# How Strategy Professionals Develop and Sustain an Online Strategy Community – The Lessons from Ericsson

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# How Strategy Professionals Develop and Sustain an Online Strategy Community –Lessons from Ericsson

## Abstract

In this paper, we report on an in-depth and inductive study of strategy professionals that proactively initiated, developed and sustained an online community dedicated to continuously engaging with issues of strategic relevance for the company Ericsson. We identified the design of an online community structure, cooperation of internal and external actors with diverse expertise and from different hierarchical levels, and formulation of adequate strategic content, as the three main decision areas that strategy professionals have to consider carefully. The detailed empirical analysis enabled us to expose characteristic interdependencies among decisions and contradictory demands that make open strategy processes a paramount organizational challenge. We argue that organizing of such collective action transforms professional strategists from expert planners and analysts into managers that centralize responsibility for decisions affecting a) permeability of community boundaries for different types of community members; b) incentive mechanisms that mobilize participation and stimulate knowledge sharing across hierarchical levels, and c) framing of strategic content needed to integrate fragmented contributions, often less aligned with strategic frames of senior managers, into actionable strategic initiatives.

## Introduction

The ubiquity of digital technologies not only affects the development of products, services, and improvements in operations (Yoo et al., 2012) but increasingly impacts the processes and practices of strategy-making (Malhotra et al., 2017; Whittington, 2014; Whittington et al., 2011). The old recognition that strategy process is a distributed and socially complex activity (Burgelman, 1994; Floyd and Lane, 2000; Jarzabkowski and Balogun, 2009) has received fresh impetus with the increasing availability of various digital platforms such as online communities (Baptista et al., 2017; Haefliger et al., 2011). Online communities, among other social media tools, enable information sharing, collaboration, and co-creation (Leonardi and Vaast, 2017) that are central to the emergent concept of open strategy and its emphasis on the inclusive and transparent contribution of multiple actors (internal and/or external) in strategizing (Hautz et al., 2017; Tavakoli et al., 2017; Birkinshaw, 2017).

Although Whittington et al. (2011) persuasively argue that technological affordances (along with other forces) prompt greater openness in strategizing and fundamentally alter the nature of the strategy work performed by strategy professionals, it is intriguing that these very strategy professionals are rarely the subject of scholarly attention when the changing nature of strategy processes and practices are investigated. Strategy professionals are those organizational members freed from operational or executive responsibilities, and instead focus on the future of an organization by deploying tools for dealing with problems of uncertainty and unpredictability, and in the planning of future actions (Mintzberg, 1994; Whittington et al., 2011; Whittington, 2019). How the nature of strategy work changes more generally, owing to the speed of changes in external environment, have been investigated (Grant, 2003; Ocasio and Joseph, 2008). However, the more particular impact that the deployment of online communities for opening strategy has on the role of strategy professionals, and the decisions that strategy professionals have to make in their role as strategists, has so far received scant scholarly attention.

The extant literature on technology enabled open strategizing can be broadly divided into two streams; research on strategic ideation contests (Hutter et al., 2017), and on collaborative communities (Baptista et al., 2017). The ideation contest in strategy is akin to crowdsourcing in innovation (Afuah and Tucci, 2012) – where self-selected members of the crowd individually engage in a rigorous problem-solving exercise characterized by well-defined evaluation and selection criteria (Aten and Thomas, 2016; Hutter et al.,

2017; Malhotra et al., 2017; Stieger et al., 2012). The goal is to find the best solution for an identified strategic challenge through well-defined, one-off processes and clear principles of collaboration (Bonabeau, 2009).

Open strategizing through continuous engagement with collaborative online communities has received much less scholarly attention, especially in the context of large for-profit organizations. An online community is a voluntarily collective of diverse individuals with common or complementary interests creating and using content, and discussing relevant problems, whose collaboration is mediated by the Internet (Faraj et al. 2011; Olson, 2009; Preece 2000; Sproull and Arriaga, 2007). The collaborative community approach to open strategizing requires aggregating a large number of diverse contributions into a value-creating whole, where involved actors with a degree of common identity share their knowledge or perceptions in order to identify strategic issues, communicate a strategic vision, or create a shared understanding (Baptista et al., 2017; Boudreau and Lakhani, 2013; Dobusch and Kapeller, 2018).

Existing empirical research on strategic online communities has almost exclusively focused on organizations which have an inherently open nature, such as Wikimedia (Dobusch et al., 2017; Dobusch and Kapeller, 2018; Heracleous et al., 2018). Dobusch and Kapeller (2018), for example, call for more research on open strategizing in for-profit organizations that have historically relied on more conventional and closed strategy processes. Hence, the deliberate creation and use of online communities by established and hierarchical for-profit organizations offers a fruitful empirical context that raises questions relevant to open strategy. Although contradictory demands of openness and closedness are broadly recognized (Dobusch et al., 2017) the deployment of an online community at established organizations characterized by highly sensitive strategizing and multiple organizational interests exposes issues such as managing permeability of community boundaries (Faraj et al., 2011) and inclusion (or exclusion) of particular strategic topics that aim to achieve strategic impact. In order to shed more light on these issues, we investigate an open strategy initiative at the telecommunications company Ericsson and engage with the research question: 'how do professional strategists manage the boundaries of participation and the content of strategic issues in an online strategy community?' We particularly focus on exploring the very interdependencies between inclusion and exclusion of various types of members (*who* gets included?) and framing of strategic topics (*what* gets included?).

## Theoretical background

In order to inform our field research and engage with the central research question, we review two different, yet interdependent, research streams. First, we review the literature concerned with challenges of open strategizing such as navigating a delicate interplay between inclusion and exclusion. This is combined with a broader literature on inclusion in strategy-making. We then review the literature that offers an overview of mechanisms for managing boundaries of participation and contributions in online communities. We consider online communities for strategy-making as a specific yet increasingly important form of open strategy, which requires further research attention.

### *Tensions of open strategizing*

So called 'digital natives', as well as established hierarchical organizations, utilize various online platforms to run open strategizing initiatives and facilitate inclusion of multiple actors (Baptista et al., 2017). The literature on open strategy emphasizes a number of challenges or contradictions that have to be carefully considered prior to starting a new open strategy initiative. These contradictions are almost inevitable and inherent in the fundamental divergence between having a flexible and inclusive approach to collaborating openly, and the historically hierarchical and controlled approaches to strategy development (Heracleous et al., 2018). Existing research highlights this contradictory demands (Smith and Lewis, 2011) for a simultaneous combination of more open and closed practices for the successful implementation of open strategizing (Dobusch et al., 2017; Dobusch and Kapeller, 2018; Heracleous et al., 2018; Luedicke et al., 2017). Hautz et al. (2017), for instance, emphasize the importance of decisions regarding the inclusion scope in balancing process and sensitivity dilemmas. The process of tapping into a broader pool of knowledge makes decision-making slower and less controlled, whilst unconventional and creative ideas coming from outside the organization come with the trade-off of the exposure of sensitive information. In line with existing literature on inclusion in strategy-making, open strategy literature also recognizes the risks of self-promotion and conflict when involving a diverse audience in strategy-making and those risks have to be carefully mitigated (Malhotra et al., 2017). Managing collaboration between actors with varied expertise and functional focus may create a challenge for the alignment of interests and agendas in strategy development as divergent perceptions and interests can trigger political activities (Kaplan, 2008; Narayanan

and Fahey, 1982) and influence power asymmetries (Miller et al., 2008; Pappas and Wooldridge, 2007). Managers might prioritize unit goals over organizational goals (Ketokivi and Castañer, 2004) and judge ideas proposed by individuals from their own business unit more favourably than those of 'outsiders' (Reitzig and Sorenson, 2013).

On top of inclusion considerations, the choice of used open and closed practices have to be taken into account. Appleyard and Chesbrough (2017) argue that the degree of openness or closedness can change dynamically over time depending on the organizational context. More openness in strategy is suitable when organizations aim to grow, while less openness in strategy might help in seizing value created in an open way. Also, the use of open and closed practices can be conditioned by the type of open strategy initiative. Dobusch and Kapeller (2018) demonstrated that crowd-based initiatives engaging independent actors can benefit from deploying limited openness, while community-based initiatives can more easily harness open practices. Literature also emphasizes the importance of balance between open and closed practices. For instance, Luedicke et al. (2017) demonstrated how the simultaneous combination of open and closed practices in agenda setting, participation, and governance led to the highly productive use of open strategizing. Similarly, Dobusch et al. (2017) explained how higher and lower levels of procedural and content openness is interchangeably applied in the case of Wikimedia's strategy development. Specifically, authors emphasize the preconditioning of content-related openness (access to information, participation opportunities, and decision-making about viable alternatives) by procedural openness (information, participation, and decision-making policies).

Another challenge can lie in attracting various individuals to participate in strategy development. The nature of strategy as an exclusive and authority-driven activity that requires specific knowledge and skills can discourage non-strategists from participation (Mantere and Vaara, 2008). Further, organizational actors might feel that tasks which go beyond their direct responsibilities are a burden, and become frustrated if their inputs are not considered and this may lead to the withdrawal of participation (Hautz et al., 2017). Hence, implementation of open strategizing will require decisions about participant's mobilization, permeability of inclusion (who to include and who to leave outside of strategic discussion), and balance of open and closed procedures to preserve process quality and its efficiency.

*Challenges of managing an online community*

The online platforms utilized for open strategizing can broadly be divided into crowdsourcing and online community-based tools (Baptista, 2017; Dobusch and Kapeller, 2018). Online communities provide a number of affordances for inclusion and transparency (Whittington et al., 2011). First, the content of the communications in online communities is visible to all community members (Treem and Leonardi, 2013). Such transparency affords information access for a larger number of organizational actors. In addition, the content is available over time and this allows revision and contextualization of information in an asynchronous manner (Faraj et al., 2011). Second, the content can be edited and crafted by community members multiple times prior to publishing, and this allows for a higher degree of control over the communicated content (Treem and Leonardi, 2013). This also secures more purposeful and comprehensive communication. Third, participation in an online community facilitates the association between relevant individuals and content (Leonardi et al., 2013; Treem and Leonardi, 2013) that enables organizational actors to identify individuals with relevant expertise and consequently collaborate with them. Next, collaboration via online communities allows for the recombination and cross-fertilization of ideas (Faraj et al., 2011). The available online content can be re-integrated with the insights of other participants into novel idea combinations. Lastly, online communities have permeable boundaries (Faraj et al., 2011), that allow dynamism in the level of inclusion over time.

The issue of inclusion has been recognized in open strategy literature; however online community researchers provide further considerations about the permeability of boundaries. Community boundaries affect the generative capacity of collaboration between community members through balancing the trade-off of openness and control (Jarvenpaa and Lang, 2011). For instance, firm-sponsored communities have a stronger alignment with the goals of a sponsoring firm and therefore lower boundary permeability that can challenge community growth (West and O'Mahony, 2008). Similarly, targeting selected users and fostering community identity helps to define boundaries through inclusion criteria for community members with a specific set of competences, while discouraging participation of other potentially valuable actors (Jarvenpaa and Lang, 2011; Reischauer and Mair, 2018). In tandem, defining the level of autonomy and degree of overlap between subcommunities helps to manage the size and membership of the

subgroups that communicate with each other, but also requires dedicated community ambassadors overseeing subcommunities' activities (Reischauer and Mair, 2018).

The issue of participation recognized in strategy literature is relevant for online communities as well, as the voluntary participation of members is essential for community existence (Preece, 2000) and a membership rate is often considered to be a success factor (Malinen, 2015; Ransbotham and Kane, 2011). Although Faraj et al. (2011) argue that the dynamism and fluidity of online communities allows barriers for participation to be reduced, maintaining and prompting participation remains one of the central challenges for community sustainability (Malinen, 2015). Hence, research emphasizes the importance of anonymous participation (Faraj et al., 2011; Massa, 2016) and rewards to foster engagement of community members (Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2016; Malinen, 2015). However, having an anonymous environment has potential to decrease accountability for created content (Faraj et al., 2011). Additionally, community members are more willing to engage with similar others such as individuals with similar functional or hierarchical attributes (Hwang et al., 2015) while anonymity precludes community members from self-identification. Reward systems are often used to trigger participation, however it can be challenging to design incentive systems which account for all of the diverse motivations of community members (Malinen, 2015).

Finally, the literature on online communities addresses management of community content in more detail than the open strategy literature. For instance, community monitoring and sanctioning help to mitigate the risk of conflict among community members (Reischauer and Mair, 2018; Ren et al., 2007). The opportunity of members to contribute to the community content simultaneously creates information overload and challenge attention allocation of its members to plurality of discussed problems (Haas et al., 2015). Adding and shaping content, as well as facilitating community discourse, helps to mitigate the risk of information overload and enable greater coherence of discussions (Kane et al., 2013; Majchrzak et al., 2013). However, this also requires dedicated roles for content moderation.

Recognized affordances enable and constrain collaboration dynamics and hence the design of an online community should be carefully considered (Ren et al., 2007). In a similar way to open strategizing, online community orchestration requires a balancing act between multiple choices about levels of inclusion, participant's mobilization, and content control that are relevant for openness more wildly. However, the

research on strategic online communities has potential to provide additional insights relevant to both open strategy and online communities in academic streams of inquiry due to specific demands of strategy context (e.g. sensitivity of strategic topics, hierarchical nature of strategizing, and demands for members' professional expertise).

## Method

We adopted an in-depth single-case study approach (Yin, 2003) to investigate how strategy professionals at Ericsson developed and sustained an online community in order to open their strategy-making process. This approach has strong context relatedness and allows a rich and detailed understanding to be derived relating to the phenomenon at hand (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Langley, 1999). This study also made extensive use of ethnographic elements (Van Maanen, 1979) as the first author was seconded to the case organization for a period of 18 months and the third author was centrally involved in the development of the online community.

### Research setting

Ericsson is a large telecommunication company with more than 100,000 employees globally. The company has a centrally located Strategy and Partnership Department, which consists of several groups of strategy professionals. This department supports the formal strategy process within Ericsson by facilitating the formulation of long-term strategy and setting performance targets. Each group has responsibilities related to a different strategy area: understanding of the market (customers, competitors, general trends), identification of strategic partners and monitoring of prominent M&As in the industry, business intelligence and market forecasts, and providing advice to major customers on their business strategy.

In 2014 an online strategy community called "Strategy Perspectives" (SP) was created by a group of professional strategists. SP can be treated as online community based on several characteristics. First, SP had a common goal to generate and share various perspectives on strategic issues that could trigger articulation and reflection on organizational strategy from people with different functional, hierarchical and personal backgrounds. As community leaders put it in the opening post: "*It* [online strategy community] *is here to serve as a catalyst for different strategic perspectives. By bringing together perspectives and translating those into actionable insights and foresights this blog hope to serve in supporting Ericsson in designing our future*". Hence, beyond the shared goal to support Ericsson's

strategic vision, this statement emphasizes the intention of sharing the content and creating outputs. Second, although SP was concerned with strategic questions, its membership had a wide diversity of participants across Ericsson. We identified 502 unique users (individuals who published at least one post or comment). This provided a fairly high participation level: more than 25%. The community's participants represented 48 countries, with the majority of members (44%) representing Sweden, Ericsson's home country, followed by India and the USA (both 9%). With regard to job areas, service delivery had 18% of participants, followed by strategy professionals (16%) and product development employees (11%). Overall, community members represented more than 30 varied job roles from across approximately 20 job areas. Third, the collaboration between members of SP occurred via an Internet mediated platform built on Ericsson's internal software called Ericoll. Finally, SP members joined the platform and engaged in discussions on a voluntary basis. We observed community development for a period of four years, during which more than 1,900 individuals joined the community. Figure 1 demonstrates the level of participants' activities over this period through the number of posts and comments made on the platform.

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Insert Figure 1 about here.
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Discussions occurring on the strategy online forum were concerned with various topics; from understanding the implications of environmental change on Ericsson's corporate future and strategy, to a discussion on their work practices. We identified 109 'post tags' used by community members to tag their posts and 36 topics defined by community leaders. We have reduced these tags and topics to 5 major themes (Figure 2). The majority of discussions were related to disruption and the digital transformation of the businesses (29%), followed by discussions on new emerging technologies (22%), competitors (18%), and internal organizational capabilities (17%). The rest of the posts (14%) did not fall into any of the aforementioned categories. The topics and tags were often interrelated and could be assigned to all four themes simultaneously. Often these discussions were summarized into reports or presentations that were communicated to senior managers in order to influence strategic decision-making processes.

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*Data analysis*

We triangulated using multiple sources of data (Gibbert et al., 2008). First, we observed participants over a 12-month period by actively participating in community activities but also engaging with strategy professionals and participants. Next, we used memos systematically collected from internal meetings related to activities within the online community and use of the insights retrieved from it. We also conducted 30 in-depth semi-structured interviews with various actors. To understand the mechanisms crucial for organizing the community we interviewed individuals involved in community leadership. In addition, we supplemented primary data with secondary data to provide insights into the historical development of SP. We used internal documents such as official reports, PowerPoint presentations and internal publications and other documents reflecting the activities of the online communities. Lastly, we had access to all 1415 posts and 3371 comments from the SP platform.

We started our analysis by building simple descriptive statistics on community activities and its members. This gave us an understanding of how many community members were active on the platform, their professional background, and how active they were. Further, we also analysed post tags used by members and how often they reoccurred throughout the timeline of SP. We aggregated them in broader categories, which allowed us to gain an understanding of the main themes discussed on the forum.

In addition to the analysis of community characteristics, we analysed interviews with strategy professionals and participants. We used thematic analysis (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006) to identify the main patterns of community development and activities that were a critical part of it. We started by coding the texts, and as we continuously re-read our codes, we started to see some themes emerging around three types of decisions that were crucial for organizing the online community. The first was a theme related to setting community boundaries and structuring membership, the second related to growing and sustaining community membership, and the third related to shaping strategic content. In each area, we identified lower-level themes that illuminated the interdependencies among decisions and contradictory demands faced by strategy professionals.

## Findings

We identified that designing the structure of an online community, growing and sustaining active participation, and shaping strategic content were the three distinctive decision areas that strategy

professionals needed to consider when building and organizing the online community. Table 1 lists a set of characteristic options within a particular decision area that require strategy professionals to make choices that affect activities performed by members of the online community.

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The structure of the online community was influenced by design decisions and procedural considerations that set the boundaries for participation, permeability of these boundaries, division of activities within the online community, and format of engagement among members. In the observed case, strategy professionals carefully balanced inclusion of the selected members external to Ericsson with broad involvement of Ericsson employees who held relevant expertise. Registration mechanisms enabled managing of the permeability of the community boundaries. The access was provided to employees registered through a subscription form, while participation of external members was limited, and their engagement mediated by strategy professionals. They decided against dividing the online community into topic focused sub-communities. Although such decentralized division of expertise could potentially reduce the managerial burden of orchestrating the community, it would also hinder the cross-fertilization of ideas among members with diverse expertise and potentially lead to isolated groups following only specific topics. Additionally, strategists made a choice towards having a blog-based, rather than social networking, community format (with features such as likes, reposts, and views). The blog-based format aligned with the objective to generate comprehensive, informative, and thoughtfully articulated content. Although this broadly defines how the content is structured, it also determines the procedure for engagement among members and the very exchange of knowledge through the online platform.

Growing and sustaining an online community is concerned with decisions that are aimed at resolving cooperation challenges, particularly as members with different expertise participate in this collaborative activity on a voluntary basis. To achieve growth of participation, everyone was invited and welcomed to contribute their opinion on a range of strategically important questions. This wide and indiscriminate mobilization of potential members represents a fundamental pillar of the online community which is aimed towards producing adequate diversity of opinions. However, it was combined with the much more targeted approach of using personal invitations to motivate participation of individual members with

expertise crucial for a particular strategic topic. To both attract new and also sustain participation of existing members, professional strategists combined monetary and reputational incentives. For example, the most active participants, chosen on the basis of the number of posts and comments they had contributed, were rewarded with vouchers for training or books. However, along with these material incentives strategy professionals utilized peer recognition. As some members contributed to a discussion frequently, they could be regarded as an "expert" or "thought leader" on a particular topic. Such "topic champions" earned a place in the community "hall of fame". Moreover, strategy professionals at Ericsson deliberately attempted to boost participation in the online community by promoting it as a "safe place" where autonomous and unconventional contributions were sought and encouraged. This created an intriguing contradiction with aspirations to solicit active participation of senior managers in the community. Protecting a "safe space" for a broader membership restricted active participation of high-power actors, who believed that their contribution might be counterproductive.

Shaping strategic content among diverse members of the online community is a decision area that clearly differentiates strategic communities from other online communities. Further, identification of strategically relevant topics is crucial because the growth of the community results in a high variation of topics that may resonate with individual members. However, it might also have limited potential to attract the attention of other members or senior management. To make the discussion more focused, a "topic of the month" was introduced, which allowed the strategy professionals to introduce topics with more resonance for senior management. This identification of relevant topics also triggers the importance of strategic framing. Often strategy professionals guided members in their writing by pointing out the key messages of the post, and these editorial activities increased the quality of the strategic content without enacting a forceful censorship policy that could jeopardize members' trust in the inherent openness of the online community.

Although identified decision areas and options available within those are distinct, our evidence suggests that a) decisions are often interdependent which makes decision-making about designing the structure, motivating participation, and shaping strategic content increasingly complex, and b) some options trigger

contradictory demands and this required a careful balancing act by the strategy professionals. We illustrate these interdependencies, contradictions, and responses by outlining three vignettes.

### *Managed openness for balancing inclusion and strategic sensitivity*

The SP community was initiated as a relatively small and professionally homogeneous community of individuals involved in strategic planning and analysis across various parts of Ericsson. However, at the beginning of 2014 strategy professionals introduced the nascent SP community to a broader audience at a strategy event and this triggered interest from a number of individuals across Ericsson who requested subsequent access to the platform. Moreover, the SP community started to attract the attention of individuals with various functional backgrounds due to the increased diversity of discussed topics. For example, a strategy professional explains this organic growth:

> *"If you write a good article about cloud computing and have opinions about how the cloud market is developing, of course, you're going to attract people in the cloud department and they are going to send around this post and look what they write on the SP about the cloud".*

By the end of 2016, the SP community boasted 1200 registered members across Ericsson and represented more than 30 distinct job roles; most of them unrelated to conventional strategy-making activities. Access to the platform was open for Ericsson's employees but required registration, whilst prospective members were asked to provide their motivation to join the community. This registration procedure also helped to attract motivated participants and indirectly discouraged more opportunistic applications, whilst also providing a transparent overview of members' expertise.

In the conventional "offline" context, strategy professionals from Ericsson routinely engage with external consultants and experts from other companies or academia. Hence, it is unsurprising that opening the already well-functioning community to trusted external members was considered to be a logical next step. This, however, triggered intensive debates among strategy professionals responsible for the SP community. Whilst the inclusion of external experts increases the diversity of expertise and brings relevant perspectives into the view of community members, it is also conducive to exposing sensitive information as SP discussions often addressed internal strategic information. This is supported by the following quote from the Director of Strategic Analysis, one of the SP community founders:

*"I usually scoff at limiting input, but the analyses and discussions we have can be sensitive. I think we have enough strategists in the company to have a diversity of thought and experience in a closed group, with the awareness for the discretion required to openly test business models and assumptions, always aiming to Ericsson's best".*

Despite serious reservations, the decision was made to selectively involve trusted experts from outside the company and design more elaborate procedures that control their engagement. External experts were usually introduced as "guest bloggers". Their opinions often brought more clarity into the discussion, reduced disagreement among discussants, and increased credibility of conclusions. However, their participation was carefully managed as external actors did not have direct access to the SP platform.

*"I* [Digital Transformation Senior Manager] *am posting on Daniel's behalf and you could either comment on the same page or email me. I'll consolidate everything and send it to Daniel* (external expert from Network & Analytics Laboratory at the Stockholm Institute of Computer Science) *".*

Such managed openness, that enables a balance between the conflicting demands of inclusivity and sensitivity, had two consequences that affected decisions in other areas; especially for shaping strategic content. On one hand, the transparency of contributions (non-anonymity) in combination with the inclusion of highly competent external contributors increased credibility of the strategic output. On the other hand, however, the limited inclusion of external experts narrowed their inputs and engagement with other community members that precluded further cross-fertilization of ideas between internal and external members.

### *Balancing aspiration for autonomous contribution and senior management participation*

Broad inclusion of diverse expertise aimed at fostering relevant, credible, and impactful strategic conversations was not the only driver for the SP community. Most prominent was that strategy professionals at Ericsson aspired to attract fresh, unconventional, or even critical opinions that could spark novel conversations which were less aligned with the existing strategic frames and dominant logics of senior management. To provide an example, a business analyst described how the creation of a "safe space" was aimed at motivating participation:

*"SP is very different because it is not politically correct. You can write almost anything you want there, as long as you have thought behind it... you don't have to have an answer, you might have the beginning of a question.... if this and that is true, then maybe Ericsson should not go down a particular way? And then just throw it out to see what comments you have".*

This aspiration of encouraging autonomous and often open-ended contribution from members was contradictory to another aspiration; to assure the active involvement of senior management in the SP community. Their involvement was supposed to achieve two interdepended goals; first, the active participation of senior managers could indicate strategically relevant themes, streamline the discussions towards strategic objectives, and make any conversations potentially more impactful, and second, the participation of senior managers should act as a major motivational factor as it promises that the divergent and autonomous opinions would be heard and potentially acted upon. However, strategy professionals at Ericsson were more successful in mobilizing participation of the wider community than persuading senior management to actively engage in shaping strategic conversations. This is not to say senior managers were not involved at all:

*"They* [Top Management Team] *are more lurkers because they are very savvy, they read everything, they forward e-mails, but they don't comment".* [Director of Strategic Analysis]*.*

This ambiguous stance from senior management can be described as an authority trap, which may be more salient in companies like Ericsson, characterized by a high degree of consensual decision-making. On one side, senior managers were more than willing to legitimize the importance of the SP community as a new strategy practice, as posts from the Chief Technology Officer attest:

*"Although this is the first time I am writing, I have followed the discussions in SP for some time and have been impressed with the energy and enthusiasm of the community to discuss and debate different areas. We must do more active engagement as we bring the two communities* [technology and strategy] *together, and focus our collective knowledge, intellect, and efforts to achieving a strong and relevant strategic direction* [Chief Technology Officer] *".*

On the other hand, such managers were reluctant to actively engage for two interrelated reasons. First, their active participation might stifle development of more autonomous suggestions and critical discussions. Second, and yet more intriguing, is that it was difficult for senior managers to engage in free-flowing and speculative thinking as their opinion would always be perceived as something definite, consequential, and substantial. Despite the fact that strategy professionals did not implement any policy constraints for senior management contributions, and actively encouraged their participation during face-to-face meetings, the authority trap triggered an intriguing cautious self-denial and restricted senior management participation. This is supported by the opinion of strategy professionals:

"*It is somehow dangerous for a senior manager to say something on our platform because people might immediately perceive this as final and they must do as s/he* [Senior Manager] *says*".

"[In uncertain and future-oriented discussions] *you could easily be proven wrong and it is very awkward if you're a senior manager who's proven wrong*".

Balancing autonomous contribution from members of the community and participation of senior management had consequences for community diversity and shaping of strategic content. On one hand, more autonomous participation and mixed incentives attracted larger number of contributors sharing their perspectives on various types of topics. For example. the number of topics increased in two years from 182 to 500. Similarly, numbers of topic categories (all posts are tagged according to topic) grew in two years from 23 to 70. However, on the other hand the greater autonomy of participation led to the higher fragmentation of community content that was more difficult to align with broader strategic conversation in Ericsson.

### Managing content fragmentation and credibility with strategic framing

Our evidence suggests that decisions related to structuring the online community, motivating participation across hierarchical levels, balancing contradictions between the diversity of participation and strategic sensitivity, as well as the autonomy of proposed strategic topics and participation of senior managers, significantly affected decisions and actions aimed at shaping strategic content. Strategy professionals needed to engage with highly fragmented content that reflected the dispersed nature of inclusive strategy-making as well as with content that was poorly aligned with dominant strategic frames of senior managers,

which in return can potentially impede the impact of strategic conversations in Ericsson's online community.

In absence of active participation of senior managers, the strategy professionals became very central for shaping strategic content. In March 2015 they introduced several new features to the platform under the umbrella "SP 2.0". One such feature was a "topic of the month" (ToM) - a discussion theme for a particular month that was visible on the front page of SP website. ToM enabled greater streamlining of discussions and structuring of generated insights. This feature was a strong governance mechanism but also required strategy professionals to carefully identify and select discussion topics that resonated with the broader community as well as with senior management. The ToM could be suggested by either community members or strategy professionals. For each ToM, a community member knowledgeable in the topic was assigned for discussion moderation and was called a "topic driver". The following excerpt from an internal meeting demonstrates discussion between strategy professionals and one of the community members:

> *"Right now, we have Privacy as ToM. It is going well but for September, we don't have anything in the pipeline. Suggestions? I thought that Company Turnarounds would be an interesting theme now. We could take knowledge from history, try to connect to Ericsson. Another possibility is your* [new community member] *current project on new strategy formulation processes. What do you think about that? Maybe, like we have done in our small team meeting, you first introduce your work, make a fit with the current strategic agenda and showcase some best practices."* [Observation from an internal meeting]

Balancing the topics introduced by strategy professionals based on their sensing of its strategic relevance with those suggested by other community members (albeit in the end they were ultimately selected by the strategy professionals) was crucial for attracting and keeping the attention of the diverse audience (i.e. senior managers and community members). The inclusion of emergent topics indicated openness and inclusivity of discussion prompting community members to stay engaged, and also posit the challenge of identifying its alignment with the dominant strategic frames. While discussing the ToM with

a "topic driver", one of the strategists stressed the importance of the alignment between the topic and the new strategic direction of Ericsson:

> *"We need in some way to recognize that we have a new "focused strategy"* [The new CEO clearly empathizes core customers, profitability and efficiency of operations] *... and how open approach to strategy* [ToM – "Open Strategy Quest"] *will help to gather input for deep dives and more long-term horizon initiatives".* [Observation from an internal meeting]

Regardless of the ToM origin, strategy professionals were actively engaged in decisions about the ToM outline and framing. The posts were often discussed with "topic drivers" off-platform and prior to publishing. Further, the discussion often revolved around a sequence of posts and its outline, to ensure that conversation unfolds coherently and conveys a clear message to the audience, for example:

> Topic driver: *"Please see attached first draft for the post. Certainly, more iterations are needed to make this post good. By now I tried to outline the main content."*

> Response from strategy professional: *"The post is too long and has a lot of ground to cover. So maybe have first a post with an intro on what we will do during the month to get people curious. Can you re-do it in two separate posts and we continue to iterate".* [Internal communication, e-mails exchange]

The discussions within the ToM were carefully summarized and often presented as a formal report. Strategy professionals at Ericsson paid serious attention to the credibility of the strategic topics, and this credibility was achieved by combining the size of a network that engaged in a particular topic and the individual expertise of the members involved. Hence, the contributions of selected experts were combined with the free-flowing contributions of other community members. In addition, the credibility was demonstrated through a clear acknowledgement of individuals responsible for contributing to the produced strategic documents.

## Discussion

By engaging with the question: 'how do professional strategists manage the boundaries of participation and the content of strategic issues in an online strategy community?', we advance extant discussions regarding

the balance between openness and control in open strategy literature (Dobusch et al, 2017). Specifically, we emphasize the importance of content shaping in managing an online strategy community and its consequential effects on community design and coordination. We start this section by introducing the grounded model (see Figure 3) which depicts the organizing of an online community where members are aiming to influence the strategic direction of a firm through collaborative, inclusive, and continuous identification, and also through discussion of strategically relevant topics. We draw particular attention to challenges determined by contradictory demands (Hautz et al., 2017; Heracleous et al., 2018; Smith and Lewis, 2011) and interdependency among decisions (Adler, 1995; Siggelkow and Rivkin, 2005) that are common in online strategy communities. We argue that successful organizing of such a community requires strategy professionals to adopt a very central role in designing and deploying the community, fostering cooperation among diverse members, and shaping the content to make it relevant and impactful. Our findings also demonstrate that the centrality of strategy professionals in organizing Ericsson's SP community, and the centralization of critical decisions and activities, extend their role well beyond conventional planning, forecasting, and analytical activities. Here, we conclude by discussing how our insights contribute to the literature on strategy practice, open strategy, and online communities. We also indicate a possible direction for future research by suggesting a more thorough focus on the specific skills required by professional strategists as they utilize digital technologies, and the affordances this creates (Leonardi and Vaast, 2017; Orlikowski, 2007).

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Insert Figure 3 about here.
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### *Design choices and community boundaries*

Design choices affecting the structure of an online community, and procedures determining engagement among members, are not dissimilar to other types of online communities such as communities of engineers (e.g. Haas et al., 2015; Foss et al., 2016), open innovation communities (e.g. Mollick, 2016), shared platform communities (Reischauer and Mair, 2018), or interest groups (e.g. Massa, 2016). However, we argue that designing the boundaries of a community, their permeability, and division of activities in the context of a strategy community, will almost inevitably expose contradictory demands (Lewis, 2000) between increasing inclusivity and diversity on one side and inherent sensitivity of

strategically relevant topics on the other (Hautz et al., 2017). If an online community for strategy-making is serious about discussing topics which have potentially high strategic impact, as opposed to becoming an inconsequential space for conversing and debate, then balancing inclusivity and sensitivity will be a paramount task for strategy professionals that design structures and procedures. We argue that this contradiction will more likely stay latent (Smith and Lewis, 2011) if membership of an online strategy community is strictly limited to employees of the focal organization. On the other hand, however, it will become salient if the online community is open to members external to the organization. The appeal to open an online strategy community to external members is driven by two factors. First, the relevant strategic knowledge is dispersed well beyond the formal boundaries of an organization (Spender, 1996). Second, engagement with external experts is part of the epistemic culture of strategy professionals (Kaplan, 2011). However, the measured, contained, and well targeted interactions with external consultants, academics, or customers that characterize offline engagement will become problematic in a transparent online environment. Hence, we argue that under conditions of salient contradiction between inclusivity and sensitivity the central orchestrators of an online community will design elaborate procedures that control and manage the participation of external members. This managed openness for external members will put strategy professionals in the position of mediators between a broad internal community and the individual external members who are invited to contribute to a particular topic. Whilst mediation and associated activities enable internal members to benefit from the relevant insights provided by external experts and increase the credibility of online discussions, they also aim at limiting external members to be privy to the richness of discussions available on an online platform. We argue that high permeability of community boundaries for continuous participation of internal organizational members will be combined with low permeability for external members whose contribution is sought for occasional input to a particular strategic topic in order to balance the contradictory demands of inclusivity and strategic sensitivity. Hence, closing participation of external members for the sake of openness of internal discussion provides further details to the argument about the centrality of the balancing act that strategy professionals tasked with coordinating an online community will need to perform (Dobusch et al, 2017).

*Cooperation decisions and the authority trap*

Cooperation decisions deal with the inherent challenge as to why members of an organization would continuously and voluntarily participate in an online community. These decisions, in the context of the online community, influence a degree of knowledge sharing across hierarchical levels and expose the contradiction of motivating participation by encouraging divergent and autonomous input less aligned with dominant strategic logics (Bettis and Prahalad, 1995) and participation of senior management that should potentially assure the impact of strategic discussions. The more active that senior managers are, the higher the likelihood for strategic impact to be achieved. Further, other members may be more motivated to participate as their voices will be heard. On the other hand, senior managers may dominate the discussion and suffocate any autonomous contribution divergent from existent dominant logics or members may simply be reluctant to contribute with more unconventional suggestions due to the fear of retribution (Detert and Treviño, 2008). The extant literature on open strategy implicitly suggests that this contradiction is balanced by focusing the involvement of senior managers at identifying strategic problems that justify inclusive participation and subsequent selection of proposed solutions; activities that predominantly unfold offline and often backstage (Dobusch et al., 2017; Luedicke et al., 2017). However, our evidence suggests that motivating continuous cooperation within an online community is often driven by aspiration to create much more direct, free, and egalitarian knowledge sharing across hierarchical levels. We argue that such direct and proactive engagement of senior managers, that goes beyond offline identification and selection, could be impeded by the authority trap; a perception held by senior managers that they will be made unduly accountable for input they could have made into often speculative, free-flowing, and sometimes controversial discussions. In essence, the more prominently members of the community are encouraged and are willing to contribute with divergent opinions, the less likely it will be for senior managers to openly engage in strategic conversations. Therefore, we argue that if the authority trap is prominent in an organization, senior management will exercise a cautious self-denial and limit their contribution to statements on an online platform that legitimize the importance of inclusivity and relevance of divergent opinions. Moreover, the absence of senior management's active involvement increases the importance of monetary and none monetary incentives for continuous participation in the strategic community.

*Content shaping and strategic framing*

Decisions about the content discussed is the domain that most profoundly distinguish an online strategy community from other online communities. Integration of fragmented input and balancing between radical opinions, novel initiatives, and critical analysis produced online - often less aligned with formal strategy directions, goals and dominant logic - require thoughtful identification of strategic topics and skilful framing that trigger attention of both community members and senior management. Content decisions are influenced by design decisions that define breadth of available expertise and format of engagement, as well as cooperation decisions that define the level of fragmentation of discussed topics encouraged by autonomous contributions, which makes input less aligned with the strategic frames of senior management. We argue here that the higher the fragmentation of strategic input that stems from increased participation, and lower the alignment with dominant strategic frames, the higher the importance of identifying and of skilfully framing the strategic content (Cornelissen and Werner, 2014). It is in this very domain where the discursive (Mantere, 2005; Mirabeau and Maguire, 2014) and epistemic apparatus (Kaplan, 2011) of strategy professionals become crucial for managing an online community. However, discursive competency and mastery of strategic tools (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015) are not used to exclude participation (Mantere and Vaara, 2008) or to win the strategy contest (Kaplan, 2008). To the contrary, framing is utilized for coordinating engagement across the diverse membership of an online community and different hierarchical levels.

Moreover, the identification of strategic topics and framing of discussions also influence crucial design and cooperation decisions. Identification of adequate topics determines the structure of participation (internal and external) and the matching of required expertise. Framing motivates participation by assuring the attention of senior managers (Ocasio, 1997), as well as the attention of the wider online community membership. Hence, content decisions lie at the crossroad of interdependencies with design and cooperation decisions.

We argue that the insights from our study strongly suggest that inclusive strategizing of online communities is a paramount and unique problem of organizing collective actions (March and Simon, 1993; Puranam et al., 2014). More generally, we assert that open strategizing is a complex organizational problem which entails enabling effective collaboration amongst actors with diverse expertise, assuring their

cooperation in the absence of clear hierarchical authority and crating frames that enable effective communication, as well as impact, on strategy-making processes. The effective organization of such collective action requires a centralized and dedicated managerial role, and our case suggests that this role may well be populated by strategy professionals, which in return requires competency that goes well beyond being an expert analyst and forecaster (Whittington et al., 2017) or internal consultant focused on developing specific organizational capabilities (Bernholz and Teng, 2015). We argue that the centrality of such a dedicated managerial role is explained through two aspects. First, structural, cooperation, and strategic content decisions are highly interdependent as changes in one decision domain goes on to affect decisions in other domains. It is argued that high interdependency among decisions require centralized coordination (Siggelkow and Rivkin, 2005) and it is, therefore, less likely that successful and impactful strategizing of an online community will be achieved without a significant degree of central coordination. Second, openness in strategy creates contradictory demands which require dedicated managers (i.e. strategy professionals) to manage tensions and balance contradictions (Knight and Paroutis, 2017). The role of strategy professionals for managing online communities certainly includes elements of the role performed by entrepreneurial middle-level managers (Floyd and Lane, 2000; Floyd and Wooldridge, 1997, 1994) who attempt to influence the strategic direction of a company through skilful issue-selling (Dutton et al., 2001) and championing of bottom-up strategic issues (Burgelman, 1996). However, complexity of these activities is further compounded by transparency of the online setting, breadth of potential contributions, and requirements to move back and forth between assuring attention of both senior managers and the wider community.

### *Implications for the open strategy and online community literature*

Our findings extend the open strategy literature which discusses the tensions of inclusive strategizing (Hautz et al., 2017; Luedicke et al., 2017; Malhotra et al., 2017). Although disclosure and process dilemmas have been recognized in extant work (Hautz et al., 2017), we have identified additional contradiction inherent in managing an open strategy initiative. Although existing strategic management literature acknowledges that managing collaboration among actors with varied expertise and functional focus may create misalignment of interests and agendas in strategy development (Ketokivi and Castañer, 2004; Reitzig and Sorenson, 2013) specifically in terms of power asymmetries (Miller et al., 2008; Pappas

and Wooldridge, 2007), open strategy literature predominantly assumes top management involvement in open strategizing (Baptista et al., 2017; Dobusch et al., 2017; Hutter et al., 2017; Tavakoli et al., 2017). Our findings suggest that senior management involvement potentially decreases generative capacity of an online community as they impose dominant logics on discussed topics. This may further affect willingness of members to voice unconventional but potentially relevant ideas. At the same time, the lack of active and continuous engagement by senior managers often creates input that is less aligned with strategic considerations and hence has less potential for achieving strategic impact. Similarly, the obvious benefit of opening discussions to diverse audiences (Stieger et al., 2012) comes with the challenge of integrating dispersed and fragmented information. This tension between the fragmented input and alignment with dominant strategic frames has not been acknowledged before. Therefore, the implementation of open strategy initiatives within an organization may foster this alignment dilemma. Further, the identified association between decision related to content shaping and decisions related to community design and coordination further extends the argument about the connection between procedural and content openness (Dobusch et al., 2017). Although previous research demonstrated how procedural openness preconditions openness of the content, our study reveals the reciprocity of this connection. Hence, the content demands will posit restrictions to the procedural openness as well.

Next, our research adds to the online community literature by furthering the key understanding of governance mechanisms. Although, in line with previous research, we have identified governance practices related to management of community boundaries and participation encouragement (Jarvenpaa and Lang, 2011; Reischauer and Mair, 2018), our findings demonstrate particular salience of content shaping specifically for strategy communities. The existing literature emphasizes interference with content as a means for conflict reduction and stimulation of engagement (Kane et al., 2014), while our findings demonstrate that content shaping as a separate governance practice that requires clear leadership and framing skills. Thus, an online strategy community affords an additional communication channel that ensures organizations and their managers can identify or attend to strategic issues, initiatives, and activities (Ocasio et al., 2018) in a more collaborative fashion. However, if this communication channel is disintegrated from the formal strategy process it will provide only limited value. Therefore, the issue of content sensitivity and demand for strategic impact requires more controlled coordination that often

implies offline activities (Reischauer and Mair, 2018). However, if the level of offline activities related to community management exceeds the level of activities emerging in online environment it may be tempting to characterize such open strategy simply as organized online social interaction rather than online community (Sproull and Arriaga, 2007). We argue here that an online strategy community will require a higher degree of central coordination if its contributors intend to make a significant strategic impact. As this very centralization is almost antithetical to the ideals of an open online community, such as high permeability of its borders and autonomous self-organizing of its members, we would encourage more studies that compare different types of online communities. This can trigger further debate about the essential characteristics of online communities and perhaps draw further distinctions between strategy communities and online communities for open innovation (e.g. Mollick, 2016) or for other purposes.

In addition, literature exploring online communities often assumes more emergent and fluid leadership (Johnson et al., 2015; Rullani and Haefliger, 2013), yet our case revealed the necessity of clearly defined and centralized management roles with a specific body of knowledge for the context of an online strategy community. Although we provide some implications of the identified decision areas of a strategy professional's skillset, more research is required to recognize competences and skills that strategists require when organizing strategy-making within an online community, and also how such skills and competences differ (or not) in comparison to offline strategizing. Additionally, although our study recognizes a number of governance decisions that enable and constrain collaboration and strategy-related content production, we invite future research to take a closer look at affordances that different types of social media (Leonardi et al., 2013; Leonardi and Vaast, 2017) provide, specifically for professional strategists. Finally, we acknowledge that this single-case study focuses on a large and hierarchical organization. Hence, more comparative case studies have to be made to understand how the choices that strategists face differ between organizations with different characteristics (size, organizational structure, hierarchy, position of strategists).

## Managerial implications

In the era of digitalization, managers are well advised to utilize digital technologies for supporting the processes of strategy formulation and implementation. Our research informs practicing managers about the appropriability of online communities for opening strategy processes, organizing principles that make such a community productive and strategically influential, and auxiliary skills required from strategy

professionals for orchestrating an online community. First, we argue that an online community, if adequately managed, is an effective organizational form capable of facilitating sharing strategically relevant knowledge across an organization. It can gather complex market and technology intelligence in an uncertain world, and identify relevant strategic initiatives with potential to increase the competitiveness of firms. However, the initiation, growth, and sustainment of a productive online strategy community, and one that is capable of impacting strategic decision-making of top managers, is without doubt a paramount challenge to organizations.

This leads us to the second recommendation. Successful online strategy communities require a dedicated team of managers that centrally and holistically coordinate decisions about membership of the community. These managers create and implement incentive mechanisms for mobilizing diverse participation and integrate multiple contributions from the community into concise and actionable strategic initiatives. As our case demonstrates, strategy professionals are suitable organizational actors for such a role, although firms without such professionals may wish to appoint competent middle-level managers that are capable of bridging the divide between the open nature of an online community and the typically hierarchical nature of strategic-decision making.

Finally, the task of coordinating a strategy community requires strategy professionals or other managers to possess, or obtain, a set of skills that go beyond those usually associated with an online community moderator or a traditional strategy analyst. For example, strong networking skills are pivotal for identifying relevant experts from within or outside the organization and engaging them in appropriate community discussions. Further, it is crucial for those managing an online community to continuously cultivate new connections within and outside organizations for creating pools of expertise that credibly inform strategic conversation. To complement this, strong command of language and writing skills are relevant in prompting online discussion, and a high level of engagement is crucial for any voluntarily online community. Dedicated managers have to be skilful in making strategically relevant questions which captivate the broader community with diverse functional background and also consider existing operational issues. Finally, some familiarity with digital technologies that inform the design of online communities is relevant for making adequate decisions. This does not necessarily imply knowledge in information system or software development, but rather a basic understanding of the main types of online

platforms and their governance mechanisms in addition to some assumptions about the dynamics which will help a community orchestrator with making choices suitable to demands of a particular organization. The combination of networking, communication, and technology skills might not only be attained by an individual but also on a team level.

## Conclusions

This study provides unique insights into the challenges of organizing an online community for open strategy, in this case dedicated to discussing topics of strategic relevance at Ericsson. Our research makes several contributions. First, we identify strategy professionals as actors with central responsibilities for organizing online strategy communities (Whittington et al., 2017). Second, we contribute to the discussion about the fundamental interplay between openness and closedness through unpacking the more micro-level decisions that trigger tensions in the context of a large for-profit organization (Dobusch et al., 2017). Finally, we contribute to the literature on online communities by providing additional insights into governance mechanisms and characteristics specifically relevant to (online) strategy communities (Jarvenpaa and Lang, 2011; Reischauer and Mair, 2018).

Our study also has practical relevance. Since there is an increasing number of organizations integrating digital technologies for open strategizing (Baptista et al., 2017; Haefliger et al., 2011) this study provides insights that professional strategists or managers working with the implementation of open strategy practices can use as a practical guide. This is specifically relevant in developing an online community-based open strategy initiative.

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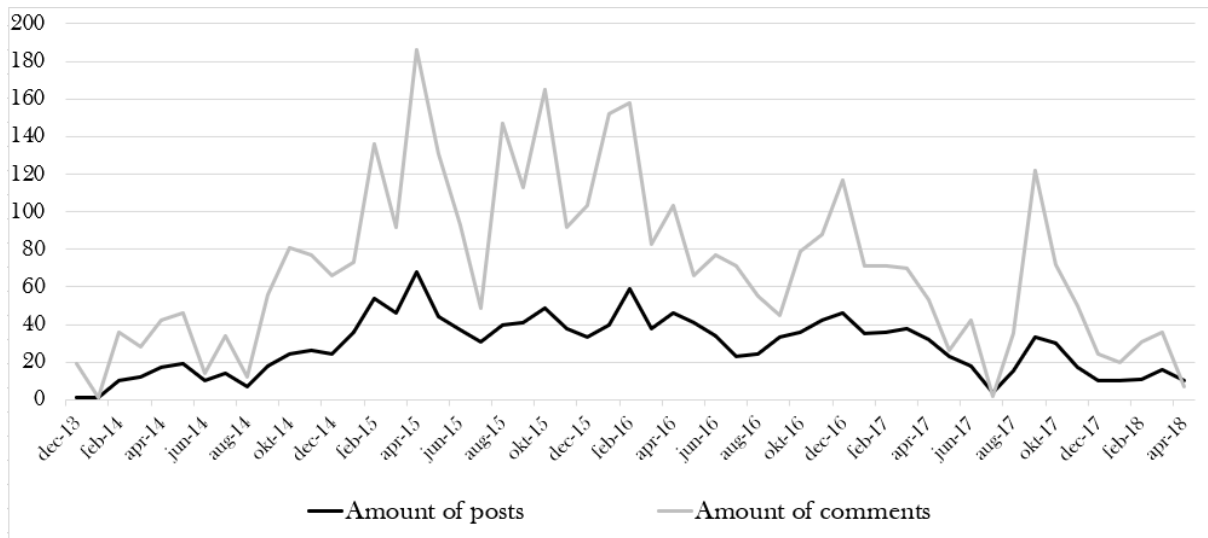
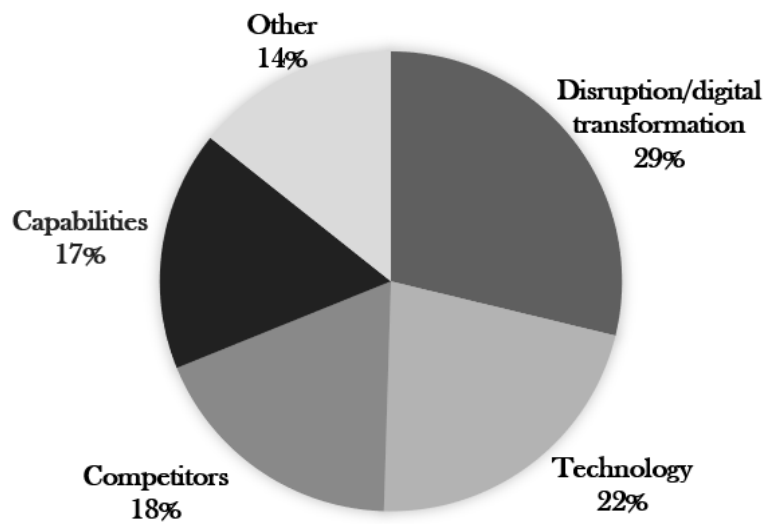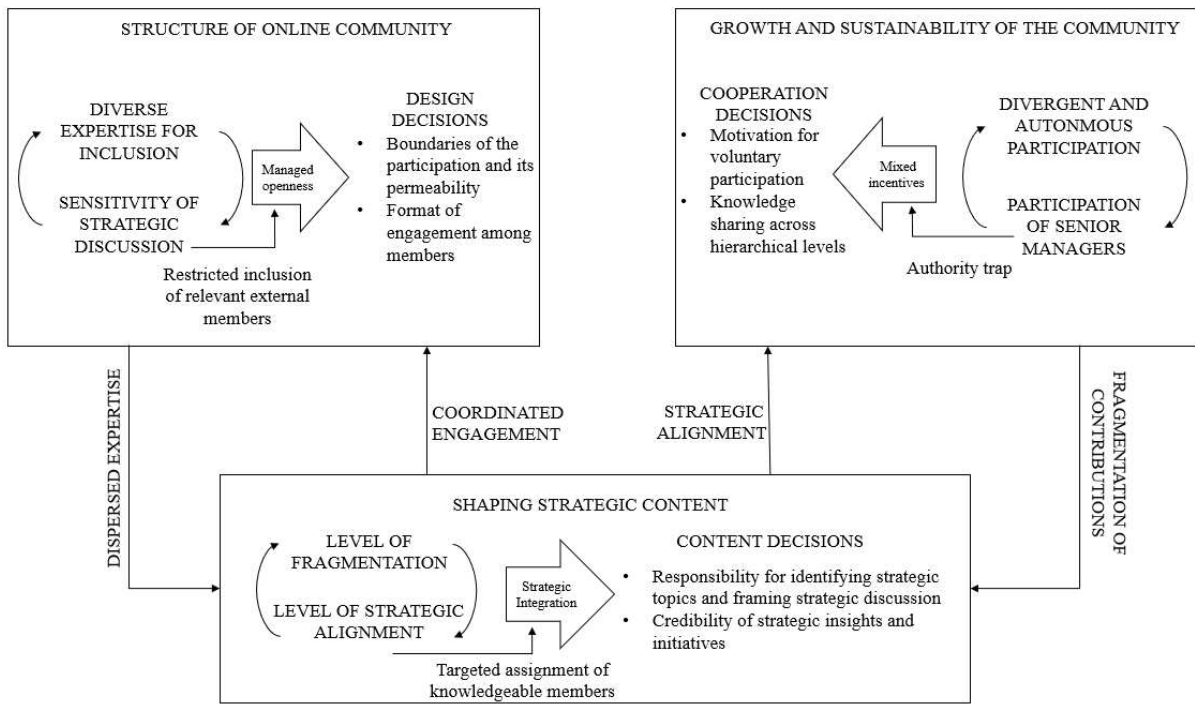Figure 1. Timeline of activities within the SP community



Figure 2. The most frequently discussed themes in SP community

*Figure 3. Framework for organizing strategic online community*

*Table 1. Representative quotes from the data*

| Contradictive demands | Required decisions | Issues to consider | Indicative quotes |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Decision area STRUCTURE OF ONLINE COMMUNITY** | | | |
| **SENSITIVITY OF STRATEGIC DISCUSSION** | Design decisions that address:<br><br>▪ Boundaries of the participation and its permeability: open access for internal members more elaborate procedures for participation of external members<br>▪ Format of engagement among members: a blog-based single platform, with registration mechanism to access a single community for members with a diverse background | **Internal vs external participation** Internal participation refers to the accessibility of a community content strictly to the internal organizational actors. External participation allows access for other actors external to the organization such as academics, consultants, customers etc. | From observations: access to SP platform (opportunity to read, post and comment) was open only to Ericsson's employees. Content from external participants was added to the platform by community members. [Internal participation]<br>From one of the emails between strategy professionals: *"Just chatted with Magnus [external expert] and he is willing to collaborate as a guest blogger on the experience from the past and his views on Innovation and Innovation Management."* [Limited engagement with external participants] |
| **DIVERSE EXPERTISE FOR INCLUSION** | | **Type of platform** (e.g. social networking vs blog-based platform). Social networking creates more noise (likes, short frequent interactions) while blog-based provides more space for articulated content.<br>**Registration mechanism** (registration form vs open registration). Registration facilitates selection of participants with greater motivation reducing the number of random subscribers.<br>**Community configuration** (sub-communities vs single community) Sub-community refers to an independent group of individuals usually within a larger online community united by their interests. A single community does not contain any additional smaller groups within its boundaries and | From an interview with community leader: *"there were two tools you could use MyNet which was a boring Yammer and then blog format right. I have hate/love relationship with Yammer, I think Yammer is like Facebook it gets to be too quick. And in MyNet it was boring, not as good as the Yammer. The idea we had is that people articulate and then we decide for a blog. So ... we have got a person to create a site because I don't know anything about Ericoll, right".*<br>From observations: potential members were asked to provide their personal information (name and e-mail), motivation to join the community and their expected benefits.<br>From an interview with a strategy professional: *"But it is one community right. So, it's not sub-communities, this is not like Facebook where your friends are in your subgroup and you don't care about the rest. This is very much like Twitter early ages..."* [Single community]<br>From an interview with a strategy professional: *"You need to make a decision, either you would like to engage everyone, then you need to go with sub-communities because no one can read everything. If you have sub-communities people will not see the other sub-communities"* [Single community] |

| | | treats all participants as a part of a whole. | |
|---|---|---|---|

| **Decision area GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY OF ONLINE COMMUNITY** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **DIVERGENT AND AUTONOMOUS PARTICIPATION** | Cooperation decisions that address:<br><br>▪ Motivation for voluntary participation: a combination of monetary and reputational incentives. Increased importance for creating incentives without active management participation<br>▪ Knowledge sharing across hierarchical levels: creation of "safe space" and senior management support for online community | **Monetary vs reputational incentives** Monetary does not mean a financial reward, like a salary bonus or a cash prize, but rather an incentive in the form of a gift that has some monetary value. Reputational incentive refers to recognition by other people of some individual characteristics or abilities. | From the announcement posts in the forum: *"It is a great honour to announce the receivers of our 'Nobel prize' The Voucher to Learn."* [Monetary]<br>From interviews with community members: *"I mean it [participation in the discussion] about bringing something to the larger community and building your reputation".*<br>*"Yes, there were certain concrete things, like recognition was amazing, it was nice to feel recognized for what I've been contributing for".* [Reputational] |
| **PARTICIPATION OF SENIOR MANAGERS** | | **Autonomous vs senior management participation** Autonomy of participation here implies the opportunity to speak openly without fear of consequences. Senior managers participation refers to the visible engagement of senior managers in the content of community discussion. | From an interview with a community member: *"The fine thing is that people in SP dare to write almost anything. And they don't just write anything, I mean they don't just criticise, it's a pretty restrained debate I would say."* [Autonomous participation]<br>From an interview with a strategy professional: *" We have been working so hard with senior management and yet these people don't post much. They are influential, why can't you write anything? Completely impossible. And it comes down that they are scared to write down their opinion because then there will be on paper, that you believe that".* [Senior management participation]<br>*"I* [Chief Strategy Officer] *would like to mention how important it is for Ericsson to have a culture based on transparency and collaboration, where we learn from each other every day.... Strategy Perspectives is a great community to foster that kind of a mindset, a true best practice of cross-functional collaboration"* [Senior managers support] |

| **Decision area STRATEGIC CONTENT OF ONLINE COMMUNITY** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **LEVEL OF FRAGMENTATION** | Content decisions that address:<br><br>▪ Credibility of strategic conversations: a combination of | **Credibility building through the participation of experts vs credibility building through a large number of members** Project management refers to a more planned and controlled approach to producing community | From the interview with strategy professionals: *"O*pen it up because *you need a critical mass and you don't know who will be the "investor". Probably, someone, you didn't expect".* [Self-managed community]<br>From the observations: For each Topic of the month a topic driver was assigned whose main responsibilities were to plan the posts, engage the contributors, facilitate discussion and prepare a summary post at the end of the month. During the May 2018 for topic 'Quantum computing', top engineer within Ericsson specializing in quantum |

| | open participation with the involvement of experts<br>▪ Responsibility for identifying strategic topics and framing strategic discussion: involvement in the decisions about discussion topics, its content and structure | content through the engagement of members with relevant expertise. A self-managed community relies on the content and initiatives of its members, which can be less systematic and strategically relevant. | technologies was invited. He was actively engaged in the online conversation through own posts and comments to posts of others. Besides that, such expert involvement created more credibility and trust as experts could facilitate and mediate a discussion by bringing his informed point of view [Project management] |
|---|---|---|---|
| **LEVEL OF STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT** | | **Emergent vs induced content**<br>Emerging discussion refers to discussion occurring from community members' interests. Induced discussion refers to a more directed approach where topics are suggested or approved by strategy professionals. | From an interview with strategy professional: *"I always thought it [quantum computing] was science fiction. But it was [name of community member], he pushed and talked so much about Quantum. And he was so active last month, it was almost too much. I had also other people with quantum in SP. So, at some point, I said, "well maybe he's right ... let's make a ToM"* [Emergent content]<br>From the announcement post in the forum: *"Welcome to the new Topic of the Month! During May we will continue on the Digital Transformation theme and explore what it means for Supply. We plan to cover the following broad topics".* [Induced content] |