Empirical Paper

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Wide open? Creative industries and open strategizing challenges

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Abstract:
Purpose: Although the open strategizing (OS) approach can bring a wide range of benefits, there are also numerous risks identified. These risks are core sources of organizational dilemmas and challenges that appear in the decision-making process in two dimensions of OS – inclusion and transparency, both of which we further explore.
Design/methodology/approach: Following the suggestions of some scholars, we have employed the specific context of research and investigated companies from creative industries in Poland. We applied purposeful sampling with maximum sample variation to collect relevant and rich data and identify shared patterns. We conducted in-depth interviews with the owners or CEOs of the chosen creative firms.
Findings: We have recognized some recurring fears and anxieties accompanying the OS concept in general and different categories of challenges in particular. This paper suggests that a specific mindset reflected in a particular organizational climate (open climate) might undermine a company's efforts in considering and adopting such a strategy.
Originality: By offering an initial conceptualization of an open climate as a potential further research avenue, this study contributes to the OS stream of research.

Keywords: creative industry, inclusion, open climate, open strategizing, transparency
JEL Classification: L02, L10

1 Introduction

There has been a growing interest in an open strategizing (OS) stream of research in recent years [Brielmaier and Friesl, 2021]. New technologies and societal pressures foster a higher level of involvement of various stakeholders in the strategy-making process [Seidl et al., 2019]. Moreover, the growing level of business education, where skills and competencies are delivered to a broader group of people, the expansion of new social media technologies, and the development of interdependent organizational ecosystems are the drivers behind strategic approaches becoming more transparent and inclusive [Whittington et al., 2016]. Therefore, the literature has discussed different forms and degrees of external and internal collaboration, intending to reveal, either partially or entirely, the strategic issues [Dobusch and Dobusch, 2019]. Previous research has mainly focused on topics such as the cost of empowering employees [Stieger et al., 2012;

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Matzler et al., 2014], integrating external actors [Dobusch and Kapeller, 2013], the use of external sources of knowledge [Martín-de Castro, 2015], recognizable dilemmas [Hautz et al., 2017], or open innovation [Saebi and Foss, 2015]. Although we can observe a growing body of literature on OS, evidence of managerial practice is still scarce [Gegenhuber and Dobusch, 2017]. Due to the complexity and multithreading of the OS concept, this topic is still worth exploring [Adobor, 2019]. By the term "open strategy," we understand the increased openness in the different phases of the strategy process [Hautz, 2017]. Implementing OS seems complicated because of the overall concept's specifics, which are multidimensional. One research avenue concerns the implications of OS for strategy practitioners, namely the challenges it poses [Gurca et al., 2021] as a consequence of the dilemmas and dynamics of openness [Hautz et al., 2017]. In this paper, we want to understand the specifics of OS and identify the challenges that make its implementation difficult. Therefore, we aim to explore the crucial challenges to comprehensive integration and implementation of the OS concept. Thus, we attempt to answer the following research question: What are the challenges of implementing the OS concept? As a result, we investigate how openness is likely to be implemented and whether it is even possible to fully adopt this concept. This research perspective seems particularly important now because the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a wide range of open, collaborative responses [Chesbrough, 2020].

As Pettigrew [1992] recommended, we have applied a specific context of OS analysis. Therefore, we have investigated companies operating in the creative industries (CI) that have specific characteristics, such as applying inter-organizational learning as a way of use the absorptive capacity of an organization [Vaisz et al., 2021], or sustain formal and informal networking as the basis of innovative activities [Meiqing and Yingli, 2009; Higdon, 2018], which we believe may foster a higher level of transparency and inclusion and provide some idiosyncrasies and recommendations useful for managerial practice in other industries. By adopting an explorative approach, we want not only to confirm but also gain a deeper understanding of the categories of challenges identified in the literature. Moreover, by conducting in-depth interviews with managers representing eight different CI, we can recognize some recurring fears and anxieties accompanying the OS concept in general and different categories of challenges in particular, which might suggest that a specific mindset reflected in a particular organizational climate (open climate) could undermine a company's efforts to consider and carry out such an approach.

This paper is organized as follows. First, we review the overall concept of OS and distinguish two dimensions – transparency and inclusion. Second, we discuss different challenges identified in the literature that hinder OS implementation. We categorize them into strategy-related, structure-related, process-related, and culture-related factors. Third, we present the qualitative data gathered. Finally, we discuss our findings. Based on that, we offer an initial conceptualization of an open climate, suggesting that this concept should be included in future studies on OS.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 OS dimensions and challenges imposed

The traditional approach to the strategy-making process is based on two assumptions. The strategy concept is perceived as exclusive (available to a narrow group of managers) and is usually regarded as confidential (strategy as a root of competitive advantage is so important that it should not be revealed) [Whittington et al., 2011]. Although the idea of involving employees [Kärnä, 2015] or middle managers in the strategy-management process has previously been investigated to understand managers' commitment [e.g., Barton and Ambrosini, 2013], it has not been comprehensively discussed in the context of the challenges it might pose. Whittington et al. [2011] introduced the OS concept and questioned the fundamental beliefs of the traditional approach. Such openness is rooted in broader inclusion and higher transparency in the strategizing process, according to which co-strategizing and including multiple stakeholders and designing a comprehensive communication process are recommended [Doz and Kosonen, 2008].

Even though implementing the OS approach can bring a wide range of benefits [von Krogh and Geilinger, 2019], there are also numerous risks associated with this concept. These risks are core sources of organizational dilemmas and challenges that accompany the decision-making process in two dimensions of OS – inclusion and transparency, both of which we further explore below.

2.1.1 Inclusion

Inclusion refers to the strategy-making process being revealed to internal and external stakeholders to use the feedback they provide [Whittington et al., 2011; Hautz et al., 2017]. The main benefit of this approach is access to a broader range of knowledge sources [von Krogh and Geilinger, 2019]. Opening up the strategy-making process through broader inclusion results in better idea generation [Whittington et al., 2011], the development of creativity [Stieger et al., 2012], and improvements in the acceptance and legitimacy of strategic initiatives [Dobusch and Mueller-Seitz, 2012; Gast and Zanini, 2012]. Although a strategy-making process opened up to large numbers of stakeholders (internal and external) is usually slower than the classical approach, it leads to better decisions, engagement, and execution [Whitehurst, 2015]. Involving stakeholders can be done by participation, which has already been explored in the research on strategy [Mantere and Vaara, 2008]. However, this approach limits participation to internal stakeholders only [Covin et al., 2006].

Meanwhile, the discourse on OS includes external stakeholders [Henisz et al., 2014; Laine and Vaara, 2015]. Inclusion is not only based on the scope of stakeholders involved in the strategy process but also includes the type of relationships and depth of involvement [Vaara et al., 2019]. Therefore, it poses particular challenges. First, organizations that endeavor to be more inclusive must *break with the established convention* that the strategy-making process is reserved for a restricted group of top managers [Hambrick, 2007]. It is crucial in the organizations that rely on conventional and centralized forms of decision-making because increasing inclusion may challenge or undermine senior managers' authority over their subordinates [Kahn and Kram, 1994]. The next challenge refers to the *difficulties in ensuring the commitment of individual actors* in the strategy-making process and its outcomes [Stieger et al., 2012]. Vaara et al. [2019] observed that some challenges refer to the process of actors' selection. Regardless of whether we are talking about internal or external stakeholders, trust-building is a crucial factor for enhancing cooperation within and outside the organization [Radomska et al., 2019] and is used as a mechanism to increase organizational openness, reduce uncertainty, and increase competitiveness [Möllering et al,. 2004]. Therefore, problems with *establishing the relevant depth and persistence of the relationship with stakeholders based on trust* are another managerial challenge.

A further challenge is that companies must decide whether to seek complete consensus on the strategy or *look for the approval of key decision-makers*. However, it can be challenging to achieve consensus, since the greater the number of stakeholders engaged in the decision-making process, the higher the probability of reductions taking place in the speed, flexibility, and control of this process, which can even result in organizations being rendered incapable of making any decisions at all [Collier et al., 2004]. Therefore, organizations opening up the strategy-making process *must determine what kind of interference with the strategy is expected from the stakeholders*, which is the next managerial challenge identified.

Organizations that decide to enhance inclusion in the strategy-making process *must search for tools or solutions useful to support inclusion adapted to different stakeholders*, which brings another managerial challenge. We can find examples of diverse practices applied by companies to engage a wide variety of stakeholders for other strategic purposes. Among these practices, Hautz et al. [2019] mentioned analog and digital forms of inclusion: inter-organizational workshops [Seidl and Werle, 2018]; internal strategy workshops [Mack and Szulanski, 2017]; blogging [Gegenhuber and Dobusch, 2017]; wikis [Dobusch and Kapeller, 2018; Dobusch et al., 2019]; ideation contests and community platforms [Stieger et al., 2012; Matzler et al., 2016; Hutter et al., 2017; Malhotra et al., 2017]; and prediction markets [Borison and Hamm, 2010]. The choice of the right tools or solutions will depend on which stakeholders the organization wants to reach and involve in the strategy-making process [Mack and Szulanski, 2017].

Finally, organizations that decide to open up the strategy-making process and be more inclusive must realize that this process can be time-consuming; therefore, they need *to deal with time constraints*. For instance, companies looking for opportunities to engage external actors are using dialoguing, which "ties up considerable organizational resources (e.g., spending time on responding to users' questions)" [Gegenhuber and Dobusch, 2017, p. 347]. The opportunities arise from large groups of actors involved in strategic decision-making simultaneously, reducing the time spent obtaining ideas, opinions, and information [Gegenhuber and Dobusch, 2017]. Still, more time is needed to create a shared understanding of the strategy, which may lead to time spent on long-lasting debates that aim to "reconcile" divided, polarized, and incompatible groups of actors.

2.1.2 Transparency

The second dimension of openness is transparency, which is defined as the visibility of information about an organization's strategy. It can relate both to the formulation process and to the outcome of the process, that is, to the strategy itself [Whittington et al., 2011]. As Hautz et al. [2017] pointed out, transparency comes in many forms, and it should be perceived as a continuum approach whereby managers can choose the desired degree. Implementing a more comprehensive range of transparency poses specific challenges, although the literature on this topic is still scarce. The standard view among scholars is based on the assumption that external audiences demand more and more information [Christensen, 2002]. Such *differences in transparency expectations* may lead to confusion about what to reveal and to whom. It requires research skills and procedures to spot these differences and perform a gradation strategy. Also, as noted by Christensen [2002], stakeholders do not have an unlimited capacity to process information, and so increasing the amount of available information combined with limited skills in processing the information may lead to a *reduced understanding* of internal organizational issues [Etzioni, 2010]. Moreover, it may be *difficult to enhance responsiveness* instead of simple information provision, which requires the skills to make transparency more meaningful [Rawlins, 2009]. Accordingly, creating a sense of trustworthiness and accountability is necessary because an organization must trust its constituents to share information. To build such a relationship, it is essential to provide relevant and trustworthy information to ensure that stakeholders are well-informed. Therefore, a managerial challenge is to *impose the required changes on the organizational structure and reduce unnecessary bureaucracy* [Parris et al., 2016]. Internal trustworthiness is much harder to obtain in hierarchical organizations with a strong focus on authority and a natural reluctance to share strategic knowledge [Adobor, 2020].

Among other potential challenges, scholars have highlighted the weakening of an organization's competitiveness due to *competitors' access* to strategically sensitive information [Appleyard and Chesbrough, 2017] and *greater exposure to regulatory influence* resulting from regulatory agencies access to information about the internal workings of the organization [Hautz et al., 2017]. Another challenge concerns *sharing resources* because OS may result in voluntarily forfeiting control over the organization's resources [Alexy et al., 2018]. The core idea of selective disclosure of resources may involve sharing not only the assets but also the problems, ideas, and routines that can be crucial to the development process [Alexy et al., 2013]. Etzioni [2010] pointed out that transparency is not an absolute value, and it has to be evaluated along with other matters such as security, private property (e.g., copyright protections), and privacy.

2.2 Research framework

As Miles et al. [1978] suggested, an organization should be studied as an integrated and dynamic whole, considering the interrelationships among strategy, structure, and process. This approach has been widely adopted [e.g., Andrews et al., 2009; MacLennan, 2011; Yuan et al., 2020]. Such a framework allows researchers to explore how organizations define their product-market domains

(strategy) and design mechanisms (structures and processes) to perform the strategy. In recent years, some researchers have extended the scope mentioned above of organization analysis to organizational culture [e.g., Janićijević, 2017; Szczepańska-Woszczyna, 2018; Daulatkar et al., 2019]. We have followed this extended framework in categorizing the challenges mentioned above of pursuing an OS, and we have classified each of the challenges into strategy, process, culture, or structure. Table 1 summarizes the research categories.

Table 1. Research categories

Category	Transparency	Inclusion	Category
Process	Dealing with differences in transparency expectations	The selection process of actors involved in strategy-making and search for vulnerable partners	Process
Process	Dealing with reduced external actors' understanding of internal organizational issues	Dealing with time constraints	Process
Process	The necessity of moderating dialogue and enhancing responsiveness	The necessity of searching for tools/solutions that support inclusion and adapting them to different stakeholders	Process
Process	Reducing the level of unnecessary bureaucracy	Dealing with reduced trust in stakeholders	Culture
Culture	The necessity of creating a sense of the organization's trustworthiness	The necessity of enhancing the commitment of individual actors	Culture
Strategy	Dealing with the dilemma of sharing resources	Dealing with shallow and short-term relationships with stakeholders	Culture
Strategy	Maintaining competitive advantage despite revealing sensitive information	Challenging the status quo: strategy-making process not only for top managers	Strategy
Structure	The necessity of imposing the required changes on the organizational structure	The necessity of deciding about the level of interference with the strategy	Strategy
Structure	Dealing with greater exposure to regulatory influence	Changing the hierarchical structures within organizations	Structure
		The dilemma of strategy approval: democratic or top managers	Structure

Source: Own work.

3 Research method

3.1 Research design and procedure

Our research goal was to explore the challenges crucial to the comprehensive integration and implementation of the OS concept. For this reason, we carried out a qualitative study to gather in-depth insights into the problem under investigation [Charmaz, 2014]. We collected the data using semi-structured and in-depth face-to-face interviews, and we further coded the research material. As the topic of OS challenges has emerged in previous studies [Hautz et al., 2017; Gurca et al., 2021], we decided to apply pre-identified codes [Saunders et al., 2018] and verify whether these codes find adequate representation in the data obtained in the context of a specific industry, which reflects the deductive coding procedure [Elliott, 2018]. As previous studies on OS challenges have not focused on the industry context, in addition to verifying if and how these more general codes refer to a particular industry, we also wanted to explore new categories that might emerge from our study. The research scenario is presented in Appendix 1. Our research procedure is shown in Figure 1. The coding process is briefly described in Appendixes 2 and 3.

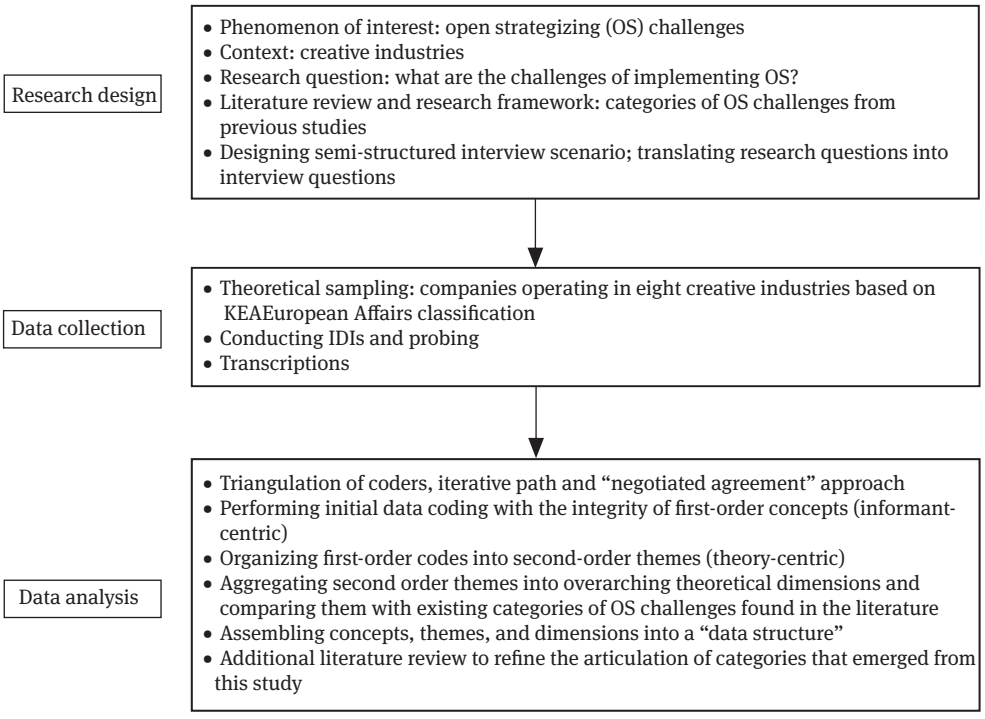


Figure 1. Research procedure.

3.2 Sample and data collection

As stated by Suri [2011], theoretical and purposive sampling is recommended in exploratory research. We have chosen the CI as a context for this research, as previous studies have highlighted some characteristics of these industries that may relate to more openness: the majority of firms in CI are micro firms, blended within different configurations of networks [Hesmondhalgh, 2013], and often need to be divided into creative ecosystems to operate effectively [Flew, 2013]. Knowledge creation and absorption, crucial in these industries, are favored by open-up strategizing [Pittz et al., 2019]. The use of an organization's absorptive capacity is carried out by applying inter-organizational learning [Vaisz et al., 2021]. Finally, innovative activities often depend on sustaining formal and informal networking [Meiqing and Yingli, 2009]. Due to these characteristics, creative communities seem to be a natural environment for open initiatives [Chesbrough and Appleyard, 2007]. At the same time, we may expect in the CI some characteristics typical of open organizations, such as a high level of flexibility, flat organizational structures, a lower level of formality in organizing teams and projects, devolved decision-making processes, and more informal communication flows [Bilton, 2007]. Each of these industries differs in its business ecosystem. However, they are similar in some respects (e.g., ideas generation, imagination, copyrights, intellectual property). Therefore, we believe that studying OS challenges in the context of CI might yield exciting insights.

Poland was chosen as the geographical context for our research in line with the report provided by UNCTAD [2018]. Poland occupied the 9th position among the top 20 creative goods exporters, and the country was mentioned as an economy to be watched as a rising star in the CI. Therefore, it is worth investigating that market to identify some idiosyncrasies.

We adopted an in-depth interview technique to explore the challenges of OS. Our interviewees were chosen purposefully, with the following criteria determining the selection. First, we chose one representative of each creative industry as distinguished by the definition proposed by the KEA European Affairs [2006]; such sampling allowed for the necessary similarities rooted in one group of industries (creative) as well as

the contrasts [Saunders et al., 2018] resulting from potential idiosyncrasies of a particular sub-industry. Second, the informants were people directly involved in the management processes – owners or co-owners of companies. Third, with one exception, our informants represented small businesses, reflecting the CI structure where 98.9% are microenterprises [Main Statistical Office, 2020]. Table 2 presents a short description of the companies investigated.

All the interviews were semi-structured to verify categories found in the literature and allow some previously unidentified vital issues to emerge during the discussion [Arsel, 2017]. The interviews lasted about 1.5 h on average. They were recorded and transcribed to provide comprehensive information.

Table 2. Characteristics of companies investigated

Case No./ informant	Industry	Description
I1	Design	A company with 10 years of market experience operating in digital design. Employment: five to ten people (five employees and additional co-workers cooperating on specific projects).
I2	Performing arts	One of the most dynamic cultural institutions, a music theater with a long history. Employment: approximately 60 employees.
I3	Architecture	Studio with 9 years of market experience, a good reputation, and a very well-known brand. It specializes in the design of public spaces and public buildings, as well as in commercial projects, many of which are carried out abroad. Employment: eight employees and additional co-workers in specific projects.
I4	Advertising	A company operating since 2004, offering advertising, mainly on the Internet/ social media. Employment: three employees and two additional co-workers.
I5	Photography	Freelancer specializing in press photography and reportage. Moreover, a member of the management board of a foundation operating to support cultural and artistic development, creative environments, and artists and to promote photography, audiovisual media, and reportage.
I6	Fashion	A company involved in clothing design, a brand that has been available in the market for 9 years. Employment: four employees.
I7	Software	A company operating in the market for over 5 years; its main activity is creating software and IT systems based on customers' needs/ideas. Its second pillar is the creation of management systems (with reporting documentation) for universities. Employment: seven employees (various forms of cooperation).
I8	Computer/ video games	The company has been in the market since 2014. The main project is an educational strategy game that combines elements of typical tycoon strategy games with educational features (running the company). Employment: nine employees.

Source: Own work.

3.3 Data analysis

To analyze the research material, we used a coding procedure. Following the etic approach, we began with a "prefigured" coding scheme [Charmaz, 2014]. We searched for codes based on an a priori framework of OS challenges found in the literature. However, following the suggestions of Elliott [2018], we were also open to adding codes that emerged during the analysis. We followed Campbell et al.'s [2013] suggestions by adopting both a unitization strategy – we focused on meaning units rather than on sentences or paragraphs – and a "negotiated agreement" approach that involved coding the transcripts separately, comparing codes, and then discussing our disagreements to reconcile them and arrive at a final version. Our data analysis had three stages. We distinguished initial codes, themes, and aggregated dimensions, as Gioia et al. [2013] recommended. To ensure the reliability of the constructs extracted, we applied two approaches. First, we used coder triangulation to improve the confidence and coherence of the findings [Archibald, 2015]. Second, we decided to use an iterative coding path with several rounds of iteration. After the first

coding round, we proposed the initial codes that emerged, which we further developed into second-order themes. However, we decided to return to the data to clarify the concepts created. We did this several times to modify the first proposal. Finally, we were able to gather some insights from our study.

4 Findings

This section introduces the challenges, which we divide into the categories described in our research framework. We further discuss some new insights that were identified. To illustrate our arguments, we have used examples of opinions provided by our informants (in italics and quotation marks, with the informant number in brackets).

4.1 Strategy-related challenges

Among the challenges identified in this category is the dilemma of challenging the status quo. Our informants confirmed this, but the dilemma was limited to internal stakeholders. The reasoning for such an approach is rooted in the belief that external stakeholders will exert pressure to achieve their goals. Moreover, some interviewees' comments suggest that companies may have a low willingness to open up the strategy-making process because they are used to established routines and are not eager to innovate and change a functioning model; for example: "*For the previous 20 years, the theater was the same, 'because it was always like that and it was good'*" (I2). Interestingly, our informants revealed that the strategy-making process was limited to a small number of people: "*When we were a smaller group, we were in fact all equal, and we all made decisions [...] But when there are more people in the company, unfortunately, a decision-making person, plus possibly two or three more, is needed*" (I4). The next exciting issue in the context of the opening-up strategizing process is the size of the company. Our interviewees suggested that the opening-up strategy-making process is possible in small companies rather than in large ones: "*In micro-companies, perhaps also in small ones [...], employees [...] should participate in, let's say, strategic meetings of the board, or with the manager, in terms of undertaking future strategic decisions. On the other hand, in large companies [...] the question is who exactly and how many of these employees should be involved in the decision-making process?*" (I7).

The necessity of deciding about the level of interference in the strategy was also confirmed. The informants pointed out that consultations with stakeholders rather than involvement in the decision stage were observed in the strategy-making process. This consultative approach also translates into resolving the dilemma between following one's vision versus meeting stakeholders' expectations. However, we were able to distinguish two approaches: companies that have an established business model and do not include stakeholders' suggestions and companies that are flexible and ready to proceed with the co-creation process with a client. Our interviews also revealed that the independence of the strategy-making process depends on the relationship with substantial stakeholders. For example, I1 mentioned the strong influence of a client, which led to a situation in which "*some strategic decisions regarding the project were not taken by us, but only by this client, who, however, was guided by his interest, and not our interest*."

Furthermore, some interviewees' comments indicated the dependence on external stakeholders (for example, public institutions), which reduces the ability to decide on strategy independently. Among the strategy-related challenges accompanying transparency, we confirmed the dilemma of maintaining a competitive advantage despite revealing sensitive information. Our interviewees pointed out that information about costs, business models, and critical business partners was not disclosed. Moreover, a willingness to keep secrecy regarding the conditions of cooperation with customers was mentioned. The advertising company owner said: "*First of all, we don't share our arrangements with customers. Because they're our arrangements*" (I4). Our informants also revealed that they were somewhat skeptical about disclosing strategic information. As one of them explained: "*If we have such a very specific knowledge, specific know-how which is our competitive advantage, I would advise against such an [OS] formula*" (I8).

The interviewed managers were possibly concerned about transparency due to the risk of information leakage ("*Sharing information brings a risk of leakage. The more people know something, the easier it is that someone unauthorized might know*" [I8]); the fear of hostile use of information against a transparent company ("*If we find dishonest partners, they will use our openness against us*" [I8]); sabotage ("*there are some financial decisions and strategies that probably should not go beyond the door [...]. So, I think that this also brings the danger that such sabotage and stupidity can turn the company upside down*" [I3]); and the fear of stealing an idea ("*If it is a serious company or serious organization, it [transparency] can sometimes also have some unforeseen effects. In the sense that someone can pick up an idea and use it in some way*" [I5]). Another problem relating to transparency, confirmed by our research, is the inadequate scope or timing of information disclosure. As the photography company owner pointed out, transparency entails "*the risk of disclosing too much information, or too early*" (I5). We also confirmed the necessity to deal with the dilemma of sharing resources, as this was mentioned by some of our informants. For example, I3 revealed: "*We share our knowledge very much, and we also share our business orders.*"

4.2 Process-related challenges

Among the process-related challenges, we confirmed the dilemmas concerning selecting actors involved in strategy-making and searching for valuable partners. Our informants indicated the need to include people from different levels of the organizational structure and identify the required competencies: "*We try to be inclusive when there is a specific expert knowledge needed*" (I8). However, such a process of searching for competencies may either be planned in a structured manner or spontaneous and unstructured. On the other hand, such inclusion of stakeholders is sometimes forced by the lack of knowledge and competencies, which is also a result of some spontaneous analysis revealed by I8: "*We first try to analyze it in our group – if there is a need to include someone because I know that he or she is, for example, a specialist in a specific database that we want to use, then we include such a person.*" It suggests that strategic awareness is blended in that process, as reflected by the ability to admit that the owners' managerial competencies may not be sufficient. For instance, as I6 confirmed: "*I am not an alpha and omega. I listen to dressmakers [...] they also know various things better than I do.*"

On the other hand, the selection process is not as straightforward as it may seem. Some difficulties may arise in shaping the relations by defining the boundaries between power and influence. Surprisingly, despite the positive attitude toward openness, we observed some exclusion of young and inexperienced workers. It was admitted by the advertising agency owner (I4): "*In our studio, we do not include the youngest people as [...] they have all the answers, and, most often, they authoritatively express themselves about how we should run this company.*" Therefore, it seems that some stereotypical thinking also occurs. All these challenges, in turn, create other challenges related to moderating and facilitating the process. As pointed out by our informants, searching for appropriate tools and solutions would reduce the negative aspects of inclusion. For example, I1 mentioned the actions undertaken by their company: "*We developed an interesting design process [...] [branding sprint] – and it was our process that we developed together*."

Consequently, time reduction and increased inclusion were observed. Among the process-related challenges outlined in the transparency area, we confirmed the necessity of dealing with differences in transparency expectations. The need to differentiate transparency standards was also mentioned: "*And now when somebody opposes and says that his expectations are not fulfilled, because it used to be like that, and now it is different, then I have to consider it individually as well*" (I2). Sometimes, the ability to moderate dialogue and enhance responsiveness is required in order to reduce unproductive discussions and the feeling that "*such attempts usually end up in a way that at some point they simply begin to get chatty and this is a waste of time*" (I7). Our research did not confirm the category of challenges that reduce unnecessary bureaucracy.

4.3 Structure-related challenges

The need to change the hierarchical structures within organizations was investigated among the structure-related challenges accompanying inclusion. Based on our interviews, we were unable to confirm this challenge. None of our informants indicated activities that could be linked to changes in the hierarchical structures. Another structure-related challenge is the dilemma of strategy approval. Our interviews revealed that the larger the company, the more difficult it is to maintain the democratic process of strategy acceptance, which is why informants commented on the need to make decisions in smaller groups: "*When there are more people in the company, unfortunately, you need a decision-making person plus possibly two or three*" (I4). In the same vein, the owner of the computer/video games company pointed out that smaller companies find it easier to achieve a more democratic approval of the strategy: "*With a smaller company, it is definitely easier to achieve [OS]*" (I8). Given the structure-related challenges accompanying transparency, there is a need to make changes to the organizational structure. One of these changes involves enriching the organizational structure with people who have an autonomous sense of what should be disclosed. As the owner of a design company elaborated: "*We don't want to have to hire a person, some project manager, who will just have to have their hand held by us, and to be led by us through life, right? We want to work with people, employ people who don't need this handholding so that they can work directly with clients*" (I1). Our interviewees also mentioned that a diversified, large team makes transparency difficult and hinders the understanding of the strategy.

The next challenge relating to organizational structure and transparency concerns dealing with more significant exposure to regulatory influence. Our informants confirmed that an organization is forced to be transparent when public funds are used or when a public stakeholder is involved in the organization's processes. As pointed out by I5: "*Transparency is crucial because, as an NGO, we have to show that these public funds simply work*."

4.4 Culture-related challenges

Our literature review revealed that OS faces several challenges relating to organizational culture. One of them was the need to create a sense of organizational trustworthiness, which was challenging in terms of transparency. One of the informants paid attention to the absence of double standards as essential to building sincere relations and an organizational culture based on trust: "*Because there is no such double communication, that we are talking about something, and still there are various unprocessed topics, information, suspicions, gossips, slander, etc*." (I3). It suggests that true transparency requires an organizational culture where formal discussions are combined with informal communication and both are coherent.

Concerning the necessity of enhancing individual actors' commitment, our interviews confirmed the role of a creative leader: "*Our director makes sure that everyone can have their say, even if they have a different opinion from him*" (I2). At the same time, internal motivation seems crucial for enhancing commitment. As one informant stated: "*The creative industry, especially the video game industry, is specific in the sense that enthusiasts often work in it. These people got into this industry not because of a recruitment ad or because they live nearby. Still, because they want to work particularly in the video game industry, [...] they just want to contribute something to the company, it is like their internal motivation [...], their passion creates this contribution*" (I7). However, such internal motivation is difficult to create and control: "*What is missing in many companies is such employee involvement [...], not only coming to work for eight hours, then closing the door and turning the head off, and being like a little robot that only carries out commands [¼] it is a huge challenge to create such commitment*" (I8). It suggests that internal motivation may foster the commitment of individual actors.

Surprisingly, there was support for a culture based on the superiority of older and more experienced employees. One of our informants stated: "*In our studio, we do not include the youngest people [...] because all attempts have failed*" (I4). It contradicts the view that creativity is associated with youth.

4.5 New categories of OS challenges

In addition to all the challenges identified and categorized according to our research model derived from the literature, we were also able to identify some additional issues mentioned by our informants. Those themes include feelings, beliefs, and fears that may accompany the process of opening up the strategizing process. Surprisingly, we noticed the negative feelings our informants expressed when talking about the possibilities of performing OS. Our interviews revealed two contradictory attitudes: on the one hand, concern, fear, and anxiety when relating to OS performance, and, on the other, mental readiness for transparent communication. One of the managers felt worried about being transparent with their employees. First, he was fearful of employees questioning the strategy content, including the pricing strategy, which was not revealed to employees because he was worried that it might not be understood in the broader context. But there were also contradictory opinions about the transparency of financial issues: "*I think that transparency [...] also brings some sense of justice in the employer-employee relationship. [...] I also think it generates a more useful situation; it builds better social capital in such a company*" (I3).

There were also fears about the employees' reaction to the disclosure of strategic failures: "*We do not internally share ideas for company development. I mean, sometimes we do, but we don't share if there are failures*" (I4). Our interviews also revealed a fear of disagreements that could lead to differing points of view and potential conflicts: "*Among the disadvantages, it may turn out that where there are two voices, there are three opinions, and then some problem arises*" (I5). It suggests that various opinions are perceived as a problem rather than a potential benefit: "*If too many people know everything about that issue, then, as I said before, there will certainly be conflicts*" (I4). One of the informants also mentioned that the conflict might lead to a drop in authority. Such findings suggest that various opinions and points of view are not as welcome in the CI as might be assumed.

As the additional issues mentioned by our informants are linked to thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and may be characterized as temporal and subjective, we can describe them as climate-related factors. It differs from the culture, which refers to an evolved context (within which a situation may be embedded) [Ehrhart and Schneider, 2016].

5 Discussion and conclusions

In our research, we aimed to explore the crucial challenges to comprehensive integration and implementation of the OS concept. We have investigated CI as they represent specific activities where either external or internal relationships are crucial for driving creativity, and such broad embedment is reflected in the strategizing process [Montanari et al., 2021].

Regarding the inclusion challenges, we have observed that the selection process of actors is mainly limited by constraints involving people from different levels of the organizational structure, rooted in problems with the ability to identify the required competencies. The dilemma reflects whether the selection process should be spontaneous and smooth or planned and structured. We also notices the challenges in moderating/facilitating the process. Another difficulty observed in our study pertained to shaping the relations (power and influence), which considered the exclusion of young and inexperienced workers (stereotypical thinking). Our findings align with the challenges observed by Vaara et al. [2019], who pointed out the risk of limiting participation that can aggravate organizational inequality. Another challenge that emerged in our data was the difficulty with defining the boundaries between consulting and deciding, accompanied by the gradation of inclusion depending on the degree of trust. This interference can be depicted as a continuum that begins with the organization's desire to obtain information and ideas from stakeholders and ends with stakeholders' participation in the strategic decisions and supports the finding outlined by Tavella [2020] and Mack and Szulanski [2017] as well as Pittz and Adler [2016].

Among the transparency challenges, based on our study, we may mention the necessity of possessing the ability to identify stakeholders' expectations regarding the amount and level of information disclosed, which may result in a growing need to differentiate the transparency standard. Based on that, we extend the

approach proposed by Yakis-Douglas et al. [2017], who distinguished between "mandatory" and "voluntary" transparency. Our findings revealed that there are a lot of different fears accompanying transparency that could be clustered into two groups. One of them covers the scope of data – such as fear of malicious use of information, risk of information leakage, the threat of sabotage in case of financial disclosure, or the fear of theft of an idea. In the second group, we identified the factors more related to employees' reactions, like the fear of employees' questioning the strategy content, fear of their response to a disclosure of strategic failures, and inadequate scope or timing of information disclosure. Therefore, we have deepened the initial observations provided by Baptista et al. [2017], and Hautz et al. [2017], who highlighted the gradations in transparency in terms of the extent of access and the scope of topics permitted.

5.1 Theoretical contribution

The main theoretical insights resulting from our studies are threefold. First, our findings show that the investigated companies operating in the CI are not as open as we assumed based on suggestions by Chesbrough and Appleyard [2007] that open initiatives often emerge in creative communities.

Second, our study confirms all the main OS-related challenges identified in the literature: strategy, structure, process, and culture but in a new context. Previous studies on OS-related challenges have not focused on CI, which is why our findings are context-specific, and we follow the suggestions of scholars to shift from context-excluded research to context-embedded research [Tsui, 2007; Michailova, 2011] and to investigate the OS phenomenon in various industrial settings [Hautz et al., 2017]. Despite the specific features of the CI, the investigated companies were not immune to the struggles and challenges that may result from such a strategy. On the contrary, these companies found OS challenging and demanding.

Third, our research has also yielded some new insights into this field. In our interviews, we observed a recurring pattern of challenges relating to organizational climate. This category was not present in previous studies on OS. Based on our data, we suggest that the company's decision to open up the strategizing process requires a specific organizational climate, which we call an "open climate." Based on our findings and previous studies in the fields of organizational climate [Patterson et al., 2005; Rožman and Štrukelj, 2020] and creative climate [Ekvall, 1996; Amabile, 1997], we suggest this category is rooted in the concepts mentioned above, albeit with a more outward orientation, which is necessary for including external stakeholders and being transparent to them. Based on our findings, we suggest that an open climate concept should be explored further in other industries' contexts, and if the challenges we identified find confirmation in different industries, it should be considered as a part of the explanation of the OS phenomenon. Previous studies in this field have not included this concept. The findings from our study revealed new gaps in the literature that have not been previously exposed and adequately described. Surprisingly, based on our understanding of an open climate, our data indicated that such a climate was lacking in the investigated companies. Our informants reported many anxieties and fears when relating to an OS, which we interpret as a low level of open climate. Such identity and security challenges have already been discussed in the context of hierarchical relations and the episodic involvement of lower level employees [Mantere and Whittington, 2021]. This might be why these informants reported that they had faced a limited range of challenges in categories such as the strategy, structure, or processes involved in opening up the strategy. We believe that creating an open climate might simultaneously be the first step and the first challenge in opening up the strategy. Only when such a climate exists might further challenges relating to strategy, structure, process, or organizational culture be fully revealed.

5.2 Practical implications

The practical implications we can mention are threefold.

First, we suggest that CEOs of companies operating in the CI should, when considering OS, be aware of several challenges that such a strategy might pose and which sometimes seem invisible initially. Identifying the organizational climate within the organization, particularly the signs of an open climate, might be the first step in opening up the strategizing process.

The second implication of our research relates to the finding that the ownership structure might influence strategy approval. Our interviews revealed that a single decision-maker is more willing than a group of decision-makers to allow others to participate in the decision-making process. Therefore, companies with a group of decision-makers that decide to open up a strategy-making process should be particularly sensitive to the inclusion of other stakeholders. Without involving a wider group of actors in the decision-making process, there is a risk that that team will dominate a company with a small group of decision-makers.

The final managerial implication relates to the challenge of including debates and different opinions in OS. Managers should consider how to encourage opinion-sharing respectfully and productively. It may require applying or creating new tools or techniques of moderation that have not previously been used in the company.

5.3 Limitations and future research

The findings in this paper have several limitations.

Our study was based on a possible sample variation by selecting one manager from each of the eight CIs. Still, more representatives of each industry might bring new insights and allow better data saturation.

Another limitation relates to context. Our study was conducted among Polish companies, which might impact the results. Poland has a relatively low level of trust toward others: only 12% of Poles believe that most people can be trusted [Czapiński and Panek, 2014]. This result may also be translated to Polish managers' attitudes toward opening up the strategizing process. As this process is based mainly on a willingness to develop and perform strategies, it requires high levels of trust. It would be interesting to investigate companies in other countries to provide more context-specific insights. A cross-national study could reveal any cultural differences relating to a willingness to open up the strategizing process, and it would enable checking whether the results are contextual.

This research has raised many questions requiring further investigation. More research is needed to better understand OS-related contextual issues, with the industry context being one of them. Future studies could explore other industries to identify benchmarks when a full OS implementation is possible.

Also, the size of a company seems to be a factor relevant to an OS. We investigated mainly small companies, whose view was that it is easier for large organizations to open. However, further investigation and comparative studies are needed to resolve this issue. Moreover, our informants represented industries embedded in very different types of ecosystems. The ecosystem's role in creating open possibilities while simultaneously setting practices and culture for the focal organizations seems theoretically critical. As it seems to differ, exploring that interface will likely yield some essential theoretical insights.

Moreover, future research could also investigate previous managerial experience with more open organizational practices to reveal their cognitive and behavioral reactions.

Finally, if the debate on an open climate and its relation to OS is to be moved forward, a better understanding of an open climate needs to be developed. Future studies that focus on and explore an open climate could help to elaborate a more accurate conceptualization of this term.

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Appendix 1: Research scenario

Our conversation will be about the creative industries (CI). Are you familiar with such a term? How do you understand it?

1. What distinguishes CI from other industries?
2. Would you classify the industry in which your organization operates as a creative industry? If yes, why? If no, why not?

We talked about how you understand the concept of CI and what you think distinguishes CI from other industries. I will now give you a definition of CI so we can have a shared perspective of the conversation when the following issues are raised.

According to the literature, the definition of CI is as follows: it is a type of economic activity that concerns the creation or use of information or knowledge in the primary production process. The result of such activity is usually protected by intellectual property rights and is utilitarian (rather than symbolic) in nature, with high commercialization potential. CI include advertising, architecture, design, fashion, performing arts, photography, software, and video game production.

3. Have you ever heard the term open strategy? How do you understand it?
4. What characteristics (dimensions), in your opinion, describe open strategy? What does it mean that a strategy has an open character?

I will now define open strategy, so we have a common perspective: Open strategy means making strategic decisions at all levels of the organizational structure with input from internal and external stakeholders.

Open strategy researchers believe that this strategy is characterized by transparency and inclusiveness. What is your understanding of these concepts?

5. How do you understand the transparency of the strategy?
6. How do you understand the inclusiveness of the strategy?

In the definitions adopted, transparency and inclusiveness are considered in the following contexts: Transparency refers to the visibility of an organization's strategy and, in particular, the amount and type of information disclosed.

Inclusiveness refers to the extent to which the organization accepts the participation of various stakeholders in the strategic decision-making process.

7. What could be the effects of transparency on the company?
8. What could be the effects of inclusiveness in strategic decision-making?
9. What benefits can an organization gain by applying transparency to strategy?
10. What benefits can an organization gain by applying inclusiveness to strategic decision-making?
11. What disadvantages can an organization suffer by applying transparency to strategy?
12. What disadvantages can an organization suffer by applying inclusiveness in strategic decision-making?
13. How do you evaluate the transparency of strategy in your organization?
14. How do you evaluate inclusiveness in your strategic decision-making process?
15. What impacts the transparency of strategy in your company?
16. What impacts inclusiveness in strategic decision-making in your company?
17. How is transparency built in your enterprise?
18. How is inclusiveness in decision-making built in your enterprise?
19. Who do you involve in strategic decision-making? What strategy information do you disclose? To whom?

There are two approaches to resources (knowledge, employees, technology, creativity, relational capital) – you can either share them or protect them.

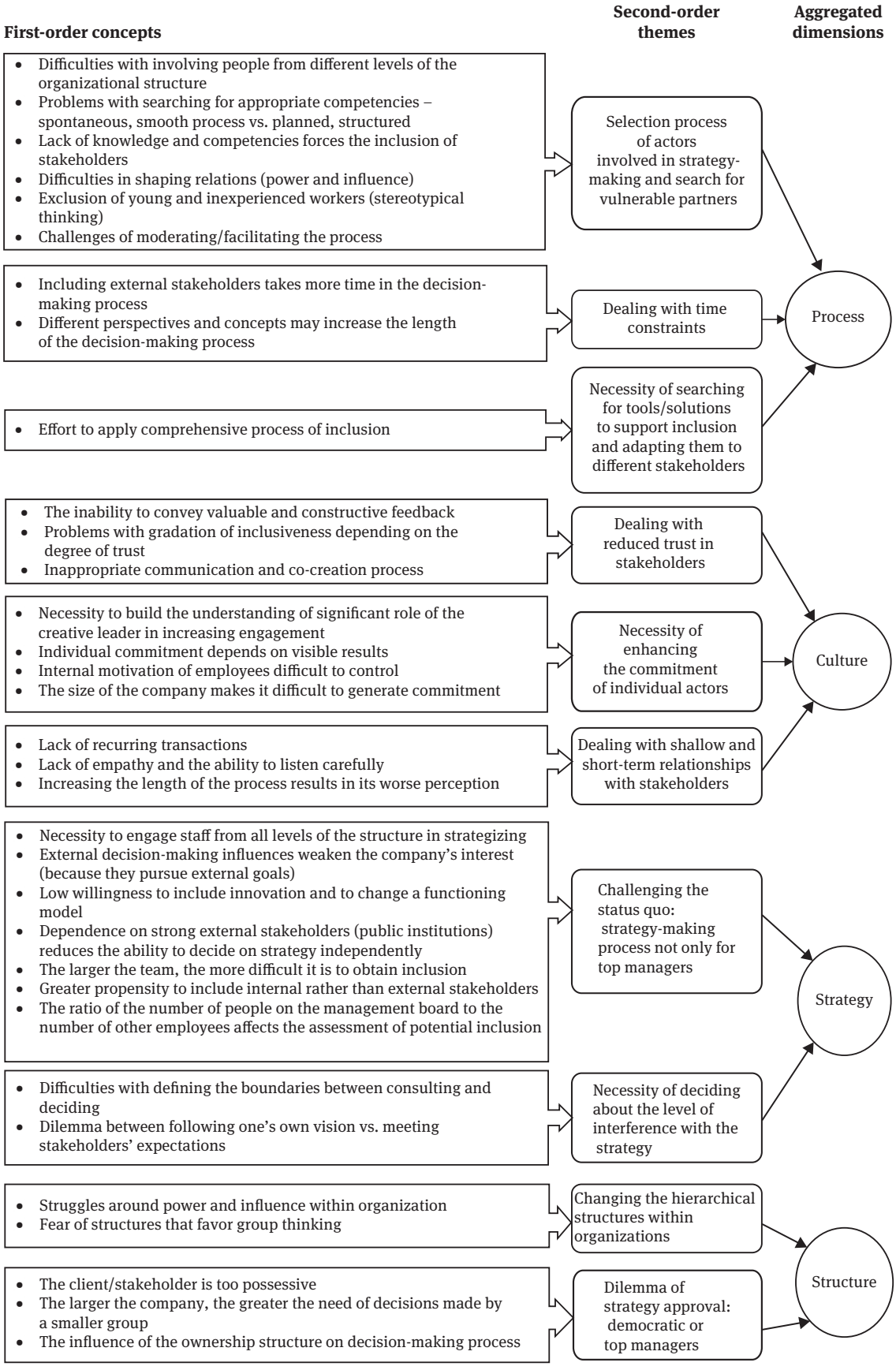
20. What resources (own or shared) do you rely on?
21. To what extent do you share resources (e.g., knowledge, creativity, relational capital, employees)?
22. How do you assess the conditions enhancing the involvement in strategic decision-making of various actors in your company?

We started our conversation with the CI.

23. How do the specifics of the CI relate to open strategy?
24. Who in your industry sets the level of strategy openness?

These are all the questions we wanted to ask. In the context of the topic of our conversation (open strategy vs. CI), is there anything else you would like to add? Something you think is essential that we didn't ask?

Appendix 2: Data structure (coding procedure) – inclusion



Appendix 3: Data structure (coding procedure) – inclusion

