Post-acquisition IT integration of mergers and acquisitions:
a need for speed perspective

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Henley Business School AFRICA

DUNNING AFRICA CENTRE

Foreword

How do you communicate in a world where human beings are addicted to social media and attention spans are on the decline? You find ways to package new concepts and important information in exciting, novel, and easy-to-digest chunks.

While it is easy to blame emails and platforms like X and TikTok for the drop in attention spans from around '12 seconds in 2000 to 8.25 seconds in 2015' – roughly that of the average goldfish[1] – this does not tell the entire story. Our human brains are being inundated with information from the time we wake up to the time we – eventually – disconnect from our devices and turn off the light at night. That is a lot to process – even for a biological computer as sophisticated and efficient as our grey matter. So, is it any wonder that we are becoming more adept at skimming information and seeking out cognitive shortcuts?

The one thing that does seem to break through and hold us rapt is storytelling. Streaming services know only too well that if they create compelling content, they can capture an audience's undivided attention.[2] Storytelling matters. Immersion is critical. And making content 'snackable' keeps people engaged.

Henley Business School Africa arrived at this conclusion quite some time ago, when we observed how the overwhelming volume of content swirling around us triggers an attention disconnect. We wanted to share our ideas, communicate innovative thoughts, and encourage debate and involvement, so we began to publish punchy, to-the-point white papers that took out the pomp and ceremony you would expect from an academic journal article or paper, and packaged the same expert opinions into a snappy, digestible format.

We posed problems, set the context, outlined the prevailing views, and proposed groundbreaking solutions or fresh perspectives. It went down a treat. Using the white paper format has enabled us to close the gap between published journal articles and the topics we like to dissect in classrooms.

For busy executives, managers, and leaders, our white papers offer a quick, convenient read that captures the essence of an argument. For lifelong, inquisitive learners, white papers are an accessible way to dip into new information and ideas, and to gain exposure to different perspectives and opinions.

'Using the white paper format has enabled us to close the gap between published journal articles and the topics we like to dissect in classrooms.'

The Henley Business School Africa white paper is also an effective way for us to share our observations, insights, and findings with our partners in business and with the world at large. This invites leaders, entrepreneurs, innovators, and business strategists to come and collaborate with us, to explore new ways to address the issues raised, and to develop products and services that answer critical social needs.

By taking care of the heavy lifting and packaging our white papers like a veritable Netflix miniseries, we are retaining attention, building interest, and inviting business leaders to take a front-row seat as we delve into novel thinking and emerging resolutions to existing, complex issues. Our white papers investigate noteworthy trends, question complex problems, and discuss solutions to these. Through our white papers, dialogue is stimulated, value is interrogated, and impact-driven research is spurred on.

Our aim is not to inundate busy leaders and executives with more to 'get through', but to hand them the valuable insights they need to make better, faster, and more agile decisions. That is what the world needs. It is what Africa needs and it is where we should all be directing our 8.25 seconds.

Jon Foster-Pedley

Dean: Henley Business School Africa

Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor (Global Engagement – Sub-Saharan Africa: University of Reading (UK))

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2. Snow, S. (2023) 'Science shows: humans have massive capacity for sustained attention, and storytelling unlocks it', *Forbes*, 16 January. Available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/shanesnow/2023/01/16/science-shows-humans-have-massive-capacity-for-sustained-attention-and-storytelling-unlocks-it/ (Accessed: 26 June 2024).

White paper

Nyasha Walter Ruzvidzo

The speed of integrating mergers and acquisitions is crucial to sustain the momentum of the newly established organisation and prevent security breaches, completion backlogs, and additional resources required from delays. This paper examines the intricate process from the perspective of employees who have occupied the front seats in a recent multinational merger and acquisition endeavour, integrating their first-hand experiences and recommendations. The findings are invaluable to organisations that consider mergers and acquisitions to expand their horizons.

This white paper is based on a Management Research Challenge submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration.

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Disclaimer

NB

Aligned with our mission, 'we build the people who build the businesses that build Africa', we facilitate open, multi-perspective conversations and the generation of thought leadership pieces, such as this white paper. However, the views expressed in this white paper are held by the author and not necessarily held by Henley Business School Africa.


5.

Abstract

This paper examines the integration of a typical merger and acquisition process from the perspective of stakeholders of a selected multinational organisation. Participants shared their firsthand experiences in individual virtual interviews, identifying five key factors they consider vital for speedy integration. The consequences of failure in this respect attracted vibrant discussion, highlighting the implications for trust in the organisation, the financial costs of restoring damages, and the adverse effects on employee morale, as they bear the brunt of longer working hours and the frustrations caused by delays. Recommendations to speed up the merger and acquisition process highlight two crucial factors – communication and cross-functional collaboration – to detect problems in a timely manner and involve all divisions of the partnering organisations in resolving challenges. Not meeting predetermined timelines was identified as a primary concern due to a project backlog, loss of cooperation and subsequent workload issues, security risks and breaches, operational challenges, and employee and knowledge management issues. Robust security measures, an agile project management process, promoting an iterative approach, and effective communication and collaboration were primary topics of discussion.

Keywords:

merger and acquisition; IT integration; post-acquisition integration; speed of integration; multinational organisations

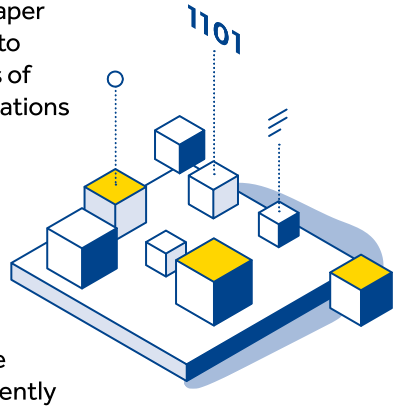
7.

Introduction

Mergers and acquisitions (M&A) are important strategies that organisations use to expand and secure growth (Rohra and Chawla, 2015), enabling companies to leverage interactions and enhance the acquiring firm's value proposition. M&A often provides partners with the chance to enter new market segments and geographic regions, as well as to optimise the research and development capabilities of the acquired company. However:

Businesses are changing quickly and face intense competition, so they no longer have time for traditional processes that rely on detailed planning and careful implementation. Today, companies must rapidly integrate information technology (IT) while maintaining quality and effectiveness. However, achieving a smooth integration of IT systems to gain the desired benefits can be very challenging, especially after a company acquisition.

In the past decade, the multinational organisation discussed in this paper has significantly increased its acquisitions, completing 30 purchases in 2022 and with more transactions underway. The corporation aims to enhance competitiveness and performance by acquiring innovative companies across all four business areas, with varying revenue, locations, and employee counts. This paper underscores the IT function's mandate to standardise the processes and systems of acquired firms to ensure seamless operations and a faster return on investment.

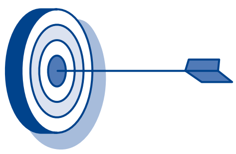


To effectively deal with the scale and speed of acquisitions, IT managers' integration processes need to be flexible, efficient, and systematic.

The 'need for speed' perspective in the post-acquisition IT integration of a recently established M&A brings the following questions to mind:

- How can the integration of disparate IT ecosystems be accelerated?
- Which crucial elements determine the pace of IT integration?
- What are the potential trade-offs if IT integration does not occur speedily?
- How does the acceleration of IT integration influence an M&A deal's success?

Aim of the paper

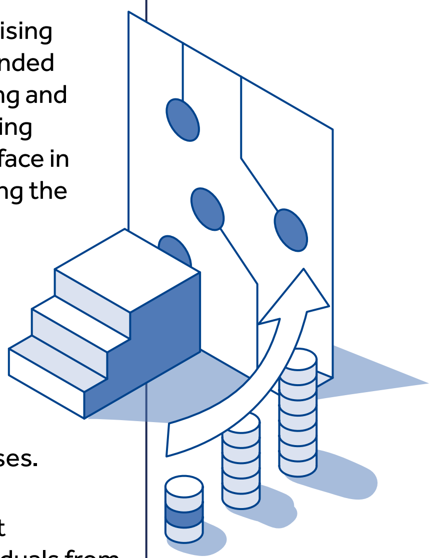


Efficient IT integration after acquiring a new M&A organisation is crucial for minimising disruptions and ensuring business continuity, allowing for quick realisation of intended synergies. Effective post-acquisition IT integration strengthens market positioning and supports sustained growth while optimising resource allocation to value-generating activities. This paper addresses the challenges M&As (mergers and acquisitions) face in managing the complexities of post-acquisition IT integration, particularly regarding the integration speed, aiming to:

→ Offer nuanced understanding of the complexities associated with M&A-driven IT integration;

→ Indicate how to balance the requirements of speed and precision; and

→ Offer practical guidance for organisations in similar scenarios to ensure informed decisions, mitigate risks, and achieve smooth integration processes.



This paper first introduces the study's theoretical framework and reviews relevant literature, followed by a report on the perceptions and recommendations of individuals from a selected organisation who have experienced the multinational M&A process firsthand.

Theoretical anchor:
agile project management theory

Agile project management (APM) focuses on flexibility, collaboration, and iterative development to effectively complete projects (Harikkala-Laihinen *et al.*, 2018). This framework aligns with the paper's emphasis on speeding up M&A processes.

The following assumptions of APM theory were considered to structure the narrative and the research report:

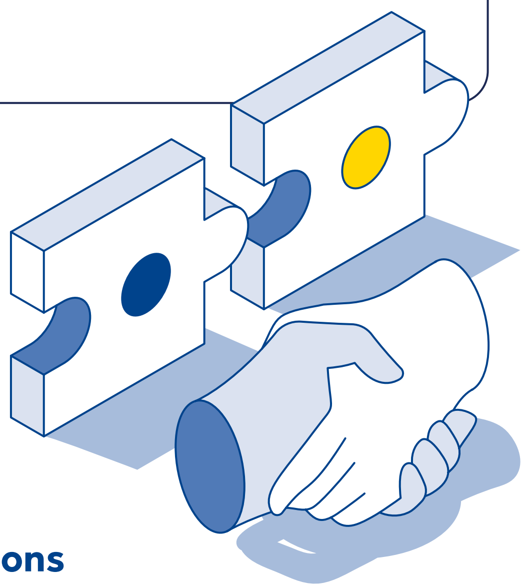
- Agile projects promote ***regular retrospection to assess successes and areas for improvement*** (Sears and Hitt, 2023). This study uses this method to explore how firms can continually enhance their integration based on lessons from past acquisitions.

- An ***iterative approach*** proposes that so-called agile projects are separated into iterations or sprints and completed in short cycles (Vuori, Vuori and Huy, 2018), which M&A should consider to minimise mistakes.

- ***Cross-functional teams*** imply cross-functional collaboration with team members containing diverse skills (Ai and Tan, 2020). During an M&A, multidisciplinary teams can expedite decision-making and problem-solving in the integration phase.

- ***Customer collaboration*** in agile projects involves frequent interaction with stakeholders to align the integration process with their needs. Open communication within teams and with stakeholders about integration planning and execution is essential for a smooth transition to new systems and processes (Takhtehkar and Rademakers, 2020).

- ***Adapting to changing requirements*** in agile projects, even late in the process, is crucial. Therefore, adjusting plans in line with the organisation's updated IT integration strategy is essential.



Theoretical support

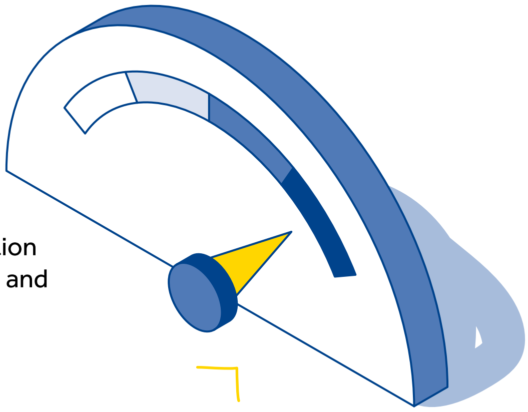
Theoretical support for the study was derived from relevant scholarly research.

Mergers and acquisitions: the phenomenon

Why do mergers and acquisitions attract so much attention?

Organisations engaged in M&A totalled transactions with a value of approximately US$5.9 trillion in 2021 (Loeb, 2022). Based on gross domestic product, the USA remains the world's largest economy, valued at $31.8 trillion in 2025, followed by China, Germany, Japan, and India.

Why is speed such an issue with mergers and acquisitions?



Merger activities should begin within the first 100 days to capture staff enthusiasm, consumer tolerance, and investor patience. Faster integration leads to better returns on investment by quickly optimising cooperation and leveraging excitement about the deal (Ibeh and Makhmadshoev, 2018).

> *Behavioural psychology and human resources experts assert that a swift integration process significantly reduces apprehension and anxiety among employees in a newly established organisation*
>
> (Dhir et al., 2020).

What is the impact of organisational culture in a merger and acquisition transaction?

Culture significantly influences international business aspects like M&A, as highlighted by cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). An understanding of these differences is vital for effective workforce integration.

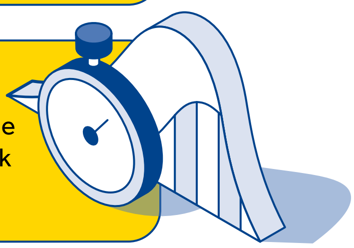
Accordingly, pertinent cultural elements that may dominate within diverse groups are:

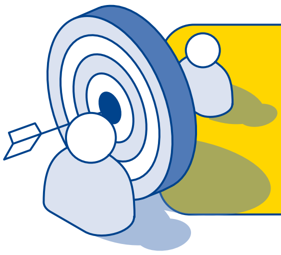
Power distance – cultures with high power distance tend to have more centralised M&A negotiations and integration, mostly involving top executives. On the contrary, in low power distance contexts, negotiations are more decentralised, involving more employees.

Individualism versus collectivism – M&A negotiations in individualistic cultures emphasise individual incentives and rewards, whilst collectivist cultures highly regard team cohesion and long-term relationships.

Masculinity versus femininity – in highly masculine cultures, M&A strategies and negotiations may be more competitive and aggressive, whilst there is a stronger emphasis on collaboration and consensus building in more feminine-oriented cultures.

Long-term versus short-term orientation – while long-term-oriented cultures typically give precedence to M&A deals' strategic fit and sustainable growth potential, short-term-oriented cultures are more interested in quick financial gains, requiring different integration approaches.

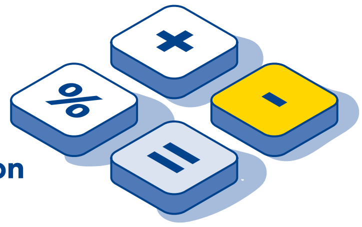




Indulgence versus restraint – the culture of indulgence after a merger or acquisition (M&A) vastly differs from a culture of restraint, affecting the overall company culture, employee satisfaction, and how employee well-being programs are integrated, because their goals are quite different.

What critical factors determine the success of mergers and acquisitions?

The success of an M&A is influenced by events that occur before, during, and after the acquisition. All three stages are crucial to ensuring success.



Pre-transaction requirements

Before concluding a merger transaction, the partners must ensure (Laveren and Verstreken, 2017) that the partnering organisations are compatible, trust has been established, the valuation has been concluded after proper due diligence, the experiences of previous M&A are noted, and continuous open communication is maintained.

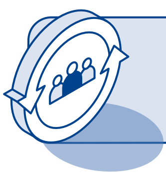
During the transaction

For a successful M&A integration (Dinneen, Johnson and Liu, 2021), the entity must:

- Demonstrate a committed effort to expedite business momentum;

- Prioritise the acceleration of interaction and integration;

- Embrace alternative operational methods; and



- Facilitate transformation at all levels of the organisation.

Post-transaction success factors

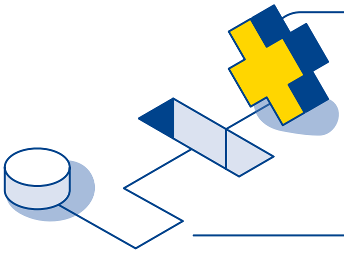
After the conclusion of the transaction, the partners (Laveren and Verstreken, 2017) must calculate and ensure the realisation of the interaction they will benefit from, ensure the quality of the integration plan, aim to achieve swift integration, and investigate the cultural fit of the new entity, because:

1. The prevailing organisational culture deserves attention, as the cultural alignment of the new organisation will significantly impact employee morale and retention.
2. Effective change management is required to guide the workforce successfully through transitions, foster stronger cooperation, and decisively mitigate resistance.
3. Strong project governance is required to oversee the integration process effectively. It is important to guarantee that objectives are met and that resources are allocated efficiently. Together, these components significantly increase the likelihood of a successful M&A outcome.

Certain key factors influence M&A success (PwC, 2017). ***Achieving collaboration is paramount*** in realising the financial and operational benefits envisioned from consolidation. Equally important is the ***speed of integration*** to minimise disruption, curb risks, and rapidly leverage the combined strengths of the respective companies.

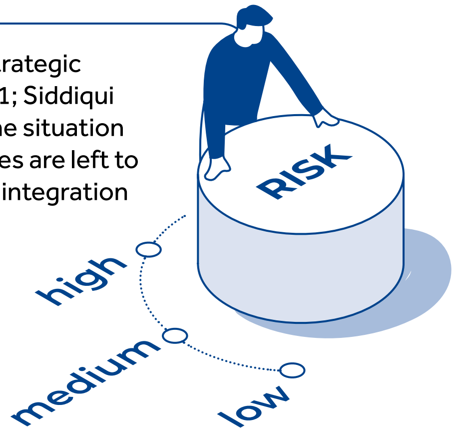
Why do some mergers and acquisitions fail?

Good intentions do not guard M&A against failure. Success can be hampered by:



Pre-merger discrepancies – failure to conduct thorough due diligence before a merger, not implementing a strong strategy for success, and unrealistic expectations about potential synergies can be detrimental to the success of any M&A and must be addressed effectively to enhance the chances of a successful merger outcome (Lynch and Lind, 2002).

Post-merger integration disputes – a merger is bound to fail if the partners' strategic planning and IT integration strategies are inadequate (Sarrazin and West, 2011; Siddiqui and Farooq, 2019). Inadequate risk management processes can exacerbate the situation (Ingle, 2015). Issues generally become insurmountable when internal processes are left to chance, and human resources specialists are not an integral part of the entire integration process. Open communication and training could prevent internal power struggles and help to manage cultural differences, which are fertile conditions for incompatible group dynamics, overconfidence, and distrust on the part of either partner (Steger and Kummer, 2007). ***Therefore, a sluggish post-merger integration process creates fertile ground for failure.***

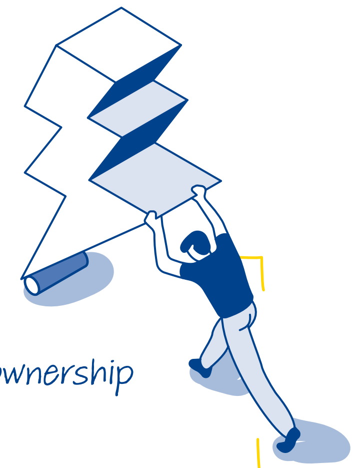


What factors are critical to ensure successful information technology integration?

Several factors are pivotal to the successful integration of technology and operations systems, and for achieving the strategic objectives of M&A (Teerikangas and Thanos, 2018), namely:

Leaders' overt commitment

Employees are more likely to accept changes in an organisation if top management is visibly committed (Sears and Hitt, 2023), although a top-down leadership approach may seem autocratic and fuel resistance (Smeulders, Dekker and Van den Abbeele, 2023).



> Balancing leadership direction and encouraging collaboration among teams enhances a sense of ownership
>
> (Smeulders, Dekker and Van den Abbeele, 2023).

Consistent communication

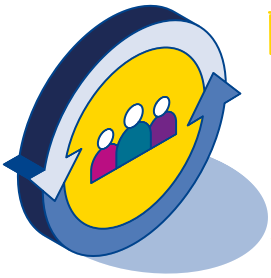
Clear and consistent communication must commence early in the merging process and continue throughout to ensure transparency and prevent uncertainty (Vuori, Vuori and Huy, 2018; Colman, 2020). Information must be tailored to the organisational culture and context (Savović and Babić, 2021), explaining the rationale behind decisions and the benefits of integration to prevent uncertainty among employees, build trust, and reduce resistance (Castellaneta, Valentini and Zollo, 2018; Razi and Garrick, 2019).

A word of caution: Excessive early communication can cause unnecessary anxiety. It's important to share information in phases, increasing communication as decisions are finalised and critical milestones are reached. This approach ensures clarity and focus at each stage

(Wynne and Henningsson, 2018).

Effective cultural integration

Integrating diverse organisational cultures during post-merger IT integration is vital for creating a unified identity, which facilitates communication and cooperation (Campbell *et al.*, 2021). It is not necessarily easy to pursue cultural assimilation that acknowledges the acquired culture's strengths (Moore, 2021), but when taken seriously:



Cultural diversity can lead to innovative solutions and problem-solving approaches, increasing the speed and effectiveness of integration

(Moore, 2021).

Rigorous change management

Rigorous change management is a prerequisite for preventing resistance to IT integration (Colman, 2020). Kurt Lewin's three step model designed in 1940 presents a logical process for organisations to follow (Wynne and Henningsson, 2018; Malik, 2025):

STEP 1 **UNFREEZING** – requires an assessment of what needs to change, ensuring leadership support, ensuring the need for change, and then managing and understanding doubt and concerns.

STEP 2 **CHANGE** – implies continual communication, addressing rumours, empowering action, and involving the relevant people to gain momentum.

STEP 3 **REFREEZING** – encompasses anchoring changes in the new culture, developing initiatives to sustain the change, providing support and training, and celebrating success.

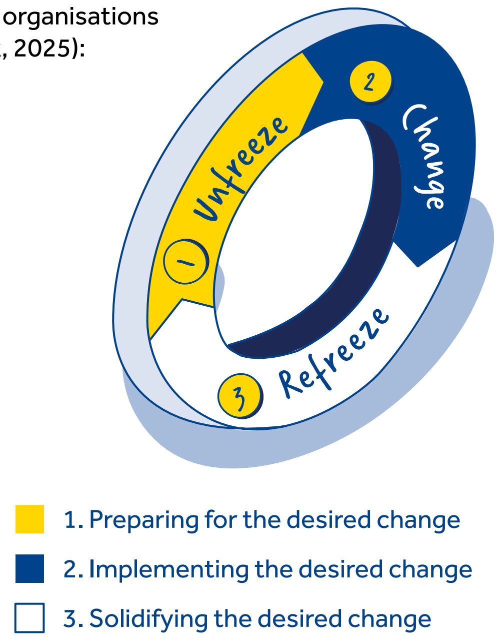


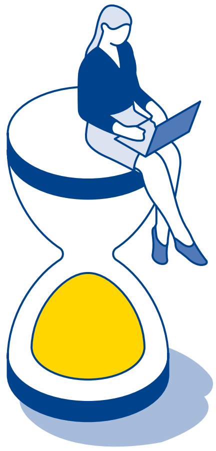
Figure 1: Lewin's model of change
Source: *adapted from Malik (2025).*

Timing matters

The timing of post-acquisition IT integration is crucial for its effectiveness (Razi and Garrick, 2019). Quick alignment of IT systems can lead to faster integration and reduce uncertainty (Ibeh and Makhmadshoev, 2018).

However, quick integration does not equate to hasty integration, as mistakes may be costly to rectify

(Takhtehkar and Rademakers, 2020).



The secret to successful IT integration is to act swiftly to prevent resistance and maintain momentum during the integration process, while ensuring that employees are not overwhelmed

(Campbell et al., 2021; Väisänen et al., 2021).

Purposeful alignment of information technology infrastructure

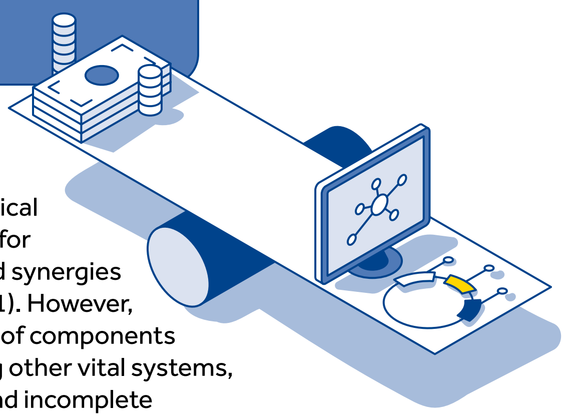
Deep IT infrastructure integration – where systems are aligned at a granular level – enhances operational efficiency by streamlining processes, eliminating duplication, and revealing valuable synergies (Rouzies, Colman and Angwin, 2019).

A word of caution: deep IT infrastructure integration can be very time-consuming, resource-intensive, and potentially disruptive, undermining short-term efficiency gains

(Ibeh and Makhmadshoev, 2018).

Hybrid integration is an alternative strategy where essential systems are closely aligned while others are selectively integrated (Colman, 2020). It allows organisations to enhance efficiency in key areas while maintaining the agility to meet specific business needs. However, it requires careful execution to avoid confusion and inconsistencies (Park *et al.*, 2018).

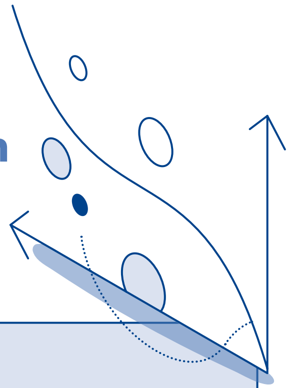
When implemented meticulously, a hybrid approach can strike the right balance between integration and flexibility, paving the way for the merged organisations' long-term success.



Responsible resource allocation

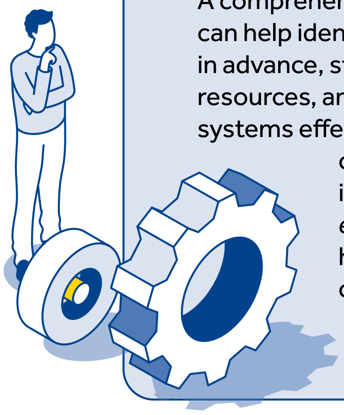
The allocation of resources during integration is a highly debated topic. Some scholars argue for significant IT investment to ensure a seamless process (Ai and Tan, 2020), while others warn that it may burden finances and impede long-term growth (Rouzies, Colman and Angwin, 2019). A balanced perspective suggests allocating resources strategically to align critical IT components needed for business operations and synergies (Savović and Babić, 2021). However, prioritising a limited set of components might lead to neglecting other vital systems, causing inefficiencies and incomplete integration (Wynne and Henningsson, 2018).

Measures to accelerate information technology integration post-acquisition



Accelerating the IT integration of M&A is vital to make the most of synergies and maintain a competitive advantage (Ibeh and Makhmadshoev, 2018). This can be achieved in different ways.

Prioritising pre-integration planning

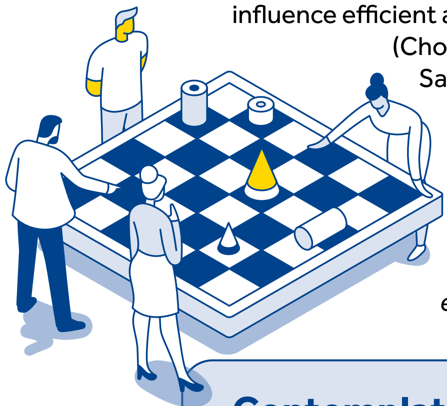


A comprehensive pre-integration plan can help identify potential challenges in advance, strategically allocate resources, and align the merged IT systems effectively. This might be time-consuming, delaying the integration process (Campbell *et al.*, 2021), and even hindering an organisation's capacity to address unforeseen challenges (Zhao *et al.*, 2019).

A road map that allows for adaptability during integration and enables agile responses to unexpected situations may be a viable solution

(Park et al., 2018).

Involving cross-functional teams



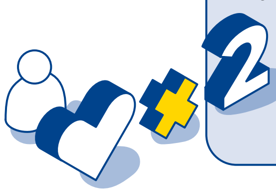
Diverse expertise across departments can provide different perspectives, ensuring a more balanced, holistic approach to technical, operational, and business aspects (Razi and Garrick, 2019). It can influence efficient and effective integration (Cho and Arthurs, 2018; Savović and Babić, 2021), without requiring serial approvals across departments, expediting decision-making, and retaining momentum (Kallousa *et al.*, 2023). However:

In cross-functional teams, balancing speed and thorough decision-making is crucial, as too much diversity can create complexity, while rushed decisions may miss important nuances

(Zhao et al., 2019).

Contemplating centralised versus decentralised decision-making

A ***centralised model*** is a less expensive, more standardised approach in which authority is delegated to those in command. ***On the positive side***, this approach enables consistent alignment with an organisation's strategic goals, preventing fragmented decisions that could hinder integration (Park *et al.*, 2018). ***The downside*** is that centralisation can cause bottlenecks and delays, jeopardising adaptability to the unique challenges of different units, reducing overall adaptability and creativity (Razi and Garrick, 2019).



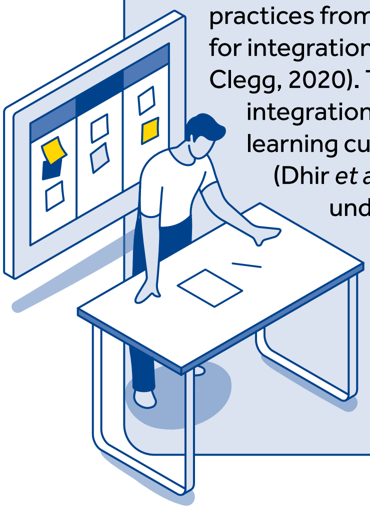
A ***decentralised approach*** grants authority to individuals closer to the stakeholders. ***Sought-after advantages*** include faster decision-making, which allows for creativity. The ***unfortunate disadvantage*** is that this approach is more expensive (Razi and Garrick, 2019).

Pursuing a phased or a 'Big-Bang' integration

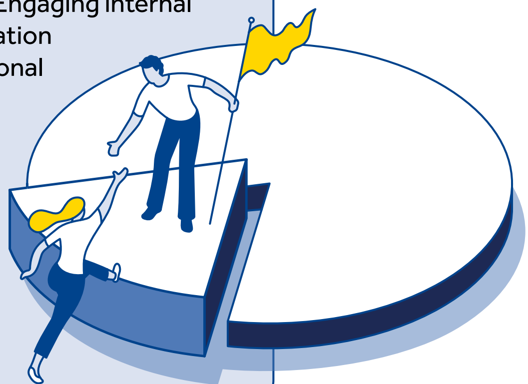
The chosen integration strategy influences process completion times, complexity, and potential disruptions (Takhtehkar and Rademakers, 2020). A phased integration approach facilitates managing complexity and resolving issues before proceeding to the next phase (Razi and Garrick, 2019). Unfortunately, these advantages may lead to longer timelines, greater uncertainty, and the new entity being unable to realise cooperation (Zhao *et al.*, 2019).

Consultants: opting for external or internal expertise

External consultants contribute specialised knowledge and experience, offering fresh perspectives and best practices from other organisations for integration strategies (Wei and Clegg, 2020). They can expedite integration and reduce the learning curve for complex tasks (Dhir *et al.*, 2020). However, understanding an organisation's unique dynamics is crucial for aligning with its culture and objectives (Rottig and Torres de Oliveira, 2019).



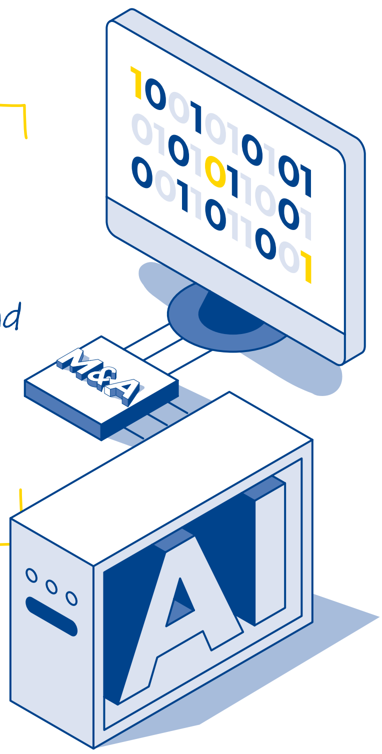
However, ***internal expertise*** should not be negated, as an insider perspective can significantly enhance trust within an organisation that is unsettled by the changing dynamics. Engaging internal experts in the integration process fosters personal empowerment and ownership, benefiting both the individuals and the organisation (Razi and Garrick, 2019).



Artificial intelligence: the catalyst for innovation

The powerful capabilities of Artificial intelligence (AI) enhances data integration from various systems, improving the efficiency of merging organisations (Lederer, Jakob and Rathnow, 2022). It identifies operational mechanisms, can optimise workflows, and automate routine tasks, expediting the integration process while aligning operational functions and improving organisational synergy. When M&A integration is supported by AI-driven analytics, real-time monitoring capabilities enable organisations to make informed, data-driven decisions. Moreover:

> *As the integration progress can be tracked, timely adjustments can be made to strategies, increasing value and promoting a prosperous and adaptive merger environment*
>
> (Acquisition International, 2023).



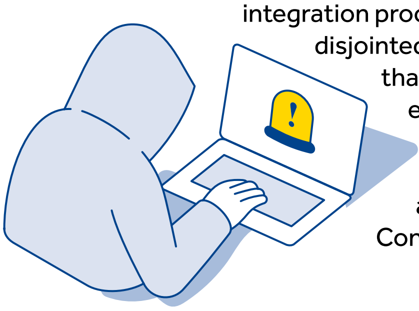
The consequences of delayed post-acquisition integration

Delayed IT integration poses various forms of risk that organisations must prevent at all costs. Examples of these risks are discussed in the subsections that follow.

Information technology security and compliance issues

Lowering firewalls to enable pre-migration due diligence creates security weaknesses, increasing the risk of threats such as data breaches and hacking (Lohrke, Frownfelter-Lohrke and Ketchen, 2016). Therefore, the integration of IT systems must be carried out with extreme caution.

Disgruntled employees who lost their jobs due to the merger may create security breaches, requiring proactive measures to monitor vulnerabilities and update the acquiring organisation's IT security policies (Skoudis, 2007). Maintaining separate systems during a prolonged IT integration process can lead to disjointed security measures that complicate the enforcement of organisational compliance (Razi and Garrick, 2019). Consequently:



Interim security measures must be implemented throughout the merger and IT integration process to mitigate security risks and prevent data breaches

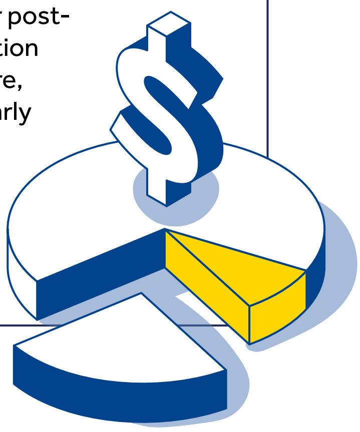
(Rottig and Torres de Oliveira, 2019).

Operational inefficiencies

Organisational performance is negatively affected when separate systems must be maintained during a prolonged IT integration process. This compromises data consistency and communication (Annosi *et al.*, 2021), amplifying the need for thorough integration planning (Dhir *et al.*, 2020).

Loss of synergies

Delayed IT integration has significant financial implications for post-merger acquisition activities (Moore, 2021), particularly for interactions that rely on IT (Harikkala-Laihinen *et al.*, 2018).

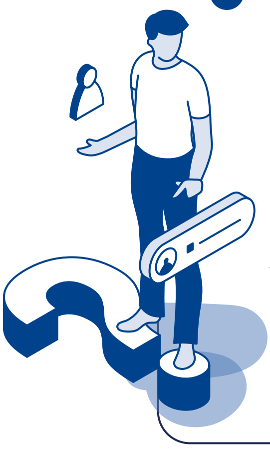


Employee uncertainties

Delayed IT integration creates uncertainty about roles and reporting structures in a new organisation, leading to employee anxiety, lower morale (Moore, 2021), and resistance to change, which can be counterproductive (Lohrke, Frownfelter-Lohrke and Ketchen, 2016).

The worst-case scenario would be when an employee exodus occurs because the organisation's integration process is protracted and employees feel unnoticed and ill-informed

(Savović and Babić, 2021).



Customer experience

A disjointed customer service, requiring interaction across multiple platforms, can lead to significant frustration (Wei and Clegg, 2020), especially with delayed or lost orders due to a lack of system integration (Sears and Hitt, 2023). However, short-term inconveniences that are explained to customers usually tend to be less problematic (Colman, 2020).

The main challenge is ensuring accuracy in implementation rather than rushing it. The organisation ultimately aims to create a robust, integrated system for long-term customer benefits

(Ibeh and Makhmadshoev, 2018).

Financial implications

Delays in IT integration can lead to duplicated expenses and maintenance costs due to excessive resource use (Rottig and Torres de Oliveira, 2019). While speeding up integration may incur immediate costs (Zhao *et al.*, 2019), effective and rapid completion can avert these expenses (Teerikangas and Thanos, 2018).

Conclusion

The literature review highlights scholars' notable interest in M&A, particularly regarding how these mergers are approached, executed, and managed to ensure success. Each phase presents challenges, many of which can be anticipated by drawing on lessons learnt from other organisations. Obstacles to a successful M&A can arise from both external and internal factors, with neither being inherently more critical than the other. Those overseeing the process must remain vigilant to maintain their organisation's momentum and ensure that all stakeholders with a vested interest in the organisation's success remain actively supportive.

The following section presents a report of a qualitative study that explored the experiences of employees of a multinational company's M&A process. While their perceptions may be subjective, their experiences were real.

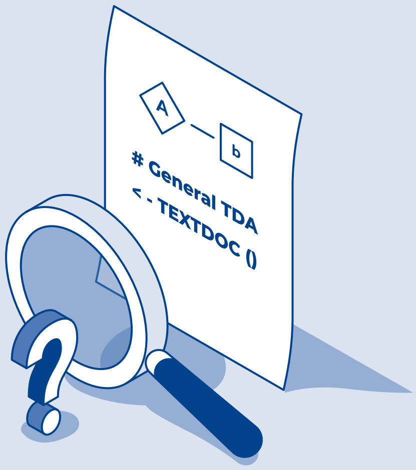
The research project

Objectives of the investigation

The study explores the interaction between key factors and effective strategies in post-acquisition IT integration after M&A. It also addresses gaps in literature regarding the speed of IT integration during M&A. The goal is to provide recommendations on the relationship between risks and critical factors that improve post-acquisition IT integration.

The research project:

what, how, and why...



Opting for a qualitative methodology

The chosen qualitative research approach recognised the socially constructed nature of participants' IT integration experiences in a specific M&A scenario and acknowledged their subjective perspectives (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). An inductive approach was used, beginning with data gathering, analysing it for codes and themes, and moving towards broader generalisations. Contextual nuances were paramount.

Population and sample procedures

The ***population targeted*** was the stakeholders directly involved in the selected organisation's post-acquisition IT integration process. The sample (N = 16) included individuals with first-hand experience of the encounter, namely IT professionals, project managers, IT managers, and specialists directly involved with the organisation's IT integration. ***Quota sampling*** was employed to recruit willing participants from the various subgroups, aiming to capture the perspectives of different stakeholder groups.

Participants were unaware of one another at any point during the study. Codes were used to distinguish individuals' contributions (i.e., P1-P16), instead of disclosing their names.

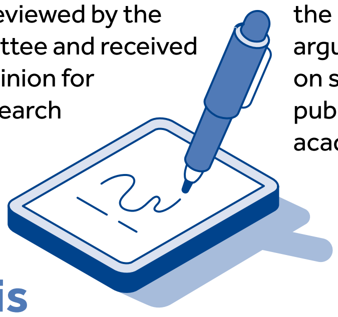
Data gathering

Semi-structured, virtual interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams to gather data from willing participants. Some participants were hesitant to share their experiences and perceptions for fear of being targeted within the organisation. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes.

The interview schedule comprised three sections. ***Section A*** focused on the top five factors influencing IT integrations in multinational M&A, including challenges and key issues. ***Section B*** looked at strategies to speed up IT integrations for future acquisitions, investigating best practices, timelines, and bottlenecks. ***Section C*** identified risks and vulnerabilities tied to delays in integrating security components.

Ethical considerations were paramount

Participants provided written informed consent to use their contributions anonymously, ensuring confidentiality. Measures were taken to protect participants' and the institution's well-being and reputation. The research for this project was also reviewed by the School's ethics committee and received a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. Scholarly research was properly cited and referenced in the document.



Quality of the investigation

A pilot study was conducted with two participants who closely resembled the study's participants to clarify the questions, time needed to complete the interviews, and possible concerns about the questions. Supportive arguments are based on scholarly research published in renowned academic journals.

Data analysis

After the transcription of the recorded data, coding and thematic analysis were conducted to identify prominent themes in the data that could be integrated to reach coherent conclusions (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Results

Sample profile

The sample of 16 included seven project managers, three IT managers, two IT security specialists, two IT team leaders, and two IT M&A managers. They were located in Asia-Pacific countries, including China and Thailand (*n* = 3); Europe and the Middle East (*n* = 10); and North and South America (*n* = 3).

Pertinent themes and subthemes

The findings are organised per the themes that emerged from the data.

Theme 1:
Critical Factors That Affect Information Technology Integrations

Participants distinguished five critical issues. These are discussed next.

Issue 1: The complexity of the process

The IT integration process proved more complicated than participants had envisaged: 'Carving out the IT systems and infrastructure of the acquired company was more challenging than anticipated, causing delays and unexpected costs' (P1); and 'Integrating the legacy devices and systems from the acquired company presented numerous challenges....

Compatibility issues and technical shortcomings hindered the integration progress' (P3). Over-relying on external IT partners caused further delays: 'Overreliance on external IT partners for integration tasks were problematic. Coordinating with multiple parties introduced complexities and caused delays in the integration process' (P3).

Scholars emphasise the importance of effective leadership and open communication in the integration process, as these elements are crucial for alleviating uncertainties, enhancing trust, and reducing resistance (Razi and Garrick, 2019; Sears and Hitt, 2023). By focusing on these strategies, organisations can navigate complex integration processes more successfully.

Above all, good change management is imperative for navigating the complexities of IT integration

(Wynne and Henningsson, 2018).

Issue 2: Workload problems

Backlogs encountered due to the complexities of the IT integration process exerted strain on employees who had to collaborate across the newly established organisation. 'With the recent increase in acquisitions, our organisation has been overwhelmed with a backlog of projects. It has become challenging to prioritise and allocate resources effectively' (P2). Backlogs presented resource allocation challenges, complicating managers' tasks. Teams were tested to their limits, which impacted productivity, caused burnout, and delayed the completion of critical tasks. 'The continuous influx of acquisitions strained collaboration efforts. Teams are stretched thin, and project fatigue decreased efficiency and effectiveness' (P5).

For a seamless integration process, resource allocation is essential (Ai and Tan, 2020). The primary challenge is to carefully balance resources to ensure that critical systems are maintained and finances are adequate (Rouzies, Colman and Angwin, 2019).

Timing is vital (Razi and Garrick, 2019). While rapid integration may realise synergies faster, there is a risk of inadequate understanding of the acquired entity's IT landscape

(Takhtehkar and Rademakers, 2020).

Issue 3: Security risks and breaches

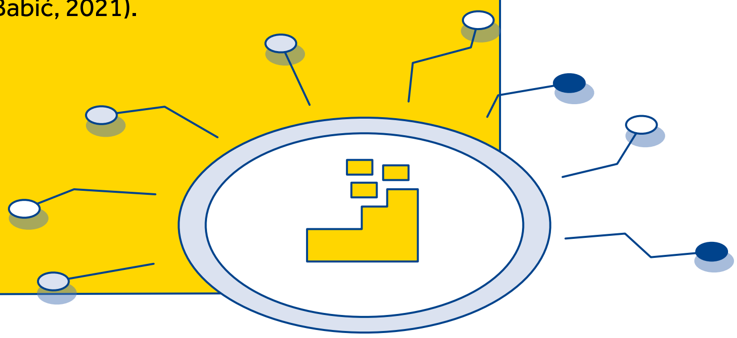
Security breaches and network system issues threatened the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of the organisation's data, requiring additional efforts to strengthen security measures. The related cost implications of fixing the issues were substantial. Feedback from participants included: 'We faced significant security breaches and network problems' (P3); 'The breaches exposed vulnerabilities in our systems, creating additional challenges in ensuring data privacy and protection' (P2); and 'Causing significant production downtime. The costs associated with remediation, recovery, and lost productivity were substantial' (P3).

Security risks and data breaches receive less attention in scholarly research than effective communication to reduce uncertainties and build trust (Castellaneta, Valentini and Zollo, 2018; Razi and Garrick, 2019), cultural integration to align diverse groups in the organisation (Zhao *et al.*, 2019), and IT infrastructure alignment to ensure operational and security protocol efficiency (Rouzies, Colman and Angwin, 2019). However, these factors are all relevant in mitigating security risks.

Issue 4: Operational challenges

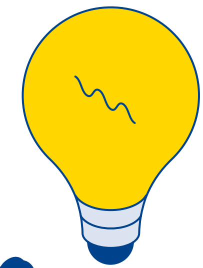
Operational challenges and delays impacted IT integrations within the studied multinational corporation, which was dealing with several acquisitions. Legacy hardware failure and user dissatisfaction during the integration process were major concerns. Participants mentioned significant challenges with: 'Legacy hardware failing to meet the integration requirements, causing delays and user dissatisfaction with the new systems and processes' (P6); and 'Project scope creep ... integration requirements expanded beyond the initial scope, causing delays, and difficulties aligning project objectives' (P11).

Scholars note that swift change management is vital to mitigate resistance, maintain momentum during integration, and reduce operational difficulties and delays (Campbell *et al.*, 2021). In addition, effective communication and appropriate resource allocation will minimise operational disruptions (Savović and Babić, 2021).

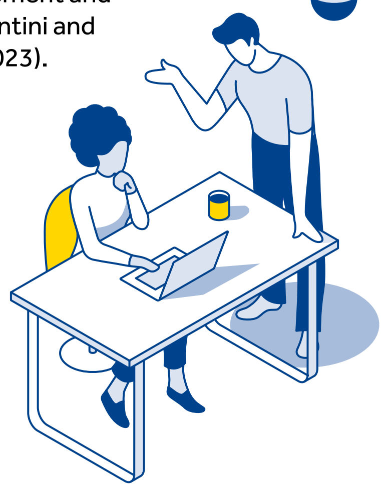


Issue 5: People and knowledge management

Losing momentum and reduced workforce efficiency were major concerns, making it impossible to honour timelines and causing significant backlogs. Participants shared: 'Loss of momentum during the integration reduced workforce efficiency.... Uncertainty and changes affected employee morale and productivity' (P10); and 'The integration process caused dissatisfaction among employees, particularly those from the acquired company... Key IT resources resigned, causing knowledge gaps ... compromising continuity' (P8). Leadership commitment, effective communication, cultural integration, and change management, which influence people and knowledge management, are imperative in fostering employee engagement and alignment (Castellaneta, Valentini and Zollo, 2018; Sears and Hitt, 2023).



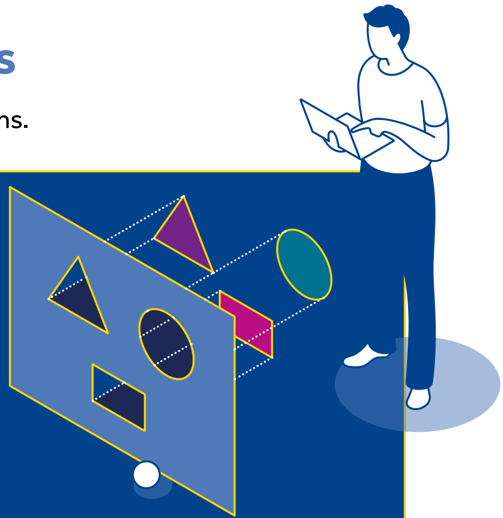
> *Change management ensures that employees are prepared for change and equipped with the knowledge and buy-in to adapt effectively*
>
> (Wynne and Henningsson, 2018).



Theme 2:

The speed of the information technology integration of the pipeline and future acquisitions

Three sub-themes emerged from participants' discussions.

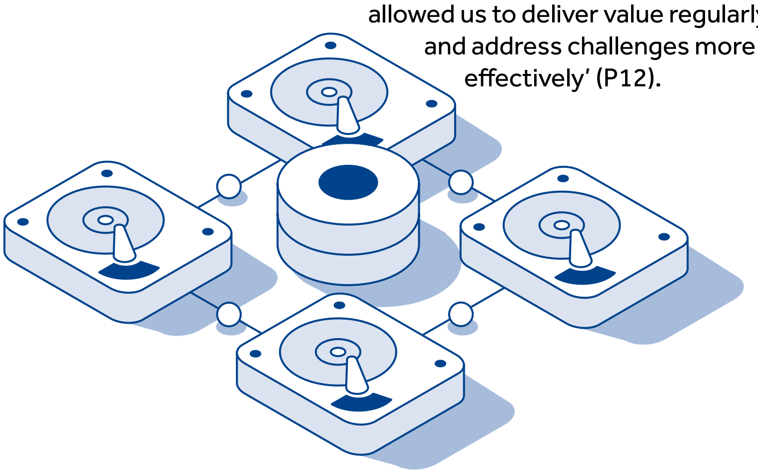


Issue 1: Streamlining integration processes and standardisation

The need to simplify integration processes was evident, with participants asserting: 'Complexities during the integration process led to delays and inefficiencies. Streamlining the integration processes would expedite acquiring companies' onboarding' (P4); and 'Lack of standardisation in acquiring companies' IT systems and infrastructure caused delays. Standardised guidelines would enable smoother integrations and faster alignment with our existing IT ecosystem' (P7). Participants' views aligned with those of Chen, Ramaya and Wu (2020), who contended that organisations guided by established integration frameworks and templates are more likely to complete the integration challenge more promptly.

Issue 2: Agile project management and an iterative approach

APM methodologies that enhance flexibility, adaptability, and responsiveness were highlighted as prerequisites for faster, more efficient IT integration. 'The traditional project management approaches were not suitable for the dynamic nature of IT integrations.... Agile methodologies allowed us to respond quickly to changes, prioritise tasks effectively, and deliver value incrementally' (P9). An iterative, rather than a 'big-bang' approach was recommended: 'Taking a big-bang approach to integration was time-consuming and prone to errors... An iterative and incremental approach allowed us to deliver value regularly and address challenges more effectively' (P12).



The advantage of an iterative approach is that each step allows for checkpoints, feedback, and adjustments, during which challenges can be resolved promptly, and uncertainties are eliminated, while stakeholders remain informed. Although iterative, the integration process is expedited because it is more flexible and does not waste time correcting errors caused by uncertainties and hasty decisions (García-Nieto *et al.*, 2024).

> *Inevitably, an agile approach must be balanced and properly managed to prevent delays*
>
> (García-Nieto et al., 2024).

Issue 3: Effective communication and collaboration

Effective communication and collaboration are key moderators of the speed of IT integration for M&A's pipeline and future acquisitions. This sentiment was voiced by several participants: 'Aligning project objectives and priorities between IT and business teams was problematic' (P11); 'Challenges due to miscommunication and a lack of clarity among stakeholders caused frustration. So, enhancing communication channels and clear and timely information sharing would help expedite integration efforts' (P6); 'Improved collaboration and a shared understanding of integration goals would certainly smooth coordination and ensure faster progress' (P9); and 'Managerial support and a show of enthusiasm would be inspiring amid the pressure' (P9).

Transparent and timely communication, including regular updates to all stakeholders throughout M&A integration, is essential. There must also be an inherent drive to secure a collaborative environment between the acquiring and target organisations, with cross-functional teams that encourage knowledge sharing. Admittedly, extensive collaboration and decision-making may cause delays, which should be avoided as best as possible (Galpin, 2014).

Theme 3:

Risks of failing to integrate components per the timelines

The risks of not integrating components by the predetermined timelines are daunting and can be grouped into three broad issues.

Issue 1: Security breaches and compromised data

Security breaches and data compromises during IT integration processes were at the forefront of participants' minds when the topic was raised. 'A security breach incident that occurred during the integration resulted in the loss of sensitive customer data, which impacted our reputation and caused delays.... We had to divert resources to address the breach' (P5). Hacking and the exposure of server infrastructure vulnerabilities caused major ramifications:

We experienced several hacking attempts during the integration, which exposed vulnerabilities in our server infrastructure…Additional resources were allocated to strengthen our cybersecurity measures and patch vulnerabilities to secure the integration environment.

(P3)

Hacking is a significant concern when integrating IT systems because inevitable vulnerabilities are created when firewalls are temporarily amended, and security measures are disjointed because the integration of partners' systems is not yet completed. Therefore, staff must be trained to remain highly alert to prevent security threats and data breaches (Razi and Garrick, 2019) and to implement interim security measures during the delay (Rottig and Torres de Oliveira, 2019).

Issue 2: Communication and collaboration hurdles

A lack of communication during integrations was frustrating, because 'conflicting priorities of teams delayed the implementation of security standards' (P8). Moreover, 'Delays and inefficiencies due to a lack of effective communication channels and access restrictions were concerning.... Collaborating efficiently across teams was complicated, slowing the integration progress' (P10).

Maintaining separate systems inadvertently leads to duplicated effort and inconsistencies, jeopardising progress (Annosi *et al.*, 2021). Although temporary inefficiencies and inconveniences are to be expected, more thoughtful and thorough integration planning must be a priority (Kroon *et al.*, 2022).

Issue 3: Not realising integration plans and activities

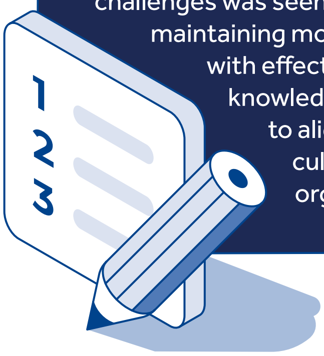
Integrations are associated with additional expenses, such as infrastructure upgrades, software licenses, and data migration. Participants admitted that it was increasingly challenging to manage perceptions and expectations when the costs exceeded the initial estimates, emphasising the importance of transparency to maintain stakeholder support. 'IT costs exceeded initial estimates, which created a perception that the integration was not delivering the expected value. It was important to manage these negative perceptions and communicate the long-term benefits of the integration' (P7).

Restructuring activities and not completing projects as scheduled were disruptive, explaining the value of proactive management of restructuring activities to minimise disruptions. Delayed IT integration severely impacts cost-related, revenue-driven, and operational activities (Razi and Garrick, 2019). A participant lamented: 'Project delays and extended timelines for project closure exerted more pressure and made it extremely difficult to cope' (P11).

Summary of the results

Participants identified five key factors for successful IT integration in multinational acquisitions. They acknowledged the complexity of the process and emphasized the need to address workload issues. Discussing security risks and breaches generated lively debate due to their potential impact. Confronting operational challenges was seen as essential for maintaining momentum, along with effective people and knowledge management to align workplace cultures in the new organisation.

To enhance IT integration for pipelines and future acquisitions, three key recommendations emerged: streamline and standardise processes, implement APM with an iterative approach, and ensure effective communication and collaboration. Participants highlighted significant risks of missing IT integration deadlines, including security breaches, data compromise, financial implications, and loss of trust. Communication issues further impacted operations and trust within the new organisation. Failure to meet integration plans added strain to an already stressed workforce and increased resource demands, which organisations aimed to avoid.



Conclusions and recommendations

Although M&A are always preceded by thorough due diligence, the actual integration process is seldom without obstacles. This paper focuses on how the integration of disparate IT ecosystems of the partnering organisations can be accelerated, avoiding potential risks. Delayed IT integration always has a ripple effect, with significant consequences that organisations want to prevent as best they can.

Participants in the study agree that speeding up IT integration is crucial, as delays can have extensive consequences. These include increased resource needs and significant damage to the organisation's reputation due to data breaches and lost customer trust. The research identifies five key management-related factors essential for expediting the IT integration process.

Recommendations include prioritising project management and collaboration among the teams of the partnering organisations, and increasing employee engagement to reduce uncertainties. To ***speed up IT integration, processes must be streamlined and standardised to reduce uncertainty that strains*** employees. An agile yet iterative approach, guided by effective communication and collaboration, is advised to prevent the need for damage control when things turn out differently than anticipated. Recommendations furthermore include developing and adhering to integration frameworks, and fostering cross-functional collaboration to optimise expertise.

The ***implications of a delayed integration process*** are straightforward. Security breaches are participants' most significant concern and are almost unavoidable because too many people need access to the systems, and firewalls are weak during prolonged processes. The consequences for the organisation, in terms of loss of trust and a tarnished image, must be avoided at all costs.

Recommendations are mostly simple: elevate communication and collaboration as the 'magic' principles to ensure that all are equally informed and devoted to the process. Although participants were initially willing to participate in the study, some were reluctant to proceed despite explanations of the study's purpose and benefits, assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, and efforts to establish rapport and trust through personalised and respectful communication.

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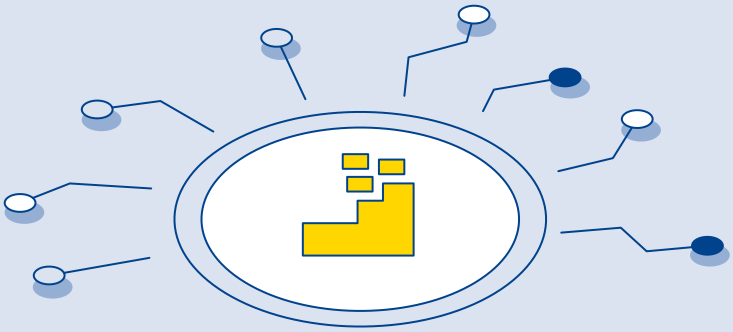

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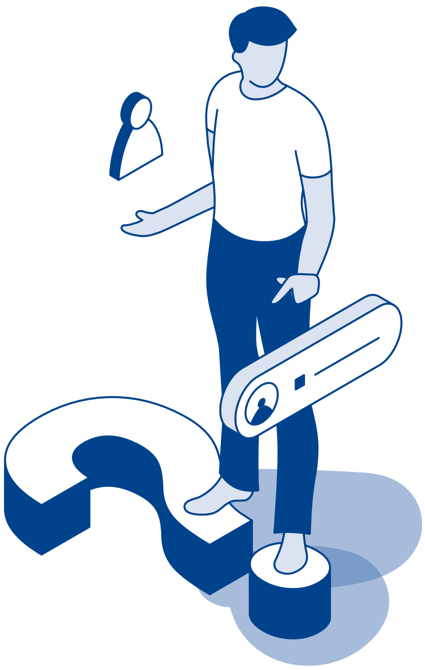

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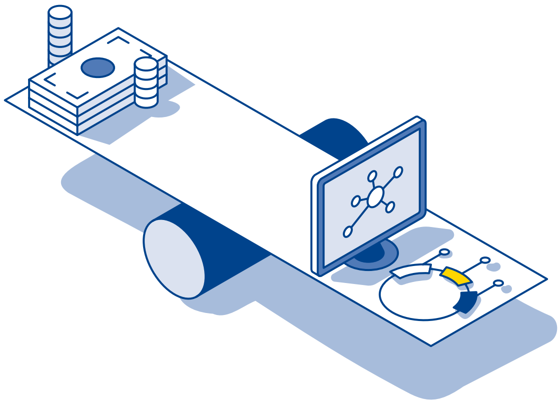

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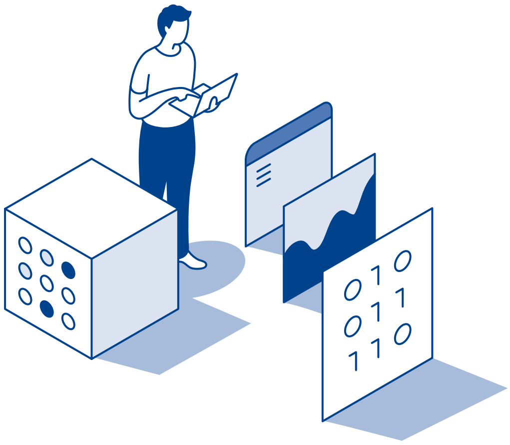

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a need for speed perspective

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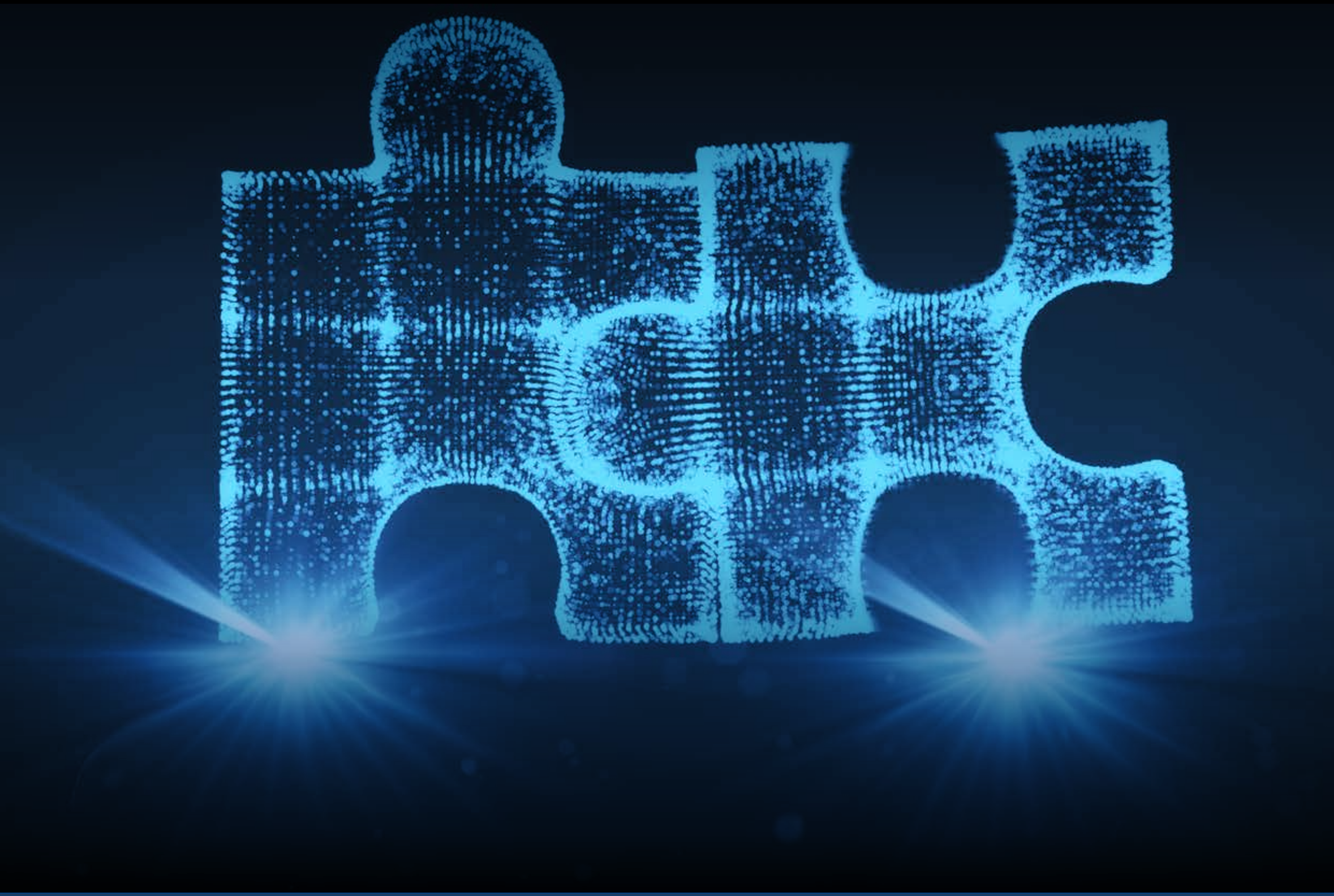

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