LAS CIENCIAS DE LA ADMINISTRACIÓN Y SU RELACIÓN CON LA ORGANIZACIÓN COMPETITIVA

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LAS CIENCIAS DE LA ADMINISTRACIÓN Y SU RELACIÓN CON LA ORGANIZACIÓN COMPETITIVA

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Strategic alliances are the new black

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Resumen. Al hablar de alianzas, comúnmente se piensa en una clase de dinámica conjunta y colaborativa. Es por ello que, pareciera que son una de las mejores maneras de hacer negocios en algunos países, en especial cuando las dos partes resultan ser atractivas. Aparentemente, estas alianzas representan instrumentos clave para llegar al éxito, al penetrar a nuevos mercados y permitir el desarrollo de nuevos productos.
Este artículo provee una perspectiva bastante útil con relación a las alianzas estratégicas en la actualidad. Algunos enfoques y ejemplos reales se discuten con el propósito de llegar a un mejor entendimiento relacionado con el actual y evolutivo escenario de las alianzas.
Palabras clave: alianzas estratégicas, *Joint ventures*, penetración de mercado.

Abstract. When it comes down to alliances we all think of a sort of collaborative and joint dynamic. Therefore, they seem to be a suitable way of doing business abroad, especially when both parties are appealing. Apparently, they are key instruments for succeeding and penetrating new markets and developing new products as well.

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This article provides a useful perspective regarding strategic alliances in our current environment. Approaches and real examples are discussed to develop a deeper understanding of the trendy, current and evolving scenario.
Keywords: Strategic alliances, Joint ventures, Market entry.

Introduction

In general, strategic alliances have been conceived as a response to globalization and increasing uncertainty and complexity in the worldwide business environment. They involve sharing knowledge and expertise between two or more parties as well as the reduction of risk and costs in areas such as relationships with suppliers and the development of technologies or some other things that turn out to be relevant to the counterpart.

Several definitions are there to explain the term "strategic alliance". The term "strategic alliance" has been used interchangeably with concepts such as business networks, clusters, strategic partnering, collaborative arrangement, cooperative strategy, flexible specialization and linkages. Webster's Dictionary defines strategic as "important" article.

Cauley de La Sierra (1995) discusses an international perspective of alliances and the differences between alliances and traditional joint ventures and uses the term "competitive alliance" to offer the view that alliances are ventures between strong international companies that generally remain competitors outside the relationship. The definition highlights that most definitions have well defined and often limited strategic objectives and are designed to serve regional and global markets.

It is necessary to set things correctly. For this study's purpose we will stick to Gulati's (1995) conceptualization, who conceives strategic alliances as a purposive relationship between two or more independent firms that involves the exchange, sharing, or co-development of resources or capabilities to achieve or fulfill mutually relevant benefits.

Strategic alliances execute superior than other organizational forms. Strategic alliances have altered the fundamental competitive

paradigm in many domestic and international markets from traditional firm-to-firm competition to more alliance-based, network-*vs*.-network competition. In the world of business, there has been the influx of competition, integration of markets via globalization. Firms that partake in today's business environments shape alliances not only to access necessary resources (Lemke *et al*., 2003), technologies (Humphreys et *al*., 2001) and new markets (Kannan and Tan, 2004), but also as a means for acquiring the knowhow, procedures and intelligence that let them to build synergies and realize long-term competitive advantage (Nielsen, 2005; Van Gils and Zwart, 2004). The mechanics of business have developed from monopoly to competition, strategic competition to collaborations and collaborative competition. Alliances have been strength of character on which these changes have been built in the recent years.

Literature review

Strategic alliances as new ways of strengthening global linkages represent a whole tendency throughout the entire globe. Regardless of the rivalry, these practices must be taken if they feel like gathering more power or market share. Generally, we all consider that the best alliance is the one carried out by strong companies, whose capacities and financial levels are outstanding. It is actually a simple thought that most of us would rapidly confirm. As a matter of fact, alliances can and should be regarded as opportunities for organizational learning. According to Joel Bleeke and David Ernst (1995), when the primary purpose of a partnership is for the weaker company to improve its skills, the venture will usually fail. Thus, partnering when expecting to be pulled by the other one is not precisely the best option among the ones that firms should bet for.

Recently, scholars have proposed that firms differ systematically in their alliance management capability and they posit that these given differences and circumstances may be a source of firm-level competitive advantage (Dyer and Singh, 1998; Ireland *et al*., 2002). It is somehow the nature of such an agreement. It is a dynamic where in every guest brings the best resources, either tangibles or intangi-

bles, what really matters is the fact that everyone cooperates with something valuable for the counterpart.

The majority of the research studies in the field of strategic management on alliances have concentrated on why and how alliances are shaped. The motives for formation of alliance, as identified by Faulkner (1995), are of two types: internal and external. The basic internal motives consist of the following.

The key internal motives are:

- The requirement of specific assets or capabilities not presently possessed (resource dependency perspective).
- The motive arising out of the need to minimize costs (transaction costs theory)
- The need for accessing unexplored market, which cannot be achievable by other means.
- The motive arising out with the spreading of financial risk (transaction costs).

The key external motives are:

- The motive surrounding the question of globalization or rationalization.
- Another external motive is concerned with the turmoil and uncertainty of international markets.
- Those focused on the need for immense financial resources to manage with fast technological changes and shortened product life cycles (resource dependency).

Several researchers have moved beyond general alliance experience and shown that alliance experience with the same kind of partner over time positively influenced or impacted the alliance performance of subsequent alliances between these two partners (Zollo *et al.,* 2002), and that firms with alliance experiences in similar technological fields were less likely to engage in post-formation governance changes in a subsequent alliance (Reuer *et al*., 2002).

How come companies fail in the attempt of blending efforts? Well, it might be a simple question, but the truth is that circumstances vary since there is a wide range of scenarios that companies go through. Even though most of the alliances succeed, there is a latent

likelihood of failure. Bleeke and Ernst (1991) in one of their articles pinpoint that when one parent has a majority stake, it tends to dominate decision-making. If we put things into perspective, then it is easy to notice that this dynamic obeys nature´s laws. There is always an Alfa who exercises its fearless power upon the others, the one who controls and takes over so that things go as expected.

They also argue that companies are better off partnering with competitors that instead of fighting against them, especially if they got the same core business. But still, this kind of alliances also tends to fail due to the tensions between them. It is worth to mention that in their study they analyzed 49 alliances, and what they got was that only three out of 49 turned out to be unevenly successful.

By giving a glance to this figure it is easy to acknowledge that successful alliances are those wherein parents are aware about the fact that what they got in common is a win-win dynamic, instead of a zero-sum game.

Nowadays, strategic alliances are kind of a business concept that is literally changing the structure and dynamics of competition throughout the whole world. Using a broad and current interpretation, a strategic alliance is a relationship between firms to create more value than they can on their own. Firms get together in order to reach objectives of a common interest, while totally remaining independent and uncompromised for an everlasting time. By providing this current concept, it is important to stand out that efforts and firms are not meant to be tied up for ever and ever. It would be rather insane to think of an everlasting relationship, especially if they have no experience in this field.

In order to get deeper into this, successful business alliances are a very strategic component within plenty of industries, but still, many strategic alliances fail to meet their partners' goals or main purposes. While the reasons behind alliance failures are farther than complex, and vary according to the kind of alliance as well as industry, such failures turn out to happen due to ill-conceived overall alliance strategies, narrowly focused industry and firm partner selection analytical thinking and models, not to mention poor alliance management, execution and implementation. In fact, the well-informed and strategically driven selection of alliance partners is a core element in

building successful alliances (Stevan R. Holmberg and Jeffrey L. Cummings, 2009).

Regardless of the abovementioned, now we focus on the core idea of the current paper. It is important to stand out the fact that throughout the last two decades, alliances have become a central part of most companies' competitive and growth strategies. What most alliances do is helping firms to strengthen their competitive position by enhancing market power (Kogut, 1991), increasing efficiencies (Ahuja, 2000), accessing new or critical resources or capabilities (Rothaermel & Boeker, 2008), and entering new markets (Garcia-Canal, Duarte, Criado & Llaneza, 2002). Approximately, by the turn of this century many of the world's largest companies had over 20% of their assets, and over 30% of their annual research expenditures, tied up in this kind of linkages, blending relationships (Ernst, 2004). A study by Partner Alliances reported that over 80% of Fortune 1000 CEOs believed that alliances would account for almost 26% of their companies' revenues in 2007-2008 (Kale, Singh & Bell, 2009).

Having given a glance to the previous figures, it might be easy to think of an alliance as an easy way to grow rapidly, but as it has already been discussed, companies go through several phases in which they neither meet each other´s expectations nor deliver operational, financial or strategic benefits (Bamford, Gomes-Casseres & Robinson, 2004). Uncertainty is a variable, which is imperatively latent in every business; unfortunately it is not possible to get rid of it. Still, teaming up is not the only and best way to reach success and so, firms should not take for granted that they are going to increase their revenues by getting involved into this. When it comes down to alliances, it should be never thought that they are flawless; chances are evenly distributed. More ahead, Table 1 presents a set of theories, which support strategic alliances.

Table 1

Theory	Motives
Resource Dependence Theory	Acquisition of Resources Theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978)
Resource-Based Theory	Acquisition of Resources Building Competitive Advantage (Barney, 1996; Tsang 1998; Das & Teng, 2000; Yasuda, 2005)
Knowledge-Based View	Acquisition of knowledge Organisational learning Building Competitive Advantage (Kaplan et al., 2001; Van Gils & Zwart, 2004)
Contingency Theory	Risk & Uncertainty Reduction (Ranganathan and Lertpittayapoom, 2002)
Game Theory	Building Competitive Advantage (Parkhe, 1993; Reardon & Hasty, 1996; Kippenberger, 1998; Song
Transaction Cost Theory	Cost Advantages Risk & Uncertainty Reduction (Williamson, 1985; Hobbs, 1996)

Source: Siew-Phaik Loke *et al*. (2009).

Do companies actually provide with a greater outcome by blending efforts?

There are many ways to respond to such a question. Ever since every company seeks to offer nothing but the best products and services, they have to acknowledge that they are not precisely the best ones at doing every little thing. Therefore, it is necessary to identify what they are best at and keep it as a core competence. Companies happen not to be totally self-dependent, but all the way around, and that is the reason why most of them look for another company that can actually fill the gap that is missing. Ohmae (1989) argues that both partners bring to an alliance faith that they will be stronger together than either would be alone. Both believe that each has unique skills

and competences as well as functional abilities the other one lacks. That is basically the main reason why they blend efforts, so that they can complement each other.

As it is expected, companies pick their choices according to their resources and aspirations. Hence, the following table (2) depicts a partner selection criteria pattern.

Table 2

	Great aspiration	**Low aspiration**
Strong resources	Attractive alliances	Resource based alliances
Weak resources	Aspiration based alliances	Unattractive alliances

Source: Mikkel Lucas Overby (2005): *Partner Selection Criteria in Strategic Alliances: When to Ally with Weak Partners.*

Fearlessly, it is the new way of doing business not only locally, but also globally. According to Ohmae, it does not matter whether they think highly about themselves, it is matter of a new era, and it is globalization what is demanding such a dynamic. Nowadays, this is the way of thriving, in the past it was all the way around. Companies used to approach to international expansion by doing every little thing on their own, acquiring others.

If we think about it thoroughly, a prosperous alliance can actually create a wide range of opportunities for success and growth as well as securing the business in market place simultaneously, due to an additional competitive edge and capacity enhancement. Alliances also provide the advantage of decreased dependency on supplier and a certain point, believe it or not, make companies potentially more independent. Many horizons can be opened as a result of a perfect strategic alliance. When it comes down to all of the benefits that can be brought up, we easily think of reduced cost of supplies, access to more and reliable information, exploring new markets through a confident entry, more resources and technology advancements and so forth and so on (Bar Nir and Smith, 2002).

There are four potential benefits that international business may realize from strategic alliances Bernadette Soares (2007) offers a great viewpoint since he pinpoints four potential benefits from doing business through an alliance, they are the following. Ease of market entry: Everything that has to do with telecommunications, computer technology and transportation have turned entry into foreign markets by international firms easier. The fact of penetrating some other markets surpassing local boundaries confers benefits such as economies of scale and scope in marketing and logistics. The sacrifice of expanding the business at an international level may be beyond the capabilities of a single firm but, creating an alliance and working jointly, will surely pay it off. Choosing a strategic partnership as the entry mode may help out to go through the remaining obstacles, which could include competition and hostile government regulations and some other issues.

A fast growing upward trend in alliance formation is consistently witnessed (Wiklund and Shepherd, 2005). Nonetheless, the reality of intense failure trend is also continuing in strategic alliances. Often, strategic alliances are viewed in the context of acquisitions, which is not a completely wrong idea, and are viewed as an auxiliary to gain control of resources. That's a perspective that cannot be criticized since termination is most commonly the path that most of them end up in (Kale *et al*., 2002).

Strategic alliances and joint ventures

On the one hand, a strategic alliance wrongly associated to a joint venture, but an alliance may involve competitors, and normally has a shorter life period. Strategic partnership is a closely related concept. On the other hand, regardless of the resemblance, joint ventures invest funds into creating a third, jointly owned company. Because the joint venture can access assets, knowledge and funds from both of its partners it can combine the best features of those companies without altering the parent companies. The new company is an ongoing entity that will be in business for itself, but the parents own the profits.

According to Zainab Zamir, Arooj Sahar, Fareeha Zafar (2014), a strategic alliance turns out to be less involved and less permanent than a joint venture, in which two companies typically pool resources to create or start a separate business entity from the scratch. Joint ventures are the undertakings, which are jointly controlled by two or more firms. Joint control exists but mostly the parent company decides on major decisions concerning the joint venture's activities.

Besides, in a strategic alliance, each company still maintains its autonomy while gaining a new opportunity. A strategic alliance could help a company develop a more effective process, expand into a new market or develop an advantage over a competitor, among other possibilities. The subsidiary relations are not alliances as they do not have separate organizations with different goals.

The joint venture is for compromise rather than a goal. Examples: Japan's Fuji Xerox is a joint venture of two companies, which are Fuji photo Film Company, and Xerox. In this relationship Xerox set the policies and Fuji Xerox help in the research and development of Xerox but Xerox is the subsidiary and this is a joint venture.

Strategic alliance of Dell with Ramco Systems (2012)

In this particular case, Dell has announced its strategic alliance with Ramco Systems to deliver Ramco's ERP-as-a-service on Cloud to help midmarket businesses execute cost and operational efficiencies and accelerate revenue growth. The new offering strengthens Dell's growing portfolio of Software-as- a-Service (Saas) solutions that help organizations manage and grow their business. Ramco's ERP on Cloud supports businesses with wide functionalities across various industry segments, including production planning, asset management, and analytics along with regular corporate functionalities of HR, Supply Chain Management (SCM), Customer Relationship Management (CRM), and financial management. The solution is designed to ensure quick adoption and time-to-value. The Ramco ERP-as-a-service on Cloud solution allows midmarket enterprises ease of adopting evergreen, feature rich business applications with significant cost and management advantages. Additionally, the solution offers customers unique features like tools for personalizing

applications to suit their requirements, architecture enabling co-existence and integration with other business applications, and compatibility on various mobility platforms.

Strategic Alliance between Tata Coffee & Starbucks in India (2012)

In a momentous step toward market entry in India, Starbucks Coffee Company (Nasdaq: SBUX) signed a nonbinding Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Tata Coffee Limited, one of the region's leading providers of premium *arábica* coffee beans. The MOU will create avenues of collaboration between the two companies for sourcing and roasting high-quality green coffee beans in Tata Coffee's Coorg, India facility. In addition, Tata and Starbucks will jointly explore the development of Starbucks retail stores in associated retail outlets and hotels.

The agreement recognizes Starbucks and Tata Coffee's shared commitment to responsible business values. In accordance with the MOU, the two companies will collaborate on the promotion of responsible agronomy practices, including training for local farmers, technicians and agronomists to improve their coffee-growing and milling skills. Building on Tata's demonstrated commitment to community development, the two companies also will explore social projects to positively impact communities in coffee growing regions where Tata operates. India is one of the most dynamic markets in the world with a diverse culture and tremendous potential.

This MOU is the first step in entry to India. The Star Buck is focused on exploring local sourcing and roasting the many regions globally where Starbucks has operations. Tata Coffee, with its large *arábica* coffee production base spread over different opportunities with the thousands of coffee farmers within the Tata ecosystem. It is believed that India can be an important source for coffee in the domestic market, as well as across growing districts of South India, has supplied premium coffee beans for Starbucks in the past and is now building a structure for a long-term relationship.

In the areas of sourcing and roasting, Tata Coffee and Starbucks will explore procuring green coffee from Tata Coffee estates and roasting in Tata Coffee's existing roasting facilities. At a later pha-

se, both Tata Coffee and Starbucks will consider jointly investing in additional facilities and roasting green coffee for export to other markets.

Tata Coffee has rich expertise in the bean-to-cup value chain, with an unyielding focus on quality. It has won global accolades for its premium coffees. Over the years, Tata Coffee has further strengthened its *arábica* coffee production base by producing premium specialty coffee. The company has an internationally certified (ISO: 22000) Roast & Ground unit at Kushalnagar in the Coorg district of India, and is a dedicated supplier to cafes across the country and specialty roasters across the globe. Tata Coffee has rapidly transformed itself by adding to its portfolio through acquisitions, becoming a more vertically integrated business. Starbucks Coffee Company is the premier roaster and retailer of specialty coffee in the world, headquartered in the United States, in Seattle, Washington.

The company manages over 16 000 stores and operates in more than 50 countries. Starbucks sells a wide variety of coffee and tea products with a range of complementary food items, primarily through retail stores. Starbucks has a long association with India. For the last seven years, the company has been ethically sourcing coffee beans from India and contributing to several social programs in the country. Starbucks believes in doing business responsibly to earn the trust and respect of its customers, partners and neighbors.

To sum up, it can be assumed that there are pro´s and con´s, but still it turns out more beneficial. Here comes a list of the most important advantages and disadvantages considered in a global scenario

Advantages

- Getting instant market access, or at least speeding the entry into a new market.
- Exploiting new opportunities to strengthen the company's position in a market where it already has a foothold.
- Increasing sales.
- Gaining new skills and technology.
- Developing new products at a profit.
- Sharing fixed costs and resources.
- Enlarging the company's distribution channels.

- Broadening business and political contact base.
- Gaining greater knowledge of international customs and culture.
- Enhancing the corporate image in the world marketplace.

Disadvantages
- Weaker management involvement or less equity stake.
- Fear of market insulation due to local partner's presence.
- Less efficient communication.
- Poor resource allocation.
- Difficult to keep objectives on target over time.
- Loss of control over such important issues as product quality, operating costs, employees, etcetera.
- It is also critical to explore all the legal and financial

Strategic Alliance and Mergers

The two or more than two firms that become ally remain independent even after the formation of the alliance contract unlike the mergers, takeovers and acquisition where one firm or corporation acquire the other firm and gets its ownership.

The concept of mergers is narrow so there is less scope of negotiation and so its concentration becomes somehow disadvantageous. Whereas in strategic alliances negotiation can take place between two companies, as it is a broader concept, they can be formed quickly and can be actually dissolved or terminated when needed which also allows to penetrate hot new markets and to achieve the goals. Unlike mergers Strategic Alliances also helps to take a trial of some companies before making agreement with them (Meurling, 2001).

Conclusion

As a result, strategic alliance can provide a powerful competitive advantage in new markets, cost, speed, knowledge, and technology access. Following the above framework will provide an approach to developing successful strategic alliance, which has the potential to improve the organization's strategic position dramatically, perhaps

even to transform the company. Strategic alliance offers the parties an option on the future, opening new doors and providing unforeseen opportunities.

Strategic alliances are an increasingly significant core element in many firms' strategies to generate and sustain their competitive advantages in dynamic market environments. Alliance is like a nuptial where there may be no formal contract and no buying and selling of equity. But, there are few strictly binding provisions.

Globally speaking, markets are moving so quickly that is very difficult for companies to stay current on all technologies, resources, competencies, and information needed to attack, and be successful in those markets. But, why would a company be so obsessed with keeping up to this? The answer is simple, their interest lingers latent due to the increasing and ever-changing customers that demand nothing but the best. Strategic alliances offer a means for companies to penetrate new markets, expand geographic reach, obtain cutting-edge technology, and complement skills and core competencies relatively fast by sharing instead of keep on fighting a losing battle. Strategic alliances have become a key source of competitive advantage for most firms and have allowed them to deal with increasing organizational and technological complexities that have emerged and evolved in the global market.

In general, to create successful alliances, a company must understand when alliances make strategic sense and how to manage them for a business results. They can be extremely useful in situations of great uncertainty and in markets with growth opportunities that a company either cannot or does not want to pursue on its own.

To sum up, it would be utopic to think of our international environment, as a market wherein companies, suppliers, rivals and consumer remain separated, having no willingness to converge and gather efforts. This is the main reason why alliances turn out to be quite useful and a great option for doing business either locally or internationally.

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