INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES

Vol 16, Issue 10, (2026) E-ISSN: 2222-6990

Strategic Alignment and Goal Setting as Drivers of Perceived Sales Performance: Action Research in a Malaysian Ict Firm

Soo Tiam Wah, Sathiswaran Uthamaputhran*

Azman Hashim International Business School, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Malaysia

Email: stevensoo2004@hotmail.com

*Corresponding Author Email: sathiswaran@utm.my

DOI Link: http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v16-i10/29184

Published Date: 15 October 2026

Abstract

ICT systems integrators depend on leaders from sales, technical and operational functions to coordinate customer opportunities and execute a shared strategy. This study examined how a cross-functional coordination platform and KPI-based management intervention shaped perceived sales performance in a Malaysian ICT firm. A two-cycle action-research design combined qualitative evidence from four leaders with a post-intervention survey of 30 respondents. Cycle One identified weak coordination, unclear ownership, strategy-execution gaps and inconsistent KPI follow-up. A structured digital coordination platform improved information sharing, visibility and follow-up but did not fully resolve role clarity or performance alignment. Cycle Two introduced KPIs centred on strategic alignment, goal setting and accountability. All measures demonstrated acceptable reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .774-.893). Strategic alignment, goal setting and accountability were strongly correlated with sales performance ($r = .614$-$.715$, $p < .001$). The regression model was significant, $F(3, 26) = 18.686$, $p < .001$, and explained 68.3% of the variance. Strategic alignment (beta = .475, $p = .002$) and goal setting (beta = .323, $p = .024$) were significant predictors; accountability was positive but non-significant. The results indicate that coordination creates visibility, while aligned strategy and clear goals translate that visibility into performance-oriented action.

Keyword: Action Research, Cross-Functional Coordination, Goal Setting, KPI-Based Management, Sales Performance, Strategic Alignment

Introduction

ICT systems integration requires leaders to coordinate complex solutions across sales, technical, service-delivery and operational boundaries. Sales outcomes depend not only on individual selling effort but also on the organisation's capacity to exchange timely information, allocate ownership and translate strategic priorities into coordinated action. Cross-functional fragmentation can delay decisions, weaken opportunity follow-up and create

inconsistent customer responses. Strategic leadership is therefore important because leaders must establish direction, align people and maintain adaptability under technological and market uncertainty (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000; Ireland & Hitt, 2005).

XYZ_ICT Malaysia Sdn Bhd experienced inconsistent communication, unclear responsibility, weak strategic execution and limited KPI follow-up among leaders. Information moved through fragmented channels, while sales opportunities required contributions from multiple departments. The study used two action-research cycles to address these conditions. Cycle One established a cross-functional digital coordination platform. Reflection showed that greater visibility alone did not ensure aligned action, leading Cycle Two to introduce KPI-based management. This paper asks how strategic alignment, goal setting and accountability were associated with perceived sales performance after the sequential interventions.

Literature Review

Cross-Functional Coordination and Strategic Alignment

Coordination integrates differentiated activities so that organisational units can pursue shared outcomes. Relational coordination emphasises shared goals, shared knowledge and communication as mechanisms that improve performance in interdependent work (Gittell, 2002). In ICT projects, leaders require a common view of customer needs, technical feasibility, delivery capacity and commercial priorities. A shared platform can increase information visibility, but effective coordination also requires ownership, decision rules and leadership follow-through.

Strategic alignment connects organisational priorities with departmental decisions and everyday execution. Visionary direction can become ineffective when strategic consensus and commitment are weak (Ates et al., 2018). Alignment is therefore behavioural as well as conceptual: leaders must interpret priorities consistently, coordinate resource choices and resolve conflicts across functions. Digital transformation similarly requires organisational capability and continuous learning rather than technology acquisition alone (Uthamaputhran & Thoti, 2024). A digital platform may support alignment, but it cannot substitute for shared priorities or disciplined leadership routines.

Goal Setting, Accountability and Sales Performance

Goal-setting theory proposes that specific and challenging goals focus attention, mobilise effort and encourage persistence when employees receive feedback and possess the capability to act (Locke & Latham, 2002). KPI systems operationalise this logic by translating strategy into measurable expectations. Balanced performance systems can clarify relationships between strategic priorities and operational measures (Kaplan & Norton, 1992). However, poorly designed KPIs may encourage compliance, local optimisation or excessive monitoring rather than collaboration.

Accountability involves expectations that decisions and results will be reviewed and explained. It can improve follow-up and corrective action, but its effect depends on role clarity, fairness and supportive leadership (Frink & Klimoski, 1998; Hall et al., 2017). In cross-functional sales, accountability is difficult when ownership is shared or tasks depend on other departments. Strategic alignment and clear goals may therefore be preconditions: leaders

must first agree on direction and responsibilities before accountability can reinforce performance.

Methodology

The study adopted a pragmatic mixed-method insider action-research design at XYZ_ICT Malaysia Sdn Bhd. Action research was suitable because it combines organisational intervention with iterative diagnosis, evaluation and reflection (Coghlan, 2019). Cycle One involved four purposively selected leaders in interviews, reflective discussions, observations and organisational-document review. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) process of familiarisation, coding, theme development and review. The intervention introduced a structured cross-functional digital platform for information sharing, coordination and follow-up.

Reflection on Cycle One informed a second intervention based on strategic alignment, goal setting and accountability. Cycle Two surveyed 30 respondents after KPI implementation using three five-point Likert items for each construct and for perceived sales performance. Analysis comprised Cronbach's alpha, descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and multiple regression. Participation was voluntary, identities and organisational information were protected, and data were used for academic purposes. Formal ethics committee and approval details should be inserted before submission: [ethics committee; approval number].

Results

Cycle One: From Fragmentation to Coordination

Pre-intervention analysis produced seven themes: weak cross-functional coordination, unclear ownership and accountability, misalignment between strategy and execution, KPIs lacking cross-functional alignment, need for a structured platform, leadership coordination influencing sales performance, and demand for stronger monitoring and follow-up. Leaders described delayed information, duplicated communication and uncertainty regarding who should progress opportunities. Strategic priorities were not consistently translated into departmental action.

The digital coordination platform improved the visibility and accessibility of sales-related information. Participants reported more structured communication, clearer follow-up and better cross-functional awareness. Nevertheless, uneven participation and unresolved ownership limited the intervention. Coordination improved the flow of information, but the platform did not by itself define common strategic priorities, measurable responsibilities or consequences for delayed action. This reflection generated the rationale for KPI-based management in Cycle Two.

Cycle Two: KPI-Based Management

All four measures were sufficiently reliable: strategic alignment (alpha = .893), goal setting (.774), accountability (.876) and sales performance (.880). Respondents rated goal setting highest (M = 3.72, SD = .931), followed by strategic alignment (M = 3.69, SD = 1.213), accountability (M = 3.64, SD = 1.134) and sales performance (M = 3.44, SD = 1.115). The lower performance mean suggests that changes in management practice were perceived more strongly than sales outcomes at the time of measurement.

All three management constructs had strong positive correlations with perceived sales performance: strategic alignment, r = .715; accountability, r = .674; and goal setting, r = .614; all p values were below .001. The regression model was significant, $F(3, 26) = 18.686$, $p < .001$, with $R^2 = .683$ and adjusted $R^2 = .647$. Strategic alignment was the strongest significant predictor (B = .437, beta = .475, p = .002), followed by goal setting (B = .386, beta = .323, p = .024). Accountability was positive but non-significant after controlling for the other predictors (B = .212, beta = .216, p = .172). VIF values of 1.477-1.943 did not indicate problematic multicollinearity.

Discussion

The findings support a sequential coordination-alignment-performance pathway. Cycle One created shared visibility by improving communication across functional boundaries. However, information visibility did not automatically produce strategic execution. Cycle Two added a management architecture that connected shared information to priorities, goals and review. Strategic alignment emerged as the strongest predictor, suggesting that leaders' agreement on organisational direction was especially important for perceived sales performance.

Goal setting also made a significant unique contribution. Clear roles, measurable targets and commitment can reduce ambiguity and focus cross-functional effort, consistent with goal-setting theory (Locke & Latham, 2002). In a systems-integration firm, sales progress depends on coordinated technical validation, pricing, solution design and delivery planning. Goals are therefore valuable when they clarify contributions across departments rather than measuring sales personnel in isolation.

Accountability's significant correlation but non-significant regression coefficient requires careful interpretation. The finding does not show that accountability is unimportant. Instead, its explanatory contribution overlapped with alignment and goal setting. Accountability may function as a reinforcing mechanism: monitoring is more productive when leaders already share direction and understand responsibilities. Where priorities remain unclear, stronger accountability may be experienced as pressure without improving coordinated action.

The study also contributes to strategic leadership by locating performance between senior direction and cross-functional execution. Strategic leadership theory often emphasises executives' capacity to establish vision and maintain competitiveness. The present findings show that strategic direction must travel through middle-level coordination routines before it can influence sales work. The digital platform acted as an information-processing mechanism, while KPI discussions created a shared interpretation of priorities. This combination may represent a practical dynamic capability: leaders repeatedly sensed coordination problems, reconfigured routines and adjusted performance practices in response to reflection.

For practice, XYZ_ICT should institutionalise the digital platform as the official coordination space and integrate it with KPI reviews. Management should prioritise a limited set of shared indicators linked to strategic objectives, define accountable owners and document dependencies across functions. Review meetings should focus on learning, barriers and corrective action rather than blame. Psychological safety remains important because leaders

must disclose risks, request assistance and challenge unrealistic assumptions for the coordination system to produce reliable information (Edmondson, 1999).

KPI design should balance shared and role-specific measures. Shared indicators can encourage leaders to optimise the complete customer journey, whereas narrowly departmental measures may reproduce silos. Each indicator should specify its strategic purpose, data source, owner, review frequency and expected response when performance deviates. Managers should periodically remove measures that no longer support decisions. This keeps the system focused and reduces the likelihood that accountability becomes a reporting burden disconnected from action.

Performance evaluation should also include objective evidence. The survey measured perceptions rather than revenue growth, conversion rates or sales-cycle time. Future action-research cycles should compare pre- and post-intervention indicators such as opportunity conversion, proposal turnaround, response time, pipeline ageing, cross-functional task completion and customer retention. Combining these measures with qualitative reflection would show whether improved management practices lead to sustained commercial outcomes.

Limitations

The single-organisation setting limits transferability. Cycle One involved only four leaders, while Cycle Two included 30 respondents, producing relatively unstable regression estimates. The quantitative assessment was cross-sectional, post-intervention and self-reported, with no matched baseline or comparison group. Perceived sales performance cannot establish actual sales improvement or causal intervention impact. The insider researcher's organisational role may also have influenced participation and interpretation, although triangulation and reflective practice were used to strengthen credibility.

Conclusion

The two interventions addressed complementary organisational problems: the coordination platform supported information sharing and follow-up, while KPI-based management linked coordination with strategic priorities and goals. Strategic alignment and goal setting were significantly associated with perceived sales performance, whereas accountability did not make a significant unique contribution. These findings should be interpreted cautiously because the study involved a small sample and used cross-sectional, self-reported data collected after the interventions; therefore, it cannot establish that the interventions caused improvements in sales performance. Subsequent action-research cycles should track objective indicators, including revenue growth and opportunity conversion, to assess whether changes in management practices correspond with sustained commercial outcomes.

Declarations

Funding: No funding was reported. Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest. Ethics: Informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity were maintained; formal approval details must be inserted before submission. Author contributions: Soo Tiam Wah conducted the investigation, intervention, analysis and initial drafting; Sathiswaran Uthamaputhran provided supervision, methodological guidance, review and editing.

References

Ates, N. Y., Tarakci, M., Porck, J. P., Van Knippenberg, D., & Groenen, P. J. F. (2018). The dark side of visionary leadership in strategy implementation: Strategic alignment, strategic consensus, and commitment. Journal of Management, 46(5), 637-665. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206318811567

Boal, K. B., & Hooijberg, R. (2000). Strategic leadership research: Moving on. The Leadership Quarterly, 11(4), 515-549.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77-101.

Coghlan, D. (2019). Doing action research in your own organization (5th ed.). Sage.

Edmondson, A. C. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. Administrative Science Quarterly, 44(2), 350-383.

Frink, D. D., & Klimoski, R. J. (1998). Toward a theory of accountability in organizations and human resource management. Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management, 16, 1-51.

Gittell, J. H. (2002). Coordinating mechanisms in care provider groups: Relational coordination as a mediator and input uncertainty as a moderator of performance effects. Management Science, 48(11), 1408-1426.

Hall, A. T., Frink, D. D., & Buckley, M. R. (2017). An accountability account: A review and synthesis of the theoretical and empirical research on felt accountability. Journal of Organizational Behavior, 38(2), 204-224.

Ireland, R. D., & Hitt, M. A. (2005). Achieving and maintaining strategic competitiveness in the 21st century: The role of strategic leadership. Academy of Management Perspectives, 19(4), 63-77. https://doi.org/10.5465/ame.2005.19417908

Kaplan, R. S., & Norton, D. P. (1992). The balanced scorecard: Measures that drive performance. Harvard Business Review, 70(1), 71-79.

Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (2002). Building a practically useful theory of goal setting and task motivation: A 35-year odyssey. American Psychologist, 57(9), 705-717.

Uthamaputhran, S., & Thoti, K. K. (2024). An investigation on the effects of digital transformation on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Malaysia. International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 14(8), 2815-2827. https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i8/21983.

Zaato, S. G., Ismail, M., Uthamaputhran, S., Zulkiffli, W. F. W., & Yusuff, Y. Z. (2022). Roles of government support policies on entrepreneurial orientation and SMEs performance in an African context. International Transaction Journal of Engineering, Management, & Applied Sciences & Technologies.