



# CREATIVITY OF STRATEGIC ALLIANCES AND JOINT VENTURES

Academic B. Djordjevic(1), Ph.D. S. Miletic(2)

## *Performance*

*Any company that aspires to industry leadership in 21<sup>st</sup> century must think in terms of global, not domestic market leadership. The world economy is globalizing at an accelerating pace as countries previously closed to foreign companies open up their markets, as the Internet shrinks the importance of geographic distance, and as ambitious growth-minded companies race to build stronger competitive positions in the markets of more and more countries.*

*This chapter focuses on strategy options for expanding beyond domestic boundaries and competing in the market of either a few or a great many countries.*

*In the process of exploring these issues, we will introduce a number of correct concepts-multicountry competition, global competition, profit sanctuaries, and cross-market subsidization. The chapter includes section of market conditions; strategy options for entering and competing in foreign markets, the importance of locating operations in the most advantageous countries and so on.*

## **Introduction**

Strategic alliances, joint ventures, and other cooperative agreements with foreign companies are a favorite and potentially fruitful means for entering a foreign market or strengthening a firm's competitiveness in world markets.<sup>1</sup>

**Cross-border alliances have proved to be popular and viable vehicles for companies to edge their way into the markets of foreign countries.**

Historically, export-minded firms in industrialized nations sought alliances with firms in less- developed countries to import and market their products locally – such arrangements were often necessary to win approval for entry from the host country's government. Both Japanese and American companies are actively forming alliances with European companies to strengthen their ability to compete in the 25-nation European

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1. Joel Bleeke and David Ernst. "The Way to Win in Cross-Border Alliances," Harvard Business Review 69, no. 8 (November-December 1991), pp. 127-35, and Gary Hamel, Yves L. Doz., and C.K. Prahalad, "Collaborative with Your Competitors – and Win", Harvard Business Review 67, no. 1 (January-February 1989), pp. 133-39.



Union (and the five countries that are seeking to become EU members) and to capitalize on the opening up of Eastern European markets. Many U.S. and European companies are allying with Asian companies in their efforts to enter markets in China, India, Malaysia, Thailand, and other Asian countries. Companies in Europe, Latin America, and Asia are using alliances and joint ventures as a means of strengthening their mutual ability to compete across a wider geographical area – for instance, all the countries in the European Union or whole continents or most all country markets where there is sizable demand for the industry's product. Many foreign companies, of course, are particularly interested in strategic partnerships that will strengthen their ability to gain a foothold in U.S. market.

However, cooperative arrangements between domestic and foreign companies have strategic appeal for reasons besides gaining better access to attractive country markets.<sup>2</sup> A second big appeal of cross-border alliances is to capture economies of scale in production and/or marketing – cost reduction can be the difference that allows a company to be cost-competitive. By joining forces in producing components, assembling models, and marketing their products, companies can realize cost savings not achievable with their own small volumes. A third motivation for entering into a cross-border alliance is to fill gaps in technical expertise and/or knowledge of local markets (buying habits and product preferences of consumers, local customs, and so on). Allies learn much from one another in performing joint research, sharing technological know-how, studying one another's manufacturing methods, and understanding how to tailor sales and marketing approaches to fit local cultures and traditions. Indeed, one of the win-win benefits of an alliances is to learn from the skills, technological know-how, and capabilities of alliance partners and implant the knowledge and know-how of these partners in personnel throughout the company.

A fourth motivation for cross-border alliances is to share distribution facilities and dealer networks, thus mutually strengthening their access to buyers. A fifth benefit is that cross-border allies can direct their competitive energies more toward mutual rivals and less toward one another; teaming up may help them close the gap on leading companies. A sixth driver of cross-border alliances comes into play when companies are an effective way to tap into a partner's local market knowledge and help it establish working relationships with key officials in the host-country government.<sup>3</sup> And, finally, alliances can be a particularly useful way for companies across the world to gain agreement on important technical standards – they have been used to arrive at standards for DVD players, assorted PC devices, Internet-related technologies, high-definition televisions, and mobile phones.

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2. See L. Doz and Gary Hamel. *Alliance Advantage* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1998), especially Chapters 2-4; Bleeke and Ernst, "*The Way to Win*", pp. 127-33; Hamel, Doz, and Prahalad, "*Collaborative with Your Competitors*", pp. 134-35; and Porter, *Competitive Advantage*, p. 66.

3. Christensen, "*Corporate Strategy*", p. 43.



**Cross-border alliances enable a growth-minded company to widen its geographic coverage and strengthen its competitiveness in foreign markets while, at the same time, offering flexibility and allowing company to retain some degree of autonomy and operating control.**

What makes cross-border alliances an attractive strategic means of gaining the above types of benefits (as compared to acquiring or merging with foreign-based companies to gain much the same benefits) is that entering into alliances and strategic partnerships to gain market access and/or expertise of one kind or another allows a company to preserve its independence (which is not the case with a merger), retain veto power over how the alliance operates, and avoid using perhaps scarce financial resources to fund acquisitions. Furthermore, an alliance offers the flexibility to readily disengage once its purpose has been served or if the benefits prove elusive, whereas an acquisition is more permanent sort of arrangement (although the acquired company can, of course, be divested).<sup>4</sup>

### **The Risks of Strategic Alliances with Foreign Partners**

Alliances and joint ventures with foreign partners have their pitfalls, however. Cross-border allies typically have to overcome language and cultural barriers and figure out how to deal with diverse (or perhaps conflicting) operating practices. The communication, trust-building, and coordination costs are high in terms of management time.<sup>5</sup> It is not unusual for there to be little personal chemistry among some of the key people on whom success or failure of the alliance depends – the rapport such personnel need to work well together may never emerge. And even if allies are able to develop productive personnel relationships, they can still have trouble reaching mutually agreeable ways to deal with key issues or resolve differences. There is a natural tendency for allies to struggle to collaborate effectively in competitively sensitive areas, thus spawning suspicions on both sides about forthright exchanges of information and expertise. Occasionally, the egos of corporate executives can clash – an alliance between Northwest Airlines and KLM Royal Dutch Airlines resulted in a bitter feud among both companies' top official (who, according to some reports, refused to speak to each other).<sup>6</sup> In addition, there is the thorny problem of getting alliance partners to sort through issues and reach decision fast enough to stay abreast of rapid advances in technology or fast-changing market conditions.

It requires many meetings of many people working in good faith over time to iron out what is to be shared, what is to remain proprietary, and how the cooperative arrange-

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4. For an excellent presentation on the pros and cons of alliances versus acquisitions, see: Jeffrey H. Dyer, Prashant Kale, and Harbir Singh "When to Ally and When to Acquire" *Harvard Business Review* 82, no. 7/8 (July-August 2004), pp. 109-15.

5. Doz and Hamel, *Alliance Advantage*, Chapters 2-7, and Rosabeth Moss Kanter, "Collaborative Advantage: The Art of the Alliance", *Harvard Business Review* 72, No. 4 (July-August 1994), pp. 96-108.

6. Shawn Tully "The Alliances from Hell", *Fortune*, June 24, 1996, pp. 64-72.



ments will work. Often, once the bloom is off the rose, partners discover they have conflicting objectives and strategies, deep differences of opinion about how to proceed, or important differences in corporate values and ethical standards. Tensions build up, working relationships cool, and the hoped-for benefits never materialize.<sup>7</sup>

Even if the alliance becomes a win-win proposition for both parties, there is the danger of becoming overly dependent on foreign partners for essential expertise and competitive capabilities of its own, then at some juncture cross-border merger or acquisition may have to be substituted for cross-border alliances and joint ventures.

**Strategic alliances are more effective in helping establish a beachhead of new opportunity in world markets than in achieving and sustaining global leadership.**

One of the lessons about cross-border alliances is that they are more effective in helping a company establish a beachhead of new opportunity in world markets than they are in enabling a company to achieve and sustain global market leadership. Global market leaders, while benefiting from alliances, usually must guard against becoming overly dependent on the assistance they get from alliance partners-otherwise, they are not masters of their own destiny.

**When a Cross-Border Alliance May Be Unnecessary**

Experienced multinational companies that market in 50 to 100 or more countries across the world find less need for entering into cross-border alliances than do companies in the early stages of globalizing their operations.<sup>8</sup> Multinational companies make it a point to develop senior managers who understand how “the system” works in different countries; these companies can also avail themselves of local managerial talent and know-how by simply hiring experienced local managers and thereby detouring the hazards of collaborative alliances with local managers and thereby detouring the hazards of collaborative alliances with local companies. If a multinational enterprise with considerable experience in entering the markets of different countries wants to detour the hazards and hassles of allying with local business, it can simply assemble a capable management team consisting of both senior managers with considerable international experience and local managers. The responsibilities of its own in-house managers with international business savvy are (1) to transfer technology, business practices, and the corporate culture into the company’s operations in the new country market, and (2) to serve as conduits for the flow of information between the corporate office and local operations. The responsibilities of local managers are (1) to contribute needed understanding of the local markets conditions, local buying habits, and local ways of doing business, and (2) in many cases, to head up local operations.

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7. Jeremy Main, “*Making Global Alliances Work*”, Fortune, December 19, 1990, p. 125.

8. Prahalad and Lieberthal, “*The End of Corporate Imperialism*”, p. 77.



Hence, one cannot automatically presume that a company needs the wisdom and resources of a local partner to guide it through the process of successfully entering the markets of foreign countries. Indeed, experienced multinationals often discover that local partners do not always have adequate local market knowledge – much of the so-called experience of local partners can predate the emergence of current market trends and conditions, and sometimes their operating practices can be archaic.<sup>9</sup>

### Strategy knowledge gap

In the knowledge economy, successful strategic management is critically dependent on managing knowledge affectively in socio-cultural business systems. Knowledge is now recognized by business practitioners and academics as one of the most important sources of innovation and new customer value propositions, emanating from individual, organizational and communal knowledge creativity and utilization. While most extant knowledge management theory and application focus on the organization, and improving its competitive advantages, there is an increasing need to shift this focus to the socio-cultural business system, i.e. understanding and effectively enabling knowledge generation and utilization to enhance the dynamic capabilities of particular socio-cultural business systems.

The purpose of this section is to present three practical frameworks as a basis for understanding systemic strategy-knowledge links. The reader is encouraged to explore the various theories underlying systemic knowledge creation and utilization, e.g. complex adaptive systems theory and autopoiesis theory,<sup>10</sup> and theories of how organizations can become “poised” in their knowledge landscapes by co-evolving with other stakeholders in their business system.<sup>11</sup>

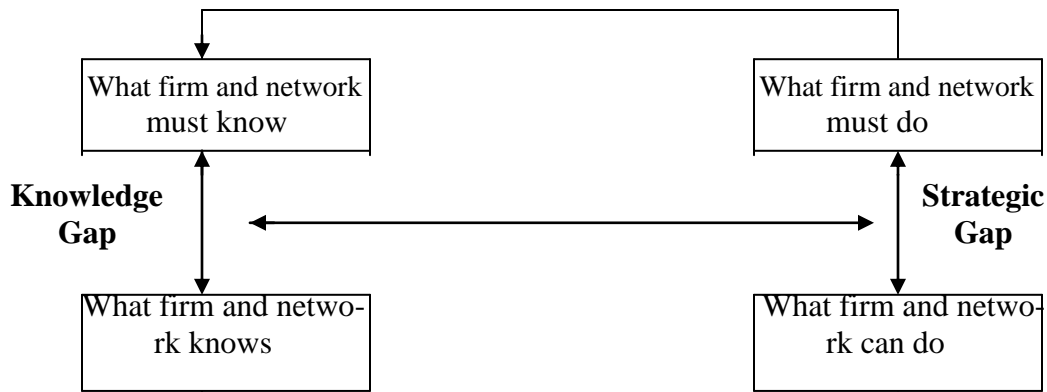


Figure 1. Identifying the systemic strategy-knowledge gap

9. Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Oliver, D. and Roos, J. (2000), *Striking a Balance: Complexity and Knowledge Landscapes*, New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company.

<sup>11</sup> Lissack, M. and Roos, J. (1999) *The Next Common Sense*, London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.



(Source: Adopted from Zack, M.H. (1999), "Developng a Knowledge Strategy", *California Management Review*;41, 136)

### The Knowledge Creating Process in a Business System

The "raison d'etre" of an organization and the socio-cultural business system of which in forms part is to continuously create knowledge and convert this knowledge into socio-cultural value. Knowledge and the capability to create and utilize such knowledge are the most important source of a business network's existence and its sustainability. Various authors, such as Nonaka, Teece, Drucker, Probst, Von Krogh and Stewart consider knowledge as the most important resource in today's economy.<sup>12</sup> Nonaka and Takeuchi propose a knowledge-creating model (the SECI model) for a firm that can also be applied to a business network.

In the above knowledge-creating system, knowledge is created through the SECI spiral (see Figure 2.), that proceeds through four models of conversion between tacit and explicit knowledge:

1. socialization (from tacit knowledge to tacit knowledge);
2. externalization (from tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge);
3. combination (from explicit knowledge to explicit knowledge); and
4. internalization (from explicit knowledge to tacit knowledge).

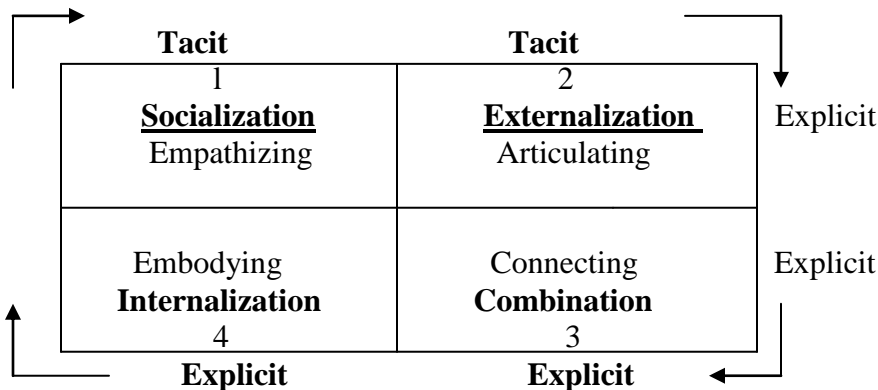


Figure 3. The SECI model of knowledge creation in a business system

(Source: Adopted from Nonaka, I. and Takeuchi, H. (1995). *The Knowledge-Creating Company*, New York: Oxford University Press).

<sup>12</sup> Nonaka, I. (1991) "The Knowledge Creating Company", *Harvard Business Review*, November –December, 96-104; Teece, D.J. (2000), "Strategies for Managing Knowledge Assets: The Role of Firm Structure and Industrial Context", *Long Range Planning*, 33, 35-54; Drucker P. (1993), *Past-Capitalist Society*, Butterworth-Heinemann: London; Devenport, T.H. and Probst, G.J.B. (2002), *Knowledge Management Case Book*, Erlangen: Publicis/Wiley; Devenport, T.H. and Prusak. L.,(1998), *Working Knowledge*, Boston: Harvard Business School Press; Von Krogh, G. (1997), *Intellectual Capital*, London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.





A number of authors e.g. Beinhocker, Govindarajan and Gupta, Hamel, and Kim and Mauborgne, have suggested approaches for “changing the rules of the game”<sup>13</sup> Most of these approaches (or frameworks) consider business models from an individual organization perspective. A framework for co-shaping the development of new business models for an organization in systemic context is presented in Figure 4. which effectively encapsulates the previous framework discussed in this chapter.

Figure 4. indicates that a new business model arises not only from reconfiguring an organization’s core business strategy and dynamic capabilities, but also from making sense of socio-cultural dynamics and gaps, reinventing of customer value proposition(s), and reconfiguring the business network and its value chain. A reconfigured core business strategy should be *results* of systemic insight, foresight and sense making.

### Frameworks for Systemic Strategic Management

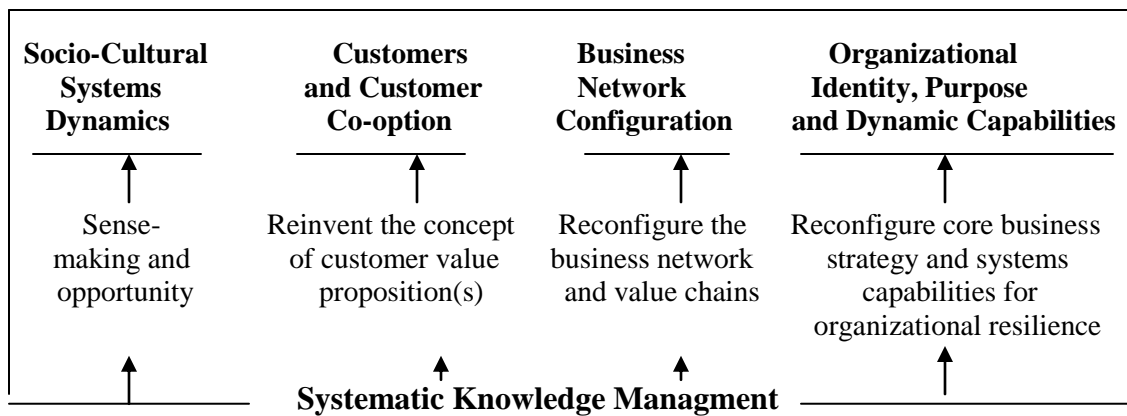


Figure 4. A systemic perspective of developing new business models  
**Strategic that fit the markets of emerging countries**

Companies racing for global leadership have to consider competing in emerging markets like China, India, Brazil, Indonesia and Mexico – countries where the business risks are considerable but where the opportunities for growth are huge, especially as their economies develop and living standards climb towards levels in the industrialized world.<sup>14</sup> With the world now comprising more than 6 billion people – fully one-third of whom are in India and China, and hundreds of millions more in order less-developed countries of Asia and Latin America – a company that aspires to world market leadership

<sup>13</sup> Beinhocker, E.D. (1999), “Robust Adaptive Strategies” *Sloan Management Review*, Spring, 95-106; Govindarajan, V. and Gupta, A. (2001), Strategic Innovation: A Conceptual Road Map”, *Business Horizons*, July-August, 3-12; Hamel, G. (2000), *Leading the Revolution*, Boston: Harvard Business School Press; Kim, C., and Mauborgne, R. (1999), “Strategy, Value, Innovation and the Knowledge Economy”, *Sloan Management Review*, Spring, 41-54.

<sup>14</sup> Prahalad and Lieberthal, “*The End of Corporate Imperialism*”, pp. 68-79, also see David J. Arnold and Hohn A. Quelch, “*New Strategies in Emerging Markets*”, *Sloan Management Review* 40, no.1 Fall 1998), pp. 7-20.



(or to sustained rapid growth) cannot ignore the market opportunities or the base of technical and managerial talent such countries offer. For example, in 2003 China's population of 1.3 billion people consumed nearly 33 percent of the world's annual cotton production, 51 percent of the world's pork, 35 percent of all the cigarettes, 31 percent of worldwide coal production, 27 percent of the world's steel production, 19 percent of the aluminium, 23 percent of the TVs, 20 percent of the cell phones, and 18 percent of the washing machines.<sup>15</sup> China is the world's largest consumer of copper, aluminium, and cement and the second biggest for PCs, and it is on track to become the second largest market for motor vehicle by 2010.

Tailoring products to fit conditions in an emerging-country market, however, often involves more than making minor product changes and becoming more familiar with local cultures.<sup>16</sup> Ford's attempt to sell a Ford Escort in India at a price of \$ 21,000 – a luxury-car price, given that India's best-selling Maruti-Suzuki model sold at the time for \$10,000 or less, and that fewer than 10 percent of Indian households have annual purchasing power greater than \$20,000 – met with a less-than-enthusiastic market response. McDonald's has to offer vegetable burgers in parts of Asia and to rethink its prices, which are often high by local standards and affordable only by the well-to-do. Kellogg has struggled to introduce its cereals successfully because consumers in many less-developed countries do not eat cereal for breakfast – changing habits is difficult and expensive. In several emerging countries, Coca-Cola has found that advertising its world image does not strike a chord with the local populace in a number of emerging-country markets.

Single-serving packages of detergents, shampoos, pickles, cough syrup, and cooking oils are very popular in India because they allow buyers to conserve cash by purchasing only what they need immediately. Thus, many of developed companies find that trying to employ a strategy akin to that used in the market of developed countries is hazardous.<sup>17</sup> Experimenting with some, perhaps many, local twists is usually necessary to find a strategy combination that works.

### Strategy Options

Several strategy options for tailoring a company's strategy to fit the sometimes unusual or challenging circumstances presented in emerging-country markets:

- *Prepare to compete the basis of low price.* Consumers in emerging markets are often highly focused on prices, which can give low-cost local competitors the edge

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15. Brenda Cherry, "What China East (and Drinks and...)" *Fortune*, October 4, 2004., pp. 152-53.

16. Prahalad and Lieberthal, "The End of Corporate Imperialism", pp. 72-73.

17. Tarun Khanna, Krishina G. Palepu, and Jauant Sinha, "Strategies That Fit Emerging Markets", *Harvard Business Review* 83, no. 6 (June 2005), p. 63.





unless a company can find ways to attract buyers with bargaining prices as well as better products.<sup>18</sup> For example, when Unilever entered the market for laundry detergents in India, it realized that 80 percent of population could not afford the brands it was selling to affluent consumers there (or the brands it was selling in wealthier countries). To compete against a low-priced detergent made by a local company, Unilever came up with a low-cost formula that was not harsh to the skin, constructed new low-cost production facilities, packaged the detergent (named Wheel) in single-use amounts so that it could be sold very cheaply, distributed the product to local merchants by handcarts, and crafted an economical marketing campaign that included painted signs on buildings and demonstrations near stores – the new brand quickly captured \$ 100 million in sale and was the number one detergent brand in India in 2004 based on dollar sales. Unilever later replicated the strategy with low-priced packets of shampoos and deodorants in India and in South America with a detergent brand named Ala.

- *Be prepared to modify aspects of the company's business to accommodate local circumstances (but not to much that the company loses the advantage of global scale and global branding).*<sup>19</sup> For instance, when Dell entered China, it discovered that individuals and business were not accustomed to placing orders through the Internet (in North America, over 50 percent of Dell's sales in 2002-2005 were online). To adopt, Dell modified its direct sales model to rely more heavily on phone and fax-order and decided to be patient in getting Chinese customer to place Internet orders. Further, because numerous Chinese government departments and state-owned enterprises insisted that hardware vendors make their bids through distributors and systems integrators (as opposed to dealing directly with Dell salespeople as did large enterprise in other countries), Dell opted to use third parties in marketing its products to this buyer segment (although it did sell through its own sales force where it could).
- *Try to change the local market to better match the way the company does business elsewhere.*<sup>20</sup> A multinational company often has enough market clout to drive major changes in the way a local country market operates. When Hong Kong – based STAR launched its first satellite TV channel in 1991, it profoundly impacted the TV marketplace in India: TV Indian government lost its monopoly on TV broadcasts, several other satellite TV channels aimed at Indian audiences quickly emerged, and the excitement of additional channels triggered a boom in TV manufacturing in India. When Japan's Suzuki entered India in 1981, it triggered a quality revolution among Indian auto parts manufacturers. Local parts and components suppliers teamed up Suzuki's vendors in Japan and worked with Japanese expert to produce higher-quality products. Over the next two decades, Indian companies be-

<sup>18</sup> Prahalad and Lieberthal, *"The End of Corporate Imperialism"*, p. 72.

<sup>19</sup> Khanna, Oalepu, and Sinha, *"Strategies That Fit Emerging Markets"*, pp. 73-74.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 74.



came very proficient in making top-notch parts and country other than Japan, and broke into the global market as suppliers to many automakers in Asia and other parts of the world.

- *Stay away from those emerging markets where it is impractical or uneconomic to modify the company's business model to accommodate local circumstances.*<sup>21</sup> Home Depot has avoided entry into most Latin American countries because its value proposition of good quality, low prices, and attentive customer service relies on (1) good highway and logistical systems to minimize store inventory costs, (2) employee stock ownership to help motivate store personnel to provide good customer service, and (3) high labor cost for housing construction and home repairs to encourage homeowners to engage in do-it-yourself projects.

Company experiences in entering developing markets like China, India, Russia, and Brazil indicate that profitability seldom comes quickly or easily. Building a market for the company's products can often turn into a long – term process that involves reduction of consumers, sizable investments in advertising and promotion to alter tastes and buying habits, and upgrades of the local infrastructure (the supplier base, transportation systems, distribution channels, labor markets, and capital markets). In such cases, a company must be system to improve the infrastructure, and lay the foundation for generating sizable revenues and profits once conditions are ripe for market takeoff.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 76.



**Profitability in emerging markets rarely comes quickly or easily – new entrants have to adopt their business models and strategies to local conditions and be patient in earning a profit.**

<b>Industry Pressures to Globalize</b>	High	Dodge rivals by shifting to a new business model or market niche	Contend on a global level
	Low	Defend by using home-field advantage	Transfer company expertise to cross-border markets
		Tailored for Home Market	Transferable to Other Countries
		<b>Resources and Competitive Capabilities</b>	

*Figure 1. Strategy Option for Local Companies in Competing Against Global Companies*  
 Source: Adopting from Niroj Dawar and Tony Frost “Competing with Giants Survival Strategies for Local Companies in Emerging Markets”, Harvard Business Review 77, no. 1 (January-February 1999), p. 122.

**Abstract**

Strategic alliances with foreign partners have appeal from several angles: gaining wider access to attractive country markets, allowing capture of economies of scale in production and/or marketing, filling gaps in technical expertise and/or knowledge of local markets, saving on costs by sharing distribution facilities and dealer networks, helping gain agreement on important technical standards and helping combat the impact of alliances that rivals have formed. Cross-border strategies alliances are fast reshaping competition in world markets, pitting one group of allied global companies against other group of allied global companies.

There are three ways in which a firm can gain competitive advantage (or offset domestic disadvantages) in global markets. *One way* involves locating various value chain activities among nations in a manner that lowers costs or achieves greater product diff-



erentiation. A *second way* involves efficient and effective transfer of competitively valuable competencies and capabilities from its domestic markets to foreign markets. A *third way* draws on a multinational or global competitor's ability to deepen or broaden its resource strengths and capabilities and to coordinate its dispersed activities in ways that a domestic-only competitor cannot.

### Endnotes

1. Joel Bleeke and David Ernst. "The Way to Win in Cross-Border Alliances," Harvard Business Review 69, no. 8 (November-December 1991), pp. 127-35, and Gary Hamel, Yves L. Doz., and C.K. Prahalad, "Collaborative with Your Competitors – and Win", Harvard Business Review 67, no. 1 (January-February 1989), pp. 133-39.
2. See L. Doz and Gary Hamel. Alliance Advantage (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1998), especially Chapters 2-4; Bleeke and Ernst, "The Way to Win", pp. 127-33; Hamel, Doz, and Prahalad, "Collaborative with Your Competitors", pp. 134-35; and Porter, Competitive Advantage, p. 66.
3. Christensen, "Corporate Strategy", p. 43.
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8. Prahalad and Lieberthal, "The End of Corporate Imperialism", p. 77.
9. Ibid.
10. Prahalad and Lieberthal, "The End of Corporate Imperialism", pp. 68-79, also see David J. Arnold and Hohn A. Quelch, "New Strategies in Emerging Markets", Sloan Management Review 40, no.1 Fall 1998), pp. 7-20.
11. Brenda Cherry, "What China East (and Drinks and....)" *Fortune*, October 4, 2004., pp. 152-53.
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14. Prahalad and Lieberthal, "The End of Corporate Imperialism", p. 72.
15. Khanna, Oalepu, and Sinha, "Strategies That Fit Emerging Markets", pp. 73-74.
16. Ibid, p. 74.
17. Ibid, p. 76.
18. Prahalad and Lieberthal, "The End of Corporate Imperialism", p. 72.
19. Khanna, Oalepu, and Sinha, "Strategies That Fit Emerging Markets", pp. 73-74.
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