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Review Article

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Strategic Business and Information Technology in the 21st Century

Oluwadare Oluwasola Olatunji[1] and Olubunmi Olatunji[2*]

[1]*Department of Agric Economics,University of Ibadan. Nigeria.*

[2]*Department of Business, Dallas College. USA.*

***Corresponding Author**
Olubunmi Olatunji, Department of Business, Dallas College, USA.

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Abstract

In the 21st century, the strategic integration of business objectives and information technology (IT) has become fundamental drivers of organizational competitiveness, innovation, and sustainability. Advancements in digital technologies—such as cloud computing, data analytics, artificial intelligence, and enterprise information systems—have transformed traditional business models and redefined the role of IT from an operational support function to a strategic enabler. The alignment between business strategy and IT strategy is essential, as emphasized by various frameworks, including competitive strategies and the value chain model. These frameworks highlight how technology can support cost leadership, differentiation, and market focus while optimizing key business activities. Despite its benefits, the integration of IT into business strategy presents challenges such as cybersecurity risks, rapid technological change, and skills shortages. Nevertheless, organizations that strategically adopt and manage IT are better positioned to thrive in a dynamic and globalized environment. Ultimately, IT is not merely a tool but a central component of strategic planning and long-term business success in the digital age. This paper examines the evolving relationship between strategic business management and information technology, emphasizing business–IT alignment, digital transformation, governance, and IT-enabled competitive advantage.

Keywords: Strategic Management, Information Technology, Digital Transformation, Business–IT Alignment, Competitive Advantage

1. Introduction

The contemporary business environment is shaped by globalization, technological disruption, and increasing uncertainty. Organizations across industries face rapid changes in customer expectations, regulatory requirements, and competitive dynamics. Within this context, information technology has emerged as a central component of strategic management rather than merely a technical or administrative function. Scholars consistently argue that IT now influences how organizations formulate strategies, execute operations, and create value [1]. Historically, business strategy and IT strategy were treated as separate domains. Business leaders focused on markets, products, and competition, while IT departments concentrated on infrastructure and systems reliability. This separation is no longer viable. Digital technologies increasingly shape business models themselves, enabling new forms of value creation such as platform economies, data-driven services, and digitally enabled ecosystems. The purpose of this paper is to examine strategic business and information technology in the 21st century from a generic and theoretical perspective. The paper synthesizes key academic frameworks and research findings to explain how organizations can align IT with business strategy, achieve competitive advantage, and navigate digital transformation. By integrating strategic management theory with information systems research, the paper contributes to a holistic understanding of modern organizational strategy.

2. Literature Review: Strategic Alignment and the Evolution of Strategy–Execution Frameworks

The concept of strategic alignment has long occupied a central position in management and organizational research, particularly in efforts to explain why well-formulated strategies often fail during execution. Early work emphasized the need for coherence between strategic intent and organizational arrangements, a theme most prominently articulated in the Strategic Alignment Model (SAM) developed by [2]. Since its introduction, the alignment literature has evolved significantly, expanding to incorporate enterprise architecture, performance management, agility, and practice-based perspectives. This section reviews the foundational alignment literature and examines how newer frameworks extend, operationalize, or challenge the assumptions of the original model.

Khan did a research study on the topic titled "Strategies for African Development in the 21st Century Beyond the East Asian Model: Integrating Markets and the Enabling Developmental State" Khan challenges the idea that Africa should simply copy the East Asian development model (e.g., South Korea, Taiwan) [3]. Instead, he argues that Africa's development strategy in the 21st century should combine markets, alongside a supportive developmental state, democracy, and sustainability—rather than imitate East Asian industrialization. He recommended a capable and accountable institutions that can Promote industrialization with state guidance. Investing in education, health, and innovation would strengthen regional economic integration. Ensuring environmental sustainability, encouraging democratic participation are other strategies that could enhance African development in the 21st Century. In Summary, Khan proposes that Africa's development strategy in the 21st century should combine markets, a supportive developmental state, democracy, and sustainability—rather than imitate East Asian industrialization. Nguyen released a paper titled "The influence of business intelligence and sustainable risk management on sustainability performance: moderated g model by information technology "The major contribution of the study is that it integrates three important domains, which include business Intelligence (BI), sustainable Risk Management (SRM) , and sustainability Performance (SUP) [4]. It shows that BI improves sustainability performance indirectly through SRM (mediation effect). The research is based on firm-level data from Vietnam, which is valuable because emerging markets are underrepresented in enhances sustainability research. It also provides context-specific insights for developing economies. This improves the external relevance of sustainability and digital transformation studies. The study confirms that BI is not just a technical tool, rather it is a strategic capability that decision-making and sustainability outcomes. This aligns with broader research showing that BI improves organizational performance and sustainability. Nguyen successfully show that Business intelligence improves sustainability performance through sustainable risk management, and this relationship is strengthened by effective IT governance.

However, the study is limited by its context (Vietnam), method (survey-based, cross-sectional) and narrow focus on internal factors. Z Xu in their research study make a strong contribution by applying large language models (LLMs) to map curricula to 21st-century competencies [5]. The research paper evaluates how well university programs align with workforce needs. This extends curricular analytics into AI-driven evaluation, a relatively new area. The authors used 7,600 manually annotated curriculum–competency alignment scores. This is significant because it provides a robust empirical foundation, and it improves the reliability of benchmarking LLM performance. The paper Integrates AI with curriculum evaluation, provides large-scale empirical benchmarking, introduces reasoning-based prompting innovation, demonstrates scalability and cost-efficiency of LLMs and it Offers practical insights for educational institutions. However, the LLMs still lack deep pedagogical reasoning, Limited ability to assess complex human competencies, the Results depend on data quality and structure and it lacks strong real-world validation. In conclusion, the study shows that LLMs can significantly support the evaluation of 21st-century competencies in higher education, but they are not yet capable of replacing human judgment—especially for deep, nuanced educational reasoning. N Sadiku-Dushi did a research study on Artificial Intelligence in Strategic Management: Shaping the Future of Business Leadership [6]. The study argues that Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming strategic management from intuition-based decision-making to data-driven, predictive, and adaptive leadership. However, its practical application is constrained by organizational readiness, skills gaps, and ethical challenges. The study demonstrates that AI helps shape long-term planning, influences competitive positioning, and drives innovation and adaptability. This improves Accuracy, Speed, and Strategic foresight. AI allows firms to become more proactive and competitive. The research highlights AI's connection with Internet of Things (IoT), Automation and robotics, and Natural language processing. This broadens the scope of strategic management into digital ecosystems. However, the study is mainly theoretical / literature-based, but it lacks strong quantitative data and Empirical testing. The study gives limited attention to cost of AI adoption, Infrastructure gaps and Organizational readiness. The study establishes AI as a core element of strategic management, redefines business leadership in the AI era, and demonstrates data-driven competitive advantage. bridges technology and strategy theory. However, the research paper has a limited empirical validation, and Insufficient attention to ethics and developing economies.

3. The Strategic Alignment Model as a Foundational Framework

Henderson and Venkatraman conceptualized strategic alignment as the degree of fit between an organization's external strategic positioning and its internal infrastructure and processes, across both business and information systems domains [2]. Their model introduced two core dimensions—strategic fit and functional integration—and emphasized that organizational performance depends on the consistency between strategy formulation and strategy implementation. A central contribution of SAM was its argument that misalignment, rather than poor technology or flawed strategy alone, is a primary cause of suboptimal performance. Despite its influence, SAM is largely conceptual and diagnostic. While it provides a clear analytical structure for examining alignment, it offers limited guidance on how organizations can achieve or sustain alignment under conditions of rapid change. Subsequent research has therefore sought to move beyond structural fit toward models that emphasize process, learning, and continuous adaptation.

4. Enterprise Architecture and Structural Alignment Extensions

One prominent extension of the strategic alignment literature is found in enterprise architecture research. Enterprise architecture frameworks operationalize alignment by translating strategic objectives into coordinated designs for processes, information, systems, and organizational capabilities. These approaches retain the structural logic of SAM but add iterative planning cycles, governance mechanisms, and standardized artifacts to support

long-term alignment [7]. Ross argue that enterprise architecture enables organizations to clarify their operating models and ensure that strategy execution is supported by consistent processes and capabilities. Unlike SAM, which serves primarily as an analytical lens, enterprise architecture frameworks emphasize repeatability and institutionalization, viewing alignment as an organizational capability rather than a static state.

5. Performance Management and Goal-Based Alignment Frameworks

Another major stream of alignment research focuses on performance management systems that connect strategy to execution through goals, measurement, and feedback. Goal-based frameworks conceptualize alignment as the degree to which organizational objectives, team priorities, and individual activities are explicitly linked to strategic intent. These ideas build on earlier concepts such as Management by Objectives but have evolved to emphasize transparency, short planning cycles, and outcome-based control [8]. Contemporary goal frameworks shift attention away from structural consistency toward behavioral alignment, highlighting how shared understanding and continuous review help organizations adapt execution to changing conditions [9]. In contrast to SAM's emphasis on design, these approaches treat alignment as an ongoing managerial practice that must be repeatedly reinforced rather than formally achieved once.

6. Dynamic Capability and Agility-Oriented Perspectives

A further expansion of the alignment literature is found in research on dynamic capabilities and organizational agility. Scholars in this tradition argue that alignment is inherently temporary in volatile environments, and that firms must continuously reconfigure resources to remain competitive [10]. From this perspective, alignment is not defined by stability or consistency over time, but by responsiveness and coordinated change. Agility-oriented frameworks differ from the Strategic Alignment Model in their treatment of causality. Rather than assuming that strategy precedes execution, they emphasize feedback loops through which learning from execution informs strategic adaptation. Alignment thus emerges from iterative cycles of sensing, responding, and adjusting, challenging SAM's largely top-down logic.

7. Strategy-as-Practice and Behavioral Views of Alignment

More recent research further critiques structural views of alignment by focusing on the social and behavioral processes through which strategy is enacted. Strategy-as-practice scholars argue that alignment is not embedded solely in formal plans or structures, but in everyday practices, routines, and interactions among organizational actors [11]. From this viewpoint, misalignment may persist despite formally aligned strategies due to power relations, competing interpretations, or institutional constraints. This perspective reframes alignment as an emergent phenomenon rather than a designed outcome, complementing earlier models by explaining why structurally aligned organizations may still experience execution failure [12].

8. Synthesis and Implications

Taken together, the literature reflects a clear evolution in thinking about strategic alignment. The Strategic Alignment Model established alignment as a problem of coherence between strategy and structure [2]. Subsequent frameworks extend this foundation by emphasizing continuous adaptation, measurable outcomes, participative processes, and learning. Rather than displacing SAM, these newer approaches operationalize its core insight for environments characterized by greater complexity, speed, and uncertainty.

9. Theoretical Foundations of Strategic Business and IT

9.1 Strategic Management Perspective

Strategic management focuses on how organizations achieve and sustain competitive advantage through the effective allocation of resources and capabilities. Classical theories emphasize positioning, differentiation, and cost leadership, while resource-based views highlight firm-specific capabilities that are valuable, rare, and difficult to imitate. In the digital era, IT capabilities increasingly meet these criteria when embedded within organizational processes.

9.2 Information Technology as a Strategic Resource

Information technology encompasses hardware, software, data, networks, and human expertise that collectively support organizational information processing. Modern research emphasizes that IT becomes strategic not because of the technology itself, but because of how it is integrated with organizational capabilities, governance mechanisms, and strategic intent [13]. The strategic role of IT is therefore relational and contextual, depending on how technology interacts with organizational structures and processes.

10. Business–IT Strategic Alignment

Strategic alignment between business and IT refers to the degree of coherence between organizational goals and technological capabilities. Alignment has been one of the most persistent research themes in information systems literature, reflecting its practical importance for organizational performance. Meta-analytic and systematic review studies demonstrate a positive relationship between alignment and outcomes such as financial performance, productivity, and customer satisfaction [14]. Alignment is now widely viewed as a multidimensional construct encompassing intellectual alignment (shared understanding), operational alignment (process integration), and strategic alignment (long-term coherence). Henderson and Venkatraman's Strategic Alignment Model (SAM) remain the most influential framework in this domain.

10.1.The Strategic Alignment Model of Henderson and Venkatraman (1993)

The Strategic Alignment Model (SAM), proposed by John C. Henderson and N. Venkatraman in 1993, is one of the most influential frameworks in the fields of strategic management and information systems. Developed at a time when organizations were investing heavily in information technology (IT) but seeing

limited returns, the model addresses a fundamental challenge: how to align business strategy and IT in a way that generates sustainable competitive advantage [2]. Henderson and Venkatraman argue that organizational performance is directly related to management's ability to achieve and continuously maintain alignment between business and IT domains. At the core of the Strategic Alignment Model is the idea that strategy involves both formulation and implementation. Strategy is not limited to high-level competitive positioning; it also includes the internal structures, processes, and capabilities required to execute strategic choices effectively. From this perspective, IT is no longer treated merely as a support function but as a potential driver and shaper of business strategy. The SAM provides a conceptual structure to examine how strategic choices in business and technology relate to one another and how misalignment among them can undermine value creation. The model is structured around four interrelated domains of strategic choice. The first is a business strategy, which represents the external, market-facing choices of the firm. This domain includes decisions about the markets in which the organization competes, the products and services it offers, its sources of competitive advantage, and its governance relationships. The second domain is the IT strategy, which mirrors business strategy on the technology side.

IT strategy defines the scope of technologies used by the organization, the competencies it develops through technology, and the governance mechanisms that determine how IT resources are managed and controlled. Complementing these external domains are two internal domains focused on execution. Organizational infrastructure and processes describe how the business strategy is implemented through administrative structures, business processes, skills, and roles. IT infrastructure and processes, in turn, refer to the technical architecture, operational processes, and human capabilities that support the delivery of IT services. Henderson and Venkatraman emphasize that these four domains must be understood as an integrated system rather than as independent areas of decision-making. Two fundamental dimensions connect these domains: strategic fit and functional integration. Strategic fit refers to the alignment between an organization's external positioning and its internal arrangements. In both the business and IT domains, external strategies must be supported by appropriate internal infrastructures and processes. For example, a differentiation strategy based on rapid innovation requires flexible organizational processes and adaptable IT architectures. Functional integration, on the other hand, focuses on the alignment between business and IT. It highlights the need for coherence between business strategy and IT strategy at the strategic level, as well as between organizational infrastructure and IT infrastructure at the operational level. To operationalize the concept of alignment, Henderson and Venkatraman describe four dominant alignment perspectives. Each perspective represents a different way organizations can achieve coherence between business and IT, depending on which domain acts as the primary driver of change. The strategy execution perspective is the most traditional view. In this case, business strategy drives organizational design and IT infrastructure. Senior management defines the business strategy, and IT management focuses on implementing systems that support it. The technology potential perspective also begins with business strategy but places greater emphasis on defining a proactive IT strategy. Here, top management articulates a technology vision aligned with business goals, and IT managers act as architects who design and implement the necessary infrastructure. In contrast, the competitive potential perspective reverses the traditional logic by positioning IT as a catalyst for new business strategies. Emerging technologies are used to redefine products, markets, and competitive positioning, requiring business leaders to rethink strategy in light of technological possibilities. The final perspective, the service level perspective, focuses on delivering high-quality IT services that support business needs efficiently and reliably. In this view, the primary goal is to build a world-class IT organization by aligning IT infrastructure and processes with IT strategy, ensuring cost-effective and dependable service delivery. A key contribution of the Strategic Alignment Model is its emphasis on alignment as a dynamic process rather than a one-time achievement. Henderson and Venkatraman argue that changes in markets, competition, and technology continually disrupt existing alignments, making ongoing adjustments essential. This insight explains why the model remains highly relevant in contemporary contexts such as digital transformation, platform-based competition, and enterprise architecture.

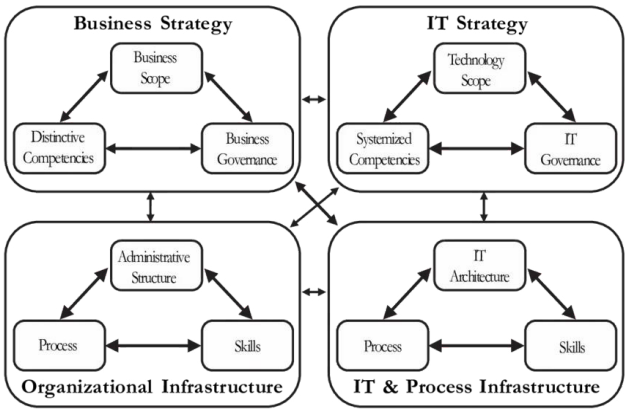

Figure 1. Strategic Alignment Model (Henderson and Venkatraman 1993)

The Strategic Alignment Model provides a powerful lens for understanding the complex relationship between business strategy and information technology. By identifying four interdependent domains, highlighting the importance of strategic fit and functional integration, and offering multiple perspectives on alignment, Henderson and Venkatraman's model helps managers diagnose misalignment and design more effective strategies. Its enduring influence reflects a central lesson of modern organizations: sustainable performance depends not on business strategy or technology alone, but on their continuous and deliberate alignment.

11. Information Technology and Competitive Advantage

11.1. IT Capabilities and Value Creation

IT capabilities refer to an organization's ability to deploy and utilize technology effectively in support of strategic objectives to improve efficiency, enhance customer experiences, and innovate products and services. These capabilities include data management, systems integration, analytics, and digital innovation. Empirical studies indicate that firms with strong IT capabilities outperform competitors by enabling faster decision-making and improved coordination [13].

11.2. Complementarity and Organizational Context

IT investments alone rarely produce sustained advantages. Instead, value arises when IT is complemented by appropriate governance structures, skilled personnel, and adaptive organizational cultures. This perspective explains why similar technologies produce different outcomes across firms.

12. Digital Transformation as Strategic Renewal

Digital transformation refers to the holistic integration of digital technologies into organizational strategy, operations, and culture. Unlike incremental IT adoption, digital transformation involves fundamental changes to business models and value creation mechanisms. Research identifies digital transformation as both a technological and organizational phenomenon, requiring leadership commitment, cultural readiness, and continuous learning [15]. Information systems such as ERP, analytics platforms, and cloud infrastructures enable transformation by improving transparency, scalability, and responsiveness.

13. Conceptual Model: Digital Transformation Pathway

Digital transformation progresses through interconnected stages: technology adoption, process redesign, organizational change, and strategic outcomes. Failure in any stage can undermine transformation efforts, highlighting the importance of an integrated approach. Studies emphasize leadership commitment, cultural readiness, and continuous learning as critical success factors in digital transformation initiatives. Technology-integrated research on digital transformation concentrates on the integrated use of digital technologies to develop specific organizational capabilities that enhance organization growth, easy accessibility to clients, and increment in profit. For instance, Trainor explore the integration of social media technologies with customer-centric management systems, demonstrating that such integration facilitates the development of social customer relationship management (CRM) capabilities, which in turn positively impact customer relationship performance [16]. Likewise, Ding examine the implementation of web-based technologies within financial organizations, showing that the design of service interfaces and the level of technology readiness significantly influence customer experience and behavioral intentions in online financial services [17]. Taken together, these studies offer valuable insights for organizations seeking to understand how digital technologies drive capability development and how these capabilities underpin more effective, customer-oriented digital transformation initiatives.

14. IT Governance and Strategic Control

IT governance refers to how organizations direct and control IT investments to ensure alignment with business objectives. Governance mechanisms include structures (decision rights), processes (planning and control), and relational mechanisms (communication and collaboration). Systematic reviews show that mature IT governance frameworks enhance strategic alignment, risk management, and accountability [18]. Governance also plays a mediating role between IT capabilities and organizational performance, reinforcing the strategic importance of oversight and coordination. Strong governance frameworks enhance transparency and reduce the likelihood of misaligned or redundant IT initiatives [19].

15. Challenges in Strategic Business–IT Integration

Despite its importance, strategic integration of business and IT remains challenging. Common barriers include organizational silos, resistance to change, and skills shortages. Rapid technological change further complicates long-term planning. Empirical research highlights communication gaps between business and IT leaders as a persistent issue, reinforcing the need for shared language and collaborative decision-making structures [20].

16. Future Directions

Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, advanced analytics, and cloud-native platforms are expected to further integrate business strategy and IT. Future research increasingly focuses on digital ecosystems, data governance, and sustainability, suggesting that strategic IT management will remain a central concern for organizations.

17. Conclusion

In conclusion, strategic business and information technology in the 21st century is inseparable, with technology serving as key enablers of innovation, efficiency, and competitive advantage. Organizations that successfully integrate IT into their core strategies are better equipped to respond to rapid market changes, meet evolving customer expectations, and operate on a global scale. Insights from thinkers like Michael Porter further emphasize the importance of aligning technological capabilities with business objectives to achieve sustainable success. Companies such as Amazon and Netflix, the effective use of IT can transform entire industries and redefine how value is created and delivered. While challenges such as cybersecurity threats and skill gaps persist, businesses that remain adaptable, innovative, and technology-

driven will continue to thrive in an increasingly digital and competitive global environment. As digital transformation accelerates, organizations must adopt integrated and adaptive approaches to strategic management.

Limitation

One of the major challenges with this research work is the non-availability of funds. Limited funds limited the scope and dimension of this research work.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors claim that the manuscript is completely original. The authors also declare no conflict of Interest.

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