

# Strategic alliances and dynamic capabilities: a systematic review

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Organizations need to find ways to survive in unpredictable, dynamic and rapidly changing environments. The development of organizational capabilities, such as relational, is a dynamic process of adaptation, which seeks to adjust to an unstable environment. Within this context, the purpose of this paper is to analyze, through a systematic review (SR), 36 articles, which discuss the influence of strategic alliances on the dynamic capabilities (DCs) process.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Through this systematic literature review, articles published in international journals were categorized in terms of their objectives, thematic axes and the research methodologies applied and evidences, to explore their methodological, theoretical and organizational practice contributions.

**Findings** – The results clarified the antecedents, implications and relevance of the relationship between strategic alliances in different countries and their DCs. The findings make it possible to determine directions for new studies that may support the advancement of this field of research.

**Research limitations/implications** – Studies from this SR point out that alliance is: a flexible vehicle of learning; a way to transfer effective knowledge in partner firms and to generate combinations of resources; and a superior means of access to technological capabilities and other complex capabilities. Those aspects would be difficult to be developed in the firms without the help of partnerships. This can encourage the reconfiguration of existing resources and capabilities. These reconfigurations can lead to deliberate evolutionary adaptations in these firms, which will build relational DCs.

**Practical implications** – As managerial implications, an alliance allows for the development of capabilities to detect new opportunities, and for the development of the reconfiguration or expansion of the existing resource base in the firm. Thus, alliances, once properly managed and with well-defined structure and purpose, can help firms achieve a sustainable competitive advantage. Alliances can serve as a type of strategic choice or an alternative that can enable companies to cope with unstable, global and competitive environments permeated by (new) threats and opportunities.

**Originality/value** – This SR paper highlighted, in a specific and consistent topic, the suggestions for future research related to the process of DCs and its relationship with strategic alliances, motivating new research works.

**Keywords** Systematic review, Dynamic capabilities, Strategic alliances, Competitive advantage, Global alliances

**Paper type** Literature review

## Introduction

A sustainable competitive advantage in an unstable environment has been a central topic of interest for many organizations' strategies. Because many organizations have not developed plans for adaptations or renewals, fast environmental changes have led to many organizational failures (Prahalad and Hamel, 2005). As a result, companies can establish strategic alliances to obtain useful external resources which can also develop skills that allow companies to maximize market opportunities or minimize the impact of threats. By adopting the strategy of engaging in alliances with other firms, the company may be able to enter new markets, increase its market share and develop new products or services, among others (Harrison *et al.*, 2001).

Faced with an uncertain context, many companies seek alliances as a strategy to reduce their risks with key stakeholders (Murray and Kotabe, 2005). The high rates of failure associated with establishing alliance objectives suggest that the process of transforming external resources and competencies into a competitive advantage is, in fact, complex



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(Helfat *et al.*, 2007). The other reason behind the high failure rate is related to the lack of familiarity that firms have with the dynamic nature of the alliance relations (Russo and Cesarani, 2017). Although alliances have grown rapidly, their results have not always been satisfactory (Schreiner *et al.*, 2009). This is due to the fact that companies differ in their abilities to benefit from alliances (Heimeriks and Duysters, 2007).

The phenomenon of dynamic capabilities (DCs) in organizations constitutes a wide interest for researchers of management, more specifically of strategic management. The DCs are defined as the company's strategy of constantly integrating, reconfiguring, renewing and re-creating internal and external resources in response to dynamic market environments in order to obtain competitive advantage (Teece *et al.*, 1997). This theme gains relevance as the maintenance of competitive advantage in globalized, complex and dynamic environments (Teece *et al.*, 1997) requires more than just the development of internal strategic resources and competencies to the firm. The ability to engage in alliances, develop resource allocation routines, transfer knowledge and replicate are some of the examples of processes on which DCs are based on.

Given this contextualization, this research aims to examine the influence of strategic alliances in the DC process, as well as the implications of this relationship. This research proposes to generate more support and clarify what has been published regarding the empirical results of international Journals of Q1 quality on this subject. This theme constitutes an opportunity for research that can contribute to the development of the theoretical approach to strategic alliances and DCs. It is a study that categorically organizes research involving the relationship between DCs and alliances, which justifies the application of the systematic review (SR) method.

### Literature review

In this literature review are presented the concepts and definitions that gave the theoretical basis necessary for the subsequent application and analysis of the SR.

#### *DC process*

Efforts have been made to identify the specific capabilities dimensions of firms that can be sources for competitive advantage and efforts. These efforts identify which capabilities can exploit the combinations or reconfigurations of competencies and which resources are to be developed, deployed and protected. Teece *et al.* (1997) refer to these efforts as being the focus of the DCs. The issue to be discussed and explored in DCs is to identify under what circumstances and aspects will a resource lead to high profitability and superior performance over a long period of time.

DCs are relevant to interorganizational settings. This approach would be the most appropriate to understand how companies create and capture wealth as well as achieve and maintain a competitive advantage in rapidly changing environments. The competitive advantage can be understood through the combination of processes, the positioning and history of the trajectory or path of companies capable of generating routines, and skills and other resources that are difficult to imitate or replicate (Teece *et al.*, 1997).

For Barreto (2010), the discussion about DC concept generated the following considerations: its nature is categorized as an ability, with an emphasis on the role of strategic management, going beyond the RBV concept (Barney, 1991); it has specified its desired end: special capability; it follows the evolutionary economic perspective; it focuses on a particular type of external context: a fast change of environment; it is assumed that they are constructed and not purchased capabilities; it is assumed that these are heterogeneous capabilities among firms; it is explained that the competitive advantage is considered as value creation. This advantage would be something resulting from the DCs' process.

For Teece *et al.* (1997), DCs focus on examining the following questions: how do some organizations develop capabilities and how do they renew their competencies to respond to changes in the business environment? These issues are related to three dimensions that identify DCs: organizational processes, positions and paths. This approach aims to analyze how firms can develop their capabilities to adapt and even capitalize on unstable environments.

The processes, position and paths would be the dimensions that relate the organizational and management processes. Processes can be defined as the routines, standards and practices of the organization. The position is tied to technology, intellectual property, complementary assets and external relations. The paths refer to the presence or absence of strategic alternatives to achieve financial return and path dependencies involving the future behavior of the company based on its investment history and repertoire of routines (Teece *et al.*, 1997).

Teece *et al.* (1997) argue that the competencies and capabilities of firms are based on the processes, which are modeled by the organization's position and paths. However, the authors emphasize that competencies can generate competitive advantages and profitability as long as they are based on a collection of routines, skills and other resources that are difficult to imitate.

#### *Strategic alliances and DCs*

The ability to effectively configure and modify strategic alliances is an example of a DC (Kale *et al.*, 2002). The alliance configuration capability allows a company to selectively modify its network of interorganizational partnerships to confront changing environmental conditions (Hoffmann, 2007). This capability includes skills such as identifying valuable alliance opportunities, alliance design, alliance coordination and alliance learning integration (Kale and Singh, 2007). This ability allows the company to explore new markets with partners from local alliances (Hitt *et al.*, 2000); shape the environment in response to customers' changing needs with new products offered by alliances; and stabilize the environment by leveraging the alliance channel to establish a competitive advantage (Hoffmann, 2007).

A company can configure its alliances to increase access to external resources and gain new skills owned by partners (Hoffmann, 2007). In particular, the learning process, obtained through an alliance, allows a company to transform external resources held by cooperative partners (Lin and Wu, 2014). Thus, alliance decisions help the company replace its declining resources, integrate new skills and accumulate resources to deal with environmental challenges and improve performance.

Helfat *et al.* (2007) define the management capability of the alliance as a type of DC with the ability to deliberately create, expand or modify the company's resource base through the inclusion of resources from its alliance partners. More specifically, in the context of relational capabilities, the management capability of an alliance refers to a DC type with the ability to purposefully create, extend or modify the enterprise resource base, augmented to include the resources of its partners of the alliance (Helfat *et al.*, 2007, p. 66).

Building on the DCs and alliance management literature, Schilke and Goerzen's (2010) research conceptualized alliance management capability as a second-order construct, reflected by the organizational routines of interorganizational coordination, alliance portfolio coordination, interorganizational learning, alliance proactiveness and alliance transformation (Schilke and Goerzen, 2010; Schilke, 2014). The empirical results not only support the proposed five-dimensional structure of the construct but also provide evidence that alliance management capability is considered as a critical strategic domain that allows the company to change its resource base and is a crucial driver of alliance portfolio performance.

Previous research has documented that technological or capability development is often path dependent, and alliances can serve as a DC for firms that are less technologically competent. In this sense, alliances are particularly important when firms are faced with a technological discontinuity and search for new technologies. The empirical results confirm that alliances are used to access new technological competencies, but also reveal the difficulty in internalizing new technology for such firms (Anand *et al.*, 2010).

Alliance management is a complex organizational activity because of the inherent difficulties and uncertainties in project management beyond the organizational boundaries (Rothaermel and Deeds, 2006). Studies deal with the success factors of the alliance, addressing different factors that may influence this success. The key to success of alliances is the choice of the partner, given the importance attached to the converging strategic objectives, similar corporate principles, complementary needs, capabilities and a spirit of cooperation (Cotta and Dalto, 2010). DC view has an important implication on alliance literature; it promotes a shift in research focus from relational or structural factors, peculiar to the individual alliance relation, toward managerial capabilities specific of a single firm (Russo and Cesarani, 2017). According to such assumption, alliance success lies not only in the relationship among partners but also in each firm's alliance management capabilities (Schilke and Goerzen, 2010).

DC has been largely used to explain the conditions of alliance success. The alliance management capabilities concept is a kind of DC, defined as superior firm's capabilities in managing alliances. They are heterogeneously distributed across firms and for this reason are useful to justify performance difference among firms (Russo and Cesarani, 2017).

In alliances, resource integration is of extreme importance only when resources are strategically combined, manipulated and deployed rather than merely accumulated (Sirmon *et al.*, 2007). This requires companies to develop specific processes, such as integration capability, to transfer resources and skills deliberately and through idiosyncratic combinations that meet current competition needs. Although many alliance studies emphasize learning and relational capital in creating competitive advantages, there is still a limited focus on the real process in which resources and capabilities can be transferred and integrated (Helfat *et al.*, 2007).

### Methodology

This qualitative research aimed to present the results and contributions of high-quality publications about the relationship between strategic alliances and DC process. The SR, a research method used to reach the objective of this study, seeks greater clarification and consensus on a given theme and presents the mapping of an academic production (Castro, 2001). In this paper, we have only considered empirical articles on this research subject, published in English with a Q1 qualification covering the period from 1996 to 2016, since the collection of articles for the SR of this present study was done in January 2017. The review presents its results as a synthesis of the field surveyed covering: the research focus used, specific research objectives, methodologies, contexts. Varied study samples are compared, contrasted and related to provide an integrated view and richer theme searched.

The starting point was to identify a research need that can be presented based on the following question: what is the influence of strategic alliances in the DC process? SR is the means for this type of research that develops reflections or in-depth analyzes of retrieved articles that focus on the background, context and implications of this theme. The selection of the articles published in this theme and the treatment of them followed the logic of the steps of SR presented below:

- (1) Database choice: this research aimed to include only the selection of publications from international databases known for their relevance and quality. These are the SCOPUS and Web of Science (WOS) databases.

- (2) Choice of analysis period: this study aimed to identify all published articles, without a restriction on the period. Because it has no temporal restriction, the search contemplated articles from 1996 until the most recent articles published in 2016, hence covering 20 years. In view of the 166 articles of this theme in the two databases mentioned above that included the preliminary sample before reading the abstracts, a considerable increase in the publications of this topic was observed in 2010, according to Table I. It is observed that interest in research on the relation of strategic alliances and DCs has been increasing in the last six years, evidenced by international publications.
- (3) Definitions of the parameterization and keywords used in the search engines: the collection of articles spans from November 22, 2016 to November 23, 2016. For the first stage of the article search, the keywords that were searched in the two databases were: Dynamic Capability and Alliances. Only articles that were published in English published in areas or fields relevant to the topic (organizations management) were chosen. In this first screening, 42 articles were selected in the SCOPUS database and 146 articles in the WOS, totaling 188 articles. Of this total, 22 articles were duplicitous. Therefore, a preliminary sample of 166 articles was obtained, before reading their abstracts.
- (4) Other inclusion and exclusion criteria – when reading the abstracts of each of 166, theoretical essays were identified and excluded from the sample. The selection of articles was defined by the search in International Journal with an impact factor above 1.4 and an H index above 24, classified as Q1 within the approach of the theme. While reading the abstracts, a considerable number of studies were identified as irrelevant or unfocused for the present subject in question. These studies were excluded from the final sample. When analyzing the impact factor and H index of these articles, publications classified as inferior to Q1 were disregarded. With these specific exclusion criteria in mind, 130 articles did not respond to the proposal of the present study. Thus, only 36 articles were considered to be fully valid, adequate and actually addressed the focus of this research in an in-depth way, enabling the filling of Table II. These 36 articles constituted the body of this research, comprising the final sample retrieved, treated and categorized in Table II.

Year	Published quantity
1999	1
2003	1
2004	3
2005	3
2006	9
2007	2
2008	8
2009	12
2010	17
2011	17
2012	17
2013	20
2014	16
2015	18
2016	22
Total	166

Source: Prepared by the authors

**Table I.**  
Total articles published on the theme per year

**Table II.**  
Results of the  
categorization of the  
systematic review –  
strategic alliances

Dynamic capabilities and organizational processes	Thematic axes	Authors	Search goal	Macro-cluster: alliances	Main evidence found
Management and organizational processes	Supply chain management Offshoring relationship Marketing of a relationship	Vivek <i>et al.</i> (2009)	How well do general theories of organization correspond to governance in offshoring relationships?		Offshoring relationships begin with calculative trust and opportunism, which later gives way to resource-based competency building and non-economic trust. Throughout the offshored partnerships, there was added value in the long term in the partner companies, resulting in the development of dynamic capabilities
	Alliance performance Experience in the alliance Alliance management capability	Schilke and Goerzen (2010)	What aspects of alliance management are relevant to the development of dynamic capabilities and how is the alliance management capability related to other key constructs?		Alliance management capability is a crucial factor for alliance performance. Alliance management capability has a positive impact on alliance portfolio performance and mediates the performance effects of dedicated alliance structures and alliance experience
	Management capability of the alliance Experience in the alliance	Rothaermel and Deeds (2006)	Investigate the ability to manage alliances in high technology ventures. The authors develop a model that links differential demands of alliance type and the benefits of alliance experience to an observable outcome from a firm's alliance management capability How can firms develop alliance capability and have greater alliance success?		The results highlight the relevance of alliance management capability to high technology ventures, since the alliance experience seems to be a distinct construction, different from the age and size of the company
	Learning alliance Alliance management capability	Kale and Singh (2007)			Alliance learning process involves articulation, codification, sharing and internalization of alliance management and is positively related to a firm's overall alliance success. The alliance learning process is similar to a higher order dynamic capability that is relevant in the context of alliances
	Learning alliance Capability development Cooperation	Lee <i>et al.</i> (2011)	How can companies in highly dynamic service markets use distinctive dynamic knowledge articulation by service alliance cooperation to improve dynamic capabilities development and realize expected synergies?		The results show that manager integration powers, external linkages, codification of experience, and ambiguity have positive effects on dynamic knowledge articulation (DKA). The study supports dynamic capabilities as a way of

(continued)

Dynamic capabilities	Thematic axes	Authors	Search goal	Macro-cluster: alliances	Main evidence found
	Diversification Internal and external skills Strategic choices	Deving and Gooderham (2008)	Testing the alliance construct quantitatively as a way to obtain external competences in the context of accounting service firms		learning and that the development of dynamic capabilities is a process of articulation of dynamic knowledge The authors analyzed small firm accountability practices' possession of key dynamic capabilities including the heterogeneity of their human capital, their internal development routines and their alliances with complementary service providers
	Integration capability Operational capabilities Alliance performance	Jiang <i>et al.</i> (2015)	The purpose of this paper is to advance the concept of "integrative capability" as a critical dynamic capability (DC) and empirically investigate its implications for a firm's sustainable competitive advantage in business partnerships		Integrative capability is an important mediator in relationship between operational capabilities (managerial, marketing and technological capabilities) and firm performance. Integrative capability has a significant direct impact on a firm's performance (marketing effectiveness and financial performance) and an indirect impact via the creation of new operational capabilities
	Relationship with the alliance Alliance configuration	Tang <i>et al.</i> (2016)	How interfirm alliance configuration strategies reduce shareholder risks via the alignment of "what" types of alliances to establish and "with whom" to build such alliances?		This research empirically demonstrates that the effects of alliance configuration strategy on shareholder risks depend on the type of risks (idiosyncratic or systematic) and the degree of industry environment changes (market dynamism)
	Innovation capability Operational capability Capability building	Schweitzer (2014)	This study examines whether heterogeneity in alliance capability development can be attributed to the use of certain intra-firm leadership behaviors		Leadership can provide context and affect capability building in the alliance. Transformational leadership behaviors have a stronger influence on the development of innovation (dynamic) capabilities of a strategic alliance than on the development of operational (substantive) capabilities, and the transactional

(continued)



Dynamic capabilities	Thematic axes	Authors	Search goal	Main evidence found
	Macro-cluster: alliances			
	Management capability – alliance Competitive advantage	Schilke (2014)	This article suggests that dynamic capabilities can give the firm competitive advantage, but this effect is contingent on the level of dynamism of the firm's external environment	leadership behaviors mainly preserve operational capabilities The relationship between dynamic capabilities and competitive advantage is strongest under intermediate levels of dynamism but comparatively weaker when dynamism is low or high The results conclude that on the internet, the optimal organizational form should be a centralized alliance with a hub-and-spoke network structure
	Quality of service (QoS) forming process Strategic alliance	M'Chirgui and Pénard (2011)	This article argues that internet service providers should form strategic alliances to coordinate their investments in a new-generation infrastructure that could provide innovative services with QoS guarantees	It supports the hypothesis that BRPM leverages the relationship portfolio performance and complements other relationship-related strategies, like building personal business ties and relationship flexibility
	Relational capabilities Relationship portfolio	Mitrega and Pfajfar (2015)	Proposes a concept of business relationship process management (BRPM) and grounds it in dynamic capability view of company's strategy	The study reveals a positive and significant effect of alliance entrepreneurship on common vision, alliance capability and alliance performance. However, more significant support is received for the relation between alliance entrepreneurship and alliance capability through moderating interaction effects of barriers to alliance knowledge acquisition and firm level learning orientation
	Alliances capability Alliances entrepreneurship	Khalid and Larimo (2012)	Investigates the role of alliance entrepreneurship with its effects on common vision, alliance capability and alliance performance in penetrating into the foreign markets	The MDCs are influenced by the magnitude of the IJV resource, by the organizational culture of resource complementarity, and by the organizational structure. They indicate that the formalization of the organizational structure of
	Performance alliances Competitive advantage	Fang and Zou (2009)	The objective of this study is to advance a theoretical framework pertaining to how interpartner learning in international joint ventures (IJV) may affect IJV instability in emerging economies	

(continued)



Dynamic capabilities	Thematic axes	Authors	Macro-cluster: alliances	Search goal	Main evidence found
Relational capabilities Rings forming process	Strategic alliances Marketing projects Guidance alliance	Findikoglu and Watson-Manheim (2015)  Kandemir <i>et al.</i> (2006)	Macro-cluster: alliances	This develops a deeper understanding of the divergent behavior of companies and contributes to SMEs and alliance literature. This research aims to explore the facilitators of this divergent firm behavior	an IJV modifies the effect of magnitude of the resources in the MDCs of the IJVs The findings suggest that a firm's alliance capabilities and organizational proximities between distant partners can substitute the lack of geographical proximity and enable IT SMEs' engagement in nonlocal service partnerships The market turbulence exerts a significant moderating influence on the relationship between alliance orientation and alliance network performance, whereas the moderating role of technological turbulence on that relationship does not appear to be significant The results show that the number of major partners exhibits an inverted U-shaped effect on an independent studio's capability. Contrary to our expectation, we find no support for the contingency of major partner turnover The main outcomes are: a discussion and a test of "what is" the alliance management capability; a better understanding of the reasons why alliances enhance performance, namely, by leveraging growth and innovation The alliance portfolios with greater organizational and functional diversity and lower governance diversity were related to higher firm performance while industry diversity had a U-shaped relationship with firm performance
				Develop a new construct, alliance orientation, and explore its influence on firms' alliance network performance and market performance	an IJV modifies the effect of magnitude of the resources in the MDCs of the IJVs The findings suggest that a firm's alliance capabilities and organizational proximities between distant partners can substitute the lack of geographical proximity and enable IT SMEs' engagement in nonlocal service partnerships The market turbulence exerts a significant moderating influence on the relationship between alliance orientation and alliance network performance, whereas the moderating role of technological turbulence on that relationship does not appear to be significant The results show that the number of major partners exhibits an inverted U-shaped effect on an independent studio's capability. Contrary to our expectation, we find no support for the contingency of major partner turnover The main outcomes are: a discussion and a test of "what is" the alliance management capability; a better understanding of the reasons why alliances enhance performance, namely, by leveraging growth and innovation The alliance portfolios with greater organizational and functional diversity and lower governance diversity were related to higher firm performance while industry diversity had a U-shaped relationship with firm performance
				Present a new perspective on the influence of alliance partners on a focal firm's capability by focusing on "link" alliances that are motivated by the prospect of exploiting complementarities rather than acquiring partners' capabilities Propose that the frequently established association between alliances and performance can be further explained by the alliance management capability	an IJV modifies the effect of magnitude of the resources in the MDCs of the IJVs The findings suggest that a firm's alliance capabilities and organizational proximities between distant partners can substitute the lack of geographical proximity and enable IT SMEs' engagement in nonlocal service partnerships The market turbulence exerts a significant moderating influence on the relationship between alliance orientation and alliance network performance, whereas the moderating role of technological turbulence on that relationship does not appear to be significant The results show that the number of major partners exhibits an inverted U-shaped effect on an independent studio's capability. Contrary to our expectation, we find no support for the contingency of major partner turnover The main outcomes are: a discussion and a test of "what is" the alliance management capability; a better understanding of the reasons why alliances enhance performance, namely, by leveraging growth and innovation The alliance portfolios with greater organizational and functional diversity and lower governance diversity were related to higher firm performance while industry diversity had a U-shaped relationship with firm performance
Strategic alliances Alliance management capability	Experience in alliances	Vandaele and Zaheer (2015)		Offer a comprehensive alliance portfolio diversity construct that includes partner, functional, and governance diversity	The positive benefits of prior experience in complex alliances suggest that a broader set of
Implications performance Alliances experience Team partners		Rocha-Goncalves and Goncalves (2011) Jiang <i>et al.</i> (2010)		Explore whether firms learn to manage their alliances. Focusing on the link between prior	
Strategic alliances		Sampson (2005)			

(continued)

Table II.

Dynamic capabilities	Thematic axes	Authors	Search goal	Main evidence found
			Macro-cluster: alliances	
			alliance experience and firm benefits from R&D collaborations	alliance management processes allows the firm to manage situations of ambiguity more readily. The lack of cumulative benefits from prior experience appears to be partly due to knowledge depreciating over time, since only recent experience has a positive impact on collaborative returns
Strategic alliances Alliances experience		Lai <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Investigate whether firms benefit from prior alliance experiences as they undertake international strategic alliances	The results confirm the contribution of ISA (international strategic alliances) experience in general, as well as that of experience specific to partner's country of origin and alliance activity type. The results also reveal a contingent benefit of ISA experiences, where experience of technological cooperation and experience with alliance partners from emerging countries both add more to firm value
Capability relational dynamic Strategies collaborative Alliances learning		Huikkola <i>et al.</i> (2013)	The present study considers joint learning as a relational dynamic capability and examines the role of relational practices as enablers of joint learning in R&D collaboration between suppliers and their customers	The results indicate that in dyadic relationships, firms would benefit from developing practices related to relational investments, relational structures, and relational capital that facilitate joint learning and yield collaborative advantages from R&D interactions
Relational capabilities		Mitrega <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Propose the concept of networking capability (NC) as the complex organizational capability oriented toward managing business relationships along all their main development stages	Develop and test a measurement model of NC that is consistent with a grounding in the resource-based view of the firm, specifically the dynamic capability view of the firm
Capabilities relational Trust in alliances		Laequiddin <i>et al.</i> (2009)	Identify the characteristics, economics, dynamic capabilities, technology and institutional perspectives of risk in relationship to develop a trust building model through risk evaluation	It is found that characteristic and institutional risk perspectives influence significantly to initiate a trustworthy relationship. Economics, dynamic capabilities and technology risk

(continued)

Dynamic capabilities	Thematic axes	Authors	Search goal	Macro-cluster: alliances	Main evidence found
	Collaborative trust Competitive advantage Collaborative innovation	Fawcett <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Develop a definition of collaborative trust, describe a trust maturity framework and discuss the competitive power of trust		perspectives play a significant role to maintain trust in relationship The results of the research reveal that few managers exploit below their surface-level perceptions to fully understand the nuances of the nature of trust building and how trust can be leveraged to improve. Presenting a dynamic systems model that elaborates on the process of building trust to improve collaboration, innovation, and competitive performance It appears that the total amount of CVC investments and the industrial diversity of portfolio companies exhibit curvilinear (inverted U-shape) relationships with the corporate investors' technological diversity. Moreover, the empirical results show that the absorptive capability of corporate investors positively moderates the effects of CVC investments on the technological diversity
	Alliances performance Technology alliances Learning organizational	Lee and Kang (2015)	Investigate the effects of CVC (corporate venture capital) investments on corporate investors' technological diversity by using 20 years of panel data from corporate investors in five high-tech industries		The results indicate that the marketing resources of a strategic alliance are positively related to the speed of sales of new products, with decreasing returns. Likewise, the technological resources of an alliance are significantly related to the innovation of new products with decreasing returns, but not in market speed The study reveals that alliances employed by firms can be viewed as initiatives to either fill a gap in the firm's resource stock or to exploit a perceived opportunity in its operational and strategic environment
	Strategic alliances	Ma <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Examine two research questions: how do strategic alliance resources influence new product outcomes, and how do these effects differ under different NPD (new product development) process characteristics		
	Strategic alliances	Rice <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Test the proposition that alliances are important vehicles allowing firms to access or acquire external resources, hence shoring up capability gaps and building new capabilities as required during firm, product and industry life cycles		

(continued)

Table II.

Table II.

Dynamic capabilities	Thematic axes	Authors	Search goal	Macro-cluster: alliances	Main evidence found
Position	Evolutionary adaptation Complementary capabilities and central Strategic choices  Complementary capabilities and central	Malik (2008)  Anand <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Show a framework that explains the logic of how companies from underdeveloped countries can associate appropriate strategies and dynamic capabilities to achieve higher levels of evolutionary adaptation  How does a company's ability to form alliances help overcome technological gaps?	Companies from underdeveloped countries with weak core capabilities but strong complementary capabilities can improve their evolutionary adaptations by adopting strategy based on forming alliances with multinational companies and building relational dynamic capabilities  The company's ability to create and manage new alliances to enter emerging technological fields in the presence of technological change is considered a dynamic capability	
	Network environments Performance innovation Knowledge-based view	Zheng <i>et al.</i> (2011)	How do knowledge-based dynamic capabilities contribute to the performance of enterprise innovation in networked environments?		Significant relationships were found between dynamic capabilities and innovation performance, while knowledge combination capability played a mediating role in this relationship. For the links between network embeddedness and dynamic capabilities, knowledge acquisition capability was affected mainly by relational embeddedness and the diversity of the network
	Collaborative structures IT governance Co-created resource Capabilities IT -firm performance Protection capabilities Cooperation between SMEs and large firms Networks for innovation	Prasad <i>et al.</i> (2012)  Sawers <i>et al.</i> (2008)	What are the effective IT governance structures for collaborative structure?  This paper examines to what extent is the number of dynamic capabilities of SMEs associated with partnership success and this relationship influenced by the number of safeguards used by the SMEs?		The findings indicate a favorable association between the organizations' IT governance efforts and their ability to sustain their capabilities to leverage their IT resources  The knowledge embodied in the dynamic (strategic, internal and external) capabilities of SMEs can flow unintentionally to the larger partner. The research found that SME's strategic and internal capabilities are negatively associated with partnership success, whereas external capabilities are positively related

(continued)

Dynamic capabilities	Thematic axes	Authors	Macro-cluster: alliances Search goal	Main evidence found
Paths	Competitive advantage Environmental dynamics	Schilke (2014)	Propose a U-shaped moderation, non-linear, inverse, implying that the relationship between dynamic capabilities and competitive advantage is strongest under intermediate levels of dynamism but comparatively weaker when dynamism is low or high	The results support the explanation that dynamic capabilities are more strongly associated with competitive advantage in moderately dynamic environments, than in stable or highly dynamic environments
	Management supply chain Innovation capability	Singh <i>et al.</i> (2013)	Explore the relationship of dynamic capabilities impact in its various dimensions of strategic flexibility, which includes alliance capability, in manufacturing	The results show that technological, innovation and alliance capabilities have strengthened manufacturing to respond to the unpredictable and hyper-competitive business environment
	Cooperation Economic transaction costs Alliance capital	Kuittimen <i>et al.</i> (2009)	Exploring the extent to which the arguments in line with traditional transaction cost savings and the prospect of dynamic capability in terms of the governance mode of strategic alliances can be supported in an empirical analysis of the ICT (information and communications technology)	Businesses that had previously cooperated were more likely to choose a capital based alliance instead of a mere contract agreement. This finding supports the approach to transactional costs

Source: Prepared by the authors

Table II.

- (5) Presentation and organization of the final sample: from the 36 articles shown in Table II, a synthesis of what was found relevant in this sample was organized according to the following categories: research themes; research problem or objective; methodological approach; country(ies); studied, main evidence found; and limitations and suggestions for future research.

All findings, according to these categories, were organized and synthesized in a table, synthesizer, that is, presented in the next session of this study. Subsequently, an analytical reading of the content in this table was made, allowing for inferences and reflections for future research recommendations.

### Findings

Through an in-depth analysis of the selected articles, 36 articles approached strategic alliances well. Many companies grow via alliances; there are dangerous relations and technical and social challenges that need to be identified and overcome, which, in fact, few people can understand. The number of alliances has grown. It is estimated that one-third of the revenues of the 2,000 largest companies from the USA and the European Union come from partnerships (Holmberg and Cummings, 2009). According to a report by Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC, 2015), 51 percent of CEOs will enter new alliances in the next 12 months. Therefore, there is a definite need to do future research on this topic.

In the compilation of the results obtained in the final sample, the articles were categorized according to the dimensions that identify the DCs, segmented in management and organizational processes, that involves coordination and integration, learning and reconfiguration. They can be defined as the routines, patterns and practices of the organization; position – assets: technological, complementary, financial, reputation, structure, institutional, market structure and organizational boundaries. A position is tied to technology, intellectual property, complementary assets and external relations; and paths – dependencies of trajectories, technological opportunities and evaluation, and refer to the presence or absence of strategic alternatives to achieve financial returns (Tece *et al.*, 1997). The structure of the articles presented in this SR sample was chosen because it better relates to DCs with publications on strategic alliances, respecting the work of Tece *et al.* (1997).

In addition to this categorization, Table II shows the thematic axes – an approach emphasized by each article analyzed, as well as the research problem or objective and the main evidence found. At the end of this chapter, the limitations and suggestions of future research found in the SR articles that compose the final sample are presented.

Looking at Table II, the thematic axes were as varied as possible. The elaboration of the axes respects the focus of the literature review and its relationship with the evidence found in the articles of this sample. In this sample, due to the high diversity of themes in the strategic alliance construct, there was a tendency to publishing about this thematic axis. Another fact that was neglected, while not presenting publication trends, was the economic sector studied in this subject. The sectors varied, ranging from manufacturing (many articles in this sample did not specify which manufacturing was contemplated in the study) to technology, telecommunication, aviation, pharmaceutical and biotechnology, chemical, electronic, food sector and hazardous waste.

As the methodological approach demonstrates, 72 percent of the articles in this SR adopted the quantitative methodology, mainly through the collection of primary data with the application of surveys, comprising 56 percent of the articles, and via the collection of secondary data in a database, comprising 17 percent of articles. Few studies of this sample, 11 percent of the articles, applied qualitative methods. It is noteworthy that there are articles, comprising 17 percent of this sample, that used the hybrid method of research:

qualitative and quantitative. There is a tendency of publications of this theme with the adoption of statistical methods, without much interpretive deepening in the analysis.

A certain dispersion of this sample was observed in the countries and regions studied, but in firms from developed countries, there was a trend, where 28 percent of this sample included studies in the USA and 22 percent in Europe. There are cases of studies conducted in developed countries, yet they are the minority. For example, surveys with data collections in Australia were 3 percent of the studies, and Taiwan also consisted of 3 percent of the studies. There is an interesting but small number of publications in developing countries, such as countries in Central Africa, accounting for 3 percent of the sample, and countries in emerging India, with 3 percent of the sample studies, China, with 11 percent of studies, United Arab Emirates and South Africa, both with 3 percent of the studies. There are three articles in the sample that did not present the country(s) where the data were collected, representing 8 percent of the sample, as well as articles that included two or more continents totaling five articles, representing 13 percent of the sample.

One can observe in Table II that most of the articles in the sample relate the alliances' constructs to the dimension managerial and organizational processes of DCs. This dimension was the one that most prevailed in the articles. The articles of this dimension focus on the management capability of the alliance maintained as a type of DC, and the development of capabilities for coordination and integration, learning and reconfiguration.

It is worth noting that in some cases, articles that were allocated in the processes dimension were observed, as they explored and analyzed in a secondary way, the position or paths dimension. To simplify the presentation of these tables, we only chose to present the dominant dimension of the DCs.

Some articles emphasize that the methodological structure of the study did not allow an evaluation of how the actions of a company can affect the responses of its collaborating partners. Few studies of the DCs examined empirically the roles of embedded social capital (structural and relational) and the type of learning and knowledge of the type exploitation and exploration (March, 1991) in organizations.

This SR clarifies that alliances can also maximize resource and provides learning benefits. The relevance of previous alliance experiences was highlighted and was shown that it has a positive influence on future alliance management processes. The more experience alliances have, the better the effect on corporate development activities. Alliances relate to or lead to investments and relational structures, which facilitate joint learning and provide collaborative advantages of interactions.

The findings of this RS (Table II) also show that the determinants of alliances success are closely related to network capabilities and strong levels of partners trust. This confidence can enhance collaboration, promote synergy among partners, spur innovation and stimulate competitive performance. Additionally, the marketing resources in an alliance bring agility to the sales of new products. The technological resources in an alliance stimulate innovation within new products. Alliance marketing and technology actions strengthen marketing and technology functions on the new product development process and minimize the impact of uncertainties.

We also found that alliance initiatives may fill a gap in the firm's stock of resources or may accelerate the exploration of perceived opportunities of the firm in its environmental context. We also detected that the use of complementary capabilities, resulting from the alliances' actions, can increase the chance of the partner firms entering emerging technological fields. The relation network generated by the alliance can: increase acceptance of the unpredictability of the environment; increase predictability; allow firms to have greater market flexibility and firm expansion; and allow greater adaptability that is necessary for the (re) construction of competencies so that the firm can cope with changes in its environment.



### **Main contributions and implications**

This paper presented how DCs and alliances can relate to organizational practice. The present paper envisions a greater improvement of theoretical approaches on strategic alliances between firms and DC. Through this sample, we concluded that strategic alliances, maintained by many articles as a management capability, can be considered a type of DC, can characterize the DCs, or even can be a type of capability that instigates the appearance of DCs. The alliances can foster a coordination and integration of internal and external processes of the firm, positively increasing the value of partner companies.

Studies from this SR point out that alliance is: a flexible vehicle of learning; a way to transfer effective knowledge in partner firms and to generate combinations of resources; and a superior means of access to technological capabilities and other complex capabilities. Those aspects would be difficult to be developed in the firms without the help of partnerships. This can encourage the reconfiguration of existing resources and capabilities. These reconfigurations can lead to deliberate evolutionary adaptations in these firms, which will build relational DCs.

As managerial implications, an alliance allows for the development of capabilities to detect new opportunities, and for the development of the reconfiguration or expansion of the existing resource base in the firm. Thus, alliances, once properly managed and with well-defined structure and purpose, can help firms achieve a sustainable competitive advantage. Alliances can serve as a type of strategic choice or an alternative that can enable companies to cope with unstable, global and competitive environments permeated by (new) threats and opportunities. Through inspecting this evidence, it is seen that the practices and implications of strategic alliances are relevant for those firms that seek to obtain new information, new forms of learning and new knowledge with other firms. This is done in order to obtain or maintain competitive advantages in their market and to explore new markets to compete.

### **Suggestions for future research**

This research highlights fundamental aspects of future research to be considered. These include the need for clarifying management DCs in orchestrating or reconfiguring the asset bases of firms to successfully adapt to unstable environments. In addition to addressing the roles of the managers of firms from underdeveloped countries or emerging economies in the analysis of their changing environments and the selection of strategic decision logic are important areas of future research.

The absence of more direct measures of alliance capability in database files is indicated in the articles as a need to further study. Therefore, as a suggestion for future research, it is crucial to employ qualitative or survey methodologies to study in a more profound and direct way the capability of alliance management. The articles in this sample also highlight the importance of conceptualizing the success of the alliance at the organizational level in financial and accounting data and replicating articles to examine the robustness of their findings.

Future research can examine in detail individual factors such as the roles of different governance modes for the alliance, perceived levels of trust among alliance partners and the specificity of alliance resources. All of which contribute to the development of innovation within alliances. The combination of responses from both of the alliance partners can make it possible to assess whether the perspectives of both partners are consistent, providing additional insights.

Research on alliance entrepreneurship has proven to be rather limited, and there are relatively few empirical studies that relate to the alliance's entrepreneurship in the area of alliance capability. The articles suggest a need for further qualitative and quantitative research on this subject. They make use of hybrid research methods, adding learning constructs to the models shown in the articles and studying the effect of learning dynamics among collaborating partners on performance from the market. For example, absorption capability has been proven to be an important skill in acquiring and internalizing the

resources and tacit capabilities of a firm's partners, which in turn can influence the collaborative behavior of partner firms.

Another way forward for future research is to examine the implications of network structure capability, including interaction effects between the evolutionary trajectory of a company's alliances and its capability. It would be interesting to evaluate the performance of the growth of a resource-poor firm's capability under the influence of resource-rich partners in its alliance portfolio.

As for the management of alliances, there is a need to further research the specific tools and practices that operationalize or characterize the management capability of the alliance. This opportunity follows the research literature, including Foss and Ishikawa (2007), which advocates for the advancement of research on how new combinations of resources and capabilities are discovered. This will be best addressed by an exploratory study, given the lack of systematic studies.

The DC perspective holds that accumulated experience can lead to the development of new resources and capabilities. Thus, further research can focus on the role of an individual target and assess capabilities. One example would be a longitudinal study to investigate how firms develop bidirectional relations and how this contributes to the evolution of that capability. Finally, how would one triangulate these findings? The question is whether the conclusions reached are relatively sensitive, in whole or in some respects, to the methodology used. Contexts of triangulation, the level of rigor as to the method used and even the attitudes of the researchers are essential to validate a theory (Mir and Watson, 2001; Tsang and Kwan, 1999).

It has also pointed as future study the intervening role of inertia by controlling how long a firm maintained a certain capability. Further research may also shed light on the length of time it takes for different types of capabilities in different industries to materialize into measurable results. Knowledge gained from additional research in these areas can contribute significantly to a better understanding of DCs and strategic alliances and their implications in organizational structures.

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