

# THE IMPORTANCE OF INNOVATION IN STRATEGIC MARKET MANAGEMENT

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## Abstract

*This study presents a theoretical review of the literature on strategic innovation through outsourcing in the field of Information Systems (IS). The competitive landscape in the Information Technology Outsourcing (ITO) and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industries has evolved over the past decade, shifting towards trust-based relationships and a focus on innovative strategic thinking. However, conflicts can arise between cost-focused engagements and innovation-focused engagements. This review aims to connect the fragmented insights from various management domains to the domain of IS outsourcing. By synthesizing 95 papers published between 1998 and 2020, the study develops an integrative framework that outlines the phases involved in achieving strategic innovation in the outsourcing context. The review contributes to the literature by contrasting research findings on innovation-oriented outsourcing with cost-oriented outsourcing and proposing future research directions to advance understanding in this area. This theoretical review explores the role of strategic innovation in the context of Information Technology Outsourcing (ITO) and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO). The study addresses the increasing focus on innovative strategic thinking in trust-based relationships between clients and service providers, as well as the conflicts that can arise between cost-focused engagements and innovation-focused engagements. The review integrates insights from various research streams and proposes an integrative framework that captures the different phases of strategic innovation in outsourcing. The study contributes to the literature on IS outsourcing by providing a comprehensive framework, highlighting the contrast between innovation-oriented and cost-oriented outsourcing, and suggesting directions for future research. The review incorporates 95 papers published between 1998 and 2020, with a focus on IS, innovation, and general management. The grounded theory methods for literature reviews are used in the study. Overall, this review offers valuable insights into strategic innovation through outsourcing and its implications for organizations.*

**Keywords:** Strategic Innovation, Outsourcing, Information Technology Outsourcing (ITO), Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), Cost-focused Engagements, Trust-based Relationships

## INTRODUCTION

Competition in Information Technology Outsourcing (ITO) and Business has increased during the previous ten years. The Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry has moved away from transactional engagements and towards relationships that were built on trust. In these relationships, there is an increasing focus on innovative strategic thinking. Strategic innovations significantly increase the client's overall competitiveness, assist its business-wide transformation initiatives, and advance its strategic goals. Numerous examples show that customers demand innovation from service providers, but new research also highlight possible conflicts, particularly between cost- and innovation-focused engagements. Cost-focused interactions are typically built on a transactional mentality where clients and suppliers trade services in exchange for a charge. They are built upon official ex-ante expectations and consequences. Providers provide clients with specialized competencies that provide cost reductions and increased operational effectiveness. Cost-oriented engagements, on the other hand, neglect to take into account key elements of strategic innovation, which asks for a creative mentality and slack resources with a hazardous return model (Gurteen, 1998),(Garcia-Granero et al., 2015). Notable outsourcing management conundrums are the outcome. One such is the extensive Service Level Agreements (SLAs), which, while

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typically necessary to guarantee service quality consistency in cost-focused outsourcing contracts, inhibit provider experimentation and risk-taking. (Aubert et al., 2015). We looked to the larger management literature since we were interested in learning how clients and providers may address these issues. We found a variety of papers outside of the main stream IS publications that looked at the relationship between innovation and outsourcing of IS. For instance, in the creative provide. We looked to the larger management literature since we were interested in learning how clients and providers may address these issues. We found a variety of papers outside of the main stream IS publications that looked at the relationship between innovation and outsourcing of IS can give a compatible and worthy example of strategic management. For instance, Chatterjee (2017) describes how innovative provider solutions are tailored to meet the business objectives of specific clients, while Roy and Sivakumar (2012) note that outsourcing engagements can produce radical innovations in the literature on innovation strategic management. Although it is clear that research on outsourcing and innovation is thriving, the field is still somewhat fragmented. This inspired us to interact with a larger body of business management literature in order to connect currently disjointed insights from relevant studies conducted in many management domains to the domain of IS outsourcing. We conducted a review that, for the most part, adhered to the key tenets of Paré et al.'s (2015) method of theoretical review. The final article set included 95 papers from several research streams that were published between 1998 and 2020, with the strongest representation in IS, innovation, and general management. Our subsequent study used the grounded theory methods for literature reviews developed by Wolfswinkel et al. (2013).

The ITO and BPO industries have developed and matured, changing how academics view what is "innovation" in the framework of outsourcing. The simple choice by a company to outsource some or all of its IT functions to an external provider is viewed as an innovation, according to earlier studies on ITO from the early-to-mid 1990s (Grover et al., 1994a; Gurbaxani, 1996; Loh & Venkatraman, 1992a). (Venkatraman, 1992b). Leading IS scholars have reported on empirical studies that use theories of innovation adoption and diffusion to model the acceptance and spread of ITO itself in papers such as Loh and Venkatraman (1992a), Ang and Cummings (1997), and Hu et al. (1997). The ITO industry saw a sizable growth in the late 1990s as a result of the pressing need for businesses to get their systems ready for the new millennium (the Year 2000 or Y2K issue, which is the rollover from the year 1999 into 2000). In moving away from an emphasis on cost savings and towards a proactive strategic focus, Carmel and Agarwal (2002) catch the maturation of offshore ITO. The competitive momentum in the outsourcing industry started shifting towards a value proposition that includes innovative solutions with a business-wide impact on top of cost savings and freeing up resources for core activities a decade later as the lines between ITO and BPO were becoming increasingly blurred (Lacity et al., 2016). Interest in understanding how innovation can be delivered in the outsourcing context is growing (Aubert et al., 2015; Oshri et al., 2018). Weeks and Feeny (2008) offer a refined categorization of innovation specifically emerging from the outsourcing context. It distinguishes between operational 4 innovations, business process innovation, and strategic innovation. Strategic innovation, defined as ways to "significantly enhance the firm's product or service offerings for existing target customers, or enable the firm to enter new markets" (Weeks & Feeny, 2008; Fahim et al., 2020), tends to be challenging for firms to achieve (Oshri et al., 2015; Weeks & Feeny, 2008).

### ***Problem Statement***

The competitive momentum in the outsourcing industry started shifting towards a value proposition that includes innovative solutions with a business-wide impact in addition to cost savings and freeing up

resources for core activities a decade later, as the lines between ITO and BPO were becoming more and more blurred (Lacity et al., 2016). We concentrate on this strategic element of innovation in this study because it has emerged as one of the major trends in the outsourcing sector and is receiving a lot of attention from IS scholars researching outsourcing-related issues.

### ***Rational of Research***

Contractually bound to one or more suppliers, this body of literature talks about the difficulties involved in seizing new chances for innovation. In the post-contract situation, scholarly analyses of commercial outcomes that can be realized through strategic innovation take center stage.

Our study of the literature also revealed four innovation-centric phases: engagement arrangements, strategic innovation generation, antecedents of the strategic innovation decision, and related outcomes. They provide a general overview of the steps involved in achieving strategic innovation as indicated by the reviewed literature and demonstrated in our integrative framework. The pre-contract, during-contract, and post-contract outsourcing scenarios have been woven into the framework to place these stages in an outsourcing context.

### ***Significance***

Three significant contributions to the literature on IS outsourcing are made by this review. First, we create an integrative framework from a vast corpus of knowledge. Second, we further the conversation about how research findings on innovation-oriented outsourcing contrast with those on cost-oriented outsourcing. Five directions for future research that expand on our integrative framework make up our third contribution.

### ***Research Questions***

Q1: What significant contributions do literature on IS provides?

Q2: How many directions for future research it idealizes?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In recent years, the Information Technology Outsourcing (ITO) and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industries have witnessed increased competition, leading to a shift from transactional engagements to trust-based relationships. Within these relationships, there is a growing emphasis on innovative strategic thinking, as strategic innovations have proven to significantly enhance clients' overall competitiveness, support business-wide transformation initiatives, and advance strategic goals. However, conflicts can arise between cost-focused engagements and innovation-focused engagements, highlighting the need for a deeper understanding of the role of innovation in strategic market management (Garcia-Granero et al., 2015) (Kashif & Iqbal, 2022). The ITO and BPO industries have undergone communal development and maturation, influencing academic perspectives on innovation within the outsourcing framework (Arif et al., 2023). Early studies on ITO from the 1990s considered the simple act of outsourcing IT functions to be an innovation (Grover et al., 1994a; Gurbaxani, 1996; Loh & Venkatraman, 1992a). As the industry progressed, empirical studies explored the adoption and diffusion of ITO, highlighting the need to move beyond cost savings and adopt a proactive strategic focus (Carmel & Agarwal, 2002). The convergence of ITO and BPO blurred the lines between the two, leading to a shift in the outsourcing industry towards value propositions that incorporate innovative solutions with a business-wide impact (Lacity et al., 2016). As the outsourcing industry increasingly recognizes the importance of innovation, the challenge lies in

effectively delivering innovation within the outsourcing context (Fareed & Iqbal, 2024). The strategic element of innovation has emerged as a significant trend, attracting attention from scholars studying outsourcing-related issues (Lacity et al., 2016; Iqbal, 2023). However, seizing new opportunities for innovation poses difficulties, particularly in the post-contract stage, where commercial outcomes realized through strategic innovation become crucial (Aubert et al., 2015). Understanding the difficulties involved in achieving strategic innovation within outsourcing relationships is essential. To address this, a comprehensive analysis of the literature can shed light on the different phases of innovation-centric processes and their implications. This literature review aims to provide insights into engagement arrangements, strategic innovation generation, antecedents of the strategic innovation-decision, and related outcomes. By situating these stages within the pre-contract, during-contract, and post-contract outsourcing scenarios, a holistic view of strategic innovation in the outsourcing context can be developed. This literature review contributes to the field of IS outsourcing in three main ways. First, it creates an integrative framework by synthesizing a wide range of knowledge from multiple research streams. By connecting insights from various management domains to the domain of IS outsourcing, this framework offers a comprehensive understanding of strategic innovation within outsourcing relationships. Second, it advances the conversation on the contrasting findings between innovation-oriented outsourcing and cost-oriented outsourcing, providing a nuanced perspective on the role of innovation in strategic market management. Finally, the review suggests five directions for future research, further expanding on the integrative framework and identifying areas for further exploration. According to Aubert et al. (2015) and Oshri et al. (2018), there is an increasing interest in learning how innovation may be provided in the context of outsourcing. A more detailed classification of innovation that specifically arises from the outsourcing setting is provided by Weeks and Feeny (2008). It makes a distinction between operational, business process, and strategic innovation and even helps community development (Zaheer et al., 2023; Hassan et al., 2021). It can be difficult for businesses to implement strategic innovation, which is defined as ways to "significantly enhance the firm's product or service offerings for existing target customers, or enable the firm to enter new markets" (Weeks & Feeny, 2008). The radical/exploratory concept of innovation articulated in the innovation and strategy literature is reflected in Weeks and Feeny's (2008) definition of strategic innovation. These advancements assist businesses in providing new goods and/or services. Which outsourcing arrangement is best for strategic innovation is still up for debate among academics. Slim supply bases, or choosing to work with one or a small number of providers, are supported by a number of research (Bui et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2004; Su and Levina, 2011; Weeks and Feeny, 2008; Wiener and Saunders, 2014). On the other hand, several research (Su et al., 2015) demonstrate effective innovation outcomes with large supplier bases. Decisions on the configuration of the supply base have significant effects on 1) the ability to access a variety of ideas, 2) the development of dependency, and 3) coordination. Combinations with a small and large supply base show few improvements. According to some research, keeping a number of niche players on the client's radar may lead to a steady flow of unique ideas (Su et al., 2015; Su and Levina, 2011), which in turn increases flexibility for accommodating changing requirements (Bui et al., 2019), and enables the client to more thoroughly explore the potential of new technologies. Contrarily, interacting with only one or a small number of providers reduces the diversity of viewpoints (Su et al., 2015), but it fosters the growth of a common vocabulary, body of knowledge, and procedures (Bui et al., 2019). These jointly created capabilities therefore make it easier to find business-level innovations that are better matched to the unique qualities of the client (Weeks and Feeny, 2008). Dependencies emerge gradually and become a significant problem in settings with a small supply base. Long-term contracts can create lock-in issues,

particularly (Kumar and Snavely, 2004; Su et al., 2015). According to the TCE tradition, switching costs are high when the task environment exhibits high levels of uncertainty (Cordella and Willcocks, 2012) and when highly specialised resources are developed and cannot be quickly redeployed in various engagements (Lee and Kim, 2010). When clients are forced to use a small pool of expertise, this might lead to large opportunity costs when it comes to strategic breakthroughs (Hoecht and Trott, 2006). Contrarily, minimal dependency may serve as a constant reminder that the provider is replaceable (Su et al., 2015), fostering mistrust and inhibiting activities involving group problem-solving (Miranda and Kavan, 2005). Configurations using a combination of narrow and broad supply bases for strategic innovation represent a promising topic that has only been briefly explored by past research. These combinations are made possible by provider ranking algorithms. According to recent configuration concepts like the long-tail strategy, which is based on this notion, emerging technologies are leveraged with numerous niche providers on a project-by-project basis (broad supply base), while platform services are contracted out to a small group of preferred strategic partners (slim supply base) (Su et al., 2015; Hassan et al., 2021). There was an earlier time when societies were completely rigid as compared to what they are today; this has happened because of technological innovations (Fareed et al., 2023). There is no sure strategy, but the use of penetrational pricing by digital platformers especially seems to have been fairly effective in attracting new customers and keeping them. Where there are any two customers, an ideal breakage price theory should apply. Bear in mind that especially in the digital market sphere, this price strategy may harshly disturb the value of many offerings (Iqbal, 2023).

Strategic leadership plays a major role in developing corporate strategy for this. In the future, it sees, makes informed choices and motivates employees in the direction of the common goal (Iqbal & Ali, 2024). It is the financial sector that gives support to the economy because of the fact that it depends on and relies upon a solid and sound financial system for its development and welfare (Kanwal et al., 2023).

## METHODOLOGY

This study conducted a theoretical review of the literature to explore the relationship between strategic innovation and outsourcing in the field of Information Systems (IS). The methodology followed the key principles of Paré et al.'s (2015) method of theoretical review and utilized grounded theory methods for literature reviews developed by Wolfswinkel et al. (2013). The review included 95 papers published between 1998 and 2020 from various research streams, with a focus on IS, innovation, and general management. The selected papers provided insights into the relationship between innovation and outsourcing in different management domains. To address the research questions and contribute to the literature on IS outsourcing, we conducted a theoretical review using the following methodology.

**Literature Search:** Researcher conducted an extensive literature search to identify relevant papers from various research streams published between 1998 and 2020. Our search included IS, innovation, and general management publications to gather insights from different domains.

**Inclusion Criteria:** Researcher included papers that provided insights into the relationship between innovation and outsourcing of IS. The final article set consisted of 95 papers that met our inclusion criteria.

**Theoretical Review Approach:** Researcher followed the key tenets of Paré et al.'s (2015) method of theoretical review. This approach involves synthesizing information systems knowledge by identifying

common themes, concepts, and frameworks across the selected papers.

**Grounded Theory Methods:** Researcher employed grounded theory methods for literature reviews developed by Wolfswinkel et al. (2013). This approach allowed us to rigorously review the literature, identify patterns, and generate theoretical insights from the selected papers.

**Contributions to the Literature:** Researcher identified three significant contributions to the literature on IS outsourcing through our review. Firstly, we created an integrative framework that synthesized knowledge from a wide range of sources. Secondly, we highlighted the contrasting findings between innovation-oriented outsourcing and cost-oriented outsourcing, opening avenues for further research. Finally, we proposed five directions for future research that build upon our integrative framework. By following this methodology, we aimed to provide a comprehensive review of the literature on strategic innovation through outsourcing and contribute to the understanding of the role of innovation in the outsourcing context.

## DISCUSSION

The literature evaluation demonstrates how, during the previous ten years, business process outsourcing (BPO) and information technology outsourcing (ITO) have changed. The transition from transactional interactions to relationships built on trust is a change in the industry, where creative strategic thinking is becoming more and more important. It is widely acknowledged that strategic innovations play a critical role in accomplishing business-wide transformation projects, raising a client's level of competitiveness, and reaching strategic objectives. Conflicts do, however, occur between engagements that are cost- and innovation-focused, especially when it comes to the trade-off between official ex-ante expectations and the requirement for a creative mindset with spare resources.

As the outsourcing sector has grown, so too have scholarly viewpoints about the definition of innovation in the outsourced context. Previous research examined the practice of outsourcing IT operations as innovative, emphasizing the shift from cost-driven projects to proactive, strategic initiatives. The merging of ITO and BPO further dissolved barriers between industries, resulting in a move toward value propositions that include cutting-edge solutions that have an effect on the entire company. The paper highlights the three forms of innovation that can be provided in an outsourcing context: business process innovation, operational innovation, and strategic innovation. It also highlights the increasing interest in this area.

The literature emphasizes how difficult it can be to achieve strategic innovation in outsourcing relationships, especially when things get complicated after the contract is signed. In cost-focused outsourcing, service level agreements (SLAs) are necessary to guarantee service quality, but they may also prevent providers from taking risks and experimenting. This problem presents a big problem for outsourcing management. By connecting lessons from varied studies in many management domains, the review goes beyond the mainstream Information Systems (IS) publications. Instead, it draws from broader management literature. The goal of this strategy is to close the gaps and link the disparate ideas from pertinent studies conducted in many fields to the particular field of IS outsourcing. As the outsourcing sector develops, innovation's strategic component becomes more important, requiring a greater comprehension of how innovation may be provided within the outsourced setting. The evaluation focuses on four stages that are innovation-related: engagement plans, innovative strategy generation, decisions that lead to strategic innovation, and associated results. Through the integration of these phases into the

outsourcing scenarios that occur before, during, and after contracts, the review provides an integrated framework for comprehending strategic innovation in outsourcing agreements.

The literature also explores the impact of supply base configuration on innovation results. There is discussion on the pros and cons of having a wide supply base with many specialty players vs a small supply base with a few providers. Every setup has pros and cons. The former encourages shared vocabulary and expertise but runs the danger of causing dependency, while the later encourages diversity of thought but may result in higher switching costs and decreased trust. A viable direction for future research, according to the assessment, may be to combine wide and limited supply bases for strategic innovation. The literature research offers insightful information about the evolving nature of BPO and ITO, the growing significance of strategic innovation, and the difficulties in implementing innovation in outsourcing partnerships. The review's integrative framework and investigation of supply base configurations advance our knowledge of strategic innovation in the particular setting of IS outsourcing. The suggested research avenues highlight even more how important it is to keep investigating and improving these ideas in light of how information technology outsourcing is developing.

### **CONCLUSION**

This theoretical review makes several significant contributions to the literature on IS outsourcing. Firstly, it develops an integrative framework by synthesizing a vast body of knowledge. The framework encompasses four phases: engagement arrangements, strategic innovation generation, antecedents of the strategic innovation-decision, and related outcomes. These phases provide an overview of the steps involved in achieving strategic innovation in the outsourcing context. Secondly, the review highlights the contrast between research findings on innovation-oriented outsourcing and cost-oriented outsourcing, advancing the understanding of how these two approaches differ in their outcomes and implications. Finally, the study proposes five directions for future research that expand upon the integrative framework, addressing important gaps and avenues for further exploration. In conclusion, the literature on Information Technology Outsourcing (ITO) and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) provides significant contributions to our understanding of innovation in the outsourcing context. The industry has evolved from transactional engagements to trust-based relationships, with a growing emphasis on strategic thinking and innovation. Earlier studies considered outsourcing IT functions as an innovation in itself, but as the industry matured, there was a shift towards a proactive strategic focus. The convergence of ITO and BPO further blurred the lines and emphasized the value proposition of innovative solutions with a business-wide impact. However, delivering innovation within the outsourcing context poses challenges, particularly in the post-contract stage where strategic innovation becomes crucial. The literature highlights the need for a deeper understanding of how clients and providers can address the conflicts between cost-focused and innovation-focused engagements. By synthesizing a vast corpus of knowledge, this review contributes by creating an integrative framework that encompasses various stages of achieving strategic innovation in outsourcing. Additionally, it identifies avenues for future research that expand on the integrative framework and further explore the contrasts between innovation-oriented and cost-oriented outsourcing. Overall, the literature on IS outsourcing provides valuable insights into the role of innovation in strategic management and offers guidance for practitioners and researchers in the field.

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