Cooperation as a network answer to deregulation policies for competitiveness: the case of Air Caraïbes

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Abstract

The air transportation industry has been growing in importance in the last few decades both on the passenger and freight sides (Burghouwt and Hakfoort, 2001). Such growth has pushed toward a reorganization of the networks of airports (Barrett, 2000) and then to deeper reforms of airport management and operations, especially airport handling with deregulation in Europe (Starkie, 2002; Ahsbahs, 2008). These reforms through deregulation are led by market theories that tend to achieve better service level and lower price through competition between private companies (Juhel, 2008).

Within these reforms, the process of call for tenders in the handling market creates conditions for transparency and free market opportunities. Private handlers then calculate the transactional cost of entering the market in a short term opportunistic approach. However, once this first stage of relationship achieved, they build a relationship with actors of the network on a longer term approach (Graham, 2013).

Following the intuition that the relationship between airport authorities, handling companies and airlines follows the pattern described by Ford (1980) to the stage of a coopetition level (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000), we helped Air Caraïbes to work together and network with the handling company and airport authority in its scale of Paris in order to replace the friction between these two entities by cooperation. Therefore, Air Caraïbes strategized deliberately in this network (Harrison et al., 2010) in order to create a more valuable service for passengers at the network level.

Early results show an increase of the On-Time-Departure rate in Orly Airport for Air Caraïbes flights, which also helps airport authority management and air control as well as the handler schedule its resources. Moreover, new initiatives emerged among the three actors through the creation of this network of practice.

INTRODUCTION

The vision of IMP research, based on a network approach of companies and their interactions, shows the interdependence of one among the other companies of the network (Ford et al. 2002). Therefore, strategic decisions can neither be taken nor implemented without considering the counterparts of the network (Håkansson & Snehota, 1989). In such an approach, organizational effectiveness is based on the effective management in the network rather than of the network (Ritter et. al, 2004; Harrison et al. 2010).

In a full-faced network context that considers strategic initiatives as a form of deliberate networking action, five approaches have been identified for deliberate strategizing (Harrison et al. 2010). However, it seems that further research is needed to characterize these five approaches, their drivers and the potential combination over time for a focal company.

The purpose of this paper is to identify and discuss drivers in the network picture that lead the decision of a focal company to choose one approach out of the five potential approaches. The paper is based on three complementary case studies within the same industry but in two different places, at different stages of a common process of reform of the industry and taken from three different focal actors' points of view.

NETWORK MANAGEMENT TO STRATEGIZE DELIBERATELY

Market theory has had a great influence on economic decisions based on the fact that liberalization of the market would offer more opportunities for transactions and competitive pressure. In this sense, Frank and Bernanke, (2004) argue that the market enables better allowance of resources. Such efficiency helps spread the market economy around the world. In fact, transaction cost theory (Williamson, 1981) that is derived from this perspective of the markets states that a company will trade off activities that are cheaper to buy than to keep internally. This mechanism, however, leads to negotiation and conflicting relationships between buyers and sellers, while IMP research shows that a network approach in which relationships carry less frictions helps explain the strategic choices of buyers and sellers both at a corporate level and at the network level (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995); this latter network level is possibly the trigger for action but also a motivation for inertia (Abrahamsen & Håkansson, 2014).

A network being defined as *"a structure where a number of nodes are related to each other by specific threads"* (Håkansson & Ford, 2002, 133), network management consists of four basic elements: network pictures, networking, network outcomes and of course the connections between these three main elements (Ford et al. 2002). At first, network picture is the view of each participant of the network. This means there are as many pictures as there are participants in the network. Moreover, this network picture is the basis of the analysis and actions of the participant who has this very unique picture. There are, however, common views and stereotypes that can lead to inertia because they freeze interactions within the network. In the same way, because of mental models (Day, 1994) and thus mental pictures,

actors have stereotypes of networks on which they base their picture of the actual network. Understanding the counterpart's network picture then becomes an essential relationship management issue (Ford et al. 2002).

Networking is the second element of the model of managing in a network. It is the dynamic element consisting of the arbitration and balance resulting from three paradoxes (Håkansson & Ford, 2002). The first paradox is related to the structure of the network and can be defined as the special opportunities and restrictions the network brings to the company. As a node, the company is linked to counterparts with threads made of its interactions. Such relationships bring opportunities and at the same time create mental barriers due to the picture of the existing network. This paradox leads to a choice regarding existing relationships, a choice between conforming to them or confronting them (Lundgren, 1995; Ford et al. 2002). The second paradox is also related to the structure of the network, but at a different level. This is because the company as a node is both defined by the threads that makes it a node and yet defines the threads it creates within the network in order to build the network. Therefore the paradox revolves around being defined by relationships or defining them. The consequence of this second paradox is illustrated in network managing as a choice concerning position in the network. Two main possibilities emerge: either to create or consolidate relationships. The third paradox is about controlling the network to achieve one's aims rather than being out of control of the network. The choice therefore revolves around the way the company will network with its counterparts; to network there are two attitudes that must coerce in order impose one's aims or to concede. Networking strategy will be a mix of these choices in accordance with three categories of actions: cognitive, positioning and adaptive network strategizing (Harrison & Prenkert, 2009). This process of strategizing comes from *"a strategic initiative [that] typically requires proactive behavior on the part of some operational level staff or middle managers, which may be 'championed' by middle or corporate strategists depending on the fit with existing strategies"* (Harrison et al., 2010, 948).

From this second element Harrison et al. (2010) identify and characterize five ways of involving counterparts in strategic initiatives: strategizing based on network picture in the absence of direct interaction, strategizing in the presence of a network audience, strategizing among deliberate equals, strategizing among imaginative equals and strategizing as open and absorptive bystander.

The third element is represented by the network outcomes. This element is difficult to scrutinize because in a network there are simultaneous networking interactions for each actor. Therefore, isolating a single action with its specific feedback at a specific moment is rather difficult (Ford et al., 2002). A useful way to cope with this is to call upon the three dimensions of a network: actors, activities and resources (Håkansson & Johanson, 1992). Activity links and ties between resources are easier to identify and to analyze than actors' bonds which are symbolic connections. However, actors' bonds are more difficult to perceive

when they constitute the dimension that activates others to make the strategizing process (Mandjak et al. 2007).

Nevertheless, the first outcomes that are looked for when companies deliberately strategize are outcomes for the actors themselves. These outcomes can be divided between outcomes for single actors as nodes, for relationships as threads, and for the whole network.

Outcomes related to activities affect the way these activities are linked together and such outcomes can also change and restructure the company or the relationships between companies. These changes to links in activities can be of four types: aggregation, when a company undertakes some activity internally; dis-aggregation, when a company ceases or externalizes an activity; dis-intermediation, when two companies create a direct interaction where there was an intermediate before; and intermediation, when a new company inserts itself between two companies that previously had a direct relationship (Ford et al. 2002).

Lastly, outcomes related to resources can be divided into two types: the development of new resources (such as know-how, facilities or technology) or the utilization of existing resources to be accessed or activated. In the latter case, new business unit resources can activate previously passively connected networks of resources (Harisson & Håkansson, 2006).

The model of managing in networks also considers the interconnection between the three elements. At first, there are interconnections between networking and network outcomes since networking is meant to reach outcomes. But there is also a regulating feedback that helps to control networking and the choices within the paradoxes in order to reach better, or more balanced, outcomes. Secondly, there are interconnections between network pictures and networking since the picture of the network will change with networking due to the perspective that networking will bring, as well as with the changes in structure that this networking will equally bring. Network picture also affects networking since it highlights the realm of the feasible by delimitating the network's internal representation. Thirdly, there are network interconnections between network pictures and network outcomes. If outcomes are aligned with the network picture, this picture will be reinforced. If not, it will be challenged. As a corollary, network outcomes are also influenced by network pictures in the sense that outcomes will be seen only if they are inside this network picture.

COMPLEMENTARY CASES IN AIRPORT INDUSTRY

RESEARCH DESIGN

Methodology used for this research is based on three complementary case studies within the same industry. Case studies enable deep and detailed analysis with rich qualitative and quantitative data, and they are longitudinal as well as process-oriented (Harrison et al. 2010).

The three cases used in this research are either based on ongoing applied research based on coopetition within this industry (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000), or consulting experiences. Two

case studies look to analyze the Moroccan airport industry from two different focal entities. One case study looks at a French context in Orly Airport (ORY) in Paris, from the focal perspective of a third type of actor of the industry.

Moreover, these three case studies happen at different stages of the regulatory airport reform that was put in place to transform the industry and make it more competitive. This context is important because one of the focal entities of our research is a branch of the Moroccan government. In fact, the air transport industry, which is younger than other branches of transport, benefited from fast growth in the last few decades (Burghouwt and Hakfoort, 2001) thanks to technological and organizational breakthroughs, as well as globalization of economies that it both enables and benefits from. Such growth of both passenger and air cargo has pushed towards a reorganization of the networks of airports (Barrett, 2000), followed by deeper reforms of airport management and operations, especially airport handling with deregulation in Europe (Starkie, 2002; Ahsbahs, 2008), followed by reforms in satellite airports such as in Morocco. The OpenSky reform that enabled a non-national company to stopover in a third country, while previously, either the departure or the arrival stopover had to be on domestic land, constitutes one of the major reforms in Europe that spread beyond the borders of the European Union. These reforms, through deregulation, are led by market theories that tend to achieve better service levels and lower prices through competition between private companies (Juhel, 2008).

The objective of these three case studies is to triangulate the deliberate strategizing process of the actors and add to the theory development of strategizing in full-faced network contexts. We also aim to explain the strategizing process of actors in this industry through an IMP approach, because within these reforms, the process of calls for tenders in the handling market truly creates conditions for transparency and free market opportunities, and then private handlers calculate the transactional cost of entering the market using a short-term opportunistic approach. However, once this first stage of the relationship has been achieved, they build a relationship with actors of the network using a longer-term approach (Graham, 2013). Following the intuition that the relationship between airport authorities, handling companies and airlines follows the pattern described by Ford (1980) to reach the stage of a coopetition level (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000), we analyzed these case studies using the framework of Harrison et al. (2010).

CASE ONE: MOROCCAN CIVIL AVIATION

At the end of the twentieth century, His Majesty King Mohammed VI decided to initiate profound reforms in most areas of the economy. The agricultural, industrial, tourist and transport sectors went on to benefit from funds and created development plans. Following this initiative, the civil aviation department of the Moroccan Transport and Equipment Ministry inherited the responsibility to develop the air transport sector.

In terms of civil aviation, Morocco is organized as follows: there are more than thirty airports that are managed by a public institution, the Office National Des Aéroports (National Office of Airports, abbreviated thereafter as ONDA). There is a national airline company (Royal Air Maroc, abbreviated thereafter as RAM) that also manages ground handling in the airports. A lot of the top managers of this sector come from a couple of national engineering schools and belong to the same community network.

In 2001, the government, through the civil aviation department, elaborated the Vision 2010 strategic plan with the help of consultants. This plan sets out three main objectives: to promote a liberalization of air transport, favor the creation of new airline companies and enable competitive prices for foreign companies. This plan has been elaborated in support and collaboration with the tourism plan since the country wishes to attract European tourists and therefore low-cost companies that can transport them.

Until 2004, meetings were organized on a regular basis between the main actors considered by civil aviation to be stakeholders in the project, that is, ONDA, RAM, other ministries (Industry, Tourism, Economy, etc.). However, these meetings were more to inform the actors and help them to adapt than to include them in the strategic decision process. In 2004, it was decided that the sector would be liberalized based on EU regulation, that a national low-cost airline specializing in tourism would be created, that RAM needed to concentrate on traditional traffic and that RAM's handling branch would be granted a license until 2014 to help the company adapt to competition.

In December 2005, the Decree n°2-05-1399 enabled private companies to compete for handling licenses and two weeks later, the Minister of Equipment and Transport signed the OpenSky agreement with the European Union (E.U.), making Morocco the first country outside of the E.U. to participate in this so-called 'open sky'.

As of 2014, there were 44 airlines serving Morocco (22 in 2003), transporting 12 million passengers (objective 10M in Vision 2010 Plan).

CASE TWO: THE ONDA

In 2005, ONDA was faced with changes imposed by the government in terms of the modernization of the transport sector and particularly the airport industry. ONDA was managing 18 main airports and some local ones with few calls per year. The objective of ONDA was to ensure that a good service was provided by the infrastructures because this service supported the policy of the government. In 2005, deregulation of the handling sector had been imposed on ONDA and it needed to open licenses to new entrants. In order to be transparent, the ONDA worked with a consultant to calculate the needs for means required by a potential handling operator and launched a call for tender reflecting these needs. The future handler will be the competitor of RAM handling in all the airports of Morocco.

A Spanish handler that is already working with Ryanair, one of the main low-cost airlines that the government was willing to attract with the open sky policy, proposed a winning offer based on their partnership with the low-cost Irish company. A license was granted for 5 years. What happened, however, was a segmentation of the market between the two handlers. RAM was working with the traditional companies which were already its clients and MAR (the Spanish handler) partnered mostly with newcomers: low-cost companies. The consequence was a difference of services but no pressure made through competition.

On a second phase in 2010, ONDA worked with another consultant, ALG, specializing in airport management. The consultant established a picture of the situation and how it evolved. The market grew but the competition between handlers did not help to reach the level of services and prices that were expected. Therefore ONDA, with the help of the consultant, organized meetings with airlines that were stopping over in the country in order to find out exactly what they needed from the handler and what they were expecting in other countries where they operated. Thanks to this additional information, roadshows in Europe were organized in order to meet potential airport handlers interested in getting a license in Morocco. These meetings included discussion of services that could be offered, but also the management tools that could potentially be implemented.

The consequence of these meetings was a total change in the way that the licenses would be controlled by ONDA, and therefore changes to the relationship that would be established with handlers. ONDA had switched from a contract with obligation of means (having enough material and personnel available) to an obligation of results (level of services). The level of services had to be ensured by the implementation of a new set of KPIs such as the minimum time for luggage to arrive on the baggage carousels depending on the size of the aircraft, or the cleanliness of the buses used to transport passengers to the terminal. These KPIs were included in the concession contracts after being negotiated with the handlers and the minimum service level was shared by all handlers. These KPIs were co-developed at the roadshow stage with all potential handlers and were based on international standards; they were then included in the call for tender with minimum levels of services. Finally, once companies had been granted the licenses, all the actors worked together to set a common procedure for following these KPIs.

Such a participative strategy that was including potential grantees helped ONDA to attract the main actors of the handling industry to compete for licenses and as a result, the world-leading company of the sector won the major license, while MAR, due to its experience in the market, won a license for the sole airport of Casablanca. Then, a few months after the attribution of the licenses, this relationship that was already established transformed into a working group in order to share experiences and technologies to improve the processes of handling in Moroccan airports, so that they fulfill the same service levels as European ones.

CASE THREE: THE AIR CARAÏBES APPLIED RESEARCH PROJECT

Air Caraïbes is a French airline company created in 2000 to serve the Antilles and French Guyana. It links Metropolitan France from Paris Orly Airport to six destinations: Guadeloupe, French Guyana, Martinique, Saint Martin, Haïti and the Dominican Republic. In 2013, the company possessed through its subsidy Air Caraïbes Atlantic 5 aircraft and employed 455 people including 35 ground employees. There are only 35 people in the stopovers because the company made the choice at the time of its creation to contract with a private handler in every stopover rather than opting for auto-handling. In ORY, the handler was WFS, one of the major operators in the industry. They managed the flows of luggage, passengers and also the management of the aircraft on the tarmac (loading/unloading, push-backs, physical connections with terminals, etc.).

Air Caraïbes had other interactions with service providers such as gas and catering suppliers, however, it considered its main partners in the network of the Paris scale to be the Airport of Paris (ADP) and WFS, because ADP regulates the traffic of airlines and grants a license to operate for WFS. Moreover, WFS had a contractual obligation toward the airport to operate aircrafts and towards the airline to provide a qualitative service negotiated in a Service Level Agreement (SLA). However it serves several companies and there are priorities to manage when aircrafts are delayed or when there is a technical problem. On the Air Caraïbes side, the aircrafts are supposed to arrive on-time and depart on-time, otherwise it creates problems for air traffic and management of the teams and materials of the handler serving several aircrafts at a time. The consequence of this interlinked situation with a lot of time pressure and penalties running from all the contracts binding these three actors is that for every departure with a problem, each actor blames the fault on another.

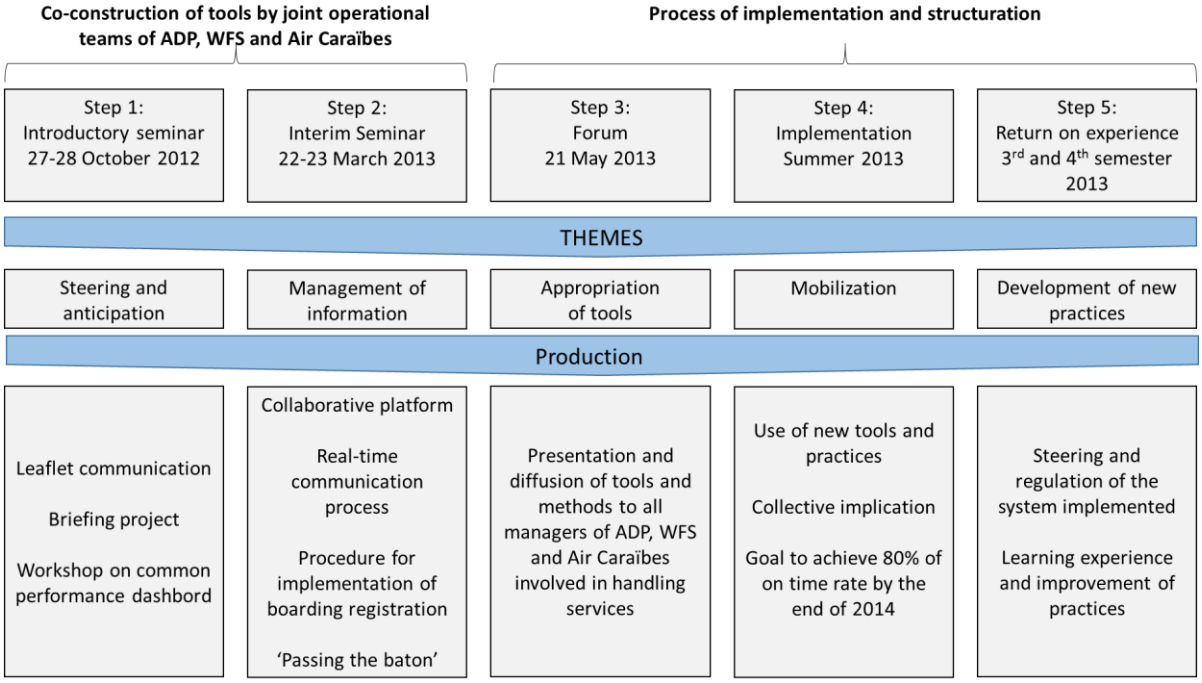
In 2012, because Air Caraïbes' ground management felt like its service level towards the passengers was too low for its standards, it recruited a Logistics Masters student from the Normandy Business School in order to help with an applied research project aimed at improving the situation in the ORY scale. The first step was to understand and analyze the situation and then to look at the relationships between the actors through the model of development of buyer-seller relationships (Ford, 1980).

The diagnostic was a lack of communication and coordination in the tasks of the three main entities involving the interactions. There was also a lack of shared norms in the processes of preparation of the airplanes that were often delaying the departure. Moreover, there were communication issues at both the ground team level and office level, but ground teams were trying to avoid being held responsible for problems by their hierarchy. Finally, performance was not analyzed with common tools, therefore no common answer was given and corrective actions were not bringing the forecasted results.

In September 2012, Air Caraïbes decided to invite the two other main actors of its network, WFS and ADP to co-construct tools in order to improve operations. The project lasted for one year with dedicated managers meeting in a steering committee and communicating in

five steps (see Table 1). After the first meetings, it was decided to focus on-time departure rate as a pilot project.

Table 1: Air Caraïbes five steps project



Interviews with members of the three entities showed a lot of skepticism at the beginning and then gradual involvement developing with the understanding of each other's drivers. The key element was to understand that the main objective of the three partners was the same: on-time departure for passenger's satisfaction (airport's vision), for aircraft and crew management (airline's vision) and for resources planning (handler's vision). Moreover, after this project, the managers involved, as well as some managers who were not, decided to create working groups to solve other common issues in the airport and further improve operations.

The results of the present project in terms of on-time rate are mitigated because this rate went from an average of 58% in 2012 to an average of 72.5% in the first semester of 2014. However, during the summer of 2014, there was a fall in this rate that could be linked to the end of the project. This shows that communication on the ground field is a key element.

ANALYSIS

In this section we analyze the three complementary case studies within the same industry in order to understand which strategizing attitude focal entities adopted, and to find the keys that will contribute to the model of Harrison et al. (2010).

CASE ONE: A DELIBERATE CHANGE IN STRATEGY

In the case of the Moroccan Civil Aviation Department, there was a change in the way of strategizing from the initial situation to the one described. In the initial stage, there was no real dialogue between the actors of the network because the Civil Aviation Department was applying the decree from the Ministry. Then, in the described stage, there was a dialogue. This dialogue does not take place with the handling companies and the airlines as we would have expected, but with other Ministries, such as Tourism, in order to know the outcomes this counterpart was expecting from national airport strategy. Although the objectives of civil aviation were mostly unchanged because of the vision inherited from the Ministry of Equipment and Transport, the considerations of this governmental part of the network were taken into account. The structure of the network is, however, divided in two from the network picture of the Civil Aviation Department: on one side, there are the equals that are other governmental agencies and international institutions that are providing recommendations. On the other side, there are the operational parts of the network with the handlers, the airlines and even the agency in charge of airport operations: the ONDA. On this side of the network, considerations of the operational counterparts were not really taken into considerations to strategize. These entities had to apply the rules and adapt to the strategy. Here the hierarchical aspect of the structure of the network generates strong links that have less ability to generate innovative approaches. The only moderator was the actor's proximity thanks to the alumni's network and the structure of the network that was still very restricted to national actors.

CASE TWO: TOWARDS A MORE COOPERATIVE STRATEGIZING POSTURE

The two phases described in the case study refer to two different attitudes. In the first one, ONDA invited its existing counterparts to inform them of its strategy. How this strategy would affect the counterparts was not really an issue. ONDA stated some goals and these goals did not change in the whole process, moreover, the quantitative part of the goals had been reached by the due date. However, the organization of the network that was supposed to be more competitive in order to improve the quality of service was not reached as the counterparts reacted to the strategy as if it were a hierarchical injunction and adapted with no consideration to ONDA's objective: they followed the rules set but segmented the market into two with each one of the handlers focusing on one of these two markets.

In the second phase, the vision brought by the consultant helped to incorporate more counterparts and to consider their own strategies in order to strategize more efficiently. As a consequence, there were some changes in the strategy during the process of consultation with counterparts, but the main objectives of ONDA's strategy did not change. Managers of ONDA just found a better way to reach the outcomes they were expecting. Creating new links with potential partners enabled new ideas to be brought forward, even though some of the relationships were not strengthened because the companies had not been selected during the call for tender process.

CASE THREE: STRATEGIZING TOGETHER THROUGH A COMMON OBJECTIVE

Air Caraïbes had problems of communications with its major counterparts in the scale of Paris and these communication problems were creating tensions on the service levels of the company, forming a vicious circle that was feeding into the communication problems. Thanks to an external input – the project to reconstruct communication and confidence through a deliberate common strategizing process – communication improved. In order to achieve this, a common goal of improving service level was defined and evolved into a very precise and quantifiable KPI: the on-time departure rate.

This case took place in a more liberalized context than the previous ones, because the OpenSky policy had been implemented for more than a decade. In this instance, the three major actors had been involved in the strategy process almost from the beginning and their managers co-developed the strategy and co-designed its implementation with regards to their own aims. The initial objectives had been partially reached by the end of the project. More interestingly, other outcomes emerged, with the relationship between the actors having been renewed and strengthened.

ANALYSIS SUMMARY

The following table summarizes the elements that enable us to characterize the strategizing process used by the three focal companies. With the three case studies and the two phases of case one and case two, we can identify the four main types of deliberate strategizing.

Table 2: Types of deliberate strategizing initiative in the case studies

	Civil Aviation Dept. (Initial stage)	**Civil Aviation Dept. (OpenSky stage)**	**ONDA phase 1**	**ONDA phase 2**	**Air Caraïbes**
Are others invited into the strategy Process?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Has the focal firm a clear vision of the outcome ?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
What happens with the focal firm's strategy during the process ?	Unchanged	mostly unchanged	mostly unchanged	changes on some issues	co-designed with counterparts
How are the counterparts' strategies handled ?	Disregarded	Considered	Disregarded	considered	co-developed
Resulting type of Strategy	Strategising based on network pictures in the absence of direct interaction	Strategizing among deliberate equals	Strategizing in the presence of a network audience	Strategizing among deliberate equals	Strategizing among imaginative equals

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

RESULTS

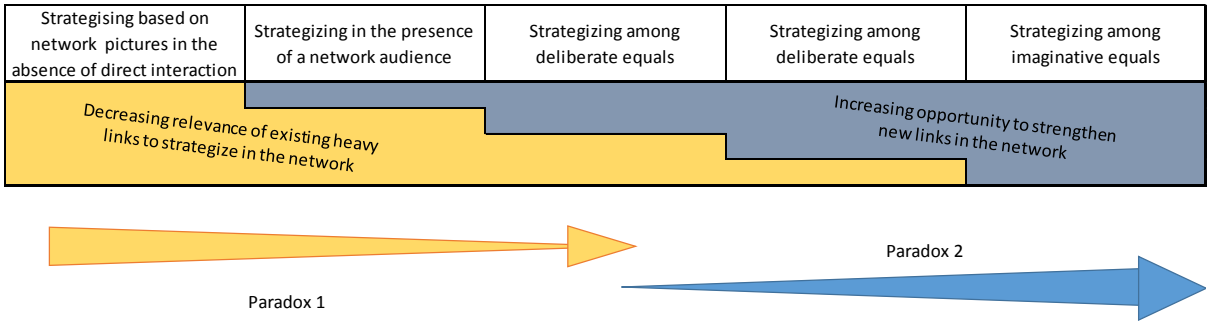
Table 2 provides the descriptive elements of each strategy used by focal entities in the three case studies, however, the drivers leading to these strategies do not appear. Harrison et al. (2010, 952) suggest that companies may strategize differently over time and development phases. Our three cases show entities at different stages of the maturity of the air transport industry, before the airport reform (case 1), at the early stage of the airport reform (case 2) and after the airport reform (case 3). If we look at the strategizing initiatives over this longitudinal framework of the overall industry, and re-order the characteristics describing the strategy initiatives, we can see a pattern (See Table 3) that shows what is the step driving the next type of strategizing initiative.

Table 3: Pattern of deliberate strategizing initiative in the case studies

	Civil Aviation Dept. (Initial stage)	**ONDA phase 1**	**Civil Aviation Dept. (OpenSky stage)**	**ONDA phase 2**	**Air Caraïbes**
Are others invited into the strategy Process?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
How are the counterparts' strategies handled ?	Disregarded	Disregarded	Considered	considered	co-developed
What happens with the focal firm's strategy during the process ?	Unchanged	mostly unchanged	mostly unchanged	changes on some issues	co-designed with counterparts
Has the focal firm a clear vision of the outcome ?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Resulting type of Strategy	Strategising based on network pictures in the absence of direct interaction	Strategizing in the presence of a network audience	Strategizing among deliberate equals	Strategizing among deliberate equals	Strategizing among imaginative equals

Table 3, however, does not explain what drives a company from one strategizing initiative to another; it describes the elements constituting each initiative, and the nature of the relationship with counterparts. What appears, in the table, is the pattern showing the strengthening relationship between the focal company and its counterparts. The focal company accepts on each step to be more influenced by its counterparts, rather than influencing them. In our cases the relationship evolves from the point where the focal entity gives a hierarchical order to the point at which companies co-construct the strategy. They co-construct the strategy without knowing what the exact outcomes may be, other than a common trust in the project. In this sense, the relationship follows the same kind of evolution as *the development of buyer/seller relationships in industrial markets* (Ford, 1980), with a reduction of uncertainty and distance and an increase of mutual commitment and adaptation. This evolution trend results from the choice induced by the second paradox of networking between creating new nodes and consolidating existing ones. The creation of new threads between entities in the network will reinforce the value and function of the thread within the network, and even change the picture and structure of the network, creating strategic opportunities.

While this previous argument describes the choice of a strategizing initiative by a company, the heaviness of existing relationships explains the context in which strategizing initiatives are taken. On one side, the heavier the relationships between the focal company and its major counterparts, or similar nodes to be found (i.e. foreign handlers potentially interested in joining the Moroccan market and similar to RAM and MAR handling), the earlier the strategizing initiative is in the pattern. On the other side, the strengthening relationship that is being built creates heavier relationships leading to inertia over time. This is related to the first paradox of networking since the context of the network structure, and probably the picture of this network the focal company has, will lead the focal company to either confront its existing relationships in order to strategize with counterparts or to conform to the inertia of heavy existing relationships. Here we observe a cycle in which threads between nodes become heavier until a new thread develops and becomes heavier, and so on...



These two points explain the context in which the strategizing initiative is launched and how it manifests in the network, but they do not explain the trigger to this deliberate initiative. In fact, the trigger for these initiatives in our case studies first seemed external to the network, but they are simply weak ties of the network. In the Moroccan Civil Aviation department case, initiatives are pushed by international institutions and then other Ministries. In the ONDA case, initiatives come from consultants and the change in consultants brings new threads to develop. In both cases, the interpersonal ties are also very important because most of the engineers in the industry are members of a few alumni groups, which builds confidence and in fact reduces distance between focal entity and its counterparts. In the Air Caraïbes case, the trigger came from the research project of the training student. In the three cases, the situation was potentially activated while the focal entity was controlling its network or trying to do so, at some point, it yields the initiative to a partner in order to bring a different network picture and innovate. This may look like a bias of the study because, of course, the observer becomes a deliberate part of the strategizing initiative, however, there are three types of actors playing this role in our case. It is also consistent with the third paradox about the active choice on how to network, either coerce or concede in order to control the network. Moreover, this illustrates the *Strength of weak ties*, as demonstrated by Granovetter (1973).

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have conducted a longitudinal study within one single industry on strategizing in networks. Our case studies followed typology of the five ways of strategizing via initiatives. Since the characteristics of the strategizing initiatives followed this typology, we looked for the main drivers of these strategizing initiatives and found a pattern that followed the evolution of the industry network picture that the focal company had. And from this pattern's analysis, we conclude that what leads to the different strategizing initiatives is primarily the context of the industry and the structure of its network with existing heavy links or not. Heavy links stabilize the network and enable the focal company to forecast the outcomes of its networking strategy, however such links lead to inertia in the network. In this context, the choice of strategizing initiative depends on the will of the focal company to add value by creating new relationships or by consolidating existing ones. The heavier the links are with major counterparts of the network, the riskier the initiative to bring new counterparts and strategize together without knowing the exact outcomes – but the greater the benefit for the actors involved, their interactions and the network branch they create.

Finally, we found that the main trigger for elaborating a strategizing initiative involving counterparts was coming from nodes external to the company and linked with weak ties. These entities (government bodies) or resources (consultants) or actors (networks of alumni or training students) bring innovation potential challenging hierarchically established ways of doing things. They, therefore, provide the energy that pushes the focal company to make a choice of strategic initiative in a network they do not picture in exactly the same way.

This second conclusion is also the main limit of this research because the trigger may also be resulting from a bias of active and participative observation. We, however, noticed the strength of weak ties such as the network of alumni, and we encourage further research to investigate, perhaps using big data analysis, how these weak ties may be the trigger for heavier interactions with third party companies.

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