

THE STRATEGY FINDING TASK WITHIN COLLABORATIVE NETWORKS, BASED ON AN EXEMPLARY CASE OF THE LINUX COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT:

More and more organisations are beginning to understand the economically sound business case for virtual organisations and communities. Probably one of the best examples of a successful virtual community can be found in the open source movement, namely the Linux community. This article will focus on how the strategy-finding task is performed within virtual organisations in general and in the open source community of Linux in particular. This article will demonstrate that one of the reasons for the success of Linux is the way the strategic finding task is fulfilled in this community.

Vast amounts of literature on the corporate strategy finding task have been written. Most of the current literature however seems to be divided between two extremes, namely that the strategy finding task should either be primarily based on the core competencies of a company (resource based view of the firm, e.g. Grant or Prahalad & Hamel) or be based on the market opportunities and threats facing a company (market based view of the firm, e.g. Porter). It is proposed that both extremes have their own flaws and in a reaction to these flaws it is suggested that the strategy finding process, at least within virtual organisations, should be a co-evolutionary interaction or adaptation between change trajectories of both (network-) internal resources and external threats and opportunities. Another dichotomy, which has to be taken into account, has to do with the nature of the strategy finding process itself, which is believed to be either deliberate or emergent in nature [Mintzberg *Strategy Safari*, 1999].

The point to be shown in this paper is the self-organising power and apparent success of emergent ('bottom up') strategy finding processes within the Linux community, ensuring the interaction between change trajectories of both its internal resources and external threats and weaknesses. It will be shown that a number of mechanisms have institutionalised this interaction in the community. These mechanisms include for instance *Internet tools*, like the discussion lists and the SourceForge project tools, emergent forms of *intellectual property rights*, like the General Public License (GPL), and the use of *stories and symbols*, like the role of the godfather Linus Torvalds.

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