

# REPUTATIONAL IMPACTS OF INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

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## 2.3. Company-focused international strategic learning alliances

Forming international strategic learning alliances has become a popular strategy for companies looking to acquire new knowledge, capabilities, and access to markets in foreign countries. A learning alliance is an important category of strategic alliances where the primary objective of the partners is to learn from each other. As a result, strategic learning alliances have become a powerful tool for creating mutual benefits and enhancing the competitive positions of the partners (Tlemsani, et al., 2023). Joining an international learning alliance with other reputed members, who share similar values, enhances the company's reputation as a learning organisation, boosts confidence in the company's innovation, and improves the company's competitive positioning and brand awareness. This positive reputation then results in generating financial, relational, resources and research and innovation impacts (Figure 2.3).

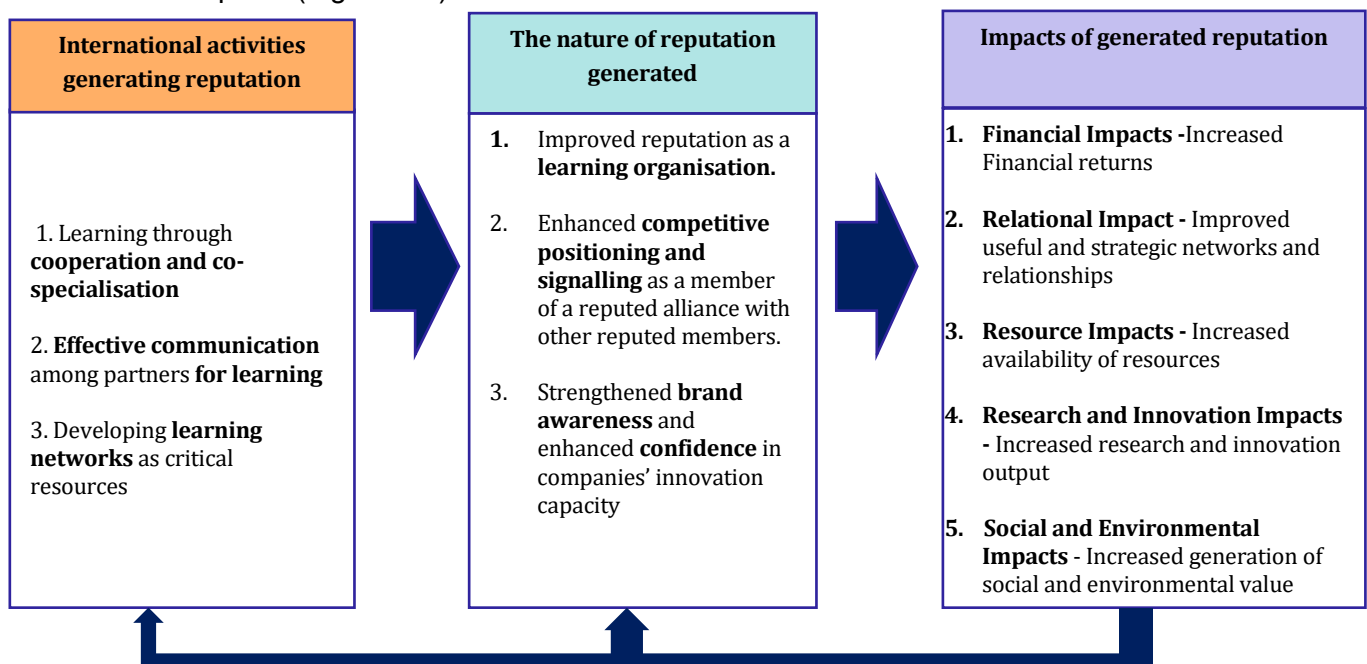


Figure 2.3. Company-focused international strategic learning alliances generating reputational impacts

### 2.3.1 International activities

#### » Learning through cooperation and co-specialisation

Cooperation within strategic alliances involves learning through collaborative activities, which is essential for firms to achieve competitive advantages (Geleilate et al., 2021; Al-Tabbaa et al., 2019). The core idea behind the learning alliance approach is that by focusing equally on the processes of innovation and associated shared learning, as on the innovation itself, barriers to innovation, adoption, and replication can be effectively overcome (Moriarty et al., 2005). A thorough selection process of identifying research questions that link international partner coalitions ensures that members contribute effectively to the alliance's goals of scaling up and implementing innovative solutions that enhance learning (Moriarty et al., 2005).

Learning alliances enhance the international partners' ability to access tacit knowledge through collaborative activities within a team working environment (Kogut, 1988). The learning alliance emphasises learning through collaboration among diverse national and international actors and the integration of multiple knowledge sources to address the complexities of fostering continuous technological, social, and institutional innovations in response to rapidly changing contexts and demands (Gotrett et al., 2005, p. 2).

Due to the emphasis on learning within the alliance, the national and international partners co-specialise through the corporation (Moriarty et al., 2005). For example, an alliance is formed between a tech company and a healthcare provider to develop innovative health monitoring systems. They leverage the tech company's software expertise alongside the healthcare provider's medical knowledge. In this context, each partner further specialises in their own area through further learning facilitated by the corporation.

One notable example of an international learning alliance is the partnership between Starbucks and Tata Global Beverages in India. In 2012, these companies formed a 50/50 joint venture to help Starbucks enter the Indian market. Tata provided local knowledge and expertise, while Starbucks brought its brand and coffeehouse experience. This alliance allowed both companies to learn from each other and leverage their strengths to achieve mutual benefits. Starbucks gained insights into the Indian market, and Tata benefited from Starbucks' global coffee expertise and brand recognition (The Strategy Society 2024).

It has been discussed in the literature that the future success of international strategic learning alliances depends on cooperative learning to establish a mutually beneficial relationship based on cooperation rather than competition. In this context, companies develop a mutually beneficial learning environment to enable alliance partners to build a relationship that strengthens the strategic fit between the national and international companies for the long

term (Morrison & Mezentseff, 1997). Learning alliances are sometimes formed as a series of interconnected national and international stakeholder platforms, accelerating the identification, development, and adoption of innovation. Each platform brings together national and international partners with complementary skills in areas like implementation, policy and legislation, research, learning, and documentation, as well as dissemination (Tlemsani, et al., 2023).

### »» **Effective communication among partners for learning- Creating learning platforms**

Effective communication among national and international partners in a learning alliance is essential for learning, transferring knowledge and maintaining information flow in all directions. It is particularly crucial when partners believe that cooperation is the best strategy for achieving mutual benefits within a learning alliance (Tlemsani et al., 2023; Moriarty et al., 2005). Methods can include workshops, seminars, training and reflection sessions, joint fieldwork, process documentation, the use of a virtual learning platform and list server, and documenting positive experiences that exist in similar cultural or geographic contexts. These methods facilitate communication among members of the alliance, allowing participants—such as researchers, policy-makers, civil society organizations, and others involved in the alliance—to easily share information, collaborate on projects, and stay informed about the latest developments within the group (e.g. [www.alianzasdeaprendizaje.org](http://www.alianzasdeaprendizaje.org)).

Collaboration toolkits are designed as prototypes, which different partner organizations are expected to adapt to suit individual needs and contexts. Partners undertake a review of existing practices and toolkits, noting relevant and existing knowledge, results, literature, institutional experience, and current work by partner organisations for improvements. The establishment of a joint platform with stakeholders, such as a multi-stakeholder platform facilitates collaborative innovation, knowledge sharing, and effective management of the complexities, given broad-based international alliances and potentially conflicting interests. Especially when the alliance has international partners digital means of learning and collaboration are critical (Moriarty et al., 2005).

### »» **Developing networks as critical resources**

Learning alliances not only support the organisations in strengthening skills in research, training, and facilitation but also build up a network with communities and local authorities as well as with a number of national-level stakeholders and international organisations (Moriarty et al., 2005). Additionally, network connections between alliances can significantly affect resource sharing and the ability to take risks. The adoption of effective learning approaches is essential for creating these critical networks, along with the necessary institutional structures and capacities. Sometimes these learning networks are involved in collaborative addressing local needs – such

as water rural supply issues. These international networks of companies and other stakeholders learn by innovating solutions in collaboration with citizens (Tlemsan, et al., 2023).

### 2.3.2 The nature of reputation generated

The reputation generated from the above activities manifests in several ways.

#### » Improved reputation as a learning organisation

By co-specializing and learning from national and international organizations with complementary assets, the alliance partners improve their reputation as a learning organization. The inter-organizational relationships aimed to acquire knowledge for achieving organizational development by allowing partners to obtain knowledge from each other showcases the capacity to identify, transform, and internalize the knowledge that resides with these partners (Schreiner et al. 2009), ultimately leading to the establishment of reputation as a learning organization (Haberberg & Rieple, 2001).

#### » Competitive positioning and signalling as a member of a reputed alliance with other reputed members

Cooperative activities and effective and open communication among partners foster collaboration, enhancing competitive positioning and signalling membership in a reputed alliance internationally, regionally and nationally with shared values (Haberberg & Rieple, 2001; Lundy et al., 2005). For example, the EMPOWERS partnership, a successful learning alliance, facilitated by thirteen international organisations<sup>1</sup> funded by the European Commission, aims to improve water governance and long-term access to water in regions experiencing scarcity of water with a focus on capacity building in developing countries. The nature of the reputation generated from this international collaboration with reputed members strengthens the members of the learning alliance's competitive positioning in terms of the quality of innovation and consideration of the environmental sustainability of their organisation (Moriarty et al., 2005).

#### » Strengthen brand awareness and enhanced confidence in companies' innovation

Establishing learning platforms and building networks further strengthens brand awareness and boosts confidence in the alliance's and associated national and international member organizations' innovation capabilities for future international R&I collaborations, positioning them as leaders in collaborative learning and innovation. Network building in a learning alliance

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Agriculture - Water Department, Inter-Islamic Network on Water Resources Development and Management, and CARE Jordan (Jordan); Palestine Hydrological Group, Union of Agricultural Work Committees, and CARE West Bank/Gaza (Palestine); Development Research Technology & Planning Centre at Cairo University, Social Planning, Analysis and Administration Consultants, National Water Research Centre of the Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation, Egyptian Water Partnership and CARE Egypt (Egypt); IRC (the Netherlands); and CARE International (USA, UK and NL).

establishes a strong reputation by showcasing the ability of organisations to access financial, human, and intellectual resources essential for their innovation success. This in turn strengthens brand awareness and confidence in companies' innovation ability. Commitment to transparent and adaptive learning processes enhances the alliance's and associated member organizations' credibility and reputation as trustworthy and effective entities capable of navigating and collaboratively resolving complex challenges and successfully engaging in international R&I collaborations (Tlemsan, et al., 2023).

## 2.4 Impacts of generated reputation

**Table 2. 3: Impacts of reputation generated through international strategic learning alliances**

Types of Impact	Specific Impacts
1. <b>Financial Impact</b> - Increased Financial returns	Enhanced market share of companies  Improved profit through new products, processes, services, and learning
2. <b>Relational Impact</b> - Improved useful and strategic networks and relationships	Increased opportunities for building international networks
3. <b>Resource Impacts</b> - Increased availability of resources	Increased opportunities to access resources and funding, and develop knowledge, skills, and capabilities
4. <b>Research and Innovation Impacts</b> - Increased research and innovation output	Innovation in products, services, processes and business models
5. <b>Social and environmental impacts</b> - Increased generation of social and environmental value	When the learning alliance innovates to address social/environmental challenges, its reputation further enhances such opportunities

## Case Study: The Strategic Learning Alliance between Rolls-Royce and Singapore Airlines

The strategic learning alliance between Rolls-Royce, a UK-based engineering company, and Singapore Airlines is a prime example of how international strategic learning alliances aimed at enhancing learning through joint R&I activities can generate reputation. This alliance, established to develop and maintain advanced aircraft engines, leverages the strengths of both companies to drive technological advancements and operational excellence.

### »» *International R&I activities:*

Rolls-Royce and Singapore Airlines collaborate on various R&I activities, including the development of next-generation aircraft engines and the implementation of advanced maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) technologies. The partnership involves joint international research projects, shared facilities, and cross-company teams working on innovative solutions to improve engine performance and efficiency. These activities are conducted across multiple locations, including Rolls-Royce's research centers in the UK and Singapore Airlines' engineering facilities in Singapore.

One significant outcome of this collaboration is the development of the Rolls-Royce Trent 1000 engine, which powers the Boeing 787 Dreamliner. This engine incorporates advanced materials and design features that enhance fuel efficiency and reduce environmental impact. The alliance also focuses on digital innovation, utilizing data analytics and predictive maintenance technologies to optimize engine performance and reduce operational costs.

### »» *The nature of reputational impacts generated:*

The strategic learning alliance between Rolls-Royce and Singapore Airlines has generated substantial reputational benefits for both companies. For Rolls-Royce, the successful development and deployment of advanced aircraft engines have reinforced its reputation as a leader in aerospace engineering and innovation. The collaboration with Singapore Airlines has also highlighted Rolls-Royce's ability to work effectively with global partners, enhancing its credibility and attractiveness as a research collaborator.

Singapore Airlines, on the other hand, has benefited from the alliance by showcasing its commitment to operational excellence and innovation. The partnership with Rolls-Royce has positioned Singapore Airlines as a key player in the aviation industry, capable of driving significant technological advancements. This has not only enhanced Singapore Airlines' reputation but also attracted additional investment and partnerships from other leading aerospace companies.

The reputational impacts of this alliance extend beyond the immediate technological achievements. Both Rolls-Royce and Singapore Airlines have gained increased visibility and credibility in the global aerospace community, facilitating further international collaborations and attracting top talent. The alliance has demonstrated the effectiveness of combining engineering expertise with operational excellence to achieve groundbreaking results, setting a precedent for future strategic learning alliances in the aerospace sector.

#### Sources:

Tlemsani, I., Matthews, R. and Mohamed Hashim, M.A. (2023), "Cross-border alliances and strategic games", Journal of Work-Applied Management, Vol. 15 No. 2, pp. 292-313. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JWAM-04-2023-0034>





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