STRATEGIC ASYMMETRIC MULTICULTURAL ALLIANCES IN BUSINESS

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Dedication

This work is dedicated in loving memory to my father, Samuel, who saw me begin this journey and who finishes it with me from a far greater perspective. Also, I dedicate this work to my mother, Mary, who has tolerated the too-frequent absence of her son as I studied and wrote. Finally, this work is dedicated to my wife, Rosanne, without whom I would truly have no center. You have given me the courage to continue and the reason for finding my voice.
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Abstract

Global economics and other factors make it increasingly difficult for organizations to operate within the boundaries of one country in a rational way (e.g., leveraging best practices, profitable, achieving goals). In this study, I looked at strategic business alliances, transcending simple quid pro quo relationships to deliver ongoing partner value. I refined my study to multicultural relationships, having differing cultural identities (i.e., ideas, heritage, language, or demographics from differing geographies). Finally, I considered asymmetry (i.e., inequity in working relationship). Using a mixed-methodology design, I surveyed alliance participants and interviewed participants from selected alliances. A multi-case study addresses emergent themes of participants from these alliances, day-to-day experiences, and ways in which leaders intervened. Drawing from these experiences, observations are presented about the nature of these alliances and their increasing contemporary relevance. The electronic version of this dissertation is at OhioLink ETD Center, www.ohiolink.edu/etd.
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Chapter I: Introduction

If one looks at contemporary businesses, it is difficult to find examples of organizations that operate on a significant scale without a form of collaboration. Global economics, availability of goods and services, statutory environments, the need for hedging and risk mitigation, and other factors make it increasingly difficult for organizations to operate without some form of partnership in a rational way. One answer to these challenges is collaboration.

Collaboration has been studied from many perspectives and for many reasons. For example, Gulati (2007) wrote extensively on the value of alliances in business:

Over the past two decades, researchers have become fascinated with the growing array of cooperative ties that firms are entering into with each other. While much of the previous research has focused on the dynamics of competition, scholars are increasingly redirecting their interest to aspects of cooperative behavior. One of the fastest growing sets of inter-organizational ties has been strategic alliances that firms enter into to achieve a common goal. (p. 1)

At its fundamental level, the concept of collaboration speaks to the sharing of resources, often to allow the involved constituencies to do what they do best and leverage core competencies of others. Collaboration also drives soft benefits to the involved parties, such as facilitating coordination and control. Most large enterprises realize that performing all functions necessary to effectuate a global supply chain within one organization is wasteful of resources, ineffective, or even impossible; thus, they collaborate with other organizations to conduct business in a more productive way. If everyone operates in a self-serving way, efficiency is lost and all suffer. When individuals and groups collaborate, specialization can occur and collective benefits can arise, often making the difference between subsistence and thriving—or even the difference between life and death as, for example, when rescue and relief organizations collaborate to bring resources to disaster-stricken regions of the world.
Increasingly, collaboration in the business world takes the form of organizations from differing cultural backgrounds forming alliances. This alliance-forming is one type of collaboration. By contrast, other types of collaboration might include outsourcing arrangements, contract work, and short-term relationships formed to achieve a specific goal. In many respects, multicultural collaborations (or contentions) are not designed intentionally, but rather the natural progression of events and innovation taking place on a global scale. For example, Gajjala (2003) wrote of the pace of expansion of multicultural interaction:

As we rediscovered with deadly clarity in the month of September 2001, globalization, information communication technologies, nationalisms, and religious diasporas are inextricably linked with a need for intercultural understanding. The world becoming “smaller” is enabled through a variety of technologies, and the clashing of various cultural, religious, and political discourses and extremisms has material consequences. (p. 168)

Leaders of multicultural business alliances must understand such differences and leverage them to produce targeted benefits and mitigate the potential marginalization of the collaborating parties. It is also important to be specific when considering the term *multicultural*, which in this context refers to demographic origins from different parts of the world and the implications for the way in which the alliance parties conduct business.

In business, collaboration can take many forms. *Partnership* is a term that has both general and specific meaning. Various legal forms allow groups to combine forces and yet separate assets and differentiate liability. Other structures provide for two organizations to form a jointly owned third, thus further differentiating the areas in which they collaborate and separating their pre-existing business concerns. In a broad sense, such business relationships are typically referred to as *alliances*. 
Establishing a Working Definition of Terms

**Strategic alliances.** For the purposes of this research, the term alliances was chosen to be as inclusive as possible. The term refers to relationships among parties, typically for the purpose of achieving a common goal. Spekman, Isabella, and MacAvoy (2000) provided a useful definition of the term: “an alliance is a close, collaborative relationship between two, or more, firms with the intent of accomplishing mutually compatible goals that would be difficult for each to accomplish alone” (p. 37).

The term *strategic alliance* is more specific. In a literature review, Taylor (2005) delineated a strategic alliance as follows:

- two or more firms that unite to pursue a set of agreed goals, yet remain independent subsequent to the formation of the alliance;
- the partner firms share the benefits of the alliance and control over the assigned tasks; and,
- the partner firms contribute on an ongoing basis to one or more strategic areas, e.g., technology, product development or marketing. (p. 471)

This summary provides a foundational definition of the type of relationships of interest. Taylor cited additional authors who classified alliances by complexity of the alliance agreement, alliance objective, and other factors; but Taylor’s clear, three-point definition emerges as most useful. In the original source referenced in Taylor’s work, Yoshino and Rangan (1995) provided additional context to the concept of strategic alliance described by Taylor as follows:

A strategic alliance links specific facets of the businesses of two or more firms. At its core, this link is a trading partnership that enhances the effectiveness of the competitive strategies of the participating firms by providing for the mutually beneficial trade of technologies, skills, or products based upon them. An alliance can take a variety of forms, ranging from an arm’s-length contract to a joint venture. (p. 4)
Multiculture. Added to the understanding of the type of relationship, there is a second concept: multiculture. Hall (1989) presented an intriguing depiction of culture:

Nevertheless, and in spite of many differences in detail, anthropologists do agree on three characteristics of culture: it is not innate, but learned; the various facets of culture are interrelated—you touch a culture in one place and everything else is affected; it is shared and in effect defines the boundaries of different groups. (p. 16)

The concept of culture is broad and nuanced, as Hall implied. For this study, focus is particularly on those aspects of culture that have their genesis in national origin. Thus, *multicultural* for the purposes of this research pertained to the aspects of a relationship in which the constituent parties identify with more than one national cultural context. The term *multicultural collaboration* is intended to combine the concepts of collaboration and multiculture to include situations where the collaborating counterparties represent ideas, corporate cultural identities, educational foundation, heritage, language, and other demographic aspects from differing parts of the world.

It is also important to distinguish between the terms *multinational* and multicultural with respect to organizations. Although these two terms are often used interchangeably, there is a distinction. Organizations can be multinational if they have a business presence (market, manufacturing, etc.) in more than one country. Often, however, such organizations merely export one culture to remote locations, taking great pains to sustain leadership language, interpersonal behavior, and corporate identity in a holistic, ethnocentric manner. To be multicultural, organizations must go beyond geography, origin, and language and identify with more than one culture, regardless of geographic dispersal. To the extent that two culturally different organizations are collaborating in a business relationship, there will be an impact to that collaboration resulting from their multicultural diversity. By focusing on the second concept of multicultural collaboration, I uncovered synergies and benefits of collaboration that stem from
the diversity of such situations. I, thus, expanded on the more simplistic understanding of business benefits derived only from two organizations having collaborated in some way and explore what kinds of leadership strategies, skills, and perspectives are essential in these situations. Added to the understanding of strategic alliances, this second dimension informs views of multiculture as described above, bias (both good and bad) and perspective that can have dramatic impact on the ultimate benefit experienced by the involved parties.

**Asymmetry.** Against this evolving understanding of multicultural collaboration, I have also considered the concept of *asymmetry*. Asymmetry in the context of business relationships relates to the existence of an imbalance in power, organizational mandate, funding, size, or other resource area. Taylor (2005) cited asymmetry in certain alliances based on learning readiness, for example: “this asymmetry depends on the degree of alliance learning readiness, or the extent to which a partner is receptive to collaboration” (p. 473). This third dimension of asymmetry introduces a crucial nuance to the sharing of organizational power, recognition of innovation, ability to execute, and distribution of benefit to involved parties.

**Evolving the Concept of Studying Strategic, Asymmetric, Multicultural Alliances**

One way of looking at differentiating alliances would be to take a binary perspective: they either are or are not strategic, asymmetric, or multicultural. This binary concept leads to a conceptual box. Alliances are either in this conceptual box or not, as illustrated earlier in Figure 1.1.
Figure 1.1. A simplistic view of categorizing alliances.

In discussion of this concept, a noteworthy abstracting enhancement to this model emerged: considering these dimensions not as absolute boundaries, but more as vectors. Alliances are neither categorically strategic or nonstrategic, multicultural or nonmulticultural, symmetric or asymmetric; rather, these concepts vary from alliance to alliance. Essentially, any alliance could fit into the expanded conceptual model. The theoretical model thus considered becomes more of a three-space vector concept, as in Figure 1.2.
Figure 1.2. Considering vectors instead of binary boundaries expands the model.

The model is more inclusive. Essentially, most forms of collaboration can be represented in the extensible space of the open-ended model. The new model allows for evolution of thought in terms of what is considered multicultural over time as global dynamics evolve. Implications of multiculture, as described above, can essentially be a progression along the y-axis of the model. Alliances can be explored against this model without regard to whether or not they fit in the box of the original model. The extent to which other insight might be gained is essentially unconstrained by the categorization methodology.

Background and Positioning

My professional life has involved international business for over 30 years. I have worked for foreign-owned companies operating in the United States, participated in due diligence for multinational acquisitions and joint ventures, and negotiated contract terms and service levels for asymmetric cross-border relationships in outsourcing and related relationships. I have been both an agent of change and a victim of it. One of the largest teams I led had several hundred
individuals operating in a flexible staffing model in an off-shore location. In that role, I implemented programs to foster increased cultural awareness and collaboration.

In my current role as a senior leader for a multinational firm, I have held positions in operations, technology, and strategy. All of these positions involved significant cross-border collaborative efforts. Currently, I lead cross-functional groups with ongoing efforts in countries in North America, Asia, and Europe. These teams regularly collaborate on joint projects that provide benefit to my organization, to the respective regions involved in collaboration, and to customers whose area of interest is global or multinational. Specifically, my company recently completed significant strategic joint ventures in China and Japan, and has working partnerships in Iberia, Australia, Latin America, and elsewhere. I have personally been involved with many of these ventures and partnerships, both as one of the enablers of certain aspects of the collaboration, and as participant in either due diligence before deals have been made or in realization of the benefits subsequent to the initial collaborative event. Accordingly, I have pondered how best to lead in complex multicultural situations. I have considered why certain multicultural collaborative efforts go well while many others seem to struggle, or fail.

Academically, the underpinnings of leading change in international business have always been of interest to me. As I pursued my MBA, I discovered the complexities layered onto traditional business activities by introducing a multinational dimension. Common precursors of change such as negotiating a contract, developing joint policies, understanding future success metrics, and conducting portfolio analysis relative to prospective partners take on greater complexity when distinct cultures, statutory requirements, perceptions of ethics, and social mandates come into play.
Gaps in the Literature Addressed by this Study

As a natural outcome of the increase in alliance activity in business, authors have been, not surprisingly, focused on success factors in alliances. As treated in the literature review in chapter 2, studies have touched on the concepts of asymmetry and multiculture. Research seems to be largely descriptive, however, with regard to the shift in alliance activity from domestic to multinational and from agreements among equals to partnerships that are highly asymmetric. I have focused on the consequence of strategic content, asymmetry, and multiculture taken simultaneously in the context of successful alliances. Observing that some alliances manage to be successful despite the additional challenges of globalization and asymmetry, I explored what can be learned from alliance managers and participants in those very special alliances.

Research Questions

The first purpose of the dissertation is to understand better how successful strategic alliances fall into this three-space mode. Subsequent to that, my second purpose was to isolate certain alliances of interest and then to delve deeper into the experiences of alliance participants. Studies show dramatic failure rates in alliances. For example, Gulati, Khanna, and Nohria (1994) wrote:

Several studies have reported failure rates as high as 80 percent, failure that usually leads to their [the allied parties] dissolution or acquisition by one of the partners. Prominent failures in the automobile industry alone include, for example, alliances between General Motors and Daewoo Corporation, General Motors and Isuzu Motors, Chrysler and Mitsubishi Motors, Chrysler and Miserati, Fiat and Nissan. (p. 61)

Another example of the high degree of alliance failure was presented by Zineldin and Dodourova (2005), who studied failure in strategic alliances, with a focus on the automotive industry:

A large number of industrial manufacturers are forming various types of alliances in a bid to improve their competitive position. The number of strategic alliances has almost doubled in the past 10 years and is expected to increase even more in the future. However, while many organisations [sic] often rush to jump on the bandwagon of
strategic alliances, few succeed. The failure rate of strategic alliances is projected to be as high as 70 percent. (p. 460)

My first question, therefore, was:

Q1: To what extent does the degree of strategic, asymmetric, and multicultural makeup of an alliance relate to the success of the collaboration?

Important to answering this question was, of course, an effective definition of success in alliances. For the purposes of my dissertation, I adopted from published, peer-reviewed empirical research what seems to be a popular working definition. For example, in “The Way to Win in Cross-Border Alliances,” Bleeke and Ernst (1991) defined a successful alliance with two tests: “. . . both partners achieved their ingoing [sic] strategic objectives and both recovered their financial costs of capital. Progress on the strategic objectives was based on market share, sales volume, new product development, or other criteria specific to the alliance” (p. 197). I also looked for additional definitions that are more inclusive of culture and asymmetry as this sample definition is silent on those dimensions.

I also used published literature, discussions with advisors, and empirical studies describing qualities, characteristics, and observations of strategic alliances, multicultural makeup, and asymmetry as the basis for my research into the first research question. My related hypothesis for this question was that a high degree of strategic, asymmetric, and multicultural (SAM) content (as indicated by survey responses) directly relates to less likelihood to succeed. Ultimately, I evolved the following conceptual model of the first phase of my research, depicted in Figure 1.3. Accordingly, the survey looked at the three dimensions of the model, plus a definition of success applied to the alliance. The survey participants’ responses allowed positioning of each alliance in the model.
Figure 1.3. The first phase of the study: Survey to identify alliances of interest.

Having surveyed alliance participants to be able to stratify alliances according to SAM content (i.e., high or low in each of the dimensions) as described in the theoretical model, the second part of the study focused on the experiences of alliance participants in successful alliances. Of particular interest were those situations with high SAM content (i.e., highly strategic, significant multicultural makeup, and marked asymmetry when compared to other alliances studied). My additional research questions were as follows:

Q2: What are the emergent themes of leaders in these endeavors?

Q3: How do SAM characteristics influence the day-to-day experiences of alliance participants and collaborating organizations?

Q4: How do the behaviors, interventions, and leadership styles of leaders relate to the successful outcomes?
It was appropriate to pursue these questions by interviewing alliance participants to form a second, qualitative part of the mixed-method study. A conceptual depiction of the second phase of this mixed-methods study is depicted in Figure 1.4.

**Figure 1.4.** The second phase of the study: Exploring the experiences.

As business alliances move more into this upper-quadrant space, it is my hope that this research will help alliance leaders and participants to better understand the makeup of their relationships and the challenges and opportunities inherent therein. This research is not a how-to work for succeeding in these complex alliances, nor do I harbor any pretense that this method of looking at alliances will, in and of itself, provide all of the insight necessary to alter the staggering odds against alliance success. Rather, it is my hope that this research might inform others in a way that challenges and expands their thinking about complex alliances and perhaps
contributes to a greater body of understanding, thus benefiting leaders in complex alliances and those who further study these relationships.

In research leading to this dissertation, I observed that many alliance leaders are thrust into their role, often with little or no formal understanding of alliance experience. By understanding at least one way to frame the nature of a complex alliance, alliance participants and future researchers have an example of thinking about these complex relationships in a discrete, deterministic fashion (i.e., two people using the same method could likely come up with similar results). Furthermore, understanding something about the experiences and learnings of leaders in these alliances, especially those that are successful, could lead to a more informed perspective on alliance success in strategic, asymmetric, multicultural collaboration.

Scope of this Study

There were, of necessity, limitations and conceptual considerations in this study related to the nature of the alliances of interest. First and foremost is the issue of language. As was seen from the trials considered as part of research leading to this dissertation, I considered the impact of language, especially because participants in cross-border alliances could include non-English speakers.

I decided to limit the scope of this study to English speakers for the survey portion, in order to minimize the risk of misinterpretation of results. One example of the risks of multilingual survey came from my reading of Berry and Kaldm (1995) in both French and English. I was interested in how researchers who were not multilingual might come away from the study with different conclusions. For example, Berry and Kaldm wrote, “in the total sample, attitudes toward multiculturalism were moderately positive, and tolerance moderately high; there was also a relatively high sense of attachment and commitment to Canada” (p. 301). The
translation reads, “Pour l'ensemble de l'échantillon, les attitudes à l'endroit du multiculturalisme étaient passablement positives, et le degré de tolérance passablement élevé; on constatait aussi un sens relativement élevé d'attachement et d'engagement au Canada” (pp. 301-302). Reading this sentence, I pondered how the English-speaking reader and the French-speaking reader come away with subtly different interpretations. In particular, the phrase “moderately positive” in English is translated “passablement positives” in French. Similarly, “moderately high” becomes “passablement élevé.” The term “moderately” in English is more or less neutral in this context; however, the term “passablement” in French can mean “acceptably,” which has a slightly negative connotation in this context. (The second word, élevé, means “elevated” in exactly the same sense in both French and English). One can easily see from this small example how sincere attempts to translate can introduce unintended nuance.

Another important scope consideration of this study was the size of the survey pool. I sought to survey enough individuals to identify three successful (as characterized by studies cited above), high-SAM alliances. It was vital in so doing to recognize the implications of any learning derived from the qualitative part of the study and to avoid generalization outside the system of alliances studied.

Finally, there were certain types of alliances that were not appropriate for research. For example, I was not able to interact with any alliances involved in overtly illegal activity, even though such alliances can be highly successful by some definitions and can clearly have high SAM content. Other types of alliances that were not accessible to me were those of a highly secretive nature, situations in which there are hostile corporate actions, and those who opted not to participate or not to self-identify.
Criteria on Which I Hope this Work to be Evaluated

It is essential to consider the criteria on which I hope this work to be evaluated. Accordingly, I have looked at the works of those authors cited in this dissertation and how both the academic and business communities appeared to have received their work. I find the academic literature to be received largely in a face-value context—evaluated on the strength of the research, appropriateness of the literature considered by the author, the internal and external validity of the findings, fairness and appropriateness of the method, or the reasonableness of the conclusions drawn. Review of such work has guided my decision of a method that is both rigorous and inclusive of both quantitative and qualitative aspects of alliances. My hope is that the academic community will similarly consider my efforts here. I accordingly applied academic rigor and to use the tools techniques and learning I have acquired in my doctoral studies as a guide.

I find the business community, in receiving empirical studies and other work related to this topic to be largely pragmatic about either the short term or longer term strategic usefulness to the problems of their business at hand. That reflection has, in part, guided my selection of a topic that is relevant to the trends in business today, as well as the concerns of leaders who are facing business problems that are increasingly global in scope and more likely to involve collaboration. I hope to provide meaningful content for those who might read this work from a business perspective to inform the problems they face day-to-day, and perhaps, to expand the perspectives from which they consider these problems. Also, I hope to encourage reflective leadership that goes beyond the practical implications of succeeding in terms of growing business success to consider broader perspectives such as social consciousness, the ramifications and outcomes of strategic alliances, and the benefits that may accrue to the communities or
environments within which alliances operate. Finally, I hope to highlight the opportunity costs of failing to act in a reflective way by showing the much broader way in which these alliances can be studied.

As a guide to my research, therefore, I held in my mind these questions:

- Have I been fair to different perspectives from which alliances could be judged? (i.e., Have I considered the differing perspectives and how those perspectives might influence any conclusions?)
- Have I considered the impacts of strategic alliances not only from a perspective of the business benefit achieved from such efforts, but also from a perspective of benefit to the individuals in the organizations and the communities within which those alliances operate?
- Have I captured the experience of successfully navigating strategic, asymmetric, multicultural alliances and shed light on how the alliance experience plays out for the alliance participants so as to inform others who may consider either studying such alliances or participating in them?
- Have I contributed not only to the literature related to this type of alliance, but also to a greater understanding of the experience of such alliances?
- Have I provided insight that stems from my research and personal experience in this field?
- Have I provided a basis for stimulating others interested in this area to continue my research and/or the research of others, either in ways I have alluded to or in ways I have not even considered?
Chapter II: Review of the Literature

To facilitate a review of the literature relevant to this topic of study, I have presented an evolution of the basic concepts involved. First, a synthesis of the concepts relating to collaboration in general is derived from the leadership literature. The underpinnings of collaboration form an understanding of how organizations come together to collaborate, and the various ways in which such collaboration can be manifested. From that understanding, each of the core concepts relating to successful, strategic, asymmetric, multicultural alliances is presented.

Leadership in Relationship to Multicultural Strategic Alliances

The study of leadership in a multicultural setting presents a valuable context for any contemporary understanding of complex alliances. Particularly relevant to the study of leadership in various cultures is the work of the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) research program. This 10-year research program focused on key aspects of leadership in 62 countries. House and Javidan (2004) set context for the importance of such a study:

> Given the increasing globalization of industrial organizations and the growing interdependencies among nations, the need for a better understanding of cultural influences on leadership and organizational practices has never been greater. Leaders confront situations that are highly complex, constantly evolving, and difficult to interpret. Managers of global firms are facing unprecedented fierce and rapidly changing competition. (p. 10)

Such interdependence is exemplified by the formation of alliances among partnering organizations from different countries. Among the many questions considered by the study, the researchers of GLOBE studied leaders’ behaviors, practices, and key attributes in an attempt to gain insight about acceptance universally across cultures or only in certain discrete cultures.
Another key focus of the study that relates to alliances is the consideration of the relationship between societal cultural variables and international competitiveness.

The GLOBE research provides many insights that are important to the study of multicultural collaboration. For example, Dorfman and House (2004) presented the concept of leader prototypes and preferences for leadership styles varying significantly by national orientation. Considering such nuances when looking at the countries involved in multicultural alliances is crucial to understanding the potential drivers of behavior and outcomes of the collaborative relationship.

Among the many important conclusions of the GLOBE study, Javidan et al. (2004) offered a compelling observation that relates directly to cross-cultural alliances. The authors noted the increasing rate of multicultural collaboration and competition. They further presented the paradox that, although current literature typically considers differing cultures separately, authors often try to speculate about cultural contact among those separate cultures. Wrote Javidan et al., “despite somewhat conflicting findings, the conventional wisdom is that cultural distance is dysfunctional and leads to failure of cross-border mergers” (p. 730). The GLOBE research took this conventional wisdom further. Javidan et al. wrote:

It is important to consider the possibility that cultural contact between two or more separate cultures entails unique dynamics that go beyond these objective measures [i.e., measures of cultural distance] of each culture. Objective measures of each culture may not be sufficient to understand what happens during the contact. What is probably important is not how a culture is objectively measured but how it is subjectively perceived by those from another culture. (pp. 730-731)

Trompenaars and Woolliams (2003) also treated this concept of cultural context in organizational leadership, specifically cautioning that one must be careful not to presume the extensibility of successful methods when different geographies are involved: “many of the prescriptions for such different approaches to change are often ethnocentric and may only be
appropriate in the cultures where they were researched, developed, and validated” (p. 157). The authors maintained that, in order to drive effective evolution in organizations in the next century, new processes must allow for the surfacing and reflection upon presumptions that may have been narrowly informed from a global cultural perspective. Thus, the GLOBE study and the work of authors such as Trompenaars and Woolliams, provides context for the consideration of successful, high-SAM alliances. The research provides a foundation for the supposition that the multicultural makeup of these relationships plays a critical part not only in the difficulty of success, but also in the ultimate subjective assessment of the alliance experience.

To relate the important evolution of multicultural strategic alliances to the broader study of leadership, it is helpful to look at leadership literature with an eye to strategic alliances. One can see the emergence of important themes that are foundational. Although the context surrounding collaboration is treated in the broader leadership literature, strategic alliances are more the subject of dedicated works.

An example of the foundational thinking can be found in Northouse (2004), who wrote of various approaches important to the understanding of dimensions of leadership. In developing a working definition of leadership, Northouse wrote:

> Despite the multitude of ways that leadership has been conceptualized, the following components can be identified as central to the phenomenon of leadership: (a) leadership is a process, (b) leadership involves influence, (c) leadership occurs within a group context, and (d) leadership involves goal attainment. (p. 3)

The second tenet relates to influence, but is silent on how that influence might need to change when a multicultural alliance structure is in place. Nevertheless, there is useful insight in the leadership approaches treated by the author. One of the approaches Northouse described was the concept of team leadership:
Most early scholars studying groups agreed on two critical functions of leadership: (a) to help the group accomplish its task (task function) and (b) to keep the group maintained and functioning (maintenance function). Scholars studying intact work teams have also referred to these same two functions as team performance and team development.

(p. 205)

These functions, wrote Northouse, need not be carried out exclusively by the leader, but can be augmented by experienced members of the team. Abstracting the theory described by Northouse to the existence of multicultural teams operating in a complex strategic alliance, the need for helping the group accomplish its task becomes increasingly complex because the two or more collaborating parties may have different needs from the alliance and by extension from the leadership of that alliance. Furthermore, developing the alliance becomes more complex as well because leaders become increasingly reliant on more experienced members who have specific knowledge relevant to the cultural perspectives and ways of leading which are appropriate from their unique perspectives.

Another relevant conceptualization can be found in Heifetz (1994), who wrote of situations in leadership that generate useful adaptation to endemic challenges, adapting the term holding environment from psychoanalysis:

For my purposes I extend the use of the term "holding environment" beyond parental and therapeutic relationships. A holding environment consists of any relationship in which one party has the power to hold the attention of another party and facilitate adaptive work. I apply it to any relationship that has a developmental task or opportunity—including relationships between politicians and their polities, nations and other nations, coaches and their teams, managers and subordinates, and even relationships between friends. The holding environment can generate adaptive work because it contains and regulates the stresses that work generates. (pp. 104-105)

Looking at strategic alliances as relationships that form to meet the needs of the collaborating parties in ways that they could not otherwise achieve independently, one can see the emergence of the type of adaptive work that Heifetz described. Alliances can achieve goals collectively that might be elusive otherwise.
Some authors have treated the subject of collaboration in a very simple form as the pursuit of mutual purposes. For example, Rost (1993) described the concept of the pursuit of mutual purpose in the context of leaders and followers:

When leaders and followers have several purposes, the likelihood of mutuality is enhanced because different leaders and followers can emphasize related purposes and still achieve some mutuality. It also means that there are several purposes around which different followers and leaders can build a common vision or mission. (p. 118)

Rost’s depiction of the pursuit of common purpose is perhaps the simplest and most pure concept that extrapolates to the notion of working together.

A more complex understanding of working together comes from Burns (1979), who looked at the psychological underpinnings of leadership. Citing Lawrence Kohlberg’s concepts of the evolution of organizational needs, Burns looked at why leaders chose to lead the way they do. According to Burns, Kohlberg formulated six stages of moral development, ranging from the preconventional level, focused mainly on the individual’s needs, to the conventional level, where conformity and approval, according to Kohlberg, begin to become significant and the concept of social order emerges. Subsequent stages in the postconventional level include principled orientation, with the introduction of group norms, shared values, and social transaction or contract for overall utility. This concept of a greater common good is, in fact, another way of describing collaboration in a simple sense to the end of achieving a greater common purpose. Burns made the important observation that such evolution of need leads to the impregnation of moral purpose on leadership, thereby bringing about a higher sense of purpose than the simple achievement of goals and aspirations (Burns, 1979).

Heifetz (1994) presented a sobering reason for collaboration—survival:

Direction may take the form of vision, goals, strategy, and technique, but on some preconscious level, it may simply mean “finding the next feeding site.” Protection may take the form of negotiating a favorable and mutually beneficial agreement with a
competitor, but basically it connotes scanning the environment for threats and mobilizing the response. (p. 69)

Looking at the work of these three authors, one can see already three distinct concepts that relate to the notion of collaboration: the pursuit of common purposes, achieving a greater common good than that which could be achieved independently, and basic survival.

**Leadership and Alliance Structure**

Growing from a basic understanding of how collaboration is treated, it is helpful to pursue what the literature has to say about strategic alliances. How do authors present the understanding of alliance formation and structure?

In *Measuring the Value of Partnering*, Segil (2004) presented an approach for understanding and quantifying the value of alliances. His work is important in that, being published recently, it has the advantage of modern context in the types of relationships, geographic complexity, and exigent circumstances that have evolved in recent times. Segil presented the constituencies involved in alliances as five groups:

1. partners;
2. management;
3. external analysts, competitors, and the marketplace;
4. other functions within each partner’s company; and
5. the alliances group and the individual alliance manager. (p. xiii)

This initial delineation of constituencies in the alliance relationship provides useful context, especially when considering the dimensions of multiculture and asymmetry. Furthermore, Segil presented phases of alliance life cycle, which explain typical experiences of constituencies as alliances are envisioned, created, launched, and managed through a point where they are successful or undergo reengineering and possible dissolution. Carefully looking at alliances as not simply associations in situ, but living relationships that evolve and with respect to the constituencies involved suggests that evaluation of the degree of asymmetry in a relationship
could vary considerably throughout the alliance life cycle. For example, benefits may accrue to one organization in greater proportion earlier in the relationship, resource demands may be greater on one of the parties, or risk may be disproportionately assumed by one side of the relationship. When one considers how either party to an alliance may be marginalized, it is useful to consider that any of the constituencies can be marginalized and that that inequity can shift as the alliance moves through its life cycle.

In another work, Kamarck (2003) noted the increasing cross-collaboration between government and private sector, citing such examples as homeland security:

Three key assumptions underlie the movement toward new modes of implementing public policy. First is the assumption that the problems of monopoly, lack of innovation, insufficient responsiveness, and inefficiency that plague both the private sector and the public sector can be overcome by the injection of greater competition. Second is the assumption that, at the operational level, few major differences exist between management in the public sector and management in the private sector. And third is the assumption that the public interest can be articulated and measured and that this will create a “market proxy” for the public sector—thus allowing the public sector a new, and stronger form of accountability. (p. 106)

Adding further to the concepts of individual groups, both from public and private sector, and the impact of alliance leadership on those groups, Kanter (1994) studied 37 companies from 11 different geographies, all involved in collaborative relationships. Her research revealed that effective alliance management involved much more than simply managing the legal and financial aspects of the relationship. By carefully focusing on the human aspects of alliances, managers were able to gain a significant collaborative advantage. Wrote Kanter, “relationships between companies begin, grow, and develop—or fail—much like relationships between people” (p. 101). This focus on the relationship, in addition to the mechanics of the financial and structural aspects of the alliance, is key to avoiding marginalization and maximizing the soft benefits of the collaborative structure. Kanter commented on the importance of this focus:
Active collaboration takes place when companies develop mechanisms—structures, processes, and skills—for bridging organizational and interpersonal differences and achieving real value from the partnership. Multiple ties at multiple levels ensure communication, coordination, and control. Deploying more rather than fewer people to relationship activities helps ensure that both partners’ resources are tapped and that both companies’ own needs and goals are represented. (pp. 117-118)

The intricacies of navigating the life cycle phases of a strategic alliance are exacerbated by the challenge of discovering these multiple communication dynamics and maximizing both parties benefits from the relationship.

Gulati et al. (1994) had another perspective on the interaction of alliance partners with one another. Their study focused on the concept of unilateral commitments. Likening an alliance to game theory precepts (i.e., the prisoner’s dilemma, in which parties have choices, but the choices have consequences for themselves and for others), the authors noted that in certain successful alliances, one party makes a seemingly counterintuitive and unilateral commitment, which advances the relationship in otherwise unachievable ways. Had each party behaved in a risk mitigation mode, doing more or less what they absolutely needed to do and no more, the relationship would falter or fail to achieve optimal results. By contrast, in these unilateral commitment situations, the relationship as a whole can achieve significantly greater benefit through collaboration. Gulati et al. likened unilateral commitments to posting a bond. The good faith commitment convinces the counterparty of the sincerity of the other partner and accrues benefit to the combined relationship. Thus, both firms enjoy the full benefit of future cooperation.

Exigent circumstances related to market pressures and signaling to competitors also come into play in the formation and execution of alliances. For example, Itschert and ul-Haq (2003) explained that European law guaranteed that, at some point, all of the particulars of the alliance agreement between partners BNP and Dresdner Bank would be made public. As such, a formal
agreement without clear articulation of measures that would be taken in the foreseeable future would constitute problematic disclosure. As a result, the formative agreement was intentionally left vague. Itschert and ul-Haq wrote:

The purpose of the contractual negotiations, then, was not to outline projects that were ripe for implementation. Instead, the two banks painted a rather vague, expansive vision of the future, the aim being to demonstrate that they were capable of thinking “across national borders” with all due consideration for global implications. Different scenarios were presented as to how—through a mysterious, joint headquarters in a third country—commercial banking units in all corners of the globe might interact to create a joint foreign group, the structure of which would reflect the interests of both partners equally and satisfy the needs of the corporate clients of both institutions. (p. 12)

Such an agreement is useful for working within statutory requirements while avoiding unnecessary disclosure. In fact, it also helps create an alliance structure that is not overly restrictive. Conversely, it leaves open the codified statement of intent that can be crucial to guaranteeing the contribution, benefit, and process requirements of the collaborating parties. As such, one can see a potential for marginalization of either of the parties in the alliance.

Rawlings (2000) presented one strategy for mitigating the risks of marginalization and sub-optimization. Through the use of collaborative leadership teams, the author suggested that partnered organizations can put in place structures to address the trends of globalization, accelerated growth, and continuous reengineering. Rawlings distinguished between teamwork and collaboration, defining collaboration as a much more advanced state of working together not simply due to an in-place organizational structure. The resulting synergies produce substantial added benefits to the partnered organizations. The author suggested that leading through effective collaboration is key to addressing the complex demands put forth by significant alliance relationships.

The contributions of these authors can be seen as related, collectively forming a broader understanding of strategic alliances. By understanding that the counterparties to an alliance
represent differing constituencies and thus distinct prospects for asymmetry, one can see that the evaluation of an alliance could vary from different perspectives. The work of Segil (2004) described useful life cycle phases and constituency descriptors to facilitate such a multifaceted evaluation. To further such an evaluation, the work of Kanter (1994), Rawlings (2000), and Gulati et al. (1994) suggested organizational dynamics that could be observed in evaluating the success of an alliance and to highlight potential marginalization of constituencies. Finally, Itschert and ul-Haq (2003) presented an example of some of the hidden justification for alliance structure that may not be obvious on primary observation.

Looking at how goals are achieved naturally gives rise to consideration of how one might evaluate the success of an alliance. Thus, one can see the importance of the first dimension of this study of strategic alliances—alliance success.

Alliance Success

In “The Way to Win in Cross-Border Alliances,” Bleeke and Ernst (1991) studied 49 cross-border alliances involving major U.S., Japanese, and European companies. The study found that alliances formed for the purpose of ameliorating weaknesses (i.e., making up for some shortcoming) in one or more of the involved parties generally did not succeed. Other success factors, unrelated to size, such as entering into new business or geographic areas and flexibility to allow the relationship to evolve, were more important harbingers of success. Ultimately, the authors adopted a definition of success in alliances that involved passing two tests. First, both parties had to achieve their initial strategic objectives. Second, both parties recovered their financial costs. Bleeke and Ernst were quick to note that these criteria were distinctly American in construct; noting, for example, that many Japanese and European leaders have a significantly
longer and less exclusively financial perspective. Nevertheless, the fact that the authors took
care to define success and to posit that there is not one single view of it is important to note.

Dent (1999) presented a view of success in partnering that provided important
perspective on a holistic view of partnerships as ongoing relationships. The author put forth a
partnership continuum model that encourages looking continuously at a partnership from the
formative stages through the point at which the parties are fully functioning in a strategic
relationship. The author presented excellent tools for assessing readiness to partner,
understanding differing perspectives and needs, evaluating cultural differences, and even for
selecting the most appropriate partner. By focusing on the qualitative makeup of a partnership,
Dent’s approach lends an important dimension to otherwise entirely metric-based views of
partnering that tend to sublimate the important human dimension of establishing an effective
strategic relationship.

In addition to considering criteria for evaluating alliance success, Doz and Hamel (1998)
provided an excellent complement to Dent’s (1999) model in a treatment of preconditions for
successful alliance activity. Doz and Hamel looked at the strategic architecture of the alliance
and noted:

A useful strategic architecture has a number of features. First, it is driven by a rich and
original understanding of the opportunity set available to the firm, not by industry recipes
and conventional wisdom. Second, managers who create the strategy understand the
“profit engine” that drives their business and its underlying assumptions. (pp. 253-254)

The authors also presented a useful table of qualities of firms that are and are not alliance-ready,
according to their concept of strategic architecture. Readiness qualities include being creative
(i.e., forming new ideas), innovative (i.e., making good use of available resources), and focused
on core competencies. Nonreadiness qualities include being product-oriented, customer-led, and
imitative. Some of these qualities are addressed in Dent’s assessment and are not absolute contraindications, so there is a disparity in the two approaches.

In a comprehensive analysis of the complete life cycle of a strategic alliance between BNP and Dresdner, Itschert and ul-Haq (2003) presented a set of success principles for multinational alliances that nicely complement Dent’s (1999) model. Itschert and ul-Haq put forth 16 principles for evaluating success including the presence of specific objectives, a mutually agreeable timetable, indivisible management responsibility to named individuals, and overt transactional transparency. It is interesting to note that Itschert and ul-Haq included not only these absolute requirements, but also a number of strictures, such as the joint effort should not be started until objectives are codified.

In addition to ways of evaluating the success of an alliance itself, Gulati (2007) noted that it is imperative to look at the performance of the individual collaborating firms:

Because the influence of other, nonalliance activities on firm performance makes empirically linking alliance activity and associated network resources with performance difficult, scholars have looked for a variety of direct and indirect ways to test the relationship between alliance activity and firm performance. (p. 151)

Some of these indirect ways of evaluation, noted Gulati, include analysis of equity markets’ reaction to alliance announcements, though the author is quick to note, “these results provide only a prospective estimate of the beneficial consequences of alliances for firms” (p. 151).

When considering the evaluation of success in alliances, it is also important to note that there are many different types of alliance and, thus, vastly different ways in which success might be evaluated based on the nature of the collaboration. Bergquist, Betwee, and Meuel (1995) treated this topic after presenting three vastly different types of strategic collaboration including a supplier-customer partnership, a public-private collaboration, and a complex, multi-industry, multiple sector consortium. The presentation of these alliances is more closely aligned with
Dent’s (1999) continuum model than with Gulati’s (2007) holistic look at the partnering organizations. In summary, the authors focused on aspects of the partnership covenant and goal orientation as harbingers of success.

**Asymmetry**

The concept of asymmetry in alliances is typically studied as it relates to other aspects of alliance performance. For example, in one study, Dussage, Garrette, and Mitchell (2004) looked at link alliances. Typical of link alliances are structures where the collaborating parties each contribute different skills or resources to the conjoined effort, each according to their competencies and going-in capabilities. Dussage et al. looked at how participation in such alliances affects the relative competitive positions of the partnering organizations. In related research (Dussage, Garrette, & Mitchell, 2000), the authors found that such alliances are often more volatile and lead to one of the parties taking over the joint effort or otherwise dissolving it through reorganization. In their 2004 study of alliances in the automotive industry, Dussage et al. concluded that, in such alliances, the relative competitive positions of the partnering organizations do tend to change during the life of the alliance.

Doz and Hamel (1998) commented on the evolution of this volatility:

> Competition between partners was seldom an issue in traditional joint ventures. In market entry arrangements, global and local partners often collaborated, but the local partners rarely had global ambitions. This is no longer true. Following the example set by Japanese companies as early as the 1960s, many local partners now see their joint ventures with global firms as stepping stones to new technologies and world markets. (pp. 24-25)

The authors noted that the asymmetric nature of the partnering relationship in emerging alliances in which a large global partner collaborates with a smaller local partner produces a dichotomy whereby the global partner can control markets and simultaneously avoid competition with the local partner in a specific region. However, marketplace rivalry still remains a source of tension.
Segil (2004) presented a model for assessing the strategic fit in such alliances, which is especially useful in dealing with the challenges of asymmetry. The author presented an 8-tiered plan for assessing strategic alliances. The 8-tiers address components including:

- mission, vision, and values;
- market forces shaping the endemic environment;
- concerns and opportunities to address the observed market forces;
- current markets served and products or services offered;
- respective operating philosophies (including critical success factors and core competencies);
- strategic intent for the potential alliance;
- short term operational objectives; and
- how progress will be measured (both operationally and strategically).

Segil wrote:

It’s certainly important to look at the strategies of all partners and how compatible they are, but strategic fit includes other issues that are not as clear, such as hidden agendas, internal cultural beliefs that are hard to find until the partnership is already operational. One of the threshold presumptions we have made herein is that each partner has a clear strategy, which is rather a large assumption. (p. 45)

Although Segil noted the importance of fully assessing the broad spectrum of impetus for alliance as suggested by this model, she also provided the sobering observation that strategic fit is a moving target. Internal organizational changes and external market changes can dramatically re-shape the nature of the relationship and, thereby, amplify any asymmetry to the point where the alliance only makes sense for one of the parties involved, or even for neither, to continue the relationship.
Cullinan and Holland (2002) provided data on the changing nature of strategic rationales for acquisitions. The data showed a shift from 1988, when roughly 80% of top-10 acquisitions were accounted for by financial engineering and diversification, whereas by 2000, 80% of top-10 acquisitions were accounted for by business redefinition, scale, and industry redefinition. The shift from less to more strategic intent in these acquisitions was accompanied by a rise in nominal value of deals from $80 billion to $600 billion in the same time period. Cullinan and Holland observed:

In 1988, fewer than 20% of the top ten mergers by price tag reported where highly strategic. This was the era of LBO takeovers such as RJR Nabisco/KKR and Federated/Campeau. In 2000, the era of transformational mergers such as AOL/Time Warner and scale mergers like Glaxo Wellcome/SKB, all of the top ten mergers were strategic. (p. 27)

This shift to more strategic underpinnings of mergers and acquisitions is testimony that companies are finding ways to create synergies that greatly transcend simple financial re-engineering and market economies of scale.

Relating to the concept of strategic asymmetry is a study by Rugman and D’Cruz (1996), who looked at strategic asymmetry in concert with credible commitments on the part of alliance counterparties. The authors posited that asymmetry can be effective in three ways: “increasing interorganizational trust; increasing the stability of the network; and increasing interorganizational learning” (p. 21). Supporting this tenet is the work of Ring and Van de Ven (as cited in Rugman & D’Cruz, 1996), who concluded that lasting relationships were a factor of successful transactional history. Rugman and D’Cruz wrote “owing to the greater degree of transaction exclusivity in the business network, asymmetry facilitates easier accumulation of transactions and consequently the development of trust” (p. 21). This accumulation of trust leads to greater efficiencies, noted the authors, who surmised “higher levels of trust lower transaction
costs associated with opportunism, monitoring and enforcing agreements, loss of proprietary
knowledge, etc.” (p. 21).

Although the studies and writings above look broadly at asymmetry as a component in
alliance formation and execution, Miller, Fitzgerald, Murrell, Preston, and Rajendra (2005)
presented the results of an organization development (OD) intervention focused on a specific
asymmetric alliance between Maharashtra Hybrid Seeds Company, a research-based family
business with a prominent market position in India, and Monsanto, the global giant in transgenic
agriculture and biotechnology. Miller et al. described the formation of a functioning alliance
between the two companies enabled by Monsanto’s purchase of a 26% equity investment in the
Indian family business and the results of an OD intervention in that alliance. Although the
intervention was not entirely successful, the study provides an understanding of the kinds of
changing dynamics noted by Segil (2004) and benefits of asymmetric collaboration that can
emerge, as noted by Rugman and D’Cruz (1996).

Another study by Esteve (2002) presented the dimension of asymmetry in a slightly
larger collection of five alliances. The dimensions of asymmetry studied in this qualitative
research included degree of organizational complexity, centralization of decision-making, and
leadership style. Using analytical induction, the author looked at the effects of organizational
asymmetries on the evolving alliance relationship. Esteve concluded only an indirect
relationship between organizational asymmetry and alliance performance.

Looking at the works of the authors previously cited, common themes emerge related to
asymmetry. These common themes include volatility, strategic makeup, and changing
conditions. Although asymmetry is not directly called out as a primary descriptor of strategic
alliances, the effects of asymmetry are clearly seen as affecting alliance execution. The changing
nature of business and market conditions is also seen as driving continuous changes in the degree and nature of asymmetry in strategic alliances. A logical progression of this concept of changing business and market conditions is the ever-increasing degree with which organizations collaborate across national boundaries.

**Multicultural Makeup and Globalization**

Globalization can be thought of as a backdrop against which the evolution of strategic multicultural alliances plays out. Globalization impacts the multicultural dimension of alliances in a neutralizing fashion. Taken to its logical conclusion, a global economy, transparent markets, universal language, and metaphor would vitiate any impact multicultural dynamics have on strategic alliances. Of course, the reality of relationships that take place in business today is much different. In some ways, the world is getting smaller, for example with the relatively easy access to transportation, information, and resources. In other respects, the challenges to complex strategic alliances are growing with globalization. Global alliances are in their adolescence, suffering from growing pains and forcing their constituents to react to a pace of growth that is historically unprecedented. Giddens (2003) wrote:

> We live in a world of transformations, affecting almost every aspect of what we do. For better or worse, we are being propelled into a global order that no one fully understands, but which is making its effects felt upon all of us. (p. 6)

Giddens (2003) also noted that, although leadership pundits and corporate speech writers are quick to use the term *globalization*, there is not a clear acceptance of what is meant when the term is used. He wrote that diverse thinkers have expressed diametrically opposed perceptions about the meaning of globalization in debates and other public forums in recent times. Espousing his own view of the meaning and impact of globalization, Giddens opined that there is no historical precedent for the current acceleration of globalization given the technology enablers
and pace of world economy today. To support this point, the author noted that, in excess of one trillion U.S. dollars is now transacted every single day in global currency markets, a magnitude-order increase from only decades ago. Giddens cited byproducts of this rapid economic expansion, including the creation of new economic and cultural zones within and across national boundaries, referencing examples such as Hong Kong, northern Italy, and an area in northern Spain that extends into the geographic boundaries of France.

Harrison (2006), chairman of JP Morgan Chase, expressed a similar opinion in a speech to North Carolina Citizens for Business and Industry:

Let’s begin with a simple and easy-to-understand definition. As I am going to use the word, globalization relates to “the death of distance.” It relates to intensified global connectedness and the whole raft of changes—economic, social, political and cultural—that spring from that. As Tom Friedman declared in “The World is Flat,” globalization has “accidentally made Beijing, Bangalore, and Bethesda next-door neighbors.” Inside this accidental, virtual neighborhood, we find that we—as Americans—no longer have a lock on many of the best jobs inside the United States. Candidates from other countries are now just a “mouse-click” away. (p. 401)

Of course, this globalization is not without inequity and is in no way uniformly beneficial.

Giddens (2003) noted that, to many people living outside North America and parts of Europe, globalization looks more like expansion of Western ideals and cultures to the rest of the world.

Harrison’s (2006) mouse-click may, in fact, have the reverse impact, according to others, tending to exacerbate feelings of nationalism in collaborative efforts. For example, Chhokar, Brodbeck, and House (2008), in another GLOBE study of 25 societies around the world, wrote:

More generally, worldwide immigration during the past century up to today has resulted in hundreds of millions of people with different cultural background who work and live in close regional proximity. This trend is particularly apparent in the metropolitan regions in which soon 50% of the world population will be living and working. Another sphere where different cultures encounter is the Internet (World Wide Web), which provides for an environment of its own, within which people from anywhere in the world can interact and work together anytime. (p. 1080)
The authors maintained that, despite the growing instance of multicultural collaboration and virtual environments like the Internet, it is not likely that major societal cultures tend to homogenize. The reverse is quite possible, opined the authors, that cultural differences may become exacerbated as individuals adapt to globalization while simultaneously striving to preserve cultural heritage.

Relating Giddens’ (2003) observations to the multicultural dimension of alliances, a temporal influence can clearly be seen. As globalization accelerates, any influence from the multicultural nature of alliances will be impacted in some proportion. Thus, a student of these alliances should be careful not to make judgments that are static, but rather consider that this dimension of multiculture is ever-changing.

Beyond the valuable enlightenment that Giddens (2003) provided to an understanding of the multicultural dimensions of alliances, there is additional value in what the author has to say about tradition. Giddens wrote:

No traditional societies were wholly traditional, and traditions and customs have been invented for a diversity of reasons. We shouldn’t suppose that the conscious construction of tradition is found only in the modern period. Moreover, traditions always incorporate power, whether they are constructed in a deliberate way or not. Kings, emperors, priests, and others have long invented traditions to suit themselves and to legitimize their rule. (p. 40)

Relating this thinking to the dimension of asymmetry in alliances, an interesting dynamic emerges. One can see tradition as an important enabler of inequity in alliances, driving behavior and attitude to a norm that may clearly favor one party of the alliance. Such inequity can create asymmetry of power with respect to ability to execute and public opinion, to cite a few potential impacts.

Steyrer, Hartz, and Schiffinger (2006) performed a series of empirical studies in Romania, Estonia, Germany, and Austria aimed at understanding the impact of cultural
embeddedness in an environment of increasing globalization. The authors found similar impact of what Giddens (2003) would call tradition, and noted:

Early explanations frequently saw this [a predilection of leadership in the Eastern European leadership style to be autocratic] as a result of the so-called communist heritage. This, however, ignores on the one hand the influence of the transformation process as a fundamental process of change which may have supported these “stricter” types of leadership. On the other hand, the different cultural backgrounds of East-European countries compared to the west have been also neglected. (p. 114)

The authors noted that to be effective, alliance participants needed to balance what they called *local embeddedness*, what Giddens called *tradition*, with the expanded challenges brought on by globalization. Adopting participative leadership styles and other behaviors counter to tradition was seen as a critical success factor in responding to the challenges of globalization.

If tradition or local embeddedness provides a basis for asymmetry in multicultural strategic alliances, one might ask in what ways these asymmetries might benefit complex alliances. Jokinen (2005) performed an extensive review of global leadership competencies, seeking to understand what key competencies were closely correlated with success in large global endeavors. She concluded that, while much research has been done to date, little empirical research attempts to test the validity of any of the observations. Research to date, noted Jokinen, has been largely constrained to describing, not interpreting: “results from previous studies accumulate into a long list of competencies characterized by only minor semantic differences of a much smaller number of key competencies” (p. 211).

Attempting to be more prescriptive, Barczak, McDonough, and Athanassiou (2006) studied over 300 global teams in 230 companies in an attempt to identify specific steps that can be taken to meet the challenges of globalization. The authors concluded that successful leaders of large global projects must address four principle challenges: differences in native language,
different cultural backgrounds, living and working in multiple countries, and team members participating from different companies on a common project.

Relating the work of Barczak et al. (2006) to the writing of Jokinen (2005), one can see that the former meets the challenges of globalization head-on, almost suggesting a homogenization of the team to achieve a common goal, while the latter focuses more on understanding differences without concluding any prescription for meeting the challenge. Steyrer et al. (2006) uncovered findings somewhere between these two extremes, suggesting some change in behavior to be more inclusive and participative in global efforts, but recognizing the innate challenges arising from complex multicultural makeup of constituents.

Kets de Vries and Korotov (2006) summarized the challenge with respect to pan-European business leadership:

The new configuration of the EU brings great expectations and considerable anxiety for organizations and their members. On the one hand, it can be seen as an opportunity to develop a powerful economic entity with a strong cultural heritage, similar values, and enough diversity to foster creativity and innovation. On the other hand, it brings the fear of diluting national identities, clashing cultural norms, religious strife, and incompatibility of leadership styles and work practices. (p. 38)

According to the authors, there is a mix of benefit and risk brought about by pan-European unity. This mix is analogous to the challenges presented to large, multicultural alliances. On the one hand, there are benefits to the collaborative effort by synergizing. On the other hand, asymmetric relationships brought about by cultural identity, tradition, and differing business perspective bring a richness to the relationship that should be leveraged, not driven out.

Where globalization is as a theme to the evolution of complex strategic alliances, cultural sensitivity can be thought of as a counter-theme that also plays throughout the formation and execution of alliances. Failure to recognize cultural sensitivity, according to many studies, yields suboptimal and sometimes unfavorable outcomes. Studies have touched upon the need to
understand the cultural underpinnings of a relationship in order to maximize leadership effectiveness. For example, Silverthorne (2005) drew learning from Project Globe, an extended, mixed-method, multicultural effort to look at leadership and organizational practices in 61 countries. Addressing the concept of globalization, the author concluded that leaders need to understand the cultural expectations of those in their organization and to validate continually their perceptions of leadership in order to adopt the most effective leadership style. Even the definition of terminology, such as participative or autocratic, can have different meaning in different cultural settings. “It is not enough to understand differences in leadership styles because the perception an definition of leadership behavior also varies across cultures” (Silverthorne, 2005, pp. 96-97).

Shonfeld-Ringel (2001) touched on this need to understand differences, focusing on the structure of the working alliance itself. Her work drew on relational theories and empirical multicultural sources to look at the structure and definition of the working alliance in a multicultural perspective. Although the term alliances in the context of this study intended more the sense of working relationships (as the study had to do with therapists and their relationship to clients), the findings are interesting to an understanding of formal, structured business alliances in so much as they touch on important factors related to interpersonal relationships in a multicultural setting. The author found specific relational domains of importance in multicultural alliances, including empathy, mutuality, power and authority dynamics, the use of self, and communication dynamics (similar to the work of Barczak et al., 2006). “The client’s ethnic identity and cultural characteristics, and the therapist’s subjectivity and cultural sensitivity are important variables in shaping these components” (Shonfeld-Ringel, 2001, p. 62). The need
for cultural sensitivity is seen by the author, as with Silverthorne (2005), to be a critical factor in evolving an effective working relationship.

Kenichi Ohmae, managing director of McKinsey and Company in Japan, has long commented on the state of global competition, evolution of business models, and strategic thinking in a complex global setting. Regarding a particular collaborative event in Japan, Ohmae (1991) wrote:

Managers back at headquarters, experienced in only one way to succeed, are inclined to force that model on each new opportunity that arises. Sometimes it will be the right answer. But chances are that the home-country reflex, the impulse to generalize globally from a sample of one, will lead efforts astray. (p. 82)

**Conclusion**

As leaders and reflective scholar practitioners, we are called to a high sense of interaction as we participate more and more in the kinds of strategic, asymmetric, multicultural alliances contemplated in this research. This literature review has considered the evolution of collaboration and how that collaboration is influenced by globalization and the changing face of alliances. Although the literature does not consider alliances simultaneously in light of the constructs of this study, each of the underlying concepts is treated by various authors. The choice of constructs for this study emphasizes the changing face of collaboration, looking at dimensions of collaboration that will become more relevant as globalization and other factors continue to influence the way organizations come together to face business challenges.

We must consider the influencers of each of the dimensions of the alliances, how we are affecting strategies to achieve benefit and avoid marginalization of constituencies. At the same time, we must be conscious that globalization is ever increasing, and the skills that work today may not be as effective tomorrow. Identifying the necessary new skills and realizing broader awareness are compelling dynamics to future alliance success. Strategic evolution in
collaboration cannot be simply about immediate organizational benefit. As the literature suggests, other factors are coming into play as organizations work together. This dynamic influences not only the likelihood of success, but also other important, often unintended outcomes of organizations coming together to address a common challenge. The awareness of other cultures, the willingness to avoid making generalizations from a sample of one, and the pursuit of best practices are not only advisable, they are mandatory.
Chapter III: Methodology, Guiding Questions, and Research Procedures

Considering a comprehensive review of research methods in related studies, I concluded that there is a strong case in selecting a mixed methods approach for this study. For my research, I used survey and representative multi-case study methods. In choosing a mixed-methods approach, I was careful to consider why such an approach was appropriate. Lincoln (2010) provided an important and relevant reflection on the past decades of qualitative and new paradigm research. Noting the juxtaposition of qualitative research to other methods which had previously been held as a gold standard for research and inquiry, the author presented the important additive relevance of qualitative methods. "We have become, largely because of our methods, lenses, and paradigms, rather awesome purveyors of some of the most profound insights into Western society ever assembled" (Lincoln, 2010, p. 4).

Survey methods, such as that used in this study for identification of alliances of interest, are valuable for understanding the population. Basic descriptive statistics can be useful in understanding observations, as well as (where appropriate), inferential methods for extrapolation. Nevertheless, such methods often prevent additional nuanced understanding that can answer important questions and lead to the type of profound insights of which Lincoln (2010) wrote. Lincoln positioned the importance of qualitative research, "in the past 25 years, the interpretivist, ethnographic, and critical community has produced a virtual tsunami of important critical work" (p. 4). I concur that such work is not only relevant, but much needed to understand the nuance of human interaction, especially with regard to the kind of complex alliance relationships considered in this study. Accordingly, I have adopted a method which allows for recognition and classification through structured survey methods, juxtaposed with multi-case study to allow
for nuanced understanding of day-to-day experiences and insights of leaders in these important alliances.

The first part of this research was intended to expose a number of alliances of interest where there is high SAM content. A survey method allowed interrogation of a sufficient number of alliance participants regarding aspects of their alliances so as to provide necessary information to position the alliance as either high or low on each of the critical dimensions of SAM. Additionally, this method allowed categorization of each alliance as either successful or not according to accepted means of assessing alliance success as studied and characterized by other researchers (and as indicated by the citations to the survey in Appendix A).

Survey methods alone, however, would not allow the further study of the nature of the alliance experience in successful SAM alliances. In order to understand the emergent themes, influence of SAM characteristics, and impact of leadership interventions, it was necessary to balance the discrete, structured survey approach with a detailed and in-depth research technique that offers a better understanding of nuance and emotion. Thus, interviews, a method tool within the multi-case study approach were an appropriate method to juxtapose the survey used in the first part of the study. Creswell (2003) wrote of the emergence of mixed methods in modern research: “with the development and perceived legitimacy of both qualitative and quantitative in the social and human sciences, mixed methods research, employing the data collection associated with both forms of data, is expanding” (p. 208). Figure 3.1 depicts a flowchart of the overall methodological approach, showing the juxtaposition of the two methods, performed sequentially, contributing to the results of this study. The survey was used as a tool to identify successful alliances and their characteristics. The results of the survey led to identification of alliances for the multi-case study, where the dominant part of the interpretation was derived.
Figure 3.1. Flowchart depicting the sequential application of mixed methods.

**Phase I: The Survey**

The purpose of the first part of the research, the survey, was intended to identify alliances of interest and to confirm the relative difficulty of finding successful alliances with high SAM content. The survey was intended to apply a consistent, methodological approach to categorizing the makeup and success of an alliance in a way that was scalable (i.e., easily applied to multiple alliances) and consistent (i.e., re-assessment of any given alliance is likely to yield a similar result). The purpose of using the survey was also to allow for a way to reach out to alliances across the globe, allowing for as broad an array as possible of alliance experience from which to draw learning. Finally, the survey also served as a way to allow alliance participants to participate without necessarily self-identifying, an important aspect of the study design.

**Participants.** For the survey, I included as research participants members of past and present alliances. In some cases, I surveyed more than one participant from the same alliance. I also included members from differing parties to the alliance so as to have a broad perspective on
the alliance. In order to increase the likelihood of properly assessing dichotomies in responses related to multiculture, I included survey participants from as many countries as possible, as well as from organizations of different sizes.

Those invited to participate were from a broad cross-section of industries including pharmaceutical, hospital/medical, high-tech manufacturing, commercial information publishing, consulting, white goods manufacturing, financial services, computer/business services, banking, legal, entertainment, and media. Alliances were both for-profit and not-for-profit, in both private and public (i.e., government) sectors. From a geographic standpoint, participants responded from alliances in North America, Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, and Australia. All participants were competent in reading and responding in English.

**Procedures.** The survey was broken down into an initial section that captured basic descriptive information in four questions about the alliance and the experience that the respondent had with the alliance. This section of the survey also provided space for supplying contact information. Following the initial information, the survey was broken down into four main parts, each containing 10 questions. The four main parts of the survey were dedicated to questions about alliance success, alliance strategic makeup, alliance symmetry, and alliance cultural makeup. Each of the four main parts contained 10 questions consisting of a statement about the alliance characteristic (e.g., alliance success) and allowed the respondent to indicate the degree to which it applied to their alliance. Respondents rated each item on a four-point Likert scale from “Completely describes this alliance" to "Completely contrary to this alliance." A copy of the survey is included in Appendix A.

Given the findings of my research on the difficulties associated with translating survey questions in a semantically accurate way, I conducted the survey only in English. I based my
decision to conduct the survey in English on my prior research which informed my understanding of the impact of language on the identification of high-SAM alliances, especially any potential lack of clarity or confusion that ensued. Volunteers with various mother tongues including English (British, American, and Australian), Japanese, Chinese (Mandarin and Shanghainese), Malay, two Indian dialects (Hindi and Tamil), and Spanish did not have any significant difficulty with the survey in the form used. Translating the survey for non-English speakers was not an attractive option. Translation brings about a host of additional considerations in terms of nuance, semantic ambiguity, and generalizability of results.

**Data collection.** The final survey instrument was constructed using Zoomerang®, an online survey tool owned and operated by MarketTools, Inc. The survey was sent via email link to approximately 220 individuals. The participants fell into three categories: alliance participants known to me or to colleagues of mine, members of an association of alliance participants, and others who became known to me as part of my research. Of the 220 potential respondents, I received 131 complete responses, resulting in approximately 60% response rate. Respondents were allowed to take the survey anonymously in order to encourage participation and assuage any concerns about privacy. Accordingly, it was not possible to audit completely those invited to participate against the responses received, however, due to the nature of general questions asked at the beginning of the survey, it was possible to confirm that no individuals took the survey multiple times. Fifty-five individuals chose to self-identify. The tool was set up in such a way that it was not possible for participants to submit an incomplete response. During the administration of the survey, I monitored responses on a daily basis to confirm that I understood the rate of walk-away (i.e. potentially incomplete) accesses to the instrument to reach a level of confidence that no participants abandoned the survey in mid-execution.
**Data preparation.** To facilitate analysis of the survey data according to the intended SAM stratification, I constructed a synthesis tool using Microsoft Excel®. Figure 3.2 shows a version of the tool.

![SYNTHESIZING RESULTS OF PILOT SURVEY](image)

**Figure 3.2.** A custom-developed tool to interpret and vet the survey results.

As surveys were received, I transferred the results from the Likert scales into the tool using a simple conversion of 4, 3, 2, 1 corresponding to the survey form read from left to right. In this way, higher numbers represented higher ranking on the scale used (ranging from “completely describes” to “completely contrary”). This conversion was performed via data extract from the Zoomerang® tool directly into the spreadsheet to eliminate any errors in transcription. As an aid to error-detection, I used conditional formatting to color top-two boxes (“completely describes” and “somewhat describes”) green and bottom-two boxes (“somewhat contrary” and “completely contrary”) red. This color coding gave me an instant visual representation of the preponderance of top-two boxes during data entry. The tool also automatically tabulated a raw score for X (success), S (strategic makeup), A (asymmetry), and M (multiculture), as well as an overall SAM index, which was “SAM” if the survey had greater
than 50% top-two boxes for all three dimensions of S, A, and M, or “NOSAM” otherwise.

Sample formulas are included in Figure 3.2 to show how these computations were made. Thus, any row that shows “SAM” would be in the gold box of Figure 1.4. Furthermore, the tool also appended a “+” for greater than 50% top-two boxes for success characteristics and a “-” otherwise. SAM indices of “SAM+” therefore relate to the gold-box green markers indicated in Figure 1.4. These are the alliances of interest to me.

This approach is for stratification only. I was not attempting to measure that one alliance has a specific amount of content in any one dimension, only that certain alliances have more overall association, by simple observation, with what is thought to be relevant characteristics. This method is only for purposes of isolating those alliances of interest. Figure 3.2 shows how the tool I constructed allowed me to easily and consistently identify those alliances.

**Data analysis.** To understand the population surveyed and the preponderance of successful, high-SAM alliances, I used basic descriptive statistics. Seventy-six percent of respondents reported that their alliance was still in effect. The range of longevity of alliances was broad, from 6 months to over 30 years. The mean alliance duration was slightly over 6 years. Respondents indicated involvement with their alliance an average of 4 years, with the least involvement being approximately 6 months and the most involvement being 30 years. Forty-four percent of respondents had been involved with their alliance since inception.

**Phase II: The Multiple Case Study**

For the second part of my study, I interviewed up to five individuals from each alliance identified as successful and with high SAM content. The purpose of interviewing more than one individual from each alliance was to triangulate on emerging themes from differing perspectives and to expose observations that only took place from certain unique perspectives.
Participants. As I am multilingual, I did not limit participants in the interview part of the study to English speakers though all interviews were ultimately conducted in English. I also did not limit my interview participants to the initial survey participants; rather, I used the survey to highlight those alliances from which I solicited interview participants. Furthermore, I interviewed individuals from both sides of the alliances studied in order to allow for triangulation within each case study. I paid close attention to situations where individuals interviewed disclosed others whose perspective was important to an understanding of the alliance. Most interview participants were consistent with my expectations that they would be at mid- to higher-organizational levels (e.g., alliance manager, CFO, legal team, marketing or sales manager), allowing for a broader perspective on the alliance (in particular with respect to SAM characteristics). Table 3.1 depicts the role characteristics of interview participants for each of the interview participants:

Table 3.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alliance</th>
<th>Senior Leaders (e.g., VP, Director, Chairman)</th>
<th>Technical Mid-Level (e.g., Developer, Scientist)</th>
<th>Analytical Mid-Level (e.g., Finance, Research)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alliance 1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance 2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alliance 3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Procedures. Interviewees were solicited in three ways. First, those who self-identified from the survey were contacted and requested to participate in an interview. Second, additional parties were identified through discussion with initial participants and through references that came up during the interview process. In such cases, those parties were contacted and asked if
they would be willing to participate in the research. Finally, through researching the alliance, additional parties were identified and contacted. In all cases, interview participants indicated their agreement to participate in advance via signed informed-consent, which included a description of the research, potential risks to participants, and stipulation of the intent to respect confidentiality. All interviews were conducted over a 6 month period.

Regarding the specifics of the interview, I established a template indicating specifically what questions were to be asked. An exemplar is provided in Appendix B. Interviews were conducted according to this template. I provided clarity where terms were poorly understood. The questions were not necessarily asked in the specific order of the interview template, as in some cases the interview participants had thoughts that took them naturally to a different dimension of the interview. Interview participants were free to stop the interview at any time, though all willingly chose to complete the process.

**Data collection.** Where clarification was required due to native language considerations, I provided that clarification during the interview with specific individuals as needed to drive consistency of interpreted meaning. In all cases, the participants had language skills that were more than sufficient to conduct the interview comfortably. The interviews were recorded to facilitate transcription. Participants were reminded at the beginning of the recording process that the interview was being recorded. Interviews lasted from 30 to 60 minutes each.

**Data preparation.** After conducting the interviews, I obtained a transcript. The transcript was checked against the audio recording, especially for places where technical jargon or accent may have made it problematic for the transcriptionist to understand the recording. Based on the transcripts, I coded the interview content, treating the entire interview as a unit of analysis. This transcript was obtained from a professional transcription service familiar with
practices required to protect privacy for research. Recordings did not contain the name of the participant. Digital recordings provided for transcription were identified with a code known only to me. To ensure consistency of method and quality of results, I engaged independent, skilled individuals adept at thematic coding to perform similar coding. This team served to provide validation of the conclusions and inform a broader perspective where appropriate. Prior to engaging in any coding, all coders took part in training to ensure consistency of coding method. The approach was consistent with Boyatzis (1999), who put forth elements of what constitutes a good thematic code, how the code should be labeled and defined, and steps to be taken to eliminate possible confusion on the part of coders. After initial coding was done, follow-up training sessions were held with all coding team members as an added measure of consistency. Another function of the coding team was to challenge the use of any industry-specific wording or other jargon, ensuring that fuller meaning was derived from the experience. Coding was done with each coding partner taking all of the transcripts for one particular case. Coding produced categories, sub-categories, and themes. Categories and sub-categories were created by looking within the coded transcripts for a particular case at terms which were coded that had the same general (category) and specific (sub-category) meaning. Themes were derived from groups of categories that had a common understanding when taken together. After the coders and I completed initial coding, sessions were held to challenge codes derived and ensure consistency of meaning. Themes were assessed only within the system of each individual case and only after initial discussions to ensure consistency in understanding. Taking my coding and the coding of these individuals together, I assessed emergent themes and enriched my understanding of concepts. That understanding led to the emergence of the analysis provided in the multi-case study presented.
**Data analysis.** In presenting the cases that are part of my multi-case study, I have provided context for the case, describing key aspects of this case to orient the reader. My intent is to ensure that the reader understands the positioning of the case in the gold-box (Figure 1.4) described as successful, high-SAM alliances. Ultimately, the multi-case study establishes triangulation in three key dimensions, perspective (in that all alliances are successful, high-SAM), method (via the survey scoring and resulting stratification), and data (looking at available information such as corporate charters, mission statements, and relevant demographic or industry data). Furthermore, the context and findings from the survey were used in conjunction with the interview data and overall context of the alliance participants to inform my final interpretation.

**Ethical Considerations**

There are a number of ethical considerations that are an important part of this study design. I took significant precautions to protect the identity of survey participants. No information was ever permanently printed that included participant names or any other identifying information. All correlation between survey results and participant names was via an alphanumeric key assigned to the survey participants and known only to me. Nothing was printed at any time, even during analysis of the survey instrument, that correlated participant names to the method used to ascribe the alphanumeric key. All survey data were kept in password-protected locations. I also added encryption of stored data in order to facilitate a retention strategy for a number of years after completion of the study.

In addition to protecting the identity of study participants, it was also critical to protect the names of the partnering organizations. Accordingly, no reference to organization names or other identifying information is part of the published results. Where necessary, I made reference to an industry, the size of an organization, or other company-specific or demographic
information only for the purposes of facilitating an understanding of the research findings; but in all cases, took care to protect the identity of organizations.

In order to further protect individuals and to level-set expectations of privacy, I used informed consent with all research participants. Both the survey and any invitation to participate in an interview were accompanied by complete disclosure of the nature of this research and the intent to provide discretion with regard to protecting the names of people and organizations involved.

The findings of this study may be troublesome to the individuals or organizations studied, particularly with regard to conclusions as to the efficacy of leadership interventions in SAM alliances. Accordingly, I took care to keep any conclusions or observations isolated from names or other identifying information that may relate to people or partnering entities.

The application of a mixed methods approach provided a robust set of data to study successful, high-SAM alliances. The alliances identified via survey and subsequently studied in the multi-case study present a broad array of collaboration experience, from a traditional collaboration to leverage the synergy of the alliance relationship to significantly more complex relationships. These findings are presented in chapter 4.
Chapter IV: Findings

This chapter presents the results of the survey and multi-case study. The findings will be presented in two parts. First, I will present the findings of Phase I, the survey. The survey provided rich data from which to select alliances of interest for multi-case study. The second part of the findings will be those from Phase II, the multi-case study. In the multi-case study, I have positioned the partnering organizations and the work of their alliances to demonstrate the impact of each of the dimensions of SAM in their relationship and within the system of alliances studied.

SAM Characteristics in the Alliances

According to the method of assessment described above, I populated a spreadsheet tool with the results of the 131 alliances. Fifty-five alliances had complete SAM attributes (i.e., a preponderance of “completely describes” or “somewhat describes” for each of the groupings of 10 questions relating to strategic, asymmetric, and multicultural alliance content). Of those 55 alliances with SAM attributes, 49 were SAM+ (also a preponderance of “completely describes” or “somewhat describes” for alliance success) with the remaining six being SAM- (preponderance of “somewhat contrary” or “completely contrary” for alliance success).

For the alliances that were not fully SAM alliances (i.e., one or more of the three categories did not meet the threshold of having a preponderance of positive responses), I also looked at sub-combinations of attributions. Results are included in Table 4.1.
Table 4.1

*Alliances Missing One or More SAM Attributes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alliance Attribution</th>
<th># of Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S only</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A only</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M only</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA only</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM only</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM only</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results show a relationship among the SAM characteristics, given that most of the possible sub-combinations were not observed (with the exception of SA in isolation, which occurred 35% of the time). This analysis suggests that it was the multicultural dimension that most often prevented an alliance from being fully ascribed as SAM.

**Focusing on SAM+ Alliances**

A subset of the 49 SAM+ responses, representing the alliances of interest, is included in Figure 4.1 below.
I also looked at the characteristics particular to the body of SAM+ alliances. The average length of existence of these alliances was 7.3 years, with 10 of the alliances ranging from 10 to 30 years. Eighty-one percent of the SAM+ alliances are still in existence. Survey respondents for the SAM+ alliances had an average of nearly 5 years longevity with their partnering organizations.

In order to isolate possible alliances for the multi-case study, I focused on those alliances where the participants chose to self-identify, indicating they would be willing to consider further
participation in this study. Further sharpening my focus to alliances where I had no current involvement led to the selection of the three alliances included in the multi-case study.

**Case Studies of Three Successful SAM Alliances**

For the case studies, I interviewed individuals from both parties to each of three alliances characterized by the survey as in the specific area of focus. Given that the participants were geographically dispersed, including participants in Asia, Europe, and North America. The diverse organizations involved in these alliances include management consulting, banking, systems development, large-scale enterprise software, insurance claims processing, and the protection of natural resources globally. As such, this collection of alliances is quite eclectic in goals, aspirations, and cultural identity of the individuals involved. That diversity notwithstanding, each of these strategic alliances has enjoyed a significant measure of success in the presence of a manifest multicultural makeup and great differences in access to resources and size of partnering organizations.

**Naming Conventions in the Alliances**

For the purposes of the multi-case study, I have adopted a naming convention to facilitate reference to partnering companies and individuals while respecting the identity of those people and organizations. There are three alliances, which will be consistently referred to as alliance 1, alliance 2, and alliance 3. References within alliances will be prefixed by a single digit number to keep clear the alliance being described, so the partnering organizations will be referred to as company 1.A and company 1.B, the organizations for alliance 2 will be company 2.A and company 2.B, and the partnering organizations for alliance 3 will be company 3.A and company 3.B. Interview participants will be referred to using the sequence P1.1, P1.2, P1.3, and so on for alliance 1, and analogous sequences starting with P2.1 and P3.1 for alliance 2 and alliance 3.
respectively. To further protect individual identity, in all cases, participants are referred to with a masculine pronoun, despite their actual gender. Figure 4.2 shows a schematic of this overall naming convention.

**Figure 4.2. Alliance nomenclature.**

**Alliance 1—Learning Together**

The alliance between company 1.A and company 1.B was formed over 10 years ago to jointly provide better services centered around claims processing in the insurance industry. The partnering organizations began with a simple fee-for-service relationship and grew that relationship by continuously learning from each other. The formation of this alliance was against the backdrop of an insurance industry that was healthy and growing. Company 1.A was facing significant cost pressure while being tasked to innovate continually around insurance
claims processing. At that time, the information technology (IT) industry was grappling with the introduction of distributed computing platforms, new development environments, mounting security concerns, and the emergence of the Internet as both technology enabler and force multiplier for competitors of both partnering organizations. Company 1.A currently employs nearly 1,000 individuals, primarily centered on relationships with a large network of insurance companies and repair facilities in the U.S., with some penetration in Europe. A conceptual way of looking at company 1.A would be a growing U.S. company with U.S. roots serving a mostly U.S. client base in an established network.

Company 1.B was introduced to company 1.A initially as a source for developers who could aid in company 1.A’s software development, particularly Year 2000 (Y2K) software remediation efforts. Like many companies at the time, company 1.A was faced with either remediation of potentially millions of lines of computer code, some of it developed years prior by long-gone developers, or rapid systems replacement in order to ensure ongoing business operations at the turn of the millennium. The individuals who supported the systems and developed new software at company 1.A knew their environment well. Some of them did not want too much help from the outside, a possible disturbance of the status-quo, but times were tough, and the pressure to produce perfect results in Y2K remediation were mounting. Company 1.B was possibly exactly what company 1.A was looking for: a source of developers familiar with the Y2K problem who would not ask too many questions and who would focus on getting the work done efficiently and rapidly, then leave things more or less the way they found them. Table 4.2 outlines the interview participants from alliance 1.
Table 4.2

*Interview Participants from Alliance 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alliance Participant</th>
<th>Description of Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1.1</td>
<td>Senior leadership at company 1.A. Involved in the formation of the initial relationship between company 1.A and company 1.B.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1.2</td>
<td>A developer in the support organization for company 1.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1.3</td>
<td>An analyst for company 1.A. Came to the company after the alliance was already formed. Oversees a key part of the relationship with company 1.B.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1.4</td>
<td>Director for a mainframe-based development team at company 1.A and a consulting group responsible for claims technology. No longer with company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P1.5</td>
<td>Very senior executive at company 1.B. Has been involved with the alliance since inception.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P1.1 summed up the relationship:

Part of it was based on some past experience on the success side, but it was building that, you know, more-than-just-a-vendor relationship, which in this case was with an off-shore company. So it was challenging from the fact of the cultural difference, particularly the Indian culture is a very—you know, “say yes” culture for lack of a better term.

P1.1’s focus on building the strategic relationship and recognizing cultural differences from the start was central to his description of the alliance. He saw immediately that the two organizations differed mostly in terms of culture. Size, experience, and even knowledge of the systems and problems involved were not top of mind central to his recollection.

P1.1’s counterpart in the alliance formation, P1.5, summarized the initial relationship formation from a different perspective:
Essentially all of the relationships that we get into are strategic relationships, in our model; the model that [company 1.B] operates in, we are a high-value provider, rather than a cost-based provider; we’re a value-based provider. And for a value-based provider to be truly successful, these relationships have to be long-term and strategic, because in the short term you cannot prove value, right?

Based in India, company 1.B had a very different makeup. Senior leadership in the company identified with Indian culture, having grown their business in the country and established themselves as a provider of outsourcing, consulting, and related services to overseas entities. The senior leadership, and many of the experienced practitioners, were quite used to operating with different cultures. To P1.5, the immediate challenge was the strategic dimension of the relationship—finding the right value proposition and making sure to deliver on that value. That value proposition included senior level consultants with a broad base of business knowledge, industry subject matter experts with a high degree of specific experience, and a multidisciplinary pool of developers and other consultants, which could be expanded and contracted to meet client needs. Adding value immediately, to be seen as a valuable partner in the relationship, was top of mind.

**Positioning this alliance as successful, high-SAM.** Although all of those interviewed agreed that alliance 1 was successful, they had differing perspectives on the reasons for success and the degree of success in this alliance. Those in the less senior positions tended to comment on the availability of differing resources willing to work hard, while senior leaders focused more on the character of the relationship. P1.1 was quite philosophical, stating, “Sometimes success is defined by failures that you can get past, so it’s things where you’ve had some issues with your work; you work through them.” He told of many hours spent working through lessons-learned sessions and various subtle, and not-so-subtle ways of influencing the teams to work together for mutual success. In one particular instance, he was able to achieve a significantly positive
outcome by flying to India for the singular purpose of meeting face-to-face with P1.5 to discuss mounting concerns with a U.S. onshore project manager. P1.5 was so impressed with the gesture that he was able to swap out that project manager to another client where his style could be more effective, substituting an individual whose style was far more effective with company 1.A’s culture. This ability to learn from “failures that you can get past,” as P1.1 put it, was a recurring theme in the relationship of these two organizations learning to work with each other. P1.5 talked about this same concept of learning together from his perspective:

Something like this can fail in the blink of an eye, if the leadership believes that this won’t work—the fine gap between working and not working, and leadership just saying that this doesn’t work, so I think we have to look back, and be thankful to the leaders who really put their careers on this, and said that this will work. We will make it work.

Ever reflective, P1.1 also spoke of another recurring theme with regard to success, namely actions taken by one party to the alliance which primarily benefit the other party without any clear return on the investment in time or resources in the short term. Said P1.1:

With this particular partner, I did speak at a couple of their global conferences, gave case studies of things that we were very successful at, and was willing to talk to their clients on the same behalf, and they did help us with a couple of clients. I can’t say that it necessarily resulted in new business, but they were certainly willing to put in a good word and say, hey, we’re working with this company; they’re very good in this particular space, and they knew of them.

Others mentioned this same theme from their perspective, noting that work was done with no anticipated benefit to one’s own organization, solely for the benefit of the other organization and the relationship itself. The willingness of alliance participants from company 1.A and company 1.B to reciprocate like this was often cited as a characteristic of their successful relationship.

There were other views of the success for the relationship, ranging from longevity (the relationship continues to this day) to mutual growth (revenue from the relationship for company 1.B continues to grow and flexible staffing continues to contribute to company 1.A’s bottom
Speaking of the original Y2K effort, which was the first successful mutual endeavor, P1.4 took a very practical, output-based perspective:

The Y2K work went exceptionally well. I think Y2K did not exactly explode in everyone’s face like a lot of people thought, and we were certainly in that group. We invested a lot of time and money in making changes, and testing changes, and [company 1.B] was core to that; I mean, they made them [the software changes] all. They tested them all. They coordinated the whole effort. I was kind of our conduit on the [company 1.A] side. It went without—basically without a real hitch. I mean, as I recall, there were a few procedural issues, as we went through the first few days after Y2K, where we were being so cautious that we forgot to turn things back on, and things like that. But there were no coding issues, so yeah, that project went particularly well.

This common view of mutual success was in no way seen as a given. P1.2 put a fine point on his contention that both parties worked very hard at the relationship, also introducing another interesting dimension. P1.2 noted that line-level employees at company 1.A did not feel in any way threatened by the consultants from company 1.B, so the help was welcome. He disclosed that he later worked with P1.1 at another alliance where the goal was elimination of headcount, and in that relationship there was far greater contention and a much less common perception of alliance success.

Views on asymmetry were unanimous in the perception of the size of the two organizations. Company 1.B had significantly more employees and much more global reach. How individuals saw the manifestations of asymmetry varied, however, from initially being surprised to note the existence of it to having accepted the asymmetry from the onset as an underlying characteristic of the relationship. P1.3 focused on the relative sizes of the two organizations, noting that it should be much easier to staff a project quickly from a larger organization. He cautioned, however, that such an asymmetry is not always an advantage (i.e., more is not necessarily better). Said P1.3:

I think in the end, the quality of the resources outweighs the number that you have, because we went through a stretch where we felt that the resources we were getting were
much more junior than we’d been getting in the past, and it seemed like work that was done had to be sent back more than once just because it wasn’t up to par.

P1.2, who had a much more tactical role and was working side-by-side with the consultants from company 1.B saw the same asymmetry in organizational size more clearly as a benefit:

We had some smart people, and all that, and that’s nice, but we didn’t have people that were going to give 120 percent, like they did. I mean, they had some really smart people that they put on our account, some young guys that were just, you know, running full blast right out of the gate, that would work—it seems like day and night, not only to fix problems, but to go further than that, to make sure that we were impressed. And they probably had people like that all over the world that they could tap into now and then when they needed it.

This asymmetry clearly had manifestations of multiculture embedded in it. All participants commented on multiculture as an underpinning of the relationship. P1.5 demonstrated a very mature, objective evaluation of the cultural differences:

It was, very clearly [company 1.A] was a [regional] company, based in [state], very, very [state]-heritage, and run by a second generation Indian, but he was probably as [regional] as anybody else with a team under him who was highly [regional], and working with an American company which had very senior level management, which was American, but most of our factories were in India, and the culture between what the factories had, and what [company 1.A] had was essentially integrating a very Indian culture with a very [regional] culture, and Indian meaning in the factories at that point they were small, and we were a small [company 1.B] at that point with all Indian culture, blending that with the [regional] culture.

This blending of culture, as P1.5 put it, came up over and over in participants’ descriptions of the working relationship. Participants commented on learning about the other culture in unexpected ways, for example when noting the social integration challenges the Indian consultants experienced when working in the U.S. for the first time. Alternately, several participants from company 1.A commented on how their perspectives were broadened when they first traveled to India as part of the execution of their alliance role. P1.4’s recollection is typical of this learning:

I’ve told this story probably 100 times since the first day I went to [city], India and met with them, but we were there, and we were having some sort of a problem, and it was like—I don’t know—five or six o’clock at night, and I don’t remember what words I
used, but I must have said something like, you know, “We’ve got to get this done by morning,” or “We’ve got to get this done before we go home tonight,” and I was speaking very casually, not really thinking about what I was saying, and we [the team from company 1.A] went back to the hotel. We came back the next morning, and all these guys are looking pretty haggard and all wearing the same clothes, and I was like, “What are you guys doing?” It’s like, “Well, you said we couldn’t leave until we figured this out.” We kind of very casually say things, and they take things pretty literally, for example.

This vignette is one of many shared by participants where some remark was made casually, resulting in largely unintended reaction due to what was perceived as a failure to anticipate the impact of words, gestures, or expressed emotions. Participants all reflected on these incidents as learning—building on future interactions that could be more predictable and, hopefully, less mutually stressful.

**Themes emerging from leader interviews.** Participants talked often of leadership interventions, particularly to maximize benefit of the alliance and lessen any negative impact of cultural-based misinterpretation. This and other key themes for all alliances are summarized below in Table 4.3. For example, P1.5 talked about ensuring mutual understanding, stating:

Insuring that there were no losses in translation between these two teams was critical, because although both these teams were speaking English, the supplemental and the nonverbal communications could be significantly different, which is where an expectation could be communicated to somebody. Emotional response that they saw could mean one thing in India, and could mean something else in [the U.S.]. Bridging this was very, very important. We put in a sequence of steps to be able to bridge the cultural gap that existed. We realized very early that the cultural gap existed, and put in multiple sequence of trainings of programs, of integrated projects to insure that the cultural gap was minimized. It could never go away; but the main thing was to minimize it.

Recognizing that this cultural difference existed and was not something to be eliminated, rather learned from, was a critical realization shared by most participants. Various stories were shared where a word or gesture was intended one way and interpreted otherwise. That the leaders saw
this difference, embraced it, and put in place programs to help both sides learn from each other was seen as a critical success factor and a running theme throughout the alliance relationship.

P1.2 saw another theme that was common to other participants, namely a focus on the customer. In this case, one party to the alliance putting crucial focus on the satisfaction of the other. P1.2, who saw day-to-day examples of customer focus, recalled, “They made sure that they understood the customer, and they wanted to understand the customer better than me.” P1.5 saw this same concept of customer focus in a more bi-lateral way, noting that each side focused on what they did best. P1.5 recalled:

We each focused on what we could do well. Very clearly, we would never be able to focus on the supply chain, the supply chain of the transaction, of the claims processing that would require a full-time job. It was an organizational job; [company 1.A] did that well. They had the sorts of people who understood it; they had relationships with their clients who could give them the right feedback to continue to enhance that experience. What we could bring was that we had enough people who could understand what they needed to do, and tell them what foundation can enable them to do that.

Others saw the theme of customer focus in a more or less bilateral way, with those in more tactical roles seeing mostly the benefit of the other party focusing on them while the more senior leaders perceived a more bi-lateral focus, where each party focused on the other in ways that mattered most to drive benefit to the alliance.

**Relating behaviors, interventions, and styles to outcomes in this alliance.** Stemming from the focus on each other, another recurring theme that participants related to the outcomes in this alliance was that of trust. This and other key themes for all alliances are summarized in Table 4.3. Participants saw the evolution of mutual trust as a critical success factor. P1.1 talked about this evolving trust:

It starts with an element of trust between a couple of people and it spreads, that there’s something between—they’re kind of working it out and I think with any alliance it might be two sales people that are working on it, or a new business guy and something else, but in this case it was some IT people—one or two key people that had a history with this
company that they knew and trusted someone and they trusted the words enough to say, that okay even when it wasn’t going great, we know the intent was there. We’ve got to keep working through this, and we’re going to make it work.

All participants spoke of evolving trust in the relationship, from the first handshake to the ultimate unmitigated success of this ongoing relationship. Those who had a position that was more likely threatened by outsourcing expressed more difficulty developing this trust, while senior leaders saw the development of mutual trust as an objective in and of itself.

**Conclusion.** The alliance between these two organizations continues today. After many years of working together and learning together, these two organizations have found mutual benefit and a strategic relevance in each others’ business future. Many of the alliance participants have moved on. P1.1 has a senior role in another organization where he is the provider of outsourced services instead of the consumer of them. He talks fondly of leveraging the learnings of alliance 1 in his new role, giving him a much more holistic perspective on this type of alliance. P1.5 has stayed with company 1.B and enjoyed mounting success, built on the learnings of relationships like alliance 1. Other participants have stayed with their organizations or retired. All of them look at this alliance as a part of their working career where they learned, sometimes despite their intentions, and grew in ways they never expected.

**Alliance 2—Hunting Together**

Very different from alliance 1, this alliance was loosely formed as a joint go-to-market strategy between two very strong and prominent companies over 20 years ago. The alliance continues today. The nature of the relationship has always been for company 2.A and company 2.B to find and exploit new market opportunities by leveraging their respective capabilities. Both companies are ever on the lookout for new customers and new opportunities with existing customers. The nature of the business is in part cyclical, driven by economic prosperity leading
to business expansion. During difficult economic times, business focus shifts to helping customers find ways to reengineer to be more lean and to ensure they are taking fullest advantage of any existing market opportunities. Because there are many firms, large and small, hunting in this space, a critical success factor is the ability to find key partners and build strategic alliances. Like hunting in the woods, a group of parties with mutually synergistic skills can much more effectively pursue and ultimately capture the big prize. By leveraging each others’ capabilities, company 2.A and company 2.B are able to find and exploit opportunities much more effectively than they could operating independently.

Company 2.A provides management consulting and related services. Those services include integration assistance with software like that offered by company 2.B. As part of company 2.A’s consulting, they help clients not only to get the software up and running in an efficient and timely manner, but also to take full advantage of organizational and operational reengineering, to optimize IT infrastructure, and to reap other benefits that come with such implementations.

The implementations themselves are the domain of company 2.B. Focused on delivering a high-quality software product, the company’s services are primarily directed toward getting their product configured and running as designed. They look to company 2.A as an outlet for helping consumers of their product to tackle more complex problems of reengineering and optimization. Company 2.A and company 2.B have formed a mutually-beneficial relationship through specialization without exclusivity. Each of the partners has always had similar alliances with other parties (company 2.A with other software vendors and company 2.B with other consulting and integration partners), so the strategic nature of the relationship was challenged from the beginning. Whether this alliance was a marriage of convenience or a great longstanding
partnership seemed to be up to the alliance partners themselves to determine through word and deed. Table 4.3 outlines the interview participants from Alliance 2.

Table 4.3

*Interview Participants from Alliance 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alliance Participant</th>
<th>Description of Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P2.1</td>
<td>Has worked on both sides of the alliance, as senior leadership at company 2.A and in a senior sales position at company 2.B. Has also worked as a customer for both organizations and for a competitor of both organizations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2.2</td>
<td>A senior member in a sales and delivery function for company 2.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2.3</td>
<td>A consultant who worked in an entry-level role at company 2.A. P2.3 has received extensive training in the products and services offered by company 2.B.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2.4</td>
<td>A project financial controller for company 2.A. P2.4 has deep visibility to the cost/value relationship as well as discussions that take place at the senior level of client engagements regarding staffing, risk mitigation, and profitability analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This author</td>
<td>Participated as an employee in this alliance more than 10 years ago. Has had no direct involvement since.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P2.1 described the relationship from his perspective, which was unique in that he has worked for both sides of this alliance, as well as in roles where he was a customer of company 2.B, both with and without other consultants assisting in implementations:

[Company 2.A] is a [key alliance partner] to this partnership; there are multiple tiers, based on investment and training of personnel that understands the product, and the breadth of functionality in the product, and the breadth of projects that are out in the marketplace drives our organization to have a very large bench of people who need to understand the product to be able to service all the opportunities in the account. There are varying tiers of partnership, if you will, and the [premium] partnership would be the highest level, which is the most amount of training, the most people that trained at the largest organizations.

Leaders from company 2.A take pride in the training of consultants and the global reach of their
organization to assist in implementations worldwide. Like a good tour operator, who relies on the existence of excellent hotels, reliable transportation, and a knowledgeable base of expertise to deliver an excellent experience for clients, company 2.A relies on company 2.B, the manufacturers and distributors of IT infrastructure, training programs to learn the nuances of company 2.B’s software, and a talented pool of consultants who consist of IT specialists, software specialists, business generalists, project managers, and others as needed to support complex implementations. A conceptual way of looking at company 2.A would be a large U.S. multinational company with presence in many countries, having grown progressively from its U.S. roots and U.S. management culture.

Company 2.B is a European company with strong national influence in management style, communications, and concentration of employees. P2.5 described the relationship from his perspective as looking for three qualities in a partner, what he calls “the push, the pull, and the marquee reference.” In his model, company 2.B is looking for a partner relationship where each party drives revenue for the other by virtue of client relationships. Company 2.A pushes revenue to partners via implementation-related consulting services. They also pull revenue from the fact that partners are helping to recommend their software solutions. Finally, company 2.B looks for marquee partners who actually use company 2.B’s software, serving as reference accounts by virtue of the fact that they demonstrate the benefits of best practices associated with using the software. According to P2.5 and P2.1, this type of complex relationship is difficult to find in a truly effective balance of trade, but not impossible. For company 2.B, there are multiple alliance partners who exhibit these traits to varying degrees, hence their scheme for stratification of their alliance partners into tiers, whereby the most beneficial terms are afforded to those partnerships that exemplify the best, mutually sustainable relationships.
P2.1 described this same multifaceted relationship using the analogy of a triangle:

We go to market with them, and share information, and help them implement their product, and we’ve made a significant, significant investment, and that’s the primary, I think, focus of this conversation. The other two sides to the triangle are that we happen to run our entire business on their product, our purchase from them over the years of their products is over [large sum]. And the third side of the triangle, is that they do a very, very insignificant amount of business with us, buying from us, buying the services that we offer to help them streamline, optimize all the things that they need to do to continue to grow and develop their organization.

What P2.5 described as a very strong three-sided relationship, P2.1 described as a triangle with one very underdeveloped side, that being revenue that accrues to company 2.A from selling services to company 2.B. This imbalance of trade was cited by other participants as a key difference in the complex relationship between the two organizations. Figure 4.3 depicts the two different perspectives of this alliance relationship.

![Figure 4.3](image)

*Figure 4.3. Two different perspectives on the alliance relationship.*

**Positioning this alliance as successful, high-SAM.** This alliance has been in existence for decades. Initially, leaders from company 2.A saw the relationship as a way to grow consulting revenue and to meet demand for an emerging class of software. This class of
software was designed to help companies go to market more efficiently, control investments in working capital, develop customer-facing commitments, optimize strategic sourcing of resources, and enable financial cost accounting. In prior instantiations of software, these types of functions were discrete, autonomous packages that were pieced together in a complex tapestry that required great expertise to achieve any real business benefit. As software became more complex and integration modalities became more prevalent, multifunctional software like that offered by company 2.B became more and more prevalent. As the software available was still not a panacea, the requirement for consulting skills like those of company 2.A simply matured as companies struggled to integrate more and more business functionality and the information produced by the enterprise and the marketplace continued to grow at unprecedented rates.

The strategic nature of alliance 2 was characterized by participants as based on creating synergies in the ability to go to market from a strong united perspective. P2.1 summarized the strategic relationship:

What we really try to focus on, or focus their teams on is what we call “strong/strong.” The best opportunities we call “strong/strong relationships,” which is where we have a strong relationship with the client, and [company 2.B] has a strong relationship with the client, and then together we can push these opportunities over the top. The second tier is where one of us is strong, and the other is to some degree less than strong, maybe weak or something in the middle, and then finally, sort of the green field accounts are where we’re weak, and they’re weak, and those types of accounts really aren’t worth the executive team spending a lot of time on.

Participants were unanimous in characterizing the Alliance 2 relationship as successful, not only in terms of longevity, but also in terms of financial benefit, mutual brand enhancement, sales efficiency, and other factors. Participants often cited the benefits of the two companies working together for a common good on behalf of their shared customer. Said P2.1:

We’re super partners. We often say that we’ve got to be big boys and girls here, and that they’ll be times when because of the client, some predisposition with the client, we could be pushing product behind the scenes really hard, but at the end of the day the
client is the one that has to make the decision, and any magic things that we do and say and wave our hands fast, and talk really loud, don’t necessarily mean the client is going to make the decision for [company 2.B’s product].

P2.4 had a more relationship-based view of the same concept, noting that at most times, company 2.A would be in the client-facing situation, representing company 2.B’s product. The success of the two organizations working together was in their ability to negotiate the relationship in a way that gives the client what they need for their business, not necessarily what they ask for. Said P2.4:

From the perspective of what the client’s looking for, what the long-term and short-term objectives are, and what the outcome that actually is going to satisfy the need is [company 2.A] was a translator for that. So [company 2.B] wouldn’t be at the table, and I mean it’s like the cartoon where, you know, the Henry Ford thing. It says “If I gave them what they asked for, they would have gotten faster horses!”

The concept of access to the client and understanding their needs was also a common theme among participants when discussing asymmetry. The nature of who enjoyed first contact with the client was often determined by pre-existing relationships, clients proactively inquiring about the software, joint go-to-market efforts, and other factors. Initial access notwithstanding, company 2.A always enjoyed far greater exposure to the client once the initial software purchase was completed. That asymmetry of access was juxtaposed by an asymmetry of product knowledge. The product was developed and maintained by company 2.B, so they would always enjoy greater product knowledge, despite significant effort on the part of company 2.A to invest in training and other discovery activities to remain highly skilled and knowledgeable. P2.4’s depiction of translator was very poignant in this regard given that often company 2.A had far greater client knowledge due to their access asymmetry, yet was often in a position of translating between needs of the client and functionality of the product, which was obtained from their relationship and training offered by company 2.B.
Two participants also noted that this asymmetry of access to the client presented a kind of asymmetric risk profile. Company 2.A had the primary client-facing relationship, so they could be aware of disfavor on the part of the client and potentially shift focus to product functionality, design, or other aspects outside their control. Participants were quick to note, however, that such a strategy would be short-lived, as the relationship between company 2.A and company 2.B went far beyond any individual implementation. P2.3 discussed another nuance of this asymmetry of risk, noting that the client might possibly be predisposed to favor company 2.A in any situation where product functionality was remotely a factor since individuals from company 2.B were simply less familiar to them. None of these risks were new to leaders from either party to alliance 2. They spoke of taking active steps to maintain mutual transparency as a mitigation factor and a critical success factor in the longevity of the relationship. In some relationships, company 2.B actually adopted a posture of requiring a seat at the table in key steering committees and other bodies as a form of active mitigation of this type of risk.

Perhaps the biggest asymmetry of all in alliance 2 was multiculture itself. Participants from company 2.A were united in their view that company 2.A, although multinational in the scope of its offices and client project locations, was primarily led from the U.S., with a U.S. corporate culture. Company 2.B had a very strong national culture influence in business style from a particular European country. Participants noted that culture permeated many aspects of the way that company 2.B conducted business, including communication style, response to pushback on key decisions, and flexibility in considering alternative opinions regarding future software modifications. P2.4 noted that company 2.A exported its culture to a degree by placing primarily American expatriates in positions in Europe where they had a high degree of contact with company 2.B. P2.4 felt that this strategy tended to exacerbate the cultural difference, while
also admitting that attempts to artificially shift the cultural demographic by bringing individuals into roles solely on a bases of their cultural identity would bring about other issues if company 2.A were not focused on getting the right person for each role, regardless of their country of origin. P2.2 took a very personal perspective on multiculture in the alliance, maintaining that one can only control one’s own behavior. Said P2.2:

The guys who run our practice or alliance with [company 2.B], they have counterparts at [company 2.B], and the current guys in charge, I think, both understand the cultures and the organizations, and can work through, issues, I think, really well. And they do, especially when things get sticky. But there’s lots of other leadership within our firm who don’t really understand these guys, and I don’t think they ever will. If they park their ego at the door sometimes, and try to listen a little bit and understand their culture, I think that it would help them.

Company 2.B was very aware of the multicultural dichotomy as well, although participants from that side of the alliance tended to downplay the impact of cultural difference on any client-facing outcome. P2.1, who worked for both organizations at different times, felt that the multiculture impact was definitely prevalent, but less overt. Said P2.1,

I would say it’s just below the surface, though, and there have been lots of articles about this balance of power where the power was going to be, and there was a gentleman that was located out of [U.S. location of company 2.B], and there was some talk about the Americanization of their company, and there was a lot of pride in authorship or of building of this product, and now the pendulum appears to be swinging back to the [European country] ownership, leadership, and so it’s been an interesting pendulum swing between the organizations.

P2.5, who is more focused on sale of the product than delivery, noted that most of the contact between the two organizations in a pre-sale capacity is at the regional level. Because the two organizations tend to staff regionally for sales positions, it seemed to P2.5 that the multicultural dimension was far less of a factor than during implementations, when the two organizations had to work together at multiple functional levels.
Themes emerging from leader interviews. Working together often produced what several participants called a “healthy tension.” This and other key themes for all alliances are summarized in Table 4.4. From the perspective of company 2.A, there were tensions relating to the dichotomy between selling a product to do the right thing for the client and finding a way to implement the specific product produced by company 2.B, which was arguably configurable to the point where nearly any rational functionality could be achieved. From a unique role that was embedded with the consulting team, but more focused on project financials and plan deliverables, P2.4 clearly felt the frustration, noting also that the client played more than a passive role in creating tension. Said P2.4:

I always saw frustrations on what people were getting versus what they were promised, and I don’t understand exactly why that communication broke down unless it had to do with client access or requirement clarity or even if the clients weren’t able to express what it was that they actually needed. You don’t actually want to replace a like for like. You want to get something a little bit better. If you don’t have so much, you can’t visualize what that might look like and what might work. So that’s difficult to do.

P2.2 explained that this type of tension was often exacerbated when the software did not function as perceived, forcing company 2.A into a position of having to defend a product that they actually did not have the direct ability to change.

Related to the concept of healthy tension was the theme of advocacy. Several participants talked about the need for advocacy, for example on behalf of the client when company 2.A would need to discuss product changes with company 2.B or on behalf of company 2.B when company 2.A would propose how to best use the software to meet an unmet need. P2.4 noted that it was not always clear how to advocate in such situations, and it was not nearly as simple as maximizing near-term benefit for one side or the other. Said P2.4:

I don’t think it was about winning out. I think it was about how do you define the problem and how do you attempt to solve it. You can solve things with process that could also be solved with technology.
P2.1 saw this need for advocacy as an end-to-end responsibility for the client relationship:

I've spent the past eight or nine years servicing all aspects of what the client could be on one of those many implementations of this product. Again, the most common theme in the alliance, and the partnership is owning the customer relationship.

As a result of the healthy tension and the need for advocacy, the leadership of the client, company 2.A and company 2.B resorted to what P2.2 and others referred to as matrix management—the formation of steering committees and other bodies to mitigate such risk through transparency and unanimity of direction to the cross-functional project teams. Alliance participants from company 2.A had a related policy that extended to the client, whereby shadow resources were placed in key roles for the client, providing that the consultant could only be perceived as successful if the analogous client in that key function was also assessed as successful. This temporary joint leadership in key roles was seen by many as a critical success factor, not only in delivering project results, but also in ensuring a common leadership message.

P2.5 summed up the leadership behavior from the perspective of project teams:

They want to be brought up to speed on what our focus is going to be so there is a common message that started at the top and driven all the way down that includes local engagement and training and making sure that when we talk to a prospect, there’s a common theme that’s being talked by both parties.

The commonality of message did not always ensure that there was mutual trust. Another common theme among participants was the need to engender and nurture mutual trust between company 2.A and company 2.B at all levels of the relationship. This need for honesty transcended the entire sales lifecycle, from selling behavior to delivery and execution. For example, speaking of the sales cycle, P2.2 said:

You’ve got to have honesty in these relationships, because no matter, you lie once, or they lie once, and you know, it always comes around, and the other person will find out. Even though sometimes the discussions are tough, there may be an account where I have an account team that’s recommending [company 2.B]’s competitor, you know, for
whatever reasons. I try to be up front with my counterparts in [company 2.B], and say, “Hey, listen, my firm is recommending your competitor on this particular account, you might as well go out and go work with one of the other firms.” We have that kind of up-front, brutally-honest kind of relationship.

P2.4 recounted a situation related to trust in the middle of the delivery cycle. On a particular project, the software had been initially installed and was in the process of being configured to meet the client’s needs. As is customary, the client appointed a senior leader to oversee the implementation from a business perspective. It was generally understood that this leader did not have any product-specific experience, but that such experience would be provided by a shadow resource appointed by company 2.A. In this case, the client leader did not begin the relationship from a position of trust in the company 2.A senior leader, adopting a posture that he could lead such a project without assistance due to his deep company knowledge and the strength of his team. P2.4 recounted how this leader was quite embattled until his trust was won over by the resource from company 2.A, who also had a critical stake in the success of the project.

**Relating behaviors, interventions, and styles to outcomes in this alliance.** Nurturing of trust and common messaging was in fact a theme of leadership intervention thought by many participants to be a critical success factor. From the initial client engagements, where one party or the other would necessarily have the client entrée, to mature relationships fraught with risk and complex communication dynamics that necessarily included more alliance participants from company 2.A, the necessity of managing the behavior that both alliance partners be transparent was seen as crucial.

Stemming from this concept of transparency was a related theme of linguistic sensitivity. P2.1 noted that a particularly effective intervention was the introduction of a default language. Nearly all alliance-facing participants from company 2.B spoke English and the reverse was not true with regard to members from company 2.A speaking the language of their European
counterparts, so company 2.B pressed for an English-only policy to demonstrate solidarity with their U.S. partners. The policy required that if anyone in the room, or entering the room, spoke only English, the spoken language was required to be English. P2.1, who worked at company 2.B at the time and is a self-proclaimed “non-polyglot” stated that the policy was very well-received as a gesture to demonstrate solidarity between the two companies.

**Conclusion.** P2.1 summed up the success of alliance 2, hunting for just the right opportunities, learning together what works and what does not at the most fundamental levels of the day-to-day interactions of the two alliance partners. Said P2.1,

> The real strength of the relationship ultimately needs to be – it lives or dies in the field at the very low levels, where the people who are working with the account share or assess the value of the partnership for that particular opportunity [emphasis added].

Like hunters in a deep forest, surrounded by risk of all kinds, success and death lying just outside or just within reach at any given moment, these two companies continue to search for that particular opportunity together.

**Alliance 3—Together to Make a Difference**

At times, commercial gain and market positioning seem trivial in the face of an aspiration that is bigger than any of the parties trying to address it. Such was the case for the parties in alliance 3. This alliance was formed with specific goals relating to the sustainability and use of a natural resource, not only from the standpoint of environmental impact, but also in consideration of people who live in very poor conditions, depending on the exploitation of that resource to survive. By finding a proper balance between conservation and effective management, the parties in this alliance hoped to achieve social impact, to foster environmental benefit, and to inspire the implementation of sustainable policies that would live long beyond the life of the alliance. The goals and aspirations of this alliance were by no means universally shared. Other
organizations and alliances existed at the time which, for political reasons, commercial considerations, or contention over shared resources, opposed the formation and evolution of the alliance partners in alliance 3. Like many efforts that involve environmental and social impact, there would be no absolute public mandate. Opinions and actions of others, sometimes working at cross-purposes, would have to be considered. The work of this alliance involved finding ways to influence government and non-government entities and the formation of public and commercial policy while managing the sources and uses of funding to derive the maximum benefit over as many geographies as possible. Table 4.4 outlines the interview participants from alliance 3.

Table 4.4

*Interview Participants from Alliance 3*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alliance Participant</th>
<th>Description of Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P3.1</td>
<td>A very senior member of company 3.A, P3.1 is also a co-founder of alliance 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3.2</td>
<td>A key researcher for company 3.A. Areas of direct leadership include baseline assessments in the major areas of alliance focus, including industry analysis, private sector research, market analysis, and identification of global trends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3.3</td>
<td>The coordinator for the alliance from company 3.A. Each party to the alliance had co-chairs. The co-chairs, in turn, had coordinators, who managed the day-to-day work, maintained the development of cooperative activities, and provided oversight of necessary reporting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3.4</td>
<td>The coordinator for the alliance for company 3.B.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P3.3 saw the alliance as primarily a vehicle for making funding available to undertake activities relating to three major principles: protection of resources, management of resources,
and restoration of resources. According to P3.3, the majority of the funded efforts fell into the first two categories, though policies helped encourage restoration after the dissolution of the alliance. By working with field offices around the world, appropriate projects were identified through collaboration with local individuals familiar with the needs and realities of each geography served. According to P3.3, the work of the alliance was as much about identifying and vetting the proper opportunities, as it was about the day-to-day management of targets and metrics to demonstrate to investors that funds were having the intended impact. P3.2 also spoke a lot about targets and the need for benchmarks to make sure that the alliance was focused in the right place. Because nothing of this scale had been undertaken previously, it would be for the alliance not only to define success, but to capture the hearts and minds of the constituencies who made funding available to understand and to believe in these targets as not only meaningful, but realistic.

P3.1, by the characterization of several participants, was the visionary who saw a path to implement sustainable change and to make others believe in that path as the right one. As with any monumental task, the parties involved needed a catalyzing leader who could have the right balance of vision, charisma, integrity, and humility to allow strong constituents to collaborate in a way that could be successful in such a global undertaking. Company 3.A was well positioned to deliver the knowledge and strategy, and P3.1 saw that opportunity and took up the mantle of leadership for this worthy cause. According to P3.1, his objective was to improve the environmental impact of loss of resources, while also realizing significant social benefit to those who lived in areas rich in the resource. P3.1 noted that statistics show the world’s poorest people, living on less than $2 per day, often live in close proximity to resource-rich areas and are
thus impacted not only by resource depletion, but also by the commercialization of their regions by industry. Said P3.1:

    We set ourselves up three targets, and the targets were meant to be catalytic, right? So, what we were trying to do was to spur others to action, to create [resource rich] areas, to bring threatened [resource] areas under effective management, and then, thirdly, to bring those [resources] that were being used for [commercial use] under better management as independently certified by third parties. And my particular role in it is that I was the founding co-chair of the alliance.

Like many charismatic leaders, P3.1 did not project an air of superiority or narcissism, rather one of a person with a clear vision, who saw what needed to be done and, undaunted by the enormity of the task or the plethora of naysayers, went on about finding a partner to deliver the vision.

    Company 3.B was exactly the partner that he needed. Where company 3.A was primarily focused on conservation, company 3.B was primarily focused on alleviating poverty through funding and stewardship of meaningful projects around the world. Company 3.B had been focused at the time on refuting public opinion that they did not consider environmental impact in achieving their goals, so it seemed that the two parties had found in each other a partner that they sorely needed. Eloquent and truly reflective about the formation of the alliance, P3.4 spoke in terms of the multifaceted aspirations of the alliance. Said P3.4:

    There were two main advantages from [company 3.B]’s perspective of making this alliance. The first one was that under this [resource preservation] strategy, [company 3.B] wants to give a lot more attention to protected areas, to be conservative of biodiversity, watersheds, etc. And [company 3.B] has very limited field capacity for investigating those sort of issues. By contrast, [company 3.A] has personnel set in probably [large number] different countries, and a lot of their work has to do with protected areas, conservation of biological diversity, etc. So, they brought [company 3.B] in that perspective, and they made it much easier for [company 3.B] to get into that business, and that’s been quite important.

    P3.1 talked about this same “business” from the perspective of company 3.A, stating:

    A big part of the reason why [company 3.A], wanted to engage with [company 3.B] is because [company 3.B] was a major driver of development, and in developing areas around the world that also happened to be places that harbored semblances of the world’s
richest, and most dynamic [resource-rich areas], so we wanted to influence the development pattern that was going on in those countries, in and around these natural areas, so [company 3.B] was a key source of finance, and policy drivers in those countries, that historically had had devastating consequences for the environment, and the natural world.

While alliance partners often need to engage in advocacy and discovery to determine if the alliance is right, it seemed to parties on both sides of this alliance that any questions of fitness of their counterparty were asked and answered from the start.

Positioning this alliance as successful, high-SAM. While the appropriateness of working together seemed easy to defend, the work of the alliance and the success of their effort were in no way guaranteed. Because success depended in large part on getting local constituents to change policy and in some cases to forego short term benefit for longer term good, the challenges to success were daunting. P3.1 noted that by the time the alliance was dissolved, giving way to sustainable grassroots programs and follow-on activities that continue to this day, several of the major goals were significantly exceeded. Among the achievements of the alliance were dramatic improvements in the availability of protected resources, and the implementation of programs for sustainable management to prevent the achievements from decaying again after the alliance moved on to other areas of focus. The impact of these sustainable efforts was not only on the environment, but on people who depend on the land and its resources for their very survival. Said P3.1:

The source of water for someone in the mostly poor, irrigated agricultural lands in the world have their origins within [resource rich] areas, right? So, if you degrade the [resource rich] areas, and you’re [depleting the environment through commercial use of the resource], you shut off the water pumps that are critical for feeding agricultural systems that literally feed tens of millions of people around the world. And so, we said we wanted to make sure that those were more effectively managed.
Through the careful documentation of the work of this alliance, P3.1 is able to show sustainable programs that exist on several continents as a direct result of this kind of careful attention to resource management and sustainability.

Participants all felt strongly that this success was achieved only through the strategic alliance of company 3.A and company 3.B. Either party alone would not have had sufficient resources or capacity to affect change. P3.1 was quick to point out that collaboration between the two organizations alone was not sufficient. Said P3.1:

A third piece of it is that neither one of us could be successful alone, or together without also building local buy-in. So, we actually had to convince leaders in developing countries to join on with our agenda, but we also had to build local constituencies in those places so that it would be viable for the leaders to make these changes.

In this way, alliance 3 was like an alliance of alliances, requiring that in each place where the two organizations strived to affect change, they were compelled to form relationships with local leaders and local constituencies.

The strategic nature of the alliance was in many ways synergized by the deep nature of asymmetry in the alliance. Indeed, both parties brought a portfolio of capability to the table that was vastly different from their counterparty. P3.3 summarized the asymmetry in terms of resources that could be brought to task. According to P3.3, company 3.B had a primary advantage in what he called "convening power," in other words, they had the organizational clout that when they called a meeting, people came—important people. According to P3.3 and others interviewed, what company 3.A brought to the table was public trust and brand. People had (and continue to have) a very positive opinion of company 3.A. Additionally, company 3.A had what P3.3 called “boots on the ground”—skilled individuals in localities that mattered who could bring relevant knowledge to bear in short order. Company 3.B could get people to listen and could help secure funding, but they did not have boots on the ground. According to P3.3,
company 3.B was made up of very differently-skilled individuals who “rarely get mud on their boots.”

The multicultural aspects of this alliance, though seemingly evident in the vast geographies involved, were illusive to for participants to discuss. Though both organizations had a myriad of multicultural influence, neither company 3.A nor company 3.B identified solely with a single national identity. In the case of company 3.A, the national identity was evident at the local level where the organization focused on local involvement which naturally identified with national culture. In the case of company 3.B, the multicultural makeup of the organization itself tended to homogenize any influence to the point where participants had difficulty explaining it.
P3.3 noted with some sarcasm that global organizations like company 3.A and company 3.B tend to operate on what he called “global standards of international engagement, same as the UN agency, so there tends to be a sort of standard of international bureaucratic culture.” P3.3 went on to explain that multiculture, in the sense of influence from a particular geography, did play a role in the execution of the alliance. Said P3.3:

In countries that don’t have a long history of stewardship and management the emphasis may be on creating new [resource protection areas]. A good example would be DRC, right? The Democratic Republic of Congo. Compare that to Poland. Poland has pretty much known for a couple of hundred years where its protected areas were going to be. They used to be royal states, and now they’re national parks, but compare that to Liberia or something, and it’s a quite different situation. So, naturally, the activities and emphasis within the three target areas of [resource] management, conservation protection, and restoration, naturally reflects the socioeconomic circumstances of the regions, and that’s why input from regional colleagues was important, and culture is certainly a component of that, but I wouldn’t say it’s the dominant component.

This depiction of the myriad of multicultural influence was echoed by P3.2, who maintained that company 3.A had likely dealt with many of the multicultural issues that would influence the organization long before this alliance was formed. Thus any national influence came from the execution of the work of the alliance, not the leadership of the alliance or participants from
either of the partnering organizations. P3.1 put a fine point on this position, stating,

“Multiculturism defines the essence of both institutions in their own right, and it magnifies
several fold when you bring the two into an alliance.”

Themes emerging from leader interviews. Those interviewed were united in the
articulation of a common theme, that of thinking globally while acting locally. This and other
key themes for all alliances are summarized below in Table 4.5. Said P3.1:

Our big successes were largely built on our ability to influence national leaders to adopt
our agenda, and to make it its own, so the ability to generate local ownership at the
highest levels that also then has that supported by some kinds of grass roots
constituencies. That’s key, right? So, getting the local buy-in from top to bottom in the
countries where we operate clearly was a recurring theme.

This concept of local buy-in from top to bottom was supported by P3.4, who gave an example,
stating:

In [country], [company 3.B] had about ten somewhat troubled joint [resource]
management projects, and these were situations where they got the government, and the
local communities around the table, and they told us how collectively in partnership they
could do a better a job of managing [resource], than if the government did it on its own,
and we’ve pumped a lot of alliance 3 money into supporting those joint [resource]
management arrangements, they’re called [industry term] and that’s had quite a positive
impact.

This example of taking a troubled strategy and reinvigorating it through local
empowerment and buy-in relates to another theme that was cited by participants, the concept of
developing and nurturing the adoption of best practices from one part of the world in other areas
of the world where the same approach could prove beneficial. P3.1 exemplified this concept,
stating:

There’s a number of examples of where we were able to catalyze things that wound up
having shelf lives that extended beyond the life of the alliance, itself. And so, we also
had a number of other organizations then adopted the targets that we had set out, and so
even though the alliance is no longer in operation, you still have organizations out there
pursuing the agenda, and the targets on [resource management] that were instigated and
launched during the lifetime of the alliance.
These best practices, clearly laid out and codified, have thus become the work of others, allowing the alliance to live on even though company 3.A and company 3.B are no longer directly involved.

Clarity of intent also played out in another common theme among participants: meticulous attention to metrics and objective measures of success. P3.3 cited several quantifiable targets of the alliance that were clearly understood by all parties. When these targets were met, it was clear to all involved. P3.1 and P3.4 quoted almost verbatim the same quantifiable targets, exemplifying the common vision that parties from both sides of the alliance had on this complex undertaking. This clarity of vision also played out in what several participants cited as an unambiguous mandate that permeated the organizations. P3.3 talked about access to any level in his organization, which was otherwise quite hierarchical, with regards to the work of the alliance. Said P3.3:

[Senior leaders] believed in the alliance and wanted to see it achieve things, and that message trickled down to all those intermediate levels of management, and it made opening the vice president’s door, or the department director’s door, or the regional group’s door, a hell of a lot easier.

This clarity of vision at all levels of the alliance permeated out to the constituencies served and involved in the targeted regions. P3.1 cited an example where a conservation effort was disregarded in a locality as being merely a showcase effort by foreign parties, having no real sustainable local impact. Rather than objecting to this characterization, P3.1 and others asked local officials to help define how one could measure real, sustainable local impact. By working together to clarify the intent, all parties involved were able to adopt standards that allowed the alliance to move ahead and work together, with clarity of objective, toward a common goal P3.4 echoed this notion, stating:
The ideas of what needs to be done come genuinely from the local communities, themselves, so there is now in place, and in the process through this [resource management program], and that includes collaboration with alliance 3, and then everybody else, but instead of having just one discrete program with alliance 3, we now have this sort of much broader partnership, which so far seems to be making a useful contribution.

**Relating behaviors, interventions, and styles to outcomes in this alliance.** Through common vision, local empowerment, inclusion, and leveraging of their collective capabilities, leaders in this alliance were able to achieve significant, sustainable results from a joint effort that lasted less than 10 years. The long term impact of this alliance, which ended over 5 years ago, continues today. The passion and conviction of all those involved is compelling in ways that are difficult to describe. Participants all articulated belief in the work of the alliance as having transcendental benefit well beyond the interests of company 3.A and company 3.B.

**Conclusion.** When asked for some of the more memorable results of alliance 3, P3.1 talked continuously for several minutes, almost without hesitation, ticking off in his mind a list of accomplishments, any one of which would normally seem to be the work of scores of people over many years. That awe-inspiring list of accomplishments of the alliance, coming from leaders intervening at local levels with global vision, largely through combinations of local knowledge and leveraging of best practices, clearly demonstrated the achievement of great results. In one country, leadership intervention with local government resulted in protecting some of the most vulnerable ecosystems in the country while preserving the livelihood of local communities. In another country, a fund was created that allowed debt restructuring in exchange for the local governments investing in the protection of resources. In yet another country, heads of state from several surrounding regions were brought together for a regional summit on sustaining resources, setting an agenda for future conservation efforts. In other parts of the world, legislation was rewritten through information and advocacy. Leaders at all levels in this
alliance have stories to tell. Some told of conflict, all told of closure with great environmental and social impact. These two organizations formed an alliance almost two decades ago to make a difference. The echoes of that collaboration continue today as some of those leaders are retiring after amazing careers and others move on to change the hearts and minds of others still.

**Examination of the Three Cases**

Looking across these three alliances from the perspective of SAM, there are aspects about them which make them very different. Although each alliance is characterized as successful, high-SAM, it seems the alliance experience has evolved for very different reasons and in very different ways. One way to see this evolution is to look at the strategic makeup of the alliance over time. Alliance 1 began as a relationship that was not at all strategic, with company 1 simply looking for a low cost provider of good quality work. The strategic nature of the work that they would come to do together evolved as the two parties learned together how to work in a more strategic way. In alliance 2, the initial relationship might be characterized as “trust but verify”—both parties had similar alliance relationships with other organizations. While their initial relationship was seen as strategic, they leveraged the power of the alliance over time to attract better business than either party could achieve with other relationships. What made alliance 2 ultimately successful was possibly the fact that it simply worked better than other alliances, or possibly that there was simply too much to lose for the parties involved not to do business with each other. Finally, in alliance 3, there was a strategic relationship from the first minute of the two parties coming together. Parties on both sides of the alliance readily admitted that they could not have been remotely successful without the skills and resources of their counterparty. Like all of the alliances studied, the relationship improved over time, but it started in this case from a very mature point from the perspective of the strategic relationship. Figure
4.4 depicts a conceptual representation of the evolution of the strategic relationships in these three alliances over time, using the same gold-box metaphor discussed in chapter 1.

![Conceptual trajectory of alliance strategic makeup over time.](image)

**Figure 4.4.** Conceptual trajectory of alliance strategic makeup over time.

There are other ways of looking at the three alliances that bring about additional divergence in the makeup of the alliances with respect to SAM. For example, the way in which alliance participants described working together was vastly different. Observations in this regard fall into what is called the humanistic plane in Figure 1.4: the plane bounded by multiculure and asymmetry. It is in this area of SAM that interpersonal and intercultural interactions manifest. In alliance 1, it seemed participants needed to learn about each other much more than they needed to learn about the business at hand. Parties on both sides of the relationship had a solid grasp of what needed to be done initially; the relationship was admittedly as much about getting more arms and legs than about any real value-add. Over time the alliance relationship blossomed
as the parties learned about their respective cultures, learned how to express disagreement and changes in management directive, and learned how to let each party bring value to the table.

Alliance 3 was much like alliance 1 in this regard, though for different reasons. Leaders from both organizations were very clear from the start what they needed from their counterparty. What they needed to discover over time was how best to use the value each party brought to the table while mitigating political and other endemic risk at the level where the alliance touched local counterparties. In effect, what they needed to learn was something they needed to learn together, each time they took on a new project or entered a new geography.

Rather than learning how to work together for optimal results, the parties in alliance 2 realized quickly that a critical success factor was to let each other own their own space, maintaining transparency and a degree of autonomy, while working together to hunt as a team. Behaving like a team meant establishing mutual trust, even if that trust required periodic verification and was at times challenged by other parties outside the alliance. Most notable in the balance of the relationship for the parties in alliance 2 was the customer dynamic. Where projects were going well and benefits were plenty, it seemed the relationship went very well. When customer issues arose, the test of the strength of this alliance was in fact the degree to which the parties could work together as a team and not weaken their alliance by suboptimization in favor of either party.

As different as the three cases are in terms of makeup, strategic evolution, scope of value added beyond the alliance participants, and other factors, there are indeed ways in which these three cases expressed similarity. One compelling way to see this similarity is to look at the way in which participants talked about cultural differences. In all cases, regardless of the multicultural makeup of the alliance, it seemed there was learning that took place over the life of
the alliance. That learning manifested itself differently in different parties to each alliance, as well as in the alliance relationship overall. For example, in alliance 1, it was clear that parties on both sides of the alliance needed to learn to work with each other, respecting cultures and leveraging the best that each had to offer. In alliance 2, the multiculture was perhaps always there, but under the surface. Parties knew that their leadership identified with different national culture and proceeded with the work at hand almost despite that difference, rather than attempting to embrace it as did the parties in alliance 1. In alliance 3, multiculture was part of the very DNA of the relationship and the nature of the work at hand. It would have been arguably impossible to ignore, yet ironically participants from this alliance seemed to have the most difficulty discussing this aspect of their relationship.

Looking across the themes of these three alliances, learning together, hunting together, and together to make a difference, the thread is in the alliance itself. As difficult as it seems to succeed, according to research and the characterization of participants in these alliances, these parties have found ways to work together to achieve very impressive results. Those results span commercial objectives (like cost savings and supply chain optimization), branding and awareness evolution (like promoting the value of the strategic alliance to the marketplace to respond to mounting competition), and ultimately even social and geopolitical objectives (like preservation of resources and remediation of marginalization of underprivileged people). That it can be so difficult to succeed in alliances seems to be well accepted. That these three alliances have found creative, impressive, and even inspiring ways to surmount the daunting realities regarding the likelihood of succeeding in complex, multicultural alliances is certainly a rich experience from which much can be learned.
Table 4.5 summarizes the key themes emerging from leader interviews in the three alliances studied.

Table 4.5

*Themes Emerging From Leader Interviews in the Alliances Studied*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alliance/theme #</th>
<th>Key theme emerging from leader interviews</th>
<th>Related themes in other alliances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1, theme 1</td>
<td>Ensuring mutual understanding</td>
<td>Alliance 2, theme 4; Alliance 3, theme 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1, theme 2</td>
<td>Focus on the customer</td>
<td>Alliance 2, theme 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1, theme 2</td>
<td>Trust/evolution of mutual trust</td>
<td>Alliance 2, theme 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2, theme 1</td>
<td>Healthy tension</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2, theme 2</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>Alliance 1, theme 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2, theme 3</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Alliance 1, theme 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2, theme 4</td>
<td>Common messaging</td>
<td>Alliance 1, theme 1; Alliance 3, theme 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2, theme 5</td>
<td>Linguistic sensitivity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3, theme 1</td>
<td>Thinking globally/acting locally</td>
<td>Alliance 3, theme 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3, theme 2</td>
<td>Clarity of intent</td>
<td>Alliance 1, theme 1; Alliance 2, theme 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3, theme 3</td>
<td>Measurable, quantifiable goals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3, theme 4</td>
<td>Sensitivity to local constituents</td>
<td>Alliance 3, theme 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter V: Discussion, Limitations, and Implications for Future Research

Considering the nature of strategic, asymmetric, multicultural alliances, how these very special types of collaboration come about, the experiences of leaders who find themselves working in them, and the complexities presented by such relationships, the possibilities for learning and the implications for future application are rich. This chapter presents interpretations from the research conducted, both in the body of existing literature and by virtue of the survey and multi-case study presented. Following an interpretation of the findings of this research, a discussion of the implications of this research on the study of leadership and change is presented. Recommendations are also made for researchers interested in furthering this research.

Interpretation of Findings

The survey was intended to explore the relationship of strategic, asymmetric, and multicultural makeup of successful alliances. Intended primarily as a vehicle to help identify alliances for future study, the survey also highlighted the relative difficulty of finding such alliances. Despite the fact that the population surveyed was rich in alliance experience, a relatively small number of alliances were assessed as successful while also having all of the desired high-SAM characteristics. The observation that multiculture was often the characteristic that caused an alliance to fall out of high-SAM status suggests that successful alliances, shown by this research to be in the minority even without any other qualification, are still more commonly found in less multicultural makeup. Interview participants supported this observation in alliance 1 and alliance 2 by highlighting the difficulties in dealing with multiculture, often seeing it not as an advantage, but rather an aspect of the relationship that had to be mitigated from a risk perspective. Ultimately, participants from all three alliances did see multiculture as a significant advantage, but only after the relationship had matured.
The survey also highlighted some of the difficulties in identifying and studying such a population of alliances. For example, considerations of language were key. Language is seen as critical in the execution of successful SAM alliances, allowing organizations to work together, as in alliance 3, or driving a wedge that could present a significant obstacle to collaboration if not sufficiently considered by collaborating parties, as in alliance 2. Nevertheless, from a standpoint of identification of alliances, language did not play as important a role as originally anticipated. Such multicultural alliances are forced by their nature to have a lingua franca, which in the case of most alliances studied was English. Additional considerations of language are discussed below in the treatment of implications for future research.

The survey also highlighted another important consideration when examining such alliances. Finding successful, high-SAM alliances which have been in existence for a long period of time is very difficult. This observation is not surprising if one considers the implications of technology, travel, access to information, and other practical matters that have tended to facilitate global collaboration in the past few decades as compared to prior times. The consideration of globalization highlights the fact that, although factors exist which tend to facilitate large scale collaboration across vast geography, many of these evolutions have taken place only recently.

The multi-case study of alliances was intended to look deeper into themes common to successful, high-SAM alliances. Looking across the three cases presented, some of the themes from the literature are supported, such as the importance of trust in relationships and the observation of unilateral commitments, such as in alliance 1. Evolution of trust was a common theme throughout the three alliances studied. Where parties undertook additional burden or risk
on behalf of the other, especially when there was not immediate foreseeable gain for the acting party, the relationships improved overall.

Another theme common in the cases studied was that of inter-alliance tension between the collaborating parties. While in all three cases, there was certainly evidence of parties finding ways to work with one another for mutual benefit, and in the case of alliance 3 benefit exogenous to the alliance counterparties as well, in all cases the parties had to find ways to identify and resolve conflict. Leadership interventions that were most common across the cases studied for responding to conflict included driving a common message, focusing on measurable goals, and paying strong attention to advocacy on the part of absent aggrieved parties. In the case of advocacy on the part of absent aggrieved parties, this theme was especially relevant in alliance 2, where one party to the alliance had to represent the other party in potential conflict situations with the common customer. In alliance 3, the manifestation of this advocacy was made even more real by the observation that the very livelihood of potentially impacted people could rest on the ability of leaders to recognize and address the need for advocacy while pursuing the objectives of the alliance.

A final theme, related to leadership intervention but more specifically to the structure of leadership within alliances was that of organizational makeup as related to the counterparty organizations in the alliance. In all three cases, fairly complex organizations came together to form an alliance which had a leadership structure proprietary to that alliance. In alliance 2, the two parties had vastly different organizational structures, one being a very flat, matrix-type organization and the other being a very hierarchical organization. In alliance 1 and alliance 3, the partnering organizations had similar structures, though the significant difference in size and organizational mandate had resulted in different levels of empowerment in the respective
organizations. In all cases, an alliance leadership structure was constructed which forced a sort of parity that allowed the alliance to have a power dynamic of its own, allowing for pursuit of the alliance goals. This structuring of the alliance apart from the structure of the partnering organizations was in fact a hallmark of the strategic nature of these relationships. Figure 5.1 presents the themes observed in terms of exacerbating themes, which tended to make the alliance more difficult, mitigating themes, which tended to improve the alliance relationship, disabling themes, which tended to be compounded by other dynamics, and the overall enabling theme of alliance trust.

Figure 5.1. Juxtaposition of themes observed in the cases.
Apart from the themes observed, the multi-case study was also intended to uncover the influence of SAM characteristics on the day-to-day experiences of alliance participants and collaborating organizations. Looking at the strategic nature of the relationship, participants in all three alliances noted a kind of evolution. In the case of alliance 1, the relationship began as more of a quid pro quo relationship and was transformed through unilateral commitment and leadership intervention to uncover learning and promote best practices. In the case of alliance 2, the alliance was strategic from the beginning, but matured in that regard as the partnering organizations learned how to work past the lack of exclusivity in their relationship. By keeping dialogue open when other parties were involved and by ensuring that all participants had much to gain by working together, the strategic nature of the relationship was enriched throughout the life of the alliance, which continues today. In the case of alliance 3, the partnering organizations had a very strong strategic relationship from the beginning. The degree to which that strong relationship influenced the individuals and organizations manifested itself in the way that the alliance leadership was able to respond to external forces working at cross purposes with the alliance, especially in the political arena.

The asymmetric nature of the relationship had impact that was quite different in the three alliances studied. In the case of alliance 1 and alliance 3, asymmetry was designed into the formation of the alliance, the partners having sought each other out exactly because they had different skills and resources to bring to the table. Individuals were united in their recognition of the asymmetry and articulate in the ways in which that asymmetry played itself out in the prosecution of the alliance objectives. In the case of alliance 2, the asymmetry was more subtle, and thus the impact on the individuals and organizations was less obvious to those interviewed. While participants in this alliance noted the resources, organizational size, and other factors to be
different, the nature of the work of this alliance was such that any asymmetry played out much more with regard to the client itself than with the partnering organizations.

The three alliances diverged significantly with respect to the manifestation of multiculture. In alliance 1, multiculture was initially a problem for the partnering organizations. Parties on both sides of the relationship struggled with understanding the other and came to realize the need to learn to work together in this regard. In the case of alliance 2, multiculture was, and always is, a part of the special relationship formed. At times, the alliance participants seemed to embrace this aspect of their relationship and at other times multiculture was sublimated in favor of presenting a united front, either to the client or to the marketplace. In the case of alliance 3, perhaps the most multicultural of all of the alliances studied, multiculture was so much a part of the coming together of the two organizations that individuals not only had difficulty discussing the concept, but also agreed paradoxically that it was critical to the success of the alliance.

A final intent of the multi-case study was to explore the way in which the behaviors, interventions, and leadership styles of leaders influenced the successful outcomes of these alliances. In the case of alliance 3 and alliance 1, there were charismatic leaders who believed in the mission of the alliance and found ways to make the relationship work. These leaders were humble in their reflection of their own influence. For example, P3.1 talked selflessly about how all parties came together to achieve the goals of alliance 3 while others were almost unanimous in citing him as a key driving force behind the success of the alliance due to his personal passion and his ability to win over the hearts and minds of others. In the case of alliance 2, the style of leadership was sublimated to a degree by the matrix nature of the relationship, with teams of leadership manifesting in the form of steering committees, shadow leadership relationships, and
other complex structures. The question of style was, to significant degree, sublimated by the methodological approach to client engagements.

Considering the efficacy of leadership interventions, alliance 2 and alliance 1 were very similar, with alliance 3 presenting as more unique. In the first two alliances, leaders saw either risk to the achievement of goals or additional opportunity for future collaboration and put programs and policies in place to capture unmet needs of the collaborating organizations. In the case of alliance 3, the leadership interventions were seen by participants as much more focused at the practical issues of funding and mandate, with grassroots efforts playing an additional key role in the ultimate success of the alliance, even to the point where the alliance itself has been dissolved, but the work continues through programs that were inspired by it or directly created through the auspices of program activities.

Discussion

The consideration of questions above leads to several conclusions about the experience of leaders in successful, high-SAM alliances. First, is the temporal nature of the attribution of SAM to an alliance. As noted in the evolution of the concept, all alliances have some degree of strategic, asymmetric, and multicultural makeup. In some alliances, the manifestation of these attributions is very low, even when perceived across multiple ways of asking the question and according to the characterization of multiple alliance participants on different sides of the relationship. In other alliances, one or more of the dimensions is the very hallmark of the relationship, as was seen with the alliances studied. What was very clear in all cases was that alliances mature over time. In some cases, the manifestation of that maturity is a lessening of one or more of the SAM characteristics, while in other cases the opposite is observed. These
changes can be a result of the overt intentionality of leaders of the alliance or a natural progression from external forces and circumstances.

Several authors have addressed the changing nature of alliances over time. For example, Slywotzky, Baumgartner, Alberts, and Moukanas (2006) wrote of the shift from initial areas of focus traditional to alliances, such as outsourcing, to much more complex relationships enabled by technology and the resulting improvements in communication and access to information. Wrote the authors:

Globalization will tend to make strong business designs stronger (through global sourcing, selling, and science). It will make weak business designs weaker (through more competition, reduced differentiation, and a greater disconnect from customers). And it will create more no-profit zones for companies and even entire industries. (p. 24)

Similarly, Austin (2000) wrote of the importance of actively managing the dynamics of a relationship over time suggesting “the ultimate effectiveness of an alliance, however, is a function of how well the partners manage their interaction. It is important that a partnership be viewed as a relationship rather than a deal” (p. 121).

There are potential counter arguments to the conclusions drawn here. One of these arguments is that SAM characteristics have only an anecdotal relationship to alliance success and, therefore, one must consider other descriptive or exogenous factors to understand these complex relationships. For example, Cullinan and Holland (2002) cited critical elements of strategic due diligence including market and industry dynamics, competitor and customer analysis, and opportunities for growth. These alliance criteria are more focused on aspects of an alliance that tie to operational efficiencies and mutual synergies. Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (2000) looked at related themes, such as the continuum from specificity to diffuseness, which relates to one of the mitigating themes in Figure 5.1 of common messaging, but also wrote of other continuums relating to status in organizations and the treatment of time.
These themes may relate to mitigating or exacerbating themes described herein. While it is certainly true that there are many other factors related to the outcome of an alliance, and certainly over the broad spectrum of alliance activity as many reasons to form alliances as to presume to understand their degree of success, there seems to be a clear emergence of these characteristics as not only directly related to the outcome of the alliances studied, but also to the very essence of why these alliances were formed and the important work that they set out to accomplish.

Another observation with regard to successful, high-SAM alliances relates to the way in which these types of alliances will necessarily need to evolve over time. Exogenous factors, such as evolving statutory changes intended to force transparency and to address potential concerns over domination of global markets and collaboration with governmental denied parties, are examples of changes in the global landscape which will require a response in the formation and execution of complex strategic alliances. A related study by Delios, Inkpen, and Ross (2004) looked, essentially, at unsuccessful alliances. The authors wrote of alliances which continue to struggle over time, despite failing to meet alliance objectives. The authors concluded that factors such as high termination costs, egregious visibility of the collaboration, and significant sunk investment as among the factors that cause such alliances to perpetuate. One potential response to this type of impetus would be a ratcheting-back on the part of partnering organizations, tending to be more insular in order to mitigate risk. Such a response may occur in the short term, but the compelling arguments in favor of increased global collaboration, especially with regard to organizations that have different size, ability, and access to resources, seem to portend an increase in the future incidence of high-SAM relationships in alliance formation and execution.
Related to the changing landscape with regard to formation of high-SAM alliances is the evolving efficiency of markets and economies. Segil (2004) wrote of the evolution of organizations in response to the increasing sophistication of the markets they serve. Citing two organizations which started with a small customer base and grew while the sophistication of the market and the customer evolved, the author wrote:

No matter how large Staples has become, their primary customer remains the individual and small business owner. In that respect, they are a large company that must consistently think small. They are similar to ValleyCrest Companies, which has become the biggest in their industry of landscape services and still owned by one family. They, too, maintain their competitive advantage by serving one customer at a time, whether it is a landscape architect, a developer, a corporation, city, county, state, the U.S. Olympics Committee, a home owners association, or, in select cases an individual. (p. 193)

As seen in alliance 3, leaders in organizations who can respond to such evolving efficiencies will be more effective in putting forth programs and solutions than those who try to perpetuate a one-size-fits-all approach to delivery of products and services.

Ultimately, organizational structures in alliances need to be flexible in order to respond to such change and agile enough to make changes that keep pace with the evolving demand for the products and services put forth. Posth (2006) wrote of his experience leading the first Chinese-German automobile factory. This massive undertaking of a strategic, asymmetric, multicultural effort that was without precedent serves as an excellent example of the need for flexibility in organizational structures, as well as the evolving demands for products and services. Itschert and ul-Haq (2003) presented another such example in an unrelated industry—international banking.

**Implications for Leadership and Change**

The realization that globalization is naturally forcing strategic relationships, asymmetry, and multiculture to the forefront, that alliances high in SAM characteristics are more the stuff of future alliances, and that it is markedly more difficult to succeed in such alliances brings about
significant and sobering reflections for practitioners of alliance activities. Most notably, skills and experiences which may have made one successful in the past may be inadequate to drive success in the future. Alliance leadership, especially in large organizations, tends to be grown from within, with leaders often selected based on past performance in successful alliance or related activities. If the nature of alliances is changing and the makeup of alliance leadership does not keep pace with that change, alliance success will suffer. It is, therefore, important for alliance leadership to be cognizant of this dynamic and to continually invite external learning, not only in terms of education and training, but also in terms of involving leadership from different cultures and different organizational contexts.

Alliance activity must also be carefully considered from the perspective of leading change in organizations. As organizations rely more heavily on partnering-type activities to achieve growth and mitigate risk, leaders of change must consider aspects such as asymmetry and multiculture not simply as interesting reflections on their external relationships, but as centers of focus for effective change programs. As seen in the examples studied, especially in alliance 1 and alliance 2, change programs within organizations that consider asymmetry and multiculture can be extremely effective in catalyzing meaningful growth, not only in terms of organizational success, but also in terms of personal growth of the people involved.

Finally, with regard to people in a broader sense, it is important to reflect on the importance of considering the strategic, asymmetric, and multicultural makeup of alliances with regard to humanistic implications. As seen in the alliances studied here, culture within an organization can grow quite richly, as in alliance 1, to the betterment of all parties involved. Learning to work together with regard to these aspects of an alliance can also impact potential marginalization and create great social benefit, as was seen in alliance 2. Leaders who strive to
learn from such alliance activity can in fact inform others in a way that not only drives effective change, but also produces lasting external benefit.

Regarding organizations seeking the type of collaboration discussed, there are a number of practical recommendations that can be offered. To emphasize the focus on evolving skills, alliance leadership should evaluate the alliance work plans and resource allocations to make sure that participants have ample time for learning and growing together. Placing individuals in roles where their skills can be challenged and grow will help not only the individuals, but also the alliance itself and future collaboration where leaders will need constantly evolving skills to succeed. Change leadership should similarly be overt with regard to multiculture in particular. As seen in this study, multiculture is a particularly challenging element of SAM. Alliance leaders who take a one-size-fits-all approach to change leadership must be challenged to consider how the alliance needs to evolve differently in different cultures. Training should focus on communication and team building to foster the evolution of increased mutual trust. This approach requires careful consideration, as any overt effort to apply different practices in one part of the world could also lead to unintended marginalization. Thus, ongoing evaluation of the efficacy of change leadership interventions is also strongly recommended. Ultimately, the greatest need is for transparency and continual re-evaluation, not only to ensure the efficacy of leadership interventions, but also to account for the changing nature of alliance makeup over time.

**Future Research**

There were necessarily limitations to this research which can provide important opportunities for others to continue this work. A compelling example, as noted above, is the further consideration of language. While language was carefully considered in this study,
ultimately it did not play a large role in the study of these alliances. As alliance activity matures and additional examples of successful, high-SAM alliances emerge in truly multilingual settings, it could be very valuable to consider how language, metaphor, writing system, and related factors influence such alliance activity. Harkness, Van de Vijver, and Mohler (2003) outlined one method of treating language differences in survey methods via the use of translators, reviewers, and adjudicators. Nevertheless, such methods would need to be carefully designed so that the language itself is not the key focus of the study.

Language is not the only factor that was under-represented in this study. Another area which was limited was access to certain types of alliances. For example, secretive government operations, highly secure private sector activities such as applied research, and illegal organizations and affiliations could present fascinating extensions to this line of research. Of necessity, potential researchers in looking at these types of alliances would face even more daunting challenges in terms of access, informed consent, and ethical considerations. Nevertheless, a study which discovers an appropriate treatment for such concerns could be very effective and compelling.

Another consideration in terms of continuing research would be potential augmentation to support the findings herein. For example, a quantitative, factor-based analysis that could develop an evaluative scale for better stratification of SAM characteristics, coupled with the understanding of the themes and experiential learnings presented in this study, could be very effective for furthering the understanding of these alliances. Another abstraction of quantitative approach, possibly enabled by such a scale, would be a study of the evolution of SAM over time and how such evolution influences alliance success.
Conclusion

In the introduction to this study, I noted that it is difficult to find examples of organizations that operate on a significant scale without a form of collaboration. One can see collaboration in a myriad of examples apart from business. For example, in world politics, one sees the formation of coalitions and alliances to respond to mounting global threats as well as to respond to environmental and social challenges. In technology, one sees collaboration in the form of emerging capabilities, such as sentiment analysis and cloud computing. In our school systems, one sees emerging models for groups to work together on team projects and group learning activities. In business, a natural analog to these dynamics is clearly the mounting incidence of alliance activity. Through careful consideration of types of alliances such as strategic, asymmetric, multicultural alliances, leaders can inform their thinking and challenge themselves and others to new aspirations. My aspiration in this regard is that this work will inform in some small way that thinking and inspire others to collaborate in new ways in business or future research.
APPENDIX
Appendix A: Exemplars Used for Final Survey

For each of the four parts of the survey, I used the following as a basis for the survey questions:

Part I - success of the alliance


Part II - strategic makeup of the alliance


Part III - degree of asymmetry (equality in access to resources and other factors)


Part IV - cultural makeup of the alliance

(Please note that due to technology differences, the appearance of the online survey differs from the presentation of the survey below. The instructions and text, however, are the same.)

STRATEGIC ALLIANCE SURVEY – Page 1 of 6

Introduction

This survey is being conducted as part of doctoral research for a dissertation on the topic of multicultural strategic alliances.

I am requesting your participation in this survey based on your involvement in one or more business alliances (e.g., joint ventures, partnerships, or other shared equity organizational structures).

Throughout the survey, the following terminology is used:
• “alliance organizations” is used to refer to the organizations involved in these relationships.
• “alliance participants” is used to refer to the people who are working in the alliance.

Individual responses will not be identified and will be treated in strictest confidence. To protect your privacy, you are not required to supply your name or the name of your organization to participate in this survey.

This survey is divided into four parts.

• Part I pertains to the success of the alliance.
• Part II pertains to the strategic makeup of the alliance.
• Part III pertains to the degree of symmetry (equality in access to resources and other factors).
• Part IV pertains to the cultural makeup of the alliance.

Please note: If you have been involved in more than one alliance, select the alliance with which you are most familiar and limit your responses to thinking about only that one alliance when answering this survey.

Thank you very much for your participation. Your time and effort are sincerely appreciated.

Anthony J. Scriffignano
ascriffignano@phd.antioch.edu
+1 973-226-4277
Basic Identifying Information

Please provide a general understanding of the alliance that you are considering for this survey.

Description of the alliance (e.g., Joint venture between a French manufacturing company and a U.S. automobile company). [ ]

Approximate duration of the alliance (in years and months). [ ]

Is the alliance still in existence [YES/NO]

How long was/is your personal involvement with the alliance (in years and months)? [ ]

You may wish access to the final published dissertation. Additionally, as part of future phases of this research, it would be helpful to contact some respondents. If you would be willing to be contacted for either reason, please provide contact information (email address and/or phone number). Any contact information you share will be kept strictly confidential and will not be shared with any third party. [ ]
# PART I - Alliance Success

Please double-click on only one box per statement to indicate the degree to which it applies to the alliance. Note: If you are not completely sure how to answer a question, please select the best possible answer given your understanding. Do not leave any questions blank.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Completely Describes this alliance</th>
<th>Somewhat describes this alliance</th>
<th>Somewhat contrary to this alliance</th>
<th>Completely contrary to this alliance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The alliance organizations have corporate cultures that are compatible</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. There is an alliance charter which clearly defines what all alliance participants must do</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Alliance participants clearly understand what their role requires them to do in the alliance</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Senior leadership on all sides of the alliance is highly supportive of the alliance</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Alliance participants feel comfortable engaging in open, honest communication</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Alliance participants are willing to share knowledge</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The alliance organizations have objectives that are mutually consistent</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The alliance is operated independently from the operation of the individual organizations involved in the alliance</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Alliance participants take active steps to build and sustain mutual trust</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Alliance participants share influence in the alliance appropriately</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### PART II - Alliance Strategic Makeup

*Please double-click on only one box per statement to indicate the degree to which it applies to the alliance. Note: If you are not completely sure how to answer a question, please select the best possible answer given your understanding. Do not leave any questions blank.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The alliance organizations share proportionally (in accordance with their investment) in the success of the alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The alliance organizations have compatible missions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The alliance organizations have compatible values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The alliance organizations serve similar markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The alliance organizations have compatible core competencies to enable the alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The alliance organizations have compatible products to enable the alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The alliance organizations have compatible objectives for the alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The alliance organizations share a common view of the value that is delivered to customers by the alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The alliance organizations have compatible strategic intents for the alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The alliance organizations share a common view of alliance success metrics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### STRATEGIC ALLIANCE SURVEY – Page 5 of 6

#### PART III - Alliance Symmetry

*Please double-click on only one box per statement to indicate the degree to which it applies to the alliance. Note: If you are not completely sure how to answer a question, please select the best possible answer given your understanding. Do not leave any questions blank.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Completely Describes this alliance</th>
<th>Somewhat Describes this alliance</th>
<th>Somewhat Contrary to this alliance</th>
<th>Completely Contrary to this alliance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. One of the alliance organizations has significantly greater market share</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. One of the alliance organizations has many more years in business</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. One of the alliance organizations holds significantly more equity in the alliance than the other</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Only one of the alliance organizations previously did business in the country where the alliance is primarily operating</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. One of the alliance organizations has greater financial resources</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The alliance is based on a contract rather than equity joint venture</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. One of the alliance organizations has more need to demonstrate success quickly</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. One of the alliance organizations has more employees</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. One of the alliance organizations has greater revenue</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. One of the alliance organizations has greater brand recognition in the country of the alliance</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### PART IV - Alliance Cultural Makeup

Please double-click on only one box per statement to indicate the degree to which it applies to the alliance. **Note:** If you are not completely sure how to answer a question, please select the best possible answer given your understanding. Do not leave any questions blank.

The questions in this section use the term “national culture.” This term is intended to refer to the typical business culture (i.e., ideas, corporate identities, educational foundation, heritage, language, or other demographic aspects) from a particular part of the world with which the alliance organization primarily identifies itself. If an alliance organization is multinational, the term should refer to the country most predominantly influencing the alliance organization at the operational level that interacts with the alliance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Completely Describes this alliance</th>
<th>Somewhat describes this alliance</th>
<th>Somewhat contrary to this alliance</th>
<th>Completely contrary to this alliance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The national culture of one alliance organization is more sensitive to punctuality</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The national culture of one alliance organization is more team-oriented</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The national cultures differ with respect to favoring direct communication over working through diplomatic channels</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The national cultures differ in their treatment of ambiguity</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The national cultures differ with respect to hierarchical management styles</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The national cultures differ with respect to harmonious labor relations</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The national cultures differ with respect to adoption of technology</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The national cultures differ with respect to focus on marketing vs. engineering</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The national cultures differ with respect to business / government relations</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The national cultures differ with respect to the rate of change in the business environment</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**END OF SURVEY**
Appendix B: Interview Template

I will first thank the research participant for his or her time and express my gratitude for their important contribution. I will set expectations that the interview will take no longer than 60 minutes. I will ask the research participant to confirm that they agree that I will record the interview and that I will remove all information that may identify the participant, but may use the transcript in whole or in part in my dissertation.

I will then say, approximately:

We are speaking today because you have experience in a strategic alliance that has very interesting characteristics, being multicultural (I will allude to the countries involved), and also involving parties with different access to resources (I will allude to the specific resources that lead to asymmetry, be they funding, people, market share, etc.). I am interested in your experience in this alliance, what it “felt like” to you.

1. How has your alliance experience been influenced by the fact that you have a strategic relationship with [name of other party] rather than a simple fee for service relationship?

2. Please describe the differences in access to resources, for example funding, people, market share, and how they affect your alliance relationship.

3. Considering the fact that [name of partner] is primarily a [dominant culture of partner] organization and [name of research participant’s organization] is primarily a [dominant culture of research participant’s organization] organization, can you describe how this cultural difference has influenced your alliance, either positively or negatively.
4. If you think about your experiences throughout your involvement in this alliance, do you see any themes that are characteristic of your working relationships with your partners?

5. How has the leadership of this alliance addressed the kinds of organizational differences we have been discussing today?

I will listen to the responses to each question, interjecting only to confirm my understanding of anything said by the participant. If the participant feels the need to use words or phrases in a foreign language (presuming I speak that language), I will not interject, though I will seek to conduct the preponderance of the discussion in English.

I will attempt to pace the conversation so that I have some degree of response to each of the 5 questions.

At the conclusion of the interview, I will again thank the participant for their time and attention to this effort.
References


