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## Management Practices in Innovative Business Models Multilateral Platforms

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** This paper focuses on studying the kinds of actions and management practices that depict an entrepreneurial culture present in businesses based on a multilateral platform. We, therefore, sought theoretical background on the different types of innovative business models (long tail, multilateral platforms, freemium (free + premium), business disaggregation and open innovation), as well as practices that could be associated with organizations having an entrepreneurial culture. Methodologically, we consider this study to be qualitative in regards to how the problem is approached and exploratory concerning its objectives. Our procedure method was a case study of MOGO Software Development and Applications LTDA., from Paraná, Brazil, that produces mobile solutions for restaurants and customers. We interviewed managers of the organization, based on a check list with an interview script. The results showed that the organization in question falls under the multilateral management platform model, demonstrating practices that are directed to management, strategy and to people management of personnel who are more developed than those listed in innovation management. This business model, being relatively new in Brazil, arouses ones interest in learning in-depth about this type of management, especially the aspects relating to managing innovation in small businesses

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## INTRODUCTION

The manner in which the internet has facilitated communication has revolutionized the business world by providing an environment that is conducive to bringing supply and demand closer together and vice versa, or by promoting business possibilities between interested parties. At an ever increasing rate, web technology solutions are developed along these lines and some of them are conceived with innovative business models, as is the case addressed by Osterwalder and Pigneur (2011). A business model is defined “as a representation of a firm’s underlying core logic and strategic choices for creating and capturing value within a value network.” (Shafer *et al.*, 2005, p.20).

This article focuses on the kind of business that is based on multilateral platforms, considered innovative as it connects two or more distinct segments of customers through technological solutions, which occurs within the operating system of the World Wide Web environment. “Two-sided Platforms serve distinct groups of customers who need each other in some way, and the core business of the two-sided platform is to provide a common (real or virtual) meeting place and to facilitate interactions between members of the two distinct customer groups.” (Evans and Schmalensee, 2007).

Most studies on multilateral platforms are based on economic theories, focusing on competitiveness, strategy, market relationship, theory of transaction costs and pricing. Among other studies are those of Rochet and Tirole (2002) where they deal with the network economy and multiproduct prices together; Evans (2002) explained the economics of two-sided markets, considered several important examples, and discussed the implications of this kind of market structure for antitrust analysis; Hagiu (2006) studied pricing and commitment by platforms in two-sided markets; Armstrong (2006) presented three models of markets of multilateral platforms: a monopoly platform; a model of competing platforms; and a model of competitive bottlenecks; Trégouët (2008) assessed whether vertical integration can help in solving the coordination problem which arises

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in two-sided markets; Hagiú and Spulber (2013) considered the nature of buyer and seller expectations and the nature of the relationship between first-party content and third-party content.

Unlike traditional economic focus on multilateral platforms, this article aims to address management aspects. It is assumed that innovative businesses have management characteristics that are different than those of other companies and that these innovative business formats are managed by practices that have fostered their success. Hence, we sought to investigate the management practices used in a company that utilizes the business model based on the multilateral platform.

The company studied was Mogo Software and Applications Development Ltda., a company located in the western region of Paraná State, Brazil. Its target publics are restaurants and those restaurant's potential clients. Their platform uses an Android system that enables the restaurants to offer their services, promotions and publicity while at the same time allowing their client to consult other restaurants registered in a certain region and order ahead of time. The Mogo offers the restaurant to managing your business through a software. This software connects the client to the restaurant, we can access your order in advance or an interactive menu to order with delivery. The company combined practicality and strategy and was able to achieve rapid success using this business model. Within this context, the following research challenge arises: What are the management practices used by the company that undertakes a business model with a multilateral platform standard?

Understanding these management practices developed by these companies opens up opportunities for actions that would foster the success of other organizations who want to apply this management model.

This paper aims to investigate practices related to the management of an entrepreneurial culture in a software business characterized by the multilateral platform model. For this purpose, we sought a theoretical foundation in the innovative business models characterized as a multilateral platform, as well as practices that may be associated with entrepreneurial culture organizations.

It is worth mentioning that the thematic association between innovative business models and management practices of an entrepreneurial culture are innovative and there are no scientific papers that address this issue. Scientific papers found that approach the addressed theme seek to explain the role of the corporate culture in business models, similar to a strategic asset and how it affects financial performance (Flamholtz and Randle, 2012); Lemon and Sahota (2004) present a conceptual model of organizational culture as a multi-layered knowledge repository; Brettel *et al.* (2014) developed a theoretical model which links the forms of organizational culture, namely group, hierarchical, developmental, and rational culture, to the dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation (innovativeness, pro-activeness, and risk-taking); Gao (2013) researched the impact of culture on business models for international retailers in emerging markets, such as China; Hakala and Kohtamäki (2010) investigated how the interaction between entrepreneurs, clients and technology affect the company's performance in the software sector; Bock *et al.* (2012) studied how culture and structure affect the strategic flexibility during the innovation of the business model and how the effort to innovate the business model moderates these relationships, and Chesbrough (2010) explored the barriers to business model innovation. In the next section, the methodological procedures are described, followed by the results and discussion, ending with the conclusion.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this section we outline the methodological characteristics of the study along with the research instrument and methodological procedures adopted.

### *Scientific Characteristics of the Research:*

This is a qualitative study, of an exploratory nature, which uses the case study and bibliographic research as a methodological procedure. According to Richardson (2008), the qualitative approach aims at complex situations or those that are strictly private, with it being the investigator's option to consider this approach appropriate for understanding the nature of the social phenomenon. This is what takes place during this research where we aim to learn about the specifics of the object under study, to recognize it or not, as an innovative business model, and if so, what are the characteristics of their management.

From the objectives stand point, this is an exploratory study because there is no previous research done on this topic in the organization under study and also because very little study has been done on this theme by academia. (Santos, 1999)

Bibliographic review is an essential part of any type of scientific research. "It is implicit in the cumulative nature of scientific knowledge itself," (Santo, 1992, p. 81). It fulfills the role of recapturing theoretical knowledge already disseminated publicly, therefore, supporting the analysis of the results.

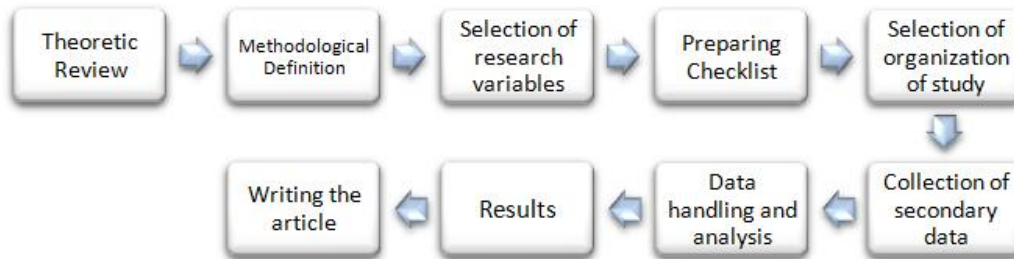
This case study consists of an empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon in real-life context which allows the use of a range of evidence (Yin, 2005). The study focuses on finding practices showing an entrepreneurial culture present in a multilateral platform management model, which is the unit of analysis. The

reason for choosing the organization under study, Mogo Software and Applications Development Ltda. (dubbed Mogo), is due to having easy access to the owners who made themselves available to provide information that would be relevant to the study.

As this is a case study, one cannot expect the results to be generalized for similar situations.

***Instrument for collecting evidence and analysis procedure:***

Theoretical foundations obtained throughout literature supported the selection of research variables and defined the methodological procedures to be applied. The study design can be seen in Figure 1.



**Fig. 1:** Resresearch design, Source: Drawn up by authors.

The survey instrument was developed in the form of a check list that works as a script for the interview, having open and closed questions. The construction of a data collecting instrument aimed to outline issues that would (i) identify patterns of business models and (ii) create affirmations on management practices used by the company that is indicated as having an entrepreneurial culture, in the form of a check list.

To identify business model patterns, 15 (fifteen) open questions were drawn up, inspired by the Canvas Osterwalder and Pigneur model (2011), in order to obtain information that would characterize the case and therefore the business, that adopts the multilateral platform model. These figures are presented in a qualitative manner. In order to determine the actions and practices characteristic of an entrepreneurial culture, 35 questions were drawn up in the following categories: Section 1 – Management and Strategy with 12 questions; Section 2 – People Management with 7 questions; Section 3 – Innovation Management with 16 questions.

The questions were phrased affirmatively, using the Likert scale of 5 points (1- strongly disagree to 5- strongly agree) for each question. Data gathered was recorded on excel sheets and presented in a graphic and descriptive format.

The organization chosen for this study met the criteria of accessibility. Data was collected on the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of September, 2013. The interview was done electronically. After transcribing the data from the interview, on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of October, 2013, the results of the interview were presented to the interviewee for analysis and confirmation of the data transcribed.

***Results:***

The results will be presented according to the way the blocks were organized in the survey tool, beginning with the case and then the results.

***The Case:***

Mogo represents an innovative business model characterized as a multilateral platform. It is active in the innovative *software* field for restaurants and food companies and is located in the city of Cascavel, in western Paraná State, Brazil. The company has a technological development center in Pato Branco, another city in the same state.

This innovative idea was born from an informal conversation amongst some young people discussing services provided by restaurants and the need for quality improvement. As they didn't have financial resources for an initial investment, they contacted entrepreneurs and investors who agreed to finance the project. After the legal aspects were taken care of, the company was successfully inaugurated in 2012. There are three partners, one of them being the investing partner while the other two are systems developers and operational managers of the company. There are presently five employees, two acting in the commercial area (sales and client prospecting) and the other three in development and systems support.

Mogo's sphere of business covers the state of Paraná. The *software* the company develops allows for differentiated activities, for both managing restaurants as well as for their clients. They can both take advantage of the services within the same *software*. The restaurant can use it on a network, controlling orders in a practical and versatile manner, in the kitchen, at the food and drinks distribution point and the company's cash flow. Now, the client can use this *software* at the restaurant table without even needing the assistance of a waiter, or

they could access a computer or mobile device connecting to the internet to make a reservation, order ahead of time or request home delivery. With this *software* that serves the restaurant and its final client, the company is characterized as having a multilateral platform, an innovative business model that has been widely accepted in the market.

The software allows the customer to anticipate his application and interact with the restaurant beyond its physical space. It has an interactive menu that ensures the interaction between the company and its client on an innovative and practical way. Thus, the offered product is: a management software for the enterprise, which features an interactive menu for the restaurant's customer, who can access the menu before going to the restaurant or use it to place your order for delivery.

The software helps on the management of restaurants, bars, fast food, deliveries, cafeterias and similar places, involving the administrative, financial, commercial, production and supply sectors, offering best practices in the management process.

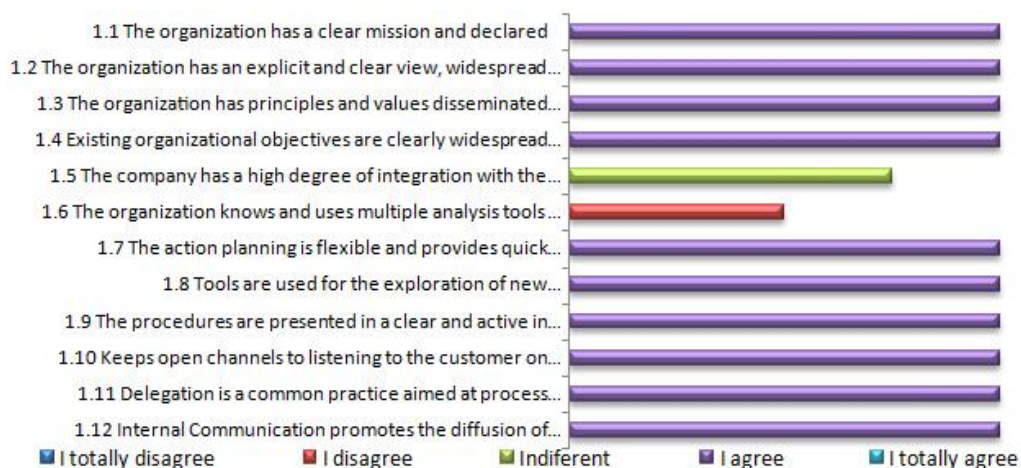
The proposed value generated by the company meets the needs of both client segments. The restaurants, in providing a technological tool that is a source for income and not just expense, fostering better management of activities and closer contact with their client, as well as helping maintain a closer relationship with them. For the final consumer client, it offers a channel where one can use the restaurant services beyond its physical boundaries, free and in a digital environment.

According to Mogos's developer, the order and delivery times are improved in 40% in comparison to the conventional model previously used. Companies using the software Mogo also reported an increase in the number of customers due to the software implementation.

With this business model, the managers consider the key factor of success to be having a tool that adds value to both segments, the restaurant and the final consumer, in an innovative way. For market penetration, it is fundamental that a free testing base is made available to restaurant clients with a limited number of accesses in order to demonstrate the product and for marketing. They also calculate that the financial return of this tool would be six months from the launching of the product of the beta test plan. All characteristics of the Mogo business model, from the initial planning to its implementation have undergone conceptual and management practices changes.

### ***Empiric Results:***

Moving along, we will now exhibit and describe the predominant business practices of the organization under study, inserted in the multilateral platform model, with the evidence collecting tool used as the guideline. Regarding the company management and strategy, 12 questions were applied (Figure 2). Of these, 10 were graded 4, which means that they agree with the affirmation and execute them. Only one question was graded 3, which means indifference and another one was graded 2, meaning that there is a disagreement with the proposed question.



**Fig. 2:** Management & Strategy.

The results show that by agreeing with the questions regarding the mission, vision, objectives, principles and values, the managers affirm that these are expressed clearly and disseminated among employees and stakeholders, through internal murals, in their meetings and employee training. This characterizes the company as idealizing an environment conducive to their line of work, guaranteeing that everyone knows the organization's strategy and can contribute to achieving it.

The company's mission is to "Create practical technological solutions that allow our clients to reach their

publics, both inside and outside of their establishment in an uncomplicated manner.” Their outstanding values are customer satisfaction, adding value to people, trust, entrepreneurial spirit and respect. Their vision is to “be amongst the five largest national companies in the *software* segment for bars and restaurants by 2016.” Long term goals involve continual growth and the search for innovation.

Mogo understands that the planning of organizational actions, carried out in regular meetings with managers and investors, must be flexible so they are able to change rapidly if need be. Although they do not do future prospecting to anticipate market tendencies, they seek to listen to the client through open channels.

Another point that also contributes to management is their internal procedures that are conceived organically with activities directed to employees according to its nature and as the flow increases, therefore establishing minimum and efficient control. Mogo uses digital, standardized *software* to relay messages and calls to employees. They work with empowerment, that facilitates faster decision making, yet having effective internal communication, flowing in all directions, which is easier due to the smaller number of employees. Communication, without the handicap of bureaucracy tends to strengthen the smooth running of organizational procedures.

All those strategic aspects made grade 4 and are important for organizational performance favorable to market changes, anticipating ideas and greater competitiveness, transmitting these ideals to their employees and *stakeholders*.

Mogo realizes that they still do not have a high level of integration in the external market and still haven't applied several different tools that analyze this environment. Management believes this is due to the fact that the product is still quite new and yet is very well received by its clients. They do affirm, however, that they will soon begin studying different market analysis tools so as to better serve the external environment, considering the importance of this procedure for organizational success.

Hence, in respect to management and strategy, the company performs a major part of the actions and practices proposed on the checklist. Management claims that they didn't answer with the highest possible grade because they believe that all organizations need to think that there are points for development that are greater than those they have already reached, in order to constantly improve.

The results of practices and actions regarding People Management (Figure 3) show that among 7 questions, 5 of them were defined as grade 4, where managers agreed and affirm that they are applied. Only 2 of them were graded as disagreeing. In other words, that they are not fully applied in the company. Among the practices implemented, there is holding regular informal meetings to encourage cohesion among colleagues and good relationships. The company claims they know their employees and map out their skills to foster the proper allocation of resources, directing their personal skills and avoiding rework. Another practice they apply is training their employees to be more pro-active, to anticipate possible actions that could add to the company's results.



**Fig. 3:** People Management.

The managers also agree that the organizational culture is collaborative, where there is team participation and everyone contributes positively to realize business activities, being that they develop actions that value and give recognition to their employees. In the people management approach, the actions the managers did not agree on and do not apply, due to the fact that they are a young company in this field and have not yet fully consolidated their policies, are the programs that select the personnel's intra-entrepreneurial profiles in order to direct them towards management and in leading internal projects as well as focus on organizational learning.

For innovative management results, 16 questions were drawn up (Figure 4), where 4 were defined as grade 4, where managers agree and affirm that they apply them, 1 was marked indifferent, and 10 as partially disagreeing, in other words that they are not thoroughly applied in the company.



**Fig. 4:** Innovation Management.

For organizations, innovation represents the possibility of organizational continuity amid a highly competitive market. Therefore, developing actions that stimulate an environment that fosters innovation becomes crucial, everywhere from human resource training, effective communication, encouraging one to come up with new ideas and creative tools. Mago's results in Innovative Management show that the organization has not yet grasped enough knowledge of all the points directing towards innovative management. Although they do know the importance of these points and have a business that fits into this innovative model, they still need to hone their focus towards a more innovative management.

The practices and actions the company uses that were graded 4 in this scenario is due to the fact that the company is seeking to always encourage a creative and innovative working atmosphere. This is done through personnel training, the use of creative tools, effective communication, generating opportunities for new products, as well as stimulating research and development, along with a focus on an offensive innovation strategy, positioning the organization ahead of their competitors in a technical and market leadership. Another emphasis is that they search for specialized personnel for project managing to shorten deadlines and increase the possibility of success as well as make budgets that foresee and are able to tolerate risks associated with innovative projects. Some innovative management actions are still in an underdeveloped stage, although the managers do recognize their importance. Among them are: A process for selecting ideas in the internal and external environment, because, although the organization encourages generating new ideas, they should also be concerned with how to select them; The absence of multifunctional project; Lack of continuity in the innovative process; There is no network for managing innovation nor an organizational knowledge repository; No appropriate policy developed for intellectual property; and insufficient knowledge and use of external resources for financing innovative projects.

Therefore, among the practices and actions of Management and Strategy, People Management and Innovation Management, one can see that the company under study applies 57% of these techniques when affirming that they agree with the same. We would like to emphasize the logic of the manager who answered the questionnaire affirming that he decided not to answer that he agreed totally because he understands that an organization always needs to have a higher goal to reach, that they should always be seeking to improve. Practices and actions that people did not agree with, due to the fact that they were not applied in the company, added up to 37%, although the majority of them were justified because the company is new in the market and the managers understand the importance of each one and plan to implement them. The indifferent ones were only 6%.

We would like to stress, therefore, that the organization, inserted in this Multilateral Platform, applies more than 50% of the practices and actions investigated in this research, demonstrating that they are knowledgeable of these techniques that contribute to honing their activities.

**Discussion:**

The model studied was the Multilateral Platforms and from the management practices studied, it was possible to analyze how their internal relations are supported to foster organizational success, where the basic function of the platform is to supply the necessary infrastructure and rules that would allow for the effective exchange among the groups. The interdependence between the two sides of the platform affects the strategies administered, since analyzing the market is essential for good competitive performance, for strategic management with an innovative focus, flexibility in handling change, having a sustainable vision, autonomy for the employees and with favorable internal communication. (Freeman, 1987) Aside from the strategic factors, in light of the results, one notices how essential the people are to the organization. They are part of the organizational process and ensure adequate procedures for good business development.

Regarding innovation management, two practices stand out in the organization under study: Project management and financial management. As innovation is one of the key factors for organizational success, it needs organizational support relating to project management and its financial aspects in order to guarantee the systematization of processes, facilitating the execution of the same. It also ensures time and cost control involved in creating conditions so that the team responsible is able to achieve the targets generated. It is important to take into consideration that the attention given to big projects should also be given to the smaller projects, or that the projects for improvement implementation be considered just as important as the radical innovative ones. Hence, Project Management can be considered a way of strengthening the innovative culture in the organization. (Loures and Schlemm, 2006).

**Conclusion:**

The initial proposal for this research was to discover which practices are presented in a company that is considered to be of entrepreneurial culture, which is characterized as having an innovative business model, adopting the multilateral platform. Mogo was chosen for this purpose, according to the criterion of accessibility to information.

Practices relating to Management & Strategy obtained 83% (10 of 12) of the company's agreement, though it has shown to be indifferent towards enterprise integration with the external environment in addition to not knowing and using multiple analysis tools market.

People Management Practices had 71% (5 of 7) of agreement, including internal collaborative culture, proactive behavior, recognizing the value of employees and mapping skills. However, 29% of the discrepancies mentioned not to select people with intrapreneurs profile for the management and the fact that organizational learning is not considered one of the critical success factors of the firm.

Innovation Management practices achieved 31% (5 of 16) of concordance which are related to a favorable environment for creativity, stimulating research and developing new products and services, offensive innovation strategy environment, relying on a specialized staff in managing projects and tolerating risks associated with innovative designs. However, 62% (10 of 16) of the questions were evaluated as discordant, ie. the firm does not adopt such practices as multifunctional team, the process of ongoing innovation or network, does not have clear policy for the intellectual property management and also does not know fonts or use external funding to finance innovation projects. The firm proved to be as indifferent to sustainability innovation processes.

The overall results show that 57% of the suggested actions are undertaken by the organization, although not wholly satisfactory because their managers feel that there is always room for improvement, and also due to the fact that the organization is new in the market, only one year old; 37% of the indicated practices are not applied by the organization, and 6% of them management felt indifferent about and did not realize its important for their business.

From these results, it can be considered that the actions that stood out were related to the organization's management and strategy as well as people management. Innovative management actions and practices seem to be less developed and need special attention for the simple fact that innovation is essential in this market segment and because of the possibility of extending their focus to other promising segments as the organization prepares itself for expansion.

Deploying an innovative business model requires favorable practices that benefit the organization. Thus, this article intended to contribute to companies that want to apply this model, presenting some management practices observed in a company that uses the Multilateral Platform business management.

The main limitation found with this study is the fact that, as this is a case study of a single company, the study had to replicate it to obtain a greater consistency of results. There's an expectation, however, that this topic will encourage other researchers to develop further studies where the results show a positive association between innovative business models and management practices of entrepreneurial culture or simply refute them.

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