

# How National Culture Affects Strategic Alignment: An Exploratory Grounded Theory Investigation of Subsidiaries of Global Telecommunications Companies in Ghana

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Godfried Bakiyem Adaba  
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## **Abstract**

Strategic alignment of business goals and information systems (IS) strategies is a persistent theme in the literature and a key issue for information technology (IT) executives. Prior studies provide evidence that strategic alignment contributes to business success by enabling organisations to leverage information technology and information systems capabilities to gain competitive advantage. Understanding the association between national culture and strategic alignment has become imperative, as a growing number of organisations now operate in multinational and cross-cultural environments. However, a cursory look at the strategic alignment literature reveals a relative dearth of empirical studies examining how national culture affects strategic alignment. To address this apparent gap in the literature, this research set out to explore the impact of national culture on strategic alignment using an adapted version of the grounded theory approach suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2014). In doing so, the study inductively developed a conceptual model of national culture and strategic alignment – the CUSA model – grounded in empirical data from three subsidiaries of telecommunications companies currently operating in Ghana.

The CUSA model proposes that the external national culture context – comprising the national culture context of the corporate headquarters and the subsidiary host national culture – shape strategic alignment indirectly through strategic and operational activities in the internal organisational context. The variables most amenable to the impact of national culture are communications, organisational and information systems structure, information systems governance and strategic planning, and management style. Consequently, approaches to strategic alignment may be universal, contingent or hybrid. Whereas the universal approach echoes the national culture of the corporate headquarters, the contingent approach mirrors the subsidiary host culture. The hybrid approach reflect both the corporate headquarters and the subsidiary host national cultures. The model further proposes that, if not managed effectively, barriers to effective intercultural communications, culture-related conflict and mistrust, and differences in work values and practices, might be impediments to strategic alignment success.

This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge on strategic alignment by building an empirically grounded model that satisfies the theoretical and practical need for such a framework. This study is an exemplar of the application of an adapted grounded theory approach rooted in the interpretive research paradigm, a suitable alternative to the use of national culture dimensions in information systems research involving national culture.

**Keywords:** Strategic alignment; national culture; information systems (IS); grounded theory; telecommunications industry; Ghana

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# Chapter 1.

## Introduction

### 1.1. Setting the Scene

Strategic alignment – connecting organisational goals with information systems (IS) strategies – has gained prominence in the IS literature in the last three decades as a means of gaining a competitive advantage and value from IS investments. Previous research has established that strategic alignment is indicative of a close working relationship between the business and IS functions (Henderson and Venkatraman, 1993; Luftman, 2000; Chan and Reich, 2007b). Strategic alignment might contribute to competitive advantage and business success by enhancing organisational efficiency and flexibility to take advantage of business opportunities (Baker *et al.*, 2011; Cao, Baker and Hoffman, 2012; Gerow *et al.*, 2014; Karpovsky and Galliers, 2015).

Notwithstanding its importance to business success, achieving and maintaining strategic alignment remains a challenge for many organisations (Gerow *et al.*, 2014; Renaud, Walsh and Kalika, 2016). One possible reason is that strategic alignment does not depend on the development of sound business and IS strategies alone but on the sound execution of such strategies. However, strategy execution takes place within a given cultural context and depends on individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. As a result, cultural factors might affect the degree of alignment, possibly causing strategic misalignment (Dulipovici and Robey, 2013). Understanding how culture affects strategic alignment has become vital as organisations increasingly operate across national cultural boundaries.

## **1.2. National Culture in IS Research**

The national culture perspective is an established research framework in the IS discipline. Issues of national culture have become particularly relevant given globalisation, and the growth of subsidiaries, joint ventures and strategic alliances (Leidner, 2010; Walsh, Kefi and Baskerville, 2010). As a number of organisations now operate across national and cultural boundaries with culturally diverse staff, elements of national culture might affect the implementation, management, and use outcomes of IS in different contexts (Leidner and Kayworth, 2006; Walsh, Kefi and Baskerville, 2010; Trauth, 2012; Kaba and Osei-Bryson, 2013; Shore, 2013; Fang, Lederer and Benamati, 2016).

To understand the potential implications of cultural factors, scholars have applied a national culture perspective to examine diverse IS research problems. For example, IS development (e.g. Kappos and Rivard, 2008), IS adoption and use (Srite and Karahanna, 2006; Twati, 2014), IS-enabled change (Martinsons, Davison and Martinsons, 2009), and IS outsourcing (Gannon, Wilson and Powell, 2014), among others. Some researchers have moved beyond studies of IS managers from a single country by seeking an international or comparative perspective (Gallivan and Srite, 2005). Others have used culture to explain, for example, the implications of IS developed in a given cultural context and used in another, and cultural change due to IS use (Leidner and Kayworth, 2006). Overall, the application of the national culture perspective in IS research has been growing in recent decades (Shore, 2013).

## **1.3. National Culture and Strategic Alignment**

Strategic alignment has been investigated extensively in the last three decades. Given its importance, strategic alignment will continue to attract the attention of researchers and practitioners in the future (Chan and Reich, 2007b; Cao, Baker and Hoffman, 2012). However, there appears to be a scarcity of research into how culture influences organisational efforts to attain strategic alignment. Some authors suggest that

national culture might affect strategic alignment (Katz and Townsend, 2000; Tosti, 2007; Silvius, De Haes and Van Grembergen, 2009a). For example, Tosti notes:

“When we look at performance at the operational level, it becomes clear that results depend not just on what people do (the processes they follow) but also on how people behave as they do things (the practices they demonstrate). Even in well-designed processes, the behavioural practices of groups and individuals can make the difference between merely adequate results and outstanding results.” (Tosti, 2007, p. 21)

Chan and Reich (2007b) underscore the importance of a cultural fit between the business and IS contexts and recommend that strategic IS planning should be aligned with the fundamentals of culture to make communications and business planning more efficient. Furthermore, Rondinelli, Rosen and Drori (2001) contend that as organisations expand internationally, their ability to align their internal business processes and management practices to conditions in their external environment is critical to sustaining growth, competitive advantage, and profitability. Scholars have stressed that without due consideration of the complex interactions between IS, cultural factors and the organisational context, strategies for attaining strategic alignment might not succeed (Heine, Grover and Malhotra, 2003; Peppard and Breu, 2003). There are currently no frameworks of national culture and strategic alignment, as relatively few empirical studies have explicitly examined the association. Also, the consistent prioritisation of strategic alignment by IT executives as a management concern (Luftman and Ben-Zvi, 2010, 2011) is an indication of the need for further empirical research. An additional motivation for this study is the need to counterbalance the largely positivist research from Western settings that has dominated strategic alignment literature by providing an interpretive study with data from a non-Western context.

## **1.4. Aim and Research Question**

As stated earlier, an initial assessment of the extant literature uncovered a relative lack of empirical research into how national culture affects strategic alignment in multinational organisations that operate across cultures. Accordingly, the aim of this study

is to address the apparent gap in the literature by exploring how culture shapes alignment and to inductively develop a theoretical model of national culture and strategic alignment, grounded in empirical data. The following research question was posed to guide the investigation:

How does national culture affect strategic alignment in subsidiaries of telecommunication organisations operating in Ghana?

## **1.5. Methodological Approach**

There are two common ways to investigate phenomena in organisations: (1) testing existing theories in new contexts or on related aspects of current phenomena; and (2) formulating a theoretical understanding of phenomena grounded in the experiences of individual respondents within organisations. The latter approach is valuable in situations where no suitable pre-existing theory is available to study the phenomenon of interest deductively or where existing theories are inadequate (Robey and Sahay, 1996; Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Urquhart, Lehmann and Myers, 2010). In such circumstances, an inductive understanding is necessary to provide the theoretical basis for subsequent deductive studies (Sarker et al., 2001).

The current strategic alignment literature has largely overlooked the impact of national culture. The few studies that exist are mainly conceptual (for example, Silvius, 2008; Silvius, De Haes and Van Grembergen, 2009). The current study embraces an inductive adapted grounded theory approach rooted in the interpretive research paradigm. Inductive research is suited to the complexity, dynamism, intersubjectivity, and multiple components that embody the culture concept (Leidner and Kayworth, 2006; Aneas and Sandín, 2009). The grounded theory approach allows a broader and complex view of the phenomena under investigation to be taken and avoids simplifying or restricting the analysis to only quantifiable and measurable constructs. Also, the absence of frameworks of national culture and strategic alignment contributed to the choice of grounded theory.

## **1.6. The Research Context**

The data for this research came from the subsidiaries of three companies currently operating in the telecommunications sector in Ghana. The firms are geographically dispersed global organisations that consist of a headquarters and subsidiaries located in different countries. These organisations are inter-organisational webs embedded in an external network composed of other groups (e.g. customers, suppliers, regulators) that interact (Ghoshal and Bartlett, 1990). The multinational character of such organisations makes them suitable case examples for examining the influence of national culture on strategic alignment. In the era of global business, many people are working in intercultural settings with individuals and groups from other cultures. National differences in management practices and structure are rooted in societal value systems transmitted through socialisation within a given national culture context. Thus, understanding the interaction of several national cultures in subsidiaries is important because that could affect strategic alignment efforts.

While there are some similarities among the study organisations because they operate in the same sector and are IS dependent, they originate in different cultures. The organisations provide a setting for the interaction of multiple cultures, including the subsidiary host culture, the culture at the corporate headquarters, the cultural backgrounds of the individual employees, and in some cases, the cultures of foreign partners.

## **1.7. The Ghanaian Culture**

Ghana is comprised of dozens of ethnic groups with common values and institutions that were brought together through history. The Ghanaian culture is the product of a dynamic process of embracing, adapting and incorporating the useful aspects of other cultures. It is, therefore, a product of diverse local cultures influenced by a long history of mainly Islamic and European contacts (Salm and Falola, 2002). Three factors have had a significant influence on national culture in Ghana: first, many decades of

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colonial rule have had some impact. For example, the arbitrary demarcation of the country's borders has collected together distinct ethnic groups with cultural differences to create a country. Second, migration, mostly from rural to urban areas and from other nations into Ghana for various reasons, has resulted in an increasing fusion of cultures. Third, the increasing mobility of people and ideas and the media, notably television, radio and the internet have exposed Ghana to the influences of world cultures, which has accelerated the rate of cultural change within the country (Salm and Falola, 2002). Fourth, colonial and postcolonial educational policies installed an education system similar to the British model. Likewise, language policies have instituted English as the formal language over indigenous languages. Furthermore, Christian missionaries have had an influence on Ghanaian culture through the establishment and operation of Western-type schools throughout the country (Mfum-Mensah, 2005).

While there is a high degree of diversity in the Ghanaian cultural landscape, there are some features that make the Ghanaian culture unique. For example, it is characterised by high power distance (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010b), which implies a preference for hierarchy. Hierarchy within organisations is perceived as a reflection of the inherent societal inequalities. Centralisation is common, subordinates expect to be told what to do, and autocratic management is tolerated (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010b). Like other African countries, Ghana is a collectivist society, where collectivism is typically manifested in a close long-term commitment to the extended family and ethnic group, which often overrides other rules and regulations. The Ghanaian business culture has an inclination for managing business activities through face-to-face meetings. Also, Ghanaians have a proclivity toward using personal contacts and relationships to accomplish business objectives (Puplampu, 2013).

### **1.8. The Telecommunications Industry**

Until the 1980s, the telecommunications industry around the world was made up of state monopolies (Fransman, 2001; Aker and Mbiti, 2010). However, the industry has

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seen enormous growth and changes since then. This growth started with the deregulation and privatisation of the sector by many countries, starting in the USA with the break-up of AT&T, and in the UK with the privatisation of British Telecom (BT). This trend of telecommunications deregulation and liberalisation continued gradually in the rest of the world, albeit for different reasons (Fransman, 2001; Li and Whalley, 2002). The trend culminated in the introduction of private actors and competition, which brought in investment, greater innovation, and skills into the sector from around the world. The overall effect has been a more vibrant sector, with improved quality of services at reduced prices, and a broader modernised network that offers greater choice for consumers (Bortolotti *et al.*, 2002).

Demand for information and communication technology (ICT) increased in the 1990s, particularly, the internet and mobile communication. The internet provided an inexpensive way to transmit voice, data, and video and resulted in the convergence of various services. This development led to the emergence of different new players in the industry such as internet service providers, mobile network carriers, telecommunications equipment suppliers, among others. As a result, the industry has transformed from three main sub-sectors to six: hardware and software, connectivity, navigation and middleware, applications (including content) and customers (Fransman, 2001). These developments, together with increasing globalisation, have contributed to the rise of multinational and global telecommunications companies. Companies typically enter new markets directly by developing their own product offerings, through collaboration with other businesses or via mergers and acquisitions. Apart from having a network of subsidiaries around the world, another important characteristic of the telecommunications companies is their heavy dependence on IS (Shore, 2013).

### **1.9. Structure of this Thesis**

Phillips & Pugh (2005) list four main elements that a doctoral thesis should address: (1) background theory, (2) focal theory (3) data theory, and (4) novel contribution.

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The next sub-sections discuss the structure of this thesis in line with Phillips & Pugh's four elements. This thesis is presented in 8 chapters, including this introductory chapter. Table 1-1 shows the elements of doctoral theses and the chapters in which they are discussed.

**Table 1-1 Structure of this Thesis**

Element of a Doctoral Thesis	Chapter
Background theory	Chapter 1; Chapter 2; Chapter 3
Focal theory	Chapter 1
Data theory	Chapter 4; Chapter 5
Novel contribution	Chapter 6; Chapter 7; and Chapter 8

### 1.9.1. Background Theory

Demonstrating background theory involves reviewing the extant literature to identify a problem area. Background theory also includes showing an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Phillips and Pugh articulate background theory as follows:

“Organising the material in an interesting and useful way, evaluating the contributions of others (and justifying the criticisms, of course), identifying trends in research activity, defining areas of theoretical and empirical weakness, are all key activities by which you would demonstrate that you had a professional command of the background theory.”(Phillips and Pugh, 2005, p. 57)

In this thesis, the first three chapters address background theory. This introductory chapter discusses the need for the research, states the purpose of the study, and poses a research question. Chapters 2 and 3 also address background theory through a review of the literature on national culture and strategic alignment respectively. Specifically, Chapter 2 examines the national culture literature and begins with a discussion of the elements and conceptualisations of the concept. Chapter 2 also deliberates static and

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dynamic frameworks of national culture. The chapter concludes by reviewing empirical studies involving national culture in the IS field. Chapter 3 considers the IS literature on strategic alignment. The chapter starts by discussing IS strategy, after which the dimensions and antecedents of alignment are deliberated upon, followed by an analysis of selected strategic alignment models. Then, empirical studies of IS and organisational performance, as well as strategic alignment and business value, are reviewed. The chapter closes with a reflection on the strategic alignment literature involving a critique of the strategic alignment construct and identifying gaps in knowledge.

### **1.9.2. Focal Theory**

The second element of a thesis is focal theory, which consists of establishing the nature of the research problem and spelling out precisely what is under examination and why. Focal theory helps to determine the character of the research problem (Phillips and Pugh, 2005). It also involves the formulation of hypotheses and developing a conceptual model for the research (if appropriate). This research adopted an inductive grounded theory strategy, which rather than formulating hypotheses and a theoretical model, seeks to develop a grounded theory. As such, Chapter 1 discusses focal theory by specifying the research problem and the research question.

### **1.9.3. Data Theory**

Data theory is the third component of a doctoral thesis. In general, data theory gives the justification for the relevance and validity of the material that supports the findings (Phillips and Pugh, 2005). It is concerned with the suitability and reliability of the research methods and sources of data. The data theory component should examine such issues as the philosophical underpinnings of the research, the rationale for adopting a given research approach, and data gathering and analysis techniques.

In this thesis, Chapters 4 and 5 discuss data theory. Chapter 4 provides a justification of the research methodology selected. It also describes how the research was

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conducted. The chapter starts with a discussion of the main research paradigms of IS research – positivist, interpretive, critical, and mixed research – and justifies the adoption of interpretive research under the current study. It then discusses a range of alternative interpretive IS research methods for exploring the link between national culture and strategic alignment in organisations and justifies the choice of a grounded theory approach. Next, it explicates the canons, procedures, developments, and coding procedures of grounded theory. The chapter ends with an appraisal of the grounded theory method and a discussion of its use in the IS field. Chapter 5 explains the empirical research process. It also examines the data collection protocols and the field data collection, ethical considerations and the coding of the data. Chapter 5 also describes the data coding and category development process to build a grounded theory.

### **1.9.4. Novel Contribution**

Specifying the novel contribution is the final element of Phillip and Pugh's model. It involves an evaluation of the importance of the thesis to the development of the discipline. The contribution part also highlights the implications and contributions of the study, its limitations, and make suggestions for further research (Phillips and Pugh, 2005). The novel contribution is discussed in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. The findings are presented in Chapter 6 and 7 while Chapter 8 considers the theoretical and methodological contributions of the study and the implications of the findings for practice. Chapter 8 also assesses the limitations of the study and explores avenues for future research.

### **1.10. Summary**

This thesis examines strategic alignment in organisations in the telecommunications sector from a national culture perspective. Specifically, it attempts to understand how culture influences the social context within which strategic alignment occurs and to assess the impact. It applies an adapted grounded theory approach to explore the relationship and build a theoretical model of national culture and strategic

## *Chapter 1 Introduction*

alignment. This introductory chapter offered a synopsis of the research. It also provided a note on culture in IS research. It then sketched the study context and the telecommunications industry and laid out the motivation and the need for research, stated the aim and research question and provided a brief overview of the methodological approach. This introductory chapter also gave an overview of the research context, the Ghanaian culture and the telecommunications industry. Chapter 1 concluded by giving an outline of the chapters to come. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on national culture, one of the key constructs of the study.

## **Chapter 2.**

### **National Culture**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter is one of two chapters that review the extant literature on the main constructs of this research, namely, national culture and strategic alignment. According to Webster and Watson (2002, p.xiii):

“A review of prior, relevant literature is an essential feature of any academic project. An effective review creates a firm foundation for advancing knowledge. It facilitates theory development, closes areas where a plethora of research exists, and uncovers areas where research is needed.”

Although there are two main streams of literature on culture in the IS discipline (i.e. organisational culture and national culture), the subject of this research is the latter. The purpose of this chapter is: (1) to review the national culture literature to highlight the concept and its application in the IS discipline; (2) to recognise the basic themes, debates and theories of national culture; and (3) to reflect on the national culture literature. The chapter begins with an attempt to define the culture construct and proceeds to examine static and dynamic theories of national culture. Studies involving national culture in IS research are also considered in this chapter. Finally, the chapter concludes with some reflections on the state of national culture research in the IS field.

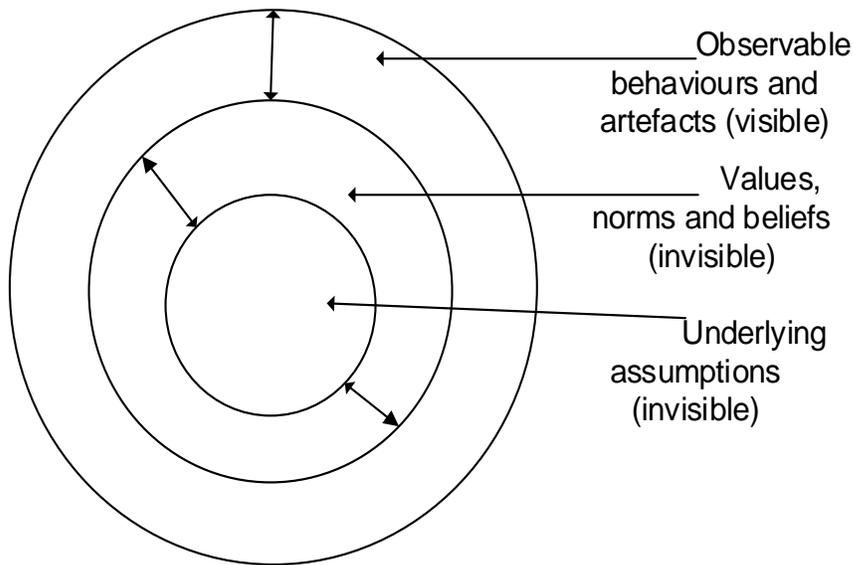
## 2.2. The Concept of National Culture

The IS literature suggests that currently, culture is a well-established concept and a subject of significant scholarly interest (Leidner and Kayworth, 2006; Kappos and Rivard, 2008; Leidner, 2010). For example, it has been applied to analyse a broad range of topics, such as the adoption of technology (Shore and Venkatachalam, 1996; Venkatesh and Zhang, 2010), IS outsourcing and offshoring (Krishna, Sahay and Walsham, 2004; Hahn and Bunyaratavej, 2010; Gannon, Wilson and Powell, 2014), software development (Deshpande *et al.*, 2010), the management of IS (Martinsons and Westwood, 1997), IS strategy (Katz and Townsend, 2000), strategic decision-making (Dimitratos *et al.*, 2011), and knowledge management (Chen, Sun and McQueen, 2010; Li, 2010; Zhang, de Pablos and Xu, 2014).

While culture has been widely studied, a cursory look into the extant literature reveals that after decades of research, the definition of culture is still contested. For example, anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952), in a review of the notions of culture registered over 160 definitions. Despite the conceptual problems, however, there seems to be some agreement that culture: (1) is a layered phenomenon socially constructed through values, beliefs, and assumptions shared by a group of people but expressed through symbols, artefacts, structures and behaviours; (2) is learned and transmitted from one generation to the next; (3) is shared by most members of a given social group but varies from one group of people to another; and (4) develops over time and is influenced by history, geography, and level of economic development.

In analysing the culture of a particular group or organisation, Schein (2006) suggests a distinction between three different manifestations of culture: visible artefacts, values, and basic underlying assumptions. As depicted in Figure 2-1, observable behaviours and artefacts constitute the external (visible) layer of culture. The inner (invisible) layer represent concealed values, norms, and beliefs that are socially testable

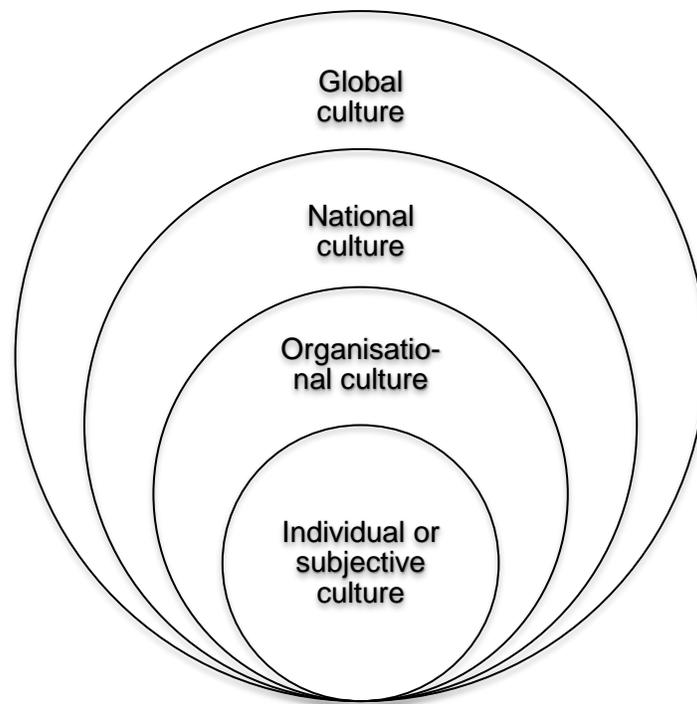
through consensus. Lastly, basic assumptions constitute the deepest invisible layer of culture that is commonly taken for granted (Leung *et al.*, 2005).



**Figure 2-1 Manifestations of Culture (Based on Schein, 2006)**

Culture has been examined at the global, national, organisational and the individual level of analysis. At the macro level, global culture embodies culture created by global networks and institutions that cut across national and cultural boundaries (Erez and Gati, 2004; Leung *et al.*, 2005). National culture, the subject of this research, represents culture shared by people of a given nation state, while organisational culture denotes patterns of shared behaviour of individuals working for the same organisation. At the micro level, individual or subjective culture represents the influences of different cultures on individual behaviours through the process of socialisation. There are many sub-cultures within global and national cultures, as there are organisational sub-cultures. The multiple levels of culture influence each other in a dynamic way through top-down and bottom-up processes (Leung *et al.*, 2005). For example, macro level changes could shape cultures at the micro level.

Straub *et al.* (2002) conceptualise culture as a virtual onion (depicted in Figure 2-2), whose layers are illustrative of the cultural identity and experiences of individuals. They also argue that people recognise themselves as members of diverse groups from various reference points such as religion, ethnicity, occupation, nationality, gender and so on. They contend that just as in the layers of an onion, people's social identity on various levels is either deep or superficial, as are the beliefs they hold that shape their behaviour. The virtual onion metaphor is an abstract representation of culture and works to reflect the many complex forces that shape an individual's culture. Consequently, each person is a unique product of various interacting identity layers (Walsh, Kefi and Baskerville, 2010).



**Figure 2-2 Multiple Levels on National Culture**

### **2.3. National Culture Theories**

Researchers have employed various theories to study national culture. These competing theories are useful in providing a similar reference point for the analysis of

cultural differences. Typically, two broad categories of culture theories are identifiable in the extant literature: static and dynamic (Weisinger and Salipante, 2000; Leung *et al.*, 2005; Fang, 2012). Whereas static theories (or national culture dimensions) perceive culture as fixed and immutable, dynamic models take a variable and emergent view.

### **2.3.1. Dimensions of National Culture**

Following Hofstede's (1980) dimensions of national culture, some scholars (Hall and Hall, 1990; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997; Schwartz, 1999; House *et al.*, 2004) have developed relatively similar conceptual models (Table 2-1 displays a summary of five different dimensions of national culture frameworks). Hofstede originally presented four national culture dimensions, based on research amongst employees of the IBM Corporation in 72 countries (Hofstede, 1980). The model was subsequently extended with the addition of two other dimensions.

According to Hofstede, differences in work-related values, beliefs, norms and behaviour might be explained in terms of:

1. power distance – the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is unequally distributed;
2. uncertainty avoidance – the extent to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity;
3. individualism/collectivism – the level to which people are integrated into groups;
4. Masculinity/femininity – masculinity signifies a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness, and material rewards for success, while femininity implies a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak, and improved quality of life;
5. long-term/short-term orientation – long-term-oriented cultures attribute more importance to the future. They foster future-oriented values like persistence, saving and capacity for adaptation. However, short-term oriented cultures promote values related to the past and present, such as steadiness, respect for tradition, reciprocation and fulfilling social obligations (Hofstede and Bond, 1988); and,

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6. indulgence/restraint – indulgence is the degree to which that society allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun. On the other hand, restraint stands for a society that suppresses the gratification of needs using strict social norms (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov, 2010).

**Table 2-1 Selected Dimensional Theories of National Culture Compared**

Author (s)	Focus	Research Basis	Dimensions
Hofstede	Managerial and work values	Based on research amongst employees of the IBM Corporation in 72 countries	Six dimensions: Power Distance; Uncertainty Avoidance; Individualism/Collectivism; Masculinity/Femininity; Long term/short term orientation; Indulgence/Restraint
Schwartz	Important lives' values	Developed theoretically	Seven Dimensions: Conservatism; Intellectual Autonomy; Affective Autonomy; Hierarchy/egalitarianism; Mastery /Harmony
Hall and Hall	Communication	Developed theoretically	High /Low Context Communication; Monochromic/Polychromic time; Space; Speed
Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner	Understanding cultural diversity in business	Based on an extensive database of over 30,000 survey results collected from questionnaires sent managers in 28 countries	Seven dimensions: Universalism/Particularism; Individualism/Collectivism; Neutral/Affective; Specific/Diffuse; Achievement/Ascription; Sequential/Synchronic; Internal/External Control
GLOBE	Culture and leadership	Based on survey research on culture and leadership in 61 countries involving middle managers	Nine Dimensions: Uncertainty avoidance; Power Distance; Collectivism I: societal collectivism; Collectivism II: In-Group Collectivism; Gender Egalitarianism; Assertiveness; Humane Orientation; Performance Orientation; Future Orientation

## *Chapter 2 National Culture*

Hofstede's framework is the most cited and has had much influence on cross-cultural research (Myers and Tan, 2002; Taras, Roney and Steel, 2009; Reis, Ferreira and Santos, 2011). For decades, a range of disciplines (e.g. management), including IS, have employed Hofstede's model for researching cultural differences. Jones and Alony (2007) attribute its relative popularity to rigour, relative accuracy, and relevance. However, many scholars have challenged Hofstede's theory because it emanates from research on a single US company, and therefore is not representative of most cultures (for example Jones and Alony, 2007; McSweeney, 2002). Besides, the model was constructed with data from the 1970s, much of it preceding the current era of globalisation and the spread of ICTs.

Similarly, Hall and Hall (1990) identified four dimensions based on analyses of styles of communication. They advocate that understanding the intercultural communication process enables people to recognise and understand unconscious human behaviour, which represents concepts, practices, and solutions to problems. Also, Schwartz (1994) proposed dimensions for classifying societies based on alternative methods of resolving issues of the individual and the group (conservatism versus autonomy), ensuring responsible social behaviour (hierarchy versus egalitarianism), and the problem of humankind and the natural and social worlds (mastery versus harmony). Another model of cultural dimensions was proposed by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) with seven dimensions, which they argue are relevant to the conduct of international business, whereas (House *et al.*, 2004) of the GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organisations Effectiveness) project produced nine dimensions based on research on culture and leadership in 61 countries.

Dimensions of national culture have been extensively applied in IS research. For example, in an analysis of the 36 IS studies involving culture, Myers and Tan (2002) established that 24 of them applied all or some of Hofstede's dimensions. However, the main drawback of such models is that they adopt the nation state as the basic unit of analysis and perceive culture as fixed and immutable (Fang, 2012). Some authors (for example, Myers and Tan, 2002; Walsham, 2002; Weisinger and Trauth, 2002) are of the

## *Chapter 2 National Culture*

view that cultural dimensions are too simplistic to capture the complexities and multilevel influences of culture on IS. Moreover, many studies consider national culture in simple terms, in which individuals belong to static, homogeneous, and mutually exclusive cultural groups (Gallivan and Srite, 2005).

Another issue with national culture dimensions is the notion that national culture is consistent with the boundaries of nation states. This view assumes cultural homogeneity within nations and glosses over the fact that many nations are multicultural and many cultures are multinational. Culture is a constantly evolving construct representing the collective experiences of the people who repeatedly reform it in every aspect. Therefore, the static view of culture is incapable of capturing cultural dynamics in a globalising society (McSweeney, 2009; Fang, 2012).

Cultural dimensions also fail to acknowledge the significance of globalisation, which has resulted in many people living and working in cultures other than those of their ancestors while embracing different new cultures in host nations. Furthermore, national culture dimensions do not take changes in the composition of populations into account. For example, some states have seen dramatic changes in their populations and ethnic compositions that have altered their culture significantly.

### **2.3.2. Dynamic Perspectives of National Culture**

While national culture dimensions are part of a static view of culture, some IS scholars contend that, in reality, culture is dynamic and emergent (for example, Myers and Tan, 2002; Walsham, 2002; Weisinger and Trauth, 2002). The dynamic view of culture holds that culture is vibrant rather than static and emerges from interactions between people from different cultural backgrounds. This paradigm perceives culture as a complex set of practices which are not fixed or monolithic across groups of individuals, but are contested, temporal and emergent (Gallivan and Srite, 2005).

## *Chapter 2 National Culture*

Several dynamic theories of culture have been proposed. For example, Weisinger and Trauth (2002) put forward the 'situating culture approach', which posits that cultural understanding is locally situated, generally behavioural, and embedded in dynamic everyday work practices negotiated by the actors in specific contexts. Situating culture is useful for understanding IS management issues in cross-cultural contexts as it emphasises the interaction between the implicit aspects of the cultural context and IS. The authors explain:

"Culture is a socially negotiated, dynamic, practical, and locally situated process. Hence, it is a view of culture as 'doing' (which places emphasis on the actual behaviours of people) rather than as 'thinking' (which places emphasis on shared cognitive schemas). Further, this view sees the interactions among group members' from different cultures as being situated in a particular context. Thus, by situating culture in a particular context, a manager may be better able to comprehend the emergence of unique local cultural processes that reflect distinct socially negotiated realities and workplace practices (Weisinger and Trauth, 2002, p. 27)."

The situating culture approach acknowledges the need for organisations to manage both IS and the cultural context. Managing IS takes into account the handling of the design, development, implementation and use of IS in different cultures while managing the cultural context involves dealing with IS workers and organisations by taking various social interactions and worldviews into consideration. The utility of this perspective is demonstrated through its application to the study of a workplace culture of US multinational organisations operating in Ireland, which revealed that workplace culture is the product of the interaction between the industry, corporate, and national contexts (Trauth, 2012).

Gallivan and Srite (2005) proposed an integrated conceptual framework based on social identity theory (SIT) for studying national culture. According to SIT, people perceive themselves as both individuals (personal identity) and as members of a collective (group identity). People identify with certain groups, and this shapes their lives through the processes of categorisation, identification, and comparison. Individuals categorise objects and other individuals to simplify their understanding of reality. People also identify with

some groups and not others. They then compare the groups that they identify with (in-groups) to those that they do not (out-groups). Through identification and comparison, people accentuate the attributes of their in-group, which they view as superior and de-emphasise the features that make their group inferior to others. Gallivan and Srite (2005) suggest that their framework is useful for researchers that want to understand the complex and rich implications of individuals' social identity for the adoption and use of IS.

Walsham (2002) takes a dynamic view of culture by applying concepts drawn from structuration theory to analyse cross-cultural software production and use. He concludes that structuration analysis provides a deeper insight into cross-cultural studies than is found in the current literature dominated by the application of cultural dimensions. He further argued that structuration theory is appropriate for the analysis of cross-cultural working, intercultural conflict and contradiction, cultural heterogeneity, work patterns, and the dynamic nature of culture.

This research opted for an inductive grounded theory approach, rather than deductively applying a given theory. However, insights from the extant literature and pre-existing theories were used to support theory development.

## **2.4. Culture and Information Systems Research**

Culture has become an increasingly important subject in IS research and has been applied to examine research problems. In a review of culture in IS research, Leidner and Kayworth (2006), for example, developed six themes: (1) culture and IS development; (2) culture, IT adoption and diffusion; (3) culture, IT use and outcomes; (4) culture, IT management and strategy; (5) the impact of IT on culture; and (6) IT culture.

In a study of the importance and implications of culture for the transfer of technology, Shore and Venkatachalam (1996) found that in high distance cultures, the introduction of new IS might produce conflict as people in authority may lose power while subordinates may not be used to working independently, potentially causing difficulties.

## *Chapter 2 National Culture*

The authors concluded that since culture is difficult and slow to change, a culturally sensitive strategy is necessary to prevent conflicts. In a study of Chinese IT professionals, Huang and Trauth (2007) identified and discussed three new themes pertinent to the challenges regarding cross-cultural globally distributed software development teams: the complexity of language issues, culture and communication styles and work behaviours, and cultural understandings at different levels. Guided by social identity theory, they concluded that the identity of global virtual team members is affected by societal culture, organisational culture, individual experience, and the structure of the globally distributed IT work.

Other studies have examined how culture affects the development and use of information systems. For example, Kumar and Bjorn-Andersen (1990) investigated the impact of the cultural values of IS developers and concluded that the values of designers have a significant influence on the degree to which systems meet the needs of organisations. Walsham (2002), drawing on structuration theory, analysed cross-cultural contradiction and conflict in teams of software developers. Straub (1994) also applied Hofstede's culture framework to study the effect of culture on IT diffusion and concluded that culture seems to play a significant role in the selection and adoption of electronic communications media in Japan and the US. Similarly, Bagchi, Hart, and Peterson (2004) concluded that national culture could predict the adoption of IT products.

### **2.5. A Reflection on the National Culture Literature in IS**

Despite the many outstanding contributions of national culture perspective in the IS discipline, an assessment of the literature reveals some issues. The first problem involves the definition of culture. There is a plethora of definitions with little agreement. Second, the literature reveals many methodological challenges to investigating culture. In this study, culture is defined to include elements of the national culture of the organisational headquarters, the subsidiary host culture, the national culture of offshore partners, and the cultural backgrounds of the of study organisations. The third issue is that

most studies involving culture in IS have applied dimensions of culture frameworks to analyse culture, some of which are derived from quantitative data (e.g. Hofstede national culture dimensions, Project GLOBE). While these studies make some significant contributions, they also have some methodological weaknesses. Fourth, a related methodological problem with culture research is that most authors attempt to study culture at the national, organisational or individual levels. However, in reality, cultures interact at various levels, making it difficult to study the effects at a single level. Finally, it is difficult to differentiate the effects of culture from individual differences. This view dovetails with the difficulties of the concept of national culture itself. It is challenging to assess whether outcomes attributed to cultural differences are actually the product of individual differences.

## **2.6. Summary**

This chapter examined culture, one of the main constructs of the study. Culture is a complex phenomenon subject to numerous definitions and conceptualisations in the extant literature. Hofstede's (1980) dimensions of national culture and similar models are widely cited in IS and other fields and are useful frameworks in cross-cultural IS research. Cultural dimensions are easy to apply as they simplify cultures into a handful of dimensions, which are amenable to quantitative analysis. However, the dimensions of national culture remain controversial and have many weaknesses. For example, they take a static view of culture and overlook significant cultural similarities across nations and differences within nations. They tend to generalise about entire countries where significant intra-national cultural differences exist. National cultural dimensions might be inadequate in an increasingly globalised world. Some authors have drawn on existing theories from various disciplines to examine culture, such as structuration theory, social identity theory, and the situating culture approach. This research embraces the dynamic view of culture as a better alternative for examining the impact of national culture on strategic alignment. It applies a grounded theory approach as a means to build theory rather than using a pre-existing one. The next chapter reviews the literature on strategic alignment.

## **Chapter 3.**

### **Strategic Alignment**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter examines the broader strategic IS literature to establish the current knowledge base. The goal is twofold: (1) to highlight the underlying themes, issues, and debates, and (2) to identify any gaps in knowledge. The review is not exhaustive, owing to the extensive nature of the strategic alignment literature. Instead, it highlights critical debates and the relevant aspects of this broad area as a lead up to the present study. The chapter begins by giving a brief overview of developments in IS strategizing. It then proceeds to discuss the general concept of strategy and IS strategy. Next, it examines strategic alignment, its dimensions, antecedents and a selection of models. The chapter then discusses the association between alignment, organisational performance and business value. Following a critique of the alignment construct, the chapter concludes by assessing the state of knowledge about strategic alignment and identifies gaps in the literature.

#### **3.2. Developments in IS Strategizing**

The concept of IS strategy goes back five decades, where it was called the 'IS plan' (Peppard, Galliers and Thorogood, 2014). There is no consensus regarding its definition in the extant literature. As a result, there are various conceptualisations, ranging from a simple plan detailing the role of IS in an organisation, to more complex formulations involving various infrastructure and process dimensions (Chen *et al.*, 2010).

### *Chapter 3 Strategic Alignment*

Galliers (2009) distinguishes 'IS strategy', the outcome of a strategizing process, from 'IS strategizing'. He traced the focus of IS strategizing through four stages of development, moving from matters of efficiency and operational support to questions of strategic and competitive advantage. The stages are (1) operational efficiency, (2) current effectiveness, (3) future effectiveness, and (4) competitiveness. In the initial years of commercial computing, IS strategy was mostly preoccupied with enhancing operational efficiency. Subsequently, it became mainly reactive and was dominated by a more formal, top-down business approach, where IS applications were chosen to meet the requirements of current business strategies. Over the course of time, IS strategizing took a more prospective stance, with emphasis on IS investments that could stand the test of time.

By the 1980s and 90s, there was a move towards proactive strategies that applied IS for business process redesign and competitive advantage (Scott-Morton, 1990; Peppard, Galliers and Thorogood, 2014). During this time, the success of American Airlines' SABRE system demonstrated the potential of IS as a competitive weapon. The advent of strategic IS planning gave prominence to the ability of IS to shape business strategies and to create new opportunities for competitive advantage in organisations. Strategic alignment is often discussed in the context of strategic IS planning, which deals with the development and coordination of the relationship between the business and IS domains. Lederer and Sethi define strategic IS planning as:

"The process of identifying a portfolio of computer-based applications that will assist an organisation in executing its business plans and consequently realising its business goals" (Lederer and Sethi, 1988, p. 445).

Earl (2009) recommends that strategic IS planning should target four main areas: (1) aligning investments in IS with business goals; (2) exploiting IS for competitive advantage; (3) directing the efficient and effective management of IS resources; and (4) developing technology policies and architectures.

IS strategy is associated with strategic alignment, which is a major factor in the ability of organisations to gain value from IS. As such, the formulation of an appropriate IS strategy to complement organisational strategies is essential for improved performance and agility (Galliers, 2007; Leidner, Lo and Preston, 2011). IS strategies are most effective when developed in the context of business strategy, because IS alone is not capable of delivering value (Broadbent and Weill, 1993; Henderson and Venkatraman, 1993; Luftman, 2000; Chan and Reich, 2007b). Also, Chan, Huff and Copeland (1997) underscore the importance of understanding both the intended and realised IS strategies of an organisation by examining existing strategy documents and statements.

Bharadwaj *et al.* (2013) call for a rethink of the prevailing view that IS strategy is a functional level strategy that is driven by and should be in alignment with an organisation's business strategy. They propose a 'digital business strategy,' which they argue reflects a fusion between IS strategy and business strategy. Digital business strategy is an alternative to IS strategy in a world of ubiquitous digital technologies and increased interconnections spanning many organisations, industries, and sectors.

### **3.3. Information Systems Strategy**

According to Chen *et al.* (2010), IS strategy is an organisational perspective on the investment in, and the deployment, use, and management of IS. They clarify three notions of IS strategy: (1) the use of IS to support business strategy – this view addresses how IS can help the business gain and sustain competitive advantage; (2) IS strategy as a master plan for the IS function – this conception centres on the role of strategy for the efficient and effective organisation of the IS function; and (3) IS strategy as a shared view of the role of IS within the organisation.

Traditionally, IS are perceived as something that provides information support for management. However, because of growing competition and advances in IS in recent years, it has gradually morphed into an integrated part of the business and a strategic weapon for achieving competitive advantage (Peppard, Galliers and Thorogood, 2014).

### *Chapter 3 Strategic Alignment*

Three levels of strategy are apparent in the literature: (1) corporate strategy, (2) business strategy, and (3) functional strategy. In general, business strategy defines the overall vision of the organisation that determines functional and unit strategies. The business level strategy specifies the business the organisation should be undertaking, while business unit strategy speaks to how to gain a competitive advantage. Sabherwal and Chan (2001) make a distinction between IS strategy, IT strategy and information management strategy.

While IS strategy concerns the business applications of IT and how such systems could be aligned to improve competitive advantage, IT strategy deals largely with policies related to technology (e.g. architecture, technical standards, and security issues). Finally, information management strategy consists of the structures and roles for managing IS and IT. Similarly, Henderson and Venkatraman (1993) suggest that there are three aspects to IS strategy: (1) technology scope, (2) distinctive competencies, and (3) IT governance. Technology scope consists of the range of IT capabilities available to an organisation. Systemic competencies are those attributes of strategy that support existing business strategy or contribute to the creation of a new one. Finally, IT governance refers to the collaborative mechanisms for technical advantage.

Based on a shared organisational view of how to pursue innovation through IS, Chen *et al.* (2010) differentiate three types of organisations as regards the strategic role of IS: (1) IS innovators, (2) IS conservatives, and (3) IS undefined. IS innovators are trendsetters in their area of business. They continuously seek innovation through new IS initiatives. On the other hand, the IS conservative prefers a stable approach to IS strategy by constantly refining and improving existing IS practices. Organisations with an undefined IS strategy lack clear long-term IS goals and patterns of behaviour with regard to IS strategy.

Miles and Snow (2003) propose four types of organisational strategies concerning the relationships between strategy, technology and structure: (1) prospector, (2) defender, (3) analyser, and (4) reactor. Organisations that pursue a prospector strategy take risks in the quest for innovation and always seek new product and market opportunities. Unlike

### *Chapter 3 Strategic Alignment*

the prospector, organisations that follow a defender strategy focus on shielding existing markets, supporting stable growth, and serving current customers. The analysers preserve current markets while seeking growth and new markets through innovation and risk taking. The analyser combines the strengths of the prospector and the defender in one strategy. Whereas the prospectors, defenders, and analysers are proactive in adapting to their environments, the reactor has no stable and consistent pattern of behaviour but only responds. As a result, the reactor is less successful compared to the prospector, defender, and analyser strategies (Miles and Snow, 2003).

Following Miles and Snow (2003) typology, Hirschheim and Sabherwal (2001) take a multidimensional view of IS strategy, encompassing the role of IS, IS sourcing arrangements, and IS structure. The IS role deals with how top management views the IS function. Regarding the IS role, they identified three types of organisations, (1) the defender, (2) the prospector, and (3) the analyser. The defender role focuses on attaining internal efficiency and improvements to organisational processes. With the prospector role, an organisation seeks to exploit new opportunities, while the analyser is a role in which the organisation strives to build on current strengths while seeking new opportunities.

IS sourcing refers to the internal and external arrangements through which IS services are provided (Hirschheim and Sabherwal, 2001). Three main types of sourcing methods are common: (1) outsourcing, (2) insourcing, and (3) selective sourcing. Outsourcing is commonly used to describe an arrangement in which at least 80 per cent of an organisation's IS budget goes to a third party that delivers IS assets, people, and activities, as opposed to an internal IS department as is the case with insourcing. On the other hand, offshoring is an outsourcing arrangement with a third party located in another country. In selective sourcing, a mix of third parties and an internal IS department undertake various aspects of the IS function.

IS structure is the organisation and governance of the IS function. There are three main IS structure types: (1) centralised, (2) decentralised, and (3) shared. In the

centralised arrangement, IS decision-making rights are vested in a corporate or central unit. Centralisation delivers standardisation, economies of scale and integrated management of outsourcing arrangements. On the other hand, such rights belong to a business unit or department in the decentralised arrangement. Decentralisation enables better responsiveness to insourcing arrangements and is well suited to a prospector business strategy. In the shared IS structure, decision-making rights are distributed among a central unit and a business unit. A shared structure combines the advantages of the centralised and decentralised structures to give the firm strategic control and synergy. The shared arrangement is particularly helpful to organisations pursuing a prospector strategy.

### **3.4. The Practice Perspective on IS Strategy**

Strategy research, in general, has placed much emphasis on macro level organisational and market phenomena at the expense of human agency and interactions of practitioners (Johnson, Melin and Whittington, 2003; Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl, 2007). There have been recent calls for a practice perspective as a means to explore actual micro-level practices of IS strategizing (Peppard, Galliers and Thorogood, 2014; Whittington, 2014). As a result, the strategy-as-practice view of strategy research has been gaining much attention (Arvidsson, Holmström and Lyytinen, 2014; Peppard, Galliers and Thorogood, 2014; Whittington, 2014).

The practice view posits that various human actions shape activities in ways that affect strategic outcomes. Thus, strategizing is the doing of strategy – the actions members of an organisation take, while practice comprises the situated actions of individuals (micro) and the various socially defined practices (macro) that the individuals draw on in these measures (Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl, 2007). Also, micro phenomena need to be seen in the broader social and institutional context in which they occur.

The practice perspective advocates a broader conceptualisation of strategy away from the narrow view of a deliberate top-down process focused on top management and

the separation of strategy formulation from implementation. It notes that middle and lower level employees are important strategic actors that shape strategy through social, interpretive, linguistic, and personal knowledge (Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl, 2007). Although middle and lower managers may not have a formal role in strategy development, and their actions and influence may be unplanned, they may be a primary source of competitive advantage. Following Karpovsky and Galliers (2015), this study defines strategic practices as any actions that organisations carry out in the process of finding and executing IS that might support business requirements.

### **3.5. Defining Strategic Alignment**

Strategic alignment emerged primarily in the 1980s from strategic information systems planning and long-range IT planning (Chan and Reich, 2007b). However, the work of the MIT90s project (Scott-Morton, 1990) had a significant impact on the development of the construct in the IS domain (Coltman *et al.*, 2015). It culminated in a seminal paper by Henderson and Venkatraman (1993), which brought more attention to the topic (Ciborra, 1997; Coltman *et al.*, 2015). In that article, Henderson and Venkatraman (1993) argue that the inability of organisations to gain value from IS investment was due to the lack of alignment between business and IS strategies. Since then, strategic alignment has developed into an important theme in IS research and a key concern among business and IS executives (Brancheau, Janz and Wetherbe, 1996; Palvia, Palvia and Whitworth, 2002; Luftman and Ben-Zvi, 2010; Luftman *et al.*, 2013; Kappelman *et al.*, 2014).

Strategic alignment has been characterised by the words 'fit' (Henderson and Venkatraman, 1993), 'harmony' (Luftman, 2000), and 'linkage' (Reich and Benbasat, 1996) among other terms. Alignment has also been defined in numerous ways in the literature. In Henderson and Venkatraman's view, for example, it is the degree of fit between business strategy, IS strategy, organisational infrastructure and processes, and IS infrastructure and processes. Reich and Benbasat define the concept as:

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“The degree to which the IT mission, objectives, and plans support and are supported by the business mission, objectives, and plans.”(Reich and Benbasat, 1996, p. 3).

This definition seems to assume that concepts such as mission, objectives, and plans, exist and can be operationally compared based on the degree of support (Queiroz *et al.*, 2012). Likewise, Luftman describes alignment as:

“Applying IT in an appropriate and timely way in harmony with business strategies, goals and needs.”(Luftman, 2000, p. 3)

The literature points to an evolution of how the strategic alignment construct has been conceptualised. Regarding the development of the construct over time, Chan and Reich note:

“In early studies, this often meant linking the business plan and the IT plan. Another perspective involved ensuring congruence between the business strategy and the IT strategy. Still, another has required examining the fit between business needs and information systems priorities. These conceptualisations have enlarged over time, and now research recognises many points of alignment between business and IT” (Chan and Reich, 2007b, p. 297).

Despite the different labels and definitions, at the basic level, strategic alignment involves the use of IS to support business strategy in organisations. A general thread in the literature is that it promotes the strategic use of IS and maximises returns on IS investments and that successful strategic alignment results in better organisational performance and competitive advantage. It also provides direction and flexibility for organisations to react to new opportunities (Chan and Reich, 2007b; Karpovsky and Galliers, 2015).

There are three fundamental views of strategic alignment in the literature (Hirschheim and Sabherwal, 2001). First, organisations need to align their business strategy with IS strategy to gain competitive advantage and derive value from IS investments (Henderson and Venkatraman, 1993). Second, alignment is a cooperative process in which business strategy influences IS strategy and vice versa. Finally, it is a dynamic and continuous process and not an event (Henderson and Venkatraman, 1993;

Burn, 1997). Strategic alignment consists of continuing efforts to realise and sustain co-dependent relationships between business and IS (Hirschheim and Sabherwal, 2001). Whereas most authors contend that it is a dynamic process (Henderson and Venkatraman, 1993; Karpovsky and Galliers, 2015), Burn (1997) see it as an outcome. In this research, strategic alignment is conceptualised as a dynamic process of balancing different strategies.

## **3.6. Dimensions of Strategic Alignment**

Some aspects of strategic alignment are discernible in the IS literature: (1) strategic/intellectual (2) social (3) structural, and (4) cultural. However, while these dimensions have been used to capture various aspects of strategic alignment, they sometimes overlap (Schlosser, Wagner and Coltman, 2012).

### **3.6.1. The Strategic/Intellectual Dimension**

The strategic or intellectual dimension is a state in which IT and business objectives are consistent and valid (Schlosser, Wagner and Coltman, 2012). This dimension has two aspects: internal consistency and external validity. While internal consistency recommends that IS goals and strategies reflect business objectives and plans, external validity requires IS and business plans to be comprehensive and consistent with the external business and IS contexts.

### **3.6.2. The Social Dimension**

The social dimension concerns the level of shared understanding of and commitment to the business and IT mission, objectives and plans by members of an organisational unit (Schlosser, Wagner and Coltman, 2012). This dimension deals with interactions among actors involved with strategy development and execution within the organisation. Weak social alignment may result in the wrong execution of theoretically sound organisational plans and strategies by organisational actors. The social dimension

could be short-term, involving the comprehension of current strategies and plans or long-term, dealing with a shared organisational vision for the future. Both the intellectual and social dimensions are necessary to the successful exploitation of IS to support business strategies (Chan and Reich, 2007b).

### **3.6.3. The Structural Dimension**

Structural alignment is the degree of fit between organisational structures and IS governance. Specifically, it deals with organisational structure and the placement of IS decision-making rights and reporting relationships. Structural alignment also involves the centralisation or devolution of IS services and infrastructure, and the deployment of IS expertise (Chan, 2002). Structural fit is an essential requirement for business and IS structures to support the attainment of organisational goals (Chan and Reich, 2007b; Banker *et al.*, 2011). Banker *et al.* (2011) found that organisational structure plays a significant role in reaching strategic alignment.

### **3.6.4. The Cultural Dimension**

The cultural dimension highlights the need for the prevailing culture to support strategic alignment. Chan and Reich (2007b) point out that alignment between IS planning and the fundamentals of culture is necessary to safeguard the success of communications and business planning approaches of organisations. Cultural fit between IS and business is a requirement for success in strategic IS planning. Also, IS planning has to be aligned with cultural elements related to business planning as well as the communication styles of top management to improve success.

Researchers have focused on examining different dimensions of alignment. For example, Wu, Straub and Liang (2015) investigated the intellectual dimension of alignment, while Wagner, Beimborn and Weitzel (2014) and Chan (2002) studied the social dimension and structural dimensions, respectively. In contrast, Ravishankar, Pan

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and Leidner (2011) examined the cultural dimension. Some researchers have studied the process of alignment, while others have reviewed the contents of strategies.

Various typologies and theories have been applied to study strategic alignment. For example, Wagner, Beimborn and Weitzel (2014) applied social capital theory, while Peppard and Campbell (2014) adopted the co-evolutionary perspective as a lens for theorising the dynamic, complex and interdependent relationships between business and IS strategies, in an attempt to address what they perceive as the tendency in the literature to reduce complexity by investigating simple cause-and-effect relationships.

In a recent study, Cram *et al.* (2016) suggested control alignment as a new dimension. They note:

“We suggest that a possible explanation for declining IS process performance is a misalignment among four fundamental dimensions of control: the control environment (e.g., the structural strategic and cultural factors that influence a choice of control), control mechanisms (e.g., the core characteristics of policy or procedure), socio-emotional behaviours (e.g. the response that employees have to control mechanisms), and control execution (e.g., the effectiveness and subsequent adjustments that employees make to controls over time”

They maintain that any conflict between the four dimensions could cause frustration, unnecessary bureaucracy and the absence of agility (Cram *et al.*, 2016).

### **3.7. Levels of Alignment**

Apart from the dimensions of alignment, three alignment levels are recognisable in the literature: strategic, operational and tactical. For an organisation’s business and IS to work in partnership, Tarafdar and Qrunfleh (2009) argue for alignment at both the planning and execution levels. Strategic or planning level alignment guarantees that business and IS plans are synchronised. Conversely, operational or tactical level alignment is necessary to ensure the successful implementation, maintenance, and use of IS to deliver business benefits. Also, case studies have found that for alignment to be

effective, it should involve all levels of the organisation (Campbell, Kay and Avison, 2005). There are both internal and external aspects of strategic alignment. Internally, organisations should strive for alignment between their IS strategy, infrastructure and business strategy. Externally, alignment involves the alignment of strategies with those of the industry and technology forces (Chan and Reich, 2007b).

### **3.8. Antecedents of Strategic Alignment**

There has been a theme in the literature focusing on factors and practices that influence the attainment of strategic alignment in organisations. It has been established that strategic alignment is affected by a broad range of factors, branded antecedents, enablers and inhibitors, critical factors, and success factors amongst other terms. For example, Luftman, Papp and Brier (1999), in the analysis of data from business and IS executives from over 500 companies, found that certain practices support the achievement of alignment while others are barriers. They identified some enablers of alignment: senior executive support for IS, the involvement of the IS function in strategy development, an understanding of the business by the IS function, partnership between business and IS, the prioritisation of IS projects and leadership from the IS function. They also found that lack of strong support from senior management, a poor working relationship between the IS and business functions, low prioritisation, weak leadership, the lack of trust and effective communication, and the lack of understanding of the business environment are all factors that inhibit strategic alignment.

Similarly, Reich and Benbasat (2000), in an investigation of the social dimension of alignment, examined the relative importance of shared domain knowledge between business and IS executives, prior IS implementation success, communication between business and IS executives, and connections between business and IS planning processes. Their findings confirm that all four factors had an influence on short-term alignment. However, shared domain knowledge also had an impact on long-term alignment. They also established that the existence of clear business plans had a bearing

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on both short and long-term alignment, while informal organisation structures played a far larger role than expected in improving IS performance (Chan, 2002).

In a study of critical success factors for strategic alignment among IS managers, Teo and Ang (1999) identified twelve key success factors. The commitment of top management to the strategic use of IS, the knowledge of IS managers about business, and confidence of executives in the IS department constituted the most important critical success factors. In a similar study of middle and junior managers in four organisations, Tarafdar and Qrunfleh (2009) recognised three antecedents of alignment at the strategic level: linking business and strategic planning processes, exploiting IS-based strategic opportunities, and the chief information officer (CIO) contributing to strategic business planning. They also unearthed five mechanisms of tactical alignment: project level alignment, aligning decision-making processes of IS with other functions, striking a balance between firm-wide technology standardisation with process specific customisation, constant formal and informal business and IS communication, and deploying people with the right IS skills.

Evidence from the literature further suggests that organisational size is an antecedent of alignment. Larger organisations are better at alignment than their smaller counterparts (Chan et al., 2006). Small firms have a tendency to make functional use of IS and have simple, centralised organisational structures that are easy to coordinate. In contrast, large organisations are inclined to be more complex and require mechanisms that facilitate strategic alignment. In a study of the antecedents and outcomes of strategic alignment, Chan, Sabherwal, and Thatcher (2006) established that planning comprehensiveness improved strategic alignment through better-shared domain knowledge. Banker *et al.* (2011) examined the CIO reporting structure to achieving strategic alignment and concluded that organisations that align their CIO reporting structure with their strategic positioning have superior future performance. Johnson and Lederer (2010) also found that common understanding between the chief executive officer (CEO) and CIO facilitates strategic alignment.

There is some evidence that when IS and business executives understand each other's domains, a shared vision and understanding develops that enables the alignment of business and IS strategies (Luftman, Papp and Brier, 1999; Reich and Benbasat, 2000). Moreover, planning sophistication has a positive association with alignment. The need for a well-articulated vision through a clearly defined planning process involving employees from different levels of the organisation has also been found to be essential for reaching alignment (Luftman, Papp and Brier, 1999). A good organisational track record of IS success also contributes positively to alignment. Other studies have found that past failures in IS negatively affect the perceptions of IS managers and users about technology (Luftman, Papp and Brier, 1999; Reich and Benbasat, 2000; Chan, Sabherwal and Thatcher, 2006).

### **3.9. Strategic Alignment Frameworks**

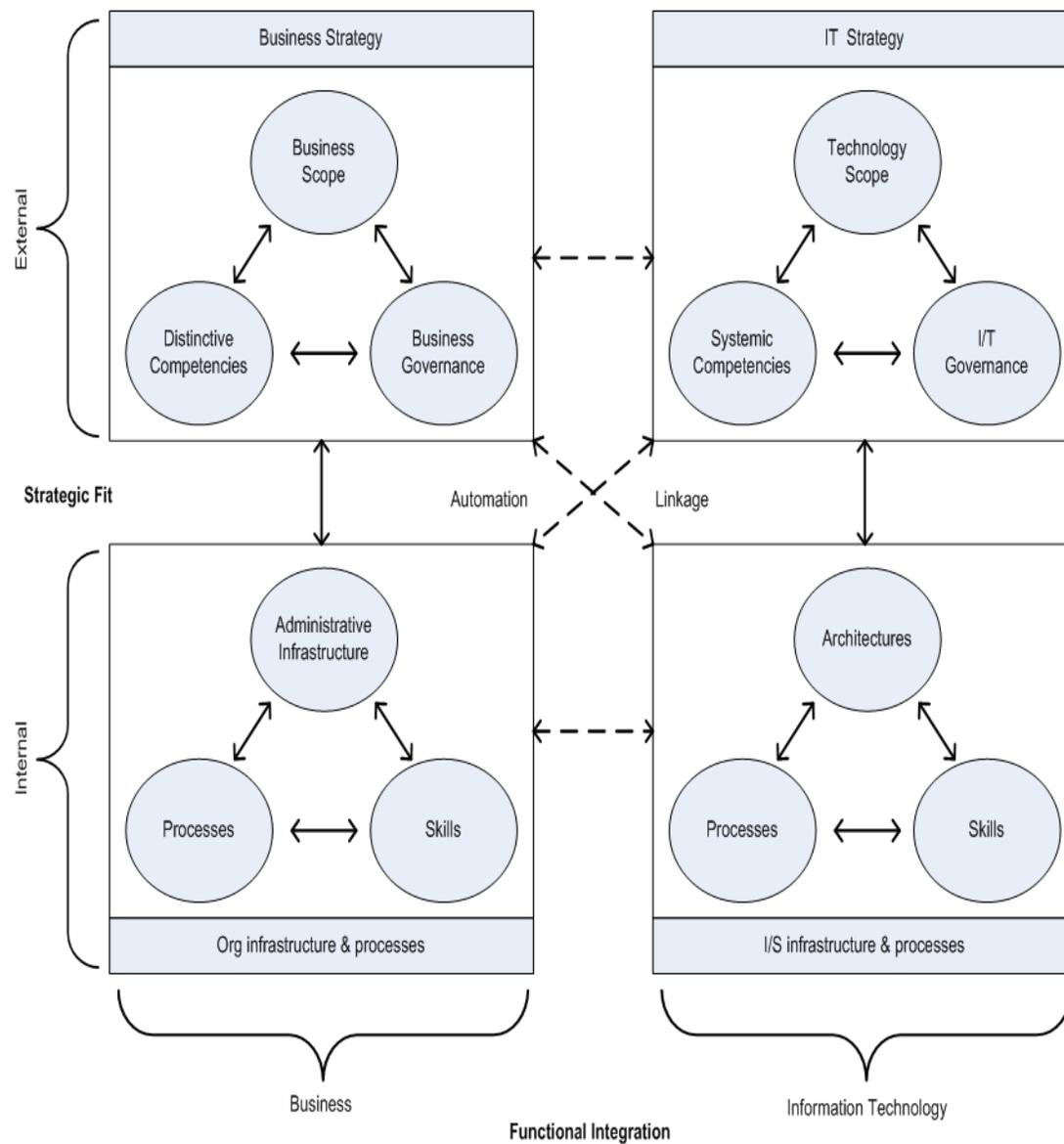
Scholars have proposed several strategic alignment frameworks (Henderson and Venkatraman, 1993; Burn, 1997; Luftman, 2000; Walsh, Renaud and Kalika, 2013). However, this section considers the strategic alignment model (SAM) and strategic alignment maturity model (SAMM), the most widely cited strategic alignment frameworks in the literature. Apart from being the most widely cited, the SAM is the foundation on which most of the other strategic alignment frameworks are built.

#### **3.9.1. The Strategic Alignment Model**

SAM (Henderson and Venkatraman, 1993) is a framework that enables managers to leverage IS to achieve a competitive advantage. SAM is comprehensive as it deals with all the relevant elements that potentially affect IS use for delivering a competitive advantage and business value (Luftman, 2003). The model (depicted in Figure 3-1) has twelve components within four domains of choice: (1) business strategy, and (2) IT strategy (strategy domain), (3) organisational infrastructure and processes, and (4) IT infrastructure and processes (infrastructure domain).

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Business strategy is defined with respect to business scope, which involves issues that influence the business environment (e.g. competitors, suppliers, products). Distinctive competencies are the unique capabilities and core competencies of the firm, while business governance refers to how the organisation is managed. Organisational infrastructure and processes comprise organisational structure, business processes, and human resource skills (the hiring, training, and motivation of employees). IT strategy encompasses IT scope, which refers to the range of IS that the organisation deploys to support its business strategy, systemic competencies, as well as aspects of IT strategy capabilities that support business strategies, and IT governance. This also represents the distribution of IT decision making authority. IS infrastructure and processes include IS architecture – involving applications, software, hardware, and network choices, policies, and priorities), IS processes – which facilitate the management and maintenance of IT infrastructure, and IS skills, which concerns the recruitment and training of competent IS staff.



**Figure 3-1 Strategic Alignment Model (Henderson and Venkatraman, 1993)**

As depicted in Figure 3-1, the model is founded on two building blocks of strategic fit and functional integration. Strategic fit consists of strategies to address both the internal and external domains. The external domain is the business environment in which the organisation operates, while the internal deals with issues about administrative structure, business processes, as well as human resources. The model supports the alignment of

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the outer and inner IT domains to derive benefits from IT investments. Furthermore, it emphasises the need to integrate business and IS domains because business and IS choices affect each other. For an organisation to achieve maximum performance, there needs to be fit between the external and internal domains. Henderson and Venkatraman (1993) argue for IT strategy to be articulated regarding the organisation's position in the IT marketplace (external domain) and how IT infrastructure should be configured and managed. Strategic alignment is assessed by the degree to which all the components of the model are in harmony.

Henderson and Venkatraman (1993) further articulated four dominant strategic alignment perspectives: strategy execution, technology potential, competitive potential, and service level. Organisations may select the perspective that suits their business conditions and organisational goals. The strategy implementation perspective views business strategy as the driver of organisation design and IS infrastructure preferences. Under this point of view, top management develops a strategy, while IS management implements it. The technology potential perspective also has a business strategy as the primary driver. However, senior management provides the technology vision that determines the required IS strategy that will support the chosen business strategy. With this perspective, the IS manager plays the role of a technology architect. The competitive potential perspective emphasises the exploitation of emerging IS capabilities to support the development of new products and services, to influence key aspects of strategy, and to develop new forms of relationships. Finally, the service level alignment perspective focuses on the development of a world class IS organisation where business strategy takes an indirect role. From that point of view, top management takes the role of a prioritizer who facilitates effective resource allocation within the organisation and in the external IS marketplace.

The main drawback of SAM is that it assumes a top-down approach to strategy formulation and implementation and does not take into consideration the contribution of employees at the bottom and their day to day activities (Renaud, Walsh and Kalika, 2016). Based on the strategy as a practice perspective and actor network theory, Renaud, Walsh

and Kalika (2016) propose a translated strategic alignment model (TSAM) as an extension to the SAM. It aims to explain how strategic alignment can be achieved in practice within organisations and how managers could optimise complex processes to help improve performance.

### 3.9.2. The Strategic Alignment Maturity Model

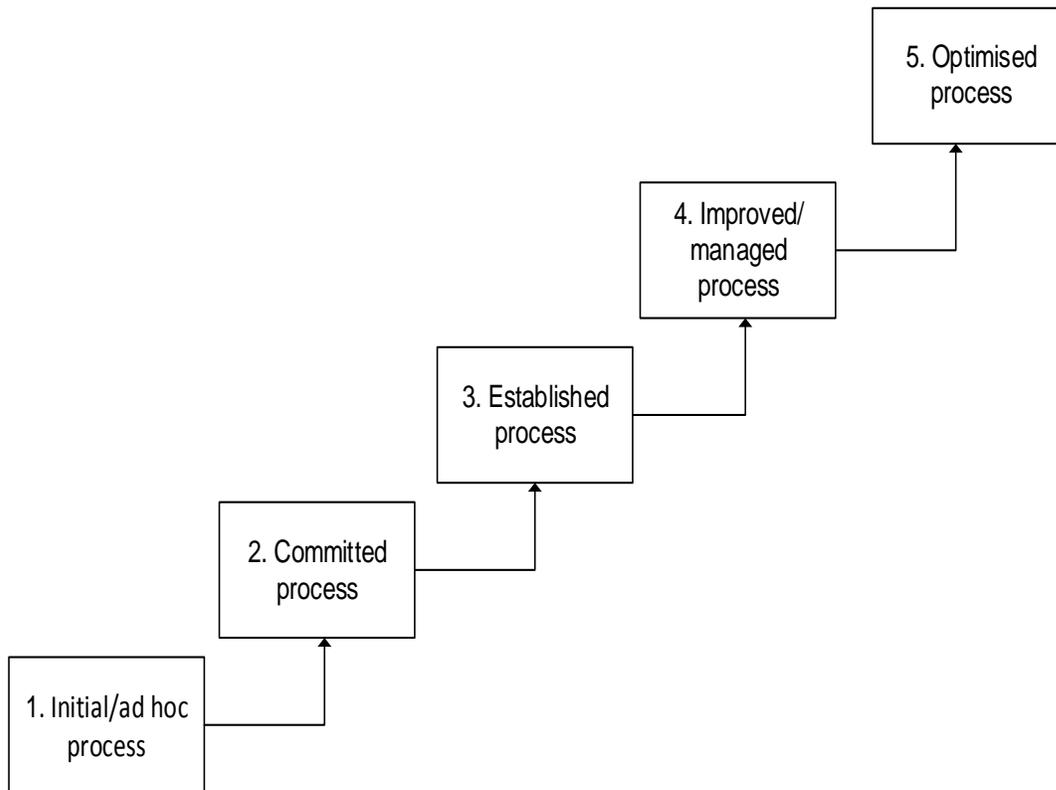
Rooted in the strategic alignment model (Henderson and Venkatraman, 1993) and research on the enablers and inhibitors of strategic alignment (Luftman, Papp and Brier, 1999), SAMM is a framework for assessing strategic alignment between the business and IS functions. The model was validated through research conducted on 50 Global 2000 companies (Luftman, 2000). The SAMM has six strategic alignment maturity assessment categories (see Table 3-1) and ranks organisations in one of five levels of strategic alignment maturity (see Figure 3-2).

**Table 3-1 Strategic Alignment Maturity Categories (Luftman, 2000)**

Maturity category	Description
Communications maturity	Emphasizes clear and common language between business and IS
Competency/value measurement maturity	Involves measuring the contribution of IS to the achievement of business goals using metrics
Governance maturity	The extent to which the power to make decisions on IS is defined and shared among management
Partnership maturity	The relationship between business and IS and perceptions of how each regards the contribution of the other
Technology scope Maturity	The impact of new IS on existing business processes
Skills maturity	Minimizing the changes that come with the deployment of new IS

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As depicted in Figure 3-2, *initial/Ad hoc Process* is the lowest level of strategic alignment maturity, which implies that the business and IS functions are not in alignment. A *Committed Process* demonstrates a commitment to attaining strategic alignment and an acknowledgement of IS as a valuable asset. An *Established Focused Process* indicates some degree of strategic alignment, with increased IS investments to gain competitive advantage. An *Improved/Managed Process* shows that management regards IS as an enabler and has leveraged it to create value. At this level, IS are deployed across the organisation to enhance business processes. An *Optimised Process* is the highest degree of strategic alignment maturity, where there is evidence of an advanced understanding of strategic alignment and business and strategic IS planning are integrated.



**Figure 3-2 Strategic Alignment Maturity Levels (Luftman, 2000)**

Various researchers have applied the SAMM model to assess strategic alignment maturity of various organisations. For example, Chen (2010) evaluated the strategic alignment maturity of Chinese companies, while Adaba, Rusu and El-Mekawy (2010) examined the strategic alignment maturity of a public sector organisation in Ghana using the SAMM.

### **3.10. Strategic Alignment Outcomes**

The relationship between IS investments and organisational outcomes has been the subject of a long-standing debate. Despite growing expenditure on IS, it has been

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challenging to establish the impact of such investments on organisational performance (Mahmood and Mann, 2000). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, studies produced inconclusive results, ranging from negligible or negative (Strassmann, 1990; Loveman, 1993) to significant benefits (Bharadwaj, 2000; Brynjolfsson and Hitt, 1996, 2000; Rai, Patnayakuni, and Patnayakuni, 1997). The 'productivity paradox' has come to represent the lack of value in the face of increased IS spending. Brynjolfsson (1993) attributed the productivity paradox to mismeasurements of outputs and inputs, lags in learning and adjustment, redistribution and dissipation of profits, and mismanagement of IS. Similarly, Devaraj and Kohli (2003) contend that actual usage of technology drives IS business value, not IS investments. They suggest that the omission of the real use variables may be the missing link in studies of IS value.

Subsequent empirical studies have adopted varied conceptual, and diagnostic approaches and various research methodologies at multiple levels of analysis (Melville, Kraemer and Gurbaxani, 2004). While some studies still question the productivity benefits of IT investments (Hajli, Sims and Ibragimov, 2015), there is evidence that IS investments contribute to improvements in organisational performance (Bharadwaj, 2000; Brynjolfsson and Hitt, 1996; Devaraj and Kohli, 2003; Kohli and Grover, 2008; Melville et al., 2004).

In a review of evidence on the associations between IS and higher productivity and organisational transformation, Brynjolfsson and Hitt (1996, 2000), found that IS may facilitate complementary organisational investments in such areas as business processes and work practices. These result in growth in productivity through cost reductions that allow firms to enhance the quality of output, introduce new products or develop the intangible features of current products such as convenience, timeliness, quality, and variety. They further argue that the economic contributions of IS might have been underestimated because traditional methods of measurement do not adequately capture them. Similarly, Bharadwaj (2000) reported that organisations with high IS competency tend to outperform a control sample of firms on a range of profit and cost-related performance measures. Empirical analysis of archival data on more than 400 global

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companies by Mithas *et al.*(2012), confirmed the positive impact of IS on profitability, much more than the contributions made by advertising, and research and development (R&D).

However, IS creates business value in synergy with other organisational variables such as management, business processes, knowledge assets, culture, strategies, and policies. The value of IS in organisations manifests itself in diverse ways, including, process improvements, profitability, and innovation. The degree of organisational performance improvements and value created by IS depends on factors like strategic alignment, information sharing actual use of IS, management practices, organisational structure and the competitive and macro environment (Melville, Kraemer and Gurbaxani, 2004; Kohli and Grover, 2008).

Much of the extant literature suggests that strategic alignment is critical to organisational performance. For example, Henderson and Venkatraman (1993) contend that the inability of organisations to gain value from IS outcome is mainly due to the lack of alignment between business and IS strategies. Since then various studies have concluded that strategic alignment has positive organisational outcomes (Henderson and Venkatraman, 1993; Luftman, 2003; Bergeron, Raymond and Rivard, 2004; Campbell, Kay and Avison, 2005; Chan and Reich, 2007b). More recent studies have also corroborated the argument that strategic alignment improves organisational performance (Tallon and Pinsonneault, 2011; Yayla and Hu, 2012; Gerow, Thatcher and Grover, 2014; Wagner, Beimborn and Weitzel, 2014; Wu, Straub and Liang, 2015; Gerow, Grover and Thatcher, 2016).

In an empirical study, Tallon and Pinsonneault (2011) uncovered an active and significant link between strategic alignment and organisational agility, which in turn, improves organisational performance. They concluded that agility moderates the effect of alignment of organisational performance and that in markets that are volatile, agility has a greater impact on organisational performance. Raymond and Croteau (2009) also found that strategic alignment produced important performance outcomes in medium-sized Canadian enterprises. Similarly, Johnson and Lederer (2010) show that strategic

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alignment improved the contribution of the IS to business performance. Drawing on the resource-based view to analyse data from Taiwanese companies, Wu, Straub and Liang (2015) uncovered a significant positive association between IS governance mechanisms and strategic alignment, and also between strategic alignment and organisational performance. Also, using data from 136 firms, Wagner, Beimborn and Weitzel (2014) examined alignment at the operational level using social capital theory. They concluded that operational level alignment is as important as the strategic level alignment for IS service quality, and recommended that managers focus on operational aspects of alignment by fostering knowledge, trust, and respect.

Notwithstanding the evidence that alignment can improve the business value of IS, some authors argue that close-fitting alignment strategies may hinder strategic flexibility and restrict an organisation's ability to react to changes in increasingly unpredictable environments, otherwise called the 'alignment paradox' (Tallon and Kraemer, 2003). The paradox indicates that strategic alignment can result in increased returns from IS, but beyond a certain point, increases in strategic alignment appear to result in lower yields.

### **3.11. National Culture, IS Management and Strategy**

As discussed in Chapter 2, culture is a long-standing concept in IS research. An examination of the literature reveals relatively few studies that have explicitly considered the link between national culture and strategic alignment. For example, Silvius (2008) and Silvius, De Haes and Van Grembergen (2009) conceptually reviewed the relationship between national culture and strategic alignment using Hofstede's national culture dimensions. They subsequently conducted a small-scale empirical study to explore the relationship by comparing strategic alignment maturity scores of Belgium and Dutch financial institutions. They found a potential effect of national culture on governance and skills maturity.

However, other studies have explored aspects of national culture and how they affect issues related to IS management and strategy. While studies under this theme do

not directly investigate strategic alignment, they may have implications. The literature suggests that national culture impacts strategy and strategic planning (Schneider and De Meyer, 1991; Ayoun and Moreo, 2008), decision making approaches (Martinsons and Westwood, 1997; Khatri, 2009; Dimitratos *et al.*, 2011), communications (Richardson and Smith, 2007; Khatri, 2009), management practices (Bhaskaran and Sukumaran, 2007), team participation (Sagie and Aycan, 2003), and organisational structure and management style (Khatri, 2009), among others.

Bhaskaran and Sukumaran (2007) found significant cultural differences across organisations owned and managed by individuals from one nationality and important cultural similarities across organisations owned and operated by people of different nationalities. They concluded that legal, economic and regulatory context influence management practices more profoundly than national culture. Dimitratos *et al.* (2011) explored how national culture values affected the strategic decision-making processes of 528 small and medium-sized international organisations based in the USA, the UK, and Greece. They concluded that there is a relationship between hierarchical decentralisation and the power distance dimension of national culture, lateral communication and individualism, and formalisation and uncertainty avoidance.

### **3.12. The Role of the Literature in this Study**

The role of prior literature is a controversial subject in grounded theory research. Classic grounded theory advises against any review of the literature before data collection and analysis to ensure that the new theory is grounded in the data and devoid of bias and influences from previous knowledge (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992). For example, Glaser admonishes grounded theory researchers to avoid reviewing the literature too early to prevent preconceptions pending the development of a grounded theory (Glaser, 1992). A review of the literature may also contaminate the researcher's perspective and compromise their ability to inductively develop concepts and categories (Glaser and Holton, 2004; Suddaby, 2006; Matavire and Brown, 2013). However,

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McGhee, Marland and Atkinson (2007) argue that a review of the literature provides a context and justification for the study and demonstrates the suitability or otherwise of the grounded theory approach for the particular research project. Also, institutional requirements make it imperative to conduct a review of the literature before fieldwork. Reviewing the literature early in the study may stimulate analytical sensitivity, serve as a secondary source of data and direct theoretical sampling (Corbin and Strauss, 2014).

On a practical level, however, reviewing the literature is essential to identifying gaps in knowledge that need attention and inform the selection of the most suitable methodological approach. The nature of PhD research requires the researcher to identify a research problem and develop a research proposal, which usually requires some degree of knowledge of the literature. Moreover, PhD students are expected to keep up to date with the literature and attend academic conferences, making it rather difficult to avoid the literature totally. This research subscribed to Corbin and Strauss (2014) view on reviewing the literature in grounded theory studies, which acknowledges that researchers have significant background knowledge of the professional and disciplinary literature.

This research started when a search through an annotated bibliography on strategic alignment (Chan and Reich, 2007a) revealed that relatively little work had been done on how national culture affects strategic alignment, particularly, within multinational organisations operating across cultures. An extensive literature search found mostly anecdotal accounts on the subject. The researcher had a good knowledge of the literature before fieldwork. For example, during the course of this research project, some papers on strategic alignment were published at academic conferences (Adaba and Wilson, 2012, 2013, Adaba, Wilson and Sims, 2014, 2015) (see Appendix A). However, conscious efforts were made to hold preconceptions at bay as much as possible to avoid influencing the theory building process.

After the open coding, emerging concepts and categories were compared with the current national culture and strategic alignment literature. Integrating the emerging categories with the extant literature helped to strengthen the developing theory. The

literature further contributed to clarifying the relationships between the categories. Moreover, the literature facilitated the placement of the findings in the broader context of prior research. Discussing the conflicting literature also provided an opportunity for creativity, which Eisenhardt (1989) argues might result in deeper insights into the new theory.

The use of the literature also supported the theory building process that would have otherwise taken much longer. For example, Nunes and Al-Mamari (2008) have argued that as a result of the time-consuming nature of the inductive research, a theory could be used to scaffold the inductive process to reach saturation sooner. Constant comparison with related and conflicting literature improved the definition of constructs. The developing theory was compared to frameworks of strategic alignment and national culture to foster theoretical integration (Urquhart, Lehmann and Myers, 2010).

### **3.13. Reflections on the Strategic Alignment Literature**

This section reflects on the strategic alignment literature in two stages. First, it provides an evaluation of the concept of strategic alignment and challenges of conducting research on the construct. Second, it identifies and discusses the gaps in the extant literature.

#### **3.13.1. The Strategic Alignment Construct – A Critique**

While strategic alignment has gained considerable attention in the last three decades, there have been criticisms of the construct. There is broad agreement in the extant literature on the importance of strategic alignment. However, there is less agreement on the exact definition of strategic alignment and how organisations might attain it in practice. The main weakness of many of the definitions is that they are too broad and vague (Maes *et al.*, 2000; Walsh, Kefi and Baskerville, 2010). Probably as a result of the vague definitions, the construct has been interpreted in different and sometimes contradictory ways (Chan and Reich, 2007b; Queiroz *et al.*, 2012). However, the alignment

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debate is not limited to definitions; there are also differences on whether it is a process or an outcome. For example, Broadbent and Weill (1993) view strategic alignment as a process, while Baker *et al.* (2011) see it as an outcome. Diverse and inconsistent definitions, conceptualisations, and operationalisation of strategic alignment pose problems in IS research and practice (Maes *et al.*, 2000). Moreover, there have been calls for the refinement of the concept as well as its measurement to clarify the larger role of strategic alignment in creating business value for organisations (Ciborra, 1997; Baker *et al.*, 2011).

The construct has also been branded as too theoretical, with little practical relevance (Ciborra, 1997; Maes *et al.*, 2000). Despite a plethora of definitions, few studies have produced useful mechanisms to help practitioners achieve strategic alignment (Avison *et al.*, 2004; Bergeron, Raymond and Rivard, 2004). While there is evidence that strategic alignment improves organisational performance and business value, there is less clarity regarding how to attain and sustain it through time. Moreover, there are limitations to reaching strategic alignment from the practitioner's point of view. For example, little understanding of corporate strategy on the part of IS managers and limited grasp and appreciation of IS by organisational leaders continue to be a challenge to achieving strategic alignment (Chan and Reich, 2007b). Similarly, various strategic alignment frameworks assume the existence of a formal business strategy. However, in reality, many firms lack formal strategies or in some cases, may have no strategies at all (Sims, Powell and Vidgen, 2015b). Besides this, ambiguities and contradictions between existing organisational strategies on the one hand, and managerial actions on the other contribute to difficulties with attaining alignment.

Many organisations have limited awareness of the strategic importance of IS for achieving improved performance. Consequently, most managers concentrate on business and relatively neglect IS, while others conclude that strategic alignment is impossible to attain as a result of the chaotic and unpredictable nature of the world of business in the era of globalisation, which typically necessitates frequent changes to strategy to reflect changing conditions (Chan and Reich, 2007b). Karpovsky and Galliers (2015) make a

similar point, stressing that strategic alignment might not be attainable where business strategy is unclear.

Ciborra (1997) contends that while strategic alignment is conceptually correct, its implementation in the real world has been problematic. In some organisations, strategy emerges implicitly through 'tinkering' rather than being explicitly developed from the outset. He explains that strategy making is fluid and constantly changing to cope with chaotic and uncertain environments. In such circumstances, strategy making might not follow existing conceptual models. He also argues that successful strategic alignment seems to show that tinkering, not conscious efforts, is the source of strategic alignment (Ciborra, 1994). Strategic plans are continuously adjusted and improvised to meet contingencies (Ciborra, 1996). As a result, attaining strategic alignment in practice has been a challenge for many organisations.

### **3.13.2. Gaps in Knowledge**

The strategic alignment literature is broad and spans over three decades; a closer look reveals some gaps in knowledge. As stated in Chapter 1, national culture is a well-established framework for analysis in IS. Prior research has not given adequate attention to the relationship between strategic alignment and national culture. Many studies have examined the relationship between strategic alignment and organisational culture. However, more research is needed to better understand the relationship between strategic alignment and national culture. It is essential to address this gap as it will help to identify culturally specific antecedents, enablers, and inhibitors of alignment (Walsh, Kefi and Baskerville, 2010). Furthermore, there is the need for a theory that conceptualises the relationship between strategic alignment and national culture.

The second gap in the strategic alignment literature concerns the relative absence of qualitative and interpretive studies. Positivist research dominates the current literature. There is also a relative lack of theory building in recent publications (Kummer and Schmiedel, 2016). Third, there is a comparative lack of studies that offer practical steps to

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help practitioners achieve strategic alignment. Research could examine strategic alignment from a practice perspective, which takes the day to day complex realities of strategic alignment in organisations into consideration. Such a perspective is consistent with the practice turn in strategy research (Arvidsson, Holmström and Lyytinen, 2014; Peppard, Galliers and Thorogood, 2014; Whittington, 2014). Also, most of the literature focuses on alignment at the strategic level. Accordingly, there is the need for more studies on operational and tactical level alignment.

Finally, the existing strategic alignment literature suggests a Western bias. Studies from Western contexts dominate the strategic alignment literature with a relative dearth of studies from non-Western contexts. There is, therefore, the need for strategic alignment studies that include data from other parts of the world. Clearly, Africa, for example, has cultures that are distinct from the Western countries. Therefore, data from that context could facilitate cross-cultural comparison.

### **3.14. Summary**

A large body of literature on strategic alignment has accumulated for over three decades in IS and allied disciplines, such as management. This chapter presented a selected review of the literature, highlighting relevant themes to provide the backdrop for the current research. The chapter traces developments in IS strategizing from the quest for operational efficiency in the early days of commercial computing to the strategic use of IS for competitive advantage presently. The review suggests that strategic alignment is an enduring topic because of its significance to gaining value from organisational investments in IS. Since IS investments constitute a significant proportion of organisational budgets, attaining strategic alignment is the key issue for many managers. This chapter discussed various definitions and dimensions of strategic alignment: intellectual, social, structural and cultural. It also reviewed the antecedents of strategic alignment in the literature. The links between strategic alignment and organisational outcomes are also discussed. While most studies found that strategic alignment contributes to positive organisational

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outcomes, a few others concluded that it does not contribute to business value. The main criticism of the construct in the literature is that it is too theoretical and often does not reflect organisational realities. The next chapter discusses research methods in IS as a prelude to the description of the study design.

## **Chapter 4.**

# **Research Methodologies in IS**

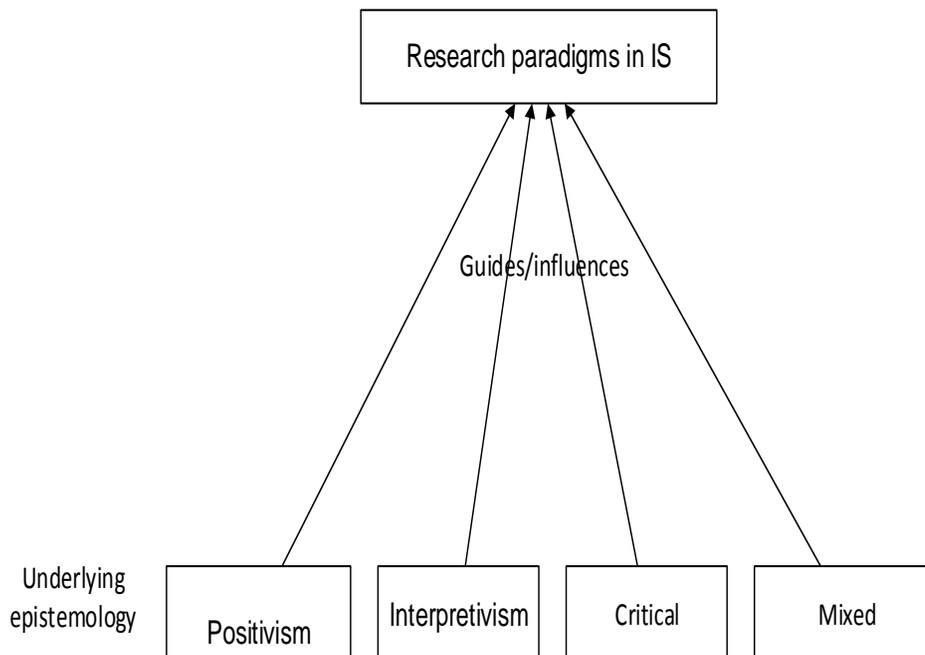
### **4.1. Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to consider the range of research approaches in IS and their relative strengths and weaknesses. This is accomplished by discussing the main philosophical perspectives, and a selected range of alternative IS research methods for exploring the link between national culture and strategic alignment. A justification is then offered for selecting grounded theory under the interpretive IS research paradigm. The chapter then highlights the canons and procedures of the grounded method, its application in IS, and concludes by offering a critique of the approach.

### **4.2. Key Philosophical Perspectives in IS Research**

Research philosophy addresses the core questions of what is knowledge and what is the best way to acquire it. The basic philosophical beliefs of a researcher shape their epistemological and ontological leanings. Whereas epistemology concerns beliefs about knowledge and how it can best be acquired, ontology concerns the nature of being. The construction of a research design requires researchers to specify their philosophical foundations. Research philosophy distinguishes two kinds of knowledge – that which is believed to be true, or ‘Doxa’, and that which is known to be true, or ‘episteme’. Therefore, the goal of scientific research is to convert that which is believed to be true into that which is known to be true (Mingers, 2015).

The discourse around IS research philosophies and methods have contended with the choice between and the relative advantages of the dominant positivist and interpretive approaches (Bryant, 2002). Following Chua (1986), Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991) identified three IS research paradigms: positivism, interpretivism and critical. In recent years, there have been calls for the use of the multi-paradigm research (Ågerfalk, 2013; Venkatesh, Brown and Bala, 2013). Figure 4-1 shows the main research paradigms in the IS discipline.



**Figure 4-1 IS Research Paradigms (adapted from Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991)**

### **4.2.1. Positivism**

Positivism originated in the natural sciences. This perspective applies the rules of formal logic and the procedures of experimental and quasi-experimental designs in IS research (Ngwenyama and Lee, 1997). Researchers that subscribe to a positivist ontology favour the methods of the natural sciences. Regarding ontology, positivist IS researchers make assumptions that an objective physical and social world independent of humans

exists and can be measured quantitatively by a neutral investigator. The epistemological foundations of positivism mostly favour the use of the hypothetico-deductive method, require formal propositions, hypotheses testing, drawing inferences, and making generalisations using quantifiable measures of variables taken from a sample of a population. The central objective of such studies is to test a theory, in an attempt to improve the predictive understanding of phenomena (Myers, 1997; Klein and Myers, 1999).

Currently, positivism is the dominant research tradition in IS (Chen and Hirschheim, 2004; Tsang, 2014). The main drawback of positivist research is the singular focus on measurable constructs, which tend to overlook important cultural and contextual factors that might shape human actions. Consequently, positivist research is unsuitable for this research because it might not adequately capture the complexities of the constructs under investigation. Furthermore, its emphasis on objectivity, independent of cognition may result in a limited understanding of socially constructed reality as perceived by people in organisations.

#### **4.2.2. Interpretivism**

The interpretive approach has been gaining increasing acceptance as an alternative to positivism. This approach asserts that the methods of the natural sciences are unsuitable to the study of social reality. Interpretive research assumes that people construct and associate their subjective and intersubjective meanings as they interact with the world around them (Kroeze, 2010). Walsham provides a helpful description of the aim interpretive research as follows:

“Interpretive research is aimed at producing an understanding of the context of the information system, and the process whereby the information system influences and is influenced by the context (Walsham, 1993, p. 4)”

Interpretive IS researchers argue that subjective, invisible and intangible elements, such as culture and social structure, are part of the real world. Consequently, they seek to

understand phenomena from actors directly involved, rather than the use of a priori constructs to objectively measure variables or make generalisations (Cavaye, 1996; Klein and Myers, 1999). This approach stresses that knowledge is socially constructed and is consequently subjective. This makes the methods of the natural sciences inappropriate for studies involving people (Braa and Vidgen, 1999).

The ontological foundations of interpretive IS research perceive the social world as constructed and reinforced through human action and interaction. As such, reality is a social construction. Because multiple realities exist, what constitutes scientific research is dependent on both time and context (Walsham, 2006). Interpretivism rejects the idea of an objective measurement of social phenomena but supports the subjective interpretations of events from the perspective of the actors. The interpretive research paradigm was chosen to guide the conduct of this study. A discussion of the justification for selecting the interpretive IS research paradigm is provided in 4.3.

### **4.2.3. Critical Research**

Critical research aims to transform alienating and restrictive social conditions by criticising the status quo and exposing entrenched and structural contradictions within social systems. Cecez-Kecmanovic describes critical research as follows:

“Critical IS researchers produce knowledge with the aim of revealing and explaining how information systems are (mis)used to enhance control, domination, and oppression, and thereby to inform and inspire transformative social practices that realise the liberating and emancipatory potential of information systems (Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2005, p. 19).”

Critical studies typically challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about organisations and IS and seek to reveal the historical, ideological, and contradictory nature of existing social practices (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991).

The ontology of critical research stresses that history shapes social reality and that human potential is constrained by existing social, economic, cultural and political forces,

which the critical perspective aims to uncover (Myers and Klein, 2011). Critical research takes a holistic view of events and assumes that organisations cannot be well understood when studied in isolation from factors such as the industry, country, and history, of which they are a part. Critical research epistemology assumes that knowledge is grounded in historical and social practices. Thus, this perspective takes a long-term view and typically prefers historical and ethnographic studies of organisations and structures.

The main weakness of this research tradition is its excessive focus on economic factors to the neglect of other important variables (Howcroft and Trauth, 2004). Critical research is not applied in this study as it is not suitable for attaining the objective of exploring how national culture affects strategic alignment, with the aim to develop a theory.

#### **4.2.4. Multi-Paradigm Research**

In recent years, there have been calls for more multi-paradigm research (Ågerfalk, 2013; Venkatesh, Brown and Bala, 2013). These calls reject the paradigm incommensurability hypothesis, which argues that since research paradigms diverge regarding the basic assumptions about organisational inquiry, researchers should select and commit themselves to a single paradigm from the alternatives available. The hypothesis cites irreconcilable epistemological and ontological differences between positivism and interpretivism (Mingers and Brocklesby, 1997). For example, Mingers (2001) argues for different research methods to give attention to divergent views of reality. He suggests that because real world research environments are inherently complex and multidimensional, the integration of various paradigms and methods into a single piece of research facilitates a better understanding of a phenomenon. The multi-method has other advantages, including the triangulation of evidence to validate data and results. Also, mixed research gives room for creativity that may make a discovery or the identification of instances that stimulate further research.

With a multi-paradigm research, different types of activities take precedence at various stages. Accordingly, particular research methods are useful and more suitable to

#### *Chapter 4 Research Methodologies in IS*

doing different things at different phases of the research process than others, making the combination of different research approaches necessary for a more comprehensive outcome. The proponents of the mixed paradigm research assert that applying one method gives the researcher a limited view of the research situation (Venkatesh, Brown and Bala, 2013).

Mixed paradigm research is expensive and time-consuming and therefore was not chosen for this study, owing mainly to time constraints. Furthermore, methodological purists argue that it is important to choose one paradigm rather than combining opposing research paradigms. Table 4-1 summarises the key differences in the four main research paradigms in IS.

**Table 4-1 Positivist, Interpretive, Critical, and Mixed Research Paradigms Compared**

Research philosophy/Paradigm	Positivism	Interpretivism	Critical	Mixed
Ontology	Researchers make assumptions that an objective physical and social world exists independent of humans	Reality is a social construction, and multiple realities may exist	Takes the view that knowledge is grounded in historical and social practices	Stresses that real world research environments are inherently complex and multidimensional, the integration of more than one paradigm/method in research facilitates a better understanding of phenomena
Epistemology	Discovering laws and making generalisations using the hypothetico-deductive approach	Assumes that people construct and associate their subjective and intersubjective meanings as they interact with the world around them	History shapes social reality and that humans have potential that can be developed but are constrained by existing social, economic, cultural and political forces	Making a combination of deductive generalisations, subjective and intersubjective, and critical analyses
Methodology	Pendant for quantifiable measures of variables taken from large samples such as surveys and experiments	Prefers qualitative methods such as ethnography and grounded theory	Use of historical and ethnographic studies of organisations and structures	A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods

### 4.3. Selecting a Research Strategy

A research strategy comprises specifying the philosophical assumptions regarding the nature of phenomena under study and selecting the suitable research methodology and data collection and analysis techniques (Avison and Myers, 2002). Most previous cross-cultural studies have drawn on predetermined national dimensions as theoretical frameworks (Hofstede, 1980; Schwartz, 1994; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997; House *et al.*, 2004). However, as discussed in 2.3, such dimensions have limitations and represent a static and deterministic view of culture (Fang, 2005). Cultural dimensions, typically the result of large-scale quantitative studies, do not adequately account for the outcomes of interactions among individuals in organisational settings (Chevrier, Brannen and Hansen, 2014). Similarly, Matsumoto and Wilson (2005) assert that cultural dimensions inhibit the understanding of other significant aspects of cultural differences. Besides, cultural homogenisation, hybridisation, and multiculturalism in an increasingly globalised world limit the usefulness of national culture dimensions in explaining cultural differences.

Consequently, researchers have called for alternative approaches to cross-cultural research drawing on the interpretive IS research paradigm (Sackmann and Phillips, 2004; Matsumoto and Wilson, 2005; Fang, 2012). Interpretive IS research was chosen based on the assumption that national culture is socially constructed and open to different interpretations, and may be difficult to assess objectively (Klein and Myers, 1999; Walsham, 2006). The goal of the research is not objectivity but rather the subjective interpretations of the views of the participants vis-à-vis national culture and strategic alignment in organisations. As outlined in Section 4.2.2, interpretive studies investigate real work settings, the emergent problems, and the meanings that the actors assign to them. The findings of such studies do not seek generalisability in the positivist sense but focus a contextual understanding of phenomena. This study selected interpretive research paradigm because it is well-suited to the conduct of this study.

## 4.4. Candidate Research Methodologies

Research methods are the specific manner in which empirical and logical research is conducted (Lee, 2009). There is a range of alternative interpretive IS research approaches that may be used to explore the association between national culture and strategic alignment. The next section examines alternative methods, their merits, and limitations. Such an overview is important as it clarifies why grounded theory emerged as the most appropriate.

### 4.4.1. Ethnography

An increasing number of IS studies have employed ethnography (Hughes *et al.*, 1994; Lee and Myers, 2004). Ethnography is a method of social research that explores the nature of social phenomena without setting out to test hypotheses. Ethnography is suitable for investigating one or a small number of cases in-depth and relies on the use of largely unstructured data. Ethnographic data analysis involves interpretations of meanings of human actions in the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantitative and statistical analysis playing an insignificant role (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994).

Ethnography is appropriate for providing rich insights into human, social and organisational aspects of IS because it seeks to understand the people, the organisation and the context (Myers, 1999; Baskerville and Myers, 2015). Interviews and participant observation are other methods of gathering evidence in ethnographic studies. Ethnographers usually immerse themselves in the research setting and spend extended periods of time gathering evidence.

The strength of ethnography lies in its ability to gain a detailed understanding of people, organisations, and the broader context in which they work. Compared to other research methods, the main drawback of ethnography is the time-consuming fieldwork and analyses required. Ethnography lacks breadth because it concentrates on studying one or a few organisations at a time (Baskerville and Myers, 2015).

#### **4.4.2. Case Studies**

Case study research is a widely used in IS (Andrade, 2009; Runeson and Höst, 2009). It is a suitable research method for understanding the interactions between IS-related innovations and organisational contexts (Darke, Shanks and Broadbent, 1998; Yin, 2011). Case studies are useful as a research method when 'how' and 'why' questions are being asked about a contemporary set of events that the researcher has little or no control over (Yin, 2011). Cavaye gives the following characteristics of case research:

“Case research can be carried out taking a positivist, or an interpretivist stance, can take a deductive or an inductive approach, can use qualitative and quantitative methods, and can investigate one or multiple cases. Case research can be a highly structured, positivist, deductive investigation of multiple cases; it can also be an unstructured, interpretative, inductive investigation of one case; lastly, it can be anything in between these two extremes in almost any combination” (Cavaye, 1996, p. 228).

Yin (2011) identifies four basic types of case studies: explanatory, causal, descriptive and exploratory. Case research designs may be single or multiple. Single case studies, as the name suggests have only one case, while multiple case studies have several cases in one research project. The choice of single or multiple case study design depends on the nature of the study. Single case studies are useful for theory generation at the beginning and theory testing towards the end. Multiple case studies are preferable when the goal is to describe, build, or test a theory. They allow for cross-case analysis and produce more research results (Benbasat, Goldstein and Mead, 1987).

Like every research method, case research has some weaknesses. First, it is hard to replicate and make generalisations from case research (Lee, 1989; Cavaye, 1996). Second, controlled observations similar to experiments in the natural sciences are not feasible; this may limit the internal validity of any conclusions. Third, case research may establish associations between variables but cannot always specify the direction of causation (Cavaye, 1996).

### 4.4.3. Action Research

Action research is an interventionist and post-positivist social scientific method appropriate for IS research in human contexts. It has been growing in popularity in the IS discipline (Baskerville and Wood-Harper, 1996; Avison *et al.*, 1999, 1999; Lau, 1999). It is appropriate for investigating the interplay between humans, technology, and information in socio-cultural contexts (McKay and Marshall, 2001). Its goal is to find practical solutions to problems while generating new scientific knowledge. Action researchers initiate change while researching the process. As Baskerville and Myers (2004) point out, it is a clinical method that puts IS researchers in a helping role with practitioners. Accordingly, a collaboration between the researcher and practitioners is critical to the success of the process due to the mutual interdependence needed to solve the problems and generate new knowledge.

Action research involves two stages: diagnostic and therapeutic. The diagnostic phase involves a collaborative analysis of a social situation by the researcher and the subjects of the investigation. The therapeutic stage involves the introduction of some interventions to induce change while studying the outcome. Avison *et al.* (1999) identifies four main categories of action research: (1) action research for change and reflection; (2) action science that seeks to reconcile conflicts between espoused and applied theories; (3) participatory action research with an emphasis on practitioners as subjects and co-researchers; and (4) action learning, which stresses group participation, programmed instruction and experiential learning in different social and organisational contexts.

Action research has the following weaknesses. First, McKay and Marshall (2001) argue that there is a lack of clarity and little guidance in the literature on how to carry out action research. Second, it might lack rigour, discipline, and impartiality, making it difficult to generalise findings (Baskerville and Wood-Harper, 1996; McKay and Marshall, 2001). Third, the close involvement of the researcher in the action research process makes it time-consuming and makes the respondents less open and honest with their responses. Also, as the researcher becomes part of the research, they may lose the benefit of a neutral perspective (Walsham, 2006).

Action research is unsuitable for this study because the research objective is not to solve a problem, but to build a theory. Also, it is time-consuming and requires access to study organisations for extended periods, which might be difficult to achieve.

## **4.5. Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory developed through the collaborative work of sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967), as a reaction to the extreme positivism which had pervaded social research (Suddaby, 2006). It is a practical method for conducting research involving the interpretive process of analysing the production of meanings and concepts by social actors in real settings (Gephart, 2004; Suddaby, 2006). Grounded theory is an iterative and inductive theory discovery methodology that strives to develop theory through the systematic collecting and analysis of data. According to McGhee, Marland and Atkinson, in grounded theory research:

“Researchers start with a topic of interest, collect data and allow relevant ideas to develop. This requires open-mindedness to ensure that data are not ignored because they do not fit in with a preconceived notion. Data are usually gathered through field observation and/or interviews, but numerical data may also be included. Initially, the approach taken is inductive, and consequently, hypotheses and tentative theory emerge from the data set (McGhee, Marland and Atkinson, 2007, p. 335)”

Bryant makes an important distinction between the grounded theory method and grounded theory itself:

“A grounded theory is the possible outcome of the grounded theory method. One might use the method without producing a grounded theory, and there are some who claim to use the method as part of an approach that does not seek to develop grounded theories (Bryant, 2002, p. 27).”

The procedures of the grounded theory approach help to develop an integrated set of concepts that offer a thorough theoretical explanation of social phenomena. The theory that develops from grounded theory research explains, describes, and may offer predictions based on a given set of conditions (Corbin and Strauss, 2014). Consequently,

the method is not intended to produce an all-encompassing grand theory but assist in the development of an explanatory model grounded in empirical data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

## **4.6. Developments in Grounded Theory**

Before the application of grounded theory in this research, it is important to discuss major events in the use of the approach. The discoverers of grounded theory later disagreed about how to conduct grounded theory research. As a result, two main strands of the method have emerged from the original authors: Glaserian and Straussian (or classic and evolved) grounded theory approaches. While Glaser remained consistent with the original tenets of the method, Strauss and Corbin provided practical guidelines for conducting grounded theory research.

Glaser (1992) criticised the practical steps suggested by Strauss and Corbin as forcing theory rather than letting theory emerge. There are also disagreements regarding the role of the research question and the literature. For example, Glaser suggests formulating a research question at the beginning of coding. In contrast, Strauss and Corbin recommend formulating the research question before the commencement of data collection as it will give the study some focus. Glaser and Strauss both acknowledge the inherent difficulties for researchers to enter the field completely free from ideas but differ considerably on the role of the literature. To maintain analytical sensitivity, Glaser (1992) insists that general information about the problem area is the only knowledge necessary to sensitise the researcher. However, Corbin and Strauss (2014) support the use of the literature and past experiences to stimulate theoretic sensitivity.

There are other versions of grounded theory. For example, Sbaraini et al. (2011) identified constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006), postmodern situational analysis (Clarke, 2005) and dimensional analysis (Clarke, 2008). Given the different variants of the method, it is necessary for every grounded theory researcher to specify which variant of the method they have adopted. As such, this research adopted the version

by Corbin and Strauss (2014) because it is more pragmatic and encourages the specification of the research question at the start of the study and allows the use of the literature to support theory building.

#### **4.6.1. Grounded Theory Coding**

Coding in grounded theory is the analytic process through which data are broken down into distinct units of meaning that are: labelled to generate concepts; conceptualised; and integrated to form theory (Corbin and Strauss, 2014). Table 4-2 shows some different grounded theory coding procedures suggested by various authors. Glaser (2008) suggested open coding, selective coding and theoretical coding, while Corbin and Strauss (2014) propose open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Charmaz (2006) recommends four-stage coding: initial coding, focused coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding.

**Table 4-2 Different Grounded Theory Coding Procedures (Urquhart, 2013)**

Authors	Suggested Coding Procedure
Glaser and Strauss (1967)	Comparing incidents applicable to each category (includes open coding) integrating categories and their properties (selective coding and theoretical coding) delimiting the theory (selective coding and theoretical coding), writing the theory
Glaser (1978)	Open coding, selective coding, theoretical coding
Strauss (1987)	Open coding, axial coding, selective coding
Strauss and Corbin (1990)	Open coding, axial coding, selective coding
Glaser (1992)	Open coding, selective coding, theoretical coding
Strauss and Corbin (1998)	Open coding, axial coding, selective coding
(Charmaz, 2006)	Initial coding, focused coding, axial coding, theoretical coding

Open coding is the first step of the inductive theory development process applied generate basic concepts from the data that become the building blocks of theory. Corbin and Strauss describe open coding as follows:

“In open coding, events/action/interactions are compared with others for similarities and differences. They are also given conceptual labels. In this way, conceptually similar events/actions/interactions are grouped together to form categories and subcategories (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 12).”

It is the basis for theoretical sampling and begins as soon as the first bit of data is collected and proceeds simultaneously with data collection all through the study (Corbin and Strauss, 2014).

Axial coding was introduced into grounded theory by Strauss (1987). It constitutes one of the main differences between Glaser's version of grounded theory on the one hand, and Strauss and Corbin's on the other. It represents the process of relating categories and subcategories and testing their association against the data. In the words of Strauss and Corbin:

“The purpose of axial coding is to begin the process of reassembling data that were fractured during open coding. In axial coding, categories are related to their subcategories to form more precise and complete explanations about phenomena” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 124).

Corbin and Strauss (2014) contend that axial coding allows for an understanding of the context of the data. They argue that such an understanding is necessary as it fosters a rigorous approach to theory development. However, Glaser (1992) criticises axial coding and describes it as forcing theory.

In Strauss and Corbin's version of grounded theory, open coding generates categories and determines how they differ in their dimensions, while axial coding systematically develops and links categories with subcategories. The final step of selective coding is the process of integrating and refining categories to form a theory. During selective coding, the core category is identified (Corbin and Strauss, 2014).

## **4.7. Justifying the use of Grounded Theory in this Research**

The aim of this research is to provide a contextual description and explanation through inductive, qualitative research, rather than an objective, quantitative assessment. A grounded theory approach based on the interpretive research paradigm was considered the most appropriate. The main reasons for selecting grounded theory for this study are twofold: firstly, a grounded theory approach is suitable to the research topic, which explores how national culture affects strategic alignment in organisations. Secondly, given the lack of theory an explanatory theory of the relationship between national culture and alignment, the potential to develop a theory grounded in empirical data makes an inductive

grounded theory approach valuable. Grounded theory is suitable for detecting new dimensions and categories regarding strategic alignment and contributes to a better understanding of the basic socio-cultural and theoretical issues at play (Glaser, 2008; Matavire and Brown, 2013).

Despite its advantages, however, grounded theory research has some pitfalls. For example, the interpretation of the data is subjective. Also, grounded theory studies require lots of data and fieldwork and may take a long time to execute. Besides, the results of grounded theory research might not be generalisable beyond the organisations studied.

## **4.8. Canons and Procedures of Grounded Theory**

This section discusses the canons and procedures of the Strauss and Corbin's version of grounded theory.

### **4.8.1. Simultaneous Data Collection and Analysis**

Data collection and analysis are interrelated processes in grounded theory studies. Data analysis usually starts after the first bit of data is collected. The analysis of the data is vital from the outset as it is used to inform and direct subsequent interviews and observations (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The systematic and sequential collection and analysis of the data ensure that the research process captures all potentially relevant aspects of the topic as soon as they are apparent. Concepts are provisionally brought into the study when they are first discovered and earn their way into the theory by being constantly present in interviews, documents, and observations in one form or another or being significantly absent. Concepts are discarded if their relevance to the phenomenon under investigation is not proven (Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

### **4.8.2. The Principle of Emergence**

The emergence principle of grounded theory states that the theory development process and the resultant theory should be emergent and devoid of the imposition of any preconceived ideas and notions about the phenomenon under examination (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992; Matavire and Brown, 2013). The researcher has to set aside theoretical ideas to let the substantive theory emerge from the data (Urquhart, 2013). Strauss and Corbin explain the principle of emergence as follows:

“Most important, because our approach to theory building is of emergence, we believe that unless the researcher is building on or continuing with his or her own previous studies, the researcher will not be able to enter into the project with a set of pre-established concepts or with a well-structured design. Rather, the design, like the concepts, must be allowed to emerge during the research process (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 33).”

### **4.8.3. Constant Comparative Analysis**

Constant comparative analysis is another distinguishing feature of grounded theory and involves making comparisons during each stage of the analysis. Strauss and Corbin explain constant comparison as follows:

“This means that as an incident is noted, it is compared against other incidents for similarities and differences. The resulting concepts are labelled as such, and in time, these are also compared...Making comparisons assists the researcher in guarding against bias for he or she is then challenging concepts with fresh data (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p. 9).”

Constant comparison is necessary as it helps attain better precision and consistency by grouping similar concepts together.

### **4.8.4. Theoretical Sampling**

In grounded theory studies, sampling proceeds on theoretical grounds and not statistically. Theoretical sampling directs data gathering in a way that maximises theory

development. It is intended to improve the representativeness of concepts, focus, and consistency. Corbin and Strauss explain:

“In grounded theory, representativeness of concepts, not of persons, is crucial. The aim is ultimately to build a theoretical explanation by specifying phenomena in terms of conditions that give rise to them, how they are expressed through action/interaction, the consequences that result from them, and variations of these qualifiers (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p. 9)”

The researcher has to have some idea of the phenomenon to be studied and the groups of individuals, organisations, or communities that are representative of it. Theoretical sampling is then used to guide data collection, where categories, concepts, and constructs documented are used to direct further data collection. The investigator has to watch for all indicators of important concepts in every interview/observation.

#### **4.8.5. Concepts are Basic Units of Analysis**

Incidents, events, or activities are taken as potential indicators of phenomena and given conceptual labels. Concepts that pertain to the same phenomenon are grouped to form categories, but not all concepts become categories. Categories are higher in level and more abstract than the concepts they represent and are cornerstones of theory. Categories are developed through an analytic process of making comparisons to highlight similarities and differences, which are then used to produce lower level concepts (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, 2008).

#### **4.8.6. Philosophical Foundations of Grounded Theory**

The epistemological basis of the grounded theory approach is a subject of debate and has been variously described as positivist, interpretive or critical (Urquhart, 2013). However, Corbin and Strauss (2014) assert that the theoretical underpinnings of grounded theory derive from pragmatism and symbolic interactionism, but researchers do not have to share them to use the methodology. Grounded theory studies may be conducted under the positivist, interpretive or critical paradigms (Urquhart, 2013).

#### 4.8.7. Theoretical Saturation

Grounded theory researchers have to decide when to stop collecting data. Ideally, researchers should reach theoretical saturation, where further data collection makes marginal improvements to theory. According to Glaser and Strauss:

“Saturation means that no additional data are being found whereby the [researcher] can develop the properties of the category (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 61)”

Theoretical saturation is the benchmark for gauging when to stop further data collection and analysis in grounded theory studies. However, despite its importance, practical guidelines on how to operationalise the concept are hard to find. Regarding how many interviews are enough, Corbin and Strauss state:

“There are always constraints of time, energy, and availability of subjects, and other conditions that affect data collection (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p. 324).”

Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) found that saturation occurred within the first twelve interviews, even though the basic elements of the main themes were present in as early as six interviews. However, theoretical saturation has practical weaknesses as research might sometimes not be able to achieve the broad data collection and analysis that theoretical saturation requires (Green and Thorogood, 2004).

### 4.9. Grounded Theory in Information Systems Research

Since its discovery by Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory has been adopted widely in several disciplines. The value of a grounded theory approach is well acknowledged, and its use has been growing in IS research (Myers, 1997; Birks *et al.*, 2013). One of the reasons for its increasing popularity is the promise of theory development (Urquhart, Lehmann and Myers, 2010).

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IS researchers have explored various problems using the grounded theory method. For example, in a seminal paper, Orlikowski (1993) applied grounded theory to study the experiences of two organisations in adopting and using computer-aided software engineering (CASE) tools. Another study by Hoda et al. (2012) developed a grounded theory of self-organising agile teams using data from 16 software organisations in New Zealand and India, while Idrees et al. (2011) built a four-staged model to develop a theory of knowledge management. Martins and Nunes (2010) applied grounded theory principles to generate a substantive grounded theory of 'effort-reward imbalance' in eLearning development, based on research on a Portuguese higher education faculty to explain the processes of motivation, self-fulfilment, commitment, and reward.

Urquhart and Fernández (2006) cited four different approaches to grounded theory: (1) the full use of the approach; (2) applying it to generate concepts; (3) combining it with other methods; and (4) studies mislabelled as using a grounded theory approach. Similarly, in a review of grounded theory approaches in IS, Matavire and Brown (2013) found four grounded theory approaches in use: (1) the classic grounded theory approach; (2) the evolved grounded theory approach; (3) the use of grounded theory approach as part of a mixed methodology; and (4) the application of grounded theory techniques, typically for the purpose of data analysis. They also found that the latter was the most common in IS research, while the classic grounded theory approach is the least common.

While the use of grounded theory in IS has been growing, some aspects of it remain controversial (Urquhart, 2013). For example, some researchers have used the method as an excuse to evading a detailed explication of methodological issues of their research (Bryant, 2002; Suddaby, 2006). Moreover, grounded theory studies have been criticised for having a relatively low level of theory development (Urquhart, Lehmann and Myers, 2010).

## **4.10. Summary**

This chapter started with a discussion of research philosophy in IS. It examined the four most important research approaches: positivist, interpretive, critical, and mixed. The chapter provided a justification for selecting the interpretive research paradigm for the current research and described candidate research approaches suitable to exploring how national culture shapes strategic alignment. The chapter also makes the case for a grounded theory approach as the most appropriate for exploring the under-researched area of national culture and strategic alignment. This chapter also discussed the canons, procedures and developments in the use of grounded theory and concluded with a discussion of the application of the approach in IS research. The next chapter moves beyond general methodological issues to the practical application of the grounded theory method based on the interpretive IS research paradigm in this investigation.

## **Chapter 5.**

# **Empirical Research Design**

### **5.1. Introduction**

The preceding chapter discussed key philosophical and methodological perspectives in the IS discipline and justified the choice of the grounded theory method in this research. The present chapter examines the practical research methods applied to the conduct of the study. Specifically, it deliberates parts of a five-step research design to develop theory using qualitative data from three organisations, including: (1) getting started, (2) fieldwork (3) coding and category development, (4) selecting study organisations and (5) reaching closure. Step 5, reaching closure is discussed in Chapter 8.

### **5.2. Research Design – a Framework for Grounded Theory Building**

Table 5-1 summarises the five-step research design for grounded theory building.

**Table 5-1 Framework for Building Theories from Organisational Research (adapted from Eisenhardt, 1989)**

Step	Task	Activity	Justification
1.	Getting started	Define research question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focuses efforts</li> <li>• Provides better grounding of construct measures</li> </ul>
2.	Fieldwork	Concurrent data collection and analysis, including field notes Multiple sources of data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data analysis informs further data collection of evidence</li> <li>• Allows researchers to take advantage of emergent themes and unique case features</li> <li>• Supports grounding of theory by triangulation</li> </ul>
3.	Coding and category development	Coding data into concepts and categories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improves familiarity with data and preliminary theory generation</li> <li>• Encourages the researcher to look beyond initial impressions and see evidence from multiple perspectives</li> </ul>
4.	Selecting study organisations	Specify population Theoretical, not random, sampling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhances theoretical flexibility</li> <li>• Constrains extraneous variation and sharpens external validity</li> <li>• Focuses efforts on theoretically useful cases – i.e., those that replicate or extend theory by filling conceptual categories</li> </ul>
5.	Reaching closure	Theoretical saturation when possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data collection and analysis stops when only marginal new concepts are generated</li> </ul>

### 5.2.1. Getting Started

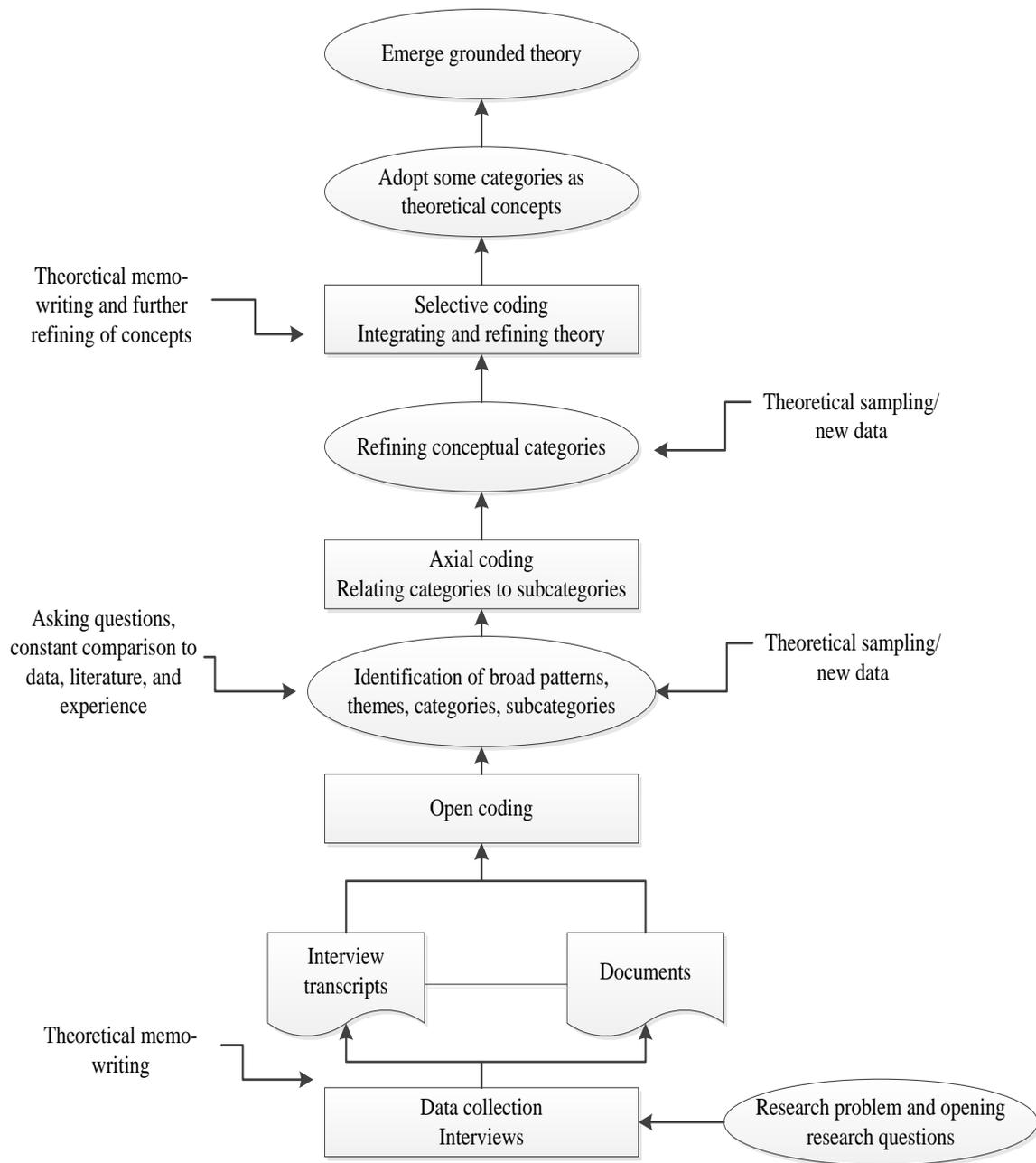
To avoid bias, Glaser (1978) recommends that grounded theory researchers choose a general area of interest and refrain from setting out the research problem or research question upfront. However, this study applied an adapted the version of grounded theory suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2014), which allows for the specification of the research question at the beginning of the study. An initial definition of the research question, at least in broad terms, is important for theory building (Eisenhardt, 1989; Corbin and Strauss, 2014). As stated in 1.3, the research question addresses how national culture affects strategic alignment. Specifying the research question gave a clear

focus to the study and guided the selection of study organisations for data collection. Thus, to a large degree, the research question directed data gathering and analysis techniques.

The Ethical Review Committee at the Department of Computer Science and Information Systems, Birkbeck, University of London, granted ethical clearance for the commencement of this study on 16 August 2012.

### **5.2.2. Fieldwork**

After identifying study organisations, the next step in the theory building process comprised data collection. To strengthen the findings by providing opportunities for triangulation, both primary and secondary data were collected. Figure 5-1 depicts the grounded theory data collection and analysis process to build theory, which is discussed in detail in the following sub-sections.



**Figure 5-1 The Grounded Theory data collection and Analysis Process**

### **5.2.2.1 Primary Data**

Like other qualitative research approaches, primary data in grounded theory research come from various sources, such as interviews and participant observations (Corbin and Strauss, 2014).

In this study, semi-structured interviews were the source of primary data. Interviews are a way of accessing the interpretations of respondents (Charmaz, 2006; Walsham, 2006). Semi-structured interviews were selected because they provide flexibility and allow improvisation. For example, they allow new questions to be posed based on answers to previous ones, which enhances the collection of detailed information through the probing of participants. The initial interview questions can be found in the Appendix C. The questions were designed to collect information on the experiences of participants regarding national culture and strategic alignment. Overall, the starting interview guide has four sections on (1) company information, (2) national culture context, (3) strategic alignment, and (4) national culture and strategic alignment. Whereas the first section sought information on the study organisation, the second contained questions concerning national culture. The third posed questions regarding strategic alignment, while the final section has the main questions of national culture and strategic alignment.

Before actual data collection, a pilot study was conducted with two organisations in London in November 2012. The pilot study organisations were initially candidate settings for the study. However, it became apparent that there were not enough cooperative respondents to proceed with further data collection. Although not initially designed as such, the pilot studies proved valuable because they became a testing ground for the interview questions. They also helped to sharpen the interviewing skills of the interviewer and provided interview transcripts for practising grounded theory coding techniques. Finally, they provided a litmus test for the likely success or otherwise of the data collection and analysis process. The pilot interviews helped to improve the quality of the interviews and the research in general.

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Whether or not to tape record interviews is a subject of debate in grounded theory. Glaser (1992) advises against tape recording and note taking during grounded theory interviews but supports note taking after each interview. The main drawback of this approach is that relevant information may be forgotten. To avoid this problem, Corbin and Strauss (2014) support the tape recording of interviews in grounded theory studies. Similarly, Walsham (2006) argues that recording the interviews is justified because it constitutes an exact representation of what was said compared to taking notes, no matter how extensive. Furthermore, audio recordings made it possible to access the original record or transcripts to enable different kinds of analysis.

In this study, the interviews were recorded to provide a verbatim account. However, the time-consuming transcription process is the main drawback (Walsham, 2006). The transcripts were convenient for selecting useful quotes in the course of writing up. Finally, recording the interviews allowed the researcher to concentrate on the interviewing process itself.

Data collection and analyses occurred simultaneously as prescribed by grounded theory. In grounded theory studies, data analysis is essential from the start as this directs further interviews (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Corbin and Strauss, 2014). Accordingly, the interview questions were constantly revised for subsequent interviews, based on the grounded theory principle of theoretical sampling.

For the reasons of confidentiality, the three study organisations are labelled: Alpha, Beta, and Gamma. The participants were interviewed either face-to-face or through voice over internet protocol (VOIP). The interviews usually began with a brief introduction stating the purpose of the study and an assurance of anonymity and confidentiality. Consent was sought to record the conversation before the start of each interview. Interviewees were made aware of their right to decline to answer any questions or withdraw consent at any stage. Some respondents were interviewed multiple times at different intervals to obtain detailed information. Multiple interviews provided a richer picture of the issue under investigation.

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As depicted in Table 5-2, 34 interviews were conducted with middle and operational level business and IS staff of the study organisations. The data collection took place at various periods between December 2012 and April 2015. The average duration of the interviews was 50 minutes. Within each organisation, potential relevance and ability to provide the relevant information on strategic alignment influenced the selection of interviewees, who were then asked to suggest other suitable people in the organisation for further interviews, a technique that helped to identify and interview additional participants (Myers and Newman, 2007).

**Table 5-2 A Summary of the Interviews Conducted**

Organisation	Interviewee Role	Code	Number of Interviews	Total
Alpha	• Performance Reporting Manager	A11	3	12
	• Head of Business Support Systems	A12	2	
	• Project Manager	A13	3	
	• Engineer	A14	2	
	• Incident Alert Manager	A15	2	
Beta	• Engineer	B11	2	12
	• Head of Customer Care and Backend Data Support	B12	3	
		B13	3	
	• Backend Operations Executive	A14	3	
	• Project Manager	B15	1	
	• Business Development Manager			
Gamma	• Programme Control and Monitoring Manager	C11	2	10
	• Northern Regional Manager	C12	1	
	• Multimedia Services Team Lead	C13	2	
	• Systems Administrator	C14	3	
	• Project Manager	C15	2	

### 5.2.2.2 Secondary Data

Documents are another important source of data for grounded theory research and might include, government or organisational documents, newspapers articles, letters, books, and anything that may shed light on the phenomenon under study (Corbin and Strauss, 2014).

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The analysis of a broad range of documentary evidence from Alpha, Beta and Gamma was used to support the theory building process. Documentary evidence, some of which is publicly available on the internet provided a rich and relatively inexpensive source of data for analysis. The secondary material included:

- information on corporate websites
- annual reports
- media reports, and
- strategy documents

The analysis of documentary evidence does not guarantee objectivity, consistency, or even accuracy because they are put together by the study organisations themselves or third parties, and their contents are difficult to verify independently. As such, the documentary evidence used in this research might have some biases, inaccuracies and distortions (Glueck and Willis, 1979). Even with these shortcomings, the secondary information complemented the primary data and strengthened the theory building process by facilitating the triangulation of evidence.

### **5.2.2.3 Data Analysis with NVivo**

QSR's NVivo 10 software for computer-assisted qualitative data analysis was used to code the data. The use of software programmes helps improve efficiency and simplify the data analysis process while giving the researcher some degree of flexibility to focus on other important aspects of the research (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). The tools of NVivo allowed the storage, organisation, management, and analysis of qualitative data (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013; Sims, Powell and Vidgen, 2015a). The software also supports iterative data collection and analysis, the writing of memos, as well as open, axial and selective coding of the data (Hutchison, Johnston and Breckon, 2010).

After the first bit of data was collected, a new NVivo project titled 'Strategic alignment: an exploration of the role of culture' was created. Open coding started after the

transcription of the first set of interviews. The transcripts of the data and the organisational documents were uploaded as internals within NVivo 10 for coding. The software tools of NVivo allowed the hierarchical and non-hierarchical listing of categories into 'tree nodes' and 'free nodes' respectively. Subsequent interviews were progressively added to the project and coded. The tools of the software enabled searches through the data and the linking of key ideas while allowing access to the original information behind the concepts. However, while using the software improved the efficiency and quality of the analysis process, the interpretation of the data and decisions about what to code were made by the researcher. Details of the coding and category development process are considered in 5.3.

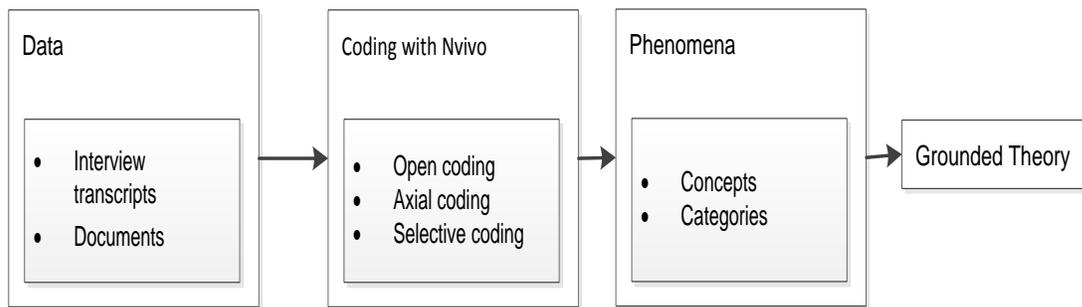
### **5.3. Coding and Category Development**

The purpose of this section is to discuss the inductive grounded theory building process applied in this research. The coding and category development comprised a three-stage process suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2014) of open, axial and selective coding. The section begins by describing the open coding process to identify initial concepts and categories in the data. Next, axial coding, the iterative refinement of the initial concepts and categories as more data is coded, is discussed. Then, a paradigm model specifying the relationships between the categories and the core category is delineated. Finally, the selective coding sub-section (5.3.4) discusses the selection of the core category and its association with the rest of the categories.

Coding is a vital link between data gathering and the development of a grounded theory. Specifically, it comprises the systematic inductive analytic procedures whereby data are divided, conceptualised and integrated to produce theory (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin and Strauss, 2008). In practice, the process does not necessarily proceed in a strictly linear fashion (Urquhart, 2013). Coding is closely linked with the analytic techniques of comparative analysis, writing memos, and theoretical sampling.

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As stated earlier, NVivo aided the coding process. Figure 5-2 illustrates the three-step process of open, axial and selective coding to discover concepts, categories and subcategories. Although open coding and axial coding are distinct processes, in reality, they are iterative, and the researcher alternates between the two modes (Corbin and Strauss, 2014).



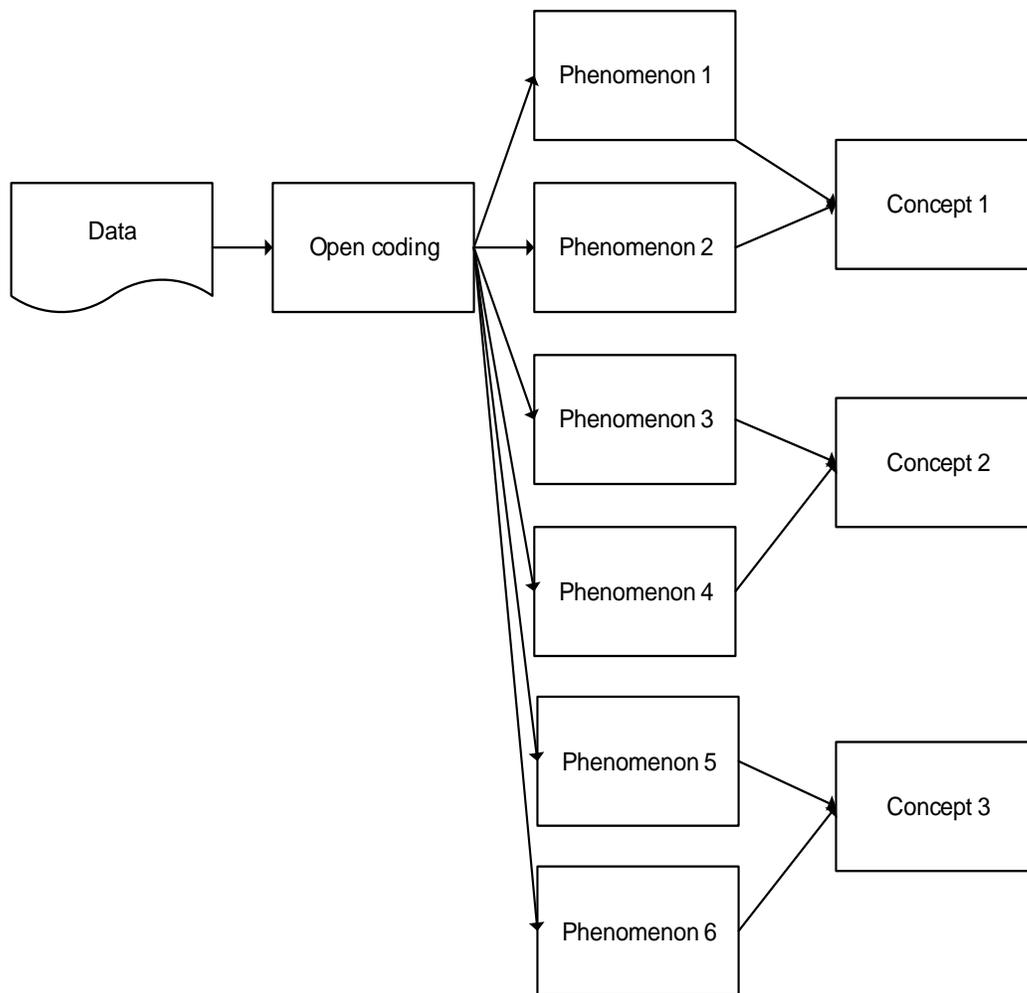
**Figure 5-2 The Grounded Theory Coding Steps (Strauss and Corbin, 1998)**

### 5.3.1. Open Coding

The first practical step of the theory building process is reading carefully through the data line-by-line, and moving back and forth to identify concepts, which are then labelled using appropriate words or phrases (Charmaz, 2012). Concepts represent actions, events, objects or interactions in the data deemed relevant (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin and Strauss, 2008). During open coding, tentative concepts and categories were identified in the data. Using NVivo, similar concepts were assembled under the same node. As coding progressed, data that seemed similar to an existing concept were coded at an existing node, whereas new information that did not fit into existing nodes were coded at a new node. Regarding concepts, Glaser and Strauss note:

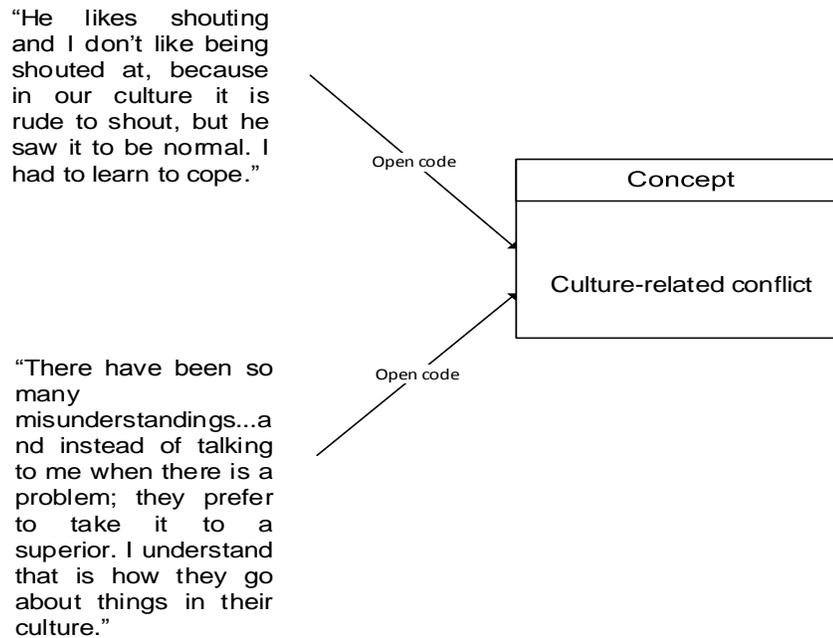
“In discovering theory, one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence; then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept. The evidence may not necessarily be accurate beyond a doubt, but the concept is undoubtedly a relevant theoretical abstraction about what is going on in the area studied (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 23).”

Figure 5-3 illustrates the open coding process showing the association between the data, phenomena, and concepts.



**Figure 5-3 An Illustration of the Open Coding Process Using Sample Quotes from the Data**

As more data is coded, the initial free nodes are developed into tree nodes in NVivo, showing categories and subcategories. For example, the quotes depicted in Figure 5-4 were interpreted as references to workplace conflict due to differences in cultural values, beliefs, and practices, which were coded under the node 'culture-related conflict.' Subsequent data that were interpreted as referring to workplace conflict emanating from cultural differences were added to the code 'culture-related conflict.'



**Figure 5-4 An Illustration of the Creation of a Concept from the Data**

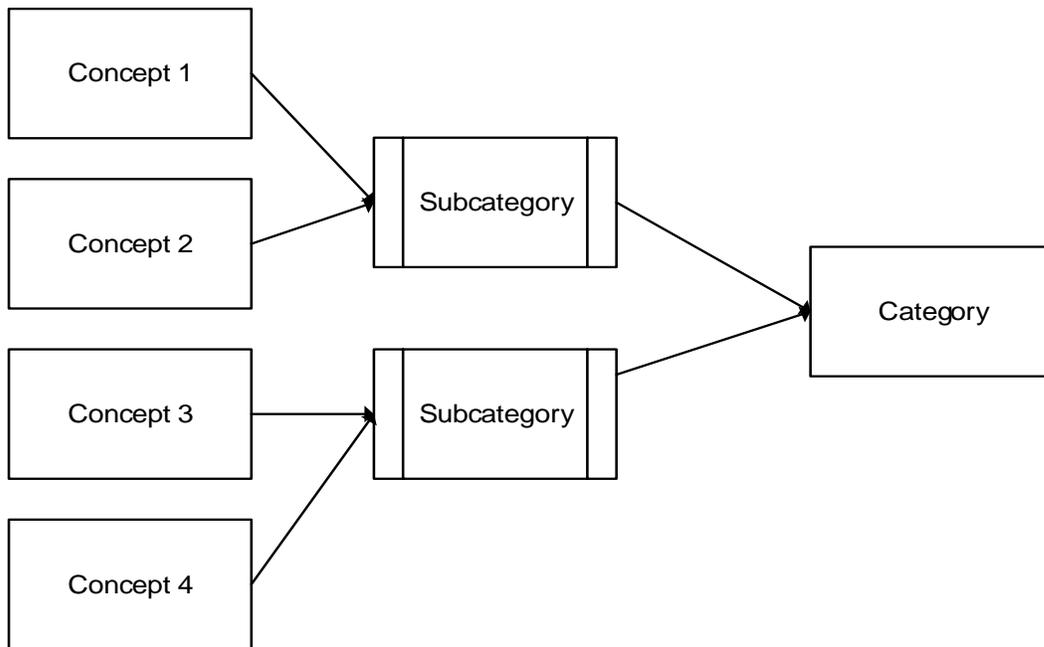
The evolving codes were continuously refined by merging some codes, while others were discarded. For example, concepts that reflected the management of the IS function, such as ‘IS infrastructure,’ ‘IT outsourcing,’ ‘the role of the CIO,’ and ‘the use of ERP planning systems,’ were merged to create the category ‘IS Context.’ Table 5-3 shows sample quotes from the data and how they were coded into concepts. After the coding of the 34 interview transcripts and documents, 219 open codes were generated and clustered into 21 initial categories. The concepts and categories continued to be refined, merged, and sometimes eliminated using constant comparison. The concepts that subsequently became part of the grounded theory were those that had been recurrent in the data.

**Table 5-3 An Illustration of Open Coding**

Organisation	Sample Quote	Open Codes/concepts
Alpha	“I have challenges with some of the team members. I am not painting everybody with a broad brush, but you will see general traits of being laid back and even laziness among people from certain cultures that I work with. We are in a high-paced environment where you push for things to be done, but some people take it a bit slow, a bit easy. On the other hand, you find members from other cultures that are more dutiful; they have a little more drive.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture-based attitudes to work</li> <li>• Cultural stereotyping</li> </ul>
Beta	“I will describe communications as top down. As far as I know, directives are still being handed down from India most of the time. Currently, my boss is in India. The top person responsible for our project is also in India. For example, if there is an issue, the head of the project will send an email to my boss’s boss in India. He will then send directives to my boss, who then gets them to us.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effects of high power distance on communications</li> <li>• Top-down communications</li> </ul>
Gamma	“Most Ghanaians are usually shy and do not like to ask questions of their bosses. Most of the employees find it difficult to express what is on their mind, while others are offended when you speak your mind.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effects of high power distance</li> <li>• Cultural challenges to effective intercultural communications</li> </ul>

### 5.3.2. Category Development

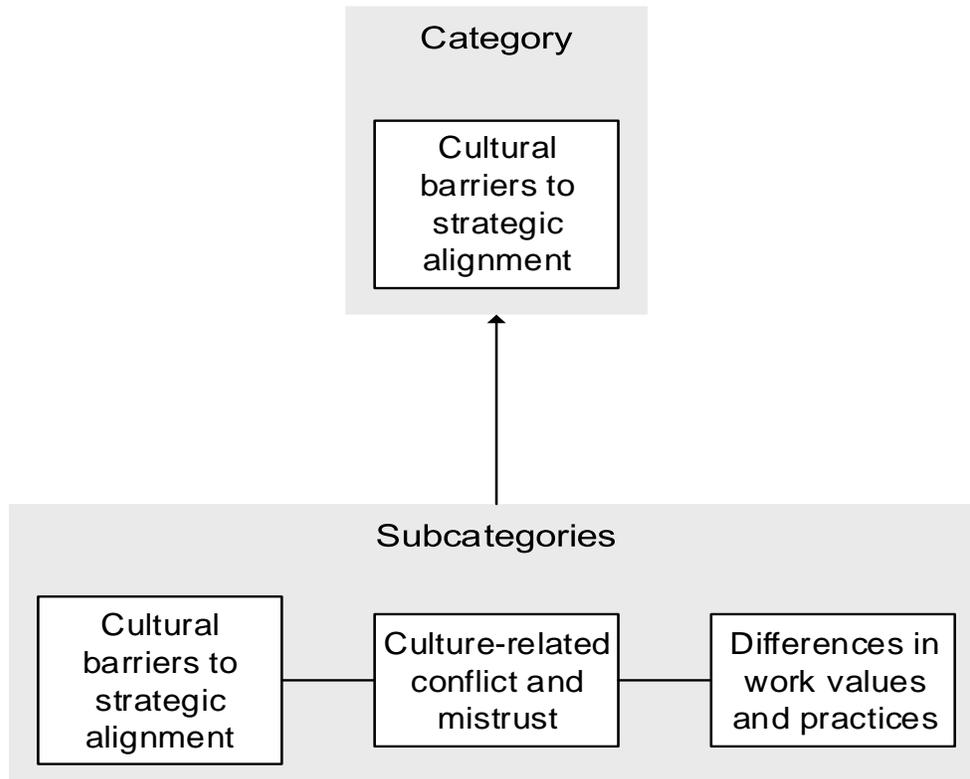
After the generation of concepts, the next step in the theory building process is to develop categories and subcategories. Specifically, conceptually similar concepts were grouped together through the process of categorising. The phenomena represented by the categories are given labels at a higher level of abstraction compared to the concepts they represent (Corbin and Strauss, 2014). The Figure 5-5 depicts how concepts were grouped together to form categories and subcategories.



**Figure 5-5 An Illustration of the Creation of a Category**

Figure 5-6 shows the ‘culture-related barriers to strategic alignment’ category. This category involves culture-related factors that appear to hinder strategic alignment in the subsidiaries studied. This category is manifested through the language issues that sometimes cause miscommunication and poor collaboration among staff. Another property of this category is culture-related conflict and mistrust, which refers to workplace conflict and mistrust resulting from a clash of cultural values. Similarly, high power distance – reflected in a centralised organisational structure, autocratic decision making, and top-down communications – is another subcategory and dimension of ‘culture-related barriers to strategic alignment.’ Organisations influenced by high power cultures tend to prefer hierarchical organisational structures, top-down communication, and centralised decision-making and governance processes. These factors affect how well senior business and IS managers relate to middle and operational level staff. Also, high power distance may adversely affect strategic alignment through its indirect effect on the partnership between the business and IS functions. By assigning language issues, culture conflict, and high power distance to the ‘culture-related barriers to strategic alignment’ category, the analysis

process moved beyond the description of the concepts and categories by arguing that such culture-related factors serve to hinder organisational efforts targeting strategic alignment.



**Figure 5-6 The ‘Cultural-Related Barriers to Strategic Alignment’ Category**

As shown in Table 5-4, the open coding identified seven categories and 37 subcategories which were constantly refined with the coding of more data.

**Table 5-4 Categories and Subcategories after Open Coding**

	Category	Definition	Grouped concepts/subcategories
1.	Organisational analysis	This category signifies information about the organisations studied on the various elements of business strategy, organisational infrastructure and processes	Organisational analyses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alpha</li> <li>• Beta</li> <li>• Gamma</li> </ul>
2.	IS context	This category relates to IS strategic issues	(1) Strategic IS Planning (2) IS strategy (3) Strategic role of IS (4) IS infrastructure (5) IT outsourcing (6) CIO role (7) The use of ERP systems
3.	Impact of culture on strategic alignment practices	This category is about the effect of cultural factors on various strategic and operational activities of the organisations studied	(1) Impact of culture on communications (2) Language issues (3) Effect of power distance and hierarchy (4) Effect of culture on organisational structure (5) Culture and IS governance (6) Differences in work values and practices (7) Culture-related conflict and mistrust
4.	Cultural barriers to strategic alignment	Cultural factors that tend to inhibit strategic alignment processes through their impact on organisational processes	(1) Challenges to intercultural communications (2) Cultural conflict and mistrust (3) Cultural differences in work values (4) Adverse effects of collectivism (5) Favouritism (6) Discrimination
5.	External cultural context	Represents the cultural context outside the organisation	(1) Headquarters culture (2) Subsidiary cultural context (3) Cultural context of offshore partners (4) Interaction of diverse cultures
6.	Organisational context	These are operational level activities in the organisational that may directly influence strategic alignment	(1) Cultural backgrounds of employees (2) Management style (3) Organisational structure (4) Decision-making (5) Communications (6) Organisational culture (7) strategic IS planning
7.	Strategic alignment approaches	Reflects the culture influences on approaches to strategic alignment adopted by the subsidiaries studies	(1) Universal (2) Contingent (3) Hybrid

### **5.3.3. Axial Coding**

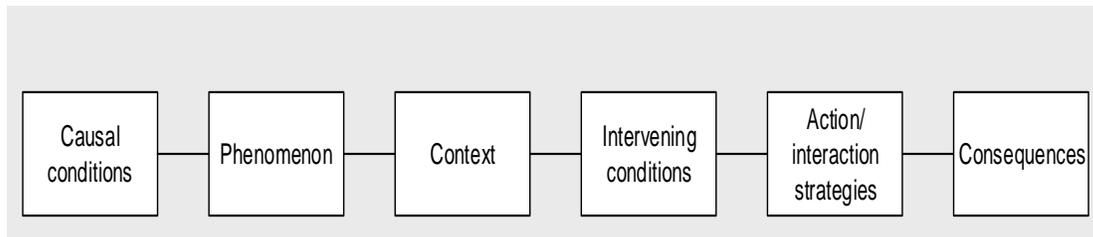
The main focus of axial coding is to describe the main phenomenon regarding the conditions that produce it, the context in which it occurs or is embedded, the approaches through which it is managed, and its consequences or outcomes (Corbin and Strauss, 2014). After axial coding, the seven categories produced during open coding were revised to six. The 'Organisational analyses' and the 'IS context' categories were merged to create a new category called 'organisational and IS context'. Table 5-5 shows the revised concepts and categories after axial coding.

**Table 5-5 Categories and Subcategories after Axial Coding**

	Category	Definition	Grouped concepts/subcategories
1.	Organisational and IS context	This category signifies information about the study organisations on the various elements of strategic alignment: business strategy, IS strategy, organisational infrastructure and processes, IS infrastructure and processes	Organisational and IS Profile: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alpha</li> <li>• Beta</li> <li>• Gamma</li> </ul>
2.	Impact of culture on strategic alignment practices	This category details the effect of cultural factors on various strategic and operational activities within the study organisations	(1) Impact of culture on communications (2) Effect of culture on organisational structure (3) Culture and IS Governance (4) Language issues (5) Impact of power distance and hierarchy
3.	Cultural barriers to strategic alignment	Cultural factors that tend to inhibit strategic alignment processes through their impact on organisational processes	(1) Challenges to intercultural communications (2) Cultural conflict and mistrust (3) Cultural differences in work values
4.	External cultural context	Represents the cultural context outside the organisation	(1) Headquarters culture (2) Subsidiary host culture
5.	Internal organisational context: strategic alignment practices	These are operational level activities in the organisational that may directly influence strategic alignment	(1) Management style (2) Organisational structure (3) Decision-making (4) Communications (5) Organisational culture (6) strategic IS planning
6.	Strategic alignment approaches	Reflects cultural influences on approaches to strategic alignment	(1) Universal (2) Contingent (3) Hybrid

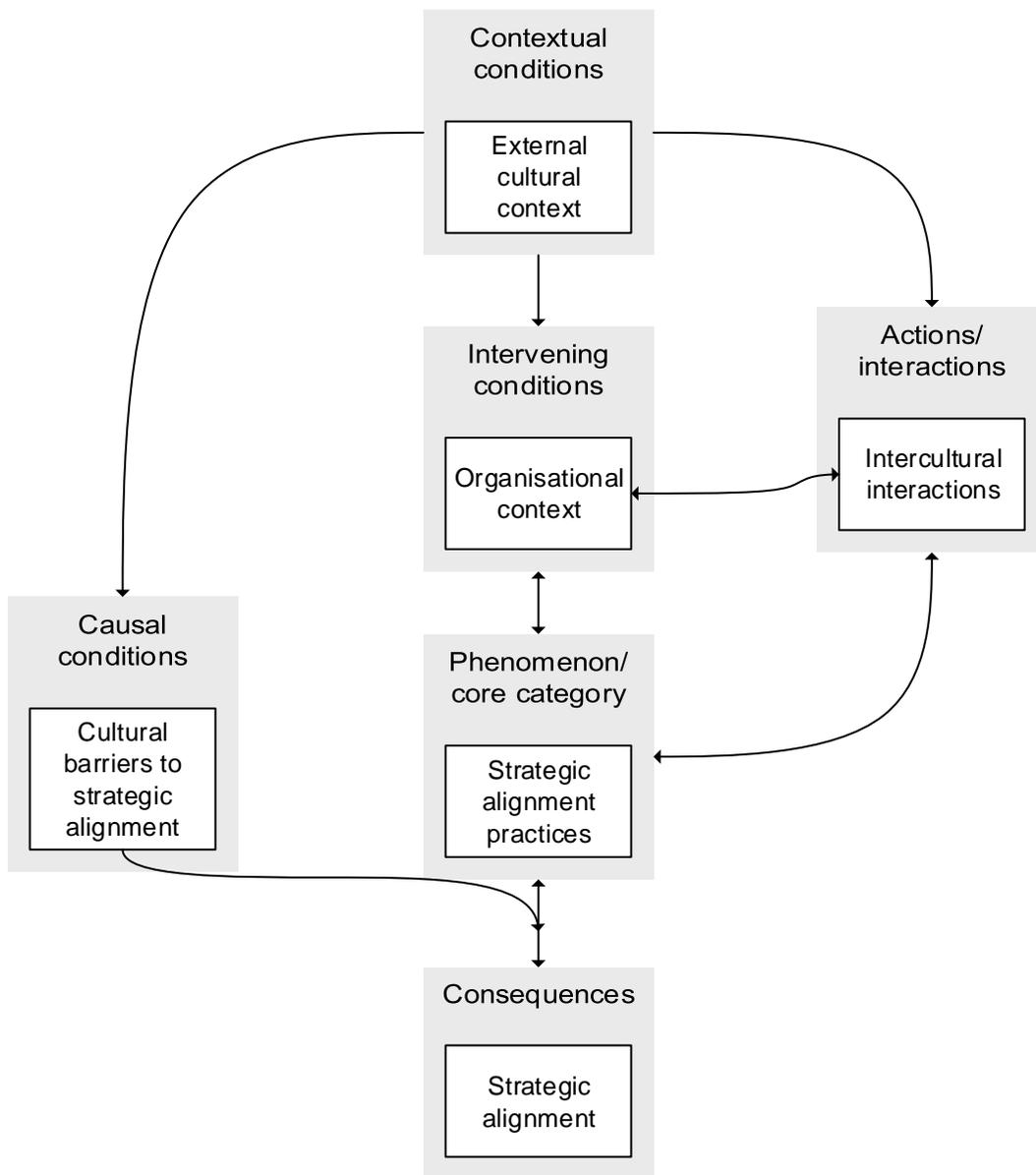
### 5.3.3.1 The Paradigm Model

A paradigm model – an analytical tool that helps grounded theory researchers explain a phenomenon by linking various categories and subcategories – was developed to illustrate the association between the categories. As shown in Figure 5.7, Corbin and Strauss (2014) suggested six elements of a paradigm model: causal conditions, phenomenon, context, intervening conditions and outcomes or consequences.



**Figure 5-7 Elements of a Paradigm Model (Corbin and Strauss, 2008)**

This study's paradigm model (depicted in Figure 5.8) proposes that the external cultural context shapes strategic alignment practices. Also, conditions in the organisational context act as intervening factors that mediate between the external cultural context and strategic alignment practices. Actions and interactions between individuals and groups in the organisational context shape strategic alignment practices and may result in different approaches to strategic alignment. Some cultural elements may act as barriers to strategic alignment as a result of their negative influence on strategic alignment practices. The components of the paradigm model are discussed in the following sub-sections.



**Figure 5-8 A Paradigm Model Showing Relationships between Categories after Axial Coding**

**5.3.3.2 Core Category (Phenomenon) – Strategic Alignment Practices**

The core category is the central idea identified in the data. The core category is also related to all other categories. Strategic alignment practices are a product of strategic

or operational activities that address strategic alignment. Such practices take place in the organisational setting and are influenced indirectly by the external cultural context. All other categories had an association with strategic alignment practices, therefore, it was selected as the central category. Strategic alignment practices refer to actions such as communications, IS governance, and partnership between business and IS that affect strategic alignment.

### ***5.3.3.3 Contextual Conditions – the External Cultural Context***

Understanding how the external cultural context of the subsidiary shape strategic alignment is essential. The contextual conditions refer to elements of the setting in which action and interaction strategies around strategic alignment occur. The macro and micro cultural setting of the organisation provides the environment for strategic alignment. In this study, the cultural context of the organisational headquarters and the subsidiary host culture affected operational activities in the subsidiary to different degrees. Whereas in some cases the headquarters culture or the subsidiary host culture might be dominant, in others both were equally important.

### ***5.3.3.4 Intervening Conditions – Actions/Interactions in the Internal Organisational Context***

Intervening conditions act to either support or hinder actions/interactions in the internal organisational environment. The cultural context of the organisational headquarters and the subsidiary host culture interact with and operate through actual practices in the organisational context. The actions/interactions involve what happens among individuals and groups in the organisation. They include ways in which operational activities relating to the implementation of organisational and IS strategies are managed. Intercultural communications, organisational and IS structure, IS governance and strategic IS planning and management style were identified as factors in the organisational context that directly shape strategic alignment. Action/interactions in this study relate to how the organisations manage cultural factors such that they enable the successful development and implementation of strategic alignment strategies. Actions and interactions are taken

to influence a phenomenon and may result in certain outcomes or consequences (Corbin and Strauss, 2014).

### ***5.3.3.5 Causal Conditions – Culture-Related Barriers to Strategic Alignment***

The causal conditions are the activities or incidents that lead to the occurrence of a given phenomenon. These conditions refer to cultural elements that may explain the differences in the experiences of organisations regarding strategic alignment. The analysis identified three factors – challenges to effective intercultural communication, culture-related conflict and mistrust, and differences in work values and attitudes – as culture-related barriers to strategic alignment.

### ***5.3.3.6 Consequences – Strategic Alignment Approaches***

The external cultural environment of the subsidiary shapes actions/interactions in the organisational context. The actions and interactions combine to set practices related to attaining strategic alignment, which in turn result in some outcomes or consequences. For example, the degree to which actions and interactions may enable or constrain strategic alignment depend on the level of success in managing elements of national culture. Furthermore, actions and interactions may result in three different approaches to strategic alignment: (1) headquarters culture having a dominant influence on strategic alignment, (2) the host subsidiary culture having a dominant influence on strategic alignment, and (3) a combination of both headquarters and host cultures having an influence on strategic alignment.

## **5.3.4. Memo Writing**

Memo writing is an essential part of grounded theory research. It is an important activity for the tracking of categories, properties, hypotheses, and generative questions that evolve from the analytical process. Corbin and Strauss (2014) argue that some conceptual detail is lost or poorly developed when the researcher goes directly from coding to writing theory without memo writing. Memos record and help the researcher to remember important ideas regarding the phenomena under investigation. They also serve

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a variety of functions in grounded theory research, for example, they act as reflections of analytical thought, store information, and facilitate clarification (Corbin and Strauss, 2014).

The field notes and theoretical memos were usually written during and immediately after the interviews to capture the ideas, categories, and questions that emerged. Furthermore, the theoretical memos captured the researcher's thoughts at every stage of the process to guarantee that no conceptual detail was lost. As an example, the memo below is a record of reflections on the 'culture-related barriers to strategic alignment' category:

### "Cultural Barriers to strategic alignment – Theoretical Memo

The coding and analysis of the data have unearthed some culture-related barriers that affect strategic alignment: (1) Language barriers – these are national culture-related obstacles to strategic alignment. For example, some countries have different languages; others have different accents that may be difficult to understand. Different culture-based work practices sometimes become barriers. It is, therefore, essential to adopt different strategic alignment approaches in each country where a multinational organisation operates to address cultural differences. High power distance barriers – these include highly structured management systems that adversely affect strategic alignment through top-down management, communications, and decision-making styles. Conflict barriers – conflicts arising from cultural misunderstandings hinder strategic alignment. However, these cultural barriers appear to operate in settings where people from multiple national cultures work together on location, virtually or offshore, through outsourcing arrangements. They do not necessarily affect strategic alignment where the majority of employees are from the local culture. The effects of cultural barriers appear to be minimised when organisations use enterprise resource planning systems to standardise work practices across cultures – Cultural barriers to strategic alignment memo, written on 23/07/2014".

### **5.3.5. Selective Coding**

Concepts and categories identified during open coding were developed further through axial coding. Selective coding was the next step in the theory development process. Selective coding is usually expected to occur in the advanced stages of the study (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). It involves relating all categories to a central category to integrate and refine theory (Sarker, Lau and Sahay, 2001). Integration involves organising the categories around a central explanatory concept at a more abstract level of analysis (Corbin and Strauss, 2014).

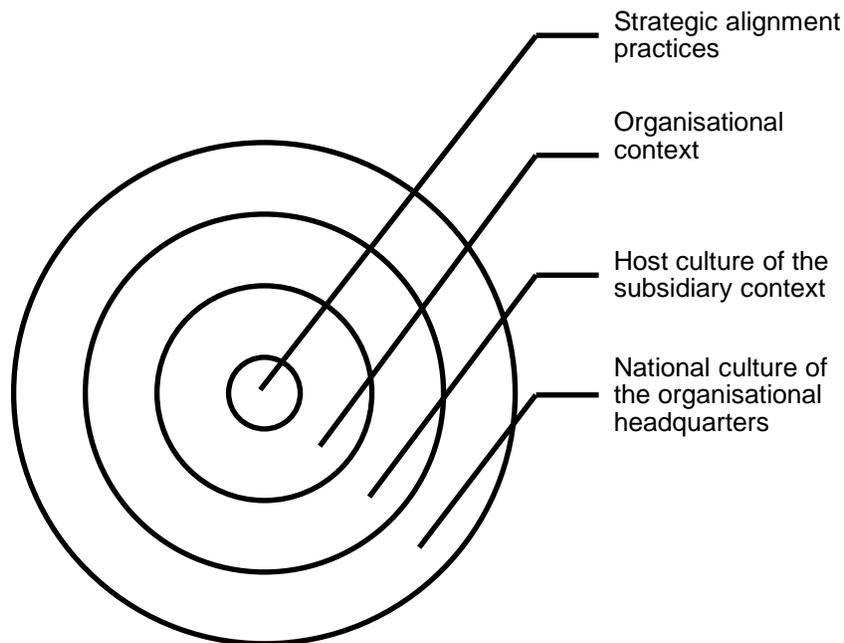
At this advanced stage of the research, the analysis involved connecting the categories and explaining the interrelationships among them. The themes indicate generalised relationships between categories and concepts as well as between distinct categories. At this stage, efforts were made to resolve any inconsistencies and contradictions. For example, there was a contradiction in the data regarding whether workplace conflict identified in the data was the result of differences in cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes or just individual differences. This was resolved after further data collection and analysis suggested that most of the respondents perceived such conflicts as largely the product of a clash of cultural values rather than individual differences.

#### **5.3.5.1 Conditional Matrix**

A conditional matrix is an analytical aid or diagram suitable for clarifying the range of conditions and consequences associated with the phenomenon being examined (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). The matrix is a transactional system consisting of interactive and interrelated levels of conditions that may pertain to the cause, context, and intervening conditions, which may act or interact to enable or impede the phenomenon. Figure 5-9 depicts the conditional matrix constructed during selective coding.

At the core of the matrix is strategic alignment practices, which are affected indirectly by elements of the three outer layers. The next layer after the core is the organisational context, where strategy implementation and the operational level functions

and activities that determine the degree of alignment take place. These functions or activities include communications, IS governance, strategic planning, organisational and IS structure and management style. The third layer is the external cultural context of the organisation, involving elements of the national culture at the organisational headquarters, elements of the subsidiary host culture and aspects of the national culture of offshore partners. Cultures interact to influence strategy implementation and operational activities at the organisational level, which then results in good or poor alignment.



**Figure 5-9 The Conditional Matrix**

### **5.3.5.2 Developing the Storyline**

A storyline in grounded theory technique by which integration of theory during the process of analysis can be realised. Corbin and Strauss (2014) recommend the use of a storyline to help theory development. The storyline should accurately reflect the data within which it is grounded (Birks *et al.*, 2009).

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It was important in this study to turn to the extant literature on national culture and strategic alignment for a framework of concepts to guide the development of a storyline to explain the impact of national culture on strategic alignment. As discussed in section 3.7, the literature on national culture and strategic alignment were consulted for appropriate theories with which to make sense of the findings and to support theory development. The strategic alignment model and Hofstede's national culture dimensions have relevant concepts that can be used to support the analysis of the findings and theory development.

In particular, concepts of culture provided by Hofstede (1998) and Hall and Hall (1990) and alignment by Henderson and Venkatraman, (1993) and Luftman, Papp and Brier (1999) were valuable in this regard. As discussed in Chapter 3, Hofstede argued that management practices may be understood and explained in regard to six dimensions of national culture. The dimensions of power distance and collectivism were relevant in explaining some of the findings. The level of power distance seemed to influence vertical communications and interactions between staff at various levels within organisations, with some impact on strategic alignment. Similarly, Hall and Hall's (1990) work on culture and communications was relevant to explaining the effect of cross-cultural communications on strategic alignment. The concepts of Henderson and Venkatraman's strategic alignment model and Luftman's enablers and inhibitors of strategic alignment were also essential to developing aspects of the theory on cultural enablers and inhibitors of strategic alignment.

The story is about the role of the external national culture context of an organisation and how that affects strategic alignment. An organisation's external cultural context shapes strategic alignment indirectly. Subsidiaries have to deal with the interactions of various elements of national culture, which tend to affect strategic alignment efforts. Specifically, three distinct national culture elements appear to be at play: (1) the national culture context of the parent organisation, (2) the local culture of the subsidiary context, and (3) the national culture context of offshore partners. However, the first two are the most influential. These elements of national culture interact to affect strategic alignment either positively or negatively through elements in the organisational context (e.g. intercultural communications, organisational and IS structure, IS governance and strategic

planning, and management style), which affect strategic alignment practices and may lead to alignment or misalignment. Some factors could be barriers to achieving strategic alignment, including challenges to intercultural communication, culture-related conflict and mistrust, and differences in work values and practices.

### **5.3.5.3 Developing a Grounded Theory**

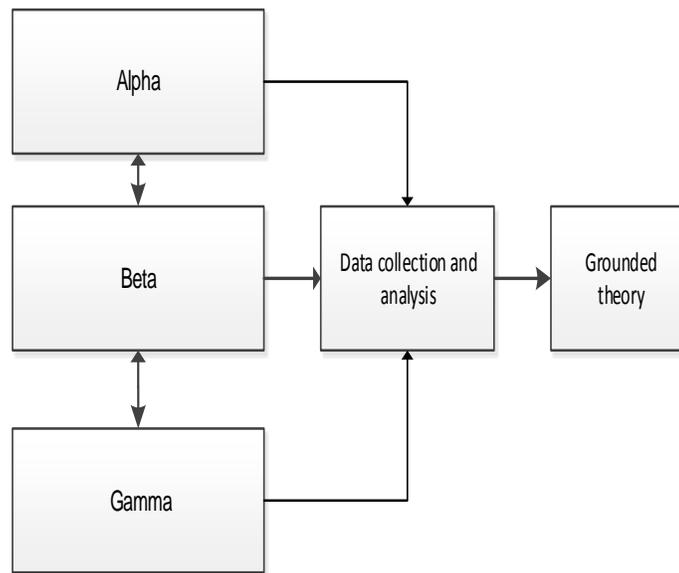
The initial stage of the coding and analysis identified some concepts, which were organised into categories through open coding. In axial coding, the second step of the analysis, the relationships between the categories were explored using a coding paradigm of causal conditions, phenomenon, context, intervening conditions, actions/interactions and consequences. Given that the main aim of the study was to examine the impact of culture on strategic alignment, strategic alignment practices had a link with all other categories and subcategories and was selected as the core category. During selective coding, the final step in the analysis, all categories were integrated into a model grounded in data of national culture and strategic alignment. The storyline was developed to explain the grounded model. A coding matrix was also developed to explain the levels of interaction of the various categories.

## **5.4. The Study Organisations**

An important issue in interpretive research relates to the appropriate number of cases that represent a robust study to generate theory. To successfully explore how national culture affects strategic alignment, three subsidiaries of global telecommunications currently operating in Ghana were studied.

Figure 5-10 depicts the process of developing theory from multiple organisations. The study organisations were similar in the sense that they are subsidiaries of multinational organisations operating in the same sector but were founded in different countries, signifying that they have various national cultural influences. Researching multiple subsidiaries is a strong basis for building a theory inductively grounded in varied

empirical evidence (Eisenhardt, 1989; Fernández, 2004; Yin, 2013). Collecting data from multiple subsidiaries also enables comparison to ascertain whether a finding is simply characteristic of a single subsidiary or reliably replicated by a number of subsidiaries. By piecing together individual patterns from each organisation, a complete theoretical image can be sketched. Furthermore, with multiple study organisations, concepts and relationships are more accurately described because it is easier to determine precise definitions and suitable levels of abstraction (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007).



**Figure 5-10 Depiction of the Grounded Theory Data Collection in the Three Subsidiaries**

Studying organisations in the same industry controlled for extraneous variations and helped to define the limits in which the findings may be generalised. Companies in the telecommunications sector are largely IS dependent and competitive, which suggests attaining alignment between business and IS strategies for competitive advantage is a key issue, and thus constitute good settings for investigating strategic alignment.

Although suitability of organisations for the research was the basis for selection, other factors influenced the selection process, including the possibility of gaining access, and the likelihood of gaining the cooperation of interviewees for grounded theory data collection; and a reasonable assurance of data quality and credibility (Marshall and Rossman, 2010). Table 5-6 provides a synopsis of the study organisations. The next three sub-sections give an overview of the three study organisations.

**Table 5-6 Summary of the Three Study Organisations**

Pseudonym	Description	Headquarters
Alpha	A European telecommunications company that provides mobile and fixed networks, equipment and services, and multimedia. Alpha started operations in Ghana in 2011 employs a culturally diverse staff.	Sweden
Beta	An Indian multinational provider of information technology (IT), networking technology solutions, and business support services to the telecommunications industry. It started operations in Ghana in 2010 and currently employs mostly Ghanaians and expatriates from India.	India
Gamma	A well-established mobile telecommunications service provider with a strong presence in emerging economies. Gamma ventured into the Ghanaian market following its purchase of a mobile telecommunications company in 2006 and employs mostly Ghanaian staff and some expatriate managers.	South Africa

### 5.4.1. Alpha

Alpha is a European telecommunications company that provides mobile and fixed networks, equipment and services, and multimedia solutions. It is founded and headquartered in Sweden. Currently, Alpha has clients in over 180 countries and employs a workforce of over 110,000. In 2015, Alpha had a net sales revenue of \$29.4 billion. Alpha's Ghana subsidiary started operations in 2011 to provide services to its growing client base. Currently, the Ghana subsidiary employs over 300 people on location, with virtual collaborations with other staff and partners offshore. Alpha is an interesting case

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for exploring the influence of national culture on strategic alignment because of its culturally diverse workforce and the use cross-cultural virtual teams to accomplish project tasks.

According to its 2014 annual report, the company regards itself as a driving force behind the networked society and a world leader in information and communication technology and services. The vision of Alpha is to:

“Empower people, business, and society through innovation, industry leadership and a long- term commitment to the vision of an all-communicating world.” – Alpha, Annual Report, 2014

Alpha’s mission is to lead a global transformation through mobility to transform how people conduct important tasks, organise their lives, share information and do business. Currently, the company manages networks that enable the flow of 40 per cent of global data.

In line with a mission to lead the telecommunications transformation through mobility, Alpha has evolved from a focus on hardware to software and services. For example, in the last 15 years, about 70 per cent of sales derived from software and services. Alpha also offers a smorgasbord of industry solutions – from cloud services and mobile broadband to network design and optimisation, and operational support systems (OSS) – which enable the communications and other sectors to conduct business, improve efficiency, enhance user experience and take advantage of new business opportunities.

Respect, professionalism, and perseverance are the core values underpinning Alpha organisational culture, business, and dealings with customers. Alpha has a diverse and inclusive corporate culture founded on egalitarianism. Alpha sees its diverse workforce – a collection of individuals from various cultural backgrounds – as a source of its strength and a key to success in an increasingly global, multi-faceted and competitive market. At the top of Alpha’s organisational structure are its shareholders, who exercise decision-making rights at annual general meetings. The shareholders elect some of the members of the organisation’s board. Six members of the 17-member Alpha board are

staff representatives. The board superintends Alpha's strategy and the management of its operations. The board also appoints the president and CEO and the management team. The president/CEO supervises day-to-day management. In 2015, Alpha made some changes to its organisational structure, citing the need to speed up strategy execution, improve performance, and the need for growth and profitability. The new structure is geared toward meeting ever-changing client needs and promote greater flexibility to seize new market opportunities and cut costs. Other strategic decisions have been made in recent years to identify and invest in revenue opportunities and make the core business more efficient.

#### **5.4.2. Beta**

Beta is a Ghana subsidiary of an Indian multinational provider of information technology (IT), networking technology solutions, and business support services to the telecommunications industry. Beta was established in 1986 as a 60/40 Indian/British information technology and telecommunications joint venture. Beta is currently a \$4.2 billion business headquartered in India. The Forbes 2016 lists Beta as a Forbes Fab 50 Company in Asia.

Since the mid-2000s, the company has progressively expanded its footprint across Africa. It started operations in Ghana in 2010 and currently employs 400 people, mostly Ghanaians, and expatriates from India. At the core of Beta's organisational culture is the recognition of the intrinsic value of a diverse workforce. Beta is a good setting to investigate the role of national culture and strategic alignment because of the multinational workforce it employs. Given that the company originated in India, it offers a different view of how national culture might affect strategic alignment efforts.

Beta has moved from being 'telecom-focused' to a 'business-centric' IT company over the last two decades and is currently among the top five Indian IT service providers. Regarding the range of services it provides, Beta's annual report states:

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“The company offers a bouquet of services which includes Telecom Services, Consulting, Application Outsourcing, Infrastructure Outsourcing, Engineering Services, BPO, Platform Solutions, and Mobile Value Added Services.” – Beta, Annual Report, 2013-2014

Beta’s service delivery model uses independent business units (IDUs) to deliver services to customers and to manage client relations. According to its 2014-2015 annual report, Beta presently has 85 delivery centres around the world, aspires to be a global leader in outsourcing services to the telecommunications industry by leveraging its technologies and competencies to create value for its shareholders and customers. Beta has also expanded gradually and improved its range of services by moving beyond its traditional emphasis on providing services to telecommunications companies. For example, Beta have ventured into building telecommunications equipment and software. Beta’s operations might be classified into three broad categories:

- IT Services: these include solution integration, application development and management, consulting, application management, infrastructure management, and revenue management services
- Research and Development services: providing services ranging from technological solutions (e.g. software development, testing, hardware development, and networks) to leading telecommunications equipment manufacturers around the world
- Business process outsourcing: beta also offers outsourcing and offshoring services in such areas as finance and accounting, human resource outsourcing, order management, contract management, inventory management and so on.

Beta’s corporate culture is a product of various factors, such as its history, the industry in which it operates, its purpose and vision and the cultural background of its employees. The company targets the best young human resource talent through recruitment, training and development initiatives using online aptitude tests and technical interviews.

### **5.4.3. Gamma**

Gamma is the subsidiary of a well-established telecommunications service provider with a strong presence in emerging economies, headquartered in South Africa. Gamma's parent company was founded in 1994 and currently operate in 22 countries and employs a workforce of 21,000 in three regions of the world: South and East Africa, West and Central Africa, and the Middle East and North Africa. Gamma's end-of-year report 2015 shows that the group has 232.5 million customers, with a market capitalisation of 245 billion Rand. The Gamma group is the sixth largest company listed on the Johannesburg stock exchange. Brand Africa declared Gamma as the most liked and valuable brand in Africa.

Gamma started operations in Ghana following the acquisition of a pre-existing mobile network operator in 2006. It currently has the largest share of the increasingly competitive mobile telecommunications market in Ghana, with about 14 million subscribers. Its annual report states:

"[Gamma] Ghana's performance was pleasing despite a weak macroeconomic environment and tough competition. Subscribers increased by 7.1 percent to 13.9 million and market share was maintained at 50.5 percent" – Gamma, Annual Report, 2014

Gamma relies mainly on local Ghanaian staff, employing Ghanaians from across various ethnic groups and religions. However, expatriates, who are mostly from the Middle East and other African countries, also work at the Ghana subsidiary. Gamma is a culturally diverse organisation that perceives the cultural diversity of its staff as one of its strengths, as illustrated in this quotation:

"Gamma's wealth lies in the inclusivity and diversity of its global community. Gamma's globally diverse culture gives us a platform to celebrate our differences. By harnessing the unique flavour and heritage of each of our operations, we're able to find innovative solutions to the challenges of the emerging markets in which we operate" – Gamma, Annual Report, 2014

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The company incorporates its purpose, core values, and beliefs into its vision and mission statements, which spells out its outlook. The Beta group has a philosophy and vision of offering telecommunication services and connectivity predominantly to the rising populations in emerging markets. The Gamma group's mission is to "make our customers' lives a whole lot brighter" and a vision of "leading the delivery of a bold, new digital world to our customers". Gamma articulates its culture through some core values and vital behaviours and believes its culture is a strategic asset for sustained success. To realise its vision, Gamma is guided by the core values of leadership, innovation, integrity, relationships, and a can-do attitude expressed through the vital behaviours of complete accountability, get it done, active collaboration, and complete candour. Gamma boasts of a 'globally diverse culture' that has created a foundation to celebrate differences.

Creating and managing stakeholder value, and innovation and best practice sharing directs the Gamma's approach to work, people and other stakeholders. The goal to create a distinct customer experience, drive sustainable growth and transform its operating model outline how Gamma strives to advance a sustainable competitive advantage and better shareholder returns. Gamma has made investments in advanced communication over the last two decades to deliver voice, data and digital services to retail customers and enterprise solutions to small and medium scale enterprises and organisations in the public sector.

Gamma regards its workforce as an asset and has focused on promoting the development of human talent through training programmes. Through its procurement policies, Gamma has fostered innovative partnerships that offer solutions to improve productivity as much as possible. Regarding its customers, the company seeks to improve customer service and develop customer-driven communication solutions consistent with global best practice. Accordingly, it has invested in call centres and help desks to deliver expert and automated customer support for its data products and services.

## **5.5. Summary**

This chapter discussed the empirical research design specifying the steps adopted in the conduct of this study. It presented and discussed four aspects of a five-step framework: getting started, fieldwork, coding and category development, selecting study organisation, and reaching closure. The final step of reaching closure is discussed in Chapter 8. The research organisations were subsidiaries of three multinational organisations in the telecommunications industry in Ghana called Alpha, Beta and Gamma. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with middle management and operational level staff of the organisations. Overall, 34 interviews were conducted with 20 individuals. Secondary evidence such as reports, information from organisational websites, and news reports were also analysed. This chapter also discussed the coding of the data to build theory using techniques suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2014). Concepts, the building blocks of the theory were identified during open coding and developed into categories. Also, the axial coding process and the paradigm model, which shows how the categories related to each other and the core category, were discussed in this chapter. Strategic alignment practices, which refer to the activities associated with achieving strategic alignment, became the core category. The starting point of the paradigm model is the external cultural context, a category that refers the cultural environment outside the organisation. It had subcategories, the most influential being the cultural context of the organisational headquarters and the cultural context of the subsidiary. These macro-level conditions influenced actions and interactions within the internal organisational context, which together shape strategic alignment practices, and determine the degree of strategic alignment. The next chapter discusses the organisational and IS profile of the three study organisations. Specifically, it examines IS and business strategies and organisational and IS infrastructure and processes

## **Chapter 6.**

# **Strategic Organisational and IS Context**

## **6.1. Introduction**

Analysis of the study organisations is essential and provides some context and contributes to the understanding of their commonalities and differences. While an overview was provided in section 5.4, this chapter presents an analysis of the strategic context of each of the three study organisations. This chapter also discusses details of each organisation's business strategy, IS strategy, organisational infrastructure and processes, and IS infrastructure and processes.

## **6.2. Alpha – Organisational and IS Profile**

This section profiles the strategic and IS context of Alpha. The section starts by addressing the Alpha's business and IS strategies and proceeds to consider the company's organisational and IS infrastructure and processes.

### **6.2.1. Business strategy**

Alpha's business strategy centres on leveraging its experience in the telecommunications sector to deliver better services to clients. The strategy aims to drive growth and profitability in four key areas: mobile broadband, managed services, operations, and business support solutions. The company's 2014 annual report states:

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“The strategy is to excel in the core business, to improve earnings and to continue to lead and innovate. The ambition is to leverage on our installed base and make further investments in R&D to maintain a strong position.” – Alpha, Annual Report, 2014

Alpha’s strategies, operations, and resource allocation are mostly determined at its Swedish headquarters, as revealed in this quotation:

“Group-wide policies and directives govern how the organisation works .... Alpha has a Group Steering Documents Committee for purposes of aligning policies and directives with Group strategies, values, and structures.” – Alpha, Annual Report, 2014

Balanced scorecards convert Alpha’s strategies into operational goals and performance indicators, which are communicated across its operating units around the world. Balanced scorecards are a management tool for the alignment of organisational and business unit goals, for monitoring of progress towards the attainment of those goals and the mitigation of any risks identified. Alpha’s annual report states:

“[Alpha] uses balanced scorecards as tools for translating strategic objectives into a set of performance indicators for its operational units. Based on the annual strategy, these scorecards are updated with targets for each unit for the next year and are communicated throughout the organisation” – Alpha, Annual Report, 2014

Balanced scorecards also enable managers to track key aspects of an organisation’s strategy beyond purely quantitative measures of performance (Kaplan and Norton, 1992). The use of balanced scorecards create a platform for planning integration and transforming corporate plans into operational plans at the subsidiary is an enabler of strategic alignment (Sledgianowski and Luftman, 2005). The performance indicators relate to marketing and customer performance, competitive position, internal efficiency, financial performance, employee satisfaction, and empowerment. In general, policies and directives governing the work of the organisation are enterprise-wide. Alpha’s use of balanced scorecards is essential to achieving strategic alignment as they simplify the tracking of the strategy implementation process and allow adjustments where necessary.

Alpha appears to follow an analyser strategy (Miles *et al.*, 1978; Miles and Snow, 2003) to protect its base of operations and to create new market opportunities. As a major brand in the telecommunications sector, which is characterised by rapid market and technological changes, Alpha continues to invest in research and development to order to create innovative new products to maintain its market performance. The company also continues to increase its presence in developing countries and has new products and services targeting its corporate customers.

### 6.2.2. IS Strategy

Alpha largely depends on IS to support its organisational processes and information needs. The role of IS at Alpha is to provide greater efficiency and standardisation across its global operations. However, such systems embody cultural values, beliefs, and the practices of its Western origins. Alpha's annual report states:

“[Alpha] utilises the competitive advantages that are gained through global scale and has implemented common processes and IT tools across all operational units worldwide” – Alpha, Annual Report, 2014

The data suggests that Alpha's IS strategy is intended to improve internal efficiency by supporting the work of virtual project teams across time and space. The strategy depends on IS to identify new opportunities and growth areas. Another component of the strategy is the drive to cut IS costs while upholding information security. As a result, the subsidiary in Ghana maintains a small group of IT staff, as aspects of the IS function are outsourced, in line with the headquarters' cost-cutting strategy. An interviewee elaborates:

“Some strategic initiatives have been undertaken which have made our work easier and more efficient. For example, we have secure systems that allow us to work virtually. That said, there has also been a drive to reduce IT-related costs” – AI3, Project Manager

Another respondent explains:

“We have a third party company that manages our IT infrastructure. Even my laptop is rented daily; it is not bought. When I resign today, I have to report it, so

that the third party company cancels the deal on my laptop. Our email systems are also handled by another company” – AI4, Engineer

As part of the cost reduction strategy, Alpha is currently considering ‘Bring Your Own Device’ (BYOD), a manager explains:

“I can tell you that at this time, there are plans in place to ensure that we become more agile. Sometimes the vendors charge relatively high fees, so we want to look at alternatives, which may in the future include people using their own computers. My understanding of some recent announcements is that if you use your own device, some stipend will be given to you. That may be the future direction, while of course we still have to make sure that we pass the security test” – AI5, Incident Alert Manager

BOYD is an arrangement that allows company staff to access corporate networks through their personal mobile devices for work. The main advantage BYOD is that it reduces company’s IT-related costs and increases employee productivity. However, it may have some security implications and challenges (Wang, Wei and Vangury, 2014).

### **6.2.3. Organisational Infrastructure and Processes**

Alignment requires business goals and strategies to be well supported by IS strategies and capabilities for an organisation to gain competitive advantage. As such, IS strategic planning is pivotal in deciding the best way to support an organisation’s strategy. According to the literature, interrelated business and IS planning processes are essential to strategic alignment (Lederer and Sethi, 1988; Earl, 1993; Galliers, 2009). Effective strategic IS planning assist organisations to use IS to implement business strategies and achieve business goals (Lederer and Sethi, 1988; Ward and Peppard, 2007). There is a shared responsibility for IS strategy development at Alpha as stated in its Annual Report:

“In the annual strategy and target setting process, objectives are set for the next three to five years. Risks are assessed, and strategies are developed to achieve the objectives. The strategy process in [Alpha] is well established and involves regional, business unit, and group functions. The strategy is summarised and discussed in a yearly Leadership Summit with approximately 250 leaders from all parts of the business” – Alpha, Annual Report, 2014

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The data further suggest that personnel across the business and IT functions in the subsidiaries are frequently consulted during strategy development and the resultant strategy is communicated across the organisation via corporate email, staff bulletins and magazines. An interviewee explains:

“We have the strategic vision, which outlines where we think the company should be going, but before it is completely crystallised some input has to be taken from the lower levels of the organisation. So [strategic planning] is hybrid, you have some broad general direction from the top, but it is fine-tuned based on input from the lower cadres of the organisation” – A12, Head of Business Support Systems

Alpha has a distributed organisational structure and a typically informal management style. This structure is replicated from the organisational structure of its headquarters, as confirmed by the following quotation:

“The operational structure aligns accountability and authority regardless of country borders and supports the process flow with cross-country operations” – Alpha, Annual Report, 2014

Such a structure is appropriate for the company’s global operations because it promotes efficiency and sensitivity to the needs of local clients, as indicated by its annual report:

“[Alpha] attempts to reduce costs with efficient and effective process flows and with standardised internal controls and performance indicators” – Alpha, Annual Report, 2014

The strategic alignment literature acknowledges the relevance of organisational structure to strategic alignment (Jordan and Tricker, 1995; Chan, 2002; Chan and Reich, 2007b). The informal organisational structure of Alpha has been found to facilitate strategic alignment (Chan, 2002). Ravishankar, Pan and Leidner (2011) suggest that informal organisational structures include cultural elements. In the case of Alpha, the organisational culture, informal organisational structures, and management style reflect the cultural norms and values of its Swedish headquarters context. Contrary to the assertion in the extant literature that Western management style might not be effective in non-Western contexts, Alpha’s management practices at the headquarters have largely been replicated in the subsidiaries. The company seems to have adopted the universalistic

approach, whereby the same management processes are applied to its operations in different cultural contexts, supported by selective recruitment and operational training of staff to adapt to its management style. The host culture of the Ghana subsidiary exhibits a preference for centralised, top-down organisational structure and a formal management style based on hierarchy (Gyekye and Salminen, 2005).

Rondinelli, Rosen and Drori (2001) have argued that aligning managerial processes to the cultural context of countries in which an organisation operates is critical to attaining a competitive advantage. However, the data shows that Alpha has an informal management style based on the egalitarian values of the company's headquarters culture. For example, the company operates an 'open-plan office.' A manager reflects:

"We have an open office. Most of the people here are managers, but you might not know because we do not have a specific office or desk allocated to anybody. When you come to the office and any desk is vacant, you can use. That notwithstanding, we have the CEO, and we have a number of horizontal managers, so you do not see managers reporting to a 'big shot'. At the end of the day, we work as a team"  
– AI5, Incident Alert Manager

The data reveals that business governance is consultative. Management usually consults staff through various communication channels – such as questionnaires, email, video conferencing, and web forums – before taking final decisions. This consultative decision-making style promotes improved decisions and information sharing but might be complex and time-consuming. A respondent describes communication at Alpha:

"Before any policy is implemented, they send questionnaires for everyone to suggest the way forward. [Management] may have their version of how they want to proceed, but they want to get everyone's opinion. They want the engineers and everyone else to say something; they then assemble them together and send back to us for review. They want to be sure that what is to be done will be of benefit, rather than coming to impose" – AI4, Engineer

The decision-making and governance procedures at Alpha appear to reflect the consensus-driven nature of the headquarters culture. The host culture is usually associated with top-down governance processes. Thus, subordinates might interpret such consensus-driven decision-making as weakness on the part of superiors. Interestingly,

however, when business and IS staff are consulted, the resultant decisions are more likely to be efficiently executed (Luftman, Papp, and Brier, 1999).

Alpha undertakes a range of project tasks in geographically dispersed locations in different countries using virtual project teams. Virtual projects enable the Alpha to pull together talent and expertise from around the company's global operation to accomplish project tasks. An interviewee explicates:

"We work across many countries, we have people who are not sitting together in their conventional offices, but they have to do their work through technology. To put it simply, I will call it LVT, meaning 'Leading Virtual Teams'. For example, I have four managers reporting to me. Two of them are in Nigeria; the other two are in South Africa. We also have people in Sweden, India, and Kenya. My manager, for instance, is in Kenya. In my last role, I had somebody working in Reunion Island, and I am sitting in Accra. Some people are in the field deploying solutions, engaging with customers, and understanding their business requirements. Therefore, it is important that our IT services are scalable to accommodate this kind of work structure" – AI3, Project Manager.

While virtual teams provide some benefits such as working across time and space, there are also challenges, which may range from project failure to delayed delivery of working systems (Shore and Venkatachalam, 1995). For example, team members have different values, beliefs, and behaviours that might pose challenges to the implementation of business and IS strategies.

Alpha encourages horizontal and vertical communications. It uses a range of face-to-face and various media to enable communications between staff co-located in the Ghana subsidiary and members of virtual project teams offshore. Effective communication is an enabler of strategic alignment in organisations as it allows information sharing between the business and IS functions and across various levels of an organisation (Luftman, 2003). Effective communications are also essential to successful teamwork (Kalla, 2005). For example, cross-functional project teams communicate frequently using a variety of media. An interviewee illustrates the importance of rich communications to the operations of the company's virtual teams:

“Communication is the key to our business, if you can’t communicate effectively, you can’t do the work.” – A12, Head of Business Support Systems

Virtual teams rely on ICT-mediated communications for the coordination and control of work. Given the constraints of communications in remote teamwork, virtual teams use different channels to promote effective electronic communications among members. The data identified a preference for both synchronous and asynchronous communication tools at Alpha, including email chatroom communications, web-based streaming, and teleconferencing. Technology-mediated communications enable the company to assemble various talents, skills, and experience to complete projects without physically relocating individuals, which saves time and cost. An interviewee commented on the use of various media to facilitate communication at Alpha:

We used a tool called ‘Sametime’, which was not exactly user-friendly. Now we have Microsoft Lync, an excellent communication tool, you can initiate with video, initiate voice and text, and sometimes it gives room for multiple chats. It can also serve as a pseudo-video conferencing tool, which is important currently where flexibility is one of the key drivers of success. That improves access all over the continent, and anywhere in the world, you can open documents, communicate with team members and clients” – A12, Head of Business Support Systems

Although the use of virtual teams has some advantages for Alpha, it also poses some challenges relating to the absence of face-to-face communications. However, the diversity inherent in the teams allows for the cross-fertilisation of ideas. One participant commented:

“My team virtually does all the deployment in sub-Saharan Africa; we are looking at 47 different countries. There are a number of delivery models I could use. For example, I could use people within Africa, or teams outside of Africa based on scale, cost, and industrialisation. In terms of industrialisation, I mean skills that can be replicated at a fraction of the cost” – A13, Project Manager.

#### **6.2.4. IS Infrastructure and Processes**

IS infrastructure and processes support the implementation of business strategy. As a global organisation, Alpha relies on an enterprise resource planning system (ERP)

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to standardise work processes. Such systems enhance efficiency, support critical business processes, support virtual work, coordinate and control international operations and provide both international and local managerial tools (Ein-Dor, Segev and Orgad, 1993). The company's annual report states:

“[Alpha] utilises the competitive advantages that are gained through global scale and has implemented common processes and IT tools across all operational units worldwide” – Alpha, Annual Report, 2014

Alpha's deployment of an ERP is not unique as it is part of a trend towards the deployment of enterprise systems by multinational organisations to meet information requirements. Such systems facilitate the integration of information across disparate locations and national boundaries, facilitate coordination and control of business operations and support international strategies (Madapusi and D'Souza, 2005). Given that the enterprise systems were designed and developed by the corporate IS unit and implemented across the entire organisation spanning many countries, they are likely to reflect the Western values of the headquarters, and may not necessarily take into consideration the host culture of the subsidiary (Ein-Dor, Segev and Orgad, 1993). Moreover, since the headquarters commissions their development, the systems reflect the values, norms and work practices of Alpha's Swedish headquarters. However, the literature asserts that ERP systems can have a harmonising effect on the organisation because they reinforce convergent work practices, behaviours and mindsets (Iveroth, 2012).

IS infrastructure constitutes a critical component of implementing an organisation's strategies. Enterprise IS facilitates the use of virtual teams to accomplish projects usually staffed by personnel located in different parts of Africa. The infrastructure is designed to support the company's virtual teams, dispersed administrative structure, and to standardise work processes across its many subsidiaries around the world. The following quote illustrates the role IS infrastructure in the world of virtual teams:

“The IT infrastructure supports mobility. Some people are in the field deploying solutions, engaging with customers, and understanding their business

requirements. So it is important that our IT services are scalable to accommodate this sort of structure.” – AI2, Head of Business Support Systems

Table 6.1 provides a summary of the business and IS strategic profile of Alpha.

**Table 6-1 Alpha – Summary of organisational and IS Profile**

Concept	Summary
Context/organisation	Telecommunication and IT services provider to corporate clients. Founded and headquartered in Sweden
Business strategy	Alpha continues to invest in research and development in order to create innovative new products to maintain its market performance. It also continues to increase its presence in developing countries and has new products and services targeting its corporate customers.
IS strategy	The role of IS at Alpha is to provide greater efficiency and standardisation across its global operations.
Organisational infrastructure and processes	Alpha has a distributed organisational structure and a typically informal management style. This structure is replicated from the organisational structure of its headquarters. Key elements include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of both vertical and horizontal communications</li> <li>• Distributed corporate structure</li> <li>• Use of virtual project teams</li> <li>• Democratic and consensus-driven governance</li> <li>• Informal management style driven by egalitarian values</li> </ul>
IS infrastructure and processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IS infrastructure and processes support the implementation of business strategy. As a global organisation, Alpha relies on enterprise systems to standardise work processes and tools. Key elements include:</li> <li>• Enables ‘flexible working’ and the cross-cultural virtual teams located in different countries</li> <li>• Cost reduction through IT outsourcing</li> <li>• ERP-enabled standardisation of work across the organisation</li> <li>• Consultation decision making</li> </ul>

### 6.3. Beta – Organisational and IS Profile

In this section, the business and IS strategies and organisational and IS infrastructure and processes of Beta, the second study organisation are discussed.

### **6.3.1. Business Strategy**

Beta's current strategy focuses on enhancing its position as a leading provider of services to the telecommunications industry by offering a wide-ranging portfolio of IT services and capitalising further on its core competitive strengths to create value for stakeholders and customers.

Beta's focus on the telecommunications industry has some advantage because of the anticipated sustained growth of the sector. The unique focus on the sector has enabled the development of the domain knowledge required, enabling the company to increasingly offer both conventional services and high-end, higher value added services, such as managed platforms and managed services and consulting, resulting in deeper participation in the businesses of its clients.

The company sees as its main strength the breadth of domain knowledge developed over the last three decades in the IT and telecommunications sector and strives to encourage staff to leverage this collective knowledge. Its annual report states:

"The Company has deep domain knowledge, skilled workforce, delivery capabilities, and efficient sales force and relationship managers to help retain its competitive positioning....we endeavour to create an environment that is encouraging for associates to innovate and collaborate to leverage this collective knowledge" – Beta, Annual Report 2014-2015

Beta's strategies are headquarters driven and are designed to support the corporate vision to become a leading player in the global IT and telecommunications industries. Hence, it has a business strategy to drive growth and profitability by increasing business from existing clients and expanding the scope of the services it provides. The strategy supports the provision of high-end value added services and managed services focused on growth in six areas: IT applications, network services, business process outsourcing (BPO); information management systems (IMS), value added services, and security services targeting telecommunications companies.

Beta's strategy focuses on six key areas: growing its current customer base, consolidation of its brand name, moving into new regions, pursuing growth through mergers, acquisitions, and joint ventures, improving efficiency and productivity, and recruiting and retaining good quality staff. The company runs a decentralised delivery model involving 12 independent delivery units supported by competency and solution units to enable better service delivery and efficiency. The delivery units are authorised to make decisions as regards recruitment, remuneration, and promotion. While they are independent, the units share knowledge and expertise. Beta also uses an offshore delivery model to provide some services. Thus, the company has an extensive communications infrastructure that connects clients' locations with delivery points. Another aspect of Beta's strategy is to reduce operational costs. The following quotation illustrates:

"Part of our main strategy is to enhance operational systems and introduce initiatives to reduce cost and turnaround time...We use business metrics, particularly, KPIs [key performance indicators] and revenue targets to assess the achievement of our objectives" – Beta, Annual Report 2014-2015

Beta's strategy as discussed in this section is consistent with that of a prospector. According to Miles and Snow (2003), the prospector strategy centres on developing new products and services and expanding into new markets. Beta's orientation is toward growth through mergers and acquisitions and is continuously seeking new markets and product opportunities.

### **6.3.2. IS Strategy**

IS strategy is important as it outlines the role of IS within an organisation and specifies the IS necessary for the organisation to be competitive (Earl, 1993). Such IS may include systems essential to achieving efficiency and effectiveness within the organisation itself and those that create competitive advantage within the broader external environment (Venkatraman, 1991). The interviewees at Beta were unaware of any formal IS strategy document and could not articulate the company's IS strategy. However, outsourcing seems to be an essential element of Beta's IS strategy. The company has an outsourcing arrangement with another company. A participant noted:

“Most of the IT is outsourced to a third party company. [Another company] provides technical support for our users.” – BI5, Business Development Manager

The organisational documents examined have not explicitly stated the company's IS strategy beyond promoting innovation through the adoption of cost-effective integrated technologies. It appears the IT strategy of Beta is emergent. The extant literature acknowledges that not all organisations have a formalised strategy (Mintzberg, 1978; Mintzberg and Waters, 1985; Sims, Powell and Vidgen, 2004). Sometimes, an organisation's strategy reflects the decisions and activities undertaken by managers in the organisation (Ciborra and Jelassi, 1994; Chan, Huff and Copeland, 1997; Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl, 2007; Peppard, Galliers and Thorogood, 2014; Karpovsky and Galliers, 2015). However, the lack of an explicit strategy and strategic planning process could mean that Beta develops and implements IS in an ad hoc fashion, which may affect its flexibility to respond to changes in the business environment.

### **6.3.3. Organisational Infrastructure and Processes**

Multinational organisations have to choose whether to adapt their structures and practices as they venture into new countries with different cultures. The data suggests a structured and hierarchical organisational structure at Beta. The following quotation clarifies:

“I won't say this company is decentralised because everything still has to come from the top. Salaries and everything is done in India. It is more of a top-down structure and management system. There are about seven levels in the hierarchy.”  
– BI3, Backend Operations Executive

Beta uses various channels to facilitate communications, as the following quotation illustrates:

“We use emails. We also use Skype; and Microsoft Office Communications Server (OCS), because many of the employees are offshore in India [the headquarters]. We also use the telephone. When I need clarity on something from my boss, I can call him if it's urgent or if I can't reach him by email” – BI2, Head of Customer Care and Backend Data Support

The data also reveals that the flow of communications is largely top-down as they are mainly used to send instructions from superiors to subordinates. However, subordinates also use corporate communications to seek clarifications, send reports, and to seek advice in cases of emergency. A respondent reflects on communication at Beta:

“I won’t say it is democratic. I will describe it as top-down. As far as I know, directives are still being handed from India most of the time. Currently, my boss is in India. The top person responsible for our project is in India. The reason why I say it is top-down is that if there is an issue, the head the project has to send an email to my boss’s boss in India. He will then send directives to my boss, who then gets them to us” – BI4, Project Manager

The top-down communications validate the findings of previous research which shows that in high power distance settings vertical communications are used to reinforce command and control (Shachaf, 2008). Top-down communications and the centralised organisational structure at Beta highlight the influence of the high power distance of the headquarters and subsidiary contexts. The hierarchy and autocratic governance practices inhibit strategic alignment as they might prevent effective communication, partnership, and participation in strategic IS planning and the effective implementation of business and IS strategies (Luftman, Papp and Brier, 1999).

Chan (2002) stresses the need for structural alignment, which refers to the degree of structural fit between IT and the business. It is affected by the location of IT decision-making rights, reporting relationships, (de)centralization of IT, and the deployment of IT personnel. Chan also found that informal organisational structures are essential to strategic alignment. Beta’s centralised organisational structure could inhibit staff at the lower levels of the organisation from contributing to strategy formulation and decision-making.

#### **6.3.4. IS Infrastructure and Processes**

As a multinational organisation, Beta has to balance the management and coordination of its global operations with meeting the local needs of its Ghana subsidiary.

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The company has systems for providing an integrated service as well as tailoring products and services to the domestic market. It uses both headquarters-driven enterprise systems across the company's global operations while outsourcing the local IS needs to a local vendor.

Beta operates a business management system to promote operational efficiency throughout the organisation. The system facilitates the development of business solutions and applications for its clients in the competitive Ghanaian market. An interviewee reflects on the importance of IS to the company's operations:

“Our work depends on our IT systems: when they go down, work comes to a standstill. We have some tools and applications that we use for work. When these applications malfunction, our work comes to a standstill. We can do all the manual troubleshooting, but at the end of the day, we need the system to resolve our issues.” – B11, Engineer.

Table 6.2 summarises the strategic organisational and IS profile of Beta.

**Table 6-2 Beta – Summary of organisational and IS Profile**

Concept	Summary
Context/organisation	Indian multinational provider of digital transformation, consulting and business re-engineering solutions
Business strategy	To diversify its client base through providing wide-ranging services, and expansion into new geographical areas
IS strategy	Emergent IS strategy seeks to promote innovation through integrated cost effective IS
Organisational infrastructure and processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Largely top-down communications</li> <li>• Corporate email the preferred medium of communication</li> <li>• Centralized structure</li> <li>• Top-down</li> <li>• Autocratic management style</li> </ul>
IS infrastructure and processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IS used for operational efficiency and standardisation</li> <li>• Cost reduction through IT outsourcing</li> <li>• Strategies developed at headquarters</li> <li>• Managers and operational staff not involved in strategic IS planning</li> </ul>

## **6.4. Gamma – Organisational and IS Profile**

The business and IS strategies and the organisational and IS infrastructure and processes of Gamma, the third study organisation are discussed in this section.

### **6.4.1. Business Strategy**

Gamma's strategic goal is to sustain its place as the leading mobile network operator in emerging markets by identifying and exploring growth opportunities, improving innovation, focusing on the customer and enhancing operational efficiency. Its annual report states:

“The aim of the current strategy is to keep our leadership position in the telecommunications industry in emerging markets and to continue to uphold a business model that ensures better value for the company's shareholders” – Gamma, Annual Report, 2014

The company seeks innovation by taking advantage of new opportunities. It also seeks agility in its operations, including the rapid rollout of new products and services to gain a competitive advantage. Gamma's strategy has five strategic themes, as stated in the following quotation:

“Creating and managing stakeholder value, and innovation and best practice sharing describe our approach to our work, people, and other stakeholders. Tangible priorities under creating a distinct customer experience, driving sustainable growth and transforming our operating model define how we at [Gamma] strive to gain a sustainable competitive advantage and superior shareholder returns” – Gamma, Annual Report, 2014

Gamma's strategic focus since 2007 has been to expand its business, diversify earnings, and to invest in better, faster networks through acquisitions. An updated strategy in 2012 focused on the needs of its customers by offering a more comprehensive range of services to drive sustainable growth, drive down costs, and enhance efficiency.

Gamma's strategic vision is to innovate and develop products and solutions to gain a competitive advantage. For example, the company has recognised the growing demand for data in Ghana and has updated its infrastructure accordingly, to provide internet-based connectivity and services to small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs). Gamma's website states:

"The company understands that the best way to gain a competitive edge in a local market is to offer different products and services customised to suit lifestyles and expectations. A vital service of [Gamma's] operations is [Gamma] Business, which provides data solutions and appropriate IT infrastructure to small, medium and large-scale businesses with the purpose for them to deliver up-to-speed efficiency in their operations" – Gamma, Website, July 2015

It appears that Gamma follows a defender strategy (Miles and Snow, 2003) and focuses on protecting its substantial market share in the mobile telephone services industry in Ghana and other emerging markets, maintaining stable growth, and serving its current customers. Miles and Snow (2003) contend that organisations that follow a defender strategy seek stability by developing products and services directed at a narrow segment of the total potential market. In the case of Gamma, its strategy is meant to sustain its dominance of the Ghanaian market.

#### **6.4.2. IS Strategy**

Gamma's annual report suggests that the company strives to achieve strategic alignment. Its corporate governance report states:

"Management ensures that all IT and network-related projects are aligned to a defined project management methodology and oversees the integration of the IT and network strategies to the business strategy objectives and the IT sustainability plan." – Gamma, Corporate Governance Report 2014

The report further states:

"Management drives and promotes the efficient, effective, secure, and acceptable use of the network, technology, and information across [Gamma]" – Gamma, Corporate Governance Report 2014

Asked about the role of IS within the organisation, a manager said:

“The IT supports the organisation to achieve its strategic objectives. You know we are in a technological environment, and everything we do here runs on IT infrastructure. The corporate organisation has its strategic objectives, what are the systems that will enable the organisation to achieve these objectives? We need to have an integrated infrastructure that can connect the entire country, so that data from the regions can be sent back to the head office.” – GI1, Programme Control and Monitoring Manager

Another interviewee alluded to the role of IS at Gamma:

“Our duty is to make sure that that infrastructure is in place. We make recommendations for the implementation of frequency monitoring, management monitoring, and we identify the best system that we think is appropriate. Therefore, our core role as IT is to support the corporate objectives. So, the IT strategy is actually in line with the corporate objectives.” – GI2, Northern Regional Manager

Although Gamma acknowledges the role of IS in supporting its operations, it appears to have an emergent rather than explicit IS strategy, as no specific IS strategy document was available and interviewees could not clearly articulate Gamma’s IS strategy.

### **6.4.3. Organisational Infrastructure and Processes**

Gamma seeks to optimise regional synergies through a hub and cluster organisational structure. Gamma’s global governance structure has shareholders at the top, followed by the board, management, employees, and other stakeholders. It has a unitary board structure, with most directors being independent and non-executive. The Board is responsible for the adoption of strategic plans, the oversight of operations and management, and designing suitable and efficient risk management strategies and procedures. The president/CEO has the responsibility for the daily administration of the company’s operations around the world with the support of an executive committee. Together with the executive team, the CEO directs the development of the company’s policies and strategies for the approval of its board. This global governance structure of the company is replicated in its subsidiaries.

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“We continually strive to improve the effectiveness and quality of our governance structures, and ensure that they are further embedded in all our operating subsidiaries.” – Gamma, Corporate Governance Report 2014

A CEO heads Gamma, supported by a nine-member executive team of directors, each heading a function. A respondent described the organisational structure at Gamma:

“It has four layers, the executive management, the senior managers, the middle managers, and then the low-level management” – GI2, Northern Regional Manager

The data indicates Gamma uses various channels of communication including corporate email, bulletins, conference calls, and video conferences. An interviewee said:

“Communications are done using the corporate email system 99% of the time. Calls and meetings are not frequent” – GI5, Project Manager

The company has made efforts to promote effective top-down and bottom-up communications using a variety of channels. The interviews also indicate the importance of communications for the effective implementation of corporate strategies at Gamma, as captured in the following quotation:

“Good communications are essential for implementing our corporate strategies. In the business setting, it is not possible to meet with everyone. So communications take place through corporate emails, bulletins, conference calls, video conferences, and electronic communications” – GI3, Multimedia Services Team Lead

### **6.4.4. IS Infrastructure and Processes**

The CIO is the head of IT at Gamma and a member of the executive team led by the CEO. The main responsibilities of the CIO include developing the IT Strategy, budgets, applications, network, hardware, and management of the IT team. Other duties of the CIO include the planning, implementation and operating of IS infrastructure and the development and execution of policies and strategies that guarantee good quality, functionality, and security. IT plays a predominant role in the work of Gamma; as such, IT

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has priority in the allocation of resources within the organisation. As a company in the telecommunications sector, IS are central to the business of Gamma; as such, management makes substantial investments in IS. One interviewee noted:

“We are a telecoms company, and ICT is one of our core areas. Management recognises that and makes it necessary to make a lot of investments in those areas” – G11, Programme Monitoring and Control Manager

IS decision-making rights are shared between the corporate headquarters and the local subsidiary. The corporate headquarters has control over the group IS function and assesses the enterprise-wide IS needs and opportunities. The management of Gamma has responsibility for the choice of what IS systems to implement at the subsidiary. Executive management and the board of directors determine broad strategic IS direction while the CIO is responsible for the strategy implementation with the assistance of professional IT staff. An interviewee explains:

“IT strategy is the responsibility of the CIO. The CIO does strategic planning. The CIO sets the vision and things like customer focus, cost effectiveness, a well-run IT operation, and flexibility and so on” – G13, Multimedia Services Team Lead

The interviews indicate that IT is central and critical to the implementation of the company's strategies and reaching its business goals. Thus, the CIO reports directly to the CEO.

Management seeks the input of the IS department when business and IS decisions are taken. The approach emphasises continuous decision making shared by the business and organisational learning focusing on the problems, opportunities, and the contribution of IS to operational efficiency and competitive advantage. A participant explains:

“It is more like a top-down approach. We use that model as an organisation. It is top-down because everything that the IT department has to do has to be strategically aligned with the corporate strategy. The corporate objectives are set at the top, and the various divisions have to break them down into the different departments” – G11, Programme Control and Monitoring Manager

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A manager explains the process of developing or acquiring new software applications:

“Most of the applications that we use for our work were drawn up by the IT department. We are usually consulted, but not all the time. They only consult the key people, not all of us. For example, when developing sales applications, they usually consult our sales people to tell them they key things that we need in the application. They usually provide training and take feedback from us.” – GI2, Northern Regional Manager

Table 6-3 summarises the business and IS strategies and the organisational and IS infrastructure and processes of Gamma

**Table 6-3 Gamma – Summary of organisational and IS Profile**

Concept	Summary
Context/organisation	Mobile network operator (MNO) in emerging markets headquartered in South Africa
Business strategy	Low-cost competitive strategy
IS strategy	Although CC acknowledges the role of IS in supporting its operations, it appears to have an emergent rather than an explicit IS strategy as it has no explicit IS strategy document
Organisational infrastructure and processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mainly corporate email, bulletins, conference calls, video conferences</li> <li>• Hub and cluster organisational structure</li> <li>• Top-down/consultative</li> <li>• A mix of democratic and autocratic styles</li> </ul>
IS infrastructure and processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeks competitive advantage through IT for operational efficiency</li> <li>• A combination of in-house IS development and the use of enterprise systems</li> </ul>

## 6.5. Summary

This chapter presented an in-depth analysis of each of the study organisations highlighting the following: business strategy, IS strategy, organisational infrastructure and processes, and IS infrastructure and processes. Each study organisation follows different business and IS strategies, with different organisational and IS infrastructure and

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processes intended to support such strategies. Table 6-4 presents an overall summary of the findings of the strategic and IS context of the three study organisations. The next chapter (Chapter 7) presents and discusses an inductively developed theory of national culture and strategic alignment grounded in data.

**Table 6-4 Summary of Organisational and IS Profile**

Concepts	Alpha	Beta	Gamma
Study organisation	Telecommunications and IT services provider founded and headquartered in Sweden	Indian multinational provider of digital transformation, consulting and business re-engineering solutions founded and headquartered in India	Mobile network operator in emerging markets founded and headquartered in South Africa
Business strategy	To drive growth and profitability in four key areas: mobile broadband, managed services and operations and business support solutions	To diversify its client base through providing wide-ranging services, and expansion into new geographical areas	Low-cost competitive strategy
IS strategy	The role of IS at Alpha is to provide greater efficiency and standardisation across its global operations.	Emergent IS strategy seeks to promote innovation through integrated cost effective IS	Although Gamma acknowledges the role of IS in supporting its activities, it appears to have an emergent rather than an explicit IS strategy, as it has no explicit IS strategy document
Organisational infrastructure and processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of both vertical and horizontal communications</li> <li>• Distributed corporate structure</li> <li>• Use of virtual project teams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Largely top-down communications</li> <li>• Corporate email the preferred medium</li> <li>• Centralized structure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mainly corporate email, bulletins, conference calls, video conferences</li> <li>• Hub and cluster structure</li> <li>• Top-down/consultative</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Democratic and consensus-driven governance</li> <li>• Informal management style driven by egalitarian values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Top-down</li> <li>• Autocratic management style</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A mix of democratic and autocratic styles</li> </ul>
IS strategy, infrastructure, and process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enables 'flexible working' and the cross-cultural virtual teams located in different countries</li> <li>• Cost reduction through IT outsourcing</li> <li>• ERP-enabled standardisation of work across the organisation</li> <li>• Consultation strategic IS planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IS used for operational efficiency and standardisation</li> <li>• Cost reduction through IT outsourcing</li> <li>• Strategies developed at headquarters</li> <li>• Managers and operational level staff not involved in strategic IS planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeks competitive advantage through IT for operational efficiency</li> <li>• A mix of in-house IS development and the use of enterprise systems</li> <li>• Developed by CIO with the assistance of senior managers</li> </ul>

## **Chapter 7.**

# **How National Culture Impacts Strategic Alignment**

## **7.1. Introduction**

Chapter 6 discussed the strategic and IS context of the study organisations. In this chapter, a grounded theory of national culture and strategic alignment is presented and discussed. The culture and strategic alignment (CUSA) model is a grounded framework for explaining how national culture influences strategic alignment. The model was inductively constructed through the coding and analysis of the data, supported by insights from the national culture and strategic alignment literature.

## **7.2. National Culture and Strategic Alignment – A Grounded Theory**

As depicted in Figure 7-1, the CUSA model has four interrelated broad categories and 14 subcategories. The 'external cultural context' category has two subcategories: (1) national culture at the corporate headquarters setting, and (2) subsidiary host national culture. The subcategories for the second category – 'internal organisational context' – include (1) intercultural communications, (2) organisational and IS structure; (3) IS governance and strategic planning, and (4) management style. The subcategories of 'culture-related barriers to strategic alignment' are: (1) challenges to effective intercultural communication, (2) culture-related conflict and mistrust, and (3) differences in work values and attitudes. The 'strategic alignment practices' category has three subcategories: (1) universal, (2) contingent, and (3) hybrid approaches. As discussed in 5.3, the categories were linked together using a coding paradigm and integrated with a storyline to derive a theory of national culture and strategic alignment. The details of the categories and subcategories are discussed in greater detail in the subsequent sections.

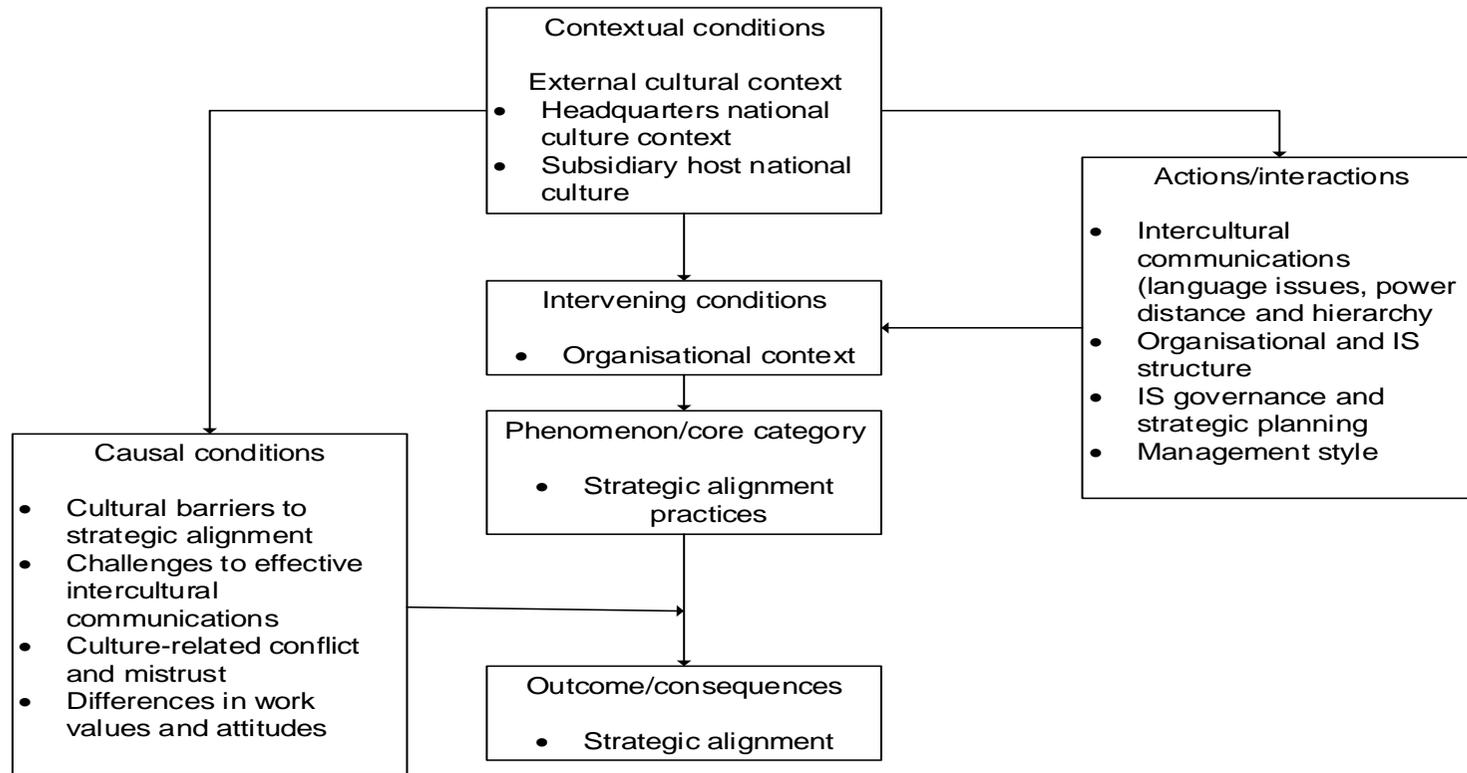


Figure 7-1 A Model of the Interaction of National Culture and Strategic Alignment (the CUSA Model)

### 7.2.1. The External Cultural Context

One of the main insights of the study is that the ‘external cultural context’ of an organisation indirectly shapes strategic alignment. This category refers to the environment outside the organisation’s boundaries. As discussed in the paradigm model in 5.3.3.1, the external cultural context shapes the context in which strategic alignment occurs. Organisations have to deal with both the local cultural context in which they operate and the cultural context of the parent organisation from which they draw resources. They have to contend with the need to conform to the host culture and to maintain consistency with the cultural values of the parent organisation (Rosenzweig and Singh, 1991; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010b; Beugelsdijk *et al.*, 2014). As shown in Table 7-1, the ‘external cultural context’ has two distinct aspects that might have a positive and negative impact on strategic alignment: (1) the national culture context of the organisational headquarters, and (2) local subsidiary host national culture. These are discussed next.

**Table 7-1 The External Cultural Context Category**

Subcategory	Category	Paradigm
The NC context of the organisational headquarters	External cultural context	Contextual Conditions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local subsidiary culture</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cultural context of offshore partners</li> </ul>		

#### 7.2.1.1 National Culture Context of the Corporate Headquarters

The national culture context of the organisational headquarters relates to the dominant values, beliefs, and practices of the country where an organisation is founded and/or headquartered. Multinational organisations have distinct organisational cultures that shape efforts directed at strategic alignment. However, organisational value systems have a national component influenced by the nationality of the founders and governing elite (Hofstede, 1985; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010b). As a result, the internal

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organisational context is affected by various national cultural norms, beliefs, and practices of the cultural context in which an organisation was founded. Indeed, elements of the national culture of the headquarters context are embedded in the organisation's culture and tend to affect strategic alignment practices (Schneider, Ehrhart and Macey, 2013).

Although the study organisations are in the telecommunications sector, they were each founded in different cultural contexts. For example, Alpha was founded in Sweden in a culture characterised by low power distance where power is decentralised; management is consultative and informal, managers are accessible and communication direct and participative (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010b). The national culture at Alpha's headquarters is also individualistic and has low uncertainty avoidance. As a result, people take care of themselves and their immediate family and maintain a relaxed attitude. The data demonstrate that Alpha's organisational culture is largely influenced by the national culture of Sweden, where it was founded. Thus, freedom and autonomy are promoted, and employees are encouraged to 'think big' and take responsibility for their performance. Recruitment and management trainee programmes for new staff are used to transmit the company's corporate culture. Furthermore, various talent development, active exchange, and placement programmes are used to develop employee skills and competencies.

In contrast, Beta was founded and is headquartered in India, which has a high degree of power distance. High power distance societies lean towards hierarchy and top-down organisational structures. Power in such settings tends to be centralised with a strong level of control. The relationship among staff is usually formal, and communications are top-down (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010b). Indian society is ethnically and religiously diverse and exhibits both collectivistic and individualistic traits. It is also characterised by competition, achievement, and success (Sinha *et al.*, 2001).

Gamma has operated in Ghana since the mid-1990s and has evolved through two acquisitions and rebranding. Following the acquisitions, the company undertook some reforms. The company's culture mirrors a mix of influences of the national culture of its

South African headquarters and its Ghanaian host culture. Both South Africa and Ghana have high levels of power distance, reflected in inequalities in society and centralisation of power. Subordinates expect to be given instructions from their superiors.

### **7.2.1.2 Subsidiary Host National Culture**

In this study, Ghana is the host setting for Alpha, Beta, and Gamma. Ghanaian culture is high in power distance and acknowledges inequality and institutional hierarchies. Power and authority are usually centralised and decision making is autocratic, while subordinates are unwilling or afraid to disagree with superiors (Gyekye and Salminen, 2005; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010b). Ghana is a collectivist society, therefore, commitment and loyalty to groups (such as the extended family and tribe) is important and takes priority over other rules and regulations in society. Given that Ghanaian culture is different from the headquarters culture of Alpha, Beta, and Gamma, the extant literature suggests that management practices of the headquarters might not be wholly applicable in the subsidiary context or may face employee resistance. Thus, it is expected that the local host culture will have some degree of influence on work practices since most of the staff are from the local culture.

### **7.2.2. The Internal Organisational Context**

As shown in Table 7-2, the internal 'organisational context' is another important category of the CUSA model. This category represents the internal organisational environment where business and IS strategy development and implementation take place. The internal organisational setting mediates the relationship between the external cultural context and strategic alignment. The actions and interactions targeting strategic alignment happen within the internal organisational setting. Also, it is the setting in which staff from various cultural backgrounds interact. This category has some subcategories, including intercultural communications (language issues and power distance and hierarchy), organisational and IS structure; IS governance and strategic IS planning and management style.

**Table 7-2 The Internal Organisational Context Category**

Subcategory	Category	Paradigm
Intercultural communications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• language issues</li> <li>• power distance and communication</li> </ul>	Organisational context	Actions/Interactions
Organisational and IS structure		
IS governance and strategic planning		
Management style		

**7.2.2.1 Intercultural Communications**

Communications facilitate strategic alignment through the sharing of ideas, knowledge, and information between the business and IS functions within organisations (Luftman, Lyytinen and Zvi, 2015). Assessing communications is a way of understanding the level of partnership between the business and IS functions within an organisation, an important antecedent of strategic alignment (Luftman, Papp and Brier, 1999; Luftman, 2003). The literature suggests that, within organisations, culture influences both formal and informal interactions that are essential to strategic alignment, including vertical and horizontal communications (Hall and Hall, 1990; Shachaf, 2008). Vertical communications relate to staff interactions across various levels of the organisation while horizontal communications refer to cross-functional interactions among staff (Luftman, Papp and Brier, 1999). Organisational practices that support strategic alignment require open and efficient communications between staff at various levels of the organisation and effective cross-functional communications that support strategic alignment.

Although effective communication, the sharing of ideas, and a clear understanding of how IS might support the successful attainment of organisational goals are essential to

strategic alignment (Luftman, Lyytinen and Zvi, 2015). The data shows that issues with intercultural communications adversely affected strategic alignment. For example, for many organisations around the world, India is the preferred destination for outsourcing because of a large pool of qualified computer professionals and companies that handle outsourcing projects at reasonable costs (Nicholson and Sahay, 2001; Hirschheim, Heinzl and Dibbern, 2013). However, challenges to effective intercultural communications in such offshoring arrangements undermined strategic alignment efforts and information sharing with the collaborating offshore companies cause some frustration and delays in delivering on IS projects. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have highlighted the role of culture in outsourcing/offshoring arrangements (Eaton, 2011; Kvedaraviciene and Boguslauskas, 2015). In this study, the data reveal that the manifestation of cultural differences regarding (1) language issues, and (2) the impact of the level of power distance on communication are important in this regard.

#### **7.2.2.1.1 Language Issues**

The association between language and culture is deeply rooted (Jiang, 2000; Feely and Harzing, 2003). Language is considered a part of culture because it is often used to maintain and express culture on the one hand, and is influenced by culture on the other (Jiang, 2000). Although the corporate language of the case study organisations is English, in some instances, most of the employees and offshore partners are non-native speakers of the language, which affects their ability to communicate effectively (Feely and Harzing, 2003; Huang and Trauth, 2007) and may be a common cause of misunderstanding (Harzing and Feely, 2008). Furthermore, information-processing is affected by the user's culture and the language in which they process the information (Alcántara-Pilar and Barrio-García, 2013).

The effect of language issues with communications was acute where organisations used cross-cultural virtual teams or collaborated with vendors offshore. Asked how culture affects the use of IS to support organisational goals and strategies, an interviewee indicated:

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“Currently, based on the fact that some aspects of our job have been outsourced to a company offshore, we have the language barrier. Based on their pronunciations, sometimes when they talk, we do not understand, and when we speak, they do not understand...Before we understand each other, it takes two weeks” – A14, Engineer

Gamma, which has an outsourcing arrangement with a vendor in India is another example of the adverse consequences of poor intercultural communications on the implementation of IS strategy. A respondent reflected:

“The language of communication at [Gamma] is English. So, if one party cannot express themselves well in English, it is a big concern. My experience has been that the outsourcing system employs people whose first language is not English. They think they are speaking English, but you can hardly understand what they are saying. For me, I can manage it but for a typical English person that can be irritating.” – G15, Project Manager

### 7.2.2.1.2 Power Distance and Communication

The data further suggests that in some cases, subordinates are uncomfortable communicating directly with superiors. One participant recounts:

“They are very ‘yes’ orientated, whatever you say, they say ‘yes, yes, yes’...even if it is not possible they say yes because they are brought up in their culture always to say ‘yes’ to their superiors. They do not want to disappoint you, and in the end, they create a bigger problem.” – G11, Programme Control and Monitoring Manager

Nicholson and Sahay (2001) contend that the norms of hierarchy and the caste system in Indian society have contributed to value systems founded on status, power, and relationships. As a result, Indian employees tend to show status consciousness. One of the implications is that subordinates hesitate to ‘report bad news’, which undermines the execution of organisational strategies and the implementation of IS projects (Keil, Im and Mähring, 2007; Lacity *et al.*, 2011; Gertsen and Zolner, 2012; Gannon, Wilson and Powell, 2014; Lacity and Willcocks, 2014).

Reluctance to report bad news can be detrimental to the successful delivery of projects (Tan *et al.*, 2003; Keil, Im and Mähring, 2007) and to attaining strategic alignment. Furthermore, Lacity *et al.* (2011) and Lacity and Willcocks (2014) argue that cultural

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distance – the extent to which clients and provider organisations differ culturally – negatively affected outsourcing outcomes, particularly, in offshoring arrangements. They suggest cultural distance management and acculturation as a way to overcome it. Cultural distance management enables client and provider organisations to understand, accept and adapt to cultural differences. Acculturation, on the other hand, is the process by which two or more cultures come together to form a ‘cohesive culture’.

Apart from issues with offshore partners, the evidence suggests relatively effective formal and informal communications in Alpha and Beta. For example, an interviewee notes:

“Normally, the CIO communicates with everybody via email. An email is usually sent globally to inform staff of any new developments. They communicate, and we acknowledge receipt.” – AI2, Head of Business Support Systems

The communications culture at Alpha is consistent that the low power distance of its Swedish headquarters. Alpha usually replicates its corporate culture, which reflects the headquarters culture and practices in its foreign subsidiaries. The headquarters values are based on flat hierarchy (Gertsen and Zolner, 2012). Furthermore, the company has a rigorous training and socialisation regime for new staff to enable them to adapt.

In contrast, the top-down communications of Beta seem consistent with the high power distance of both the national culture of its Indian headquarters and the host Ghanaian culture, which are both based on hierarchies (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010b; Gertsen and Zolner, 2012). Evidence from the data suggests that communications at Beta are mostly used by senior managers to send instructions to subordinates and by subordinates to seek clarifications and send reports to superiors, as demonstrated in the following quotation:

“I will describe communications as top down. As far as I know, directives are still being handed down from India most of the time. Currently, my boss is in India. The top person responsible for our project is also in India. For example, if there is an issue, the head of the project will send an email to my boss’s boss in India. He will

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then send directives to my boss, who then gets them to us.” – BI5, Business Development Manager

Another respondent said:

“We have a vertical type of communications. I report any issues to my boss, and he has to take it from there.” – BI3, Backend Operations Executive

The foregoing corroborates previous research findings that in high power distance settings, vertical communications reinforce command and control (Khatri, 2009). The top down communications and the centralised organisational structure of Beta highlight the role of the high power distance of both the headquarters and subsidiary contexts. The top-down communications regime might discourage employee feedback, participation, and empowerment, which are essential to strategic alignment and agility.

Strategic alignment is better facilitated by better information sharing between senior and junior managers (Kearns and Lederer, 2003; Luftman, Lyytinen and Zvi, 2015). There is no evidence of effective horizontal communications between business and IS managers at Beta since most of the IT is outsourced to a third-party vendor. The literature suggests that high power distance contexts have a preference for vertical communications whereby managers use such communications to reinforce hierarchical controls and send out instructions to subordinates (Martinsons, Davison and Martinsons, 2009), while subordinates are passive followers of managers' instructions (Khatri, 2009).

As stated earlier, Gamma is a subsidiary of a mobile network provider headquartered in South Africa. However, because it has been acquired by successive companies previously, it was difficult to judge the relative influence of the headquarters and host cultures on its communication practices. The data, however, reveal a good information sharing culture between business and IT staff via various communication channels. The following quotation illustrates:

“Depending on the situation, we communicated upwards, sideward and downwards. The nature of the business is such that you have to be talking to everybody, so depending on what you are looking for, you can either organise a

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one-to-one meeting, a group meeting, vendor-client meeting, that sort of thing. It is a hybrid environment, depending on the current situation, you decide what is appropriate for you and that is what we do.” – G15, Project Manager

There was some evidence that the local host culture has some influence on communications at Gamma. The high power distance in Ghanaian culture means some subordinates are not comfortable expressing their opinions in the presence of superiors. These findings are consistent with the impact of high power distance on communications (Keil, Im and Mähring, 2007). An interviewee expressed the following sentiment:

“Most Ghanaians are usually shy and do not like to ask questions of their bosses. Most of the employees find it difficult to express what is on their mind, while others are offended when you speak your mind” – G12, Northern Regional Manager

It would seem Alpha has effective vertical and horizontal communications. The communication practices of its European headquarters were transplanted at Alpha, supported by selective recruitment and training of staff. However, Beta preferred vertical top-down communications and little bottom-up and horizontal communications. Beta’s communication preferences are consistent with the high power distance of its headquarters and host cultural contexts. The effect of national culture on communications at Gamma appears to be marginal.

### **7.2.2.2 Organisational and IS Structure**

The data indicates the organisational structure is another element that influenced strategic alignment. Organisational structure relates to the hierarchical arrangement of vertical and horizontal lines of authority, communications, rights and duties and power dependencies among organisational actors. Prior research has also paid some attention to the similarities and differences in organisational structure across cultures. For example, Rosenzweig and Singh (1991) contend that multinational organisations tend to replicate their organisational structure as they sanction existing practices and standard operating procedures when starting new operations in other cultures. Organisations from high power distance cultures might prefer centralised structures, while those from low power distance

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contexts prefer decentralised structures (Shore and Venkatachalam, 1996; Krokosz-Krynke, 1998).

Alpha has a decentralised organisational structure that it has replicated from its headquarters. The low power distance and egalitarian values of its European headquarters appear to have shaped the company's organisational structure, which is then replicated in Ghana. However, this is at variance with the subsidiary host culture, which is characterised by centralised structures. A respondent said:

“The organisational structure, for the most part, is dispersed.” – AI3, Project Manager

Another respondent confirms:

“The organisation is highly distributed for efficiency, reporting reasons, and sometimes proximity to customers” – AI2, Head of Business Support Systems

Meyer, Mudambi, & Narula (2011) suggest that corporate headquarters exerts a strong influence on organisational practices and strategies. As a result, multinational organisations have to balance the local context in which they operate and the multinational network of the parent organisation.

Despite the wholesale transfer of its organisational structure founded on norms and values of its Swedish headquarters, there was no evidence of employee resistance. A plausible explanation is that Alpha prefers recruits that are amenable to its corporate culture. Alpha organisational structure is consistent with previous research, which suggests that this decentralised and informal structure is necessary to strategic alignment as it promotes information sharing and partnership between the business and IS functions at all levels of the organisations (Chan, 2002). However, the decision-making processes might be time-consuming. Iveroth (2012) argues that the use of enterprise-wide IS has resulted in organisational structures and processes mimicking those of the headquarters, a phenomenon acknowledged as ‘the mirror effect’. Alpha has an open organisational culture, which is acknowledged as an enabler of strategic alignment (Chan, 2002).

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According to Sinha (1982), the preference for hierarchy in Indian organisations is rooted in Indian culture and social structure, which might explain Beta's centralised organisational structure. Similarly, most African cultures tend to favour highly structured organisations (Gyekye and Salminen, 2005). Power distance and individualism-collectivism may clarify the tendency of organisations founded in some countries to favour a given organisational structure (Shore and Venkatachalam, 1996). Beta's organisational structure reflects the national culture of both the headquarters' setting and the subsidiary's host culture. However, Beta's preference of a centralised structure might be the result of other factors other than national culture (e.g. effective management).

A possible drawback of a centralised organisational structure is that it might stifle the participation of subordinates, particularly those of the business and IS functions, regarding decision making and strategic IS planning. Most strategic and operational decisions are taken higher up without much consultation with staff at the bottom of the structure. Furthermore, instructions have to travel down the structure to reach operational level staff, which might hinder effective and timely decision-making. The literature also suggests that a hierarchical organisational structure negatively affects the ability of organisations to adapt to changes in the external business environment (Chan, 2002).

Although Gamma has centralised structures, there was no evidence to suggest that this adversely affected strategic alignment. A possible explanation is that Gamma has only a small degree of cultural diversity, as most of the staff are Ghanaian.

### **7.2.2.3 IS Governance and Strategic Planning**

IS governance is a part of corporate governance and concerns leadership, organisational structures and processes that ensure that IS supports organisational goals and strategies (ITGI, 2003; Adaba and Rusu, 2014). It also refers to the allocation of authority for IS related decisions at the strategic, tactical and operational levels (Luftman, Lyytinen and Zvi, 2015). Effective IS governance mechanisms are essential to achieving strategic alignment (De Haes and Van Grembergen, 2004).

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The data shows that Alpha has authority over local decisions about strategic IS deployment. However, enterprise systems are the domain of the headquarters. Before final strategic IS decisions are made, however, input from both the business and IS personnel at various levels of the organisation are usually sought, which suggest a consultative IS governance approach.

On the other hand, Beta currently has elements of a centralised IS organisation and governance structure. In the literature, centralised IS governance implies that decision making authority for IS is vested in a centralised unit (Brown and Magill, 1994). It would appear that high power distance at the headquarters in India has had some degree of influence on the governance practices in the organisation generally, and IS governance structures in particular. Centralised IS governance structures offer standardisation, efficiency, and organisational integration, but the lack of local control over IS decisions which might hinder the responsiveness to local contingencies (Brown and Magill, 1994; Adaba and Rusu, 2014). High power distance is associated with formal hierarchy and less participation in decision making (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010b). However, the prior literature has underscored the importance of participation in decision-making by the staff from the business and IS functions from various levels of the organisation (Luftman, Papp and Brier, 1999).

IS decision-making rights at Gamma are shared between the headquarters and a small local IT department at the subsidiary. Enterprise systems are the domain of the headquarters, while the local IT department is responsible for software applications that suit operations at the subsidiary. The local IT department is also responsible for aligning systems and applications with the business and IT Context. The data indicate that senior management consult local IT employees before taking IS decisions.

The literature asserts that joint development of business strategies and IS strategies by managers from the business and IS managers are necessary for strategic alignment (Henderson and Venkatraman, 1993; Luftman, 2003). Strategic IS planning is the process of identifying the range of IS applications necessary for the execution of an

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organisation's business strategies (Lederer and Sethi, 1988). This is a key feature of aligning IS with business goals, which can assist the organisations to identify the best IS investments to make. Strategic IS planning also help execute existing strategies and define new strategies, technologies, and policies (Earl, 2009).

Analysis of the data revealed that culture had an influence over strategic IS planning processes in the organisations studied. Thus, some elements of culture might affect the strategic IS planning process, with some implications for strategic alignment. The national culture of the country where a multinational organisation is founded influences the organisation culture, strategy development practices, and strategic IS planning processes. For example, Gamma has a top down IT-led approach to strategic IS planning process at the subsidiary that reflects elements of the corporate culture and the high-power distance of its South African headquarters and the host subsidiary culture. This preference for top-down strategic IS planning process implies minimal participation of lower and operational level staff. However, given that the strategic IS planning process is congruent with the local subsidiary cultural context and the cultural backgrounds of the majority of the employees, Gamma might be less likely to encounter resistance from middle and operational level managers.

### **7.2.2.4 Management Style**

Cultural values, norms, and behaviour also shape strategic alignment through their influence on management styles. Management style involves decision-making preferences and interactions with subordinates in the business and IS functions. Management styles are culturally determined and vary from one culture to another. Thus, the effectiveness of management style is an important determinant of strategic alignment success. The analysis of the empirical data illustrates that the study organisations have different management styles. For example, Alpha has an informal leadership style that is reproduced from its corporate headquarters in Sweden. This management style is largely Western and incongruent with the host subsidiary culture. Although the management style in Alpha was replicated from its headquarters and different from local management preferences, the staff are trained in the corporate culture and therefore well-adjusted to it.

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The data suggest that the largely informal management style at the subsidiary has facilitated greater interactions and information sharing between managers at various levels in the organisation and from the business and IS functions. The literature asserts that strategic alignment is enhanced when the key actors in the business and IS functions share knowledge and have a common vision of how IS contributes to strategic alignment outcomes (Reich and Benbasat, 2000).

On the other hand, although Ghana is a high power distance context, Beta has a formal and hierarchical structure, which appears to have been profoundly influenced by the high power distance of the company's headquarters in India. This formal and centralised management structure adversely affects vertical communications, partnership, information sharing, and interactions among business and IS managers. It also inhibits flexibility to respond to strategic issues at the subsidiary level, as decisions have to be taken at the corporate headquarters and cascaded down the hierarchy. For example, communications are top down and mainly used to convey instructions and subordinates are not encouraged to make their views known. Martinsons, Davison, and Martinsons (2009) assert that organisations in high power distance cultures typically use IS for vertical communications to reinforce hierarchical controls of business activities and are less likely to develop formal IS plans. As Khatri (2009) points out, such organisations prefer autocratic decision making and most employees are passive followers of directives with little discretion. Furthermore, middle and lower management of the organisation may be uncomfortable participating in or contributing to strategy development. As a result, the quality of strategies and their implementation is negatively affected as little input is taken from the junior ranks of the organisation.

ERP implemented in Alpha appears to have a harmonising effect on management and work practices. This finding is supported by the literature, which states that enterprise systems have a harmonising effect on the organisation as they reinforce the convergence of work practices, behaviours, and mindsets (Iveroth, 2012). The processes and tools are standardised across the organisation. The ERP system was commissioned by the headquarters and reflects the cultural values, norms, beliefs of its Swedish headquarters

and the corporate culture. Consequently, the national culture context of the parent organisation is embedded in the ERP and drives work practices at the subsidiaries.

### **7.2.3. Culture-Related Barriers to Strategic Alignment**

Culture-related barriers to strategic alignment represent another category of the CUSA model (see Table 7-3). This category represents elements of national culture that might inhibit strategic alignment, resulting in a negative impact on strategic alignment. Understanding such factors is the first step towards taking action to mitigate their impact. This category has three main subcategories: (1) challenges to effective intercultural communications, (2) culture-related conflict, and (3) cultural differences in work values and practices.

**Table 7-3 Culture-Related Barriers to Strategic Alignment**

Subcategory	Category	Paradigm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Challenges to intercultural communications</li> </ul>	Cultural barriers to alignment	Causal condition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cultural-related conflict and mistrust</li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Differences in work values and practices</li> </ul>		

**7.2.3.1 Challenges to Intercultural Communications**

Assessing communications is a way of understanding the level of partnership between the IS and business functions. Effective communications promote mutual understanding among staff, encourage knowledge sharing and inter/intra-organisational learning, and overall organisational effectiveness (Sledgianowski and Luftman, 2005). Vertical communications refer to staff interactions across various levels in the organisation, such as exchanges between the top, middle, and operational management. In contrast, horizontal communications relate to cross-functional interactions between staff. Effective communications between staff of the business and IS functions is of particular importance to strategic alignment. Practices that support strategic alignment require open and effective communications between staff.

Intercultural communications involve interactions among people from two or more cultures (Koester and Lustig, 2015). Previous studies suggest that culture has some influence on the how individuals perceive information, act on it, and relate to other persons (Nicholson and Sahay, 2001; Shachaf, 2008). In this study, however, language issues and high power distance had largely negative effects on communications, and ultimately on strategic alignment (see 7.2.2.1). Cultural differences could sometimes lead to misunderstanding and miscommunication (Sagiv and Schwartz, 2007). For example, various interpretations of the same issue could result in distortions that adversely affect the development and effective implementation of strategic alignment strategies. Language differences are a culture-related factor that negatively affects verbal interactions.

Furthermore, cultural filtering of communications could result in misinterpretations or distortions that adversely affect alignment (Kankanhalli *et al.*, 2004; Wakefield, Leidner and Garrison, 2008).

### **7.2.3.2 Culture-Related Conflict and Mistrust**

This subcategory refers to workplace conflict and suspicion, usually related to cultural differences, which can affect cooperation among staff. Such conflicts have adverse effects on strategic alignment. Cultural differences may influence how different individuals perceive and interpret information. Because of different interpretations of issues by people from diverse cultural backgrounds, there is always a potential for conflict. Such conflict may take the form of task or relationship conflict and might be detrimental to team performance (Kankanhalli, Tan and Wei, 2006). Beta reported some conflict between local and expatriate staff, which affected effective partnership between staff of the business and IS domains, a requirement for strategic alignment (Luftman, Papp and Brier, 1999).

Similarly, 'system conflict' may develop when values embedded in a given IS contradict the values held by the staff expected to use the system (Leidner and Kayworth, 2006). For example, Alpha uses ERP to enable collaboration among virtual teams that was developed and embedded with the low power distance values of its Swedish headquarters that emphasise autonomy, but the ERP is also used in its Ghanaian subsidiary, which operates in a high power distance context. The degree of deviation between the values embedded in the system and the user values determines the level of system conflict.

The study organisations reported some form of 'cultural misunderstanding' or 'culture-related conflict' that appeared to adversely affect strategic alignment efforts. Previous studies have suggested that culture may have a profound influence on how individuals perceive information, act on it, and relate to other persons (Nicholson and Sahay, 2001; Holmstrom *et al.*, 2006; Shachaf, 2008). Similarly, cultural filtering of communications may cause misinterpretations or distortions that may lead to

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misunderstandings and even conflict (Walsham, 2002; Kankanhalli, Tan and Wei, 2006; Wakefield, Leidner and Garrison, 2008). In the current study, culture-related conflict refers to incompatibility, disagreement, and dissonance because of cultural differences (Rahim, 2002).

Several instances of conflict, particularly in Beta and Gamma, were identified. For example, Beta reported some cultural conflict among local Ghanaian staff and their expatriate counterparts that adversely affected the implementation of business and IS strategies. Although most of the instances are subtle, a respondent gives an extreme example:

“He likes shouting, and I don’t like being shouted at. I had to learn to cope because, in our culture, it is rude to shout. However, he saw it as normal. Therefore, he had to come to an understanding to stop because, despite our differences, we had a job to do” – B11, Engineer

Most organisations operating across cultures have laid down procedures to manage work relations, but sometimes have to contend with conflict rooted in cultural misunderstanding (Walsham, 2002; Ravishankar, 2014). Such conflicts are attributable to the tendency for different cultural groups operate with various frames of interpretation. Also known as frame disputes (Goffman, 1974), various happenings may be framed and interpreted differently based on cultural backgrounds and the mental models of specific actors. Furthermore, collaborations between staff from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds make conflict more likely.

However, the participants suggest that it is more likely to be the result of cultural differences. This finding is supported by Gertsen and Zolner (2012), who assert that Indian leadership values encourage leaders to guide employees, give explicit orders and control their execution. Furthermore, status consciousness and the high levels of hierarchy sometimes lead to authoritarian behaviour on the part of superiors (Sinha, 2009). In a culturally diverse setting, such cultural misunderstanding and conflict could impede the development and implementation of effective business and IS strategies, with a detrimental effect on working practices and ultimately, strategic alignment.

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There instances in the data where expatriate managers are reported to have favoured and promoted people from their cultural background at the expense of others, creating mistrust and suspicion. Similarly, expatriate managers were more likely to seek the views of other expatriates, as captured in the following quotation:

“I will be frank with you, the expatriates like to put their people other expatriates at the top, and so as an indigenous person, I do not have as much influence. The expatriates have more influence in the company; their voices are more likely to be heard than mine.” – B13, Backend Operations Executive

An additional source of mistrust is the tendency of staff from the same cultural background to speak their native language in the presence of colleagues. The inclination may also explain the preference of collectivist societies for people from their culture to those from others, which tend to alienate some employees and create division (Lu and Heng, 2009). An interviewee said:

“We are working with expatriates, where instead of talking to me when there is a problem, they prefer to take it to a superior. But I understand that that’s how they go about things in their culture.” – B11, Engineer

Paradoxically, some respondents did not see cultural differences as the source of conflict within organisations. As one interviewee put it:

“Conflict at the workplace is not strange; it happens everywhere. For me, it has happened a lot of times within my set up. You just have to find a way to avoid it. A lot of fighting happens within emails. Irrespective of anger, you have to find a way to control and manage it.” – G11, Programme Control and Monitoring Manager

Another interviewee indicated:

“I do not think conflict occurs because of people’s ethnic or cultural background. It is human nature, it happens everywhere, even in families.” – G15, Project Manager

The collectivist nature of both Indian and Ghanaian societies might promote teamwork as individuals are expected to transcend their self-interest and work towards group goals. Collectivists tend to lay emphasis on obedience and cooperation, which are important success factors for teamwork.

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Business and IS strategies need to be implemented by employees working as a team. Thus, conflict is a barrier to effective collaboration to achieve strategic alignment. The study found that culture-related conflicts affect the achievement of business and IS strategic objectives. For example, asked if culture negatively affected the strategic alignment, a respondent replied:

“Yes. It does affect the achievement of strategic goals.” – G11, Programme Control and Monitoring Manager

While national culture affected strategic alignment, others suggested that professionalism among staff would mitigate the adverse impact on the implementation of organisational strategies. As one interviewee put it:

“It doesn’t depend on cultural background. Occasionally we have misunderstandings, but where there is professionalism, it does not get to affect the work and the implementation of strategies” – G12, Head of Customer Care and Backend Data Support

Another participant expressed a similar sentiment:

“As professionals, the challenge is to manage workplace conflict within organisations so that the work is not adversely affected.” – G12, Northern Regional Manager

### **7.2.3.3 Differences in Work Values and Practices**

In the case of organisations operating across cultures, subsidiaries are usually located in distinct national cultural contexts, although the parent company emerged from a specific culture. In cases where the work practices of the headquarters are replicated in the subsidiary, the lack alignment of work practices of the parent organisation and subsidiary has negative implications for strategic alignment. Differences in management and work practices is particularly a problem within virtual teams or vendors offshore (Adaba, Wilson and Sims, 2015).

Work practices are about how work is conducted within an organisation. It emerged from the analysis that differences in work values, attitudes, and practices pose a challenge

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to partnerships between IS and business staff. As an example, members of Alpha's virtual teams are from diverse cultural backgrounds, which in some cases, have been detrimental to partnerships amongst business, IS and project staff. Issues with cross-cultural understanding, differences in work practices and effective communications occasionally created frustration and escalated to clear or latent conflict. Some of the respondents branded some of their colleagues as 'lazy', 'laid back', and appeared to exhibit tendencies of 'superiority' over others. Other interviewees, while not recounting instances of direct conflict talked about their frustration with some team members. For example, employees from certain cultures are labelled as "having a poor attitude to work" and "a lack of commitment". Some managers perceived the attitude to work by some of his virtual team members as a sign of disrespect or a feeling of superiority. One project manager prefers a more 'aggressive' approach to work than was demonstrated by some of the members of his virtual team:

"I have challenges with some of the team members. I am not painting everybody with a broad brush, but you will see general traits of being laid back and even laziness among people from certain cultures that I work with. We are in a high-paced environment where you push for things to be done, but some people generally take it a bit slow, a bit easy. On the other hand, you find members from other cultures that are more dutiful; they have a little more drive" – AI3, Project Manager

Likewise, team members from some cultures misconstrued the concept of 'flexible working' at Alpha, which permits working from home, to mean working less. A respondent expressed the following sentiment:

"Flexible working can sometimes lead to laziness. Ideally, the team will be a little more productive at the office" – AI3, Project Manager

Delay in responding to asynchronous communications was a source of frustration and a source of delays to the advancement of projects. The data also shows a perception that people from some cultures were not used to working long hours. As suggested in this quotation:

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“We have our way of work in Ghana, which is 8 to 5, but in our organisation, there is no 8 to 5. For those in the service delivery department, it is 24/7. So you can understand the effect that has on us; even when you’re at home, you do have to be working.” – AI3, Project Manager

The relative impact of national culture on strategic alignment in the three subsidiaries studied is shown in Table 7-4.

**Table 7-4 Summary of the Impact of National Culture and Strategic Alignment in the Subsidiaries Studied**

Culture issue	Organisation		
	Alpha	Beta	Gamma
Cultural barriers to effective communication	Yes	Yes	No
Culture conflict	No	Yes	Yes
Culture-based mistrust	Yes	Yes	No
Cultural differences in attitudes to work	Yes	Yes	Yes
Organisational and IS structure	Yes	Yes	-

### 7.2.4. Strategic Alignment Practices

The ‘strategic practices category’ is the core category and relates to micro level activities that affect strategic alignment. From a practice perspective, operational activities might affect strategic alignment outcomes (Peppard, Galliers and Thorogood, 2014; Whittington, 2014). Thus, apart from strategic and operational practices, the situated actions individuals, which are influenced by the broader social and cultural context, have consequences for strategic alignment.

As shown in Table 7-5, based on the data, three models of the influences of national culture on strategic alignment are hypothesised: (1) the universal approach, (2) the context-specific approach, and (3) the hybrid approach.

**Table 7-5 The Strategic Alignment Practices Category**

Subcategory	Category	Paradigm
Universal	Strategic alignment practices	Consequences
Contingency based		
Mixed approach		

#### **7.2.4.1 The Universal Approach**

The universal approach refers to strategic alignment practices that reflect the national culture of the organisational headquarters, which is usually the result of the reproduction of the same organisational practices in subsidiaries located in different cultural contexts. This approach assumes that effective management has little to do with the cultural context in which it is practised (Pil and MacDuffie, 1999; Rondinelli, Rosen and Drori, 2001; Gamble, 2010). This approach fosters integration, uniformity, and consistency regarding management and strategic alignment across the entire organisation. It is also an efficient means of administration and control (Gray, 1988). However, the universal approach is not flexible and may cause resistance and cultural conflict without rigorous training of staff.

Alpha and Beta seem to have adopted the universal approach of replication of management and strategic alignment approaches in subsidiaries. Alpha was founded in a culture with low power distance; power is decentralised, management is consultative, democratic and informal, managers are accessible and communication is direct and participative (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010b). Its Swedish headquarters culture largely influences Alpha's organisational culture. Thus, freedom and autonomy are

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promoted and employees are encouraged to 'think big' and take responsibility for their performance. Although the cultural values driving Alpha's organisation culture are different from the host culture, various programmes were used to acquaint new employees with the organisational culture. For example, the company's organisational culture is inculcated through recruitment and management trainee programmes for new staff as well as regular in-service training. Also, an ERP system is used to enable standardised organisational practices, which is consistent with the view that ERPs have a harmonising effect on organisations as they reinforce the convergence of work practices, behaviours, and mindsets (Iveroth, 2012).

In contrast, Beta was founded and is headquartered in India, which has a higher degree of power distance (Sinha, 1982; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010a). Hofstede describes high power distance societies as preferring hierarchy and top-down organisational structures. Furthermore, power in such settings tends to be centralised, and the degree of control is strong. The interactions among staff are usually formal, and communications are top-down (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010b). Beta relies on employing many expatriate managers from the headquarters culture, who might be inclined to observe the management and alignment practices of the parent company.

### **7.2.4.2 The Contingent Approach**

With the contingent approach, management and strategic alignment approaches are adapted to reflect the values of the subsidiary context. The main advantage of this approach is the alignment of values and practices of the organisation to the local culture, which makes conflict and resistance less likely. It also gives the subsidiary some flexibility to adapt to local conditions. However, it makes standardisation and the integration of organisational values and alignment practices difficult. The context-specific approach is consistent with the contention that management practices need to be adapted to the local culture in which an organisation operates in order to achieve improved business performance (Newman and Nollen, 1996). This approach is supported by Rondinelli, Rosen and Drori (2001) who contend that the ability of multinational organisations to adjust their management processes to the external cultural conditions of the countries in which

they operate is essential to achieving competitive advantage. In the current study, none of the study organisations appears to have strategic alignment approaches that completely reflect the subsidiary host culture.

#### **7.2.4.3 The Hybrid Approach**

The hybrid approach refers to alignment practices, which echo elements of both the headquarters culture and the host subsidiary culture. This approach attempts to achieve integration with the parent organisation and alignment with the local culture. It involves the formation of different management and strategic alignment strategies through the selective adaptation of practices from its headquarters context and the host subsidiary context (Gamble, 2010). Gamma seems to follow the hybrid approach. Unlike Alpha and Beta, it has not reproduced management and strategic alignment practices wholesale from its headquarters. Instead, it appears to employ a complex pattern of adaptation. It has a combination of strategic and operational practices adapted from both the headquarters and the local subsidiary cultural context. While the corporate culture reflects its South African headquarters, it also has the majority of its employees recruited from the local culture.

Table 7.6 summarises the relative influences of the headquarters and subsidiary cultures and the approaches to strategic alignment. The findings suggest that Alpha and Beta replicated management structure and practices of the headquarters in the subsidiaries. The cultural differences between the host culture and headquarters culture did not have a noticeable impact strategic alignment practices. However, given that Gamma has gone through acquisitions and rebranding, the cultural influences on strategic alignment practices reflect elements of both the headquarters and subsidiary cultures.

**Table 7-6 The Impact of Headquarters and Host Cultures on Alignment Practices**

Organisation	Headquarters Culture	Host Culture	Headquarters/Subsidiary culture	Approach
Alpha	Yes	No	No	Universal
Beta	Yes	No	No	Universal
Gamma	No	No	Yes	Contingent

### 7.3. Summary

This chapter presented a grounded theory of national and strategic alignment – the CUSA model – that explains the relationship between national culture and strategic alignment. The model was inductively built and grounded in empirical data and supported by insights from the literature. The model shows that the external cultural context of an organisation, comprising the national culture of the country where it was founded and/or headquartered, and the host culture of the subsidiary exert some influence on strategic alignment through variables at the organisational level. In particular, the external cultural context shapes intercultural communication, organisation and IS structure, IS governance and strategic planning, and management style. Also, challenges to intercultural communication, culture-related conflict and mistrust, and differences in work values and practices are culture-related barriers to strategic alignment. Three main kinds of approaches to strategic alignment were identified: the universal, the contingent, and hybrid approaches to strategic alignment in the organisations studied. With the universal approach, the same alignment practices are adopted irrespective of the cultural context, while the contingent approach adapts practice to suit the cultural context. Chapter 8, the concluding chapter discusses the findings, contributions and conclusion of the research.

## **Chapter 8.**

### **Contributions and Conclusion**

#### **8.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter presented and discussed a grounded theory of national culture and strategic alignment (the CUSA model), a framework for conceptualising the relative role of the national culture context of the corporate headquarters and the subsidiary host culture on strategic alignment practices. This concluding chapter considers the contributions of this research to the extant literature. The chapter begins by presenting a brief summary of the findings. The theoretical and methodological contributions and the implications for practice are then outlined. Finally, the study appraises the quality of the research is evaluated. The study concludes after identifying the potential limitations and suggesting possible avenues for further research.

#### **8.2. Summary of Findings**

This research explored the role of national culture in strategic alignment using an adapted grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 2014). It was motivated by the growing number of organisations operating across national and cultural boundaries and the insufficiency of research examining national culture and strategic alignment (Adaba and Wilson, 2012, 2013). A further motivation was the need to counterbalance the largely positivist research that has dominated strategic alignment literature, and the absence of clear frameworks for conceptualising how national culture shapes strategic alignment.

Based on the empirical data and insights from the literature, a grounded model of national culture and strategic alignment – the CUSA model – was inductively developed. The theoretical model proposes that the external national culture context – comprising the national culture context of the corporate headquarters and the subsidiary host national

culture – shape strategic alignment indirectly through the strategic and operational activities in the internal organisational context. The variables most amenable to the impact of national culture are communications, organisational and IS structure, IS governance and strategic planning, and management style. Consequently, approaches to strategic alignment may be universal, contingent or hybrid. In the universal approach, strategic alignment practices reflect dominant influences of elements of the national culture of the corporate headquarters that have been transplanted in subsidiaries situated in different cultures. With the contingent approach, strategic alignment practices reflect a dominant impact of elements of the national culture of the host setting. The hybrid approach exhibit elements of both the national culture context of the corporate headquarters and the host national culture of the subsidiary. The model further proposes that, if not managed effectively, barriers to effective intercultural communications, culture-related conflict and mistrust, and differences in work values and practices, might be impediments to strategic alignment success.

### **8.3. Contributions**

The final element of a doctoral involves spelling out its contribution to the development of the discipline (Phillips and Pugh, 2005). This section lays out the theoretical and methodological contributions and the implications of this study for strategic alignment practice.

#### **8.3.1. Theoretical Contributions**

A theoretical contribution is something that advances understanding of a phenomenon and shows why and how it occurs (Corley and Gioia, 2011; Ågerfalk, 2014). National culture has been acknowledged as relevant in the IS discipline (Leidner and Kayworth, 2006), but the literature shows relatively little research the impact of national culture on strategic alignment.

The novel theoretical contribution of this thesis is a grounded theory of national culture and strategic alignment – or the CUSA model – a conceptual framework grounded in data, which contributes to the understanding of how national culture affects strategic alignment. As organisations increasingly operate in various cultural contexts, the model could be useful for conceptualising the impact of national culture on strategic alignment. Although the model was developed based on data from three subsidiaries of organisations in the telecommunications sector, it may be relevant to organisations in different industries and contexts. The model meets the criteria of a practical theory grounded in empirical data or a substantive theory built for a specific domain of study based on the analysis of data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Gregor, 2006). The model is supported by insights from the literature, which have strengthened its efficacy. The CUSA model satisfies the definition of a theory suggested by King, Keohane and Verba (1994) as a logical and precise speculation about the answer to the research question.

Finally, the model helps address some deficiencies in the strategic alignment literature identified previously – i.e., the relative lack of research into how national culture influences strategic alignment, and the absence of a grounded theory of national culture and strategic alignment. It also counters the predominance of quantitative positivist studies from Western settings by using qualitative data from a non-western context.

### **8.3.2. Methodological Contributions**

Most IS research involving culture has drawn on dimensional models such as Hofstede's (1980) dimensions of national culture to articulate the association between national culture various IS research problems. The limitations of dimensions of national culture have been well documented (Myers and Tan, 2002; Walsham, 2002; McSweeney, 2009). As a result, this research applied an adapted grounded theory approach to explore the impact of culture on strategic alignment. The grounded theory method offers tools for inductive theory building (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Sarker, Lau and Sahay, 2001; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). The use of the grounded theory method under the interpretive research paradigm in this thesis is also in response to the call for the greater

use of interpretive research in the IS discipline (Walsham, 1993; Myers, 1998; Klein and Myers, 1999; Avison and Malaurent, 2014).

This study contributes to the interpretive IS methods literature and specifically, the application of the grounded theory approach to build theoretical models from organisational studies in particular. A relatively small number of studies have applied grounded theory to investigate strategic alignment. Thus, this research makes an important methodological contribution by providing an example of the application of an adapted version Strauss and Corbin's approach to grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). The adaptation was made to suit the phenomenon under investigation, the philosophical and methodological preferences of the researcher, and the need for rigour.

The methodological approach applied in this study adds to the existing number of IS studies that employ grounded theory as an appropriate alternative to the use of predetermined cultural dimensions with regards to IS research concerning national culture. Such an approach addresses most of the weakness of the application of national culture dimensions in IS research. A grounded approach addresses some of the limitations of the largely positivist stance adopted by most of the strategic alignment literature. Also, grounded theory allowed a holistic understanding of the interpretations of the respondents on how national culture affects strategic alignment. This research has confirmed that grounded theory is a valuable methodology for theory building and context-based description and explanation of phenomena (Urquhart, Lehmann and Myers, 2010). It is expected that the contributions of this research could encourage other PhD students to apply grounded theory approach to theory build in IS research.

### **8.3.3. Implications for Practice**

Although the research findings are specific to the three study organisations, they potentially have broader implications and could inform strategic alignment practice. The first implication is that national culture may indirectly shape strategic alignment through strategic and operational activities in organisations. The strategic alignment literature has

## *Chapter 8 Contributions and Conclusion*

emphasised the intellectual and the social dimensions with relatively little attention to the cultural dimension. This study underscores the need for national culture to be taken seriously in efforts to achieve strategic alignment. Indeed, some aspects of culture such as the challenges of effective intercultural communication, conflict emanating from cultural differences, and different attitudes to work might hinder strategy implementation and other operational activities. Poor management of the impact of national culture might cause strategic alignment failure, particularly in organisations with subsidiaries located in different cultural contexts. For example, people from various cultural backgrounds may have different cultural values, and the potential for conflict in such situations may be greater. Similarly, strategies developed at the headquarters to be implemented in subsidiaries in different cultural contexts might meet some resistance. Since culture is difficult to alter, it is important that the culture of the headquarters and the subsidiary host country be taken into consideration when strategic alignment strategies are being developed.

Second, strategic alignment strategies might be likely to be successful if they are consistent with the national culture context in which they are being implemented. For example, strategies and practices designed in a low power distance context might not be successful when transferred to subsidiaries based in a high power distance context without some form of adaptation (Newman and Nollen, 1996; Rondinelli, Rosen and Drori, 2001; Adaba, Wilson and Sims, 2014). Also, the collaboration between multinational organisations and their offshore partners might be affected by differences in national culture beliefs, values and practices.

Third, the impact of national culture on strategic alignment is mediated by organisational contingencies, which require management. For example, staff training could improve the success of practices transferred from one culture to another. Training in cultural sensitivity may reduce the incidence of conflict (Adaba, Wilson and Sims, 2015). Strategies for the management of conflicts and intercultural learning could promote cross-cultural understanding among staff (Kankanhalli *et al.*, 2004; Wiredu and Sullivan, 2006), especially those of the business and IS functions. Also, Bada (2002) makes a case for

local adaptations to Western management practices and organisational models to fit local contexts through a process of negotiations and interactions at various levels of the organisation to reconcile differences between the universal technique and local work practices. He proposes conceptual adaptation at the strategy making level (top management) and operational adaptation of practices to suit local operations and the traditional customs and values of the wider society. Finally, the CUSA model provides a conceptual framework that could inform the development of culturally sensitive strategies to enhance alignment in multinational organisations.

## **8.4. Reaching Closure – Appraising the Quality of this Research**

This section discusses the final step of reaching closure, where the study ends after reaching theoretical saturation. This section also evaluates the quality of the research. The techniques of theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Corbin and Strauss, 2008), triangulation (Klein and Myers, 1999) and reflexivity were observed to ensure quality (McGhee, Marland and Atkinson, 2007) and are discussed next.

### **8.4.1. Theoretical Saturation**

Grounded theory studies should close when theoretical saturation is reached. Theoretical saturation – where additional data did not seem to uncover relevant new evidence – was achieved after 34 semi-structured interviews, which were supplemented by secondary data. Triangulation was safeguarded through comparing the interview data with information from documentary sources. For example, comparing data transcripts with annual reports and information from company websites. Follow-up interviews were also used to resolve contradictions in the data. Respondent validation involved comparing the accounts of the different interviewees within each study organisation to see if they are consistent. Strategic alignment is a complex phenomenon with several dimensions. Therefore, using primary and secondary data from multiple study organisations allowed the impact of national culture on strategic alignment to be more accurately evaluated.

### **8.4.2. Reflexivity and Theoretical Integration**

Reflexivity was also applied to improve the quality of this study. McGhee, Marland and Atkinson view reflexivity as:

“the explicit quest to limit researcher effects on the data by awareness of self, something seen as integral both to the process of data collection and the constant comparison method essential to grounded theory” (McGhee, Marland and Atkinson, 2007, p. 334)

Being reflexive ensured that knowledge of the previous strategic alignment literature did not unduly dilute the development of the grounded theory. Instead, it helped to attain ‘theoretical integration’ – the use of existing theories inform the theory as a ‘sense-making tool’ (Urquhart, Lehmann and Myers, 2010). Accordingly, insights from the national culture and strategic alignment literature informed the inductive development of the grounded theory, while memo writing helped to reflect on each step of the research process and to assess the potential impact of the researcher's views and prior knowledge of the literature.

### **8.5. Limitations**

This exploratory research suggested the CUSA model, a grounded model of national culture and strategic alignment. This theoretical framework could be the starting point for further investigations into the role national culture – an under-researched aspect of strategic alignment. As with every study, there some limitations to this study that require acknowledgement. First, no claim is made about the generalisability of the findings beyond the three subsidiaries of the organisations studied. Second, grounded theory research requires the researcher to approach theory building from a relatively neutral angle. While a significant amount of effort was made to prevent knowledge of the literature and any preconceptions from getting in the way of the theory building process, given the requirement for PhD students to develop a research proposal and to publish papers in academic conferences, the preconceptions of the literature might have inadvertently influenced the process. The value of this study is not based on the generalisability of the

findings directly to other organisations, as each organisation is unique and affected by different cultural conditions. However, it demonstrates that national culture might interact with organisational contingencies to produce different practices that shape strategic alignment.

## **8.6. Further Research**

Potentially fruitful avenues for future research arise from this work. First, additional research is required to test the grounded CUSA model and to validate the findings. As an example, such a study could adopt a positivist survey-based approach to examine whether the culture-related factors identified in this research do affect strategic alignment. Second, data for this research came from three Ghana subsidiaries of multinational organisations operating in the telecommunications industry. It would be interesting for future research to investigate multiple subsidiaries in various sector to facilitate a cross-sector comparison of cultural influences on strategic alignment. That way, a richer and comprehensive picture could emerge. Third, the culture-related barriers to strategic alignment identified in this study could be the starting point of an investigation into potential cultural enablers of strategic alignment. Finally, empirically grounded CUSA model could be tested, validated, or revised with data from multiple subsidiaries and the headquarters.

## **8.7. Conclusion**

As mentioned previously, strategic alignment has been a key issue among IT executives for at least the last three decades (Luftman *et al.*, 2013). Although much research has been published on the topic, few studies have examined the effects of national culture on strategic alignment in subsidiaries of multinational telecommunications companies. Consequently, this research explored how strategic alignment could be enhanced through understanding how it is shaped by national culture. The findings suggest that culture shapes strategic alignment indirectly through its influence on strategic and operational activities in the internal context of an organisation. The main contribution

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of the research is the empirically grounded CUSA model. While acknowledging the limitations, this research makes a new contribution to the strategic alignment literature with an insight into the impact of national culture, a topic that is relatively under-explored. The findings of this study contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between national culture and strategic alignment and demonstrate the value of interpretive research in general, and grounded theory in particular for exploring IS phenomena.

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## Appendix A.

### Related Publications

In the course of this research, four papers were presented at and published in the proceedings of peer-reviewed conferences to get some feedback from the IS research Community:

1. Adaba, G. B., Wilson, D. W. and Sims, J. (2015) 'Challenges to Effective Collaboration in Cross-Cultural Virtual Teams', in *Proceedings of 8th IADIS International Conference on Information Systems*. Madiera, Portugal, pp. 19–26.
2. Adaba, G. B., Wilson, D. W. and Sims, J. (2014) 'Power Distance and Strategic Alignment: a Case Study of a Subsidiary of a Multinational Organisation', in *Proceedings of the 19th UKAIS Conference on Information Systems*. St Catherine's College, University of Oxford, UK, pp. 1–22.
3. Adaba, G. and Wilson, D. (2013) 'Strategic Alignment: Exploring the Role of National Culture', in *Proceedings of 18th UKAIS International Conference on Information Systems*. Worcester College, University of Oxford, UK.
4. Adaba, G. B. and Wilson, D. W. (2012) 'The Impact of Culture on Organisational and Information Systems Strategic Alignment', in *Proceedings of the 2nd AIM Workshop on Information Systems, Culture and Globalisation*. Strasbourg, France: EM Strasbourg, pp. 103–119.

# Appendix B.

## Proposal for Ethical Review

### RESEARCH ETHICS: CONSENT FORM

**Project title: Strategic alignment: an exploration of the role of culture**

This doctoral research project attempts to understand whether cultural factors influence the ability of organisations to use information technology/systems effectively to achieve business goals. I'll appreciate it if you could share some thoughts and experiences regarding this subject with me in a short conversation. The interview is for academic research purposes only and your views will be treated with confidentiality and anonymity. Thank you.

**Name, position and contact address of Researcher:**

Godfried Adaba, PhD student  
Department of computer Science and Information Systems  
Birkbeck, University of London  
Malet Street, Bloomsbury  
London WC1E 7HX  
[gadaba01@mail.bbk.ac.uk](mailto:gadaba01@mail.bbk.ac.uk)

**Please Initial Box**

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I agree to take part in the above study.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I agree to the interview being audio recorded   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes in publications                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Date	Signature

**Proposal form for ethical review**

<b>Name of applicant</b>	Godfried Bakiyem Adaba
<b>Status</b>	MPhil/PhD Student
<b>Department</b>	Computer Science and Information Systems
<b>Project status</b>	Doctorate
<b>Funding source</b>	Non-ESRC
<b>Project title</b>	Strategic alignment: an exploration of the role of culture

Attachment (s): Information Sheet:  Consent form:  Questionnaire:  Other:

**Description and rationale of proposed doctoral research project**

Globalisation and the deployment of information systems across cultures makes it imperative to explore whether there are cultural considerations that must be taken into account in designing interventions aimed at aligning organisational and information systems strategies. My current perspective of the information systems and culture research literature leads me to believe that a culture's influence on strategic information systems alignment is an area not yet deeply researched. Studies on strategic alignment have mostly come from research in developed Western cultures, with a paucity of empirical studies from sub-Saharan Africa. This research will explore whether culture influences the alignment of organisational goals and information systems strategies, by comparing and contrasting strategic information systems alignment in organisations in Ghana and the UK using grounded theory. It hopes to emerge a theory, closely linked to the data to help conceptualise, explain and predict the impact of culture on the alignment of organisational goals and IS strategies.

**Ethical issues**

My research will collect data from organisations in Ghana and UK in order to determine whether national culture influences efforts to achieve strategic alignment. Data will be collected through structured and unstructured interviews. The ethical principles that will guide this research include:

- Truthfulness
- Confidentiality
- Informed consent before participation by signing a consent form
- Respect for interviewees
- Protection of the data

**I confirm that the proposed project conforms with College and professional ethical guidelines, as indicated: (please circle)**

- |   |                   |
|---|-------------------|
| 1. Access to participants:                          | YES/NO/DON'T KNOW |
| 2. Informed consent:                                | YES/NO/DON'T KNOW |
| 3. Anonymity and confidentiality :                  | YES/NO/DON'T KNOW |
| 4. Potential harm to participants:                  | YES/NO/DON'T KNOW |
| 5. Potential harm to researcher:                    | YES/NO/DON'T KNOW |
| 6. Potential harm to College:                       | YES/NO/DON'T KNOW |
| 7. Participants' right to decline to take part:     | YES/NO/DON'T KNOW |
| 8. Uses of the information (including publication): | YES/NO/DON'T KNOW |
| 9. Conflicts of interest:                           | YES/NO/DON'T KNOW |
| 10. Issues regarding intellectual property:         | YES/NO/DON'T KNOW |

11. Other relevant ethical concerns:

YES  NO  DON'T KNOW

**Classification of project:** Routine

Signed by:

The applicant adab. Solwee Date: 15/12/2012  
ADRIEN B. ADABA

Supervisor (if applicable): DKW Date: 15/12/2012  
DR DAVID W. WILSON

**I confirm the proposal classification as (please circle):**  ROUTINE  NON-ROUTINE

**Decision (please circle):**

**Acceptance / Refer to SEC / Refer to CREC / Refer back / Rejection**

Department Research Ethics Officer: ..... Date: .....

## Appendix C.

### Initial Semi-Structured Interview Guide

#### *Introduction*

- Thank you for agreeing to do this interview.
- The interview is part of a research project that seeks to explore whether cultural factors influence the use of information technology to achieve organisational goals.
- Everything you tell me will be confidential. To protect your privacy, we won't connect your name with anything that you say.
- Please remember that we want to know what you think and feel and that there are no right or wrong answers.
- Is it OK if I audiotape this interview? If yes:
- [Turn on recording equipment.]

#### *Section 1: Company Information*

- What is your position at the organisation?
- What are the major responsibilities of your current position?
- Obtain job description if possible
- How long have you been with this organisation?

#### *Section 2: Strategic alignment*

- What is your position at the organisation?

- How do your organisation's IT systems support its operations and business strategy?
- Please describe your organisational structure?
- Who does the head of IT in your organisation report to?

### *Section 3: Social dimensions of alignment*

- How does the IT department participate in the development of the organisations business strategies?
- How do other departments in your organisation take part in the development of IT strategies or plans?
- How would you characterise the business and IT planning style in your organisation? (e.g. top-down, bottom-up, decentralised, centralised)
- How does management in your organisation support the work of the IT department?
- Describe how communications take place between staff of the IT department and those of other departments?

### *Section 4: Strategic alignment and national culture*

- What are the cultural backgrounds of staff of this organisation?
- Also, probe for the various nationalities of staff
- In your experience, how have cultural differences among staff affected work in this organisation? Please explain why?

- Please describe any instances of misunderstanding or conflict as a result of cultural differences among staff?
- How does staff at different levels of the organisations relate with each other?
- Find out whether lower level staff are comfortable in the presence of superiors
- Are subordinates allowed to speak their mind
- How have different cultural backgrounds of staff influenced the organisation's use of IT?
- Discuss any cultural practices and differences and how they affect the performance of IT in the company?
- Tell me about how cultural values have affected communications and collaboration among staff?

*Section 5: Organisational culture*

- Briefly, describe the mission/vision of your organisation?
- Obtain mission/vision statements where possible
- What is the management/leadership style like? (E.g. top-down, bottom-up, decentralized, centralised, authoritarian, democratic or both)

## **Appendix D.**

### **NVivo Screenshots of Data Analysis**

Strategic alignment- an exploration of the role of culture (NVivo10).nvp - NVivo

File Home Create External Data Analyze Query Explore Layout View

Go Refresh Open Properties Edit Paste Copy Merge Cut Copy Paste Merge

Workspace Item Clipboard Format Paragraph Styles Editing Proofing

Look for: Search In Interviews Find Now Clear Advanced Find

**Sources**

- Internals
  - Interviews
  - Externals
  - Memos
  - Framework Matrices

**Interviews**

Name	Nodes	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
Company B3	20	44	13/01/2015 18:33	GA	23/09/2015 19:23	GA
Company A1 (Head of BSS)	54	164	13/01/2015 18:33	GA	23/09/2015 19:19	GA
Company A2	11	26	02/10/2013 16:32	GA	23/09/2015 19:19	GA
Company A3	6	36	08/10/2013 15:22	GA	23/09/2015 19:20	GA
Company A4	0	0	13/01/2015 18:33	GA	23/09/2015 19:20	GA
Company A6 (Performance Reporting Manager)	58	200	13/01/2015 18:33	GA	23/09/2015 19:27	GA
Company A7	5	5	03/10/2013 15:14	GA	23/09/2015 19:27	GA
Company B1	30	64	24/09/2013 15:33	GA	23/09/2015 19:22	GA
Company B2	24	32	24/09/2013 15:31	GA	23/09/2015 19:22	GA
Company B4	10	22	03/10/2013 15:13	GA	23/09/2015 19:23	GA
Company B5	0	0	13/01/2015 18:33	GA	23/09/2015 19:24	GA
Company B6	7	10	13/01/2015 18:36	GA	23/09/2015 19:24	GA
Company B7	6	13	13/01/2015 18:36	GA	23/09/2015 19:25	GA
Company B8	7	12	13/01/2015 18:36	GA	23/09/2015 19:25	GA
Company C1	17	38	02/10/2013 17:54	GA	23/09/2015 19:21	GA
Company C2	28	32	25/05/2014 17:13	GA	23/09/2015 19:21	GA
Company C3	15	15	25/05/2014 19:17	GA	23/09/2015 19:22	GA
Company C4	21	34	25/05/2014 15:49	GA	23/09/2015 19:22	GA
Company C5	0	0	24/09/2013 16:13	GA	23/09/2015 19:26	GA
Company C6	0	0	13/01/2015 18:33	GA	23/09/2015 19:28	GA
Company C7	63	103	21/01/2014 17:39	GA	23/09/2015 19:28	GA
Company C8	6	11	13/01/2015 18:36	GA	23/09/2015 19:32	GA
Company C9	8	9	13/01/2015 18:36	GA	23/09/2015 19:33	GA
Company D1	14	20	16/11/2012 16:13	GA	23/09/2015 19:17	GA

**Sources**

- Nodes
- Classifications
- Collections
- Queries
- Reports
- Models
- Folders

Company A1 (Head of BSS)

[Click to edit](#)

are all connected to the local area network. In addition to being connected to the local area network, they are accessible to multiple people. There are easily accessible such that you can find out which one is the floor that you are in.

*How is strategic planning done?*

To a large extent, I will call it a hybrid. We have the strategic vision, which outlines where we think the company should be going to, but before it is completely crystallised, a lot of input have to be taken from the lower levels of the organisation. So it a bit of hybrid, you have some broad general direction, but it is

In Nodes Code At

GA 28 Items Nodes: 54 References: 164 Read-Only Line: 1 Column: 0 100%

Strategic alignment- an exploration of the role of culture (NVivo 10).nvp - NVivo

File Home Create External Data Analyze Query Explore Layout View

Go Refresh Open Properties Edit Paste Copy Merge Cut Copy Merge

Format Paragraph Styles Editing Proofing

Workspace Item Clipboard Format Paragraph Styles Editing Proofing

Look for: Search In: Nodes Find Now Clear Advanced Find

**Nodes**

- Nodes
  - Company A
  - Company B
  - Company C
  - Company D
  - Relationships
  - Node Matrices
- Sources
- Nodes**
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**Nodes**

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
Culture, Religion and Work	7	13	28/11/2012 19:02	GA	25/05/2014 17:40	GA
Examples of Cultural Influences on Work Practices	8	19	28/11/2012 18:44	GA	25/05/2014 17:43	GA
Power Distance	7	9	02/10/2013 16:35	GA	25/05/2014 17:41	GA
Management or Leadership Style	5	7	23/07/2014 17:26	GA	23/07/2014 16:16	GA
Cultural Backgrounds	7	9	02/10/2013 17:58	GA	11/12/2014 15:31	GA
IT Infrastructure	4	6	08/10/2013 14:02	GA	11/12/2014 15:31	GA
Strategic information systems planning	6	8	23/05/2014 17:41	GA	16/01/2015 17:40	GA
Cultural Barriers to Alignment	3	4	23/07/2014 14:43	GA	11/12/2014 15:31	GA
Language Barrier	5	9	23/07/2014 14:47	GA	24/07/2014 16:13	GA
Different Work Practices and Attitude to Work	4	6	23/07/2014 14:49	GA	23/07/2014 17:06	GA
Culture Conflict	3	7	23/05/2014 17:43	GA	08/08/2014 16:09	GA
Hierarchical Management Structure	2	2	23/07/2014 15:58	GA	08/08/2014 13:36	GA
Management or Leadership Style	1	1	23/07/2014 16:01	GA	24/07/2014 16:27	GA
Communications	1	1	23/07/2014 16:03	GA	23/07/2014 16:03	GA
Attitudes to Time	2	2	23/07/2014 17:04	GA	08/08/2014 13:27	GA
Mistrust	1	1	24/07/2014 17:56	GA	24/07/2014 17:56	GA
Racial discrimination	1	3	08/08/2014 16:10	GA	08/08/2014 16:11	GA
Conflict at the workplace	1	3	08/08/2014 16:13	GA	08/08/2014 16:30	GA
Favouritism	1	1	08/08/2014 16:18	GA	08/08/2014 16:18	GA
Culture not relevant	1	2	08/08/2014 15:57	GA	11/12/2014 15:31	GA
Enablers of alignment	1	1	08/08/2014 16:21	GA	11/12/2014 15:31	GA
Communications (2)	8	14	13/01/2015 18:33	GA	11/12/2014 15:31	GA
Management Structure	2	4	13/01/2015 18:36	GA	12/02/2014 16:00	GA
Communications (3)	4	6	13/01/2015 18:36	GA	19/05/2014 18:37	GA
Culture and Work Practices	5	10	13/01/2015 18:36	GA	19/05/2014 18:37	GA
Cultural Diversity	4	6	13/01/2015 18:36	GA	19/05/2014 18:37	GA
Culture Conflict	3	4	13/01/2015 18:36	GA	19/05/2014 18:37	GA
Collectivism	1	1	13/01/2015 18:36	GA	12/02/2014 15:51	GA
Intra National Cultural Differences	2	2	13/01/2015 18:36	GA	19/05/2014 18:37	GA
Power Distance	3	4	13/01/2015 18:36	GA	19/05/2014 18:37	GA
Planning and Decision Making	3	7	13/01/2015 18:36	GA	18/02/2014 15:52	GA
Organisational Culture and Practices	1	1	13/01/2015 18:36	GA	12/02/2014 16:00	GA
IS and Strategic Planning	2	4	13/01/2015 18:36	GA	19/05/2014 18:37	GA
Communications (4)	4	6	15/01/2015 18:01	GA	19/05/2014 18:37	GA
Natural culture (Headquarters culture and local culture of the subsidiary context)	0	0	16/01/2015 17:18	GA	16/01/2015 18:30	GA
Local subsidiary cultural context	0	0	16/01/2015 17:18	GA	16/01/2015 17:18	GA
Strategic Alignment	0	0	16/01/2015 17:19	GA	16/01/2015 17:19	GA
Management Style	0	0	16/01/2015 17:22	GA	16/01/2015 17:26	GA

GA 101 Items

