Enacting the IS Strategy: Transforming a Strategic Actor Vision into Praxis

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ABSTRACT

In the education sector, online knowledge sharing and online social learning are fundamental in the new education landscape. But some years ago, in some prestigious education institutions, talking about online education and online communities was like a taboo. The focus of this research study is an academic and international institution, where a visionary ahead of his time saw the importance of online social networks before the boom they experienced. With this idea in mind, he proposed to create an online knowledge community platform (OKCP). We describe the OKCP different development stages paying special attention to the most important events that shaped and motivated the (re)creation of this environment. In this sense, the main contribution of this study is to make us reflect on how the strategy-as-practice approach is useful for a better understanding of the evolutionary process of an IT-based innovation product (OKCP), describing how the different streams of strategies and praxes (re)shape the intrinsic characteristics of the product, transforming it gradually into what actors want it to be.

Keywords: Business school, online knowledge community platform, strategy-as-practice, strategic actor vision, praxis

INTRODUCTION

Any innovative project begins with someone who has a vision, who thinks different to others and who faces risks when others do not. However, it is often difficult to materialize or carry into practice this vision, translating it into actions that can be identified and carried out by different people within the organization. This situation could be explained because the strategy field has generally been seen at the macro level, neglecting human actors and their actions in most strategy theories (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009). These authors suggest that there is little room in mainstream strategy research for emotions, motivations and actions that shape strategy. In this sense, strategy-as-practice (s-as-p) research stream has taken this concern seriously, bringing human actors and their actions and interactions to the center stage of strategy research (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009), investigating the essential aspects of strategy formation from the perspective of activities undertaken by people (Carter et al., 2008).

The focus of this study is an academic and international institution, which is dedicated to educating business leaders through programs based on a set of core values: global focus, entrepreneurial spirit and humanistic approach. Nowadays, academic institutions have realized the power of online social networks to maintain and promote a more fluid communication between teachers, students and alumni, overcoming physical barriers of the classroom; but in 2005 only few of them participated in such challenging projects. Cash Jr. et al. (2008) suggest that organizations should embrace Web 2.0 tools for flexible communication and collaboration. They argued that these tools enable people to collect, share, and productively use more sources and kinds of information. Specifically, business

schools become the ideal environment for these initiatives because they have interests not only in keeping their stakeholders updated in academic or business issues but also in increasing their network of contacts, to improve the likelihood of getting a better job, acquiring new clients or discovering possible business partners.

In this context, a visionary ahead of his time saw the importance of online social networks before the boom they experienced, foreseeing to some extent the phenomenon that now all of us are experiencing by using Web 2.0 tools in our daily lives. With this idea in mind, he proposed to create an online knowledge community platform (OKCP), which at first should serve to those who were carrying out an online program because according to his argument, these people may easily learn of using this type of environments. After convincing many people in the executive committee, this institution began to build the OKCP that emerges to be the meeting point where students, alumni, professors and professionals satisfy their goals and develop their professional careers, depending on their personal and professional interests and characteristics. For confidentiality reasons and for do not disclose the name of the institution where the study was carried out, in the following paragraphs we identify this platform as OKCP.

The years have passed and OKCP's evolution has been very fast and with many changes. Neither in the most optimistic scenario of the visionary's dream, he would have imagined the growth that these technologies would come to have, nor the changes that any organization would have to overcome for the adoption and use of these kinds of initiatives. In this sense, we describe the different stages of OKCP paying special attention to the most important events that shape and motivate the (re)creation of this environment as well as the IS strategy behind the decisions adopted by strategic actors to face the challenges that arose during the implementation process of OKCP, treating the IS strategy as an important social practice (Whittington, 2004); and at the same time, paying attention to the concept of praxis, which was defined by Jarzabkowski et al. (2007) as the nexus that interconnects everyday actions of individuals and groups with the wider context in which those actions are located and to which they contribute.

The research case is structured in the following way: first, we do a review of the evolutionary process of OKCP based on interviews to the most important participants and documents used to promote this initiative; then, we show the findings paying special attention to the strategy and actions made by participants in each particular stage to identify how they characterize OKCP, and how it evolves over time; finally, we analyze and discuss the findings using Institutional Theory as a theoretical underpinning.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We have followed a bottom up approach using a case study, beginning with individual stakeholders' perceptions and actions to build a stakeholder interpretation of an IT-based innovation (OKCP), moving toward the general in an effort to develop a richer, more finely grained perspective on how stakeholders filter certain specific knowledge based on the socio-cultural environment in which they are embedded, influencing the way in which they strategize IS. Through this process, we have had the opportunity to build theory and thereby contribute to the emergent field of strategy as practice in the context of an implementation, adoption and use of an Information System (IS).

For the data collection process, we have combined semi-structured interviews to key participants with a variety of written material and documentation in order to understand the political, institutional and individual decisions that were taken, as well as the public discourse about the IT-based innovation project. This material included project plans, organization charts, and information from Websites on the Internet. In summary, data were collected covering approximately seven years of the OKCP project (2005 through 2011). Details of the roles of people interviewed can be found in Table 1.

Table 1 – Detail of in-depth Interviews

Organization	Role in the Project	Interviews
Academic Institution	Project Manager	3
	Information System Director	1
	Blog Responsible and/or Community Leader	4
TOTAL		8

CASE STUDY FINDINGS

The origin

The original idea came from a visionary, who was in the executive committee during 2005. In this year, the social networking philosophy was not widespread like now and he saw a practical application to this approach. At the same time, the academic institution started to promote an innovative online program, and this person had the vision to combine these two scenarios to propose the development of an online knowledge community platform (OKCP).

> Interview 6: "Students did not ask the communities because no one was thinking about that; hence, it was clearly the execution of an idea of [the visionary]"

Summarizing the visionary's vision, he saw that the online education had to have a complement, a kind of platform that supports the formation process. The idea was to support those people who were going to do a master online, supported with different resources (e.g., creating knowledge communities). For instance, if it was created a knowledge community of marketing, all those in the online program with marketing skills and familiar of using online tools, they are going to join this community and will come to talk and discuss marketing issues. In words of two of the interviewees:

> Interview 2: "… the original idea considered the community only for students in … the online master's degrees, that is, the whole issue of e-Learning…"

> Interview 3: "… it was born as an idea that was to promote online communities to attract more people as students and also to promote an online master …"

The project was quite innovative at that time, and for that reason it was done outside other projects that were being made at the academic institution. Other characteristic was that there was no budget and very limited resources. In this sense, it was something that was thought by a visionary, and it can or cannot be a success.

> *Interview 3: "… the good thing about this project was that actually inside the academic institution we have introduced some solution or some technology that until then had not been raised and one of the challenges was to take it forward without having skilled resources to do it…"*

> *Interview 4: "… in the early stages, we had no control as such, but there were definitions of strategies and processes, we had control meetings, and we were creating a knowledge base which then we would start to implement…"*

During 2005 the academic institution had been working to get the OKCP ready. This platform enabled participants to do a lot of work and develop activities within the various Communities in which participants can be involved as Alumni, Faculty or Contributors, allowing them (as "members") to discuss and share knowledge and interests. Participants may access and use discussion forums, store document files, review links of interest, read blog articles and opinions, or participate in virtual meeting rooms where time and distance were no longer obstacles to make the most of their lifelong learning experience.

In terms of perception of the IT-based innovation product (OKCP), there were two clearly opposing perceptions at the beginning and with which project managers had to fight to align them. On one hand, students considered OKCP as an opportunity to improve their network, to be notorious in their respective communities, to be updated on topics that interest them. On the other hand, teachers were not convinced of the benefits of social networking, even some thought that it was a fad, and they were not fully convinced to participate:

> *Interview 4: "I think that they perceived [OKCP] as something added, as an added value that allowed them to do networking, allowed them to attain documentation, do things that were part of their objectives"*

> *Interview 2: "… then, there have been teachers that believed in the idea and other teachers who did not want to know anything, the issue of social networking and virtual communities was a fad and then did not want to spend their time on that"*

Another interesting point to note is that from the beginning there was a debate about whether OKCP should only have a public area, a private one or both of them; which had much to do with the strategy that academic institution wanted to propose for promoting the IT-based innovation. Within each of these areas, although they had been organized in divisions according to the academic areas within this institution, the interaction among them was almost nonexistent:

> *Interview 1: "Note that here the structure is very important … We had on one hand the public environment (blogs) and the private environment (which is what we understand as a community) …"*

> *Interview 1: "… at the beginning, communities were like silos, they did not have any interaction"*

> *Interview 5: "... first there was a discussion ... whether it was better to have a blog or have a community closed to alumni, closed to members of the Business School ... I discard from the outset the communities, I did something reluctantly in them, knowing that it had no future, no interest for me, I said it very clear from the beginning ... from the first moment I wanted something open ... somewhat open to anyone who could discuss the issues that were there"*

In this phase, participants required authorization to access to OKCP, which was granted based on their level of interest in contributing to the knowledge, discussions and activities developed by the members of each group. Keep in mind that once participants join any of the Communities within OKCP, they shall have a number of resources to build and maintain their professional network. Being part of a process means their participation and contributions are the key element to strengthen their knowledge and that of the other members. In this sense, participants can choose communities they wish to join to personalize their options.

For ensuring the quality of contributions within each community, the idea was to appoint a leader, which was a faculty member of the academic institution, someone very knowledgeable in the topics of interest in each specific community; so, the leaders were key participants within it because after they shared its philosophy, they became the evangelist of their community. With this goal in mind, were organized a series of talks with teachers and other people interested within this institution, but the problem was that at that time, the topic of social networking was very theoretical and people did not see practical applications for this environment.

> *Interview 5: "We started talking if I wanted to create a blog, I usually collaborate with the media, then I had a lot of material, and it seemed a good idea, so we started the blog; neither with much nor with little hope, we just started…"*

This phase had a short duration because the visionary died in spring 2006.

Time of uncertainty

The second phase started with the visionary's death. He died unexpectedly in 2006 and in this period of uncertainty the intention of people in the project was to reinforce the creation of shared knowledge base, because the possibilities for building new relationships among individuals and communities were greater online. Therefore, the academic institution saw that it was easy to add value by combining efforts within a particular area of knowledge, or area of interest. When participants combine data, knowledge, know-how developed during master's programs, and experience built in participants' workplaces, it is possible to enrich each individual intellectual capital.

> *Interview 2: "... when the visionary died, we had a transitional period ..."*

This phase was characterized by having a strategy with a focus more on filling communities and less on developing them in terms of technological development. In addition, this project was not yet fully integrated in the spirit of the academic institution and this situation caused problems (e.g., implementation problems, request problems). One of the explanations was that, at this phase, there were no initiatives to involve participants and gain their commitment, especially because community leaders were chosen arbitrarily; hence, OKCP failed to engage key users in the project. Furthermore, the project represented very

challenging goals that in most of the cases people were not capable of delivering on time because it was extra work with any extra compensation.

> Interview 4: "… there were problems in implementations, there were problems in the requests because they were very demanding, and sometimes we could not deliver them within the defined period…"

Another problem was because of the pressure in deadlines. This situation caused that the initial version of OKCP was very difficult to use, because participants had to ask permission whenever they wanted access to each community; and after an evaluation, it was decided if people were worthy to belong to that community or not, so the process lasted 2 or 3 days, becoming a little bureaucratic. The same happened if someone wanted to get out of a community and belong to another one, the process was to send an email and wait for the approval. This procedure works well with small groups but in huge amount of people it was unviable. Finally, it is worthy to know that communities were like silos where they did not have any kind of interaction. It may be because there were no incentives for cross-participation.

As in the previous phase, this period was also short, and then the project was assigned to a committee to define the next steps and deal with the stated problems.

Transition to a new structure

In this phase, it was decided to establish a committee to decide the future of OKCP. The committee assessed the project results, what part has worked and what part has not worked well, to prepare a complete analysis of the status quo and its possibilities to continue as well as paths for further developments.

> Interview 2: "… after [the transitional period] we set up a committee for [OKCP project] …"

After the establishment of the committee, its members find between 15 and 20 communities created, but only two with activities, the others were empty with no people inside. There were 750 users registered, but only between 10 and 20 were really active participants. In this sense, despite some key users expressed their commitment with the project to be involved in the development process, they were not aware of the extra time that they need to participate in this environment. Therefore, one of the main problems was the content; most of people agreed that the project was wonderful and beautiful, but in their daily activities they realized that writing a blog, or participate in an online community is quite time demanding.

> Interview 3: "… the involvement of insiders, it means the content, providing the value that you want to offer to the community was the hardest to obtain over a period of time"

> Interview 3: "… then there was a kind of critical part in the project that was the end user involvement…"

A critical aspect for the development and implementation of a concept is the creation of a brand. The original version of OKCP was linked to an online master program; hence, when the committee decided to change the original goals of this project, it was necessary to decouple OKCP to that program because the idea of the visionary was initially to create a

community of knowledge closely linked to this master. Finally, the committee decided to create a new department in charge of OKCP with the goal of being the virtual community of the academic institution as a whole: for current students and alumni, faculty members, external partners, and local staff.

> *Interview 4: "… from there we create a brand, we create a graphic style, a style of colors, a series of designs that would use on a recurring basis because we realized it was very important to have a brand, so we were clearly identified as a new option inside the academic institution"*

In this period, OKCP's department worked with the support of information systems department, who provided OKCP with technological resources and servers for the project. The responsibilities were divided in three: one person was responsible for development, other had to deal with the generation of content and the last one had to create new strategies and business opportunities. They began to work directly with all the functional areas at the academic institution, because this initiative started slowly to gain importance in the organization; hence, people began to trust in the project and all the departments began to participate more actively in it.

> *Interview 1: "… when incorporated one person to be responsible of the development, then we have certain voice in the development process to incorporate all the changes that asks the user"*

> *Interview 1: "at one point we were separated from information systems' department, and were assigned our own resources, and we were who controlled the project…"*

> *Interview 2: "… a department … was created with a budget assigned and a series of technological resources to start implementing [OKCP] …"*

> *Interview 3: "communities were moved as a business unit to another department"*

Meanwhile, OKCP had included various services that provide value to users: a job search module, where members can see the offers managed by Careers Center, and also to publish their own offerings; a repository for all the online conferences taking place at the academic institution; among others. The rationale for the inclusion of these services was to increase the loyalty of participants and to attempt that they enter to OKCP every day upon arrival in the morning to their office. In this sense, this initiative tried to cover the demands of all those involved in master programs, not only students and alumni but also faculty members, who have been expressing their suggestions and opinions over time. In addition, OKCP members can find discussion forums, a leading social network, a repository of all documentation from the academic institution, and so on; but it is not limited to just that. The main goal was that OKCP wanted to be a point of reference enabling the access to all the services that the academic institution can offer to its members.

> *Interview 2: "... gradually, [OKCP] became a kind of portal that consolidates services, many of them were then derived to the respective area, e.g. if you click on a job offer, you will be redirected to the careers center page, avoiding extra logins ... the idea was to have a single entry point where you'll find everything, so it was like we sold [OKCP]"*

The main idea of this stage was to setup the environment for its future requirements, organizing it in such a way that people perceive a shift in the original strategy. This change was consolidated in the next stage.

Wonder years

The strategy to improve the participation within OKCP communities was to drop all the empty ones. It was bad in terms of image to have communities with no participants; hence, the main requirement for opening a community was to have someone responsible for it. It is important to differentiate that in the project there were not only a public environment (blogs) but also a private one (communities). Blogs were useful for people exposure, and to reach indirect benefits because contributors could be perceived as internet gurus, positioning their personal brand with the academic institution behind, supporting and legitimizing their participation due to its worldwide recognition. This new strategy, based on "vanity management", tried to convince people that do not like to have extra work for free; the new argument to engage them was that they will receive indirect benefits in terms of recognition and improvement of their reputation.

> *Interview 1: "… if you do it right in the blogs, the benefits will be indirect because you will have a positioning in Internet as a guru and with the [academic institution] behind, supporting you…"*

> *Interview 4: "…there was a very interesting model based on the "vanity management", where people can collaborate for free in the construction and the creation of value and knowledge"*

> *Interview 4: "In terms of vanity management, for example, teachers were paid relatively low for their participation because they earned in professional development, visibility, prestige…"*

In addition, there was a very friendly approach to convince some faculty members; it consists of inviting prospective participants to eat and drink something, using the meeting to talk about the project and the possibilities for participation and involvement, explaining them how they can help or be helped by OKCP; hence, it is a philosophical change, instead of involving people arbitrarily, it is important to show what OKCP could do for participants, it was another approach that got much more support. After convince some faculty members, who increased dramatically their participation, other people have started to see their results, and it was a way to play with the vanity of people that wanted the same opportunity like a professor who was having 1000 visitors by day on his blog; hence, vanity management was like a hook to attract more contributors.

> *Interview 1: "… now we lead this project and we will sit with you and we will explain it and in which you can help us, or maybe in which we can help you, is a matter of philosophy … we have it and we think it would be useful for you and we are offering it to you, is another approach"*

> *Interview 2: "The hook was to motivate teachers, as well as support from the top of the academic direction"*

In this phase, OKCP was characterized by three goals:

- The public area of OKCP (i.e., blogs) should be treated as a showcase for the academic institution. Blogs could be a great point of contact with potential customers, which is called "try before buy". It means that if OKCP can generate a rich content followed by thousands of people and spread within their social networks, people could be very interested in joining the academic institution. This point is valid because through blogs this institution has sold masters, indeed some blog leaders said that in the first year of their blogs people asked specifically through the blog to obtain more information about specific master programs and finally these individuals joined those programs.

- The second goal was putting the academic institution as a technological reference in the field of business education, namely be pioneers in the topic of social networks, social media, technology, and so on. In this sense, other business schools are more delayed in this technological race. This goal was aligned with the strategy of internationalization that the academic institution was doing at that time; and, as you can see, both ideas show synergies between them because the common objective is to become a leader in the sector of business education.

- The third goal was to create a meeting point, a sense of union between all the people belonging the academic institution; hence, it was decided who would be part of the community (i.e., current students, alumni, faculty members, staff), not allowing to enter external people except for some special guests. Therefore, the idea was to leverage on the identity of the academic institution to legitimize OKCP.

This period could be considered as the maximum splendor of OKCP, because in this phase the project obtained enough resources to renew all the systems and the blogs, launch new templates, integrate new designs, etc. Within this period, the new OKCP's department began to set annual goals, highly oriented to the number of people within each community as well as the rate of activity measured in terms of real participation (i.e., not only is important to enter in OKCP for reading something but also participate actively in the discussions or use other features in this environment). The average rate of activity at OKCP was 13%, it means that despite that there were few people; they were generating higher levels of interaction among them.

The monitoring of the activity within each community was very important because if some community was a little bit lazy the OKCP team tried to involve more faculty members in their specific academic area in order to boost the debate. In this sense, it was noteworthy that OKCP's department collaborated tightly with each community in the elaboration of strategies, defining whether students have to work within it or not, whether the participation in this environment will be part of the course of some teachers or not, and so on. However, the traditional participation metrics proved to be useless for this project because they gave more emphasis on quantity rather than quality of participations. It was an opportunity to propose different performance metrics with focus in the social component of participation.

> Interview 2: "… if this community is a little bit lazy, we'll try to go for teachers of this particular area asking for help, we'll develop strategies considering whether students have to collaborate or not…"

The performance metrics were created trying to avoid the bubble "dot com"; for instance, issues like number of visits, millions of visitors, clicks and all these kinds of things were avoided. It was more interesting to use metrics that were specific for social media, namely a new metric for a new world. For example, the index of activity reflected the level of user activity on the OKCP; in other words, the people who wrote, valued or contribute with content in any way (i.e., active participants); also it was considered an active user who used different services (i.e., if in the same session participants go to documentation, see a video and then read the forums, but they had not generated any content, they are also considered active because they did different things in the OKCP). A passive user was the person who consumed only one thing each time at OKCP, this participation was considered very punctual because it did not contribute to anything.

> Interview 4: "[for communities] we were particularly interested in the rate of activity ... [it] reflected the level of user activity on the OKCP, meaning the people who wrote, assessed or contributed with content somehow"

> Interview 4: "[for blogs] between metrics were open threads, posts, new users, evolution of posts by community, total of visits, total number of visitors ... we wanted to know if we were generating such demand"

User involvement was the critical part of the project at this phase, but fortunately if the project needs content, there are other mechanisms to motivate people, encouraging their participation to support the community by using economic incentives. In this sense, there was an initiative to make contracts paying people to participate in the private area of OKCP (e.g., forums). It was thought especially for community leaders; hence, there were several contracts for key communities, which were more likely to be a success. These contracts defined minimum objectives; hence, when there was money as an incentive, if people did not reach the minimum objectives they do not receive the money, so at least the minimum goals were secured.

Then, the contract evolved to include some additional goals paying a variable amount of money if participants fulfill them, so if contributors wanted to receive additional money they had to do something more, cover an extra mile. After the incentives, people had different approaches, some contributors preferred communities and others blogs. Some people said: "I do not like the blog, I will focus on the community, which is where I get paid"; there are others that preferred the public area of OKCP (e.g., blogs), despite that they did not receive any additional payment. When some of the blogs suddenly started to take off, it is important recognize that they are not personal blogs, they belong the academic institution, reinforcing its brand as a leading academic institution.

> Interview 1: "… in principle we paid only for the forums, were people who said, here they pay me and over there not, then I focus only on that"

> Interview 1: "… eventually we developed a contract ... that was fixed to achieve things in forums and variable if you had other things ... for example, writing weekly in a blog, writing in English, participating in other communities that were not yours ..."

Another incentive was the creation of a scholarship for current students; hence, if they reached certain level of productivity at OKCP, they obtain a significant reduction in their

academic fees. At the end, there were not only the faculty members collaborating within OKCP, but also the fellows of the scholarship as well as the community itself; all of them could be considered the engine of OKCP because without their contribution this initiative could not succeed.

> Interview 2: "… such as it was growing … was an opportunity to … create a specific scholarship for [OKCP]"

In this evolutionary process, OKCP team members were concerned about the participants' impressions of using this environment; for that reason, they encouraged participants to provide feedback completing a satisfaction survey to be aware of possible key features for further developments. With this information, they intended to release a new portal, in the short term, with a new interface for communities and more users friendly, where OKCP users could find quickly and easily all the content generated by their communities of interest. Another project was to start the first community managed entirely by alumni who were healthcare industry, trying that participants presented their desired discussion topics and enhanced their relationships among them.

> Interview 5: "… my classes have benefited from the blog, the blog has benefited from my articles, and my articles have benefited from the blog…"

> Interview 5: "… at the end you do that because it produce you satisfaction and unfortunately I haven't all the time I would like for answering"

> Interview 6: "… it served me as an outlet for things I was doing and thinking and that not necessarily they had an immediate output"

OKCP wants to be a place of encounter and relationship that allows participants to continue their professional development. But do not forget that this is only a step and still have a long way to go. Many people think about what OKCP can offer and other social networks cannot. The answer lies in the profile of its members: current students, alumni, faculty, staff and external partners. In other words, the community is composed solely of a very high profile of executive and directors as well as faculty of great excellence, both academically and professionally. Therefore, OKCP can be considered a good complement to other social networks.

In the coming years, there is an opportunity to achieve a full integration with other social networks, where OKCP could play a key role as a portal integrator, without losing its identity of exclusivity and excellence. Meanwhile, each social network has its strengths and weaknesses; therefore, the academic institution tries to exploit the benefits of each of them, creating groups within the most important social networks like Facebook, LinkedIn or Xing.

> Interview 4: "we decided not to look like other networks, for example if we create a profile and gave it some interest and an internal messaging, but always trying not to supplant other networks, because we did not want and we were not competing with networks like LinkedIn and Facebook"

This phase ends with the creation of the General Direction of Alumni and Career (GDAC), which absorbs OKCP department.

New challenges

What happened after OKCP was created? The main issue was that this project crashed and cannibalized what was the alumni network, because both environments shared some features. However, the main difference was the different level of use of collaborative tools in both environments. While alumni platform was developed using the concept of Web 1.0, they use Internet as a unidirectional communication channel; OKCP offered to its participants a bidirectional communication channel where they not only receive valuable information but also they can contribute to the debate participating actively in the discussions using collaborative tools. The Solomonic decision was to maintain both environments, allowing that OKCP and alumni network evolve separately; the idea was that the winning concept be used to integrate both platforms into a single environment.

In 2009, there was a radical change because the establishment of the General Direction of Alumni and Career (GDAC). In principle, the original project was that GDAC had alumni, student office, and careers; but then, it was included OKCP too, because there were synergies among these areas. GDAC's Director set the goal of unifying or integrating the services offered to alumni and current students in the same umbrella, it means that websites were no longer oriented to departments but to create service-oriented features. This means that many of the services offered in different platforms began to be offered in a unique place. The same happened with events, careers, etc. In summary, OKCP has evolved to a more service-oriented environment, integrating other services within it to create a much larger OKCP bolstered by alumni features.

But the challenges facing OKCP have raised a reorganization of its structure to adapt it to changing times and to use the best features of other social networks to avoid reinvent the wheel, with the aim that OKCP evolves and becomes a place where participants can synchronize their information with other social networks, thus avoiding the duplication of information, and taking advantage of tools developed by third parties.

> Interview 4: "In fact what we wanted, or would have been ideal, was to integrate data from LinkedIn and Facebook on our network so that users do not have to enter it twice…"

In 2012, the OKCP will be reviewed, adapting it to current times; hence, it will be much easier to use and will tackle the problem of redundancy with other social networks like LinkedIn, Facebook, Xing, Flicker, YouTube, etc. If we have certain features in YouTube, Flicker, LinkedIn and so on; OKCP should take advantage of them, enabling participants to access other social networks and synchronizing the information in all of these environments, without losing the essence of having a private network at the academic institution.

> Interview 2: "… if we have YouTube, Flicker, LinkedIn; we going to take advantage of them and go to a point in common, we will do that people can access other networks out there…"

The review in 2012 could be considered a natural evaluation because at this point in time the project should be mature enough to identify the lessons learned and how this environment really works, taking special attention of the current needs of the participants based on the social changes that have occurred during the life of this project. The final goal is to make a really ad hoc OKCP to the needs of all participants (i.e., current students, alumni, faculty members, partners, collaborators, sponsors, etc.).

DISCUSSION

Key actors in organizations articulate views of strategy and have the power to implement that view (Fligstein, 1991). The visionary fits this description, because he not only was a visionary but also was part of the executive committee at the academic institution; hence, he had the power to lead his ideas into practice, convincing friends and colleagues to be involved in the project and using their feedback to refine the main features of the product. In this particular case, each stakeholder had an opinion about how IT-based innovation should be (e.g., public vs. private debate, opportunity vs. fad debate), and it was not possible to satisfy everyone; people in the project had to do what was possible with the few resources that they had at the beginning. Baptista et al. (2010) demonstrate how the institutionalization of emergent technologies occurs gradually; the technology evolved as people used it in new ways to accomplish their work practices, it was not static. However, some stakeholders did not believe in the benefits of Web 2.0 tools and thought it was a fad, so they were not motivated to participate.

The first phase was characterized by the refinement of the original idea, which was evolving through the different debates that we have described. Zilber (2002) proposed that to fully understand the complex and delicate process of institutionalization, analysts must consider actions together with meanings and acts of interpretation by organizational members. In this sense, Weick (1995) argued that all members within organizations are involved in the creation of common meanings and identities, trying to make sense the world around them. Therefore, all the members of an organization should become active participants in the process of refining, sustaining, or rejecting institutional meanings (Zilber, 2002). However, individual frames act not only as templates for problem solving but also as imprecise and conservative filters for new information (Davidson, 2002). The first phase was characterized by a widespread skepticism within the academic institution, as most of participants did not understand the Web 2.0 philosophy and the workload that would involve actively participate in such environments. Therefore, except for some enthusiasts, the majority of people began timidly and then practically stopped participating when they noticed the high level of work required to launch and dinamize communities and blogs for each area.

Analyzing the strategies that took place at this stage, we can say that this period was characterized by the identification of the main features of the desired product, in terms of that OKCP enables participants to discuss, share knowledge and interests among them. At the same time, this process facilitated the elaboration of the criteria for success that were taken into account for strategic decision making. At the end, a better understanding of the IT-based innovation (OKCP) is a pre-requisite for the alignment of the strategy adopted for this project with the whole business strategy, which can be summarized as the willingness of strengthening ties among alumni, students and professors. In Table 2 we can found the relationship between the activities in the different phases with the strategies adopted in each of them as well as the event that triggered the change to the next phase.

The second phase began with the visionary's death, leaving the project a bit adrift, and trying to follow the initial guidelines without a clear future in mind. Another important issue at this stage is that the commitment of participants was not sought; instead, responsibilities were delegated without any prior motivation to people involved in the project; and as most believed that this was a fad, they did not take seriously their active participation in the

project because they did not see its potential for the future. A political variant explanation is appropriate when there is disagreement about organizational goals and values among individuals; when uncertainty exists on what is required to produce the desired objectives; when resources are scarce; when decisions are important (Pfeffer, 1981). In the information systems context the political variant is the most appropriate analytical framework when individuals within an organization disagree about the nature of the problem that a system is proposed to solve, and when there is uncertainty about whether a particular proposed system will solve the problem (Markus, 1983). The solution to overcome the uncertainties and to deal with these different perspectives was the creation of a multidisciplinary committee, who took the decisions about the next steps to follow.

The strategy adopted in this phase was to filling communities instead of worry about their development. With this goal in mind, OKCP was not fully integrated in the spirit of the academic institution because the idea was not to engage people but to tell people what to do. This strategy failed to involve key people in the project because they were not motivated appropriately; ignoring the value that OKCP could have for them, especially in terms of improving their work experience.

The third phase was forged on the basis of establishing a committee to evaluate what had been done so far and analyze the possible project alternatives. As a result, it was defined a new structure in the organization with new goals, even changing the project scope to extend it not only to certain masters online, but also to the entire community belonging to the academic institution; decoupling the new project from the original one. Fiss and Zajac (2006) show that decoupling is more complicated than a binary choice, stating that it can involve multiple ways of presenting and justifying organizational actions. Therefore, an important decision was to bet on the creation of a brand, which was used to identify the changes in the project, distinguishing it from earlier stages and showing that now it had more independence and autonomy. From there, people within the institution began to believe in the project because they realized that there was a formal commitment from top management for taking the project forward.

The main strategy of this phase was to evaluate very well OKCP as is and how it would be. With this goal in mind, a complete reorganization was needed to give more autonomy to the project, not only in terms of budget, but also at the level of decision making. Thus, people in the committee delegated the leadership of the project creating a new department to set the project strategies and align them with the overall strategy of the academic institution. Another critical point detected was the lack of content in OKCP; hence, new strategies should be formulated to enhance participation of OKCP users, providing more and better contributions to this environment.

In the fourth phase, there was much more freedom to develop the product and convince more people to participate because the project was underway and was visible for everyone. Markus (1983) argued that new information systems could lead to a division of roles and responsibilities completely different to the existing ones, being perceived as vehicles for organizational change. Greenwood and Hinings (1996) suggested that there is a need to understand how new ideas become legitimated within the organization. They argued that in situations of a competitive commitment is evident that power dependencies determine which view prevails; but when groups that do not have enough power lead the change, it

would be interesting to know how they obtain enough power to promote the change, convincing others that changes are desirable. In this case, the main argument to involve people in the project was "Vanity Management", arguing that people will achieve greater visibility and recognition by using OKCP. This phase resulted in the greatest achievements of the project, because it was changed the strategy and it was sought a better involvement of participants through motivation, using arguments of increment of reputation and prestige, as well as economic incentives for certain community leaders, ensuring minimum levels of participation and boosting greatly the communities. Thus, the project was perceived as that could help the daily activities of participants and that all would be benefited to use OKCP.

The main strategy in this stage was the change of philosophy to engage key people in the project, showing what OKCP could be valuable for them as an effective argument of motivation. In this sense, OKCP managers play with the vanity of people, the new argument to convince them was that they will receive indirect benefits in terms of recognition and improvement of their reputation. However, other users require economic incentives to participate in these kinds of initiatives; for them OKCP managers created different contracts based on minimum levels of productivity. With the increased use of OKCP, it was noted that this environment has positively affected the performance of the most frequent users, helping them to stimulate discussion and exchange of information and knowledge. Therefore, the impact on users change the way in which some of them behave as well as the way in which they interact with others.

In the last phase, we can identify two well-defined challenges. First, the technological challenge, because the academic institution is not a development company, so it cannot compete with the developments and regular updates of the major social networks; hence, OKCP team has to focus on its strengths and to leverage the strengths of their competitors, following the strategy of positioning itself as a complementary social network. Second, the organizational challenge, due to conflicts generated with other areas that were affected by the services provided by OKCP; this issue was attempted to solve by creating a new General Direction (DGAC), which grouped the various departments with common themes and resulted in a reorganization and a new internal review of the project to determine the next steps in the future. After the inclusion of OKCP as part of the new direction (DGAC), there were duplication of services on some platforms; hence, the goal was to integrate everything in a single environment. When a conflict appears, other points of view or perspectives have to be delegitimized or even hidden through interactions between people who negotiated their understandings (Zilber, 2002). She proposed that those who hold power try to convince others to follow their truth, dictating an institutional meaning by offering the official perspective of institutional structures and practices. In this sense, DGAC proposed to assess OKCP because competing products have included additional features that have been difficult to replicate within OKCP, so it entered a period of review to see the possible evolution of this product.

At this phase, potential competitors (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn) were also analyzed and people involved in the project were aware of possible features to include in the product. In this sense, organizations tend to imitate the information system configurations used by supposedly successful organizations, especially in times of uncertainty and goal ambiguity (Gosain, 2004). This situation leads the organization structure to share similarities if

configurable technologies are configured in the same way (Nicolaou, 1999). Davis and Powell (1991) noted that the educative sector has received the greatest scrutiny by institutionalists, being cited as an example of a highly institutionalized field (Kraatz and Zajac, 1996). In this sense, educational organizations face strong institutional pressures for conformity, as well as increasingly strong technical pressures for institutionally illegitimate organizational change (Kraatz and Zajac, 1996). This situation promotes the isomorphism among institutions in this business sector because the advantages of mimetic behavior are considerable; especially when organizations face a problem with ambiguous causes or unclear solutions, finding a viable solution with little expense (Cyert and March, 1963).

The main strategy in this stage was the identification of the criteria for success, the lessons learnt and the current needs in the new context, taking into account not only internal power struggles between departments, but also the synergies among them. In addition, it is time to identify the main features of competitors to take advantage of them instead of reinvent the wheel, prioritizing the resources of the academic institution with the aim to have a more service-oriented environment.

Table 2 – Relationship between main activities, phases and strategies

Phase / Highly Salient Strategies	Main Activities / Change Triggers
Phase 1 (Origin): The original idea was verified and extended with the help of colleagues and friends of the visionary. In this phase, there were defined the main features of the original product as a complement of business education. • Identification of the main characteristics of the desired product (discuss, share knowledge and interests) • Elaboration of the criteria for success for strategic decision making • Understanding of the IT innovation, strengthening ties among alumni, students and professors	• Visionary's original idea • Brainstorming with other colleagues • Refining the idea <hr> Key change triggers leading to next episode: Visionary's death
Phase 2 (Time of uncertainty): After the death of the visionary, there was a period of uncertainty, where no one knew very well what the project would be. It was a phase where the project faced some challenges causing the doubt	• Set up of a committee • Preliminary assessment of IT-based innovation <hr> Key change triggers leading to next

Phase / Highly Salient Strategies	Main Activities / Change Triggers
if it should continue or should be abandoned. • Strategy to filling communities • OKCP was not integrated in the spirit of the academic institution • OKCP failed to involve key people	episode: Creation of a committee to define the next steps to follow
Phase 3 (Transition to a new structure): This phase cover the period in which the project was evaluated in terms of what have been done so far and the possible paths that it could take. • The main strategy of this phase was to evaluate very well product as is and how it would be • Participation should be enhanced to provide most and better content to the environment	• Critical assessment of the project • Identification of people to lead the new department Key change triggers leading to next episode: Creation of a new department with autonomy to manage OKCP
Phase 4 (Wonder years): Once created OKCP department, there was much more freedom to develop the product and convince more people to participate because the project was underway and was visible for everyone. • The main strategy in this stage was the change of philosophy to engage key people in the project (Vanity Management and contracts) • The value of IT-based innovation (OKCP) was highlighted showing what OKCP does for user as an effective way to motivate them • The impact on users change the way in which some of	• Vanity Management • Incentives (Contracts) • Identification of conflicts among departments due to overlapping of services provided Key change triggers leading to next episode: Creation of General Direction of Alumni and Professional Careers (DGAC)

Phase / Highly Salient Strategies	Main Activities / Change Triggers
them behave as well as the way in which they interact with others	
Phase 5 (New Challenges): When OKCP became part of the new direction (DGAC), there were duplication of services on some platforms; hence, the goal was to integrate everything in one single environment. At the same time, competing products (leading social networks) included additional features that have been difficult to replicate in OKCP, so it entered a period of review to see possible new paths for this product. • The main strategy in this stage was the identification of the criteria for success in the new context • Identification of main features of competitors to take advantage of them instead of reinvent the wheel, prioritizing the resources of the academic institution • Evolution to a more service-oriented environment	• Outsourcing of certain activities • Cost/benefit assessment • Consolidation of services into a single OKCP Key change triggers leading to next episode: Research study ended during this episode

CONCLUSIONS

This research study shows how each stage was governed by different people with different strategies, objectives and perceptions of what OKCP means for them, and what could be done or achieved through it. At the same time, in each stage, people involved in the project were influenced by the project leaders who define the strategies to follow to overcome the challenge that they found. Therefore, this case study highlight the importance of the strategic actions that actors did, and the impact in the evolution of the OKCP, explaining how this situation leads to change the trajectory of this product into other completely different compared with its initial conception. According to Mackay and Gillespie (1992) social appropriation of technology should be considered a key element of technology because it contributes not only to determine how it is used, but also the meaning that use has for the user; in this sense, a technology is not merely a physical object, it carries meanings. Zilber

(2002) argued that once meanings are socialized, individuals will understand them as the shared referential aspects of institutionalized practices and structures; hence, individuals are those who carry these meanings, implying that changes in them may result in changes in meanings as well.

The first phase was characterized by skepticism by most of participants, leading to a poor adoption and appropriation of the product. The second phase put on the table an interesting debate related with multiple perspectives related to the product; some participants perceived it as an opportunity, while other perceive it as a fad. This situation was originated because the uncertainty produced by the pass away of the visionary. The third phase gave legitimacy to the project with the creation of a new department, showing the support of the top management team; hence, participants began to create in the project. The fourth phase was dominated by a philosophical change to involve participants through motivation, reaching the best results and gaining recognition across the whole academic institution. The fifth phase presented two challenges for the future of the project, conflicts with other areas and technological obsolescence in comparison with other social networks. Therefore, an assessment is mandatory to analyze the lessons learnt and the possible future strategies.

Through the different phases, we have noticed how the product has evolved, how strategies have changed, and how actions were used not only to overcome the challenges of each phase, but also to align them with the whole business strategy. It is important to underline that the different perceptions and interpretations of main participants had an impact in the corresponding strategies and actions of each phase. In this sense, the main contribution of this study is to make us reflect on how the strategy-as-practice approach is useful for a better understanding of the evolutionary process of an IT-based innovation product (OKCP), describing how the different streams of strategies and praxes (re)shape the intrinsic characteristics of the product, transforming it gradually into what actors want it to be.

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