

Innovating with an online community: the Yoomaneo and EDF Pulse and You cases

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Abstract

This chapter analyses the role of online innovation communities (OICs) in co-creation processes, using case studies from Yoomaneo and EDF Pulse and You. These OICs combine digital platforms, community facilitation and hybrid methods (individual/collective) to generate insights, test concepts and build member loyalty. The authors explore the management mechanisms—including facilitation, platformisation and gamification—needed to transform user engagement into actionable knowledge. They highlight the critical importance of user experience in retaining participants with diverse motivations (learning, recognition, socialisation). In conclusion, despite challenges related to data quality (avoiding reward-related bias), confidentiality, and social bonding in an often anonymous environment, CILs are proving to be major levers for strengthening the absorptive capacity and innovative agility of open organisations. These CILs also reduce the costs of studies while extending the innovation phases (exploration, prototyping), thereby strengthening openness and knowledge absorption by organisation

Keywords: Online innovation community, co-creation

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Organizations can be supported by a community of users, brands or customers to co-produce new products and services or improve existing offers. These communities bring together members who share information about their practices and needs, and even create new knowledge with the aim of reaching a specific goal. When these communities are explicitly directed towards the generation of new ideas to solve problems, imagine new products and services or testing novelties, these are innovation communities (Sarazin *et al.* 2021; Masson and Parmentier 2022a). Following the emergence of digital technologies, these communities also exist online, and can unite several geographically dispersed individuals and grow rapidly (Masson and Parmentier 2020). We thus call this type of community online innovation communities (OIC). The relationships between members and the generation of ideas and knowledge thus go through interfaces, and individuals and content are brought together within a digital platform.

For companies, online innovation communities are true innovation labs that inscribe themselves into a logic of open innovation. The platform enables the company to extend its boundaries and to include users, customers or consumers in its processes of innovation. The community thus brings forward new ideas, knowledge about practices and needs, decreases the cognitive fixation of members of the company and even increases the success of the innovations that are created with users. In this way, this kind of openness strengthens the creative capabilities of organizations by continually bringing new ideas and knowledge to the company that would otherwise be expensive and difficult to create without the innovation community.

There are two possible types of innovation communities: innovation communities that are directly created by users without necessarily being directly linked to a company, or communities that are directly created by companies that invite their customers or users to participate in activities focused on innovation. This second type of OIC, hosted by platforms managed by companies, does, however, differ from crowdsourcing platforms. Crowdsourcing platforms are generally not very community-oriented, in the sense that there is little discussion between participants outside of idea competitions and calls for contributions. In a OIC, members participate in activities proposed by the company (opinion and ideation on a particular topic, generation of innovation ideas, testing of innovative products and services, etc.), but they can also propose topics and sometimes interact with other participants outside specific activities.

Therefore, for an innovation community to work well, i.e., for individuals to want to connect and participate in community activities, the challenge is for them to have a positive user experience, both in terms of the community, innovation activities and use of tools to connect and generate ideas and knowledge (Masson and Parmentier 2023). This experience depends on the activities proposed on the platform, the features on offer, the facilitation, the link created with the company and the way the innovation process is managed with community members. However, there are many ways of connecting with users to innovate and bring a OIC to life.

That is why we describe two cases of online innovation communities that work well, EDF Pulse and You and Yoomaneo, in the sense that they regularly attract users who respond seriously to the proposed activities and generate numerous insights, knowledge and ideas that are likely to enhance the innovation process of management or customer companies. In this sense, these two OICs are successful because they achieve the objectives of co-designing innovations and meet the expectations of their participants (Masson and Parmentier 2022b).

In section 8.1, we describe the context to the creation and operation of EDF Pulse and You and Yoomaneo. In section 8.2, we describe the organization, communication and platform practices used to manage these communities. In section 8.3, we discuss the characteristics of community members

in greater detail. In section 8.4, we highlight the contributions of OICs to companies and participants. Finally, section 8.5 looks at the challenges that need to be addressed if a OIC is to function well and achieve its objectives.

8.1. CONTEXT AND DESCRIPTION OF YOOMANEO AND EDF PULSE AND YOU

8.1.1. The context in which the Yoomaneo community was created

Ixiade is an innovation agency based in Grenoble that offers strategy, study and design services focused on the user experience. In particular, the firm supports companies in their innovation processes by studying the acceptability of their projects in the eyes of users. Ixiade identifies potential targets of innovations and tests with them concepts of varying degrees of maturity (from the emergence of an idea to the prototyping of a product ready for market) using qualitative studies (focus groups or interviews) or quantitative studies (online questionnaires). Ixiade is faced with two recurring problems when conducting research: how can we find users who often have highly specific profiles quickly and easily? And how can we benefit from both the advantages of semi-structured interviews (emotions, spontaneous, individual and unbiased reactions, richness and detail of information) and focus groups (richness of the collective, consensus, common disagreements, sharing of points of view, etc.)?

Faced with this dual challenge, the company decided to create an online innovation community: Yoomaneo. The aim of this community is to supplement traditional research methodologies by offering a hybrid data collection method and a community dimension, the loyalty of whose members will enable them to more effectively recruit the individuals targeted by their research.

8.1.2. The Yoomaneo community

Yoomaneo is thus a OIC designed for the general public, with no restrictions. It is accessible for free via Webapp as well as on smartphone, provided you create your own account.

The community is divided into six sections with varied, complementary themes, designed to target all areas where innovation is a key challenge. The six themes are: mobility/transport; energy; lifestyle/trends; health/medecine; leisure/sports/wellness; and the IoT/digital world.

When members sign up with the application, they choose to join as many themes as they wish, each of which is its own sub-community. In addition to these different themes, the application is divided into two sections: a discussion forum and a project space (see figure 8.1).

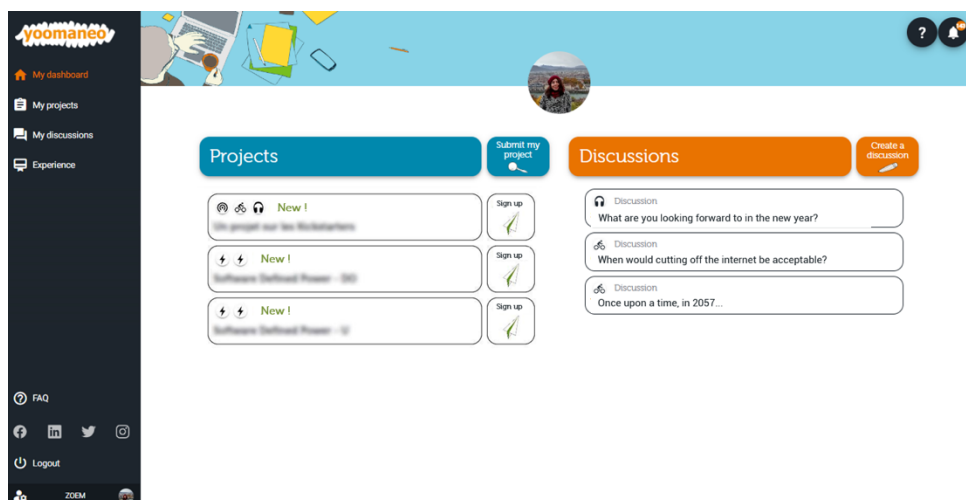


Figure 8.1. Yoomaneo's community dashboard

8.1.2.1. Discussion forum

The first area is dedicated to discussions. Members can express themselves freely on subjects of their choice. They can propose new topics to discuss with the community. The only constraint is that these topics must deal with innovation, evolving uses or the future in general. Once a chat has been submitted to Yoomaneo, moderators in the Ixiade teams are responsible for accepting, modifying or rejecting it, depending on the suggested topic. Once the chat has been published, members exchange views on the topic. Analyses of these discussions are regularly published on the Yoomaneo website in the form of infographics or articles highlighting the plurality of opinions held by members of the community.

8.1.2.2. Project space

The second space within the Yoomaneo sub-communities is a project space. This is where members discover current and future innovation projects on the application. When a new topic is published by the Ixiade teams, if it is linked to the sub-community to which a member belongs, they receive a notification suggesting that they sign up for it. When registering for a project, members must complete an eligibility questionnaire. This consists of a series of both closed and open-ended questions, enabling Ixiade to determine the participant's profile and thus whether or not they fall within the study target. If they do fit the study target, they are accepted into the project. A project generally lasts around ten days, during which participants watch a short video of the innovative concept being tested, and must answer questions (on average, one or two per day) about their perceptions and expectations for using the innovation. First, they answer individually, then they can discover and react to the answers of the other participants.

In order to encourage participation in projects and chats, Ixiade has established a system of experience points and bonus points. Experience points are earned through participation in chats. They enable participants to unlock levels over time, which can eventually give them greater responsibilities within Yoomaneo (moderation, running a sub-community, etc.). Bonus points are earned through participation in projects. Every project is allocated a specific number of points, which are distributed among members according to their involvement (attendance, responses to other participants, points for relevance of their ideas or evaluation of others' ideas). When a member has scored 200 bonus points, they are rewarded with a €20 gift card. In the case of certain projects, the rewards are not monetary, but linked to the innovation evaluated (discount or offer of the product, a test of the solution, etc.).

Using an online community has enabled Ixiade to develop a collection tool that goes further than traditional means. The traditional methods used by the company are those of the interview, enabling the collection of spontaneous, rich and individual testimonials, and the focus group, enabling the collection of collective reactions and the discovery of consensus and disagreement. Yoomaneo's method of gathering information combines these two techniques, collecting spontaneity from participants via individual testimonials, followed by interactions between members about their respective experiences, or more in-depth interviews with the moderators:

“Traditionally, in studies, we have interviews and focus groups, but today we have a third way, which is using this Yoomaneo community platform [...]. We have the advantages of these two modes of collection, individual and collective, without the problems.” (Ixiade Marketing Project Manager)

8.1.3. The context in which EDF Pulse and You was created

EDF's OIC, called “EDF Pulse and You” (EPY), was created in 2016, following the emergence of a new competitive environment for state-owned companies. New companies have established themselves on the electricity market with tariffs challenging those of EDF, set by the state. In response to this challenge, EDF has developed a range of innovative strategies to ensure that these issues become key elements in the relationship with its customers. At a time when competitors are selling cheaper

energy, EDF's online innovation community helps it to co-construct offers with its customers on themes such as sustainable well-being in the home, energy transition and electric mobility.

8.1.4. The EDF Pulse and You community

8.1.4.1. How the community works

The EPY community consists of a website that is accessible to all, whether EDF customers or not. To become a member of the community, you need to create a free account. Within the community, members can post spontaneous ideas, take part in a variety of themed projects, and find out about completed projects and current crowdfunding campaigns.

The core of EPY's activity revolves around projects. These projects can be ideation campaigns to explore projects and themes in search of new ideas for products and services, co-development projects where members give their opinion on innovation projects proposed by EDF, or beta usage tests, where members receive products at home to test in their daily lives.

These projects can be proposed by EDF, startups or community members. The latter were the main project initiators when the community was first set up. Six years on, it's EDF and partner startups that are behind the majority of current projects. In creating new services, EDF now wishes to focus more on its customers.

In terms of projects, themes are set to structure discussions. After several years' experience, EDF realized that projects involving radical innovations were the most appreciated by members, who are less interested in more conventional projects (concerning the company's current services, for example).

8.1.4.2. How a project unfolds

The projects published on EPY are intended for the whole community, regardless of their profile. When a new project arrives, members discover a context and a problem to which they can respond. There are two ways of taking part:

- they can answer a short questionnaire that may provide information about their daily life, their habits or their satisfaction with an existing situation;
- they can submit a new idea for an innovation or problem-solving solution to the situation presented, read those already published by other members and respond or vote for those they deem relevant. Their ideas must fit into one of the specific themes set by EDF for the project (for example, on a project concerning the evolution of heating solutions, a theme is linked to what they know, what they have, what they imagine for tomorrow and what EDF would have the ability to do) (see figure 8.2).

To encourage participation in projects, EDF has introduced several strategies. The first is to give rewards through a price draw, depending on the number of points collected during the project. A user wins points for proposing ideas or evaluating those of others. The rewards are often material tools (Mölkky, plancha, mouse pad, solar dryer, etc.).


The second strategy is to highlight the most active contributors by featuring them on the project page. These strategies aim to increase participation, but also, above all, to create a link with end customers.

In response to EPY's success in addressing their customers, EDF has developed a new community space dedicated to the company's employees. The organization system is the same; sometimes projects are posted in both the private and professional communities, so that approaches can be compared and lessons learned for future offers and innovations launched by EDF:

“As it was working well with Pulseurs, from 2019, the marketing director asked to do it with employees too. [...] Often, there are mirror campaigns: the same campaign with employees and

private individuals... This makes it possible to compare projects from a pro and non-pro perspective, and makes very interesting things come to surface.” (Community manager EDF Pulse and You)

What do you think a truly innovative heating system is?



- 01** What you've already seen
- 02** For you, today...
- 03** And tomorrow, which solutions will you use?
- 04** How can EDF support you?

YOUR OPINION

Are you currently satisfied with your heating system?*

☐ Yes, quite

☐ No, not really

Next

SUGGEST AN IDEA

Thème

Titre

Descriptif

Submit Attachment

806 IDEAS AND COMMENTS ALREADY POSTED

Trier : Plus récentes

Filtrer : Toutes les contributeur

Tous les thèmes

TOP CONTRIBUTORS






3335 PTS	
DOMDOM	
Membre depuis 4 mois	
2645 PTS	
APPROUVE	
Membre depuis 4 mois	
1197 PTS	
SEB-16	
Membre depuis 4 mois	
1190 PTS	
BOTTO	
Membre depuis 4 mois	
1181 PTS	
APO21	

Figure 8.2. A project on EDF Pulse and You

8.2. MANAGING AN ONLINE INNOVATION COMMUNITY (OIC): ORGANIZATION, COMMUNICATION AND PLATFORM BUILDING

Managing a OIC requires daily organization, communication and reflection on the platform's functional upgrades. At Ixiade, one person is in charge of these tasks, supported by the rest of the team when important decisions need to be made. At EDF, three people manage the community's organization, communication and development, in addition to the Fanvoice company, which provides the digital support and leads organization actions.

8.2.1. What are the organization strategies?

In a digital environment, organization strategies must be developed to encourage members to participate and reconnect to the platform (Masson and Parmentier 2022a). Furthermore, to maintain its momentum, in addition to defining internal organization strategies to build member loyalty and value, OIC's community managers must also work on its external communication, to promote its image and recruit new members (see figure 8.3).

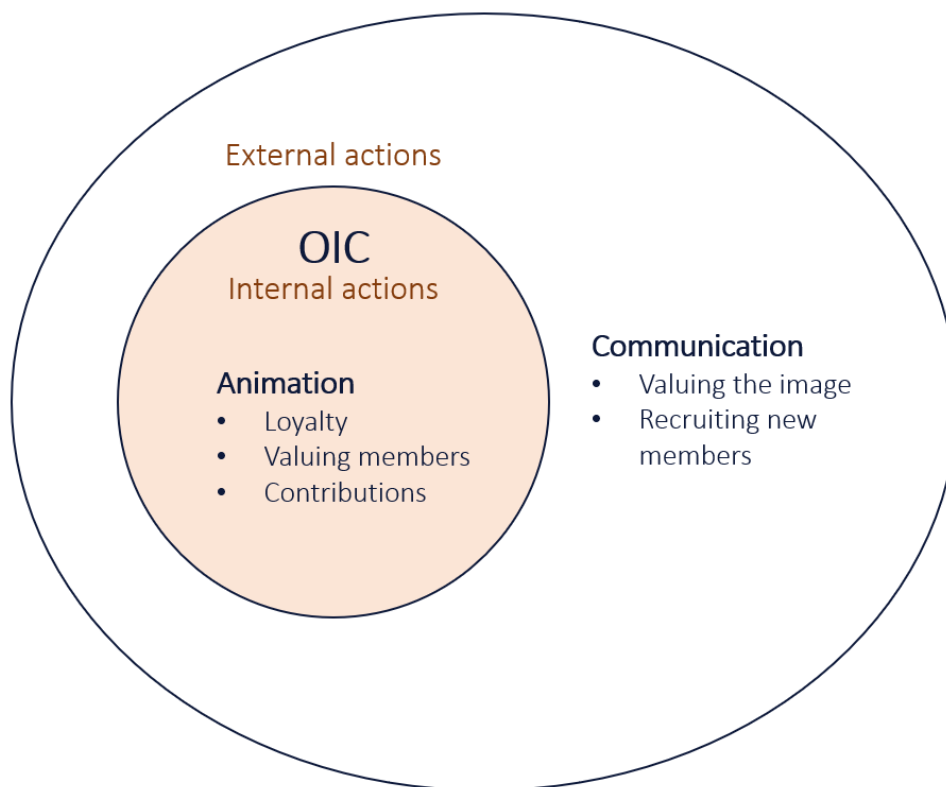


Figure 8.3. Various CM actions carried out for OIC

8.2.1.1. Yoomaneo

Yoomaneo's organization strategies are primarily focused on the application's two distinct sections: chats and projects.

Chats are regularly published by the community manager within Ixiade and by members themselves who wish to address certain topics. The community manager considers that one chat per month and per community is the minimum to be achieved to organize the OIC on a sufficiently regular basis, especially as the majority of users are registered in several communities and are therefore confronted with several thematic discussions. The community manager monitors innovation-related topics. This involves evaluating new concepts or creative exercises that encourage members to

imagine themselves in various futures. Once the discussions are sufficiently productive, the community manager collects and analyzes the data to transcribe them into articles and infographics, which they distribute on the Yoomaneo website and social networks.

Currently, the discussion forum is the permanent organization hub. More ad hoc projects give rhythm to the life of the community. The community manager talks about the desire to develop the organization strategy by organizing webinars and writing official reports on the various themes addressed in each of the communities.

8.2.1.2. EDF Pulse and You

OIC EPY's organization strategies involve similar levers of action. Community managers publish projects on the community so that there are always one to three ongoing projects. The projects last several months, and the themes aim to respond to topical issues while remaining engaging:

"You see here, we're talking about the energy crisis, we launched it when the war in Ukraine started, it was April 4, it was the beginning, we launched this campaign because it was topical." (Community manager EDF Pulse and You)

Topics should allow members to discover and learn new things, while also giving them the opportunity to contribute with their own perceptions and feedback:

"We need to come up with sexy new campaigns in terms of innovation, that are going to be relevant, they're going to discover things and at the same time, they're going to bring in elements that may be interesting." (EDF Open Innovation Manager)

Alongside launching projects, EPY's community managers regularly respond to comments posted by members. Fanvoice's teams also contribute to the community's organization efforts with their own community managers. They are the ones who decide on publication rhythms, regularly write new articles for the community blog, post new photos and answer members' emails.

8.2.2. What are the communication strategies?

8.2.2.1. Yoomaneo

To date, no specific budget has been allocated for OIC's paid communication activities. Strategically, the Ixiade teams have decided to position Yoomaneo on three different social networks to spread news from the community. The community manager regularly publishes new posts on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn to promote new topics of discussion and new projects. He shares discussions by featuring a selection of verbatims from members who have already taken part, and projects by inviting certain people to join the study.

This communication tool serves both as:

- a showcase for people not yet familiar with OIC;
- a recruitment channel when projects are launched in the community.

Yoomaneo's posts are regularly shared by Ixiade's accounts, with a view to giving them greater visibility. In addition, Yoomaneo's community manager sends out a biannual newsletter to community members to tell them about new projects, platform developments or to share the results of discussions published on the website. Links with innovation-related media have been established as part of press relations, and new strategies (meetings, webinars, etc.) are being developed with a view to investing specific resources in these communication strategies.

8.2.2.2. EDF Pulse and You

EDY is a OIC that emerged in 2016 with no budget allocated to its communications, and has seen its resources evolve over time.

Today, the community doesn't have its own accounts on social networks, but sometimes uses different EDF networks to promote the OIC and new projects (@EDFOfficiel social networks, @EDF_Innovation, etc.). Community managers also promote the OIC on the EDF&Moi application or within the communications revolving around the innovation awards (the "Pulse" awards).

In terms of press relations, the OIC has established a partnership with the online magazine Futura, which promotes the community in its articles to readers interested in similar themes (sustainable development, technology, sustainable mobility, etc.).

In addition, EPY's community managers publish a monthly newsletter highlighting the various projects and articles published over the past month, as well as numerous blog posts. The articles cover topics such as the end of projects, the announcement of the best contributors, the relationship between EPY and EDF or the recognition of certain active members.

Finally, community managers traditionally send out a recruitment email to the whole community when a new project is published on EPY.

8.2.3. Platform-specific features

As OICs, Yoomaneo and EPY are exclusively available via virtual spaces. As a result, certain decisions have been made to optimize the online member experience (see table 8.1).

There are numerous challenges involved in choosing a 100% digital space. While the community aspect implies, by its very definition, relationships between members (Dahlander and Frederiksen 2011), the dehumanization and individualization brought about by the confinement of each person behind their own digital screen must be moderated. Strategies are being developed to convey genuine, human communication to reduce the coldness of platforms. EPY's community managers chose to make short videos to show members their faces:

"Our videos are clumsy, our videos aren't perfect, but you get the feeling that it's human, real people, genuine people, that it's not been worked on, polished in terms of communication. I think this sincerity, this element of wholeness, shows that people realize that behind the screen, there's a person, and that this person is sincere." (CM EDF Pulse and You)

"On EDF Pulse and You, when we present a startup, we always make little videos where we show the individuals behind the startups who speak directly to the Pulseurs." (EDF Open Innovations Officer)



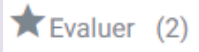

		
Support	Webapp and iOS and Android application	Website
Ergonomics	Intuitive approach, four different sections	Intuitive approach, five different sections
Information density	Low information density per page	Average information density per page
Member area	Choice of nickname, profile picture, personal information (profession, location, personal summary)	Choice of nickname, profile picture, personal information (age, profession, place of residence, family situation)
Gamification	Points earned for activity in chats and projects	Points earned for members' participation in projects. "Top contributors" displayed on EPY's main page
Understanding the objectives	Access to a community manifesto, a reminder of how each section works, a FAQ and a video presenting the platform.	"How it works", "Why take part", "About us" and FAQ access on the EPY main page
Graphic design	Strong graphic identity, different from that of Ixiade	Strong graphic identity, using elements of EDF's
Interactions between members	Option of posting comments and replying to others' comments in chats and projects. Evaluate other members' contributions 	Post and respond to ideas within projects. Evaluate other members' contributions 
Ways of contributing	Technical support for co-creation Possibility to upload text, images, videos and PDFs in project and chat areas	Projects, images and PDFs can be added to contributions
Other features	Sponsoring, notification center	Notification center

Table 8.1. Features of the OIC platform

For Yoomaneo, strategies of wording, recognition and valorization of members in articles or project summaries are adopted to break down the screen.

8.3. CIL MEMBERS

Within both OICs, a similar member profile emerges. The people contributing to these communities seem to be curious and wish to discover new ongoing innovations, linked to their own interests.

Their profiles can be categorized according to three types of members, depending on their investment in the community: core members, periphery members or lurkers (Iriberry and Leroy 2009).

Members initially discover and join the community according to the communication channel through which they discovered OIC.

They join and contribute to it for various reasons, which can be listed as follows:

- the opportunity to learn new things (tools, innovations, monitoring, techniques) linked to their interests;
- the opportunity to take part in innovation projects where their opinion has an influence on the future development of the products or services they discover;

- the chance to meet new people with shared interests;
- the opportunity to create a close relationship based on trust with companies they respect.

“What they also find is perhaps also a way of feeling heard, not just by other individuals, but by the EDF group, a sign of trust from french people, and that gives value and importance to the things they have to say. I think it's important in terms of self-esteem.” (Community manager EDF Pulse and You)

By taking part, members gain certain intrinsic and extrinsic benefits:

- recognition from a company and project leaders they respect;
- recognition from other members;
- learning about topics with which they may or may not be familiar;
- material or financial rewards based on their involvement in the various projects.

“Discussions, seeing people who have opinions and being able to confront these opinions, asking ourselves questions that we don't ask ourselves every day, adding a bit of ourselves into the overall structure that is on offer.” (Yoomaneo member)

“I was interested in being able to innovate, give my opinion, guide solutions, discuss solutions with others, and above all, since EDF was behind it, it was perhaps an opportunity for solutions to emerge, to be implemented, to go a little further.” (EDF Pulse and You member)

“I was also interested in the topic and there was an opportunity to gain something from it... There was a challenge, and since I like challenges, I said to myself, 'I'm going to take part', and I won the first prize.” (EDF Pulse and You member)

8.4. THE BENEFITS OF OIC FOR COMPANIES AND PARTICIPANTS

OICs are strategic assets for companies wishing to innovate by taking their users into account. The benefits are invaluable for these project leaders, who are interested in these new ways of reaching their future customers. It is also important for OIC members to understand the effects of their investment, so as to encourage them to take part in new studies.

8.4.1. Transversality: what are the roles and contributions of the various players working with OIC?

There are many individuals with a role to play around the OIC. They may be internal or external to the company, depending on the situation (see figure 8.4).

8.4.1.1. Yoomaneo, at the heart of Ixiade's strategies

Supporting innovation projects with a OIC has changed the way things are done at Ixiade. The community manager isn't the only person who spends time on the community, and the project managers have turned to the application to speed up their recruitment phases and equip themselves with a new way of collecting data for their projects. As a result, OIC is a tool used by the majority of the company's members.

Furthermore, working with a OIC also has an impact on relationships with existing and new Ixiade customers. The OIC is put forward in commercial exchanges as a demonstration for an innovative company. It gives credibility to customer innovation strategies:

“Right from the start, we set the tone by saying that we're a company that also innovates internally, namely with the creation of a community platform and therefore Yoomaneo, of course.” (Ixiade Marketing Project Manager)

In addition, at business meetings, OIC is perceived as attractive by project managers from both large groups and smaller companies. Although these two profiles have different levels of knowledge about these practices, both have constructed an attractive imaginary about this tool. The former are

already familiar with these tools, and are attracted by the prospect of being supported by a OIC to reach their users through a strong and appealing strategy:

“More established companies, large SMEs or large accounts, who will resonate with it, because the question of communities has become a bit of a trend, so it will bring things to mind.” (Marketing Project Manager, Ixiade)

The latter, often less experienced in the world of research, are attracted by these communities they know little about. They often express curiosity about this mode of collection, which impresses them:

“Small investors who know little about technology, or little about the world of innovation and communities, are going to be a little more impressed by the power of these communities, by what we're capable of doing.” (Ixiade Marketing Project Manager)

So, in addition to mobilizing the community manager and research managers, the people in contact with potential and existing customers have to integrate OIC into their daily work. OIC is therefore an integral part of our research, sales and communication challenges. It provides the company with strength, but also credibility and originality in its methods:

“It adds to our credibility, that, for me, is the first point, it also gives us originality, because not all innovation agencies or consulting firms have that [...]. I think it also reassures us that we're able to reach [...] users easily.” (Marketing Project Manager, Ixiade)

Player	Action	Benefit
Community manager	Organizing the community with projects and discussions	Creating a close relationship with members
Project manager	Publication and management of projects	Fast recruitment and data collection
Customer service manager	Promoting OIC in commercial exchanges	Business opportunities
Ixiade	–	Image of an innovative, credible, original company
Ixiade customer	–	Gather the opinions of future users quickly and reliably

Table 8.2. Benefits of OIC Yoomaneo

8.4.1.2. EDF Pulse and You, for all EDF teams

For EDF, many players are involved in the relationship with OIC. In addition to EDF and Fanvoice community managers, other internal EDF teams can be called upon to support projects. Some teams (innovation, R&D, sales) can make use of the platform to publish their own projects. Others, such as marketing or HR teams, can be involved in various phases of the community's life (rewards for participants, communication, etc.):

“As a gift, we made the offer to win a permanent contract with EDF, which corresponded to the candidate's dream job. We involved the entire HR department, who agreed to play along and wrote a job description that included the candidate's dream job.” (EDF Open Innovations Manager)

Furthermore, as well as launching internal projects, EDF encourages startups to post their own projects in order to collect feedback from the community. In these situations, they become leaders of their own projects on the OIC:

“The project leaders are not always from EDF, sometimes we find startups and ask them if they'd be interested in offering their product to users for testing, in which case they become the project leaders.” (Community manager EDF Pulse and You)

Player	Action	Benefits
EDF or Fanvoice community manager	Organizing the community with projects	Creating a close relationship with members
EDF's HR and marketing teams	Support for certain projects (communication, awards, etc.)	Increased transversal collaboration between different professions
EDF	–	Building customer loyalty and relationships
Startup	Use CIL to support their own external innovation projects	New ideas and recommendations for their projects

Table 8.3. Benefits of OIC EDF Pulse and You

This responsibility enables them to communicate directly with their potential future customers, a relationship that OIC members particularly appreciate: the opportunity to speak directly to project developers adds weight to their contributions. Moreover, the startups, often won over by the value of the discussions, fuel this relationship with the members by thanking them for their contributions:

“The project managers themselves want to be community managers, for some people, it's their own personal project, their little baby that they're going to give birth to and develop [...]. We had a colleague who was extremely responsive, his name is Julien. We didn't ask him to do anything, but at the end of the campaign, he posted a huge thank you. [...] He put it there because the value of the exchanges exceeded his expectations. He felt the need to say ‘thank you for helping us so much’.” (Community manager EDF Pulse and You).

A closer look at the practices of these two companies reveals the different roles played by OIC in their respective innovation strategies. At Ixiade, Yoomaneo appears to be a tool that enables research managers to capitalize on new data collection methods and enhance the value of sales initiatives; at EDF, on the other hand, the OIC takes on the role of a more widely open tool, enabling EDF to generate engagement and insights with its members, and various external players to carry out their own research.

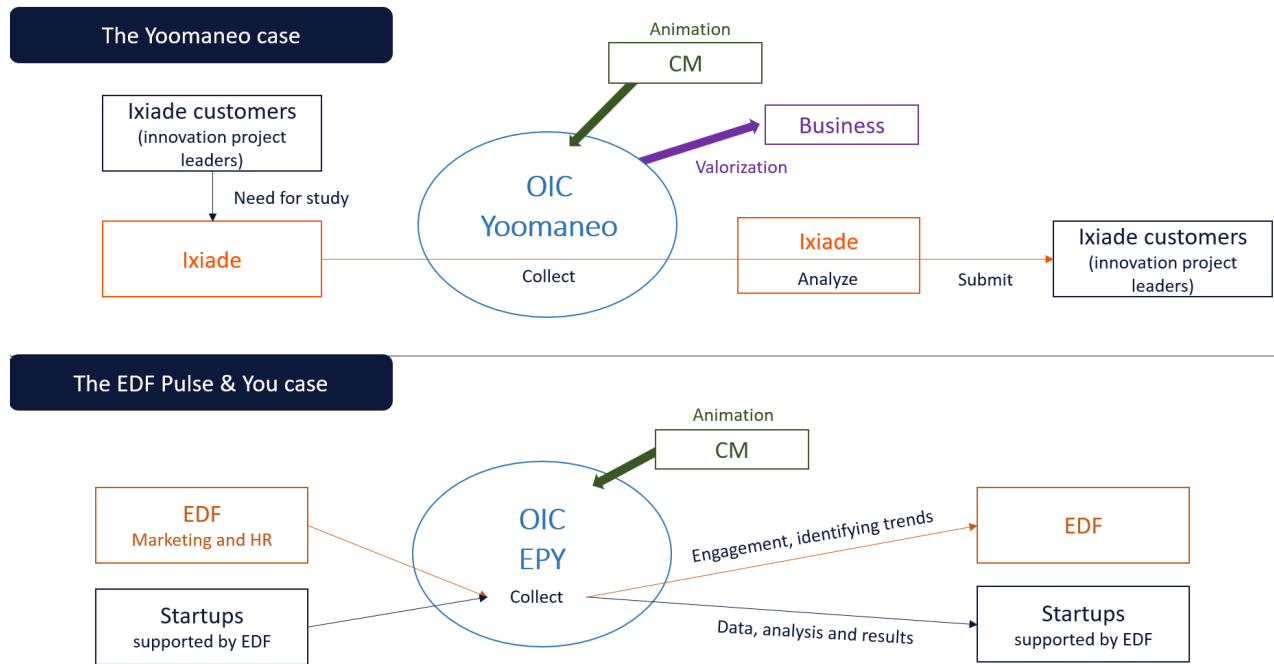


Figure 8.4. Actions of the various players on OIC

8.4.2. Results generated by OIC

Within the two OICs studied, numerous contributions are generated by members in response to suggestions for innovation. These highly valuable results can be used by companies to develop their innovations in line with the needs of their users, before they go on the market.

8.4.2.1. Results generated by Yoomaneo

Once a project has been collected, Ixiade members can download all the data and then analyze the content. This analysis is carried out by the project managers, who identify signs of acceptability and desirability for the innovation under study. At the end of the analysis, a report is made to the customer responsible for the innovation.

A second, more succinct analysis is then carried out for all Yoomaneo members who took part in the study (see figure 8.5). The aim is to add value to their participation by showing them the results and ways of improving the innovation generated thanks to their contributions:

“It’s very important to make a summary for the members of the community who took part in the project. It shows them that we’re taking their opinion into account, that it’s going to be passed on to customers, that it’s of value to us. And being transparent about this, for them, helps establish loyalty.” (Community manager Yoomaneo)

8.4.2.2. Results generated by EDF Pulse and You

In terms of results, EPY represents a dual challenge for EDF: providing new ideas and opinions on the offers and innovations proposed (for them or the startups) and establishing a relationship of trust with their customers.

Initially, within the projects, many ideas are generated by the community on behalf of individuals and professionals within the company. More than 120 projects have been published to date, and EDF uses all this data by analyzing and comparing feedback, in order to plan new offers and innovations.

Their aim is to collect unbiased, non-subjective visions of their concepts, to move away from expert opinions in order to hear the voices of their customers. EDF teams also take advantage of contributors' words and visions to support their marketing strategies. Customers' words carry more weight than those of experts in the field.

At the end of each project, an analysis is carried out by the EPY teams, in order to report the major trends emerging from the study to the members who took part, and to reward the best contributors (see figure 8.6).

Secondly, the inclusion of participants in EDF projects invites members to establish a close relationship with the company. Within the various projects, contributors are able to confide in each other, share moments in life, testimonials and create bonds with other members, or with the moderators. This environment creates a relationship of trust between members and the company.

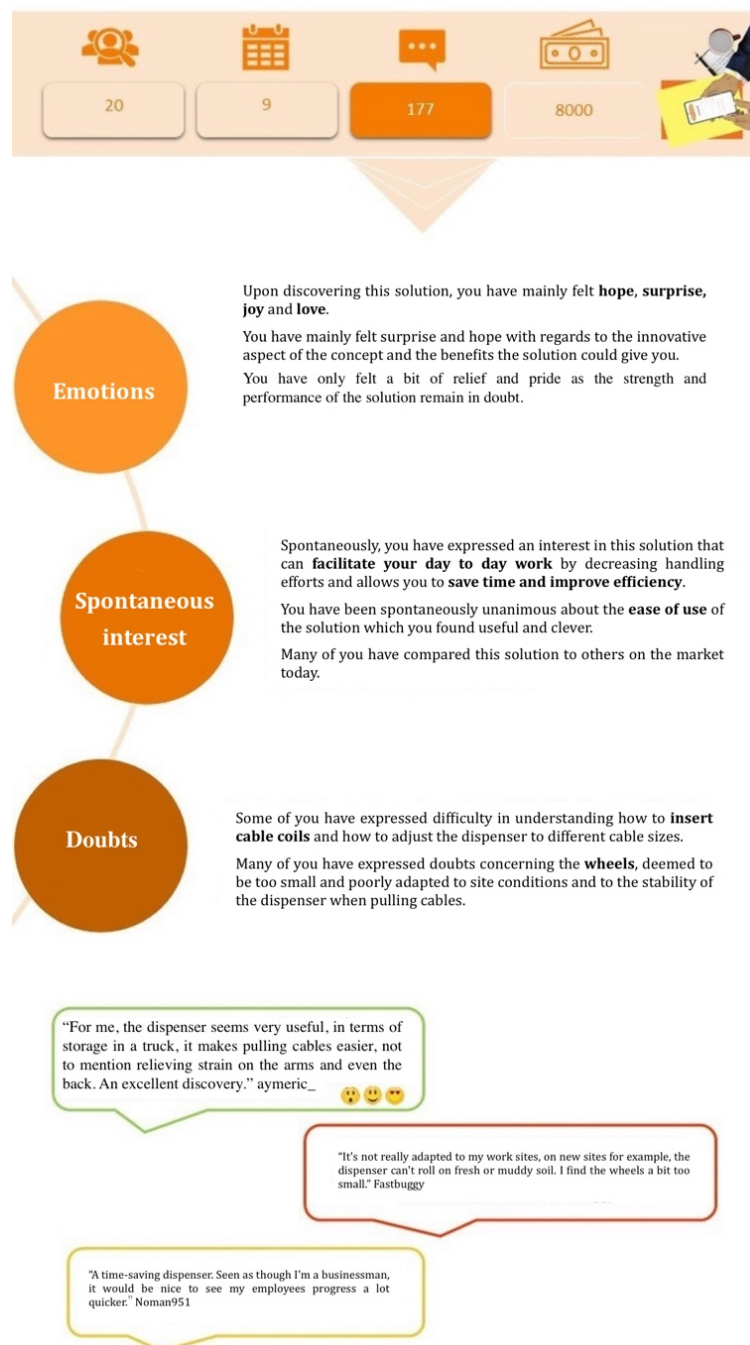


Figure 8.5. Example of an extract of Yoomaneo project results

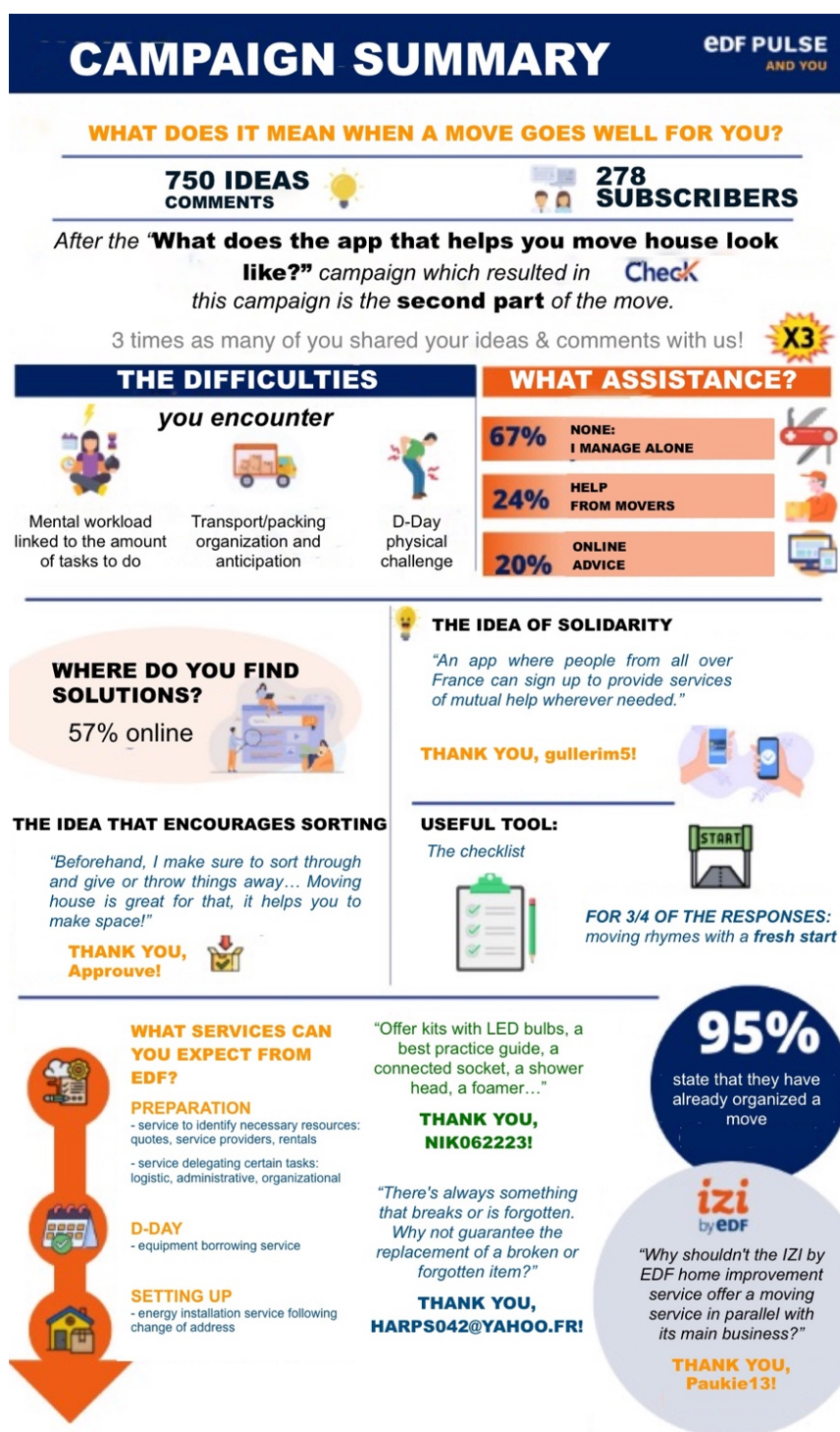


Figure 8.6. Example of an extract of EDF Pulse and You project results

8.5. THE ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF OICS

OICs have many assets that make them valuable tools for innovation. However, creating and managing a OIC is not straightforward, and managers have to overcome a number of challenges to ensure its successful operation and contribution to the innovation process.

8.5.1. Issues related to community members

The main issues identified are closely linked to community members, for a variety of reasons.

- **Recruitment.** A OIC needs the continuous renewal and recruitment of new members to make the community denser and bring variety to respondent profiles. This ongoing recruitment requires the implementation of techniques and resources by the leading companies (communication, promotion, dissemination, links with the press, etc.). Recruitment can sometimes prove complicated and slow down OIC's expansion. In the case of Yoomaneo, for example, whose pilot company Ixiade is less influential than EDF, recruitment is one of the main challenges to the community's development:
"Recruitment is a very important issue for the community. There's a lot we can do to develop it further and thereby reach more members. This mainly involves efforts in terms of visibility, or communication." (Community manager Yoomaneo)
- **Member diversity.** As mentioned above, insufficient recruitment can have an impact on member diversity. If the people who take part in studies and discussions are always the same, this will reduce the diversity of exchanges and the quality of the study results. On the other hand, the fact that OICs are communities dedicated to innovation means that there is a risk that their members will be mainly early adopters or lead users. If all community members have similar innovation behavior profiles, this will bias the results of the studies.
- **Attendance.** As mentioned above, community members can be divided into several types according to their investment in the community. Member attendance and participation are major challenges if the OIC is to benefit from a wealth of contributions. Building member loyalty is one of the main objectives of a community like this.
- **The link between members.** Some members are keen to join the community to create new relationships with other members, whether friendly or commercial. This aspect can be complex to implement in these often anonymous communities, which don't allow for direct exchanges between members. Satisfying participants on this relational issue is a major challenge for OICs.
- **Rewards.** A final difficulty experienced by OICs is that of reward systems. These lead to the risk of some participants to get involved only for the sake of a reward. This can result in members sharing false information to get into the target of certain projects, or to comment excessively to earn more points. This can have a significant impact on the quality of projects, and requires constant vigilance on the part of moderators.

These various challenges and limitations illustrate the importance of members in OIC performance.

8.5.2. Confidentiality issues

A second type of obstacle may emerge in the very specific case of OIC, linked to data confidentiality.

- On the part of members. In the case of very specific, professional projects, some members may not be able to divulge certain information regarding their professions, for reasons of professional confidentiality. Some members may also refuse to give certain ideas to the company for purposes of intellectual property.
- On the part of companies. Although some companies working in the field of innovation seek to gather the opinions of their future users, they may also be reluctant to reveal certain innovations

at very early stages, which may not have been protected (patents, etc.), and whose idea could be appropriated by certain members or competitors.

8.5.3. Challenges related to the competitive environment

A final element to be pointed out in the context of the challenges facing OICs is their positioning in a competitive environment. More and more new online innovation communities are emerging, often linked with a company wanting to test its innovation projects with its users.

	Yoomaneo	EDF Pulse and You
Company	Ixiade: a private company and research institute that supports its customers' innovation projects in a wide variety of fields.	EDF: a state-owned company, a producer and financier of electricity in France and Europe.
Community	A OIC created in 2019, Android smartphone app and webapp. Free for participants.	A OIC created in 2016, a website accessible for free by participants.
Features	Participation in open discussions and closed projects. Space for comments, replies, likes, sharing photos, videos, PDFs, etc.	Participation in open projects. Space for comments, replies, likes, document sharing (photos or PDFs), etc.
Recruitment	Communication efforts on networks, specific recruitment for customer projects.	Natural recruitment due to EDF's reputation. Communication in online media and social networks.
Organization	Organization by an internal CM, creation of chats by members, projects by Ixiade.	Organization and creation of projects by a mixed team of internal and external CMs.
Involvement of members	Attraction to innovation, learning, discovery, rewards.	Attractive for the relationship with EDF, the opportunity to give them their opinion on their services (among other things), the rewards.
Rewards for members	Rewards in the form of gift cards or advantages on innovation products assessed according to points accumulated.	Material rewards vary according to the project and the points accumulated on a project.
Key figures	Number of members: 950. Number of completed projects: 82.	Number of members: 14,233. Number of completed projects: 94.
Benefits for the company	Facilitation of recruitment and data collection phases. Use of data generated for customer studies.	Member commitment and loyalty. Creating a close relationship with the EDF brand.

Table 8.4. Summary of the characteristics of the two OICs

Companies offering these community services may find themselves in direct competition with each other and therefore need to stand out from the crowd by offering services that differ from one another. This is the case, for example, with Fanvoice and Ixiade, each of which offers a different service, but which ultimately enables a company to test its projects with users.

As this theme is currently undergoing strong expansion, the competitive stakes are yet to be determined.

8.6. CONCLUSION

We have studied two online innovation communities that both started out in different contexts and with different goals. The Yoomaneo community was created by an innovation agency carrying out user studies to cut costs and improve the quality of the insights, ideas and knowledge gathered. The EDF Pulse and You community was created by a major energy production and distribution company to develop a closer relationship with its customers, detect new trends and co-create new offers.

Despite these differences, these two communities share common management issues relating to organization, communication and platform building, and community managers face similar challenges and issues in maintaining community spirit and obtaining quality insights, ideas and knowledge. Beyond these management issues, these communities are indeed an important contribution to supporting an organization's creative capabilities. In fact, having a permanently available community of motivated people to react to, test or improve concepts or first versions of innovations, which provide valuable ideas, has many implications for organizations. First of all, OIC makes it possible to conduct more research, since the cost is lower, and the panel is available. It also broadens the spectrum of innovation studies, which now involve users and customers in all phases of the innovation process: exploration of a variety of topics and issues to identify needs and trends, concept testing, prototype testing and so on.

Furthermore, developing an OIC or connecting to an existing OIC could encourage organizations to become more open, since they would directly see the benefit: Innovate better, and faster. It could also have a direct effect on an organization's ability to absorb knowledge, when properly managed. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 2 of this book, it's not just a question of setting up open systems, but also ensuring that the knowledge and ideas acquired externally actually fuel the innovation process and lead to new processes, products and services. A well-performing OIC, which generates valuable insights, ideas and knowledge in line with the organization's innovation objectives, demonstrates the value of external creativity on a daily basis, encouraging executives and managers to take a more serious interest in this type of arrangement and integrate it more effectively into the organization's management processes.

Finally, these case studies have enabled us to identify nine lessons linked to different strategic axes, benefits and issues, which we have grouped together in table 8.5.

Strategic areas	OIC reports	Details of actions
Organization	Internal OIC actions	Loyalty, member recognition, contributions
	Actions external to OIC	Enhancing the organization's image, recruiting new members
Communication	Actions external to OIC	Presence on social networks, newsletters, press, mailings
Technical features	Internal OIC actions	Choice of platform, ergonomics, information density, member access and interaction, gamification, graphic identity, etc.
Benefits	Beneficiary	Details of benefits
Tool efficiency	Project manager	Fast recruitment and collection
	The organization	Innovative company image, credibility, originality, user loyalty
Idea generation	R&D teams, project leaders, start-ups, etc.	New ideas, project suggestions from users
Creation of links between members	The organization	A relationship of trust between members and the company, building user loyalty to the community and the brand.

Types of challenges	Challenges	Details of challenges
Related to members	Recruitment	Continuous renewal and recruitment of new members is necessary to ensure a sufficient number and variety of respondents.
	Member diversity	A low variety of member profiles can reduce the quality of study results
	Attendance	Attendance and participation are essential for valuable contributions
	The link between members	This link can be a driving force for commitment and participation for some members
	Rewards	They must not bias results by generating the wrong incentives
Related to confidentiality	On the part of members	Some members are bound by professional confidentiality
	On the part of the company	Some companies may be reluctant to reveal innovations at a very early, unprotected stage
Related to the competitive environment	For companies	Many organizations turn to CILs to generate new ideas and build loyalty among their members, and may find themselves in direct competition with them

Table 8.5. Summary of the findings of this chapter

To date, few OICs exist, as we have seen that their creation and implementation are not easy, with managers facing numerous challenges. By presenting these two case studies as concrete examples of OIC management practices and issues, our hope is that this knowledge can inspire community managers and strengthen the impact of their actions.

8.7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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