

**The Relation between Openness and
Closure in Open Strategy: Programmatic
and Constitutive Approaches to Openness**

CHAPTER 19

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**Chapter published in: David Seidl, Georg von Krogh &
Richard Whittington (eds.) *The Cambridge Handbook
of Open Strategy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press**

Introduction

Two facets are all but universally present in current works on open strategy. First, while being aware of and addressing challenges and dilemmas associated with openness in strategy-making (Hautz et al., 2017), increasing openness is mostly perceived as normatively good, as an ideal that should be achieved. Generally speaking, studies on openness in strategy-making focus on different forms and degrees of collaboration with newly invited actors and on the potential benefits of open strategy by generating more, and more suitable ideas (Whittington et al., 2011; Stieger et al., 2012; Aten & Thomas, 2016). Even when tensions and dilemmas of greater openness such as “compromising speed”, “undermining competitiveness” or “burdening wider audiences with the pressures of strategy” (all taken from the overview in Hautz et al., 2017, p. 302) are discussed, these are considered limitations or hurdles to be overcome for achieving the desired greater openness.

Second, openness is mostly considered to be the opposite of closure, or at least the other endpoint of a continuum from closedness to various degrees of openness in terms of greater transparency or inclusion (Whittington et al., 2011). Consequently, openness is associated with increasing transparency by sharing more strategically relevant information (Gegenhuber & Dobusch, 2017; Yakis-Douglas et al., 2017) and with inviting broader sets of actors to participate in strategic conversations (Heracleous et al., 2018; Turco, 2016) or even strategic decision-making (Dobusch & Kapeller, 2017; Luedicke et al., 2017).

Taken together, an affirmative perspective on openness as opposed to closure is central to a currently dominant *programmatic approach*, which is mainly concerned with putting openness into practice and unleashing its respective potential. However, as we will argue in this chapter, addressing many of the tensions or dilemmas observed in empirical endeavours to implement greater ‘openness’ could potentially benefit from another perspective, which understands openness (and closure) as a paradox (Putnam et al., 2016) where openness and closure appear contradictory but yet simultaneously depend on each other. Key for such a *constitutive approach* towards openness is that this paradox cannot be dissolved entirely but only addressed in a specific way, namely by *legitimate* forms of closure. But before we lay out our

constitutive perspective on openness in detail, we first summarize insights of the dominant programmatic approach in the next section.

Openness as a programmatic approach

The literature on open strategy is full of affirmative accounts of introducing or increasing openness in strategy-making, promising various benefits for strategy processes, outcomes and an organization's legitimacy (e.g., Chesbrough & Appleyard, 2007; Stieger et al., 2012). Opening up strategy in these views is a desirable programme to be promoted with different motivations for openness reported in the literature, ranging from functional rationales such as potential gains in innovation and efficiency (e.g., Jeppesen & Lakhani, 2010; Bauer & Gegenhuber, 2015) to principled attempts at establishing more transparent and participatory forms of organizing (e.g., Tkacz, 2012, 2015; Turco, 2016).

Already Chesbrough and Appleyard (2007), in a paper that primarily associated open strategy with preceding literature on open innovation, argue that “we need a new approach to strategy – what we call ‘open strategy’” (p. 58). Such an approach is said to embrace “the benefits of openness as a means of expanding value creation for organizations”, which “will balance value capture and value creation” (ibid.). Many studies on open strategy followed in these footsteps, investigating various cases of ‘greater openness’ in strategy-making. For instance, Stieger et al. (2012, p. 49) celebrate the use of crowdsourcing tools for internal strategy-making as “an important sign of openness – employees’ ideas are welcome”. Yakis-Douglas and colleagues (2017, p. 411), to give another example, conclude “that increasing the transparency of M&A strategy to investors through voluntary communications can bring share-price related benefits”. While dealing with different dimensions of openness – participation in the former, transparency in the latter case – both view openness as a continuum and identify situations where moving towards ‘greater openness’ is basically beneficial for the cases under study.

Such affirmative positions do not necessarily preclude the authors from recognizing difficulties, tensions or dilemmas associated with putting openness into practice. Quite to the contrary, most empirical works actually deal with the various tensions (Dobusch & Kapeller, 2017; Heracleous et al., 2018) or dilemmas (Hautz et al., 2017) organizations face when trying to open up previously exclusive strategy-making processes. Hautz et al. (2017, p. 5), for example, argue that harvesting the benefits of openness by sharing wider sources of knowledge might come at the cost of “compromising speed, flexibility and control” – a dilemma of process – and of

“creating escalating expectations about increasing openness” – a dilemma of commitment. Eventually, however, this literature frames these tensions and dilemmas as hurdles in the way of – at least: selectively – increasing openness, which is the reason why we suggest calling such a perspective a *programmatic approach*. It is programmatic because (1) openness is associated with vastly positive aspects – be it from an ethical and/or an economic perspective – and because (2) the underlying goal of most research is to identify efficient ways or degrees of openness in strategy-making, thereby more or less promoting the implementation of open strategy processes.

At the same time, the generally affirmative undertone of a programmatic approach in combination with the great variety of practices subsumed under the term of openness both frees and forces organizations to develop their own understanding – ideal – of what ‘open’ should mean in their particular empirical context (Dobusch et al., 2018). However, the related conceptual work on how openness should be defined, (can be) measured and practically achieved is often ad hoc in its theorizing (see, for example, the variety of definitions, categories and concepts applied even within the same special issue on open strategy published in Long Range Planning in 2017) and tends to neglect literature with similar concerns in the realm of diversity, equality and inclusion (see for example a literature review on organizational inclusion efforts by Shore et al., 2018).

This lack of specification of what openness entails in a particular case can lead to labelling something – an organization, a process, or a policy – as ‘open’, which eventually works as a “non-performative” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 117). This means that the articulation of openness as a goal for the organization or describing organizing practices as already ‘open’ may be a non-/intended way to conserve the status quo and actually complicate endeavours of ‘opening up’. For instance, Heimstädt (2017b) describes cases of “openwashing” in his study of municipal “open data” transparency initiatives, where under the banner of openness information is orchestrated for a particular audience or presented in a highly selective manner. Maybe less intentionally, the proclaimed radical openness of Wikipedia as “the encyclopedia that anyone can edit”¹ makes questioning its actual open qualities particularly difficult: How can something be not open (enough) that allows literally *anyone* to take part? In this context, Tkacz (2015, pp. 22-23) refers to persisting gender inequalities to demonstrate that the assumption of

¹ This programmatic slogan is to be found on the main page of the English language Wikipedia at <http://en.wikipedia.org>.

unrestricted access to the platform – as it is in principle ‘open to everybody’ – results in denying organization-wide structural and cultural reasons for the skewed participation of men and women and thus blocks appropriate change attempts :

“Remember, ‘anyone can edit.’ The project encourages participation and collaboration, and if people are really unhappy, for any reason, they can always create a fork. So there are a series of possible responses that can fend off a gender critique based on empirical grounds: ‘it’s not our fault that there are more male contributors because anyone can edit’; ‘if the situation were that bad, people would fork the project and realize their own gender-balanced vision.’ A more extreme position could even place the blame with the nonexistent female contributors for ‘not participating.’”

The argument is thus that the concrete implementation of ‘opening-ups’ might actually reproduce or even lead to additional exclusionary effects. For example, in the field of open source development, anyone with the ability to read and write code may contribute to the joint endeavour. This radical openness, however, may make it difficult to police ‘toxic behavior’ with exclusionary effects on already underrepresented subgroups such as women programmers (Reagle et al., 2012). Contrariwise, establishing and maintaining certain forms of openness might be enabled by backstage dealings (Heimstädt, 2017a) or by closure in terms of procedures (Dobusch et al., 2018), which we will describe in more detail in the section on legitimate closure.

Openness as a constitutive approach

In contrast to the programmatic approach, a constitutive approach towards openness understands openness neither as a desirable goal to be reached nor as the positive opposite of closure. Rather, by applying a relationalist ontology (Emirbayer, 1997) a constitutive approach understands the constructs of openness and closure as inextricably linked and interacting with each other. By “understanding all phenomena as constituted through relations, and treating relations themselves as processes” (Powell, 2013, p. 187) it becomes clear that the idea(l) of openness does only make sense in comparison with the notion of closure. We would even argue that openness *requires* the possibility of closure attempts and is not at all immune to unintended closure, otherwise it could not be framed as ‘open’ in the first place (Armbrüster & Gebert, 2002). This means a constitutive approach does not frame closure as a hurdle for openness that needs to be removed. Rather, it understands the coexistence of openness and

closure as a *necessary* condition, with the arrangement of the relationship being a matter of negotiation and research.

For strategy-making labelled as 'open' this means dealing with the paradoxical relationship of openness as requiring the coexistence with (the possibility of) closure. It is a paradox in the sense that the constructs of openness and closure are commonly perceived as "contradictions" (Putnam et al., 2016, p. 72) that in fact "impose and reflect back on each other" (ibid.).

Therefore paradoxes tend to "create situations of almost impossible choice" (ibid., p. 75-76), which can lead to unexpected or seemingly absurd results such as "equity programs that legitimate discrimination, and democratic systems that restrict participation" (ibid.). Revisiting previous empirical studies of open strategy, we can indeed find examples of closure that are associated with or originate from attempts of increasing openness in strategy-making (see Table 1 for an overview with respective examples).

Table 1: Examples of closure in empirical studies on open strategy

<i>Study</i>	<i>Example of closure</i>	<i>Consequences of closure</i>
Aten & Thomas (2016)	Contribution in strategy-making by external volunteers is restricted to environment and rule-set of a massively multiplayer online war game (MMOWG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - scope of action limited to rules of the MMOWG - game allowed high number of online participants
Baptista et al. (2017)	Internal social media channel allowed employees to raise issues they otherwise would not without the safety of anonymous posting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - concealment of individual identity allowed more open discussion of certain issues - contributions might lack context and/or credibility
Dobusch, Dobusch & Müller-Seitz (2018)	Limitless openness of allowing “anyone” to contribute to Wikimedia’s strategy process reproduced pre-existing biases such as dominance by contributors from the US and Western Europe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reduction of translation efforts - reduction of diversity among participants
Gegenhuber & Dobusch (2017)	Companies used polls among readers of their corporate blogs to decide on product development strategy, committing to following decision by the participants in advance (closure of procedure)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - higher levels of participation compared to other forms of audience responses such as comments - renunciation of control
Heracleous et al. (2018)	In spite of consensus decision-making in task forces, individual group members with final decision-making powers had been identified at the beginning of the process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fallback rule of situations, in which reaching consensus was not feasible - shadow of hierarchy
Hutter et al. (2017)	Participation on an online platform set up by Siemens to find new business ideas was thematically restricted to the issue of sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - thematic focus guided criteria for evaluating contributions - thematic focus represented an agenda beyond the open strategy initiative itself
Luedicke et al. (2017)	Informal practices such as “selective participation” and “authoritative decision-making” counterbalanced radically open practices such as “distributed agenda setting”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - addresses practical barriers of radically open approaches to strategy-making

Mack & Szulanski (2017)	Lower level of transparency when the strategy process in a firm proceeded to the selection phase	- full control of strategic decision-making remained with senior management
Malhotra et al. (2017)	Explicit guidelines defined what types of knowledge could be contributed by online crowds in open strategy process	- restricted scope and variety of contributions - allowed analyzing a large number of contributions
Schmitt (2010)	The situation for an open strategy process was framed in a particular way, e.g. “a wicked issue” or “as a 40-year-project”	- issue framing shaped the stakeholders’ perceptions of the meaning of the proposed solutions
Stieger et al. (2012)	Use of a crowdsourcing tool for strategy-making was temporally and topically restricted	- temporal restriction avoided continuously burdening all employees with strategic tasks

Further, even on an abstract level ‘complete openness’ is impossible on none of the various dimensions of openness identified in the literature. Regarding transparency, a key dimension of openness according to Whittington et al. (2011), disclosing information always means (actively) prioritizing – highlighting – some information as being worthy of being documented, which is a precondition for any way of sharing it. Not only does disclosure of some information automatically leave – if not push – other information in(to) the dark (Fenster, 2015), the limits of transparency begin even earlier. Since “archivization produces as much as it records the event” (Derrida, 1998, p. 17, cited in Fenster, 2015, p. 158), any decision regarding open access to strategically relevant information depends on and is restricted by preceding decisions regarding relevance or codification.

Similarly, we know that formalizing secrecy may actually enhance transparency of an organization by creating a space for “official secrets” (Weber, 1978, p. 992, cited in Costas & Grey, 2014, p. 1427). Costas and Grey (2014, p. 1431) define formal secrecy as “the intentional concealment of information by actors in officially defined, established and recorded ways”. Allowing access to official secrets equals closing spaces of formal secrecy, with the very likely consequence of creating or reinforcing informal – and thus maybe even less transparent – spaces. Accordingly, transparency scholars such as Christensen and Cheney (2015), argue that

calls for transparency “may impose *new types of closure*, as both a reaction and a proactive form of protection” (p. 80, emphasis in original). On the other hand, formalizing previously informal arrangements to enable transparency and participation may immediately reinforce the relevance of other informalities still in place (e.g., Van den Brink et al., 2010). In other words, opening up previously closed spaces – whether they had been formally or informally closed – may quickly lead to newly closed spaces (see also Hansen & Flyverbom, 2014; Laari-Salmela et al., 2017).

A similar pattern can emerge with respect to inclusiveness, another core dimension associated with openness (Whittington et al., 2011). For instance, Clegg (1994) points to the fact that the predominance of a specific set of values – even when it revolves around an ‘openness agenda’ – can result in closing tendencies regarding the composition of the organizational membership:

“Openness does not equate with non-distorted communication. Where openness is premised on recruitment in an ideological image, conversation in the organization becomes more monological as values get cloned and reinforced in recruits. Any organization with a strong value base risks the ultimate paradox of becoming cultish and thus increasingly incapable of reflexivity with respect to the environment in which it operates. Consequently, where value of openness is paramount, successful organizations must build dissent into their practices, even as it may challenge core values of the organization.” (p. 171)

If there is no openness without closure, this raises the question of which forms of closure are legitimate in or necessary for strategy-making characterized by particular open qualities such as broad participation and collaboration of various internal and external stakeholders (Aten & Thomas, 2016; Dahlander & Piezunka, 2014), access to and sharing of various knowledge sources (Chesbrough, 2006; Jeppesen & Lakhani, 2010) as well as transparent and collective decision-making practices (Luedicke et al., 2017). The focus thus shifts from questions of degrees of openness to questions of what combinations of openness *and* closure are desirable in strategy-making labelled as ‘open’. At the same time, such a constitutive perspective on openness forces researchers and practitioners alike to explicitly address the normative aspects of openness, which are oftentimes only implicit in programmatic accounts.

Of course, assessing the legitimacy of closure in open strategy-making requires a frame of reference. In short and very basically, we understand legitimacy according to Suchman’s (1995, p. 574) classic definition as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity

are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions.” In our research context, the respective system relates to the broader openness discourse and the ideals connected to open organizing influenced by scholars and practitioners alike. Against this background, we propose to assess closure with regard to these very openness ideals adopted by an organization in order to assess the *(il)legitimacy of exclusion* of actors from access to sensitive information (“transparency” dimension in Whittington et al. 2017) and from participating in strategy design and implementation respectively (“inclusiveness” dimension, *ibid.*). To illustrate these theoretical arguments regarding the role of closure in and for openness, we use previous empirical studies on open strategy-making and explain in more detail (a) the illegitimacy of exclusionary openness and (b) inclusion through legitimate closure. Thereby we show that even though the openness paradox cannot be resolved, it can be proactively addressed and moderated.

The illegitimacy of exclusionary openness

Key for a constitutive approach on organizational openness is the recognition that any form of opening-up also implies certain forms of closing. This is no new observation. For instance, in the realm of equal opportunities and diversity policies the relationship between the inclusion of historically disadvantaged groups is connected to direct or indirect forms of exclusion of majority group members. This becomes particularly manifest with respect to affirmative action programs, whose controversial, explosive force is, however, not commensurate with its actual dissemination (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016): be it in the case of rather ‘hard’ affirmative action approaches entailing specific recruiting or training programs for women and minorities, which became popular in the 1970s among US-firms (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998), or be it in the case of ‘milder’ forms of tiebreak preferential treatment, which involves favoring certain minority group members over other applicants with equal qualifications (Verbeek & Groeneveld, 2012). Among the – repeatedly contested (Reyna et al., 2005; see for example Calpin, 2017) – legitimacy premises of affirmative action programs is that the direct exclusion via positive action (e.g., targeted programs) or indirect exclusion via positive discrimination (e.g., preferential treatment) of some applicants is a justifiable side effect for counteracting historically developed, structural inequalities in society. These actions are thus considered to be contributing to the – at least quantitative – inclusion of disadvantaged members in both the respective organization and society at large (Plous, 1996; Noon, 2010). When applying an openness lens, affirmative action can be understood as a response to the fact that formal – limitless – openness to all kinds of

applicants reproduces a systematic underrepresentation of certain historically disadvantaged groups.

In the context of organizational strategy-making processes, 'simply' broadening the access to sensitive information or inviting wider sets of people to participate is also likely to reproduce certain biases, such as in the case of low shares of female programmers in open source software projects (Reagle, 2012; see also Dobusch et al., 2018). Furthermore, given a certain level of communication technology, increasing openness by inviting more and more participants might overburden both the organization and the participants in the strategy process (Hautz et al., 2017), making it increasingly difficult to engage in actual strategy-making as a form of joint sensemaking. As a consequence, merely increasing openness might reduce the *quality* of inclusion in terms of actual participation opportunities or the diversity among participants in the process (Dobusch et al., 2017).

In the case of Wikipedia mentioned above, the simple but formally limitless openness of "anyone can edit" leads to the reproduction of structural inequalities rooted in inequalities regarding internet access or language skills. Given that Wikimedia, the organization behind Wikipedia, applied the principle limitless openness not just to its encyclopedia but also to a year-long open strategy process (Dobusch et al., 2018), provides us with several examples for exclusionary openness. For instance, overrepresentation of volunteers from English-speaking countries made English the default language for strategy. Underrepresented contributors were thus either excluded from taking part or burdened with additional translation tasks. In combination with other biases associated with online volunteer editing such as Internet access and access to higher education, eventually all of the top 11 contributors responsible for over 40 percent of edits in Wikimedia's 'Strategy Wiki' were based in Western Europe and the US – even though literally anyone was allowed to contribute. Additionally, the management of the 'open' strategy-making process was characterized by the absence of predefined procedures or explicit rules for information sharing and participation opportunities. One consequence of this limitless openness was not the increase of influence of 'ordinary' people on the development and outcomes of the strategy-making process, but rather the opposite: Wikimedia board members and hired consultants modified – whether intentionally or accidentally – both content and course of the strategizing endeavor without providing any official ways for volunteers to express their disagreement regarding neither specific procedures nor the process as a whole (ibid.).

In sum, officially opening up access to participation of anyone has, at least in the case of Wikimedia, turned out to be self-defeating. The potential contribution by anyone turned out to be biased towards certain groups and biased against other groups (for a more general, similar argument, see King, 2006). For Wikipedia and its carrier organization Wikimedia, this exclusionary openness poses a legitimacy problem given its own ideal of an “unbiased” openness, striving for a “neutral point of view”.²

We would argue that unintended exclusion and respective biases are common in most – if not all – strategy-making processes described as open in the literature. Of course, the criteria for assessing the il-/legitimacy of such exclusion vary depending on an organization’s goals in general and the ideals for its openness in strategy-making in particular. Ironically, the inherent limits and exclusionary effects of openness are particularly visible in cases described as very – radically – open. Luedicke et al. (2017, p. 382), for example, describe how in the case of the German Premium Cola collective the formally “radically open practices” such as “distributed agenda setting” or “consensual decision-making” needed to be counterbalanced by more informal practices such as “selective participation” and “authoritative decision-making”. These counterbalancing practices were driven by information and power asymmetries resulting from division of labor in the collective. According to Luedicke et al. (ibid.), “Premium members do not frame counterbalancing practices as problematic, but legitimize them as pragmatic ways of raising, deliberating, and deciding on strategic issues in spite of practical barriers.” This, of course, puts the question of legitimacy again center stage.

Insofar as this exclusion can be considered illegitimate in comparison with the proclaimed openness ideals of an organization and its open strategy process, this raises the question what kinds of (closing) measures – coping strategies – might be necessary to counteract illegitimate, mostly non-intended consequences of opening up.

Inclusion through legitimate closure

² All content in Wikipedia should be written from a “neutral point of view”, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Neutral_point_of_view.

We identify two related types of closure which potentially contribute to particular open qualities in strategy-making and thereby also account for the non-resolvable openness paradox as such: (1) the formalization of closures and (2) the closure – predefinition – of procedures.

Formalization of closure. The basic rationale behind the emphasis on formalizing closure in order to enable particular open qualities is rooted in the assumption of the “constitutive significance of formality and formalization, both for the securing of organisational purposes *and* for individual freedom” (du Gay & Lopdrup-Hjorth, 2016, p. 8; emphasis by authors).

Formalization can include various elements such as the explicit definition of procedures, rules and responsibilities including specifications of information sharing and decision-making (Pugh et al, 1963). The key feature of formalization – regardless of its degree, be it in form of a voluntary self-commitment, be it in form of law-enforced regulations – is the limitation of the scope of action for a certain period of time in order to enable and secure a particular corridor of action (which might also entail procedures to change exactly this corridor). However, formalization – particularly in the context of bureaucratic organizing in general – should not be understood as the ‘solution’ to exclusionary openness, given the critique of being a barrier to innovation as well as to enhancing equal opportunities (Thompson & Alvesson, 2005; see also Ferguson, 1984). Nevertheless, formalization can counteract – not completely prevent – exposing the individual organizational member or contributor to the ‘free play’ of the “inevitably elitist and exclusive nature of informal communication networks” (Freeman, 1972-73, p. 155). Instead, formalization helps to institutionalize opportunities for “organized dissonance” (Ashcraft, 2001, p. 1304), which supports the individual actor in manoeuvring amidst the unsolvable tensions and dilemmas between openness and closure (Hautz et al., 2017).

For instance, similar to formal secrecy increasing transparency within an organization (Costas & Grey, 2014), formalized closure of participation opportunities may help to support openness. Restricting participation – the inclusiveness dimension (Whittington et al., 2011) – in certain parts of a process might be legitimized by correspondingly increasing transparency, that is, being open about a certain closure and its rationale. This is of particular importance, since the responsibilities and resources of actors involved in strategy-making differ according to their status inside or outside the respective organization, even in a strategy-making process labelled as ‘open’ (see, for example, Luedicke et al., 2017). Formalizing closure, especially in terms of overall procedures, does not level these differences, but allows discussing the (il)legitimacy of exclusionary consequences of these very rules.

In the case of the Wikimedia strategy process, wiki-based transparency was an attempt to guarantee transparency even in stages of the process, where only a very limited number of actors were actively involved in shaping the strategic plan (Heracleous et al., 2018). For example, task forces with only a couple of members working on selected topics such as “financial sustainability” or “Wikipedia quality” were “strongly encouraged” (ibid., p.10) to document their discussions and findings in a publicly accessible wiki.

Closure of procedures. By clearly defining procedures for access to sensitive information and participating in the strategy design and implementation *in advance*, addressing – and changing – the rules of the strategy-making process itself becomes possible for the ‘ordinary’ contributor. What appears paradoxical is the fact that the predefinition of procedures, which can be interpreted as the limitation of one’s individual freedom of action, forms the basis for the capacity to act on content creation or decision-making in the first place. This is in line with Freeman’s (1972-73) perception of the “tyranny of structurelessness”, which is based on the idea that an absence of bureaucratic organizing might reduce instead of enhance opportunities for participation by certain groups. Similarly, Armbrüster and Gebert (2002, p.176), building on Popper (1966 [1944]), emphasize the importance of closing procedures for ensuring ‘open’ capacities for action: “In Popperian terms, the establishment of bureaucracy is a step from the closedness of patronage towards the openness of rules and procedures.”

In the case of the Wikimedia open strategy process, lack of clearly stated participation procedures may have unintentionally undermined the openness of the strategy-making process as a whole (Dobusch et al., 2018). On the other hand, closure of procedures may even allow participation of external actors in decision-making, as has happened in the case of “Mite”, a software-as-a-service firm which repeatedly allowed readers of their corporate blog to vote on product development decisions (Gegenhuber & Dobusch, 2017).

Taken together, formalization of closures and closure of procedures brings us back to the example of affirmative action mentioned above. By directly or indirectly excluding participation by members of certain strata, participation of members of other strata becomes viable. And by formalizing the respective procedures, they are constantly under scrutiny regarding the legitimacy of exclusionary and inclusionary effects.

Conclusion

Our conception of openness as inextricably bound to and even constituted by closure raises crucial questions that cannot be ignored: Is the conceptualization of openness as relying on particular forms of closure a contradiction in itself? Does it turn the idea of openness into an empty shell that loses its potential for change and eventually undercuts the main reasons why openness was brought to the field of strategy-making in the first place? These are plausible objections to our approach. However, such objections only hold when relying on certain ontological assumptions that privilege substance over relations (Emirbayer, 1997; Powell 2013). Such a view, which is typical for programmatic approaches, perceives openness as an idea entailing an essential and context-independent meaning, whose inherent boundaries result from these very features.

In contrast, a constitutive approach based on relationalist assumptions does not attribute any absolute and intrinsic properties to the notion of openness, but rather understands it as context-dependent and relative. It is depending on the context in the sense that the term of openness we are referring to is rooted in the open source movement in the 1990s (Weber, 2004). It is relative in the sense that its meaning becomes only manifest in relation to and in distinction from a counterpart. However, we don't imply a rigid relationship between fixed relata, but rather a dynamic and mutually affecting one in order to take the constitutive relationship between openness and closure into account. We argue that only by paying attention to the openness paradox – which means the inextricable linkage and oscillating movement between practices of opening and closing – we can achieve more convergence of openness ideals and openness in practice. It is important to acknowledge that this convergence cannot be reached in its entirety as it always a matter of (collective) legitimation and thus an issue of negotiation and interpretation power. Nevertheless, we deem it possible to tailor the respective closing measures to the openness ideals in a particular context.

For researchers who want to apply a constitutive lens on phenomena labelled as 'open' or 'closed', we see at least three opportunities for future studies. Empirically, revisiting cases described as exemplars of openness from a constitutive perspective would require focusing on the particular open qualities associated with these cases as well as the legitimation of corresponding closures. Given that most of the examples for exclusionary openness we refer to in our chapter deal with the invitation of external contributors (e.g., Wikipedia, Open Source Software), we consider revisiting cases of intra-organizational open strategy-making to be

particularly promising in this regard. Methodologically, a constitutive perspective requires devoting particular attention to non-participants, non-mentions and non-topics in allegedly open environments and processes. Capturing this excluded 'other' is a methodological challenge because it – by definition – cannot be simply coded in the material collected on open strategy platforms and, to some degree, interviews with participants. One way forward among others could be to always collect data from potential but not actual contributors to processes labelled as 'open'. Theoretically, the constitutive approach to openness may allow for cross-fertilization between related streams of literature such as the discourse on organizational inclusion (e.g., Ferdman & Deane, 2014; Shore et al., 2018) or the literature on visibility, transparency and (dis)closure (e.g., Christensen & Cheney, 2015; Albu and Flyverbom, 2016). In each of these fields we observe the potential of introducing the distinction between programmatic and constitutive perspectives on the phenomenon of interest and thereby capturing the (un-)intended side-effects of change attempts.

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