products (Ali, Nagalingam, and Gurd 2017). It can also involve intangibles such as multiskilled workers, broad job descriptions (Johnson et al. 2013), multiprocesses, supplier relationships and decentralised management as a form of organisational redundancy (Juttner and Maklan 2011).

Although easy to build into a SC, redundancy is costly (Adobor and McMullen 2018) and should therefore be reserved for critical resources (Purvis et al. 2016; Sawyerr and Harrison 2020). By contrast, flexibility is cost effective, yet difficult to implement (Carvalho et al. 2012). Vanpoucke and Ellis (2019) found that redundancy is preferred when disruptions are unlikely, and flexibility is better when disruptions are likely. Similarly, Kamalahmadi et al. (2022) found redundancy is a better response to disruptions in terms of both cost and service level compared to volume flexibility. However, some authors argue that the two are interrelated, with redundancy seen as an antecedent of flexibility (Adobor and McMullen 2018). Given that back-up sites, multisourcing (Juttner and Maklan 2011; Sawyerr and Harrison 2020) and low-capacity utilisation (Wicher and Lenort 2012) are all cited as antecedents of flexibility, we categorise redundancy as an element that enables flexibility, rather than a 'strategy'.

4.1.3 | Agility

Agility facilitates SCRes through enabling timely response to unforeseen events. Agility is often regarded as a business-wide capability, enabling firms to respond to changing market environments and characterised by flexibility and responsiveness, and spans organisational structures, processes, information systems and mindsets (Blome et al. 2013). Flexibility and agility are often used loosely and interchangeably in practice. However, Abdelilah et al. (2018), via a systematic literature review, provide some clarity. They suggest that although flexibility is considered an operational ability, agility is a strategic ability that enables a firm to establish a strategic long-term vision. This positions flexibility as a subcapability of agility, amongst others such as responsiveness or speed.
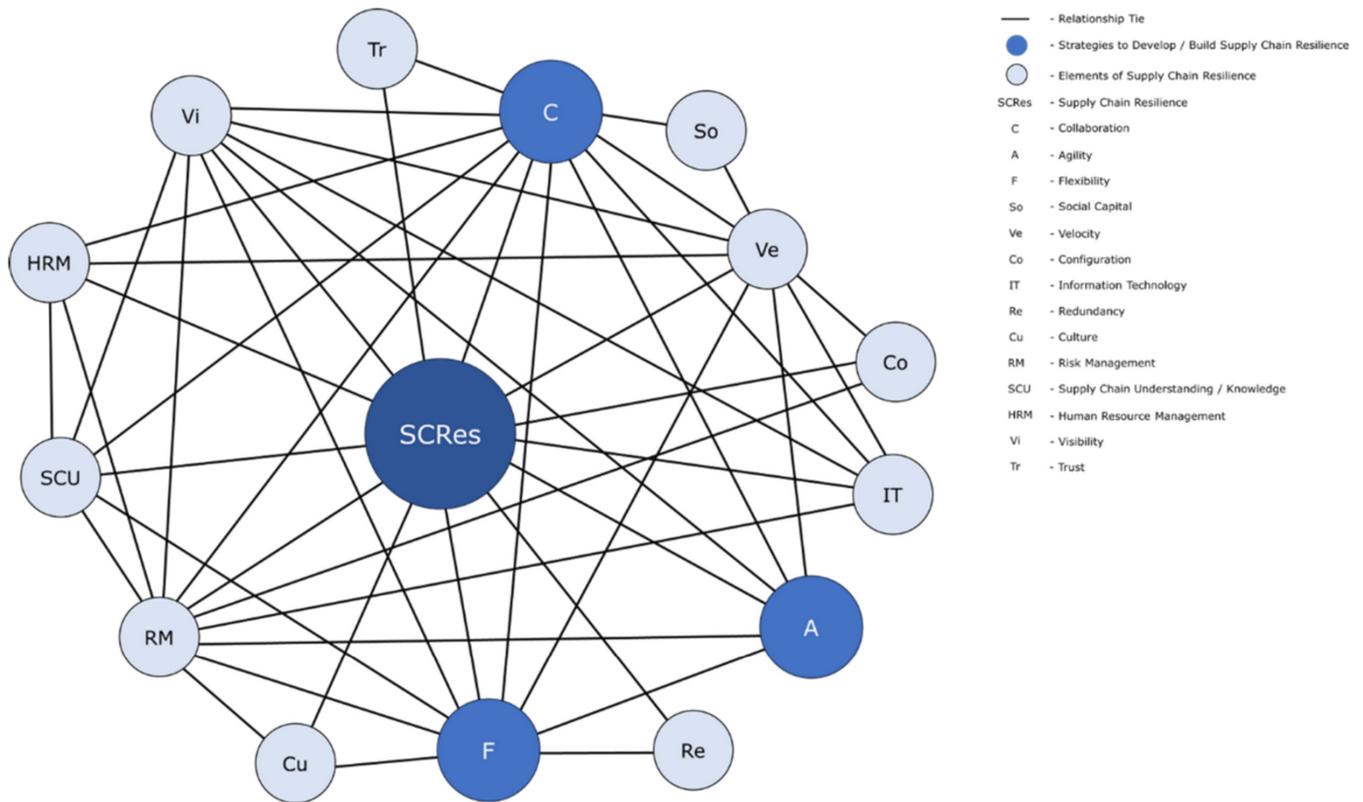
4.2 | Elements of SCRes Strategies

Multiple elements of SCRes strategies were identified in the literature (See Table S2). Figure 1 provides an illustration of how SCRes (dark blue in the middle) relates to the SCRes strategies (shown in mid blue), which are interconnected with the SCRes elements (shown in light blue). Some elements have few connections; for example, social capital is related to collaboration strategy and the velocity element. Some elements, such as visibility, have multiple connections, linking with several strategies and the elements of velocity, IT, risk management and SC understanding.

4.2.1 | Configuration

Traditionally, SCs have been designed to prioritise cost and/or customer service, as opposed to resilience (Christopher and Peck 2004), particularly for food systems (Stone and Rahimifard 2018). Therefore, to generate SCRes, SCs must be configured to foster the necessary capabilities. SC configuration for SCRes has been further discussed in terms of its density and complexity, along with the criticality of its members (Falasca et al. 2008; Chowdhury and Quaddus 2017). SC density is considered high when many members of the same SC are situated in a small geographical space (Falasca et al. 2008; Chowdhury and Quaddus 2017). With greater distance comes greater likelihood of operations being disrupted, along with increased transportation costs and longer delivery times (Wicher and Lenort 2012; Purvis et al. 2016).

SC complexity relates to the number of members and their interconnections. SCs with reduced complexity may isolate disruptions and reduce impact, whereas higher complexity may compromise interorganisational trust, commitment and cooperation (Chowdhury et al. 2019). However, multiple suppliers and greater complexity may build flexibility (Chowdhury et al. 2024). Member criticality is determined by the extent to which the SC depends on their continuity. This criticality can be diluted through integrating additional members into the SC with this same role and responsibilities, albeit at the cost of greater SC density and complexity (Falasca et al. 2008).

FIGURE 1 | Map of interconnections between SCRes strategies and elements.

4.2.2 | Trust

Trust, that is, 'a general inclination in which people show faith or belief in humanity and adopt a trusting stance toward others' (Adobor 2019, 540), is recognised as a prerequisite for collaboration within the SC (Stone and Rahimifard 2018; Sawyerr and Harrison 2020; Pu et al. 2023). It is facilitated through operating in an environment perceived as conducive to taking interpersonal risks that encourages engagement, tolerates mistakes and provides critical feedback (Adobor 2019). Johnson et al. (2013) found that continued collaboration fosters greater trust and a willingness to work together without formal agreements, suggesting that the trust-collaboration relationship is circular and self-reinforcing.

4.2.3 | Social Capital

Another prerequisite for SC collaboration is social capital (Tukamuhabwa et al. 2015; Polyviou et al. 2020; Nagariya et al. 2024), comprising structural, cognitive and relational capital (Johnson et al. 2013; Polyviou et al. 2020; Chowdhury et al. 2024). Social capital is attributable to close interpersonal relationships consisting of respect and commitment, achievable through prolonged tenure, shared objectives and vision (Polyviou et al. 2020). This enables better communication and knowledge exchange, collective action, enhanced disruption avoidance and recovery capabilities (Polyviou et al. 2020). Yang, Xie, et al. (2024) found relational capital emanating from collaboration with suppliers contributed significantly to the development of flexibility and risk management capabilities.

4.2.4 | Visibility

SC visibility is 'the ability to see from one end of the pipeline to the other' (Christopher and Peck 2004, 10) and enables SCRes by identifying 'pinch points' and critical paths (Christopher and Peck 2004), providing real-time monitoring of inventory throughout the SC (Blackhurst et al. 2011; Jain et al. 2017). Visibility also supports decision making (Kamalahmadi and Parast 2016), the detection of potential and incoming disruptions, timely interventions (Juttner and Maklan 2011; Kamalahmadi and Parast 2016), rapid response (Johnson et al. 2013; Kamalahmadi and Parast 2016) and postdisruption learning (Ali, Mahfouz, and Arisha 2017; Jain et al. 2017).

4.2.5 | Velocity

Defined as 'distance over time' (Christopher and Peck 2004, 10), velocity concerns how quickly a SC can respond to sudden change (Jain et al. 2017; Adobor and McMullen 2018). Velocity can be achieved through (1) streamlined processes, (2) reduced inbound times, (3) reduced nonvalue adding time throughout the SC (Christopher and Peck 2004) and (4) decentralised management (Sawyerr and Harrison 2020).

4.2.6 | Human Resource Management (HRM)

HRM is fundamental to SCRes (Sawyerr and Harrison 2020), with training and education enabling employees to handle disruptions (Blackhurst et al. 2011; Hohenstein et al. 2015; Zhao

et al. 2024) and allowing SCs to stabilise and rebound faster (Blackhurst et al. 2011; Ali et al. 2018; Zhao et al. 2024). The creation of a multiskilled workforce reduces both uncertainty (Wicher and Lenort 2012; Sawyerr and Harrison 2020) and disruption occurrence (Ali, Nagalingam, and Gurd 2017; Ali et al. 2018; Adobor 2019). Workforce training needs to go beyond organisational boundaries to include both suppliers and customers (Blackhurst et al. 2011; Scholten et al. 2014). Scholten et al. (2019) highlight the importance of formal and informal learning and reflection through preparation for, response to and recovery from disruptions.

4.2.7 | Culture and Risk Management

Kamalahmadi and Parast (2016) state that resilience is embedded in the culture of a system. Culture in SCRes literature is mainly discussed in relation to risk management (Polyviou et al. 2020; Sawyerr and Harrison 2020; Santos et al. 2024). An effective risk management culture identifies sources of risk and integrates risk management throughout the organisation (Christopher and Peck 2004; Adobor 2019; Polyviou et al. 2020).

Risk management enables anticipation, identification, mitigation and prevention of risks (Adobor 2019; Sawyerr and Harrison 2020). Risk management is particularly pertinent in food SCs (Stone and Rahimifard 2018; Ali et al. 2018), which involve the production and distribution of food to the point of consumption, face unique risks attributed to limited shelf-life and inconsistencies in the availability of raw materials (Stone and Rahimifard 2018). Ali et al. (2018) propose four risks specific to perishable product SCs: (1) temperature breakdown, (2) substandard packaging, (3) natural disaster and (4) deterioration in product quality due to delays in delivery. Geopolitical conflicts and wars such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine are risks that, if not managed well, result in food supply shortages and escalate food poverty problems.

Following a vulnerabilities assessment, risk management strategies can be implemented (Colicchia et al. 2010) including (1) buffer implementation, involving holding surplus inventory and/or multi sourcing to absorb disruption; (2) mitigation strategies, to reduce disruption occurrence; and (3) contingency planning, to be triggered following a disruption (Colicchia et al. 2010), reducing reaction time (Hohenstein et al. 2015; Sawyerr and Harrison 2020). Such risk management is most effective when operating as 'a continuous cycle of identification of hazards, assessment of risks, analysis of controls, choosing controls, implementing controls and review' (Pettit et al. 2010, 4). Continuous risk management both predisruption and postdisruption facilitates disruption understanding. This includes the cause of disruptions, how they spread and how they can be handled, therefore enhancing future predisruption risk management (Blackhurst et al. 2011).

4.2.8 | SC Understanding/Knowledge

Christopher and Peck (2004, 9) cite the value of *strategic*, *tactical* and *operational* knowledge. Strategic knowledge concerns emerging issues and trends that may compromise the SC in the future. Tactical knowledge reflects supply and demand and the assessment of operational risks, whereas operational knowledge relates to the day-to-day management of the organisation (Christopher and Peck 2004). More specifically, SC understanding/knowledge can be broadened in relation to: the physical structure of the SC, along with the location of members within it (Johnson et al. 2013); organisational processes (Scholten and Schilder 2015); current inventory levels and alternative suppliers (Scholten et al. 2014); the presence and generation of expertise (Scholten et al. 2014), with the latter through access to education and training (Blackhurst et al. 2011); historical disruptions (Ponomarov and Holcomb 2009); and sales statistics, forecasts and trends (Scholten et al. 2014; Brusset and Teller 2017).

4.2.9 | Information Technology (IT)

IT systems represent an enabler on which antecedents of SCRes increasingly depend. There are abundant studies exploring the role of IT in supporting SCRes, through aiding collaboration (Jain et al. 2017; Adobor and McMullen 2018; Atadoga et al. 2024), providing end-to-end visibility (Adobor and McMullen 2018; Atadoga et al. 2024; Ivanov 2024) and managing risks (Jain et al. 2017). Ali, Nagalingam, and Gurd (2017) suggest the absence of such systems creates barriers to generating SCRes. The role of digital technology in supporting resilience was highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic (Modgil et al. 2022; Ivanov 2021).

4.3 | Development of an SCRes Model

From our analysis of the literature and map of interconnections in Figure 1, a SCRes model was developed (Figure 2). The model highlights that to be resilient, a SC must be both agile and flexible. Agility supports SCRes through enabling SCs to respond quickly to unforeseen events (Kamalahmadi and Parast 2016; Purvis et al. 2016), whereas operational and sourcing flexibility (Stone and Rahimifard 2018; Sawyerr and Harrison 2020) supports SCRes through enabling the avoidance (Bradaschia and Pereira 2015) and containment (Juttner and Maklan 2011; Soni and Jain 2011) of disruptions. Consequently, Figure 2 suggests that by being agile and flexible, a SC can resist, respond, recover and grow. The ability to grow has been grouped together with the ability to recover for two reasons. First, to achieve growth implies that recovery has taken place. Second, although growth is identified as a phase of SCRes, it is not viewed as a mandatory phase of SCRes like recovery, instead being something to aspire to. To be able to resist, respond, recover and grow requires a combination of elements relating to resources, structure and management/decision making. This model simplifies complex and interconnected elements. In practice, resources, management and structure will all be intertwined in their influence on SCRes.

The SE literature will be analysed next, identifying and elaborating upon any themes to be integrated into our conceptual framework.
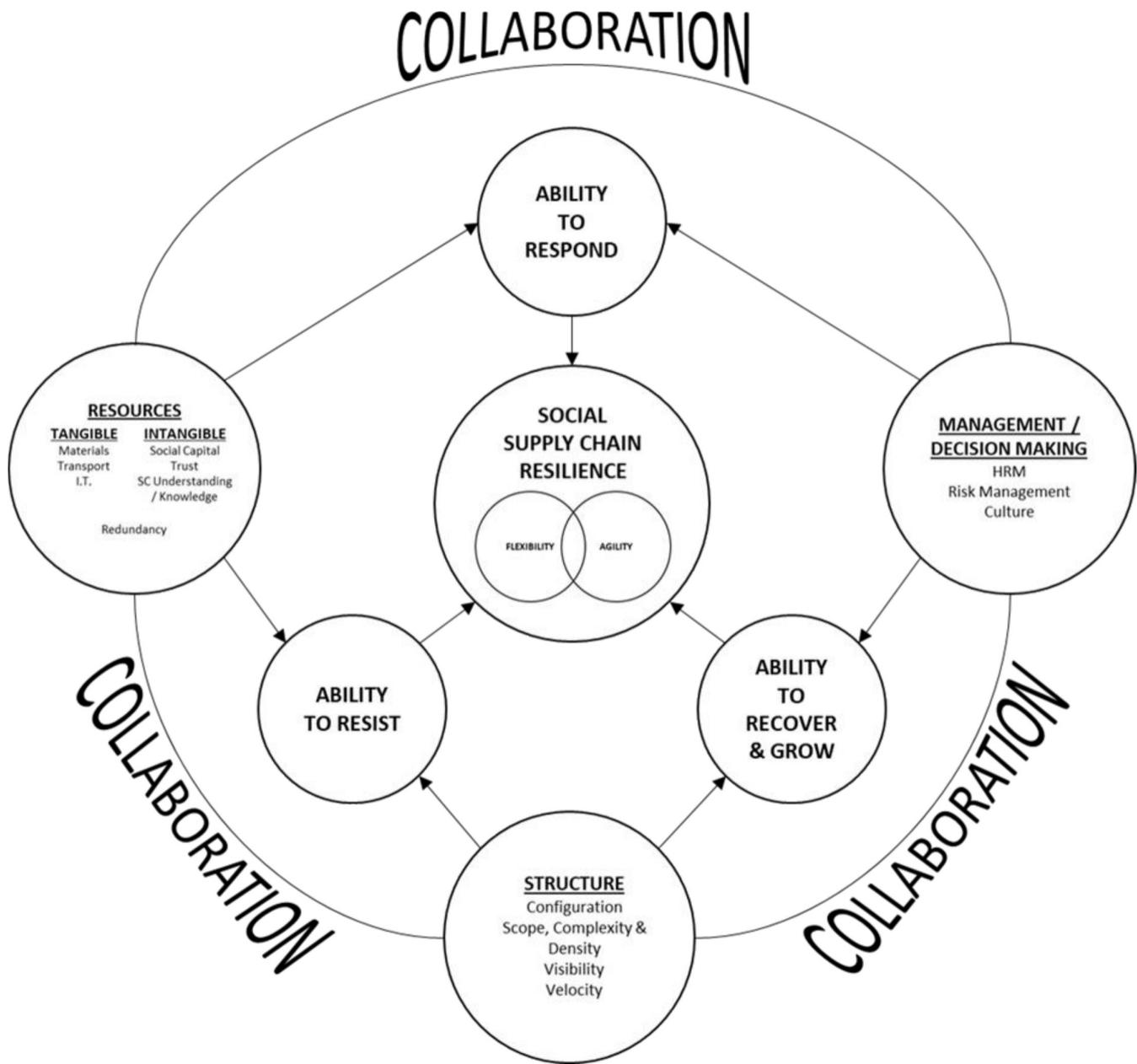
FIGURE 2 | SCRes conceptual framework. *Source:* authors.

5 | Findings—SEs

SEs could be assumed to face identical SC risk management challenges to their commercial peers. However, there are some distinctive elements of SEs that have the potential to impact the management of their SCs (Pullman et al. 2018; Longoni et al. 2019) and their ability to develop SCRes. These can relate to SEs' distinctive hybrid identity with a dual mission to be commercially successful, while delivering a social service to society (Pache and Santos 2013; Pullman et al. 2018; Hagedoorn et al. 2023; Hazenberg and Paterson-Young 2025), typically in the face of constrained resources (Ebrahim et al. 2014; White et al. 2022). Perceived tensions in this dual mission can lead to mission drift, whereby an increased focus on commercial revenue building is to the detriment of social objective performance (Doherty et al. 2014; Ebrahim et al. 2014). Pressures to commercialise can be seen to threaten SEs' legitimacy

(Doherty et al. 2014; Herlin 2015), giving rise to concerns about 'selling out' (Peattie and Morley 2008a, 30). This can inhibit SEs from working with for-profit organisations (Peattie and Morley 2008b), possibly limiting SEs' response options to SC disruptions. Furthermore, unlike for-profit firms where customers and shareholders represent the dominant stakeholders, SEs often have a wider variety of stakeholders and pressures to manage, including funding bodies and beneficiaries.

5.1 | Commonalities Across SCRes and SE Literature

Despite their contrasting contexts, there are commonalities across the SE and SCRes literature (see Table S3). These commonalities are discussed below, along with a number of 'influences' that affect the SESC context.

5.2 | SE Strategies

5.2.1 | Collaboration

Collaboration is a success factor for SEs generally (Doherty et al. 2014; Allen 2020) and for SESC management in particular (Pullman et al. 2018), with the longest collaborations yielding the greatest benefits (Sharir and Lerner 2006). SCRes collaboration typically has a narrow operational scope focusing on other SC members, with an emphasis on shared information and planning. SE collaboration, by contrast, involves a wider range of stakeholders with a focus on accessing opportunities and resources (de Bell and Bakker 2025) such as access to grant funding (Shaw and Carter 2007; Doherty et al. 2014) or particular expertise (Spear 2006; Allen 2020). SEs often collaborate formally and informally with their founders' families, particularly in their early years (Spear 2006; Davies and Ryals 2010), and with community members (Islam 2007), government agencies (Desa 2010), customers (Seanor and Meaton 2008; Doherty et al. 2014) and target beneficiaries. SEs also frequently collaborate with each other on projects in order to gain resource capacity, credibility and legitimacy (Granados and Rivera 2018; Spanuth and Urbano 2024) even though they may compete with one another in other contexts.

Unlike for commercial firms, SE collaboration can be constrained (and SCRes compromised) by an ideological and cultural reluctance among SEs to collaborate with commercial organisations, attributed to an unwillingness to be associated with business ideologies and the perceived risk of compromised legitimacy or 'selling out' (Peattie and Morley 2008b; Herlin 2015). Instead, they prefer to rely on their informal social networks or noncommercial networks such as local government, personal contacts and other nonprofit organisations.

5.2.2 | Flexibility

Flexibility contributes to SE success (von der Weppen and Cochrane 2012; Doherty et al. 2014). This is primarily achieved through their hybrid identity (Doherty et al. 2014) and minimalistic processes (Patel and Mehta 2011). However, this may not be possible for all SEs, particularly in the case of social franchising (Cumberland and Litalien 2018; Naatu and Alon 2019), which involves 'the replication and rolling out of a foundation model of a social enterprise that has worked elsewhere' (GHK 2005, 40), often for a fee (Litalien 2006; Doherty et al. 2014).

5.3 | SE Elements

5.3.1 | Human Resource Management, Social Entrepreneurs and Volunteers

Appropriate HRM to promote SCRes relates to ensuring that a firm's people have the skills and training to handle disruptions. Within SEs, challenges related to both accessing sufficient human resources and to the nature of those resources can impact organisational viability and SCRes. Partly this relates to the pre-eminent role that 'social entrepreneurs' play in establishing and managing SEs. Although commercial enterprises are often founded by entrepreneurs with expertise in the market sector served,

social entrepreneurs are often 'change agents in the social sector' (Harding 2007, 74) whose expertise relates more to the social issue served (Shaw and Carter 2007; Asarkaya and Keles Taysir 2019). This can bring advantages to the SE in terms of the entrepreneur's social capital and perceived credibility (Sharir and Lerner 2006) but also challenges in 'finding the correct combination of skills and motivations appropriate for both an entrepreneurial venture and the pursuit of a social cause within a single individual' (Peattie and Morley 2008a, 29). Important SCRes capabilities beyond day-to-day management, such as proactive risk management or recovery management, may be outside the skillset of an SE's founding entrepreneur who, seeing themselves as central to an enterprise run on a 'shoestring', often become overly invested in operations and decision-making, thus creating bottlenecks and vulnerabilities.

Staffing problems exist for SEs beyond that of the social entrepreneur, and a potential overdependence on them (Peattie and Morley 2008a; Social Enterprise UK 2019; Crucke and Bockaert 2023). SEs' financial constraints can make them unable to pay the market rate for employees (Doherty et al. 2014) or offer long-term contracts or pensions, leading to an inability to attract candidates with the required skillsets and values (Royce 2007). This results in a preference for appointing candidates with broad skillsets, which can promote flexibility, coupled with a tendency to hire socially motivated and/or local but inexperienced individuals (Social Enterprise UK 2019; Kilpatrick et al. 2021; Crucke and Bockaert 2023). This requires SEs to invest heavily in training, and although theoretically this can promote SCRes, the breadth of the training that resource-constrained SEs need to develop suitably multiskilled workers may leave little scope for the inclusion of SCRes orientated training. Instead, SEs tend to use bricolage approaches (Jamburia and Courrent 2024; Jewer et al. 2024) and online and offline networking strategies to achieve 'the proactive sourcing of those that can offer advice, guidance, professionalism, and expertise' (Allen 2020, 447).

SEs often solve their labour challenges through a reliance on volunteers (Peattie and Morley 2008a, 2008b; Doherty et al. 2014; Gee et al. 2023; Hazenberg and Paterson-Young 2025). Staff turnover is greater amongst SEs utilising both paid and volunteer labour, which could be attributed to a volunteer's ability to withdraw their labour should they become dissatisfied (Doherty et al. 2014; Gee et al. 2023). The complexities of managing such a hybrid workforce are typically presented as a challenge for SEs (Royce 2007). However, for SCRes, it may represent an unexpected advantage because in times of postdisruption response and recovery, the process of standing down volunteers until they are needed again will be less complex, costly and traumatic compared to commercial firms forced to downsize their paid workforce.

5.3.2 | Social Capital

The strength of the SE Sector is largely attributed to the social capital flowing from contacts, support and expertise, sourced from social entrepreneurs' family members, customers and communities, and from local organisations and support agencies (Granados and Rivera 2018; von der Weppen and Cochrane 2012). This social capital is fundamental to the collaborative activities of SEs (Richards and Reed 2015) and is

vital due to the financial constraints SEs operate under (Doherty et al. 2014). The relatively high staff turnover observed amongst SEs (Doherty et al. 2014) has implications for building social capital. This is because cognitive capital, a key form of social capital (Polyviou et al. 2020), depends on prolonged employee tenure.

5.3.3 | Trust

Trust is important to collaborative activities of SEs (Richards and Reed 2015; Perikangas et al. 2024). Without trust, SEs are reduced to working in isolation, increasing their vulnerability (Seanor and Meaton 2008). Without trust, SESC may require comprehensive formal agreements to govern collaboration, which SEs may lack the business and legal skills to implement, monitor and manage (Allen 2020).

5.3.4 | Culture

Although there is considerable literature dedicated to SE culture, the issue of risk management, the pre-eminent aspect of culture within the SCRes literature, is very underdeveloped (Sari and Sundiman 2019; Wronka-Pośpiech et al. 2016). Where risks are considered they tend to consider broad organisational risks linked to financial sustainability. The heterogeneous nature of the SE literature and the nature of the sector have acted to obscure potential risks (Wronka-Pośpiech et al. 2016), including those relevant to SCRes.

What is prevalent in the SE literature is a picture of SEs as relatively innovative problem solvers. Doherty et al. (2014) attribute the relatively innovative nature of SEs to the management of the demands of a variety of stakeholders, coupled with utilising unique combinations of resources to achieve social objectives whilst coping with resource constraints. These resource constraints prompt SEs to 'identify under-utilised resources—people, buildings, equipment—and find ways of putting them to use to satisfy unmet social needs' (Leadbeater 1997, cited in Shaw and Carter 2007, 422). These skills of coping with resource constraints and being able to identify and access underutilised resources may represent exactly the types of capabilities required for effective responses to SC disruption and the creation of SCRes.

An aspect of culture that is proposed as both beneficial for SCRes and for the development of successful SEs is creating a culture of distributed responsibility with staff and volunteers involved in decision-making. Such a culture supports employee recruitment and retention among SEs, leading staff to 'feel empowered to speak up' (Sharir and Lerner 2006; Rykaszewski et al. 2013, 22), which generates greater commitment and loyalty among employees (Patel and Mehta 2011; von der Weppen and Cochrane 2012). Staff feeling empowered to speak up can also be invaluable for ensuring supply chain risks are identified and responded to. The dominant role often played by the founding social entrepreneur may hinder such openness. Generating a culture that is open and potentially capable of effective risk management can be achieved by promoting collaboration and two-way communication between management, employees and volunteers (von der Weppen and Cochrane 2012; Rykaszewski et al. 2013) and a willingness to discuss risks within decision-making at all levels (Adobor 2019; Polyviou et al. 2020).

5.4 | SE-Specific SCRes Influences

There were several influences in the SE literature that, although not prominently featured in the SCRes literature, may disproportionately impact SE SCRes (see Table S4). These are discussed below and contribute to the elaboration of the conceptual framework.

5.4.1 | Finance

Although financial resources are relevant to the SCRes of both commercial and SEs, SEs tend to have extremely constrained finances (Ebrahim et al. 2014; Santos et al. 2015), which can limit their ability to generate SCRes. When trying to access resources, the funding landscape for SEs can be uncertain, with conventional investment sources less accessible to SEs (White et al. 2022). This may hamper SEs' ability to access funds to absorb external shocks that threaten their SCRes or to implement mitigation strategies by investing in redundancy.

Although grant funding is still commonly utilised among SEs to supplement market earnings, there has been a notable move away from reliance on it (Allen 2020; Green et al. 2024). The impact of this on SESCRes is unclear. It may counterintuitively promote SESCRes because overreliance on uncertain and hard to win grant funding can absorb much management resource and negatively impact the 'business' side of an SE in terms of planning and marketing activities (Peattie and Morley 2008a). On the other hand, success in grant funding may provide access to resources that help to build SCRes (Peattie and Morley 2008a), and the process of grant applications may build social capital, provide access to training workshops to build skills (Rykaszewski et al. 2013) and promote assessment of risks.

5.4.2 | Planning

Planning is paradoxically seen as a key success factor for SEs (Islam 2007) but also as an area where they are comparatively weak. Sharir and Lerner (2006) identified that most social entrepreneurs fail to conduct any preplanning, whereas Royce (2007) found that only 5% of SEs undertook regular formal planning. Even amongst SEs that plan, key SCRes activities like risk identification or disruption planning may be unlikely to occur because this represents an 'advanced' form of planning which is not a priority (Rykaszewski et al. 2013).

The use of professional business services has the potential to improve SEs' planning activities. However, business services providers often fail to adapt their offerings for SEs, resulting in limited uptake (Royce 2007; Peattie and Morley 2008a).

5.4.3 | Skills

Skills are not commonly an explicit focus within the SCRes literature, although there are implied skills involved in relation to key factors such as HRM, risk management, IT provision and SC understanding. For SEs, skills and skills shortages are a frequent focus of attention (Wronka-Pospiech 2016) and linked to the resource constraints that can make it difficult to attract and retain sufficiently skilled people (Social Enterprise UK 2019; Allen 2020). Effective SESCRes will require a range of business skills including scenario planning, contingency planning, SC management, IT management, customer service management and negotiation. For those SEs that are highly reliant on a single social entrepreneur, it is unlikely that they will possess all the necessary skills. SESCRes is likely to require the sourcing and developing of skills through external stakeholders and support services.

5.4.4 | Governance

There tends to be two archetypes of SE governance. One is of the entrepreneurially led SE where a founding individual retains relatively tight control of decision making, creating a bottleneck and restricting the managerial focus to survival. The other archetype is SEs as democratic (Social Enterprise UK 2019), synonymous with terms such as *community* and *collective* (Shaw and Carter 2007, 430). These SEs commonly adopt multistakeholder governance structures (Spear et al. 2009), with beneficiaries, communities and employees actively involved in governance and decision making (Social Enterprise UK 2019).

As hybrid organisations, SEs face unique governance challenges around managing any perceived trade-offs between their social and commercial aims (Spear et al. 2009; Doherty et al. 2014). Ebrahim et al. (2014) propose several strategies for avoiding mission drift, including having managers monitor the relationship between the two objectives. Managing mission drift and the needs of a variety of stakeholders (Doherty et al. 2014; Roumpi et al. 2020; Wu et al. 2023; Spanuth and Urbano 2024) places two additional management responsibilities on SEs that are not faced by their for-profit equivalents, drawing attention away from SCRes.

5.4.5 | Location

Location is crucial for SEs, partly because the social issues they address will often reflect local community needs (Shaw and Carter 2007; Peattie and Morley 2008a; Olmedo et al. 2024) and partly because SEs are frequently highly dependent on nontransferable place-specific factors (Kilpatrick et al. 2021), such as local authorities, infrastructure and culture (Amin et al. 2002). Social entrepreneurs show a strong preference for establishing businesses in familiar locations (Shaw and Carter 2007), and most SEs surveyed by Social Enterprise UK (2019) recruit their entire workforce locally. SEs tend to rely on networks that are intrinsically tied to location (Shaw and Carter 2007; Peattie and Morley 2008a; Allen 2020). Trust, social capital and legitimacy are positively

associated with face-to-face exchanges, made easier by geographical proximity (Seanor and Meaton 2008; Spanuth and Urbano 2024; Hagedoorn et al. 2023). Such local networks and relationships can be potentially valuable to SEs in accessing resources and expertise (Allen 2020), which are important in promoting organisational resilience amongst SEs (Bonomi et al. 2021) and therefore in supporting SCRes.

Given the reluctance of funding bodies to provide grants for the purchasing of premises, SEs have responded by cohabiting spaces within local communities (Peattie and Morley 2008a), and a greater concentration of SEs can be beneficial to their survival (Haugh et al. 2022). Benefits of such cohabitation include the sharing of utility costs as well as the promotion of intertrading and codevelopment (Peattie and Morley 2008a).

5.5 | A Model of SE Supply Chain Resilience

We have compared the concepts identified in the SCRes and SE literatures in Table 2. We are able to elaborate upon our initial SCRes-focused conceptual framework (Figure 2) to develop a conceptual framework for social enterprise supply chain resilience (SESCRes) (Figure 3). Drawing on the SE literature, we have added elements to our initial framework that will potentially impact SESCRes such as access to resources (e.g., human and financial); location as a structural element; management processes including planning and governance; and intangible relational resources such as the generation of social capital.

6 | Discussion and Conclusions

This research set out to explore the answer to the question of 'what does supply chain resilience mean in a social enterprise-led supply chain context and how can it be attained?' We conducted a narrative review of SCRes literature and identified the key strategies and elements to building SCRes and developed an initial conceptual framework. Sequentially, we then reviewed SE literature, identifying the particular characteristics of SEs that are critical to their success. This led to an elaboration of our initial conceptual framework, providing insights into SCRes that are specific to an SE context.

If we reflect on our conceptual framework, we can consider the four strategies for SCRes (collaboration, flexibility, redundancy and agility) highlighted by Tukamuhabwa et al. (2015). Of these strategies, collaboration was a particularly strong feature of SEs' strategies and culture and therefore is likely to be a foundational strategy for their SCRes. By contrast, building a redundancy strategy into SCs can be costly (Wang et al. 2016; Adobor and McMullen 2018) and therefore is likely to be unsuitable due to the resource constraints that SESCs operate under. Measures such as 'back-up sites', 'alternative modes and routes of transport' and 'surplus stock' are inappropriate forms of redundancy from a SESCRes perspective. In the study's specific context of addressing food poverty through food provision, due to the financial constraints under which both the SEs operate and target beneficiaries live, as well as the perishability of the goods being provided, it may

TABLE 2 | Concepts from across SCRes and SE literature that contribute to our conceptual framework.

	SCRes literature	SE literature	SESCRes conceptual framework
Phases			Phases
Readiness	✓		Ability to resist
Response	✓		Ability to respond
Recovery	✓		Ability to recover and grow
Strategies			Strategies
Collaboration	✓	✓	Collaboration
Flexibility	✓	✓	Flexibility
Redundancy	✓		
Agility	✓		Agility
Elements			Elements
Resources—tangible			Resources—tangible
	✓		Redundancy
IT	✓		IT
Human Resources		✓	Human Resources
Finance (influence)		✓	Finance
Materials	✓	✓	Materials
Transport	✓	✓	Transport
Resources—intangible			Resources—intangible
Trust	✓	✓	Trust
Social capital	✓	✓	Social capital
SC understanding	✓		SC understanding
Skills (influence)		✓	Skills
Management/decision making			Management/decision making
Risk management	✓		Risk management
HRM	✓	✓	HRM
Culture	✓	✓	Culture
Planning (influence)		✓	Planning
Governance (influence)		✓	Governance
Structure			Structure
Location		✓	Location
Configuration	✓		Configuration
Visibility	✓		Visibility
Velocity	✓		Velocity

be necessary for the supply chain to be kept short as possible. The holding of surplus stock would be a particularly unsuitable redundancy-based to create SESCRes in food provision due to the perishable nature of the stock involved. If redundancy is to be achieved in SESCRes, it will more likely be in the areas of multisourcing, multiskilled workers and broad job descriptions.

With regard to flexibility and agility strategies, the flexibility of an SE to adapt to changing circumstances was identified within the SE literature. SEs typically prioritise cost-reduction and responsiveness, often encountering trade-offs between the two (Saenz et al. 2018). SCRes in an SE context often relies on reducing the probability and impact of risks through mitigation strategies and contingency plans (Colicchia et al. 2010).
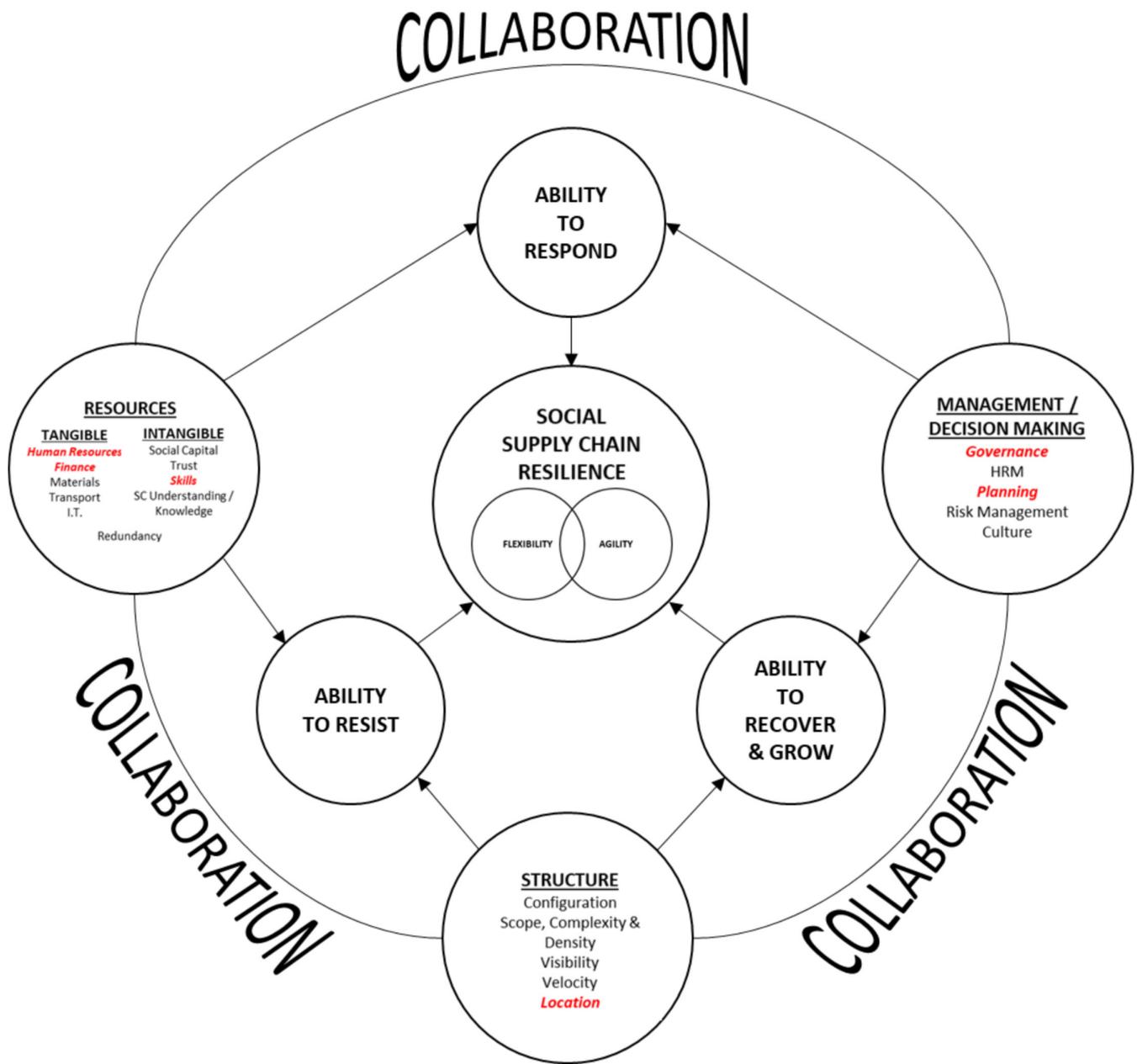
FIGURE 3 | Conceptual framework for SESCRes.

6.1 | Implications for Practice

Our research on SESCRes has several practical implications. Given the tendency of SEs to be SMEs, there is a temptation to assume that the SCRes challenges faced by SEs are a function of size. However, the nature of SEs can create SCRes opportunities and challenges that are specific to them. The social mission of SEs may introduce additional requirements for SC surveillance and visibility. For example, Herman's (2017) exploration of Fairtrade enterprises stresses the importance of having a highly visible SC to support accreditation and generate legitimacy. Facing limited resources, SEs develop innovative strategies based around social capital, collaboration and location-specific factors. Practitioners may apply this framework as a diagnostic tool to assess their supply chain's capacity to resist, respond to, recover from and grow following a disruption to subsequently inform resilience development. The framework may be used

as an informal checklist for practitioners to think about when looking to increase resilience, such as identifying opportunities for introducing redundancy and extending supply chain visibility. By examining SE-led supply chain resilience, this study advances knowledge of both supply chains and the third sector. SESCRes may also generate lessons that practitioners in for-profit SMEs could learn from. By positioning resilience as a component of sustainability, this study makes a contribution to broader research on sustainability in business.

6.2 | Implications for Policy

For central and local government, and those organisations that provide funding and business advice for SEs, this research provides several insights that could be integrated into their processes and interactions with SEs. Guidance could include

emphasising collaboration and lessening reliance on redundancy strategies. SEs can develop strategic alignment with local government, strengthening their social contribution by adding benefits such as creating employment opportunities for the disadvantaged or contributing to local government objectives (Pullman et al. 2018).

6.3 | Implications for Research

There is a lack of SE research across operations and SC management research (Pullman et al. 2018; Longoni et al. 2019). This study has explored SCRes in an SE context, providing balance to the majority of service sector SE research by focusing on the physical supply chain context of food provisioning. It also elaborates upon SCRes in an SE context, with this study being, to the best of our knowledge, the first of its kind to conceptualise SCRes within an SE context, introducing the concept of SESCRes into the body of literature and balancing the majority of studies, which explore SCRes in a 'for profit' context. In doing so, we have developed a framework that both expands the knowledge of SCRes and SE and will enable further research into the topic. In subsequent studies, we will further scrutinise our SESCRes framework, investigating the strategies, elements and influences through primary qualitative data analysis, allowing further elaboration and refinement of the conceptual framework.

Future research could focus on uniting these two disparate fields of SEs and SCRes further, to apply, test and enhance lessons related to SCRes in an SE context. The more we understand about the challenges and opportunities facing SEs from a SC perspective, the more chance there is of enhancing their operational performance and social contributions, getting support and resources to those members of society that need it most.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section. **Data S1:** Supplementary Information.