Open Strategy: Consolidated Definition and Processual Conceptualization

Research-in-Progress

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Abstract

Open approaches to operational work in organizations (e.g., crowdsourcing and open source development) have been of particular interest to information systems (IS) researchers. Recently, organizations, including IBM, Red Hat and Wikimedia Foundation, have also embraced openness principles for strategic work (e.g., planning, forming and implementing strategy). Little is known about such "open strategy" and, within it, the (critical) role of information technology (IT). Definitions and conceptualizations of open strategy in the literature are vague and inconsistent. In the study reported in this paper, we have reviewed the emerging literature on open strategy. By analysing the characteristics most commonly attributed to open strategy, we propose a consolidated definition of open strategy. Furthermore, we develop an open strategy process model and use it to re-analyse four open strategy case studies. This analysis contributes to our conceptual understanding of open strategy and of what is required for open strategy to work in practice.

Keywords: Openness, open strategy, strategy process, strategy-as-practice, strategy formation, definition, conceptualization, process model, literature review.

Introduction

"Openness", in the context of information systems/information technology (IS/IT), *"typically refers to technological and legal accessibility of IT artefacts, transparent and permeable organizational structures, and distributed collaborative processes based on knowledge sharing between peers"* (Feller et al. 2014). IT has enabled a wide range of "open" practices and approaches (e.g., Benkler 2006; Chesbrough 2003). West and Bogers (2013, pp. 7-8) considered that *"the Internet's rise has played an important role in enabling searches for external sources of innovation [...] online communities, crowdsourcing and Internet platforms"*. IS researchers have shown great interest in IT-enabled openness as illustrated by workshops, conference tracks and journal special issues on the topic (e.g., Dobusch et al. 2015; Feller et al. 2014; Whelan et al. 2014). Research has focused on open approaches that provide alternatives to traditional operational work, whether this is commercial crowdsourcing and open innovation, or non-commercial open source and open content development.

Recently, however, a range of organizations has also used IT to enable openness for strategic work. That is, in these organizations, IT-enabled openness is not only used to perform operational work but also to define organizational strategy. Examples of these open approaches to strategy have been documented at, for instance, IBM (Bjelland and Wood 2008), Red Hat (Gast and Zanini 2012) and the Wikimedia Foundation (Dobusch and Kapeller 2013). This is not a niche phenomenon. In their most recent (2015) global social media survey, McKinsey & Company found that 33% of surveyed organizations used social media in some way to develop their current strategy (Bughin et al. 2015). Chesbrough and Appleyard (2007) argued that "open strategy" constitutes a phenomenon that is related to, but different from, open approaches at the operational level.

To better understand and research the emerging phenomenon of open strategy, a common terminology and a shared conceptual understanding would be helpful. However, at present, several vague and, at times, conflicting definitions and conceptualizations are used in the research literature and in the industry. That is, quite different implicit or explicit conceptualizations of "open strategy" have been used. To further confuse the situation, alternative terms such as "democratized strategy" (Stieger et al. 2012), "social strategy" (Gast and Zanini 2012) or "strategy as a practice of thousands" (Dobusch and Müller-Seitz 2012) have been used to describe, essentially, the same phenomenon.

The purpose of our work is to develop a unified definition and a shared conceptualization of "open strategy" to support future research. To fulfil this purpose, we have: a) systematically analysed the literature to develop a consolidated definition of open strategy and b) re-analysed the most salient open strategy cases to advance the conceptual, processual understanding of open strategy. This research-in-progress paper is to share and discuss key findings of the study with the ICIS and the Strategy and Organizational Impacts track communities.

The paper is structured as follows: In the second section, we present the review method that we used to identify and analyse studies on open strategy. The reviewed literature is then used to develop a consolidated definition of open strategy. In the third section, we build on the strategic management literature to develop a strategy process model. The process model is then used to re-analyse existing open strategy cases so to increase the conceptual understanding of open strategy. We conclude the paper with a brief summary and the outline for our future research.

Consolidated Definition of Open Strategy

Review Method

Reviews of the literature allow for the synthesis and critical assessment of existing research (Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic 2014; Schwarz et al. 2007). For our particular review, we have used techniques from both systematic, keyword-centred reviews (Schryen 2013) and semi-structured, concept-centred reviews (Webster and Watson 2002). The purpose of our review was to examine and consolidate the understanding of open strategy in the literature.

We defined an initial set of search terms based on a review of an initial set of papers that we had already identified as "open strategy" papers. We then used keyword searches across pertinent research databases (i.e., AIS eLibrary, EBSCO*host*, JSTOR, ProQuest, ABI/INFORM, ScienceDirect and Web of Science),

covering a wide range of disciplines, including all leading outlets for IS and strategic management research. The keyword-based approach was useful as it allowed us to identify a comprehensive set of sources including those outside our disciplinary area (Schryen 2013; vom Brocke et al. 2009). The search terms were Boolean combinations of alternative terms for "open/openness" (e.g., "social*", "democratic*" or "collaborative*") and alternative terms for "strategy/strategizing" (e.g., "plan*", "tactic*" or "blueprint*"). We identified papers as relevant based on first-reading meta-information (titles, keywords, abstracts and classifications) and reading of the full texts. We then iteratively extended the keyword search phrases based on our reading of additional papers as, at times, they revealed alternative terminology that was in use.

In addition, we conducted backward and forward searches on all identified relevant sources (Webster and Watson 2002). By "backward search", we mean a search of the bibliographies and full texts of papers already identified as relevant sources. By "forward search", we mean the analysis of more recent papers citing the already identified papers (using the forward-search functionality of EBSCO*host*, Google Scholar and Web of Science). In this way, we iteratively extended the number of papers, until we could not identify any additional academic, peer-reviewed papers on open strategy. In January 2015, we concluded the literature search and review reported in this paper.

Ultimately, we considered a paper to be relevant when it: a) dealt with the strategy process of an organization; b) concerned the opening-up of the strategy process in some way towards a wider group of people; and c) described in some meaningful way the role of IT in this opening-up of the strategy process. Overall, we identified 25 relevant publications.

This systematic examination of the literature, as described above, allows us to reasonably claim that our definition of open strategy is based on all, or almost all, of the existing, peer-reviewed open strategy literature. The reason is that a paper would only have "slipped past" us if it was not using common terms (otherwise it would have been picked up in the keyword search); was not cited in other open strategy papers (otherwise it would have been picked up in the backward search); and was not citing other open strategy papers (otherwise it would have been picked up in the forward search). This is possible but unlikely.

Due to the newness of the phenomenon, we also included non-peer-reviewed material from books and influential industry sources (e.g., Gartner, McKinsey Quarterly, Think Act) in our review. As this part of the review is a selection by us, the authors, it does not completely cover all practitioner sources. An EndNote library with all identified sources on open strategy is available from the lead authors on request.

Consolidated Definition

Overall, we found the IS literature on open strategy to be surprisingly sparse, with a few exceptions (Amrollahi et al. 2014; Matzler et al. 2014a). The majority of papers on the topic to date have been published in strategic management outlets. This lack of interest in strategic openness is somewhat surprising, given the interest shown by the IS community in operational openness (Aksulu and Wade 2010) and the important role of IT for both types of openness.

The first description of open strategy is provided in a psychology paper. Liinamaa et al. (2004) call the phenomenon "collaborative strategic planning" and describe it as an IT-enabled form of collaborative learning, knowledge sharing and participation in strategy planning. In later papers, Chesbrough and Appleyard (2007) and Doz and Kosonen (2008) suggest the term "open strategy" for the same phenomenon. Chesbrough and Appleyard (2007) approach the issue from an open innovation perspective and suggest that certain characteristics of open innovation also apply on a strategic level. Doz and Kosonen's (2008) approach is from a strategy perspective in which they suggest that strategizing could be opened up to and benefit from a dialogue with a wider range of organizational members. A contemporary open strategy understanding is provided by Whittington et al. (2011) in which open strategy is characterized as an inclusive and transparent form of strategizing that allows participation beyond organizational boundaries (e.g., allowing consultants and suppliers to contribute).

We systematically analysed the above and other existing literature on open strategy in regard to the definition, characterization and conceptualization of open strategy as a phenomenon. A summary of our analysis results is provided in Table 1 and discussed below.

Dimension	Ideal Type Closed Strategy	Continuum	Ideal Type Open Strategy
Inclusiveness (range of participants involved)	• Restricted, small group of formal C-level corporate leaders and organizational elite (e.g., Montgomery 2008). • Strategy is created and implemented in an elitist and exclusive manner (e.g., Johnson et al. 2010; Makadok and Barney 2001).	◀··▶	• Wide range of participants, including external participants (Chesbrough and Appleyard 2007; Doz and Kosonen 2008). • Strategy is created (e.g., Stieger et al. 2012) and implemented (e.g., Tackx and Verdin 2014) in a participative and inclusive manner.
Transparency (degree of openness and visibility)	• No transparency of input (e.g., Powley et al. 2004). • No transparency of strategy process (e.g., Powley et al. 2004). • No transparency of intermediate or final outputs (e.g., Powley et al. 2004).	◀··▶	• Transparency of inputs (e.g., Matzler et al. 2014a; Tackx and Verdin 2014). • Transparency of strategy process (e.g., Dobusch and Müller-Seitz 2015; Whittington et al. 2011; Whittington and Yakis-Douglas 2011). • Transparency of intermediate and final outputs (e.g., Tackx and Verdin 2014).
IT-Enabledness (role of IT)	• Supporting role of IT (e.g., Whittington 2015). • Traditional (non-social) IS used (such as enterprise resource planning/management information systems dashboards) (e.g., Schlagwein et al. 2011; Whittington 2015).	◀··▶	• Enabling role of IT; open strategy, particularly mass participation not possible without IT (e.g., Amrollahi et al. 2014; Haefliger et al. 2011). • Social IS used (such as social media, co-creation platforms) (e.g., Amrollahi et al. 2014; Schlagwein et al. 2011; Whittington 2015).

Table 1. Characteristics of Closed vs. Open Strategy Ideal Types

Based on the literature, we identified three dimensions in which the "ideal types" of open and closed strategy processes are different. Ideal types (Weber 1922) represent the ends of a spectrum (not either-or categories). In practice, most or all empirical instances (actual strategies in actual organizations) will lie somewhere between the ideal types (e.g., see cases outlined below). Organizational strategies differ on the degree of openness on a continuum; that is, organizational strategies are not "either completely open or completely closed".

Inclusiveness. Building on Whittington et al. (2011) and others (e.g., Amrollahi et al. 2014; Dobusch and Müller-Seitz 2015; Tackx and Verdin 2014), we used the term "inclusiveness" to refer to the range of participants involved in, and contributing to, the strategy process. The open strategy process is more participative and inclusive than the closed strategy process. In closed strategy, the strategy formation process is restricted to a limited, C-level group of people and their immediate affiliates (e.g., Montgomery 2008). In open strategy, individuals beyond C-level and senior strategy teams, including external individuals or communities, are part of the process and can actively contribute (e.g., Chesbrough and Appleyard 2007; Doz and Kosonen 2008). The tasks of communicating, implementing and operationalizing a strategy are also part of the strategy process (the strategy process is discussed in detail in the next section). The degree of inclusiveness, that is, the inclusion of internal participants of specific ranks and/or external practitioners can vary from organization to organization. In closed strategy, strategy implementation remains within an exclusive, executive group (e.g., Johnson et al. 2010; Makadok and Barney 2001) with only specific tasks possibly delegated. In open strategy processes, the activities of implementation are inclusive and involve a wide range of participants (e.g., Stieger et al. 2012; Tackx and Verdin 2014) in meaningful ways.

Transparency. Furthermore, papers generally characterize the open strategy process as transparent and visible (Amrollahi et al. 2014; Dobusch and Müller-Seitz 2015; Tackx and Verdin 2014; Whittington et al. 2011). Hence, we use the term "transparency" to mean the degree of openness and visibility of the inputs to, outputs from and the activities of the strategy process itself. The open strategy process is more transparent and visible than the closed strategy process. In closed strategy, the strategy is developed in secret and only limited details are shared with selected personnel (e.g., Johnson et al. 2010; Makadok and Barney 2001; Montgomery 2008). In open strategy, various steps in the strategy process become transparent and visible, including the generation of ideas for future strategic direction (Tackx and Verdin 2014), decision making on ideas for strategic direction (Dobusch and Müller-Seitz 2015) and strategy implementation (Matzler et al. 2014a; Matzler et al. 2014b). In addition to the strategy process itself, the typical inputs (e.g., analyses of various types) become transparent (Matzler et al. 2014a; Tackx and Verdin 2014), as do the outputs (e.g., strategy statements in various formats) (Tackx and Verdin 2014). In practice, the degree of transparency varies along the activities of the strategy process (see below). In closed strategy, the inputs and, at the least, the finer details of the strategy are kept secret (Powley et al. 2004). Exceptions from this ideal type of traditional closed strategy already exist as some organizations make "strategic intent" or "vision" statements publicly available (Schilling 2013); albeit, such outputs are typically of a severely edited and aggregated nature (Whittington et al. 2011).

IT-Enabledness. The third dimension in which open and closed strategy differ is the role of IT in the phenomenon. In closed strategy, if organizations rely on IT at all, it is only as "support" (Whittington 2015). Traditional tools that support closed strategy include enterprise resource planning and management information systems dashboards and other "non-social" IS (e.g., Schlagwein et al. 2011; Whittington 2015). The closed strategy process is possible without IT, and was in use before contemporary IT existed. In contrast, the open strategy process is not possible without IT (Amrollahi et al. 2014; Haefliger et al. 2011). Social IS (e.g., social media, enterprise social software, collaboration and co-creation platforms) are used to enable open participation (e.g., Schlagwein et al. 2011; Whittington 2015). Organizations use adjusted common tools such as forums (Stieger et al. 2012) or custom-built IT (Amrollahi et al. 2014) to enable open strategizing. In relation to operational openness, scholars have recognized that IT "enables" (Schlagwein and Bjørn-Andersen 2014) and "shapes" (Majchrzak and Malhotra 2013) open processes; it is not a mere "support" of existing processes. In addition, open strategy is one phenomenon in which IT is best thought of as an inseparable part of the phenomenon itself (Orlikowski and Scott 2008). That is, the enabling role of IT is a constituent part of the phenomenon and one of its main characteristics. Of concern for IS researchers is that the role of IT has been glossed over in the majority of strategic management studies on open strategy.

Based on the review of the literature, we consider the above three dimensions, and the characteristics of open strategy as expressed in these three dimensions, to be a solid foundation for a definition of the term "open" in "open strategy".

In addition, the term "strategy" in "open strategy" needs to be defined. Strategy in a business and organizational context is widely understood as a *"formula for how a business is going to compete, what its goals should be, and what policies will be needed to carry out those goals"* (Porter 1980, p. xvi). The strategy process is thus the process used to develop and enact a strategy (see next section). Furthermore, we substitute the term "business" in Porter's definition with the term "organization" as open strategy can also be enacted also by government organizations and non-governmental organizations (Whittington et al. 2011).

Based on the above review and argument, we come to define open strategy as follows: *Open strategy refers to an inclusive, transparent and IT-enabled process to develop and enact a formula for how an organization is going to compete, what its goals should be and what policies will be needed to carry out those goals.*

The above definition for "open strategy" meaningfully resolves the ambiguous views on the definition and, by clearly defining "open strategy", enables better integration of future research on this emerging phenomenon.

Processual Conceptualization of Open Strategy

To better conceptualize open strategy (i.e., to increase understanding about what open strategy is and how open strategy works), we use a processual perspective to discuss the actual strategic "doings". We use this perspective in order to focus on doings, outcomes and people while strategizing (Vaara and Whittington 2012). Other open strategy studies, including those published in IS outlets (Amrollahi et al. 2014; Matzler et al. 2014a), have argued the usefulness of this perspective. One reason we find the traditional majority perspective in strategic management—logical-positivist studies building on variance theories (e.g., Golsorkhi et al. 2010)—not suitable for a better understanding of open strategy is that this perspective treats strategizing as a black box, focusing on measurable outcomes instead of the actual strategic process and the doings of the people involved. Based on this argument, we find it useful to consider all activities, practices and sub-processes that occur at the strategic level and that collectively constitute the "strategy process". This consideration allows us to analyse how these activities and practices are conducted differently in open strategy compared to closed strategy. In this section, we develop a process model for the strategy process and then use it to re-analyse early open strategy cases reported in the literature.

Strategy Process Model

We did not identify a readily suitable model of all strategic organizational activities, which we needed in order to analyse the different understandings of open strategy. Hence, to develop a process model for the strategy process, we analysed seminal business, management and organizational literature to identify all tasks and activities that are commonly considered to be "strategic". Figure 1 presents our resulting model of the strategy process.
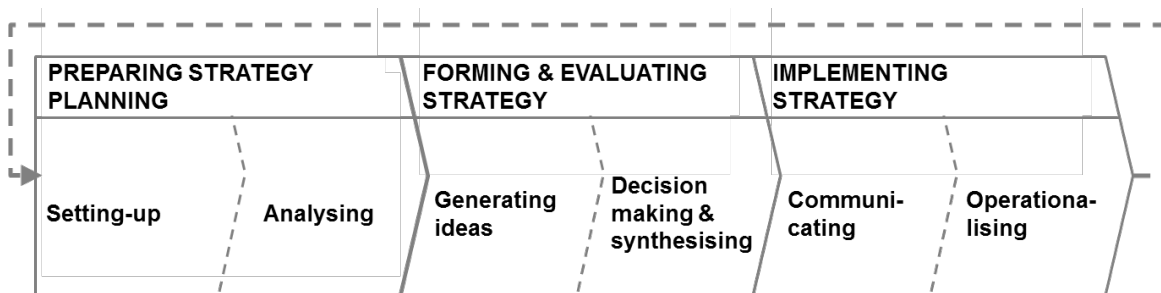

Figure 1. Strategy Process Model

The first phase of the strategy process, **preparing strategy planning**, involves activities related to set-up and analysis. During set-up, the planning process is outlined (Bryson 1988; Steiner 1979) and organizational objectives for planning the next period are defined (Ansoff 1965; Mintzberg 1994). Different types of analyses are performed to better understand the organization's position in relation to its current environment (Andrews 1988; Ansoff 1965; Bryson 1988; Steiner 1979). A gap analysis (Ansoff 1965) is conducted to identify the necessary developments to achieve organizational objectives (Mintzberg 1994; Steiner 1979).

The second phase, **forming and evaluating strategy**, involves activities related to idea generation and decision making. The strategic ideas generated are typically related to new product–market combinations (Ansoff 1965) or to strategic issues and barriers (Bryson 1988). These ideas are then evaluated (Ansoff 1965; Mintzberg 1994), synthesized (Steiner 1979) and eventually selected for implementation.

The third phase, **implementing strategy**, consists of communication and operationalization. The strategy is codified, usually in the form of textual documentation of the mission, core values, etc. (Bryson 1988) and then communicated and disseminated (Bryson 1988; Mintzberg 1994). To create the operational change required by the strategy, the developed strategy is translated into more detailed, comprehensive plans for different organizational functions (Mintzberg 1994; Steiner 1979). Financial and other resources are then assigned (Andrews 1988; Ansoff 1965).

The strategy process feeds into itself; that is, we included a feedback loop in Figure 1 to indicate that organizations learn from their past strategizing for their future strategizing (e.g., Argyris and Schön 1978).

Open Strategy Case Studies

We selected four salient case studies (DialogTage, IBM, Red Hat and Wikimedia Foundation) that fulfil the above open strategy definition, have been commonly referred to as open strategy cases, and for which detailed case reports are available. The selected cases serve as examples of how the strategy process activities have been opened up in practice. We re-analysed the cases to identify characteristics and common patterns of open strategy processes; that is, we used a meta-synthesis approach (Schreiber et al. 1997). Before analysing the cases through using the above process model as an analytical framework, the cases are briefly summarized below.

DialogTage, a project by an Austrian car manufacturer, engaged top managers, employees and academics (inclusiveness). The strategy process itself was transparent: the strategy process set-up was conducted openly, and idea discussions and the final management letter including actions were made available (transparency). The strategy process of the project used a custom-built IT platform for idea pooling and for the calculation of an "impact factor" (IT-enabledness). (Stieger et al. 2012)

IBM involved top management and other employees as well as external partners, competitors and industry experts (inclusiveness). An initial vision was defined, synthesizing insights from 1,100 internal/external executives, thus building the framework for open gap analysis and idea discussions. The resulting strategy was announced in the form of reports and priority projects (transparency). Use of an IT platform provided idea pooling and algorithmic idea aggregation (IT-enabledness). (Bjelland and Wood 2008; Matzler et al. 2014a; Matzler et al. 2014b)

Red Hat involved top management and employees in its strategy process (inclusiveness). Pre-defined priority areas, ideas and discussions were visible. Specific ideas were selected for implementation through consensus in dedicated focus groups (transparency). A range of IT tools (wiki, chat, a platform for idea pooling and evaluation) was used to access, generate and communicate strategic ideas and outcomes. (Gast and Zanini 2012; Yeaney 2011)

Wikimedia Foundation involved top management, employees, consultants and its user community (inclusiveness). The strategy process, inputs, intermediate results, final strategy and operationalization were visible (transparency). Wikis and an IT platform were appropriated for idea pooling, discussion and implementation. (Dobusch and Kapeller 2013; Dobusch and Müller-Seitz 2015)

Application to Open Strategy

The above generic strategy process is enacted differently when comparing open strategy versus closed strategy. Table 2 provides an overview of the cases and our analysis. The top part of table 2 shows the ways in which the strategy process was open in the four cases. The bottom part of table 2 shows how, based on these empirical examples, a description of a generic, ideal open strategy process can be formulated.

Case	PREPARING STRATEGY PLANNING		FORMING AND EVALUATING STRATEGY		IMPLEMENTING STRATEGY	
	Setting-up	Analysing	Generating ideas	Decision making and synthesizing	Communicating	Operationalizing
IBM	1,100 interviews were held in preparation for identifying key topics and preparing the structure for idea generation.	Defined vision translated into idea generation framework and specified priority areas for further elaboration.	Ideas were posted, discussed and voted on by participants in different categories.	Ideas were selected and aggregated for decision making by top mgmt. through voting and text mining.	IBM business units announced implementation of (selected) ideas publicly and in reports to participants.	–

Red Hat	–	–	Employees brainstormed ideas in pre-defined priority areas.	–	CEO provided regular updates and hosted employee chats. Ideas and discussions were available via IT.	Specific ideas were selected for implementation; employees remained involved via mailing lists.
Wikimedia Foundation	Key employees and external consultants defined a structure for contributions and "kicked off" the strategy process.	–	The user community provided and discussed ideas in pre-defined categories.	–	Ideas, discussions, aggregated results and idea mappings were published. The final strategy was made public.	Volunteers operationalized the strategic directions into business procedures, and were then involved in implementation.
Open Strategy (Abstract ideal type)	Open discussion and development of an initial framework containing priority areas for the future organizational direction.	Joint feasibility checks and gap analyses towards defined aspirations in priority areas.	Creative mass generation of strategic ideas to shape future direction in specific priority areas.	Evaluation and selection of individual strategic ideas for synthesis and inclusion in strategic plan.	Communication of synthesized organizational strategy, inputs and analyses to participants and internal/ external audiences.	Open translation of strategic ideas into measurable and implementable projects and operating procedures.

Table 2. Open Strategy Process and Cases

The phase of **preparing strategy planning** has been opened up in various ways in the four cases. The identification of priority areas and their assessment of feasibility and future value were made more transparent and inclusive through expanding the group of people involved as practitioners. IBM, for example, created an open strategy team, consisting of internal and external people, that analysed whether selected priorities were feasible for mass idea generation (i.e., for the later open strategy phases).

In this early phase, inclusiveness is more limited than in the following phases with typically only a smaller set of practitioners participating in strategy making. Organizations that openly pursue this phase aim to create buy-in among a group of highly regarded key participants, for instance, middle management (Mantere and Vaara 2008), to build a core team and to further promote and market the initiated effort. Transparency is present, yet limited to sharing inputs and intermediate results, such as frameworks, in this smaller group. IT is an enabler: the role of IT in this phase is less than in other phases, corresponding to the relatively lower inclusiveness.

The phase of **forming and evaluating strategy**, in particular, that of idea generation, was the one in which the case organizations opened up the most. All case organizations opened up this phase in some way, allowing a large group of practitioners to participate in generating ideas for the future organizational direction as well as, directly or indirectly, to participate in deciding which ideas were to be funded and implemented. DialogTage, for example, involved all employees in idea generation and discussion. The variety of ideas was then synthesized using an IT platform that allowed participants to vote, enabling the calculation of an "impact factor". Through this process, DialogTage essentially allowed participants to decide which ideas were to be included in the final strategy.

In this phase, in terms of active participation, inclusiveness is at its highest level: organizations try to benefit from the effect of the "wisdom of the crowds" to level out biases in the ideas and decisions of small

groups of executives (Surowiecki 2004). Transparency is also high as the purpose of this phase is to enable the creation of broad consensus among employees and management while jointly generating, discussing and deciding which ideas should shape the future direction, thus ultimately leading to increased buy-in. The usage of IT in this phase is intense with particular focus on collecting, storing, evaluating and aggregating strategy ideas and suggestions.

The **implementing strategy** phase has been opened up in all case organizations through providing access to the results of grass-roots idea generation and through codification and communication of the earlier activities' results to the "crowd" of organizational participants and stakeholders. In addition, the selected strategic ideas were broken down into projects at a more operational level for implementation, thus leading to changes in operating procedures along with organizational processes. Wikimedia Foundation, for example, transparently and publicly communicated several aggregation steps of the generated ideas in a wiki, leading eventually to public communication of the final strategy. To break down the high level strategy, Wikimedia Foundation transferred strategic directions into wikis that were then used by Wikimedia employees and users to define future operational work.

In this phase, inclusiveness in the form of active participation decreases compared to the earlier phases, yet passive participation in the form of consuming the results increases (the purpose of this activity is dissemination). The organization and open strategy participants are to a greater or lesser degree actively managing the organizational perception of employees and external practitioners (Whittington and Yakis-Douglas 2011). Active participation finally increases, when practitioners are asked to operationalize the selected strategic ideas, thus openness ultimately allows the achievement of buy-in by those who had previously been left out (Aksulu and Wade 2010). In the case organizations, transparency in this phase was the highest, with the organizations widely sharing the inputs, intermediate results and outcomes. IT-enablement was again intense: although the focus first shifted towards disseminating content to the masses, it finally settled on capturing and aggregating ideas for operationalization.

The analysis of this initial set of published open strategy case studies shows how all six of the strategy process steps were opened up. Through the process perspective, we are able to comprehend that the existing understandings simply represent different strategy activities that, in essence, all lead to the ultimate goal of defining the organizational strategy. IT was seen to play a critical role in this openness, exhibiting a plethora of different usage patterns, depending on the type of activity and the context of the organization (see also Orlikowski 2000; Riemer et al. 2010). Specifically, IT is critical in open strategy in the capture and structuring of strategic ideas, in identifying and synthesizing patterns, and in communicating and implementing the finally developed strategy.

Conclusion and Future Research

In this research-in-progress paper, with our review of the existing literature as its foundation, we contribute a definition of open strategy based on three dimensions (inclusiveness, transparency and IT-enabledness). We provide a processual conceptualization of open strategy, using a general process strategy model that includes three major phases (preparing strategy planning, forming and evaluating strategy, implementing strategy) that can all be enacted in an open way. The paper contributes to research on open strategy by resolving disagreements, gaps and ambiguities in the prior definitions of open strategy, and by improving our conceptual understanding of open strategy by focusing on the strategy process and the enacted strategic activities and practices that are open. Using the strategy process as a sense-making device, we show that the understandings of open strategy in the literature are related to different activities within a larger process.

In our research, we will use the concepts provided in this paper as a base model for field studies of organizations that are appropriating open strategy. We will inform this by using strategy-as-practice as the theoretical base. Our reason is that, as indicated in this study, the strategy process itself does not dramatically change; rather, it is the practices and practitioners within this larger process that differ. We hope that these field studies will contribute to refining what is presented in this research-in-progress paper. We invite interested colleagues to join the investigation of this interesting and promising area of IT use in organizations.

Acknowledgements

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