Opening strategy or opening Pandora's Box?

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Résumé :

L'open strategy est un sujet de recherche récent dans le domaine du management stratégique, qui a pris de l'ampleur auprès des académiciens au cours de la dernière décennie, avec un pic de contributions à sa littérature à partir de 2015 (Sailer et al., 2017). L'open strategy est communément définie par les dimensions d'inclusion, de transparence et de participation. Néanmoins, au travers de la littérature, de nombreux facteurs ajoutent de la complexité au processus et divers dilemmes ont émergés avec l'accroissement du niveau d'ouverture du processus (Hautz et al., 2017). En nous appuyant sur la littérature récente, nous trouvons que l'ouverture est influencée par des facteur multiples et des dynamiques qui évoluent au travers des divers contextes et pratiques d'une organisation. Ainsi, notre principale réflexion et question de recherche est de savoir s'il existe d'autres facteurs influençant le niveau d'ouverture et les dynamiques d'un processus d'open strategy. Grâce à notre méta-synthèse qualitative, nous analysons les contributions de 25 papiers de recherche basés sur des études de cas. Notre principale contribution est de soutenir qu'un processus d'open strategy peut être composé de différents niveaux d'ouverture à travers les différentes étapes du processus. Notre recherche contribue donc à la fois à la littérature d'open strategy et à celle de la stratégie comme pratique en apportant une nouvelle perspective et en se concentrant sur les individus dans leurs rôles et l'influence qu'ils exercent. Nous concluons en émettant l'hypothèse que les organisations pourraient bien finir par ouvrir la boîte de Pandore dans la quête d'ouvrir leur stratégie.

Mots-clés : open strategy, qualitative meta-synthesis, strategy as practice

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1. INTRODUCTION

The term "open strategy" was first used by Chesbrough and Appleyard (2007), in their paper linking open innovation to strategy. Since then, various authors have actively taken part in the debate and defined open strategy through several factors that come in opposition to traditional strategy making, which is seen as a secretive and exclusive practice of top management in an organization (Birkinshaw, 2017). In open strategy, the range of people involved is extended beyond top management and aims at opening up the process towards various external (Chesbrough and Appleyard, 2007) and internal people (Whittington et al., 2011). From there, two of the main factors defining open strategy, transparency (related to the 'visibility of information' of a strategy) and inclusion (related to the wide participation in the 'strategic conversation' of people traditionally excluded), were introduced to the literature (Whittington et al., 2011).

As the literature is still nascent, many factors influencing the level of openness in open strategy initiatives are being discussed, brought to light and refined. Indeed, debates arise around the levels of participation (Mack and Szulanski, 2017), the nature of people participating (crowds and communities) (Dobusch and Kapeller, 2018), the processes of decision-making and governance (Hautz et al., 2017; Whittington et al., 2011), or even the role of information systems (Morton et al., 2017). Moreover, it has been found that several factors influencing the level of openness such as the range of people, the range of purposes and the range of topics have a relation of interdependence (Dobusch et al., 2017). That is to say that, when one factor increases towards a higher level of openness, it is expected that the other two factors evolve respectively; unless they are explicitly limited to a lower degree of openness.

We also learn from the literature that several dilemmas emerge from the higher levels of openness in open strategy and that some can be linked to the nature of the people involved belonging to either the crowd or a community (Hautz et al., 2017). In the case of Premium Cola (Luedicke et al., 2017), some of these dilemmas have been answered to by implementing

2

counter balancing methods in order to harmonize the extreme open practices. Building up on this, a recent paper argues that for every form of openness there is a form of closure (Dobusch et al., 2019). However, the literature does not address these dilemmas from a global macro-level perspective, investigating how a different organizational structure could affect the level of openness and thus reduce the overall "organizational complexity" (Dobusch et al., 2017). Building up on this recent literature, we find that openness is influenced by multiple factors and dynamics that evolve throughout the various contexts and practices of an organization.

Thus, our main reflection and research question are set on exploring whether there are any other factors influencing the openness levels and dynamics of an open strategy process? Through our qualitative meta-synthesis, we find that the many variables and unpredictable behaviors of the people taking part in the strategic conversation can lead to overwhelming situations and that depending on the organization and its ability to deal with complex situations, open strategy can be more of a burden than a blessing. First, we argue that a way to lower organizational complexity would be to adopt open strategy as a continuous process rather than an episodic strategy-making practice. This includes rethinking the stages of the open strategy process and especially the pre-planning stage, which we argue should be a continuous, open and transparent exploratory dialogue with an organization's stakeholders, which then leads to the initial agreement and structuring stage of the planning process. We then build on this by developing that an open strategy process can have varying levels of openness throughout its process, based on the range and nature of people participating, which we argue not needing to be extremely high. Our paper therefore contributes to both the open strategy and strategy as practice literatures, as the vast majority of the literature mobilized in our paper does, by bringing a new perspective and focusing on the individuals in their roles and the influence they carry.

In the following sections, we will explain the methods used for our qualitative meta-synthesis, how we identified relevant literature, selected the references for our synthesis and how we coded and extracted the data used in our findings. Finally, we will present our qualitative meta-synthesis and discuss the findings. We conclude our study by reflecting upon the fact that organizations might end up opening Pandora's Box in the search of opening their strategy and develop a future research agenda.

2. Open strategy literature review

Open strategy is a recent research topic within the field of strategic management, which gained thrust amongst academics over the last decade, with a pike of contributions to its literature from 2015 and on (Sailer et al., 2017). Open strategy has also been the subject of a special issue in 2017, in the journal Long Range Planning, and a recent handbook has been published by Seidl et al. (2019), which testifies of the growing interest of the academic world.

Several authors have as well documented the benefits of opening an organization's strategy making process, amongst which we can cite the possibilities of collective intelligence (Bjelland and Chapman Wood, 2008), positive impression management (Gegenhuber and Dobusch, 2017), increased legitimacy and brand loyalty (Luedicke et al., 2017; Stieger et al., 2012) and inter-organizational sensemaking (Seidl and Werle, 2018; Van der Steen, 2017). Even though the literature shows that there are many benefits to implementing open strategy in an organization, there are also many dilemmas (dilemma of process, commitment, disclosure, empowerment and escalation) that arise with it and from the increased level of openness in the process of strategy making (Hautz et al., 2017).

Various others authors set on refining the definitions and adding subtleties to the latter. The notion of inclusion for example has been contested as being used interchangeably with the notion of participation (Mack and Szulanski, 2017). In their paper, inclusion (high engagement) and participation (low engagement) are to be understood as the nature of the practices structuring the 'strategic conversation', and not so much in the sense of the nature of people taking part in the process, as described by (Whittington et al., 2011). Then again, another subtlety is brought forward regarding the nature of people taking part in open strategizing, by differentiating in between crowds and communities (Dobusch and Kapeller, 2018). One of the authors' findings is that communities will urge for more openness and thus for inclusive practices, where the tendency with crowds is opposite; that is to say that they long for more participatory practices and do not demand high levels of openness.

Furthermore, it was bound to be, for academics to look within the differentiation and similarities of open innovation and open strategy, as the concepts are closely related and that various

authors either set open strategy as a means to deliver open innovation (Chesbrough and Appleyard, 2007) or see open innovation as a subset of open strategy (Whittington et al., 2011). This is exactly what Dobusch et al. (2017) did, by re-analyzing extant literature of both open strategy and open innovation through the lens of communication theory. Through their study, Dobusch et al. (2017) found that open strategy in most cases has high degrees of openness regarding factuality ("the range of different topics that can be discussed" p.9) and temporality ("the capability to integrate different purposes" p.9); allowing a high variety of topics and purposes within the strategy making initiatives. However open strategy lacks of openness in the social dimension ("the variety of the different groups of people whose contributions will be treated as meaningful" p.9), as a majority of cases show that the strategy making initiative is opened only to internal practitioners. Whereas open innovation is highly dependent of external practitioners, but is usually focused on a specific topic and purpose throughout the initiative.

Finally, in the literature, various authors develop different processual models of open strategy each of which is context bound. However, Tavakoli et al. (2017), attempted a consolidated version of the open strategy process model in which they develop three main stages : 1. Preparing & planning, 2. Generating & synthesizing and 3. Communicating & implementing. Moreover, the model has not been tested in practice such as Amrollahi and Rowlands (2018) suggest in their paper, where they develop another processual model of open strategy including a pre-planning stage and tested their model in two organizations.

This overview of the literature shows the multitude of factors and the complexity that constitutes open strategy through its process and practices. The various ongoing debates come to add to this complexity paradoxically in the research of clarifying what open strategy is and how it enacts in practice. We therefore develop a qualitative meta-synthesis in this paper, in order to explore our research question and ground our findings in empirical data. Indeed, we aim to uncover whether there are any other factors influencing the openness levels and dynamics of an open strategy process.

3. METHODOLOGY FOR THE QUALITATIVE META-SYNTHESIS

In order to answer our research question, we found that an exploratory approach was most well suited. Therefore, we develop a qualitative meta-synthesis in our paper, which Sandelowski et al. (1997, p.366), define as being the theories, grand narratives, generalizations, or interpretive translations produced from the integration or comparison of findings from qualitative studies. A qualitative meta-synthesis (where the database of the study are the findings of a sum of qualitative studies), gives a third level interpretation aimed at pushing forward knowledge or theory on the given object of study, rather than combining studies (Nye et al., 2016). In this sense, we differentiate ourselves from a review of the literature on open strategy and focus on theoretical and managerial contributions to the literature on open strategy.

 Our methodology has been inspired by Hoon's (2013) work on qualitative meta-synthesis methodology, which details 8 steps for crafting a qualitative meta-synthesis. Hoon (2013) starts by mentioning the need to frame a research question, which we presented earlier on in this paper and is formulated as following "Whether and if there are any other factors interplaying during an open strategy process which influence its level of openness and the dynamics of it?". The next steps involve identifying relevant literature on open strategy, selecting the references to include in our qualitative meta-synthesis and finally coding and extracting the data. The remaining 4 steps presented in Hoon's methodology are developed throughout the rest of this paper and constitute the analysis of the case studies on a single and cross-case level, discussing the findings of our synthesis and developing the limitations of our study.

3.1 IDENTIFYING RELEVANT LITERATURE ON OPEN STRATEGY

We started our literature search using google scholar's database. We did a first search by author (Table.1), combining the author's names and using the keywords "open strategy" with the criteria set on title and full text within the period of 2007-2020. We chose 2007 as a starting point for the literature search as it is in this year that Chesbrough and Appleyard (2007), used the terms "open strategy" for the first time to describe the phenomenon. We thus looked for papers having both the words "open" or "strategy", or the full expression "open strategy" and any derivatives such as "open strategizing", 'open strategy-making", "opening-up strategy"

6

"strategy openness" in their title. We also included papers combining the previous search terms with keywords identified in our primary review of the literature such as "transparency", "inclusion", "crowdsourcing", "communities" and "participation". The search yielded 132 references who qualified for our criteria of which 66 employ the full expression "open strategy" or its derivatives mentioned above in their title.

After this first identification of the literature, and our previous readings, we decided to use as keywords (Table.2) the defining factors of open strategy and its components mentioned earlier in this paper for our second step in collecting papers. We thus continued our search by combining these keywords with the terms "open strategy" and its derivatives and keeping the same search criteria as before. After comparing with our previous list of papers and excluding any doubles, this led to identifying 36 additional references.

We further broadened our search by conducting forward and backward integration on the papers of specific authors (Table.1), who either contributed to theorizing open strategy, who published a literature review on open strategy or who contributed significantly to the literature on open strategy (5 or more references in our database). We then did a backward integration (or snowball integration) in order to be thorough and thus looked for additional papers within the bibliography of the selected papers (Table.1). This process led to identifying another 35 references. Using the citation function of google scholar in order to find more recent papers (forward integration), we included papers matching our keywords (Table.2) in their title, which added 15 references to our database.

In order to be thorough, we looked for additional references on the open strategy network [1]; which is an international network of scholars interested in studying open strategy. The bibliography of the network references various papers previously identified and allowed us to add another 11 references to our database. Through our search on open strategy literature, we identified a total of 229 references (117 journal articles, 57 conference papers, 28 book chapters, 12 reports, 9 theses, 4 books and 2 webpages), which could be of interest for our meta-synthesis

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[1] https://www.openstrategynetwork.com/

on open strategy. Barroso et al. (2003), who develop in their paper (of the same name), the challenges of searching for and retrieving qualitative studies, recommend all these steps.

Table.1 - List of authors identified for forward and backward integration (presented alphabetically)

1st authors of a reference on open strategy	Number of references found in the literature on open strategy	Literature review on open strategy
Amrollahi. A	9	
Birkinshaw. J		(Birkinshaw, 2017)
Dobusch. L	8	
Hautz. J	3	(Hautz et al., 2017)
Matzler. K	3	(Matzler et al., 2014)
Morton. J	9	
Pittz. T	5	
Sailer. AS	1	(Sailer et al., 2017)
Sunner. A	1	(Sunner and Ates, 2019)
Tavakoli. A	3	(Tavakoli et al., 2017)
Whittington. R	4	

Table.2 - List of keywords used as inclusion criteria for search by keywords and forward & backward integration

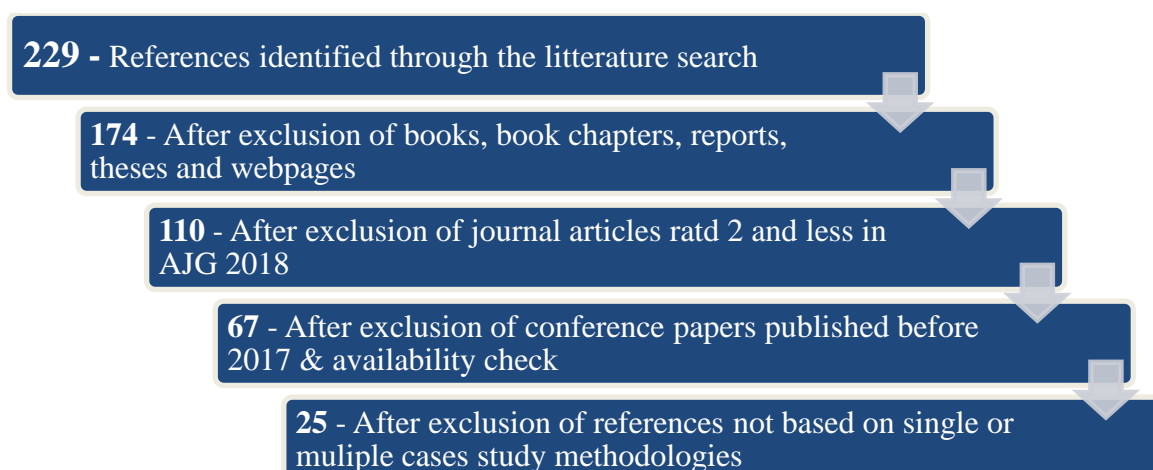|		
Communities	Democratizing strategy	Inter-organizational
Crowd	Decision making	Participation
Crowdsourcing	Inclusion	Transparency

3.2 SELECTING RELEVANT LITERATURE FOR THE META-SYNTHESIS

Our first exclusion criteria is motivated by the availability and easy access of published articles; we thus excluded from our dataset all books, book chapters, reports, theses, and webpages (n=55). Moreover, it is brought forward that the quality of the primary data in a synthesis is of central importance (Hoon, 2013). We therefore used the Academic Journal Guide 2018 [2] ratings as a criterion for exclusion and defining quality. We therefore excluded journal articles which were rated 2 and under (n=64). As the literature on open strategy is still nascent, it was also important to consider conference papers and especially the recent published papers, which have

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[2] Available at: https://charteredabs.org/academic-journal-guide-2018/

not yet been able to evolve into a peer, reviewed journal article. We therefore excluded any conference paper published before 2017 (n=32) and proceeded to further exclusion amongst the remaining references based on their online availability (n=11). Finally, we applied a methodological exclusion factor, as it is recommended to select studies using the same methodological approach in order to allow for higher comparability and final validity of the meta-synthesis (Hoon, 2013). As our primary data for the meta-synthesis is made up of the findings of previous studies, we found that articles using a single or multiple case study methodology would offer us the most context sensitive data, as they are rich bodies of empirical data. We therefore excluded the references that did not qualify for this criteria (n=42). This reduced the number of references to 21 journal articles and 4 conference papers, which make up our final database for the qualitative meta-synthesis.

Figure.1 – Selection process of papers for the meta-synthesis

229 - References identified through the litterature search

174 - After exclusion of books, book chapters, reports, theses and webpages

110 - After exclusion of journal articles ratd 2 and less in AJG 2018

67 - After exclusion of conference papers published before 2017 & availability check

25 - After exclusion of references not based on single or muliple cases study methodologies

3.3 CODING & EXTRACTING DATA

In business and management research, grounded theory allows to develop new concepts and theories which are grounded in qualitative data and in many cases, qualitative researchers use grounded theory only as a coding technique (Myers, 2013). We decided to use a grounded theory approach for our data coding as it sits in line with the meta-synthesis approach. That is to say, grounded theory is an inductive approach, where data is not collected based on predefined categories and hypotheses as would require a classical "hypothetico-deductive" approach (Bryant and Charmaz, 2011). As our meta-synthesis is based on an exploratory

9

approach, and that our data set is made up of data from previous studies with their own agenda and selected based on their relevance to the overarching research subject (open strategy), we find that this inductive analysis method was most suited.

Our meta-synthesis starts by extracting and coding data from these selected case studies. One of the main challenges in qualitative meta-syntheses after the selection of the studies is to analyze and to determine whether they speak of the same phenomenon; this is what Sandelowski et al. (1997) call topical similarity. They argue that beyond analyzing the stated research purposes and research question, it is the key findings, which determine whether there is a topical similarity in the compared studies; and indeed, within a qualitative meta-synthesis approach, it is the findings of previous qualitative studies, which serve as the database for the ongoing study.

For the coding process, we used NVIVO and followed the three steps of grounded theory coding (Bryant and Charmaz, 2011). First, we went through the process of open coding, breaking down our data and letting various codes emerge from the data, which then led to identifying core categories. From this, we started our selective coding process and comparison of incidents, which define the properties of a core category. We continued the comparison of the incidents until theoretical saturation (no new properties are emerging from the comparison). We then started our theoretical coding, in which we search to establish hypotheses of a relationship in between core categories and their related properties. This last step allows for the emergence of a theory.

4. FINDINGS OF OUR QUALITATIVE META-SYNTHESIS

In this section, we will briefly present the 25 papers (Table.3) used in our qualitative meta-synthesis and then move on to the cross-case analysis and discussion of our findings. We develop throughout this section three main findings and illustrate them with data from the various case studies that illustrate our arguments particularly well. First, we argue that organizations should approach the pre-planning stage as an open, continuous and transparent exploratory dialogue with its stakeholders, which then leads to co-constructing the initiative with their stakeholders. We then build on this by developing that an open strategy process can

have varying levels of openness throughout its process, based on the range and nature of people participating, which we argue not needing to be extremely high. Finally, we argue that open strategy is more of a continuous organizational form and that its implementation is complex, time and resource consuming for organizations and therefore not particularly adapted as a single use strategy tool.

Table.5 – Overview of the selected case studies (presented in alphabetical order)

Case ID	Author(s)	Brief description of the case study(ies)	Nature of people / Level of analysis
CS#1	Amrollahi and Rowlands, (2017)	A case study in an Australian university implementing a proposed method of open strategic planning.	Internal / Organizational
CS#2	Amrollahi and Rowlands (2018)	A multi case approach in an open source software project and in a life-long learning institution, used to test a process of open strategizing.	Internal & External / Organizational
CS#3	Bjelland and Chapman Wood, (2008)	An inside view of IBM's "innovation Jam", bringing together 150.000 employees and stakeholders in an online collaborative platform.	Internal & external / Organizational
CS#4	Bryant et al. (2011)	A UK university's open strategy initiative to deal with low results from their employee satisfaction survey.	Internal / Organizational
CS#5	Castelló et al. (2016)	A multinational pharmaceutical corporation developing its stakeholder engagement through social media.	External / Organizational
CS#6	Deken et al. (2018)	An automotive company exploring a strategic issue with its stakeholder network and specifically with its suppliers.	External / Inter-organizational
CS#7	Denyer et al. (2011)	A large multinational telecommunications company that is commonly regarded as one of the leading proponents of Enterprise 2.0.	Internal / Organizational
CS#8	Dobusch et al. (2019)	Analysis of Wikimedia's open strategy process	Internal & External / Organizational
CS#9	Dobusch and Kapeller (2018)	Cross-analysis of the case studies on Wikimedia's and Creative commons' open strategizing initiatives.	External / Organizational

CS#10	Franken and Thomsett (2013)	A case study presenting how the UK's Royal Marines developed an adaptation of war gaming to affect strategic change in Afghanistan.	Internal & External / Inter-organizational
CS#11	Friis and Holmgren (2017)	A case study analyzing the strategy process of a mid-sized Danish textile company with its stakeholders.	Internal & External / Organizational
CS#12	Garlick (2019)	A charity's "mass engagement" strategy initiative after a new CEO and Chair of the board of trustees were appointed	Internal & External / Organizational
CS#13	Gegenhuber and Dobusch (2017)	The case presents two new technology startups using blogging as a means of open strategizing with their communities.	External / Organizational
CS#14	Harrison et al. (2010)	A case study presenting an inter-organizational strategic initiative to establish a sourcing network.	External / Inter-organizational
CS#15	Jarzabkowski and Balogun (2009)	A case of a multinational trying to develop greater strategic integration across Europe.	Internal / Inter-organizational
CS#16	Lennox et al. (2011)	Two case studies looking into the collaborative strategy-making initiatives around the strategic issue of water governance in New Zealand.	External / Organizational
CS#17	Luedicke et al. (2017)	The paper develops the case of extreme open strategizing in the Premium Cola collective in Germany.	Internal & External / Organizational
CS#18	Morton (2018)	A participative strategy initiative in a professional association for strategic sensemaking and realignment as part of the CEO post-succession process.	Internal & External / Organizational
CS#19	Morton et al. (2018)	A case study looking into the open strategy initiative of a professional association developing a new four-year strategic plan.	Internal & External / Organizational
CS#20	Regnér (2003)	Four Swedish multinationals evolving in different industries (telecommunication and equipment, mechanical trailer coupling assembler and manufacturer), are selected for their strategy creation issues.	External / Inter-organizational
CS#21	Schmitt (2010)	The paper presents the extensive case study of the Shell-led Camisea gas project in Peru, who developed a sense making initiative with various stakeholders to navigate socio-political and ecological issues.	External / Inter-organizational
CS#22	Seidl and Werle (2018)	Two cases of inter-organizational sense making are presented in this study. The first one expressing a problem of sustainability and the second one a problem of business operations.	Internal & External / Inter-organizational

CS#23	Stieger et al. (2012)	The study presents a crowdsourcing initiative called DialogTage in an Austrian automotive company.	Internal / Organizational
CS#24	Van der Steen (2017)	The papers presents a collective sense making initiative in the Dutch bank Rabobank. The study compares two workshops held in two different banks of the brand.	Internal & External / Organizational
CS#25	Zaggl et al. (2019)	This case study analyzes the dynamics and relations of the ecosystem of open source gaming handhelds. In particular, they focus on 3 organizations and their interactions with the community of users.	External / Organizational

4.1 CONTINUOUS PRE-PLANNING IN OPEN STRATEGY

The various case studies analyzed in our meta-synthesis revealed how important the pre-planning stage is. Indeed, before deciding to open-up its strategy making process, we find that an organization should start by opening up its culture and its organizational boundaries.

Indeed, CS#5 illustrates this very well by showing how the organization gained awareness and set new items to its agenda by opening up its communication process towards external audiences. In CS#6, where the organization had already identified a strategic issue, it gained in depth information and transformed its strategic approach through a cycle of "prospective resourcing", which translates into sourcing potential business partners and developing the project with them as the organization gains insights on the various possibilities and requirements about its project, before launching it. Moreover, CS#22 underlines this argument very well by illustrating how the organizations involved in intra-organizational sensemaking start by a phase of looking for organizations with a common interest in the exposed problem and who will be able to contribute by adding their specific opinion, informed by their various backgrounds (here, the diversity of their industries), until reaching a consensus.

We also find in line with the previous elements, that clearly deciding upfront how the open strategy initiative is to be structured is particularly important. In CS#7 we can see how the lack of explanations and purpose of the initiative, allow for inappropriate conversations to flourish on the platform, where employees discuss topics which are not of relevance to the company, or even engage in heated dialoguing, using inappropriate language and responding emotionally.

13

We find similar behaviors in CS#3 and in CS#23, from which we also gain further evidence about the need to plan such an initiative openly. Indeed, in the case study it was found after the initiative that employees expected more dialogue with the management level rather than engaging in discussions in between themselves. This is also an element which is brought to light in CS#7, however, in various cases the employees disengaged from the dialogue, because of being repressed by their managers, who use the dialogue platform as a means to control the debate and limit it to what they think is appropriate to discuss. Similar evidence can be found in CS#15, which perfectly illustrates the resistance met by an organization that decides to create a collective strategy without consulting the key players (here the business units of the brand), neither in the design phase, nor in the actual strategizing phase.

Moreover, we can see in CS#7 how an open strategy initiative can miss to live up to its expectations because of the organization not having empathized enough with its employees. Indeed, what was supposed to be an opportunity for open communication and collective decision making through technology based communication systems, ended up in being a counter-productive element for the organization's employees. Indeed, part of the employees did not use the platform because they were not able to understand how it functioned; either because they were not very resourceful with technology or because they simply had no support nor learning phase in how to use it. CS#8, illustrates the same phenomenon, where the open initiative was based on wikipages and solely in English. With regard to the worldwide community of Wikipedia, amongst which many of the users are consumers rather than editors of Wikipedia pages, these choices reveal a poor understanding and the absence of dialogue with the people that were expected to take part in the open initiative.

These various elements show that indeed, it is very important to find and clearly define a common ground of debate, with all the people taking part in the strategic conversation. In CS#20, there was a rupture in between top management and lower management, who did not see the same topics as relevant to the organization's business. Lower management being closer to the actual doings of the organization and the market identified several elements as important strategic corners of innovation. However, top management did not feel these were relevant to the core business. The lower management being convinced of their ideas, set out on a learning phase, including external actors who were experts on the subject in order to test the viability of

14

the ideas. It turns out that these ideas when finally accepted by the top management because of the research work that had been done collaboratively with external experts have been a real game changer for the organization.

Finally, starting an open strategy initiative by opening up to potential stakeholders will help the organization in aligning its objectives with them and maximizing the results, rather than forcing a preconceived sketch upon them. CS#24 illustrates this particular point very well, where two different groups set out with the same objective of collectively making sense of strategic issues, but using different approaches. In one group, top management had crafted up front what they thought was the unique solution to all their problems and tried to link all suggestions from the workgroup to their solution. The second group took the opposite approach and let the people ideate without any constraints or predefined objectives, alternating in between a smaller group made up of middle and top management and a larger group adding employees and clients. Although they were unable to link the various ideas together into an overarching strategic objective, the group revealed what the real tensions they were experiencing are; which probably would otherwise not have surfaced.

One should also be aware that when engaging in open strategy, one of the tacit rules is that all the parties and especially the one organizing the initiative is engaged to deliver what has been agreed upon. In CS#4, where the social context was quite tense, this was one of the conditions imposed upon the top management of the organization before launching the open initiative. It was asked, "they demonstrate commitment to the implementation of findings, no matter how distasteful these might initially appear […]" (Bryant et al., 2011, p.845). Similarly, in CS#21 they bring forward the notion of credibility; where an organization expresses its need to be credible in its ability to deliver what was brought forward in the planning phase of the open initiative, in order to rally the support needed to conduct the open initiative.

4.2 VARYING LEVELS OF OPENNESS IN OPEN STRATEGY STAGES

From our analysis, we also find that the levels of openness can fluctuate in between the various stages of an open strategy initiative. Indeed, building upon our previous argument, where organizations jointly craft their open strategy initiative with their stakeholders, we argue that

15

lesser people should be involved throughout the various stages and that different stakeholders are mobilized depending on the stage of the process. This in turn influences the level of openness of the practices used in each stage, in terms of transparency and inclusion.

In CS #25, the interactions of a community and several organizations in a high technological enabled industry are presented. The community is made up of user-developers and user non-developers. Their main differentiation point is their ability to develop or not. The study shows that, where user developers are actively participating and demanding to be part of the product development, user non-developers are passively consuming the product (Zaggl et al., 2019, p.9). When transposing the element of study from a technological product to the product being the organization's strategy, we can thus differentiate in between those who possess strategic knowledge and skills (user developers) and those who do not (user non-developers). We thus open up the possibility of reducing the number of people within an open strategy initiative in favor of more carefully selecting the people taking part in the conversation, valuing expertise and knowledge as a selection criterion for a certain stage in the process for example. The case presented in CS#21, also points to the fact that the initial people involved (who were directly impacted by the project), did not have the expertise to answer the problem at hand, and the organization called upon experts in order to attain real impact through the open initiative. These insights show that various people are involved throughout different stages and that their skills and capacities are at the center of their relevance to be part of a specific stage in the process.

Moreover, CS#22 illustrates that integrating more people, leads to opening the conversation to more ideas and personal interests; which in the end leads to more difficult ideation phases and decision-making, where a consensus is not always reached. Our argument is also illustrated by the successful open strategizing initiative in CS#10, where a relatively small group of stakeholders interacted together in order to strategize, which later on lead to over 6000 people to enact successfully upon the strategy without having taken part in its designing.

Furthermore, in the process of open strategizing, where the focus is set on engaging collaboratively in the practices of strategy making, it might be tempting to push it to the limit and engage in democratic voting in order to reach a consensus. Even if several cases do present such a trial, we find that it is not a necessary step to take in order to achieve open strategy.

In CS#17, many members have subscribed to a mailing list, which is the primary tool used in the open strategy practices at the Premium Cola collective, however the case shows that just a few people are actively sending and responding to the mailing list. This posed a problem regarding the open governance principle, where collective decision-making was essential. The solution was to assume that not giving an answer meant agreeing with the debated issue. As previously mentioned, nonparticipation can be explained by several elements such as "information overload or asymmetry". However, we suggest that in this case maybe a majority of people were satisfied with the level of transparency and were not expecting more than just being kept informed about how the decisions were made and having the ability to raise a question or opposition if needed. We assume they read the emails and keep themselves informed without voting or would otherwise unsubscribe from the mailing list if it were of no interest to them.

We find similar arguments in CS#24 supporting our argument, where two groups were involved within a process of collective sense making. Indeed, in the first case, the general director and his managing team had designed up front what would be the outcome of the workshop. The idea was to get a collective understanding and adherence of middle management to the new strategic direction, by recalling and illustrating with daily experiences, the problems that justify the new strategic direction as the solution. This practice helped to diffuse and collectively implement a strategy with those who did not take part in the ideation and decision making process. This case study shows that it is indeed possible for people to accept and integrate pre formulated strategic objectives of which they did not take part in their creation. Concerning the previous study (CS#24), we find that this process of collective sense making is to some extent fulfilled by the transparency to which the people in that case are exposed. Similarly, in CS#17, the CEO of the organization imposes his decision in certain occasions and the people taking part in the strategic conversation, as he has the legitimacy by being legally and financially responsible for the organization, do not reject this.

4.3 DYNAMICS OF OPENNESS IN OPEN STRATEGY

Throughout several case studies, we also come to find that there might be a dynamic in the levels of openness in an open strategy initiative. We argue that levels of transparency and

inclusion are interchangeable in order to maintain a level of openness or at least of perceived openness. Indeed, CS#13 analyzes two organizations, who from the start were created with the values of openness and engaged in open strategy practices. The case study reveals that both organizations move through various levels of engagement with their community as they grow to more mature companies. As the organizations evolve towards a more established state in the market, they shift from inclusive and dialoguing practices towards nearly only broadcasting. However, both organizations took the transparency level regarding the information shared to an extreme level; at which point it excesses the community's expectances and results in even higher support from the community. In this case study, the authors define inclusive practices as inviting the community to take part in decision making; dialoguing is to be understood as the exchange of information and collective sense making; and broadcasting refers to the one way communication of information from the organization towards the community.

Indeed, we find that the various people involved in an open strategy initiative do not have the same needs and expectations regarding the openness level of the process, which might also increase throughout time. In fact, CS#21 develops the need to offer various practices and tools for the various groups taking part in the conversation, in order to help them make sense and let them interact at their own pace. This argument is also developed in CS#9, where a differentiation is made in between crowds and communities, mentioning they do not have the same expectancies towards openness.

On the other hand, CS#25 shows a rather opposing image to these findings. Indeed, in the case study the community has high expectancies of openness from the organization, which does not meet these expectations and reduces the level of openness even further. The community in response to this stopped supporting the organization and even went to the extent of developing a competing product. The authors describe this phenomenon through the phases of "openness surplus" and "openness deficit" (Zaggl et al., 2019, p.9-10), which result respectfully from the opening up of an organization and the absorption of the openness by a community which then strives for more openness.

Finally, CS#25 reveals another dynamic of open strategy regarding its "openness". Indeed, the authors found that a dynamic was set in motion when an organization offers a higher level of

18

openness ('openness surplus' (Zaggl et al., 2019, p.9). Over time, communities absorb the openness ('shrinking the open area'), and thus strive for even more openness; this is what the authors call 'openness deficit' (Zaggl et al., 2019, p.10). When an organization cannot or refuses to increase its level of openness or even decides to reduce it, this leaves space for new entrants. This insight points to the importance of opening up gradually and selecting the people taking part in an open initiative, in order to manage the flow of openness and the complexity that results from it. In the case of CS#13, previously developed, it is illustrated how starting with increased levels of transparency can be a way to stimulate people to actively take part in more inclusive practices later on.

4.4 OPEN STRATEGY AND TEMPORALITY

Throughout our meta-synthesis, we find that many of the case studies reveal that their open strategy initiative stretches over long periods (or should have allowed more time to be more efficient) and uses significant resources to reach their objective. Moreover, generally in the analyzed case studies, organizations focus on the idea generation stage and use this as a particular approach to a specific objective rather than thinking of it as an organizational structure.

In CS#23, it is suggested that the limited period set on the open initiative was too short and inconvenient for several people in order to participate as much as they would have wanted to. Then again, other factors might be affecting participation as well such as in CS#17 (a case of extreme open strategy), in which the number of ideas generated was mainly attributed to a small group of people; even though they could suggest new ideas whenever they felt the need. The authors found that people were not taking part in the conversation because of "asymmetry of information" (they did not have the information necessary to do so (competitor analysis, financial statements, business model, etc…)) and "information overload" (they chose to focus only on subjects of interest to them) (Luedicke et al., 2017, p.379). Therefore, in CS#3 for example, the organization implements three phases in its open initiative, where people first take part in the strategic conversation by generating ideas. Then, there is a phase of idea refinement by a group of experts, who turn the ideas into strategically viable elements. Finally, the last phase consists in returning these refined ideas to the public having generated the primary ideas

in phase 1, for a new round of ideation on how to implement them. We find similar evidence of such a process in CS#4. This comes in strong opposition of what has been observed in CS#9 and in various other cases, where the strategic plan is developed by a closed a group of people, who turn the ideas into strategy and then just expose what the plan is without continuing the dialogue.

Moreover, in CS#22, a form of iterance is also brought to light as a dynamic installs through the process of collective sense making. Indeed, as the group makes sense of the topic under study, they reveal new elements of interest, which are set aside and will constitute a new cycle of designing an open initiative, in order to meet the expectations of the groups involved and to develop a common purpose. At this point, it is possible that several people taking part in the previous open initiative do not find an interest in the matter at hand, or do not have the ability to contribute; thus exiting the initiative.

Similarly, we find that in CS#23, many of the impactful ideas with high relevance to the organization's business, were often those submerged by the quantity of information circulating in open conversation; probably because of the level of expertise needed to engage within the subject's debate and other subjects creating more of a buzz, which promotes higher interaction with them. We also find that it might be related to the highly time consuming task of reading through the various comments and ideas such as presented in CS#3, where a team was assigned for several weeks to read through all the comments and categorize them in order to select which topics would be acted upon in the later strategy.

5. DISCUSSION

The literature on open strategy represents a multitude of organizations, each evolving in their own context and with their own resources. We argue that a majority of organizations cannot mobilize the power, resources and quantity of people such as done in the innovation jam of IBM (Bjelland and Chapman Wood, 2008) or Wikimedia's open strategy initiative (Dobusch et al., 2019), nor can they all have an extreme approach to open strategy such as the Premium Cola collective (Luedicke et al., 2017). Even though there are many examples where open strategy was in some ways successful, these initiatives were often triggered by a situation of

20

uncertainty (Franken and Thomsett, 2013; Schmitt, 2010). We argue that an open strategy initiative even though effective in these instances comes with a high level of organizational complexity (Dobusch et al., 2017) to manage and that a way to lower this complexity would be to adopt open strategy as a continuous process rather than an episodic strategy-making practice.

We see continuous open strategy as an organizational structure, which requires the remodeling of an organization's processes and which stands in line with our previous findings regarding the pre-planning phase and the level of openness within the different stages of an open strategy process. Several authors have already proposed different models of open strategy processes, such as the proposition of Tavakoli et al. (2017), which develop the stages of 1. Preparing & planning, 2. Generating & synthesizing and 3. Communicating & implementing. A recent paper has developed another process model for open strategy, which includes a stage of pre-planning (Amrollahi and Rowlands, 2018). Our findings stress the importance of this pre-planning stage and we add to this phase the iterative, open and continuous factors, which we developed earlier. Indeed, the pre-planning stage in Amrollahi and Rowlands' (2018) model starts with already an identified strategic issue, for which it is needed to select the stakeholders and develop the activities of the planning process. Whereas we rethink this stage as a continuous sourcing and research of a strategic issue with its stakeholders by developing an exploratory and transparent dialogue that then leads to the initial agreement and structuring phase they develop in their paper.

Moreover, we argue that Whittington et al.'s (2011) inclusion factor has perhaps been overlooked or misunderstood as it has mostly been stressed in terms of the quantity of people involved in the process. Recently in open strategy literature, it was developed that in every action of opening up, there is also an action of closing (Dobusch et al., 2019). From our meta-synthesis, we come to add to this understanding by developing that the level of openness can vary in between the different stages of an open strategy process, whereas Dobusch et al. (2019) analyze the overall macro level of openness in the process. In this view, we argue that an organization is able to reduce the overall complexity level of its process by adjusting the openness level through balancing the levels of inclusion and transparency, which are closely linked to the practices and thus the range of people involved. We find that with a continuous

21

open strategy approach as we argued previously, organizations will not need to focus on large number of participants if they select them wisely.

Finally, the literature on open strategy presents the dimensions of inclusion and transparency as structuring elements of the phenomenon (Whittington et al., 2011). Through the analysis of the various case studies, we come to find that both dimensions can complement each other in the expectations of openness one can have. We find that there might be a link in between transparency and inclusion, which can be interchangeable to maintain a level of desired openness, when reducing one factor and increasing the other respectively, without increasing the organizational complexity.

6. CONCLUSION & FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

From our meta-synthesis, we contribute to the macro level of open strategy knowledge by discussing here the various impacts different openness levels have on an open strategy process. Although our qualitative meta-synthesis points to several elements of improvement of an open strategy process, by implementing open strategy as a continuous organizational structure and remodeling the process and openness levels, there might not be an ideal way of doing open strategy. Tavakoli et al. (2017), developed in their paper an ideal typical definition of open strategy, which illustrates what open strategy could be in an ideal world. We argue that even with a continuous pre-planning stage, organizations might effortlessly try to get as close as possible to this ideal and on the way of doing so open up Pandora's Box. Indeed, we find that the many variables and unpredictable behaviors of the people taking part, can lead to overwhelming situations, where organizations can lose the support of their stakeholders and be forced to exit the market (Zaggl et al., 2019). Admittedly, this is a worst-case scenario, but depending on the organization and its ability to deal with complex situations, open strategy can be more of a burden than a blessing.

Finally, we have demonstrated that various organizations with a multitude of sizes and industries have engaged with open strategy practices; we thus ask why there are not more organizations following the same trend. Is there a reason for not engaging in open strategizing and if yes what could it be? Building up on this, we find it might be interesting to explore why

those who chose to engage in open strategizing did. Moreover, several elements in our qualitative study point to the fact that virtual spaces do not offer the same experience that offline practices do and are sometimes counterproductive. We thus find that maybe the paradox of extensively using information technology based tools for open strategizing in order to be more open and inclusive also means that the process becomes more individualistic rather than co-created.

7. LIMITS OF THE PAPER

Our study, as all studies presents some limits in its achievement. First of all, , there is a lot of criticism towards qualitative meta-synthesis; mainly from the stream of researchers who defend that, a qualitative study is unique and that its particular context, methodological and theoretical approach does not allow for comparison or integration with other qualitative studies (Sandelowski et al., 1997). However, we developed several exclusion criteria in order to guarantee higher quality of our primary data and thus ensure the quality of our own findings.

Moreover, we did not crosscheck our coding with other researchers in order to build towards a common agreement on the coding elements. The process of triangulation (Myers, 2013), is recommended in order to increase the validity of the findings in the study, by comparing different viewpoints on a same topic.

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