Partner Selection in International Strategic Alliances: The Case of the Information Industry

H. Nakamura

Abstract—This study analyzes international strategic alliances in the information industry. The purpose of this study is to clarify the strategic intention of an international alliance. Secondly, it investigates the influence of differences in the target markets of partner companies on alliances. Using an international strategy theory approach to analyze the global strategies of global companies, the study compares a database business and an electronic publishing business. In particular, these cases emphasized factors attributable to "people" and "learning", reliability and communication among the organizations and the evolution of the IT infrastructure. The theory evolved in this study validates the effectiveness of these strategies.

Keywords—Database business, electronic library, international strategic alliances, partner selection.

I. INTRODUCTION

The ways to enter the global market are through green field investment, merger and acquisition (M&A), partnerships with local companies, and joint ventures. Forming alliances has become an important strategy in the rapidly changing information service industry. In strategic alliances, partner selection is an important factor because an organization cannot be established on its own; the relation between the core organization and external partner(s) is also important [20], [26], [33], [37], [40].

"Organization relation theory" analyzes relations among organizations. Further, the business ecosystem has adopted the living-world ecosystem framework into business administration.

This study aims to extract facts concerning partner selection from cases of strategic alliances. A qualitative investigation is effective for analyzing a small number of cases [13]. Chandler [7] and Mintzberg [28] used descriptive methods to examine organizations. The present inductive study is based on these previous studies. Chandler studied the organizational structures of representative companies in the United States, while Mintzberg analyzed the strategic change of a famous German car company.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Theory of Inter-Organizational Relations

Companies cannot survive without being involved with stakeholders. The theory of organizational relations aims to theoretically elucidate inter-organizational relations, and it is based on previous research on inter-agency relation theory. Furthermore, the basic concept of analyzing inter-organizational relations was presented as the inter-organizational power, communication, behavior, and variation within the organizations [39].

There are various analytical perspectives in inter-organization relation theory: An interchange perspective, an organization set perspective, a power-based perspective, and a resource-based perspective. The dominant perspective is the resource-based approach [6]. About Analysis Perspective of Organization Relationship, previous research has been organized in Table I.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE I</th>
<th>ANALYSIS PERSPECTIVE OF ORGANIZATION RELATIONSHIP</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perspective</td>
<td>Prejudice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resource based</td>
<td>Acquisition of resources from external environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization set [12]</td>
<td>Organizational interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective strategy [1], [5], [29]</td>
<td>Analyze organization association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional theory [27]</td>
<td>Organizations embedded in an institutionalized environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transaction cost [8], [14], [36]</td>
<td>The analysis unit is a transaction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on [39, pp.1–62], summarized by author

According to Yamakura [39], “The alliance is that two or more companies combine to do business that cannot be done alone.” The advantages and disadvantages of alliances are listed in Table II.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE II</th>
<th>ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF AN ALLIANCE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advantages</td>
<td>Disadvantages</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resource acquisition</td>
<td>Internal development earlier than external development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Conflict</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>New behavior</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brand value</td>
<td>Continuing support from other companies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restoration</td>
<td>New competitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lose personality</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lose sight of essence</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on [39, pp.216–225], summarized by author

Strategic alliances operate under three conditions: (1) a product-level collaboration that preserves the independence of...
each partner even after consultation between the two companies; (2) ongoing collaboration among companies; and (3) partner independence. [24], [42].

The management of an alliance is necessary for each of its three phases: (1) start of alliance, (2) continuation of alliance, and (3) termination of alliance.

III. CASE STUDY

A. Global Alliance of Specialized Database Companies

1) Outline of Company A and Company B

Company A was a global company. From 1987 to 1993 the global publishing group was reorganized. Company B was acquired by company A in 1996. Company B had been founded in 1872 and published the most prestigious case books in the United States along with official case collections.

2) Outline of Company C [32]

Company C is a Japanese legal publisher, founded in 1948, which issued a loose-leaf-style law collection. It was aggressive in computerization. In 1988, Company C issued a case search system on CD-ROM. In 2000, Company C opened a legal portal site.

3) The Japanese Market

In 1995, Microsoft released Windows 95, which gave the IT industry a great boost. In Japan, some legal information providers also worked on researching database provisions via the Internet. In 2001, Company C began distributing its database through the Internet. In 2002, the competitor announced an Internet-based database and a “law school class support system.” [45]

The market expanded against the background of judicial reform as an external factor.

In 1999, the Judicial System Reform Council was established in the Japanese Cabinet [46].

For expanding the mechanisms to solve legal cases, a law school modeled on a United States-type law school was born. This was a great opportunity for American-type legal information enterprises to enter the market.

4) Contents of Partnership

The partnership between Companies A and C was comprised of two points: (1) the use of platform technology of A and XML content of C and (2) the development of an online Japanese information service of Japanese law. The two companies aimed to cooperate and promote commercialization.

The negotiating manager of Company A shared the following seven points to Company C during the formation of the alliance:

1. Negotiate with relationship in mind [19]
2. Designate alliance managers and leaders
3. Maintain relationships and communication at all levels
4. Hold periodic, planned, personal meetings
5. Ensure people exchange and information sharing
6. “Blameless reviews” of alliance health
7. Be flexible: expect the unexpected

We gained a common recognition that how to overcome obstacles such as language and distance on the second and third points is an important subject in the future.
The negotiating manager also indicated “Seven Rules of Trust in the Virtual Corporation” [19]. On these points, there is no difference between Japanese companies and foreign ones. Especially, in the case of American companies, negotiations are not established without trust between managers. This seems to conflict with the business world; however, the points of strategic alliance negotiations are set out as follows:

1. Trust is not blind
2. Trust needs boundaries
3. Trust demands learning
4. Trust is tough
5. Trust needs bonding
6. Trust needs touch
7. Trust needs leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE III</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TIMELINE OF THE DATABASE COMPANIES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
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<td>2002</td>
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<td>2003</td>
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<td>2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

5) Business Model of Company A
The business model of A is (1) Collect free information (2) Add valuable value information by the editor (3) Provide useful functions.

B. Case of Electronic Library
1) Outline of Company D [34]
Established in 1986, this company is an electronic library business. It began its business by converting data from analog to electronic. The distribution business began in 2000.
In the United States, more than 90% of libraries have introduced Company D’s electronic library system. Globally, this system exists in 28,000 libraries in 36 countries. Company D enjoys 85% and 80% market shares in New Zealand and the UK, respectively, where, this system is a de facto standard.

2) Outline of Company E
Established in April 1999, this company is a distributor of e-books. Initially, it implemented its services for mobile phones, and in 2006, it launched e-book distribution service. In addition, it started “brokerage” of e-book content.

2) Alliance
Company D expanded globally mainly in English-speaking countries. When considering entering Japan, it was in contact with several companies involved in electronic books, including Company E.
Company E was highly interested allying with Company D because D was the de facto standard in many countries already. Electronic book distribution was Company E’s core business, and it had a policy for partnerships in its peripheral projects. The core business conducts M&A.
The alliance between them was smooth because both companies’ positions were the same. Both companies are distributors of e-books and electronic libraries, but they are not publishers or retailers.
Company E initiated the partnership, and the negotiations were conducted in the United States.
As system-based companies, their understanding of each other’s systems meant a mutual understanding of each other’s business.

Company D congratulated Company E when it was listed in 2013. The listing served to establish trustful relations between the companies, and the partnership was finalized at this time. After that, D M&A was made by Company F. Company F was a Japanese IT company, and an electronic book store (Company D) was added to the business. Company D is managed from the United States. Company E felt that it would be easy to work as a stable shareholder. Company E and Company F are working in e-book.
The common purpose of Companies D and E was to create a lifestyle that incorporates the use of regional libraries. They wanted to take up a role at the children’s libraries recently added to the local libraries. In addition, they wanted to provide opportunities to touch books, whether through a cellphones or through rentals.

Alliance details:
1. D’s content to be distributed through D’s network
2. Digital library business in Japan to be expanded
3. D’s content to be offered in Japan

IV. FINDINGS
The advantage of an alliance is that companies can easily acquire the resources and information that they need. This enables them to (1) learn about new corporate behavior and thinking styles, (2) acquire continuous support from other companies, and (3) further the company’s prestige. The two cases are classified in Table III.

Case A and case B were analyzed in the analysis framework of the alliance.

V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION
This article shows that it is possible to understand the background of partner selection in strategic alliances. Partner selection was examined by the organization relation theory and business ecosystem in the literature survey.
In this study, the global alliance of specialized database companies and electronic library has been presented. In both
cases presented herein, first, US companies advanced into English-language countries. Next, when entering Asia, they implemented strategic alliances with local companies. It is not easy for overseas companies to respond to local environments by themselves. For this case, partner selection is important. At the time of partner selection, we discovered the following:

1. (1) Factors attributable to "people" and "learning," such as resources, customer base, and tacit knowledge, etc. are important when negotiating and making an alliance.

2. (2) Reliability and communication between organizations (at each level within the hierarchy) are important.

3. (3) The evolution of the IT infrastructure made it possible for the information service industry to expand overseas.

This paper is based on the results of these two cases. In other words, a generalization usually has limitations. Hence, more research is needed to fill in the gaps created by the limitations.

**TABLE V**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Case A</th>
<th>Case B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japanese language; Legal information;</td>
<td>Abundant communication for each level and job</td>
<td>Abundant communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>Internet service</td>
<td>Internet service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Support of top management</td>
<td>Support of top management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Both companies; Trust in management and the team in charge of the company</td>
<td>Both companies; Trust in management and the team in charge of the company</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**REFERENCES**


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