# Strategic Coherence under Turbulence: How Corporate Universities Balance Exploration and Exploitation

**Olga Tunkevichus, Irina Plaunova and Konstantin Bagrationi**
Graduate School of Business, HSE University, Frankfurt am Main, Germany

ivplaunova@edu.hse.ru
kbagrationi@hse.ru
oagordienko@hse.ru

**Abstract:** Corporate Universities (CUs) play a crucial role in modern businesses, serving as strategic tools that foster individual and organizational learning, knowledge creation, and innovation. Their impact extends beyond mere skill acquisition, influencing organizational outcomes such as sustainable competitive advantage, social innovation, and enhanced knowledge processes. CUs' success relies on a number of contextual circumstances, including the institutional environment, economic situation, and industry-specific norms. Moreover, being integral components of organizational learning systems, CUs align with the concept of organizational ambidexterity. However, their strategic orientation – whether exploratory (innovation-oriented) or exploitative (efficiency-oriented) – remains understudied: while extant literature underlines the role of CUs in organizational ambidexterity, there is little empirical evidence on what determines their orientation. This research bridges these gaps by statistically validating the influence of the most significant factors on CU's strategic orientation. Based on open-source material, such as articles and reports retrieved from large scientifical databases, this study gives the state of the art of corporate education research and identifies strategically important factors for CUs. A survey conducted among the management staff of well-known CUs in large companies supplied comprehensive responses. Hypotheses are tested to examine the effect of external environments, strategic learning practices and technology integration on CU strategic orientation. By integrating ambidexterity theory with organizational learning theories, this research provides a comprehensive framework of CU strategic coherence. The findings contribute to both theoretical and applied domains by (1) contributing to the scant literature on CUs, (2) empirically validating the dynamic influence of various factors in CU orientation, and (3) providing practical lessons for corporate managers and policymakers on how to facilitate long-term CU effectiveness. This research not only addresses a significant gap in comparative CU research but also provides input for strategic decision-making to foster innovation and competitiveness under turbulent economic conditions.

**Keywords**: Corporate Universities, Strategic Orientation, Strategic Coherence, Corporate Learning, Exploration vs. Exploitation

## 1. Introduction

CUs are vital strategic tools in modern organizations that promote learning, knowledge creation, and innovation (Allen, 2002). Aside from enhancing personal skills development, they contribute to organizational success by strengthening competitive advantage, innovation, and knowledge management (Scarso, 2017; Rademakers, 2005). They are effective depending on situational factors including industry culture, economic performance, and cultural differences (Shakina et al., 2024; Parshakov & Shakina, 2018; Bogolyubov & Easterby-Smith, 2013). In today's rapidly changing business environment (Meister, 1998), ongoing learning through CUs has become essential, with progressive companies employing them to become successful in knowledge-based markets (Rademakers, 2005).

Despite their potential, many CUs focus on operational training rather than strategic knowledge innovation (Jansink et al., 2005). Recent empirical evidence shows that tightly knit, non-formal social ties – often labelled blat – can silently block the diffusion of novel practices, including digital learning solutions, by shielding employees from strategic directives (Aksiutin et al., 2022). This issue is particularly evident in emerging markets, where institutional, cultural, and economic conditions differ from Western contexts (Bogolyubov & Easterby-Smith, 2013). Much of the existing research centers on Western CUs, creating a gap in understanding those in other regions. Foresight-based scenario studies show how CUs can follow divergent evolutionary paths depending on technology uptake and change-management capability (Zinchenko et al., 2024). Because employee readiness for, and resistance to change vary sharply across institutional settings (Bagrationi & Gordienko, 2024; Bagrationi et al., 2021, 2022), context-sensitive studies of CUs remain indispensable.

As integral components of organizational learning systems, CUs align with the concept of organizational ambidexterity - balancing exploration (innovation) and exploitation (efficiency) strategies (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2008). However, the influences on their strategic orientation from this point of view remain underexplored. So, the following major *research question* is raised: What are the key determinants influencing the ambidextrous strategic orientation of CUs?

## 2. Theoretical Foundations of the Study

The CU concept originated with a General Electric initiative in the 1950s, though significant development began in the late 1980s (Gould, 2005). This period saw economies shift toward service-oriented and knowledge-based industries, prompting organizations to invest in specialized training. Walton (1999) identified three generations of CUs. The first concentrated on formalized, standardized training. The second centered on the flexibility and autonomy of workers amidst growing competition. Third-generation universities reflect technological advancements and utilize virtual communication modalities for training. In today's organizational landscape, knowledge plays a pivotal role in sustaining competitive advantage. CUs act as agencies in spreading, consolidating, and facilitating knowledge to affect business results (Singh et al, 2020).

Efforts to categorize CUs are generally found on strategic emphasis. Rademakers (2005) proposes three categories, starting with rudimentary training (School) and progressing to strategic innovation (Academy). Paton et al (2017) highlights a networked model of CU encompassing diverse learning strategies as the newest one. The most advanced CUs actively impact corporate strategy, pointing to the critical importance of designing CUs in harmony with organizational goals.

### 2.1 Strategic Orientation From an Ambidextrous Point of View

The strategic orientation in this article is framed through an ambidextrous approach (Ramachandran et al., 2019). Drawing on March (1991), organizational ambidexterity involves balancing exploration and exploitation. Exploitation refers to refinement, efficiency, and execution, linked to explicit knowledge, while exploration involves experimentation, innovation, and risk-taking, tied to tacit knowledge (Nonaka, 1994; Benner & Tushman, 2003). Together, these enable firms to thrive amid market uncertainty. The knowledge process in companies is strongly related to ambidexterity. For instance, Lin et al (2013) recognizes the ability of learning to facilitate organizational ambidexterity which, in turn, provokes business performance. This term has been applied to education already by numerous scholars (Cabeza-Pulléset al, 2020), but it concerns traditional and not corporate education. Lissillour & Rodriguez-Escobar (2022) were the first to apply it specifically to CUs. This article extends this debate.

### 2.2 Selecting Potentially Influential Factors

Drawing on existing literature, the factors influencing the strategic orientation of CUs can be examined through an ambidextrous lens. Batra & Dhir's (2022) classification of ambidextrous orientation antecedents in developing economies highlights key elements that lead to the introduction of strategic context factors in this study. Additionally, Chen & Xu's (2022) insights support the role of strategic learning and digitalization. A more detailed analysis is given below.

#### *2.2.1 Strategic Coherence*

Rademakers (2005) posits that two features are common to successful CUs: strong top management commitment and a clear mission linked to corporate strategy. Extending this view, recent work on change-oriented leadership under conditions of strategic autonomy demonstrates that leaders who frame evaluation systems as learning opportunities significantly boost employees' willingness to support transformational CU agendas (Diakova et al., 2024). These variables enable the university to effectively exploit and innovate knowledge, resulting in long-term organizational performance. In this paper, strategic coherence is seen as a combination of vertical and horizontal strategic fits. Strategy requires balancing them to achieve both stability and distributed problem-solving creativity. The combination of the two concepts is equivalent to the topic of ambidexter strategic orientation for employee training. Moreover, this approach aligns with the unique challenges of emerging markets (Hoskisson et al, 2000).

Hypothesis 1 (H1): The CU strategic orientation positively follows from the characteristics of the main strategic priorities implemented in the organization.

#### *2.2.2 Strategic Learning Processes*

Exploration and exploitation strategies are associated with strategic learning processes, as demonstrated by Sirén et al (2012). Organizational learning addresses the fundamental challenge of maintaining an equilibrium between developing new knowledge and leveraging existing competencies, particularly as organizations naturally tend to favor one over the other (Levinthal & March, 1993). An integrative strategic learning framework (Sirén et al,

2012) encompasses individual, group, and organizational levels, connected by processes like knowledge creation, distribution, interpretation, and implementation. Within this context, Paton et al (2017) highlight the growing importance of CUs as strategic learning mechanisms.

H2: Strategic learning processes significantly influence the adoption of CU strategies, contributing to overall ambidexterity.

### *2.2.3 Cultural Influences*

The effectiveness and efficiency of CUs are context-dependent (Singh et al, 2020). In developing economies, they have an additional challenge to provide training to cover up gaps in public education systems (Kolo et al, 2013). Bogolyubov & Easterby-Smith, 2013 illustrated cross-national variations in organizational learning. For instance, high power distance and uncertainty avoidance negatively impacted adaptability, while individualism and long-term orientation facilitated learning. As such, CUs' operation may be contingent on the special nature of the CU program and where it operates.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Cultural dimensions influence the choice of CU strategic orientation significantly.

### *2.2.4 Digital Learning*

E-learning concepts are in extensive application in third-generation CUs, which are currently the most common type everywhere (Walton, 1999). In this study, we use digitization as an umbrella term that represents many modern technologies enhancing accessibility, interactivity, and efficiency in education.

According to Singh et al (2020), now technology is a key force shaping CUs. The scientific research shows that IT capabilities have a positive impact on innovation ambidexterity. While IT infrastructure alone may not create a competitive advantage (Kmieciak et al., 2012), IT capabilities can boost both processes, particularly in emerging markets (Soto-Acosta et al., 2018). Based on the AI case as the brightest example of modern technology, the content analysis of global news on AI (Johnson et al, 2022) shows a preference for exploratory use (64%) over exploitative use (5%). This suggests a similar trend may apply to other digital technologies.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): The introduction of modern technologies in CUs has a greater impact on the adoption of an exploration strategy than an exploitation one.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the conceptual model posits that several antecedent factors – including strategic coherence, strategic learning processes, cultural context, and digital capabilities – influence a CU's strategic orientation toward exploration (innovation-focused) or exploitation (efficiency-focused). The arrows in Figure 1 represent the hypothesized direction of each influence, indicating how each factor is expected to drive either an exploratory or exploitative orientation.

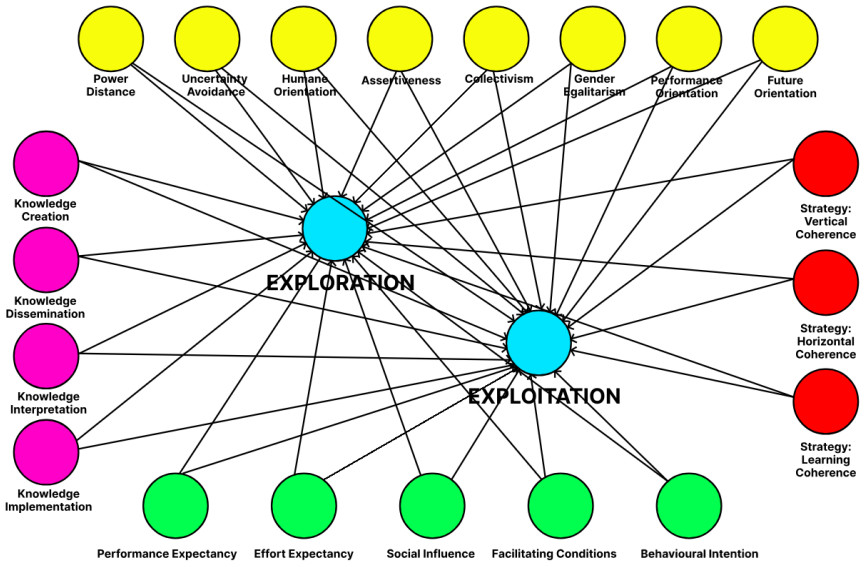


**Figure 1: The generalized conceptual framework of the study**

## 3. Data and Methodology

The literature review identified several factors that may influence CU's strategic direction, but these had not been studied thoroughly. To address this gap, the study developed a questionnaire to test the proposed hypotheses using rigorous statistical methods. The conceptual model was a prerequisite for SEM, which relates measurement items to their respective latent variables. Data analysis began with descriptive statistics and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess construct validity, followed by PLS-SEM with a bootstrapping procedure (5,000 resamples) to evaluate the significance of each hypothesized path (Hair et al., 2019). This approach was chosen to accommodate the sample size and non-normal data, and to robustly test the proposed relationships.

### 3.1 Questionnaire Development

The questionnaire utilized 7-point Likert scales to provide more accurate responses (Joshi et al, 2015). It measured CU's strategic orientation, technological innovation, strategic learning processes, and regional cultural influences, and consisted of 91 items. To enhance content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by two subject-matter experts. Their feedback led to minor wording adjustments, ensuring that all items were clear and relevant. All key constructs were measured with multiple items, and each scale demonstrated high internal consistency (composite reliability > 0.85) and acceptable convergent validity (average variance extracted > 0.50), indicating a robust measurement instrument (Hair et al., 2019).

Scales for exploration and exploitation items were constructed by the authors using theoretical anchors and empirical measures available from the literature on innovation and organizational learning (He & Wong, 2004; March, 1991). The strategic coherence measurement was also author-constructed. A key strength was the inclusion of six learning alignment items, which assessed how well training initiatives aligned with strategic priorities. The strategic learning items were adapted from Sirén (2012). A modified version of the GLOBE research program's questionnaire (House et al., 2004) was used to assess cultural dimensions. Leadership-related items were removed from Form Alpha of the 2006 GLOBE survey, as they were outside the scope of the study. The UTAUT framework (Venkatesh et al., 2003) was used to examine technology adoption.

### 3.2 Sample and Procedure

The selection of CUs for the study followed criteria set by Paton et al. (2017): they must be centralized initiatives in large organizations aimed at generating enterprise-wide value, maintain strategic coherence through adaptable programs, and enhance learning outcomes via partnerships and technology. Accordingly, CUs were selected from large companies (1000+ employees) across various industries.

The study targeted managers in strategic divisions of selected CUs. Out of 23 companies from emerging markets invited, 5 participated. The survey did not collect personal data in any form, and therefore, ethical or data protection approval was not mandatory. Overall, the CUs that took part in the survey belonged to the development, telecommunications, FMCG, and consulting industries. The final sample consisted of 67 mostly young, female, and well-educated managers, reflecting a modern, tech-oriented CU leadership in the region, though with a gender imbalance. The survey was administered via an online questionnaire distributed to the selected CUs, ensuring convenience and anonymity for participants. Out of 23 CUs invited, five provided responses (approximately a 22% participation rate at the organization level). The final sample of 67 managers reflects a modern, tech-oriented CU leadership demographic.

### 3.3 Primary Data Analysis

The items were grouped by construct and averaged to create composite scores. This process ensured that all constructs were standardized and ready for further statistical analysis, including correlation and regression.

For analysis purposes, we used SmartPLS 4 and Python statistical software. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were calculated to check for multicollinearity. No significant multicollinearity was detected in the dataset (inner-VIF < 3). Descriptive statistics showed high mean scores, moderate standard deviations, and near-normal univariate distributions based on skewness, kurtosis, and the Shapiro-Wilk test. However, the data did not follow a multivariate normality. Given the novel nature of this research, partially custom-developed indicators, and a small (N=67) sample with non-normal multivariate distribution (confirmed by the Mardia test, $p<0.05$), PLS-SEM was an appropriate choice. It effectively handles limited sample sizes, non-normal data, and new measurement scales, while offering strong predictive power suited to the exploratory aim of identifying key influencing factors (Hair et al., 2019; Jannoo et al., 2014).

### 3.4 Analyzing Construct Validity

As the measurement model was established, CFA was conducted to account for construct differences. Items with non-significant p-values were removed. The measurement model showed an acceptable fit to the data based on several fit indices. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was 0.942, above the recommended threshold of 0.90, indicating a good fit. The Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) was 0.875, slightly below the ideal cutoff but still acceptable. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was 0.0687, with a 90% confidence interval from 0.0258 to 0.101, and fell below the 0.08 threshold, suggesting a reasonable fit. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) was 0.0675, also under the recommended threshold of 0.08. All preserved factor loadings were positive and mostly substantial with many exceeding 0.7, indicating strong relationships between indicators and their factors. Out of 91 questions, 79 remained.

## 4. Results

In this study, results are reported at the p≤0.1 significance level, which is considered marginally significant. This approach is appropriate given that the research is exploratory in nature and based on a small sample size. For comparative purposes, findings at the more conventional 0.05 significance level are also indicated where applicable. Unlike CB-SEM, PLS-SEM does not rely on traditional model fit indices like chi-square or SRMR due to differences in algorithmic foundations (Hair et al., 2019). The model-fit indices requirements were met (high indicator loadings, AVE ≥ 0.5, HTMT ratio < 0.9, VIF < 5). Figure 2 presents the estimated structural equation model with all hypothesized paths and their standardized coefficients. As shown in the figure, the model explains approximately 70% of the variance in the exploration orientation and about 80% of the variance in the exploitation orientation of CUs (indicated by $R^2$ values), highlighting the model's substantial explanatory power.

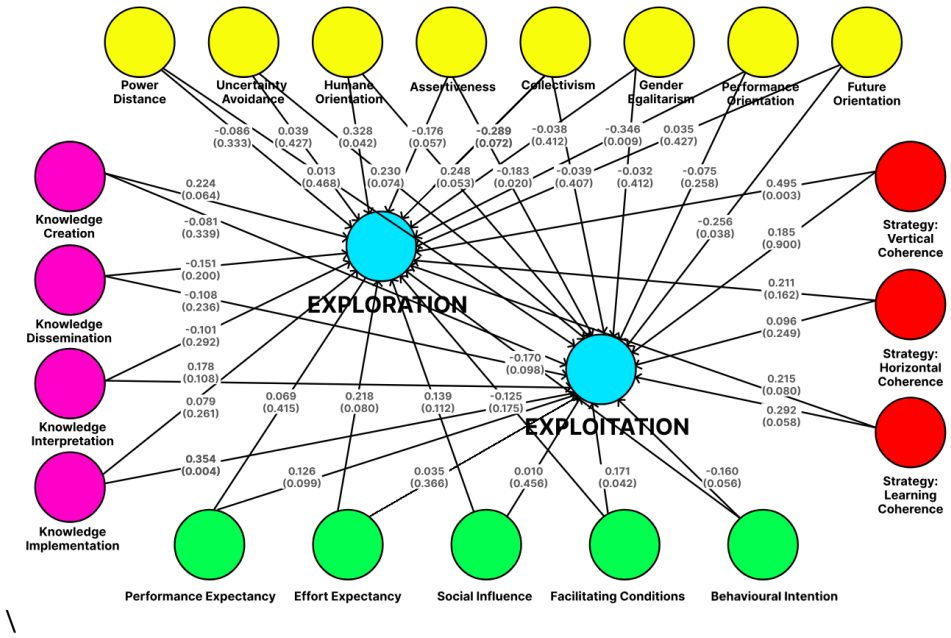


**Figure 2: The estimated structural equation model**

### 4.1 Hypotheses Testing

The bootstrapping results with 5000+ iterations are shown in Table 1, which details the results of the hypothesis tests, listing each proposed influence on exploration and exploitation alongside its standardized coefficient, standard deviation and p-value. The table highlights the relative strength of each factor's impact on exploratory versus exploitative orientation, guiding interpretation of the model's findings.

#### *4.1.1 Strategic Coherence*

Learning alignment marginally predicts both exploration (β=0.215, p<0.1) and exploitation (β=0.292, p<0.1). Vertical alignment influences exploitation (β=0.185, p<0.1) and significantly predicts exploration (β=0.495, p<0.05), whereas horizontal alignment shows no significant relationships. These findings indicate that vertical

strategic linkages and learning alignment support overall ambidexterity, being in line with Hypothesis 1 and underscoring the role of strategic coherence and vertical integration in enhancing CU effectiveness.

### *4.1.2 Strategic Learning*

Knowledge creation positively predicts exploration (β=0.224, p<0.1). Knowledge implementation significantly drives exploitation (β=0.354, p<0.05). Other learning dimensions show marginal or no relationships. So, the hypothesis that strategic learning processes positively influence ambidexterity is partially supported. Distinct aspects of strategic learning drive different innovation types. Nevertheless, the balanced ambidexterity is not reached.

### *4.1.3 Cultural Influences*

The results provide support for H3. Several cultural dimensions (e.g., assertiveness, collectivism, humane orientation, uncertainty avoidance, future orientation, performance orientation) show significant or marginally significant relationships with either exploitation or exploration. However, not all cultural dimensions demonstrate effects, indicating that while cultural dimensions influence strategic orientation, their impact varies depending on the specific dimension and the type of strategy.

### *4.1.4 Digital Learning*

The results do not fully support H4. While effort expectancy has a marginally significant positive effect on exploration (β=0.218, p<0.1), facilitating conditions (β=0.171, p<0.05) and performance expectancy (β=0.126, p<0.1) have significant positive effects on exploitation with no effect on exploration. Behavioral intention is negatively connected to both strategies. This suggests that technologies may have a greater impact on exploitation rather than exploration, contrary to H4. However, while most factors had some impact on exploitation, fewer influenced exploration, though their effect was stronger in that area.

**Table 1: Hypothesis testing**

| | | Original sample (O) | Standard deviation (STDEV) | P values |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cultural Influences | *Assertiveness -> EXPLOITATION* | -0.183 | 0.089 | 0.020 |
| | Assertiveness -> EXPLORATION | -0.176 | 0.112 | 0.057 |
| | Collectivism -> EXPLOITATION | -0.039 | 0.168 | 0.407 |
| | Collectivism -> EXPLORATION | -0.289 | 0.197 | 0.072 |
| | Humane Orientation -> EXPLOITATION | 0.248 | 0.153 | 0.053 |
| | *Humane Orientation -> EXPLORATION* | 0.328 | 0.189 | 0.042 |
| | Power Distance -> EXPLOITATION | 0.013 | 0.156 | 0.468 |
| | Power Distance -> EXPLORATION | -0.086 | 0.200 | 0.333 |
| | Gender Egalitarism -> EXPLOITATION | 0.032 | 0.142 | 0.412 |
| | Gender Egalitarism -> EXPLORATION | -0.038 | 0.170 | 0.412 |
| | Uncertainty Avoidance -> EXPLOITATION | 0.230 | 0.159 | 0.074 |
| | Uncertainty Avoidance -> EXPLORATION | 0.039 | 0.212 | 0.427 |
| | *Future Orientation -> EXPLOITATION* | -0.256 | 0.144 | 0.038 |
| | Future Orientation -> EXPLORATION | 0.035 | 0.193 | 0.427 |
| | Performance Orientation -> EXPLOITATION | -0.075 | 0.115 | 0.258 |
| | *Performance Orientation -> EXPLORATION* | -0.346 | 0.145 | 0.009 |
| Digital Learning | Effort Expectancy -> EXPLOITATION | 0.035 | 0.103 | 0.366 |
| | Effort Expectancy -> EXPLORATION | 0.218 | 0.153 | 0.080 |
| | *Facilitating Conditions -> EXPLOITATION* | 0.171 | 0.099 | 0.042 |
| | Facilitating Conditions -> EXPLORATION | -0.125 | 0.134 | 0.175 |
| | Behavioral Intention -> EXPLORATION | -0.170 | 0.132 | 0.098 |
| | Behavioral Intention -> EXPLOITATION | -0.160 | 0.100 | 0.056 |
| | Performance Expectancy -> EXPLOITATION | 0.126 | 0.098 | 0.099 |
| | Performance Expectancy -> EXPLORATION | 0.069 | 0.124 | 0.415 |
| | Social Influence -> EXPLOITATION | 0.010 | 0.087 | 0.456 |
| | Social Influence -> EXPLORATION | 0.139 | 0.114 | 0.112 |
| Strategic learning | Knowledge Creation -> EXPLORATION | 0.224 | 0.147 | 0.064 |
| | Knowledge Creation -> EXPLOITATION | -0.081 | 0.194 | 0.339 |
| | Knowledge Dissemination -> EXPLOITATION | -0.108 | 0.150 | 0.236 |
| | Knowledge Dissemination -> EXPLORATION | -0.151 | 0.180 | 0.200 |
| | Knowledge Implementation -> EXPLORATION | 0.079 | 0.123 | 0.261 |
| | *Knowledge Implementation -> EXPLOITATION* | 0.354 | 0.131 | 0.004 |
| | Knowledge Interpretation -> EXPLOITATION | 0.178 | 0.143 | 0.108 |
| | Knowledge Interpretation -> EXPLORATION | -0.101 | 0.185 | 0.292 |
| Strategic alignment | Strategy: Learning Alignment -> EXPLOITATION | 0.292 | 0.185 | 0.058 |
| | Strategy: Learning Alignment -> EXPLORATION | 0.215 | 0.153 | 0.080 |
| | Strategy: Horizontal Alignment -> EXPLOITATION | 0.096 | 0.141 | 0.249 |
| | Strategy: Horizontal Alignment -> EXPLORATION | 0.211 | 0.214 | 0.162 |
| | Strategy: Vertical Alignment -> EXPLOITATION | 0.185 | 0.138 | 0.090 |
| | *Strategy: Vertical Alignment -> EXPLORATION* | 0.495 | 0.182 | 0.003 |

To sum up, the data provided statistical evidence in favor of Hypotheses 1 and 3, while other hypotheses showed mixed results.

## 5. Discussion

Overall, the research on strategic orientation in CUs within emerging economies, viewed through the lens of ambidexterity, highlights key findings (Fig. 2). Strategic coherence and strategic learning emerge as the strongest predictors (based on β-estimates) of success for either exploration or exploitation strategies. Strategic learning alignment shows the greatest positive impact on both, underscoring the importance of shared understanding, knowledge sharing, and adaptive learning cultures central to CUs' mission (Garzón Castrillon, 2019). Vertical Alignment also significantly supports ambidexterity, particularly in markets where hierarchical structures often hinder implementation (Hoskisson et al, 2000). These insights align with prior studies stressing structured knowledge processes and strategic consistency for balancing exploration and exploitation (Crossan & Berdrow, 2003; Sirén et al, 2012; Rademakers, 2005; Batra & Dhir, 2022). However, the results indicate that different dimensions of learning have distinct impacts on strategic orientation. Knowledge creation and implementation emerge as key drivers of organizational ambidexterity, supporting Kat'kalo and Shumkova (2024), who found that CUs in emerging country primarily focus on knowledge creation activities such as education (100%) and interaction with universities (62%), which are closely linked to exploration. High involvement in personnel assessment (81%) further highlights a strong emphasis on knowledge implementation, aligning with exploitative strategies. In contrast, limited engagement in knowledge distribution (e.g., publishing, conferences – 9%) and interpretation suggests these processes are either embedded within broader practices or less critical, exerting minimal influence on ambidexterity.

Cultural dimensions significantly influence strategic orientation. In contexts with high power distance and uncertainty avoidance, organizations tend to prioritize efficiency over experimentation. However, this study found no significant impact of power distance, contrary to earlier studies by Pelagio Rodriguez & Hechanova (2014) and Bogolyubov & Easterby-Smith (2013). Pandey and Sharma (2009) suggested that high uncertainty avoidance cultures favored exploitation over exploration, which was supported here. Humane orientation was found to support a people-centered environment that encourages exploration and strengthens exploitation. However, collectivism was found to be negatively related to exploration only, suggesting that highly cohesive or group-oriented environments might limit the diversity of perspectives or autonomy needed for exploratory activities. Future orientation was negatively related to exploitation, aligning with long-term flexibility. Assertiveness hindered both exploration and exploitation, suggesting competitive cultures may stifle innovation. Performance orientation also limited exploration, indicating achievement-driven environments may reduce creativity and risk-taking.

The digital perspective did not support the research hypothesis that new technologies contribute more to exploration than exploitation. Exploitation was more broadly driven by technological enablers. However, leading UTAUT constructs exhibited different patterns: effort expectancy was indeed positively related to exploration, meaning that the convenience of use in technology inspired people more toward new and risky activities. Concurrently, facilitating conditions and performance expectancy mainly facilitated exploitation, suggesting a focus on efficiency when job performance and organizational support were experienced. Therefore, although most digital tools enhance operational efficiency, the newest ones such as AI and adaptive technologies may have supported exploration if intentionally designed for it (Gastaldi et al., 2022; Johnson et al., 2022), underscoring the need for targeted strategies that go beyond intentions to foster innovation in digital environments. A recent bibliometric synthesis confirms this trajectory, revealing six fast-growing AI research streams in higher education – ranging from generative tutoring systems to blockchain-backed credentialing –that jointly enlarge the exploratory space available to learning organisations (Gordienko & Bagrationi, 2024).

## 6. Conclusion

The findings indicated that the alignment of CUs with broader organizational goals is crucial in shaping their strategic orientation, underscoring their role as key platforms for knowledge integration. Strategic learning processes were found to positively influence both exploration and exploitation, though with varying intensity and focus. Additionally, cultural dynamics in emerging economies were shown to significantly influence strategic decision-making, while technological capabilities predominantly fueled exploitation efforts.

This study has several limitations. The small sample size (67 CU managers) limited statistical power and generalizability, particularly beyond emerging markets. Moreover, CFA required modifying or removing

constructs, thus simplifying the model. The marginal significance level assessment is also a limitation and requires further research.

Based on the findings of this study, several practical lessons can be drawn for corporate managers and policymakers aiming to enhance the effectiveness of CUs. First, it is essential to foster strategic congruence between CUs and organizational goals, particularly through strong vertical integration and learning congruence that support exploratory and exploitative approaches (i.e., balanced ambidexterity). This sets CUs in a leading position for influencing long-term organizational performance. Second, promoting strategic learning processes can significantly enhance a CU's ability to balance exploration and exploitation, though different dimensions of learning may require targeted interventions depending on the desired strategic orientation. Third, understanding and sensitivity to cultural and technological forces in emerging markets are required, as certain dimensions can facilitate or hinder innovation and efficiency. Policymakers should complement their efforts by crafting mechanisms that encourage investment in strategic CU initiatives and build innovation-supportive environments and conditions for continuous learning. Fourth, organizations should institute mechanisms for knowledge retention to preserve intellectual capital when employees depart. CUs can play a pivotal role in capturing and codifying the tacit know-how of experienced staff – for instance through structured knowledge-transfer programs, mentorship, or documented best practices – so that valuable expertise remains within the company (Nonaka, 1994; Scarso, 2017). By converting individual know-how into organizational memory and intellectual property, firms reinforce the exploitation side of ambidexterity, ensuring that accumulated knowledge continues to be leveraged for efficiency and competitive advantage even as personnel change.

## Ethical Declarations

Ethical clearance was not required for the research.

## AI Declarations

AI (ChatGPT o3) was used to enhance language quality.

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