

Publishing Asian Case Studies in Top-tier Journals: A Structured-Pragmatic-Situational (SPS) Approach

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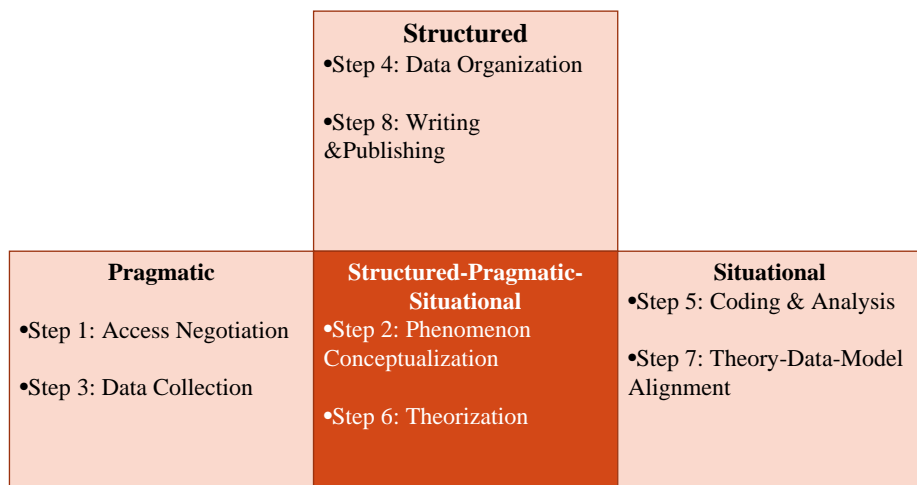
Agenda

- Challenges of Publishing Asian Case Studies in Top Journals
- The 8 Steps of my Structured-Pragmatic-Situational (SPS) Approach
 - Step 1: Access Negotiation:
 - Step 2: Phenomenon Conceptualization:
 - Step 3: Data Collection:
 - Step 4: Data Organization:
 - Step 5: Coding & Analysis:
 - Step 6: Theorization:
 - Step 7: Theory-Data-Model Alignment:
 - Step 8: Writing & Publishing:
- Lessons Learnt & Recommendations

Challenges of Publishing Asian Case Studies in Top Journals

- Challenges of publishing case studies
 - Requires **clear chain of logic**
 - Need to build on **prior work**
 - Need to demonstrate **clear association** between qualitative evidence and conclusions drawn
 - Always argue for the **generalizability** of your findings
- Challenges of publishing Asian studies
 - Overcoming the **language, cultural and social barriers**
 - Writing with **coherence** and **conviction**
 - Presenting study in **concepts** understood by Western scholars

An Integrated Structured-Pragmatic-Situational (SPS) Approach to Conducting Case Studies



Step 1: Access Negotiation

- How to choose an interesting case?
 - **Internationally-renowned** organizations
 - E.g. Alibaba.com, Beijing Capital Airport
 - **Extreme** cases
 - E.g. Chang Chun Petrochemicals
 - **Difficult to access** phenomenon
 - E.g. SARS, Shan Zai Ji phenomenon
- How to gain access (in order of effectiveness)
 - **Unsolicited contact**
 - E.g. Hardwarezone
 - **Partnerships** with established institutions
 - E.g. CPF broad, MINDEF
 - Endorsement & Referrals from **Influential Benefactors**
 - E.g. Neusoft & SAP China
 - Working with **collaborators** with ready access
 - E.g. Tzu Chi Hospital, Shanghai Tobacco

Access Negotiation: Beijing Capital Airport

- Visit dates: **8 June to 13 June**
- Interview sessions: **9**
- Each session: **~2-3 hrs**
Group interviews: **2-5**
- Team
 - **Beijing Renmin University**
(Lead by **Prof Zuo** + 2)
 - **National University of Singapore** (Lead by **Prof Pan**
+ Barney Tan + Jenson Goh)



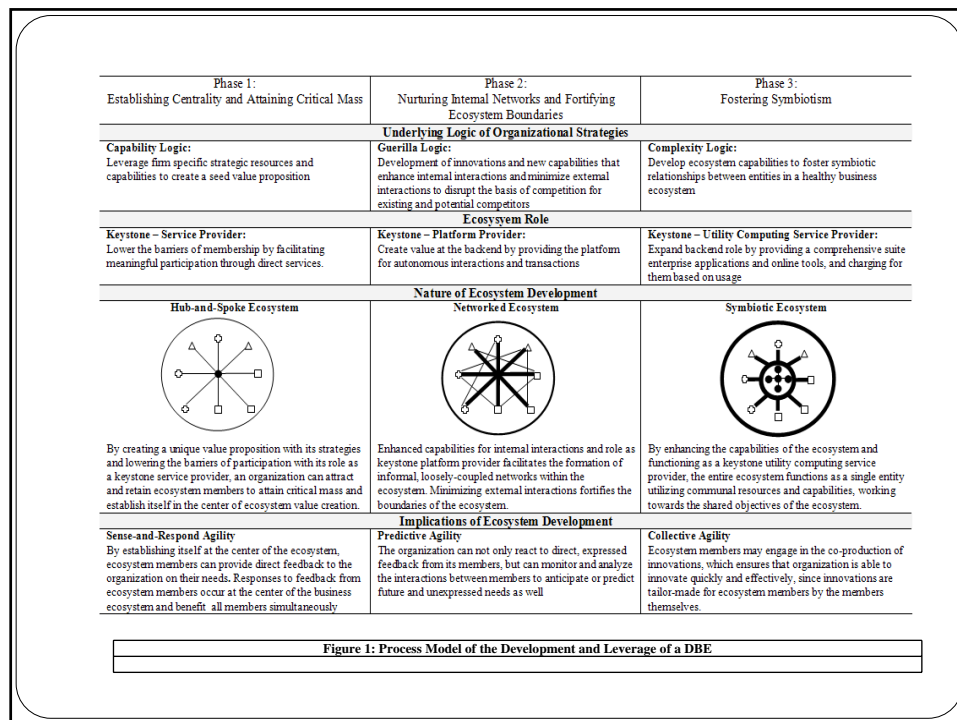
Step 2: Phenomenon Conceptualization

- Gathering background information about phenomenon:
 - Via **search engine**
 - Via **wikipedia**
 - Via **initial materials** from gatekeepers or collaborators
- Identify **possible phenomena of interest** from initial materials
 - Equipping alternative **theoretical lenses** based on possible **phenomena of interest**

Phenomenon Conceptualization: Alibaba.com

- Gathering resources that provide **background information**
 - Books on the strategies of Alibaba.com
 - Internet articles
 - Initial materials provided by informants
 - Published case studies
- Identify **possible phenomena of interest** from initial materials
 - Alibaba's strategies over the years can be conceptually divided into 3 distinct phases
 - Phase 1: Leveraging its capabilities and knowledge of the Chinese SME market
 - Phase 2: Relentless innovation and capability development
 - Phase 3: Developing the capabilities of its members





Phenomenon Conceptualization: Alibaba.com

- Equipping alternative **theoretical lenses** based on possible **phenomena of interest**
- Different Strategies in different phases
 - **Different logics of strategies (Lengnick-Hall & Wolff, 1999)?**
- Phase 1: Leveraging firm specific resources and capabilities
 - **Resource-based view (Barney 1991)**
 - **Dynamic capabilities (Teece et al., 1997)**
- Phase 2: Relentless innovation and capability development
 - **Hypercompetition (D'Aveni, 1994)**
 - **IT-Enabled Enterprise Agility (Sambamurthy et al., 2003)**
- Phase 3: Developing the capabilities of its members
 - **Business Ecosystems (Iansiti & Levine, 2004)**

Step 3: Data Collection

- Prepare **initial interview questions** based on identified theories
- Ensure all important **equipments are working**, e.g. voice recorders & camera
- **First interview** is the **most important!**
 - Provides **overview** of case study
- Be **spontaneous**
 - Might not find what you have prepared for
 - Other interesting phenomena may emerge



Step 3: Data Collection

- Following initial interview
 - Review data to **match phenomenon** with **identified theory**
 - Identify subsequent key **personnel to interview**
 - Identify **level of details** that can be collected
- Create data collection strategy
- **Group** interviews
 - **Snowballing technique** interviews
 - Source for **secondary data**

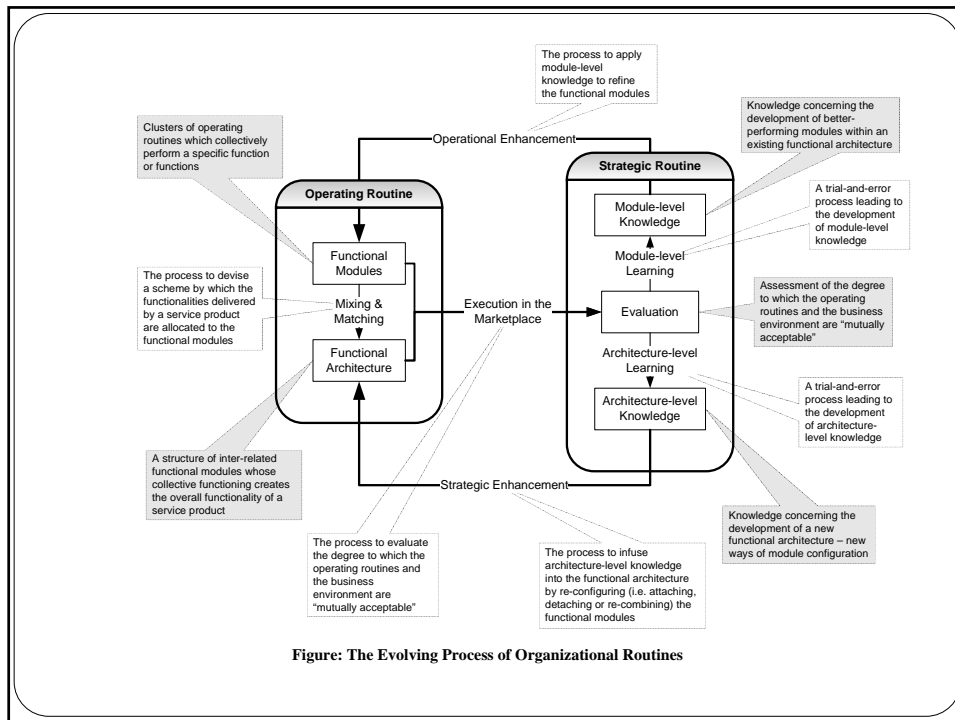
Data Collection: Shanghai Tobacco

- Our First (Overview) Interview:
 - Informant was **Manager of IT Department**
 - Began with **open-ended questions**
 - Extracted interesting account of **systems implementation failure** against the background of China's informatization movement
- Subsequent interviews were structured to delve deeper into the **evolution of their approach to systems implementation**



Step 4: Data Organization

- Structured ways of thinking of our data:
 - Anchored on temporal phases
 - Incremental Development: **Evolutionary Process Model**
 - Iterative Development: **Cyclical Process Model**
 - Conditional Development: **Contingency Model**
 - Anchored on an interesting phenomenon
 - Routines or practices
 - Series of intermediate states
 - Underlying mechanisms



Data Organization: Chang Chun Petrochemicals

- Organization was resource rich but **unwilling to buy expensive off-the-shelf packages**
- IT innovations primarily introduced by their CIO
- **Pattern of repeated improvisation** in systems implementation emerged in the
- Organized our data into **cyclical phases** (cyclical process model) and look for **recurrent themes**

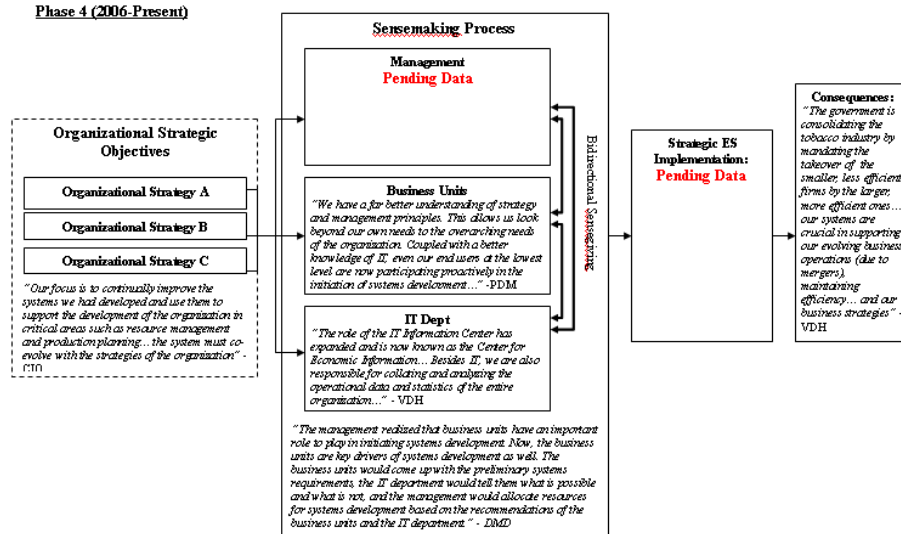


Step 5: Coding & Analysis

- Initial theoretical lens provide a set of themes
- Systematically code data according to those themes
 - Open Coding
 - Axial Coding
 - Selective Coding
- Ensure that each finding is corroborated by at least 2 sources of data
 - Factual information or subjective information?
- Modify the initial set of themes whenever new findings that challenge the existing schema emerge

Coding & Analysis: Data Coding Diagram from the Shanghai Tobacco Case

Phase 4 (2006-Present)



Findings & Analysis: Shanghai Tobacco Case

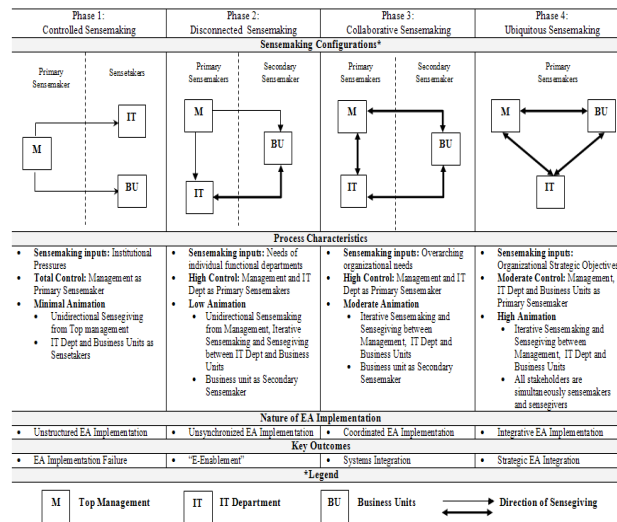


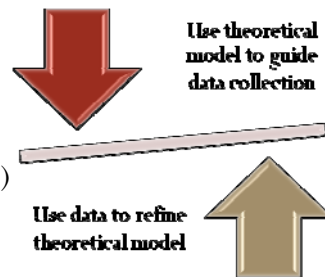
Figure 6: Process Model of Organizational Sensemaking in EA Implementation at STC

Step 6: Theorization

- **“Begin with the end in mind”**
 - Contribution to literature on phenomenon of interest? ?
 - Contribution to literature on theoretical lens?
 - Contribution to practice?
- Capturing theoretical ideas on paper
 - Create **Narratives** and **Visual Maps** to condense data (Langley 1999)
 - Constructing the **Theoretical Model**
- Ensuring Theory-Data-Model Alignment (**Iterating between Steps 6 & 7**)

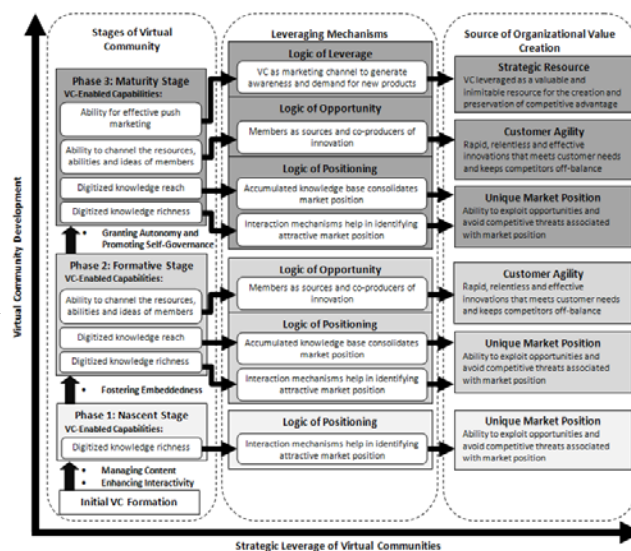
Step 7: Theory-Data-Model Alignment

- Recursive iterations between theory, data & emerging model (**3-way Alignment**) Can you explain your data based on existing theories?
 - **Model-Literature Alignment**
 - Does the existing literature support your theoretical model?
 - **Data-Model Alignment**
 - Does the data support your theoretical model?
- Every model consists of boxes (concepts) & arrows (process flows)
- Every box & arrow supported by > 1 quote



Theorization & Theory-Data-Model Alignment: Hardwarezone.com

A Two-Dimensional (2-D) Process Model of how Virtual Communities can be Developed and Leveraged



Step 8: Writing & Publishing

- Write the paper with the **audience in mind**
- Make full use of **graphical tools & tables** to illustrate your case
- Fixed reporting structure (**6 standard sections**):
 - Introduction
 - Literature Review
 - Research Methodology
 - Case Description
 - Discussion
 - Conclusion
- **Advantages** of structuring the writing process
 - Ensures nothing important is left out
 - Enhances comprehensibility
 - Improves the efficiency of writing



Step 8: Writing & Publishing

- The Process of Publishing
 - 1st Round Review: **Survival**
 - Emphasis on ensuring adequate research contribution
 - 2nd Round Review: **Life or Death**
 - Emphasis on delivering what the reviewers want
 - 3rd Round onwards: **Refining the paper**
 - Emphasis on making incremental improvements
- Tips on the publication process
 - Always give what the reviewers want and more
 - Suppress angry retorts
 - Persevere through the painful process

Lessons Learnt and Recommendations

- Take it **one step at a time**
 - **Identify** interesting phenomenon
 - **Collect** sufficient data
 - **Write** a good teaching case study
 - **Apply theoretical lens** to yield strong findings
 - Adopt '**learn from imitation**' approach
 - **Collaborate** with internationally renown case researchers
- Focus on conducting studies that are '**interesting and yet theoretically strong**'

An interesting phenomenon is half the battle won

 - Demonstrate rigor in research
 - Highlight theoretical and practical contributions

Lessons Learnt and Recommendations

- Specific to Data Collection
 - **Informant's responses** tend to have a **positive bias**
 - **Careful** in discerning between **facts & propaganda**
 - E.g. *Lower-level informants* may credit organizational success to the strategic vision of the *top management* even though there is **nothing strategic** about the vision of the top management
 - **Take advantage** of the **flexibility** of case study research
 - **Data analysis** performed *in tandem* with **data collection**
 - Data tends to be more **diverse** (*more people asking different questions*) & **voluminous** (*more questions asked*)
 - **Theoretical "Framing"** should be *clearly defined early* to **prevent losing direction**

Lessons Learnt and Recommendations

- Specific to Writing & Publishing
 - **Writing from the reviewers' perspective**
 - **Phenomenon** expert (Knowledge Management)
 - **Theoretical lens** expert (Social capital theory)
 - **Methodological** expert (Case study)
 - **Regional** expert (China and Asia)

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Thank You!

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