

## Special Issue Call for Papers

# Problematising Strategic Alliance Research: Challenges, Issues and Paradoxes in the New Era

Submission Deadline: 31 October 2021

### Guest Editors:

Professor Qile He, University of Derby, UK  
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### Background

Strategic alliances have attracted substantial attention from industry and academia over the past three decades (e.g., Child *et al.*, 2019; Christoffersen, 2013; Das, 2006; Devlin & Bleackley, 1988; Gomes *et al.*, 2016; He *et al.*, 2020; Mesquita *et al.*, 2017). Theoretical, conceptual and empirical papers have attempted to examine the formation, maintenance, and utilisation of strategic alliances. While offering incremental understanding of the phenomenon, most of the previous work has tended to follow a gap-filling approach based on traditional theoretical assumptions including (but not limited to) transaction cost economics (Judge & Dooley, 2006; Williamson, 1981), the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991), resource-dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), the knowledge-based view of the firm (Grant, 1996), social capital theory (Koka & Prescott, 2002), agency theory (Ross, 1973), and dynamic capabilities theory (Teece *et al.*, 1997). However, these theoretical underpinnings are largely based on assumptions developed in the previous era. Fundamental and rapid changes in the wider environment necessitate the review of theoretical and practical insights of earlier and emerging studies – to examine the new challenges, issues and paradoxes of strategic alliances.

Due to rapid technological evolution, saturated marketplaces, globalisation of businesses on the one hand and de-globalisation of the market on the other (as marked by Brexit and the trade war between US and China, as well the COVID-19 pandemic), the strategic environment of businesses is changing quickly. The new strength of emerging economies (such as the BRIC countries) and the consequent increase in the number and power of multinational firms from those markets, has challenged the strategic vision of many businesses with regard to their international cooperative strategies, especially when companies from the emerging economies may have very different conceptions compared with their western counterparts. The 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic have altered the shape of inter-firm collaboration structures; and this is compounded by the increasing importance of strategic agility, flexibility and resilience, and the sustainability agenda adopted by firms around the world. Moreover, the urgent need to mitigate institutional failings in dealing with the major crises of climate change, environmental degradation, pandemics, and migration, has encouraged collaboration between public agencies and corporations. Such alliances enable firms not only to contribute their competences and resources, but also to secure new opportunities through filling institutional voids.

For these reasons, there is much greater need than ever for contemporary companies as well as academics to review traditional models of alliances and relationship coordination.

The concept of a strategic alliance is a multi-dimensional one, and it represents a broad array of strategic partnerships across inter-firm / inter-organisational boundaries with many different alliance types or arrangements (Koka & Prescott, 2002) ranging from joint ventures (Kogut, 1988), franchising and licensing (Combs *et al.*, 2011), business networks (Gulati *et al.*, 2000; Min & Mitsuhashi, 2012), public-private partnerships (Hart, 2003), vertical supplier-buyer alliances (Carmeli *et al.*, 2017; Wilson, 1995), consortia (Ring *et al.*, 2005), and concentric partnerships (Bustinza *et al.*, 2017), among other types. New alliance models are fast emerging thanks to the advancement and the wider adoption of technologies, such as data analytics, internet of things, and cloud computing. For example, more flexible, ad hoc, and even virtual partnerships are enabled by block chain and smart contract technologies (Cong, 2018; He *et al.*, 2020). This is the case of newly emerging concentric strategic alliances between manufacturing firms and Knowledge Intensive Business Service (KIBS) firms are being used as a means for integrated product-service innovation, where service feedback and analytics facilitate technology, knowledge, and resource transfer across collaborating firms (Bustinza *et al.*, 2017), especially for those firms competing in global markets (Vendrell-Herrero *et al.*, 2018). Co-operative alliance business models are also increasingly adopted thanks to the fast-emerging shared economy concepts. An example is the web of alliances between government agencies, research institutes, manufacturing firms and venture capitalists in business ecosystems that are developing applications of hydrogen as a fuel source. Complex inter-firm relationships have the potential to generate significant benefits for firms but they can also induce various relational risks (e.g., Gallear *et al.*, 2015; Nooteboom *et al.*, 1997). As a result, alternative alliance formations, structures and governance mechanisms have brought new issues and paradoxes for companies, which are facing dilemmas, such as whether to form strategic alliances, which strategic partners to select, how to manage alliance coevolution in fast changing environments and to unravel alliances if things go wrong.

Overall, the underlying assumptions behind strategic alliances are changing rapidly (He *et al.*, 2020). Although research is beginning to address this changing landscape and exploring the implications of the new pressures mentioned above (e.g., Arranz *et al.*, 2017; Balboni *et al.*, 2017; Christoffersen, 2013; He *et al.* 2020; Inkpen & Tsang, 2016; Mindruta *et al.*, 2016; Pangarkar, 2007), a forum for debate, extending and challenging existing perspectives is needed urgently to take into account the changing nature of strategic alliances in rapidly evolving strategic environments.

In this special issue, we highlight the *problematization* perspective offered by Alvensson and Sandberg (2011) who suggest that questioning the assumptions underlying existing theory in some significant ways (rather than “gap-spotting” or “gap-filling”) offers the major opportunity for the construction of innovative research questions and, thus, for the development of interesting and influential theories. We argue that it is time for scholars to challenge existing paradigms and offer alternative perspectives to guide and enhance decision-making on strategic alliances due to the fast changing strategic context. This special issue will therefore venture deeper into the new phenomenon, and explore the opportunities, issues and paradoxes of strategic alliances while adopting alternative theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches and interpretations to address issues of managing strategic alliances and maximising returns from them in the new strategic context.

In line with aims and ethos of *IJMR*, this special issue will stimulate multidisciplinary debate and review on emerging paradoxes and challenges facing contemporary firms during the formation, development, optimisation and resolution of multiphase (pre and post-agreement) processes of strategic alliances. It will also offer suggestions on how new multilevel (individual, departmental, and firm level) issues emerging from alliance strategies and their implementation may be addressed. This will be achieved by problematising strategic alliance research, by offering fresh reviews of existing theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches and practical advances, leading to new strategic research directions and alternative theoretical underpinnings concerning strategic alliance management, and shaping future conceptualisations in the discipline.

### **Special issue main features/themes**

The special issue invites papers that present significant and novel conceptual contributions (Gatrell & Breslin, 2017), grounded in a thorough and critical review of the literature (Jones & Gatrell, 2014), which have not been published or considered for publication anywhere else. In particular, the special issue welcomes submissions which:

- Challenge the adequacy of the theoretical basis of current strategic alliance research, offer new or alternative theoretical perspectives or develop new applications of existing theoretical perspectives;
- Extend the scope of the conventional definition of a strategic alliance, to include not only the private sector but also not-for-profit, NGOs, and public sector organisations; and to review strategic alliances not only from a unilateral perspective but also from a bilateral or network perspective.

The research themes of interest include (but are not limited to):

- Management of the political dimensions and dynamics across inter-firm / inter-organisational boundaries in strategic alliances;
- How alternative business models may be necessary for engaging with new ways of constructing and managing strategic alliances;
- Emergence of alternative strategic alliance business models enabled by new advances in technology, such as block chain, cloud computing, and big data analytics;
- The motivation for alternative strategic alliance business models and how these are decided upon;
- Governance structures of different alliance types (e.g., joint ventures, inter-firm collaborations, global value chains, public-private alliances) in the new era;
- The strategic challenges to which these governance and coordination structures are responding during economically difficult times;
- The role of strategic alliances in enhancing the strategic agility, flexibility, improvisation, ambidexterity and resilience of firms operating in highly dynamic and turbulent environments;
- Linear versus non-linear processes of strategic alliances lifecycle and coevolution;
- What new alliances may mean for alliance termination or reinvention and when alliance partners become targets for acquisitions;
- Differentiating collaborative capabilities of managing different types of strategic alliances;
- The microfoundations of alliance management including the individual and human side of collaborative partnerships;

- Management of strategic alliances processes, including optimization of collaboration for innovation, sharing of benefits/risks, use of information and knowledge sharing especially those enabled by emerging ICT solutions;
- Sustainability strategies and agendas emphasised by strategic alliance partners or enabled by strategic alliances;
- New inter-industry, and inter-sector strategic alliances formed between private, not-for profit, and public sector organizations and between manufacturing and Knowledge Intensive Business Service (KIBS) firms;
- New solutions for managing international strategic alliances between developed economy companies and partner firms from emerging markets.
- The role of alliances in international business ecosystems.

### Instructions to authors

Manuscripts should follow the Author Guidelines set out by the *International Journal of Management Reviews* available at:

[http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1468-2370/homepage/ForAuthors.html](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1468-2370/homepage/ForAuthors.html)

Additionally see also:

Jones O. & Gatrell C. (2014). Editorial: The Future of Writing and Reviewing for IJMR. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, **16**, pp. 249-264. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12038>

Gatrell C. & Breslin D. (2017). Editors' Statement. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, **19**, p. 3. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12133>

Breslin D., Gatrell C. & Bailey K. (2020). Developing Insights through Reviews: Reflecting on the 20th Anniversary of the *International Journal of Management Reviews*. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, **20**, pp. 3-9. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12219>

Manuscripts should be submitted online via <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/ijmr> highlighting that you wish to be considered for the Special Issue '**Problematising Strategic Alliance Research: Challenges, Issues and Paradoxes in the New Era**'.

### Deadline/timelines

Full manuscript submission: 31 October 2021

Authors notified of decision (Accept/Revise/Reject): on or before 1 February 2022

Deadline for submission of 1st revisions: 1 May 2022

Authors notified of decision (Accept/Revise/Reject): on or before 1 August 2022

Deadline for submission of 2nd revisions: 1 November 2022

Accepted paper authors will be informed of decisions: on or before 1 February 2023

Final manuscript submission to publisher: 1 February 2023

Special issue published: April 2023

## Guest editor short biographies

### Professor Qile He

Qile He, PhD, is Professor of Strategy and Performance Management at the University of Derby. He was previously the Associate Head of School for Research of the School of Strategy and Leadership at Coventry University. His research interest lies in inter-firm alliances. He is also specialised in supply chain partnership, as well as innovation strategies and processes of organisations. He has published over 80 papers in refereed journals, books, and leading international conference proceedings, including prestigious international journals, such as *British Journal of Management*, *International Journal of Production Economics*, *European Management Review*, *International Journal of Production Research*, and *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal*, *Production Planning & Control*. He serves on the editorial boards of three international journals, including the field leading *International Journal of Production and Operations Management* (CABS4\*). He is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and a Chartered Member of Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport. He has supervised multiple PhD candidates to completion. He has been the co-chair for the BAM Inter-organisational Collaboration SIG and BAM conference track chair for 6 years. He is currently an elected BAM council member.

### Professor Maureen Meadows

Maureen Meadows, PhD, is Professor of Strategic Management at the Centre for Business in Society (CBiS) at Coventry University. Formerly with the Open University Business School and Warwick Business School, Maureen's research interests include the use of strategy tools such as scenario planning and visioning by senior managers, and the post-merger integration phase following M&A deals. Maureen is currently a member of the Executive at the British Academy of Management (Co-Vice Chair for Special Interest Groups), and a member of the BAM Council. With a background in mathematics, statistics and operational research, Maureen has over 20 years of experience of working with 'big data' and customer analytics, both as a practitioner in the financial services sector and an academic. She has published on the progress and problems experienced by organisations working on strategic projects such as market segmentation, relationship marketing and customer relationship management. She has been co-editor of a number of special issues and is currently Managing Guest Editor for a special issue of the journal *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*.

### Professor Duncan Angwin

Duncan Angwin, PhD is the Dean of the University of Nottingham Business School in the UK. He is also Professor in Strategic Management. Prior to this position he held a named personal chair, the Sir Roland Professor of Strategic Management and was Head of Department at Lancaster University, UK. He has 30 years of practical and academic experience in strategy and mergers and acquisitions, has published 12 books, 50 research papers and won multiple research grants including those from the EU, Oxford University and ICAEW. He has published in *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, *Academy of Management Executive*, *British Journal of Management*, *California Management Review*, *European Management Journal*, *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *International Marketing Review*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of World Business*, *Long Range Planning*, *MIT Sloan Management Review*, *Management and Organisation Review*, *Organization Studies*, *Strategic Change*, *Thunderbird International Business Review*. His recent work concentrates on six main topics: 1) international M&A; 2) conceptual development of the field; 3) M&A during economic recession; 4) communication patterns and reputation management

in M&A; 5) the practices of M&A; 6) the importance of organisational space in strategising practices. He has sat on several editorial boards, including 10 years at the *Journal of Management Studies* and was co-editor of a highly successful special issue in *Organization Studies* on M&A. He is currently co-editor of forthcoming special issues in *Long Range Planning* and *European Management Journal*.

### **Dr Emanuel Gomes**

Emanuel Gomes, PhD, is an Associate Professor at Nova School of Business and Economics, Universidade Nova de Lisboa. His research interest is in the areas of M&A, strategic alliances, strategic agility, digital product service innovation and firm internationalisation, particularly in the African context. He is the author of various books, including *Mergers, Acquisitions and Strategic Alliances*, published by Palgrave Macmillan, and of several papers published in international refereed journals such as: *Journal of Organisational Behavior*, *British Journal of Management*, *Journal of World Business*, *Long Range Planning*, *International Business Review*, *Regional Studies*, *Management International Review*, *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *International Marketing Review*, *Human Resource Management Review*, *R&D Management*, *Thunderbird International Business Review*, *Strategic Change*, and others. One of his papers published in the *International Business Review* (a review on strategic alliances research published in 2016) has attracted nearly 150 Google citations. He serves a Regional Editor (Africa) for the *Journal of Knowledge Management* and has served as Guest Editor in special issues for various journals including, *European Management Review*, *Human Resource Management Review*, *International Marketing Review*, *Journal of Knowledge Management*, and *Strategic Change*.

### **Professor John Child**

John Child, PhD, ScD is Emeritus Professor of Commerce at the University of Birmingham. His degrees are all from the University of Cambridge. He is a Fellow of the Academy of Management, the Academy of International Business and the British Academy of Management (BAM). He is an elected Fellow of the prestigious British Academy [FBA]. In 2015 he received the Richard Whipp Lifetime Achievement Award from BAM. He has published 27 books including the co-authored textbook on *Cooperative Strategy* (Oxford University Press) which has attracted approximately 3000 citations, and a new study of *Hierarchy* (Routledge) which won the 2020 EURAM Best Book Award. He has also published over 150 articles primarily in the fields of international business and business organisation. He has been editor-in-chief of *Organization Studies*, Senior Editor of *Management and Organization Review*, and co-editor for the *Academy of Management Journal* of a special research forum on new organisational forms. His current interests focus on the internationalisation of SMEs and problems of organisational hierarchy.

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