

Critical perspectives on bottom-up initiatives in multinational corporations

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ABSTRACT

Set in the automotive industry and based on a single case study this paper seeks to examine how bottom-up initiatives strive and survive in the corporate setting of an MNC. As a result of consolidation and high entry fees the automotive industry has since inception been protected from disruption and remained stable in times of turbulence. However, the rapid development of new technologies such as electrification and autonomous driving vehicles has caused dramatic industrial changes with new competitors instantaneously designing more and more digitally oriented products. This industrial shift into the digital arena has called for new ways of innovating products, methods and services by all actors. Drawing on the micro-political perspective of the MNC and the issue-selling literature this paper uncovers the negotiation process by individuals for pursuing bottom-up entrepreneurial initiatives. The findings illustrate the internal playground in the organization as greatly politized arena, the implications of decentralized innovation structures and the effect on bottom-up innovation is further discussed. Theoretically the paper explains the ‘strategic renewal journey’ of initiatives as an ongoing and continuous process; questioning the commonly applied evolutionary framework of variation-selection-retention.

INTRODUCTION

How do managers pursue bottom-up entrepreneurial initiatives? This simple question seems to be fundamental to research on multinational corporations (MNCs), but there are still surprisingly few detailed empirical accounts in past research. When studying innovation in organizations it is common to apply a basic *variation-selection-retention* (VSR) process model (Burgelman 1991; Birkinshaw 1997). As a result of variation, bottom-up initiative-takers compete for limited organizational attention and resources to increase their relative importance. From this perspective, top management can be described as an orchestrator of the MNC that decides what activities are performed by which units and furthermore directs competence during the innovation development to achieve a better fit of the finished innovation within the MNC (Dhanraj and Parkhe, 2006).

Previous research on corporate entrepreneurship in international business (IB) research has often approached this issue on an aggregated organizational level; exploring the antecedents, implementation and outcomes of the initiative (Strutzenberger and Ambos, 2014; Schmid, Dzedek, and Leher, 2014). Some studies have although shed particular light on the subsidiary initiative process from a microfoundational perspective; highlighting how initiatives are directed by individuals e.g. O'Brien et al., (2019) and Gorgijevski, Holmström-Lind and Lagerström (2019) as well as Dörrenbächer and Gammelgaard (2016) that explores the micro-political perspective and subsidiary initiative-taking. As a way of capturing “*the detailed processes and practices which constitute the day-to-day activities of organization life and which relate to strategic outcomes*” (Johnson, Melin and Whittington 2003, p. 3). These studies base their investigation on the concept of issue-selling, implying that subsidiary managers use certain voice- or selling tactics to convince the top management of the value of their ideas (Dutton and Ashford, 1993; Dutton et al., 2001). This research stream recognizes that teams and individuals within the MNC can influence decisions in intricate ways. For instance, through utilizing micro-political bargaining tactics – political games that involves bargaining, persuasion, confrontation and forming coalition groups within the MNC. Accordingly, we conceptualize the modern-day MNC as a process-oriented body consisting of a web of business units located in distinct sovereign jurisdictions which are used in business networks as strategic resources (Andersson, Forsgren and Holm, 2007). MNCs seeking not only to be able to adapt to changing environments but also to take an active lead in the change have been forced to improve selection processes and become more proactive, entrepreneurial, and heterarchical (decentralized). In order to be innovative and responsive at the global level it is argued that the MNC must be open

to flexibility at the lower levels which foster entrepreneurship (Lee and Williams, 2007; Ambos and Birkinshaw, 2010). Hence, bottom-up initiatives are not only enhancing the competitiveness of the focal business unit but also the overall corporation (Birkinshaw, Hood and Jonsson, 1998).

However, the actual process of how bottom-up initiatives strive and survive in the corporate setting of an MNC remain indistinctly ambivalent (Mol, Foss and Birkinshaw, 2017). By virtue of the rather rationalistic and normative view upon power dependencies, influence and control in MNCs the initiative process is often oversimplified in the prevailing IB literature. In order to comprehend the phenomena researchers commonly conceived a strict application of dichotomous selection mechanisms on aggregated organizational levels such as ‘headquarters’ and ‘subsidiaries’ which has hampered a deeper exploration of the underlying micro-political bargaining processes. In this paper we therefore seek to qualitatively explore the behaviors that regulate how bottom-up initiatives survive and grow in the organization. We do this by applying a more ‘realistic’ view of the MNC as an organization that consists of internal teams spread out across organizational boundaries rather than that of clearly separated entities forming straightforward agency relations between headquarters and subsidiaries.

We investigate this issue and ask the following question: *How do bottom-up entrepreneurial ideas gain foothold in an MNC?* We address this problem by considering bottom-up entrepreneurial ideas as internal R&D initiatives championed by middle managers of the organization. Hence, we explore how these initiatives gain a strong initial position that allows for further progression and improvement. In principal these initiatives go beyond the current mandate/domain of the working team and thus they need careful anchoring in the organization to attract resources. The initiatives have to pass several filtering processes at different organizational levels in order to become integrated, these filtering instruments are governed by management teams that protect and hinder the MNC to excessive variation (Birkinshaw and Ridderstråle, 1999). Our concept of R&D initiatives does not include minor adaptations to the market or incremental product developments. Rather it encompasses novel initiatives that disrupts or challenge the established purpose of the product offering.

The contributions of this paper are twofold. First of all, this study provides insights on the activities and implications of bottom-up ‘voicing’ in the organization thus extending our knowledge about the role of middle managers in MNCs. We are not only showing the value of

bottom-up innovation but we also contribute to previous research by presenting the internal selling as a fundamentally politicized process portrayed as an ‘unequal playground’. Secondly, through this we are also able to contribute to addressing how decentralized innovation structures not only favors bottom-up innovation in MNCs but also creates conflict and tension. Further contributing to the understanding of the MNC as a differentiated network consisting of different ‘political actors’ and their interaction. Consequently, the paper adds to the on-going research of micropolitics in bottom-up initiative processes (Lee and Williams, 2005; Becker-Ritterspach and Dörrenbächer (2009); Dörrenbächer and Geppert, 2006, 2009; Williams and Lee, 2009; Dörrenbächer and Gammelgaard, 2011, 2016).

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. First, we outline the theoretical background of the MNC as a playground of micro-politics in terms of the initiatives ‘strategic renewal journey’. This is followed by a description the methodology used in the case study and its related considerations. Next, we present our empirical results and analysis. Finally, the paper ends with some concluding remarks, implications for theory, practice and avenues for future research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The evolutionary perspective on bottom-up initiatives in the MNC

Derived from theory that explains the development and survival of biological species. The evolutionary perspective on organizations (Nelson and Winter, 1982) explains how existing routines fit their environments, how routines change, and why certain routines are adapted, while others are preserved or rejected. Internal competition is created when different business units engage in initiative-taking; a battle to obtain resources and mandates necessary to grow and increase their importance emerges (Pfeffer, 1992). Hence, the outlined journey of initiatives can be described as ‘market competition’ has created an environment similar to the natural selection where the strongest survives the organizational ecology (Nelson and Winter, 1982). The ‘strategic renewal journey’ of initiatives from an evolutionary perspective is based upon three fundamental assumptions (Campbell, 1965; 1969). First, there must be a source of variation (i.e. deviation from the normal) whether its natural, cultural, purposeful or haphazard. Second, a relative constant selection mechanism must exist. Third, a retention mechanism is needed to preserve the selected variations for the future. From this perspective, each corporation is seen as an ecology within which strategic initiatives emerge. Variation comes about as different business units seek expression of their special skills through initiatives. These initiatives draw on existing and/or new competencies and routines and take shape if they are able to pull the company's resources to their development. Selection works through administrative mechanisms at top managerial levels that regulate the allocation of resources and attention to different initiatives. Retention concerns the initiatives that survive and grow to become important for the company's performance.

However, it is not always the case that the ‘fittest’ initiative survives, given the elements of chance. As such, we argue that the ‘strategic renewal journey’ rather should be seen as a managerial (individual) selection process of purposeful entrepreneurial activities. These individuals can be influenced through e.g. politicking, persuasion and the formation of coalition groups within the MNC by initiative-takers seeking recognition and mandate gains. Likewise, initiatives are founded on acquired knowledge to bring about change in organizational competencies and firm evolution which established organizational structures resist (Kotter and Schlesinger, 1979; Watson, 1982). In sum, the internal selection is facilitated through administrative control mechanisms such as strategic planning, goal setting and imprinting of the current corporate strategy (Weick, 1979; Burgelman 1983) but in this process a conflict in

views, competition over resources, and power usage to control outcomes also materializes (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978).

Extending towards a micro-political perspective on bottom-up initiatives in MNCs

Given that different actors have different views on how to distribute resources we argue that the evolutionary approach lacks explanatory precision of the ‘behind the scenes’ processes that lead to selection. While the evolutionary approach recognizes that not all variations filtered through the organization leads to the selection and retention it fails to capture the negotiation process of pulling the company's resources to their development. Dosi and Nelson (1994) contends that by connecting routines to value systems, prejudices, generally accepted practices, wider cultures, and pre-existing knowledge one can understand how the evolutionary process develops. However, because of the relatively linear, static and predominantly rational underpinnings, the evolutionary perspective does not recognize the actions by individuals and teams that can make claim against the organization's resource sharing system (Becker-Ritterspach, 2006; Felin and Foss, 2005; Barney and Felin, 2013). In fact, the general evolutionist view does not wish to take individuals as the appropriate unit-of-analysis. Rather it is argued that the suitable unit-of-analysis are routines and management processes (Nelson and Winter, 1982). As such research on strategic issue-selling by middle managers is often mitigated (c.f. Dutton and Ashford, 1993; Dutton et al., 2001; Dutton et al., 2002; Howard-Grenville, 2007).

Therefore, we argue that the ‘strategic renewal journey’ of initiatives is foremost a political process that is best explained through a dialectic logic. Van de Ven and Poole (1995) describe the political process as the result of a current situation (thesis) and an opposing part (antithesis). These two pools meet to create an outcome, or synthesis. Thus, the process only exists when actors not only hold different opinions, but actively engage in a negotiation struggle i.e. when bottom-up initiatives disrupts the main business as they often lie outside the current organizational strategy and are not directly sanctioned by corporate decision-makers (a top-down process). Hence, the micro-political scholars that recognizes a more dynamic and political view of MNCs (Geppert and Dörrenbächer, 2011; 2014; Morgan and Kristensen 2006) has conceptualized the organizational field as a ‘contested terrain’ (Edwards and Bélanger 2009). This perspective is rooted in Game Theory c.f. Neumann and Morgenstern (1944) *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior*. The theory was originally developed for applied mathematics but has since been used in a variety of fields, including organizational theory, to capture

behavior in strategic situations. The focus in such situations has been on an individual's success in making strategic choices relative to other 'players' in the organization and/or marketplace with a goal of finding the equilibrium in the game itself. Crozier and Friedberg (1980) built on this to in order to enrichen the theory for organizational research, following their suggestions and previous micro-political scholars in IB research we address the (1) strategies and moves of players (2) their rules and roles as well as (3) the available resources and stakes in the game as three dimensions of the negotiation process.

First, 'strategies and moves' refer to the mechanisms of interdependent actions taken by individuals or teams/groups to reach their personal aims. Such mechanisms can broadly be referred to as different voice behaviors towards higher authority, specifically we build on the issue-selling literature (Ashford et al., 1998; Dutton and Ashford, 1993; Dutton et al., 2001; Dutton et al., 2002). This literature provides particular insights into how to voice by identifying important tactics which are used by individuals that seek influence. A particularly emphasized aspect is involvement during the selling process, i.e. 'going solo' (the working team alone) or involving others (Dutton and Ashford, 1993). If the seller involves other persons from the organization, the likelihood of the initiative becoming more visible increases hence it is argued that the commitment base to the initiative increases (Dutton et al., 2001). Moreover, the research highlights that the targets of involvement as well as the nature of involvement can make a difference for the success of seeking commitment to the issue. These procedural moves imply that the proposers can involve actors outside the boundaries of the current project as well as the MNC. The involvement can take place formally, that is through committees and task forces, but can also occur quite informally through, for instance, causal meetings and memos (Dutton et al., 2001).

However, there still seems to be a lack of research on how individuals and teams actually do voice initiatives in contemporary MNCs. The majority of contributions dealing with power games and loosely coupled to issue-selling in MNCs remain conceptual (Geppert and Dörrenbächer, 2011; 2014). Ocasio (1997) (re)introduced the concept of attention in firm behavior and argued that what decision-makers do is dependent on the issues and answers they focus their attention on. Thus, managerial attention implies the noticing, encoding, interpreting and focusing of time and effort by organizational decision-makers on both issues/problems and answers/solutions. Within this arena certain individuals hold more central positions than others implying a strategic angle on whom to address at which stages along the negotiation. Actors

negotiate in order to increase their control in uncertain situations which are particularly prevalent in bottom-up initiative activities (e.g. the strategic allocation of resources to these undertakings). Dutton et al. (2001) elaborate on these aspects in terms of timing and persistence; proposers need not only to have a rigid business case with convincing facts but also need to evaluate when in time and how to push the initiative upwards. Which is in turn based on their knowledge of the level of support for the actual issue and the pressure to act on the issue, identifying its novelty.

Second, the ‘structures (rules and roles)’ have predominantly been studied on the aggregate organizational level such as how subsidiaries receive attention from the headquarters and influence within the MNC (Bouquet and Birkinshaw, 2008a, 2008b) and subsidiary role development (Cantwell and Mudambi, 2005; Mudambi and Navarra, 2004). Along with the call from scholars to focus on the microfoundations of initiatives another stream of literature referred to as ‘boundary spanning’ has zoomed in on a particular aspect of knowledge creation (Birkinshaw, Ambos and Bouquet, 2017; Monteiro and Birkinshaw, 2017; Pedersen, Soda and Stea, 2019; Schotter and Beamish, 2011). Suggesting that certain individual employees span across geographical, functional and hierarchical boundaries. This is congruent with the conceptualization of the contemporary MNC as an agile organization consisting of cross-functional teams within the same organization. The MNC offers a fertile ground for boundary spanners as it brings together individuals from different parts of the world, with different profiles. Thus, in these organizations’ individuals co-operate between different functions or functional areas, divisions or business units (Dasí et al., 2017). It is recognized that for the MNC to remain competitive it is crucial to assimilate, integrate and leverage resources from across the global organization (Enright and Subramanian, 2007; O'Donnell, 2000). Hence, innovative MNCs have a strong interest that their employees establish networks of social relationships that allows for a mobilization of knowledge between individuals of inter-functional boundaries (Reagans and McEvily, 2003). Ultimately, this implies that corporate entrepreneurship occurs between individuals that work in different teams, functions and business units. Connections to diverse knowledge pools is what fosters creativity and innovation, leading to superior product development (Carlile, 2002; 2004; Pedersen, Soda and Stea, 2019).

However, a looming risk of developing initiatives through boundary spanning is that of organizational inertia (e.g. Hannan and Freeman, 1984); despite new structures being formed knowledge flows and coordination continue to follow the old structure. Traditionally the core

innovation activities have been centered around an internal R&D unit in the home country, hence the flow of information has mainly been one-dimensional from executives at headquarters downwards to subsidiary managers. In this structures R&D tend to focus on improving products and services for the most profitable customers, not the new or overlooked segments. Hence, boundary spanners selling the initiative upwards in the organizational hierarchy may encounter several forces of resistance due to fears concerning the new idea dismantling existing competencies or revenue streams (Birkinshaw and Ridderstråle, 1999). This resistance is caused by a distance between the established knowledge pools and attitudes in the organization and that of the team of initiative proposers.

Third, when addressing the ‘resources and stakes’ in the game the original theory by Neumann and Morgenstern (1944) referred to a zero-sum game where the success of one actor was contingent upon the failure of its counterpart. However, in R&D it is recognized that there are net gains that can be realized in strategic resources and the accompanying outputs. Through e.g. ‘competitive collaboration’ (Hamel, Doz, and Prahalad, 1989) several parties can benefit from creating greater value due to overlapping interests which allows for the exploration of new ideas. Moreover, although long-term strategic planning and resource allocation is ultimately decided by the central executive management (Chandler, 1991) numerous management boards exist below implying that the commitment to bottom-up initiatives do not necessarily reach the central committee until they have reached a certain developmental stage and passed other filtering panels at various functional boundaries (Birkinshaw and Ridderstråle, 1999). Hence, bottom-up initiatives most commonly receive gradual commitments and conditionally accepts characterized by a small adjustments and/or further improvements while the proposers climb the organizational hierarchy. Consequently, the journey these initiatives travels is therefore best understood as micro-political bargaining process where lobbying for attention (Bouquet and Birkinshaw 2008a; 2008b), issue-selling through personal appeals (Dörrenbächer and Gammelgaard, 2016) and overall challenging the status quo (Birkinshaw, 1997). Conversely, we see conflicts and politics as a *sine qua non* of organizational life (cf. Becker-Ritterspach and Blazejewski, 2016) rather than as an undesirable trait.

Proposed research framework

Our proposed research framework for studying how bottom-up entrepreneurial ideas strive and survive in organizations is illustrated below. Following the above-mentioned political process from a dialectic logic, we stipulate that a ‘premise’ envisaged from the top management collides

with new initiatives originating from boundary spanners in the organization's lower levels. Consequently, a negotiation process takes shape between the proposers (initiative-takers) seeking resources and commitment and governing boards that has control of the firm's resources. These negotiation processes are conceptualized as micro-political power games along the three dimensions of strategies and moves by players, their rules and roles as well as the available resources and stakes in the game. By lobbying activities, the proposers can overcome a first step of convincing some resource allocation to the initiative but as the playground still exhibits certain underlying patterns that protect and hinder change (from new initiatives) we contend that full selection seldom occurs. More commonly, the initiative will receive gradual commitment step-by-step from multiple governing boards in the organization, hence we outline the 'strategic renewal journey' of bottom-up initiatives as a continuous process that reoccurs over time and with different decision-makers.

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METHOD

Research design

We base our conclusions on a qualitative case study of a European automotive manufacturer with a track-record of world-changing innovations. Case research is particularly useful for exploratory research and examining processes close to the context where they occur (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). The case study is used to explain and illustrate the nature the bargaining process with higher authority for an organizational commitment to initiatives driven by boundary spanning individuals. Hence, we do not limit ourselves in terms of a headquarter and subsidiary perspective but rather view the organization as a whole consisting of internal teams working towards a common goal. A single-case study approach was chosen as this design generates a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study and allows for a more comprehensive understanding of complex social relationships (Graebner, 2009; Flyvberg, 2011). This research design does however lack inter-firm variation commonly seen in multiple-case study designs (Eisenhardt 1989; Yin, 2009). However, we are able to communicate increased contextual insight and highlight a micro-politics by showing its operation in an ongoing social context. (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991).

Research setting

Several conditions make the automotive industry especially relevant to examine bottom-up initiatives. Until recently, the automotive industry has been seen as one of the mature industries with little new/radical technological change. However, the industry has lately faced unprecedented ambiguity from multiple sources about its possible evolution (Teece, 2018). Both from new technology that has been stimulated from new entrants, political, legal and societal opinion e.g. environmentally friend(lier) electric vehicles, digitally enabled autonomous driving vehicles as well as in terms of business models and ownership structures such as personal mobility services such as centrally owned shared vehicles. Due to extreme uncertainty of what is to generate future revenue internal political struggles unfold in regards to the organizational development. Hence, the setting is characterized by a new frontier of growth and rapid R&D that has resulted in a fast-moving and dynamic market; the firms have been required to look beyond their existing structures and frames of reference to bring about new ideas from different sources thus paving the way for bottom-up initiatives. Managing initiatives is cumbersome task (cf. Schmid et al. 2013; Strutzenberger and Ambos, 2014) particularly regarding R&D initiatives with the goal of creating new products, services and establishing new processes in a dynamic industry.

Case selection

The case was selected purposively based on several criteria. The firm was required to operate globally with local units and foreign production as well as incorporating different forms of ownership structures for these units to allow for a diversified sample firm (e.g. joint-ventures and wholly-owned). The case was also required to entail access to management and development team members close to product development and innovation. As the focus lies on understanding the underlying processes behind the internal promotion of bottom-up R&D initiatives the vast majority of interviews have been conducted with so called innovation managers and team leaders. Guided by these criteria the case selection was driven towards a revelatory case study seeking to explore how these activities are take shape within the organization. The case study examines the practices of *Automotive Europe*, a pseudonym for an established firm and industry leader in the automotive industry. The firm enjoys great freedom and autonomy in terms of operations from their foreign-based majority owner, the main goals of the ownership company is to primarily learn and transfer practices out rather than applying domestic policies. Automotive Europe is therefore acknowledged as the firm's formal 'headquarter'. Formally the case consists of the parent company and four subsidiary business units. However, it became clear throughout the course of collecting and analysing the data that the interviewed managers acted as boundary spanners; working in spread-out international teams and even the 'subsidiaries' themselves were internally referred to different 'units of teams' in the single company rather than that of 'separated' companies. As illustrated by a manager of innovation:

"We are not only developing and manufacturing vehicles, but we create products and services and then it does not matter whether it is subsidiary A, B, C or D [Subsidiary names] or anyone else in our structure developing the initiative. We do that together across the organization."

The main motivations behind establishing these subsidiaries have been to create specialized teams within the organization that can focus on developing ideas where new knowledge is needed at a rapider rate. But as no formal mechanisms exists for integrating the knowledge Automotive Europe have employed what we label as boundary spanners; individuals working in global groups that extends the scope of their job across geographical and organizational boundaries. Prior to the establishment of the new business units the company utilized various kinds of suggestion systems to make upper management more responsive to business ideas

originating from the lower levels of the organization. However, it was recognized that these systems were not quick enough in responding to changes in the marketplace and that employees often lacked feedback to continually share business ideas in the long run. On the other hand, top management has also not been able to sustain their attention sufficiently on the business ideas that were shared. Thus, the company shifted working procedures to more agile processes where individuals are encouraged to develop their ideas and launch international teams themselves across the organizational borderlines, hence spanning boundaries. Administrative mechanisms are nevertheless still present across the initiative development process where the proposers need to consult with key individuals in the hierarchical chain regarding the commitment of resources to those opportunities.

Data collection

A total of 24 semi-structured interviews, lasting approximately an hour each with key informants constitutes the primary source of data. Informants with different roles ensured that a range of perspectives was covered. The average informant had been employed at the company for 15 years (SD 9.7) and held 6 different positions (SD 3.4) Data collection took place between December 2018 and June 2019 and it was followed by a snowball sampling. A summary of informants is provided in Table 1 and the company structure with the informants is illustrated in figure 2 below. The interview material consisted of retrospective accounts and perspectives on ongoing development of bottom-up R&D initiatives. The questions were open-ended to capture emerging issues, different perspectives, and interaction beyond the pre-defined questions (Silverman, 2012). Examples of interview questions included, *“Can you describe the process of identifying business opportunities, from idea generation to actual implementation?”* *“Did you have other internal or external support at the time of seeking approval for the particular opportunity? And how does this affect management’s evaluation and decision-making?”* *“What are your general reactions towards management’s decision of approval/rejection?”* The questions sought to capture the overall experience (both benefits and challenges) associated with bottom-up initiatives. Some interviews included more general questions about the automotive industry and the focal company depending on the respondent’s position. The anonymity of the interviews was emphasized in order to encourage openness and sincerity in the answers.

-----INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE-----

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To take advantage of insights from previous interviews the data collection procedure was characterized by iteratively going back and forth between data and theory to inform each other (Dubios and Gadde, 2002). The interviews were also complemented by secondary data to further triangulate findings, e.g. press-releases, annual reports, news articles and secondary audio/video interviews found on the web with the informants. This secondary data was collected in parallel to the interviews. When the interviews centered on previous specific initiatives, it was possible to search for complimentary information specifically related to these.

Data analysis

The interviews were conducted face-to-face where practicable as well as via telephone and internet-based communication through Skype for Business. The interviews were transcribed *verbatim* and coded using NVivo computer software. Coding was done using a structured approach (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2013). This was done by first summarizing the data into case descriptions and then identifying common concepts by coding and grouping them into categories. In the second step of our analysis, we abstracted our codes to a second order by aggregating the first-order themes into second-order categories in line with the ‘Gioia methodology’. In order to do so we compared and contrasted our coding with theory from micro-politics in international organizational research. The interview data was additionally triangulated with additional data sources. The coding structure is shown in figure 2 below. The following section outlines a summary of the findings from the case-study.

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FINDINGS

This research asks how bottom-up R&D initiatives strive and survive within an organization by exploring the negotiation process that leads to commitment decisions by governing directors. In this section, we disentangle the mechanisms that emerged in the data. The lobbying tactics were found to influence the level of support, alongside we explore how the organizational structures have created an ‘unequal playground’ in the negotiation process for the resources and mandates. These mechanisms and how they affect the survival of bottom-up initiatives is elaborated below. Once again, we would like to stress that the following empirics refers to bottom-up R&D initiatives in the organization that rests outside traditional (central) R&D units.

Strategies and moves by innovation managers

Boundary spanning middle managers in these activities all stressed a need to early create a sense of legitimacy for the initiative by letting it mature and grow throughout the organization. Hence, different kinds of lobbying activities were identified in the case. Concerning a rejected initiative, a Director in charge of an international team at Digital Services explained:

“We haven't managed our lobby well enough. I think that before the initiative [officially] comes to the decision makers it should already have come by others. Thus, we have to start spreading a good reputation beforehand. That you deliberately leak information about the concept in some way e.g. through magazines and workshops – to make people talk about it.”

Another director of new technology elaborated how their team have identified a network of individuals that allows them to anchor and nurture new initiatives in line with upcoming shifts in corporate strategies. Hence, they utilize social relationships not only for instigating a buzz in the organization of their initiatives that benefits the process legitimizing the initiative but also for aligning the initiative organizationally. Facilitating a stronger ‘spark’ when officially presenting the initiative to the decision-makers in possession of resource allocation mandates.

“We have built up a small community that we take care of, and share our ideas with. In order to get some [organizational] buy in early phase. We think it is important that we already start with some form of blogging internally to demonstrate value.”

Crucially, the informants also expressed a need to also be strategic on what to reveal, especially in the early initiative stages which are regarded as highly sensitive for several reasons. First, initiative-takers expressed concerns of the idea being misunderstood which can lead to the spreading of false notions with a negative undertone regarding the idea. More importantly, these notions can be extremely difficult to eradicate later on. Second, if you attract too much attention from other parts of the organization at an early, formative stage when the initiative lacks a proof-of-concept or similar others units might seize the initiative and embody it in one of their own ideas. Thus, once you have developed an idea at a business unit, there is a substantial need to be very clear on when and how the initiative is brought back to the main organization. This is exemplified in the following quotes by a director of Corporate Innovation.

“It's also dangerous when people don't understand ideas, so they can easily be killed too early. Has it just come in a little doubt about an idea, then it is very difficult to get out of there. The only option is almost then to rename the whole project and reformulate it but then it will be something else.”

“Early revelations can also work against you and your team in the sense of other groups ‘stealing’ your initiative and developing it as their own.”

In order to mitigate these risks, it is crucial for the managers to know the organization and the politics around it. Informants described organizational political competence as social influence abilities, knowledge and behaviors about when and how to involve certain individuals in the initiative process to influence decision-making to their favor. Consequently, a particular aspect mentioned throughout the interviews was the prerequisite of personal relationships, as expressed in the following statements by a senior director of Innovation and Technology:

“Selling innovation [internally] without being able to navigate the organization very well is extremely difficult...The process very much starts with personal contact networks. Who do I know that work in this area, who can I talk to informally? Are those people generally curious and open or are they difficult to flirt with and even build up fences and barbed wire for your team?”

To succeed in these internal lobbying and selling activities of initiatives some particular aspects were mentioned to vastly boost the survival of the bottom-up initiative namely that of external

(positive) acknowledgement and embracement from individuals at or around the very top corporate executive group. Hence, informants expressed that if the ‘local’ decision-makers above and around a certain team simply do not believe in the idea the only option is to circumvent them (politically) through the involvement of others. One way to do so is through responses from the media. Two managers at Digital Services lobbying for the same initiative explained how they (finally) received endorsement by their local decision-makers:

“You had to be smart and almost a little ugly...If we presented something [externally] and get some media pressure going, then they cannot stop it. If you know that you have a good thing going it becomes very difficult to hinder [future commitments].”

“We went out with it [the initiative] at a congress, a huge fair. Then it took giant leaps! Both large and small newspapers even the New York Times started writing about our innovation that the team had hacked together under the radar of the local control groups. The decision-makers at home became turncoats, now they asked how they could be part of the initiative instead of dismissing it.”

Moreover, another manager of innovation and technology illuminated the nature of politicking as a learned ability of circumventing certain individuals and approaching others at different stages:

“...to get past and get around single decision-makers...I think it's a definitive strength, that a lone boss can rarely kill a really good idea. If you are skillful [at politics] you will find ways to get around, and go to someone else.”

Initiative development was often described by the informants ‘skunk-works projects’ on the side of daily operations. Thus, it much comes down to for an extended period of time to work on the initiative solely on the team’s own resources. Albeit limited, and only approach decision-makers for funding and approval of the initiative when further development requires a significant investment. Moreover, if the initiative is different/novel in the sense of being outside of the current business it is very hard to get it approved by the nearest decision-makers because they seem to a large degree being focused on making profit in the short term as it is their way of climbing the organizational ladder. Hence, there is a need to approach decision-makers

higher up in the hierarchy than the nearest local governing boards. Contradictory, getting the attention by the members of the executive team for a bottom-up idea require it to already have come to a certain decisive degree. Hence a local team manager explicated that:

“In large companies, there are always a group of people who are actually more interested in politics and get up to the top rather than to do cool, good stuff for the company. But it is when you are at the top, that you really have the task of just making sure the company is doing well. They [top management] sit in such a position that they can have big freedom on financial matters...To request a few millions from the management is nothing! On the other hand, if you come to a lower decision-maker where you have a turnover of 100 million, then you have a considerably more difficult time to harbor such initiatives.”

The manager further elaborated that the lower decision-makers who initially have been cautious or negative towards the initiative changed attitude once his team received endorsement from the company's corporate CEO:

“Suddenly the eyebrows were lifted and you got approached bit like this ‘oh yeah, what is this? Does he think this is good? Yes, but then I can't say that this is not good’ So then they became a bit quieter.”

Finally, middle-managers pushing for bottom-up initiatives experienced a need to approach different decision-makers and control/investment boards in distinctive ways. Meaning it was necessary for them to adapt (frame) the selling proposal of the initiative depending on the receiver. The manager in charge of an international team at digital services explained how they had created a short film (with actors) regarding the concept of a new in-vehicle service. The film explicated how the new service worked and how it affected the users, the consequences and advantages. Certainly, they also had proven tests indicting towards good results. The reaction from a control board related to marketing was tremendously positive who pushed towards showcasing it immediately to production development whose initial response was to debate over the cost of shooting the film. The director in question explained:

“We had the exact same approach, but immediately got rejected. If we've been familiar with their school of thought we probably would not even had shown the

film and only presented facts [a business case], and then the initiative would have gone through.”

The case further illustrates how the initiative-proposers leading the development lacked appropriate political skills in the sense of conveying the right message to the right decision-makers and the astute moment in time.

Rules and roles in the organization

Based on our findings on the strategies and moves, we can now further dismantle the negotiation process by discussing the rules and roles the initiative-proposers need to relate to when engaging in promotion and lobbying activities. Upon further elaboration with the managers in charge of bottom-up initiatives it became evident that ideas are in most cases not killed because they are weak but because there is little or no place for them in the existing organizational structure. Implying that there are few purely bad ideas but a lack of capabilities to explore them further. Managers at a group of emergent technologies expressed concerns about aligning the initiatives to current organizational resources and capabilities, with the senior manager saying:

“The more distant the idea is from what is our core business today, the stronger the idea must be in order to continue living. If the innovation is very much in line with your mission, it is easy. Then it does not need such a great height or such great potential to live on. But the farther away it is from what you really are set to do, the stronger it must be as an idea to live.”

Another manager, currently COO of Subsidiary Connectivity Lead with previous experience from corporate innovation expressed similar thoughts:

“When it gets too far from our regular business, then it is very difficult to get it through. That's how it is. And it is almost so that it needs to be sanctioned [induced] from the absolute top so that it will get full pressure.”

By establishing subsidiary business units in certain identified key areas of new technologies the company has sought to decrease the distance between bottom-up initiatives in these areas and current business. Hence, these subsidiaries have been given resources to pursue initiatives even though they are distant from the current (corporate) business concept. Furthermore, informants

articulated how top executives with the central CEO as a frontrunner have been clear in communicating that all initiatives will not be successful. Nevertheless, the envisioned culture is rooted in the allowance of daring and testing new bottom-up ideas. For the company as whole this have been a radical transformation; where previously everything was to be controlled and analyzed before e.g. initiating real-world trails. The COO at Subsidiary Connectivity Lead explained the new culture that promotes daring initiatives and allows failures:

“But there is a huge uncertainty in all these areas; how we should make money, how it should work in parallel with today's activities, how we should find competence. You name it, huge uncertainty. And that means you have to constantly evaluate, slow down, throttle up within different parts. And this is something that we [the MNC] traditionally are not used to do but our subsidiary have been given an independent role where we do not need to rely on shared services [with other organizational units] because they only hinder entrepreneurship at this stage.”

At the Subsidiary Connectivity Lead business models to some degree compete with the present market; the subsidiary is set to explore new forms of owning vehicles. Hence their services could potentially grow at the costs of existing products. The same trends were also identified at Subsidiary Mobility Lead exploring new sharing possibilities. This has been positive in the sense of allowing entitled units to develop business outside and around the core business. The Head of Corporate Development explained:

“We now have designated teams that work with what is not the core business. And you dare to talk about it and say ‘It is okay, these teams are working on it.’ Because it is important to drive innovation on different horizons.”

However, this change of ‘structural culture’ has resulted in tensions and an unequal playground in the organization. Innovation activities have become increasingly dispersed and, in a sense, isolated were members of different units struggle to comprehend one another, and fail to understand why some units enjoy greater freedom to develop bottom-up initiatives than others. As innovation has spread throughout the organization the understanding of who in the end is responsible for driving innovative initiatives has decreased; this has caused difficulties when

pushing bottom-up initiatives back into the main organization as exemplified in the following quotes:

“I can now say that almost each department has its own innovation group. Which is not always easy because we step on each other...And then there is a strategic decision-making board that feels that they really have ownership for the innovations.” (Digital Program Lead, Subsidiary Connectivity).

“At times it feels It's just a few people who actually understand what we are trying to do and accomplish, and that makes it all very precarious when promoting ideas bottom-up.” (Innovation manager at Digital Services).

The COO at Subsidiary Connectivity Lead remains ambivalent concerning the organizational implications:

“In the end, we have created a structure that makes it possible for us to come out with this [initiative], we actually have a mandate that if we do not want to negotiate, we can go straight forward. But it's clear that in the end it's not good either...In the larger organization it has been perceived as a bit annoying that we are actually now getting so much attention and support [from top management.]”

Within the subsidiary of Autonomous Drive (joint-venture) tendencies towards empire-building by local managers where their unit is portrayed as an independent company where Automotive Sweden and the other subsidiary units are regarded as simple customers. A manager leading an internal team focused on active safety (which is where autonomous driving lies) explained:

“To be honest, I am very critical on how Subsidiary Autonomous Drive has developed...They think they supply our Subsidiary Electrification Lead with their components but it goes via us...At times we have worse dialogue with them than with some of our suppliers...It's only working because of some personal relations where we know each other from before and understand how we think.”

The abovementioned aspects can be seen as experiences of organizational inertia, where despite the implementation of new structures, knowledge flows and coordination de facto continue to sub-optimally follow the same patterns associated with the old structure. Even though boundary spanning middle-managers are encouraged to drive bottom-up initiative and establish cross-functional teams these groups are structurally too weak to compete for top-managerial attention and are outcompeted by business units directly sanctioned by top management.

Resources and stakes in the game

After highlighting our findings regarding the strategies/moves and rules/roles we can complete the picture by discussing further longer-term implications of bottom-up initiatives and how they advance an organization. In the text above we acknowledged some of the complications regarding decentralized innovation structures; smaller boundary spanning teams often experienced an increased need of political maneuvering in order to acquire resources and decisions to their initiatives. As explained by a Head of Business Innovation with experience from supporting several different teams:

“Sometimes there is a persistence difficulty of getting any kind of decision. Is it an approval or is it a rejection of this project, this idea that our team does? In some way you end up constantly having to promote it to different decision groups, to different people, decision-makers...higher and higher up the ladder, if they say no then you go on to someone else trying to get a yes there.”

A fundamental difference is noted with larger product development groups and the external subsidiaries as they possess certain resources of their own and are to a lesser degree dependent on others. The COO at Subsidiary Connectivity Lead explained:

“The advantage for us is that we sit on the resources ourselves. Many of the [cross-functional] innovation teams we have in product strategy and product development, they do not have the resources themselves to be able to take the next step, they are highly dependent on others to make it work. It is a bit unclear where you make the decisions then.”

A manager of a group at Digital Services tried to establish an initiative at a plant in China but experienced struggles because of the local executive (in China) not seeing any direct short-term gains. The proposing manager explained:

“When I wanted them to look much further ahead, it became a conflict in their interests. Their boss wanted the local team to produce a value of two, three months and we wanted them to produce value in three years' time. It didn't fit together, they were often put on doing very short-term investigations on completely different things. And that was a problem, that we did not control these resources.”

Hence the new organizational structure has in part been created due to the realization that the existing internal teams were not ‘allowed’ to be innovative owing to the lack of mandate and difficulties of leveraging initiatives that challenges/disrupts the main business. It was noted to a varying degree across all interviews that initiatives which sets to explores the unknown are difficult if not mere impossible to evaluate by the established routines of traditional business cases. So, what is then a completed initiative? Several interviewees working with bottom-up initiatives expressed a need by upper managers to also evaluate value creation outside of conventional commercial and monetary indicators. A senior manager of Digital Innovation described:

“An idea does not become an innovation until we can extract value from it, however it does not need to be implemented to create value, value can be created along the way when you build up knowledge or generating brand recognition by getting it out to the public.”

To bring this section to a close it was demonstrated how no-one can predict the future, even though the future can be seen as the present of the past. Meaning that the decisions made today determines the decisions that can be made in the future. In relation to the bottom-up initiatives it was illustrated how they could influence the creation of future subsidiary units. The senior manager of Digital Innovation explained:

“[Radical] ...innovation is not implemented until it either exists as a brand new business unit within the company, but more likely as a new company owned by us.”

Another senior innovation manager referred to the final implementation of initiatives as the ‘corporization’ of them:

“The ultimate purpose of the ‘In-vehicle delivery’ [initiative], was to show that it is indeed possible to make money in other ways, and around mobility services rather than just the actual mobility itself, and to sell cars. So, our initiative created the necessary push that was needed to get a lot of this to happen...However, I think that one also could have picked less mature ideas and already incorporated them [as standalone business units].”

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study has been to move beyond the macro-level and instead investigate managerial actions in detail; what managers actually do that allows their initiatives to gain a foothold in the organization for future commitments. It can be concluded that the findings correspond to earlier observations in some aspects, but the findings also reveal characteristics that have been less commonly noted in previous research.

As with all modern MNCs Automotive Europe wishes to facilitate bottom-up initiatives and provide managerial attention to future business leaders with new ideas. The case study reveals the complexity of bringing bottom-up initiatives as characterized by continuous lobbying and selling activities by initiative-proposers. The study by Dutton et al., (2001) shows that the early involvement of others in the process of issue selling was an important ingredient for the successful outcome of the selling process. Our findings confirm and goes beyond this notion, it was demonstrated that it was crucial for new ideas to gain an early buy-in from decision-makers. Hence, lobbying activities and the recognition of the idea begins at its very inception. The success of those activities depends on the availability and handling of personal relationships by the middle managers. On the other hand, Delany (2000) illustrated that the engagement in developing ideas and opportunities is essentially an *under the radar* activity which is protected from scrutiny until a success can be demonstrated. Thus, implying that innovation leaders withhold their ideas in the formative stage. Our case study shows how initiative-proposers risk finding themselves in 'catch-22' situation where the closest decision-makers are reluctant to commit resources on initiatives that does not yield an immediate gain and when it is too difficult to gain attention from top executives due to a lack of initiative development. Without persistency by these individuals to continue driving the initiative forward as skunk-work projects the organization risks losing out on potential opportunities.

Moreover, O'Brien et al., (2019) suggested that they may be a trade-off between the selling of ideas and implementation of ideas in MNCs. Thus, managers that spend their time championing initiatives for support may fail to devote adequate attention to the realization of initiatives. The findings from our study supports this notion by illustrating the hazardousness of revealing too much of the idea at an early stage; an inherent risk of others not understanding it endangers the survival of it as negative talk will spread throughout the organization. For small teams with limited resources to develop initiatives this is a tremendous difficulty which can be seen as a messenger problem of innovation; there is a constant need to involve the rest of the organization

in the initiative development. By involving key people from other parts of the organization e.g. production, logistics and marketing, business development units leading bottom-up initiatives can spread the understanding of what is going on and thus enabling the broader organization to familiarize themselves with the initiative. Hence, increasing the commitment base and building legitimacy around the initiative which positively affects the likelihood of acquiring additional means to pursue development.

On the other hand, due to certain underlying structures, systems and predispositions within the organization that suppress the advancement of creation-oriented activities such as initiatives (Birkinshaw and Ridderstråle, 1999). Novel initiatives are often judged as distant, situated outside or in the periphery of the current business. Hence, when uncertainty comes into place, organizational members not involved in the initiative often express unwillingness to accept new knowledge; decisions are thus based upon what is good for the individual decision-makers and their closest unit rather than overall organization (Katz and Allen, 1982). Consequently, the findings illustrate that the more an initiative deviates from the current operations, strategies or capabilities of the organization the need to maneuver the political landscape of the organization increases. As novel ideas are more difficult to contextualize and measure with traditional indicators the importance of astute selling and promotion activities by the managers becomes the key politicking ability for reaching organizational commitment to the initiative and overcoming organizational inertia.

Moreover, our findings reveal a type of external involvement in initiatives not considered in previous studies on initiative-selling. Gorgijevski, Holmström-Lind and Lagerström (2019) proposed that 'going solo' may actually be a better option than to engage actively in involving outsiders when it comes to the selling of subsidiary initiatives. While the proposition per se might be true in our findings, we see that external involvement in the context of public responses and media can have an immense effect on the leveraging of the initiative. Previous studies have predominantly only conceptualized involvement by other actors closer to the value-chain such as customers and suppliers during the actual selling propositions to the decision-makers.

Finally, this study discloses how bottom-up initiatives can influence long-term strategy. A particular initiative in the case illustrated how the value-chain of the company expanded to also include mobility services of digitally-enabled cars. Burgelman (1991) discussed autonomous and induced strategy processes; processes driven by individual managers or subunits within the

organization versus processes driven by top management in line with the organizational strategy. Our findings suggest that ‘autonomous’ initiatives by individual managers over time can become ‘induced’ policies by the executive management. Because of good strategies and moves by the innovation managers the main ideas of the initiative become ‘incorporated’ (to live on in a separate business unit). Hence, although initiatives outside the scope of current operations suffer disadvantages in acquiring resources from decision-makers compared to their better adjusted initiatives, they can continue to survive within the organization (in smaller boundary-spanning teams) due to the political skills of individual managers.

Theoretically, we encourage future research to conceptualize the ‘strategic renewal journey’ of initiatives as an ongoing a political process through a dialectic logic. Rather than that by the commonly applied evolutionary VSR-framework which we see as prescribed to explain selection dichotomously and neglecting the politicking behaviors of individual managers. The empirics from our case show how selection or commitment to an initiative in-principal transpires gradually by different governing managers with resource allocation mandates. Hence, a process of conflict/negotiation continually materializes. The reason for this is that the gradual commitments characterized by adjustments and/or further improvements of the initiative gives rise to new ‘organizational premises’ the initiative-proposers need to overcome. Thus, we consider the selection of an initiative as the survival of a negotiation process, which most likely reoccurs numerous times before final acceptance and implementation procedures are initiated. Within these negotiation processes we propose that politically skilled individuals are better to accumulate and protect scarce organizational resources and these behaviors are not necessarily of evil; rather they reduce the information asymmetry between the premise of decision-makers (top management) and bottom-up initiative proposers (boundary spanners).

Finally, the study highlights the difficulty of striking a balance between the need of autonomous, creative innovation teams and a main organization that is open to these ideas. Regardless of the organizational structure a certain level of fit with the MNC’s core activities always seems to be necessary (Birkinshaw and Ridderstråle, 1999). Although separated business units sanctioned from executive management with own resources and mandates can more independently pursue initiatives, the outcome e.g. product, service or process has to be retained and implemented also in the wider organization. Not only for generating increased value to the overall MNC but also for mitigating unnecessary power struggles with smaller boundary-spanning teams.

CONCLUSION

By studying how bottom-up entrepreneurial initiatives gain foothold in the organization this paper highlights some of the underlying mechanisms that have received limited attention in previous research. We have identified the role and manifestation of politicking moves by boundary-spanners seeking approval and recognition of their initiatives, explored the structures of the MNC's playground and analyzed the resources in these configurations. We hope that this will inspire continued research on corporate entrepreneurship from a micro-political perspective.

In terms of managerial implications, the insights into initiative managers' experience of the bottom-up innovation processes can help top management better understand the bottom-up perspective on their actions and why it can lead to negative effects such as missed opportunities, frustration and inefficiencies. The study shows how the negotiation process of innovative ideas truly is an arduous process underscored by the engagement in micro-political games. A particular suggestion is not to restrict the pursuit of innovation, for no-one can with certainty predict which ideas will be successful in the marketplace. In fast changing and dynamic environments which the automotive industry is becoming due to changes in customers, technologies and competition, success is heavily dependent on the organization's ability to renew themselves. Hence, the development of (radical) innovative products, services and processes that is able to turn non-consumers into consumers e.g. creating new markets. Whereas smaller companies with fewer resources are able to challenge established incumbent business in certain overlooked or new segments, MNCs have the advantage of the possibility to employ boundary-spanners to alleviate the risk of leaving these areas untouched. The difficulty seems to be to be on finding a balance between incremental R&D in the traditional business while exploring new businesses. The bottom-up initiatives could benefit if the entrepreneurial teams were encouraged to problematize on issues related to implementation and transferability across the MNC in order to reduce biases such groupthink and not-invented-here syndrome.

Theoretically, this study demonstrates the need for researchers to construct and validate multifaceted measures when investigating the 'selection' processes of initiatives. Bottom-up initiatives are presented at several developmental stages and to different decision-makers throughout the developmental stages. Hence, it is difficult to correctly measure and portray the

acceptance or rejection as a one-time dichotomous activity based on the evolutionary VSR-framework.

We acknowledge that the findings of this study may be limited to only certain MNCs and to industries ongoing large change processes themselves. In our case of the automotive industry experiencing a shift into the digital arena which has to some degree allowed for and made it necessary to undertake more radical variations of status quo. Future research is needed to examine the ‘fear of missing out’ and how it potentially influences managers decision-making process in industries previously regarded as stable and matured. An interesting avenue for future research would also be to address which type of initiatives that are best developed in-house and which should be sourced outside of the main organization? We recognize that personal relationships and hierarchical power relations correspondingly do influence and are intertwined in these activities. Lastly, future research might benefit by approaching the phenomenon of bottom-up initiatives as an ‘effectuation process’, originally constructed by Sarasvathy (2001) to describe the process entrepreneurs follow as they prepare to start a new company.

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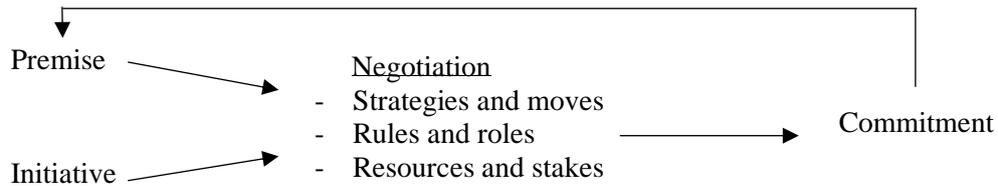
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Figure 1. Initiative process**Table 1. Informants**

Date	Unit / Current position	No. Yrs. / No. Pos.
181218	<i>Automotive Europe</i> , Senior Manager – Global Services	25 years, 10+ positions
190206	<i>Automotive Europe</i> , Manager – Innovation and New Technology	17 years, 5+ positions
190206	<i>Automotive Europe</i> , Senior Manager – Corporate Innovation	19 years, 8 positions
190226	<i>Automotive Europe</i> , Senior Manager – Corporate Innovation	17 years, 7 positions
190226	<i>Automotive Europe</i> , Head of Business Innovation and New Technology	17 years, 10+ positions
190307	<i>Automotive Europe</i> , Senior Manager – Innovation and New Technology	35 years, 10+ positions
190311	<i>Automotive Europe</i> , Head of Innovation Digital Services	6 years, 3 positions
190319	<i>Automotive Europe</i> , Senior Manager – Corporate Innovation	14 years, 4 positions
190325	<i>Automotive Europe</i> , Senior Manager of Innovation Digital Services	14 years, 4 positions
190326	<i>Automotive Europe</i> , Director – External Research	1 year, 1 position
190327	<i>Automotive Europe</i> , Director – New and Emergent Technologies	32 years, 12 positions
190402	<i>Automotive Europe</i> , Director – Strategy and Innovation Concepts	19 years, 7 positions
190404	<i>Automotive Europe</i> , Manager – New and Emergent Technologies	15 years, 6 positions
190404	<i>Automotive Europe</i> , Head of Corporate Development and Governance	1 year, 1 position
190411	<i>Automotive Europe</i> , Manager Strategy and Innovation Concepts	23 years, 10+ positions
190611	<i>Automotive Europe</i> , Innovation Leader – Corporate Innovation	5 years, 3 positions
190225	<i>Business Unit Autonomous Lead</i> , Senior Technology Advisor	18 years, 4 positions
190314	<i>Business Unit Autonomous Lead</i> , Manager – Intellectual Property	1 year, 1 position
190327	<i>Business Unit Connectivity Lead</i> , Chief Operating Officer	19 years, 7 positions
190417	<i>Business Unit Connectivity Lead</i> , Manager – Digital Program Lead	14 years, 4 positions
190409	<i>Business Unit Electrification Lead</i> , Head of Enterprise Digital	11 years, 3 positions
190411	<i>Business Unit Mobility Lead</i> , Chief Operating Officer	8 years, 4 positions
190410	<i>Automotive Europe Production Unit</i> , Quality Engineer	32 years, 5+ positions
190307	<i>External researcher</i> in collaboration with <i>Automotive Europe</i>	-

Figure 2. Company structure of Informants

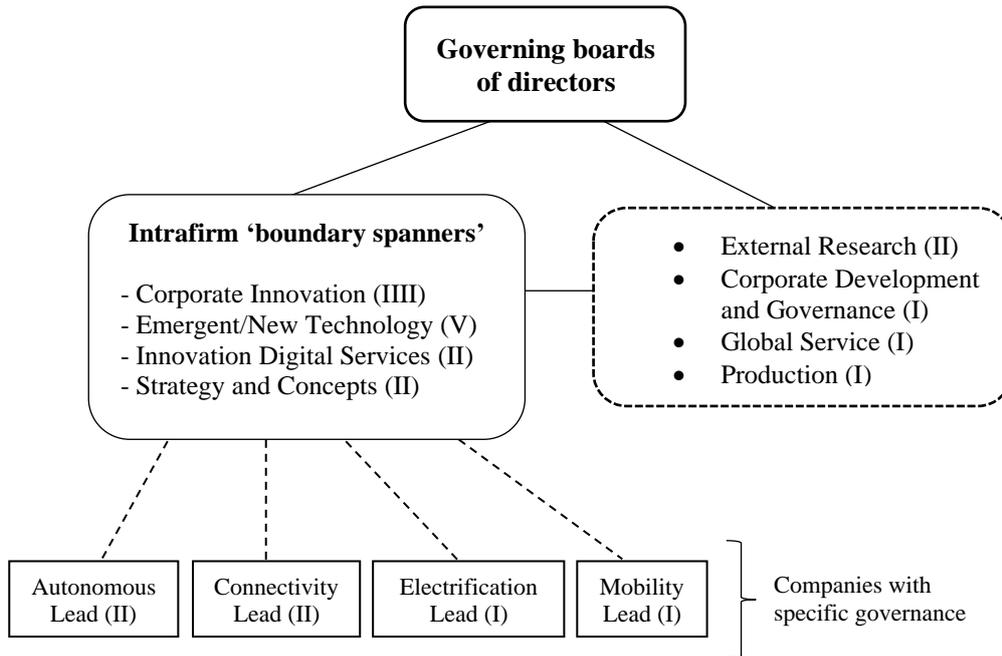
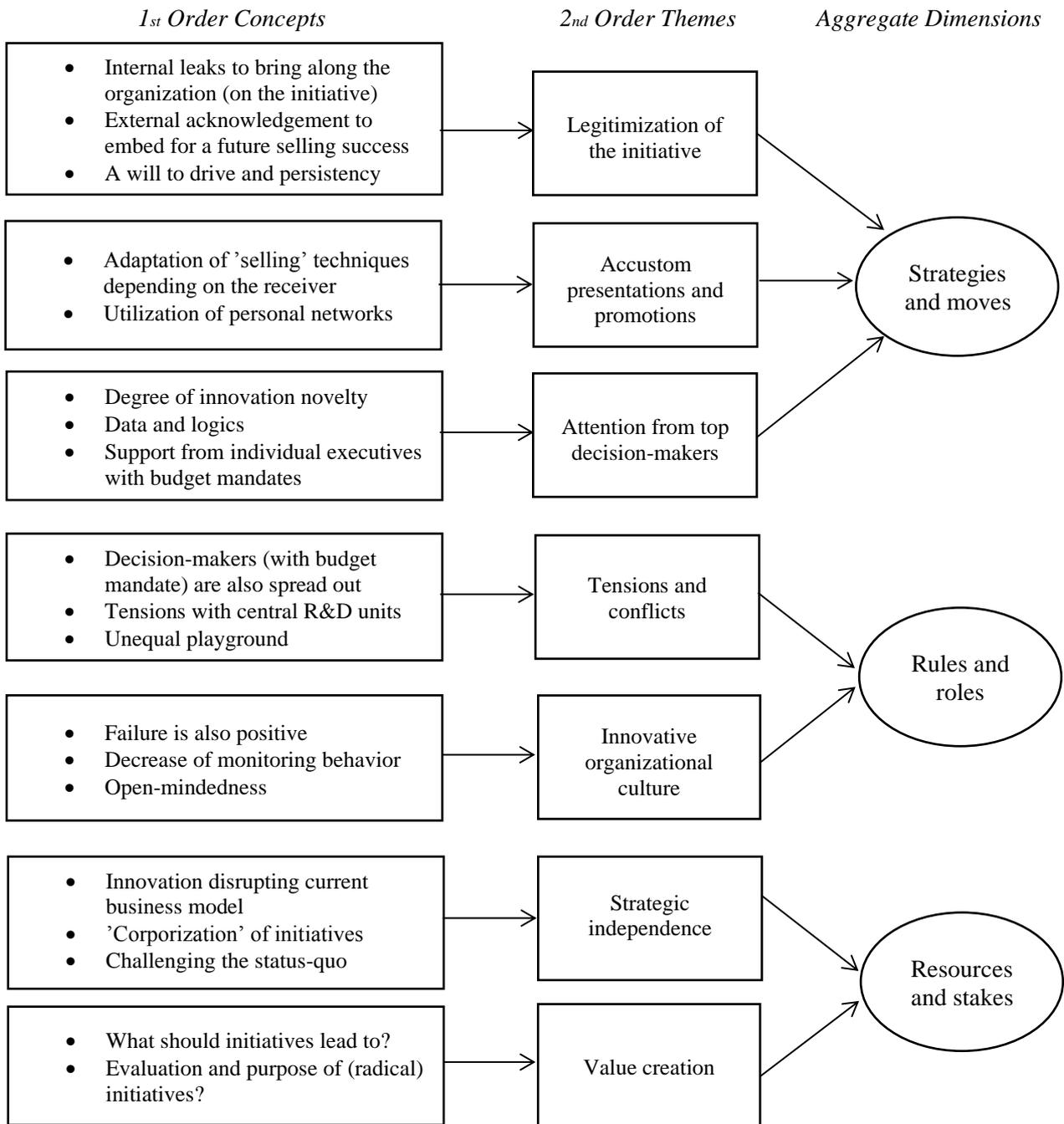


Figure 3. Coding structure



APPENDIX: Supplemental quotes about the survival and leveraging of bottom-up initiatives

Theme	Representative quotations
Strategies and moves	
Legitimization of the initiative	<p>“And it is because the demands from the beginning have not been clear with what they need to make decisions I believe. Or that it feels so uncomfortable because it is still quite far from our core business.”</p> <p>“It is possible to keep on infinity, because no one really knows what they need to make decisions. Most of the time you need more basis all the time. More decision support.”</p> <p>“You have a manager sitting there who can actually, who understands the politics, who’s very experienced, who’s very seasoned in the work that he or she is actually doing, and can actually open doors for the rest of the organization”</p>
Accustom presentations and promotions	<p>“Skunk-work is where it happens, That is where it happens, it has never happened in the formal structures. So as now you are passionate about AI, one says no and the next but we continue and then we see. But in the end you have to go and ask for money, and then you go back to those who have said no from the beginning - that's where it fails. If you are lucky then they are in another place and come to others who need to say yes or no. That's how I look at it. Because if you go to the same as said no once from the beginning you get a no again or best case you'll get a maybe”</p> <p>“It is it based on which one you have in such a decision group also, if you beforehand know that a person there will say no right from the start. Then you have to work in other ways...”</p>
Attention from top decision-makers	<p>“I say that it is quite a lot of individual managers that affect quite a lot. It is seldom only one boss, but if you can get a manager's lead where there is one or two who have a certain attitude, then it starts to look good pretty fast.”</p>
Rules and roles	
Decentralized innovation structures	<p>“Most ideas die because people can't work with their idea, one is. The second is that once they have become an idea that goes on and evolves, one must not work with them because there is no place in the organization”</p>
Innovative organizational structures	<p>“Our transformation have resulted in a fairly radical change compared to just 10 years ago when every little initiative was extremely controlled and broken down before we dared to do anything.”</p> <p>“Creating a culture where curiosity and receptiveness and openness to the environment has become a natural part.”</p>
Resources and stakes	
Value creation	<p>“You cannot judge market potential as well as in the same way. So then we tried to work with other things and talk about market potential in other ways, that is, this is in the direction that trends seem to go and which customers seem to like, it is a future challenge for society...”</p> <p>“All initiatives need to create a value. And the sooner one can evaluate the value, the better it is for everyone involved. Because I mean, I usually also say that it is okay to consume services, but it is never okay to consume people. So when one works with the wrong things, then it gets shit for everyone.”</p> <p>“There may be ideas that are being killed prematurely, before it has been possible to prove a value in it. And then one would be able to turn the steak and think so that yes, but let the ideas ... let, what to say, the teams work on their ideas and find, try to prove a value in them.”</p>
Strategic independence	<p>“Resources on a specific idea, it could be resources in money, but another important thing that a large organization has to think about is also resources in terms of time. You can provide money to an idea, but do we actually have the people?”</p>
