

Kevin Rudolph

Analyzing Dynamic Capabilities in the Context of Cloud Platform Ecosystems

A Case Study Approach



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Preface

This thesis is made as a completion of the Master of Science in Industrial Engineering and Management (IEM). Yours truly has a Bachelor of Science in Industrial Engineering from the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Germany and this thesis is the product of the master period, which is the last part of the IEM study at the Berlin Institute of Technology – School of Economics and Management, Germany.

A motivation for this topic comes first of all from my personal interest in the research areas of strategic management, (open, digital, business model) innovation, platform ecosystems and value co-creation. Furthermore, in this day and age we see high economical dynamism among all kinds of industries. We see companies that need to reinvent themselves. Especially, in the cloud computing industry some players tend to have strong competences in reshaping their companies and services frequently in order to gain market share and to grow in revenue – they have developed dynamic capabilities (DCs). This thesis examines the dynamic capabilities in cloud platform ecosystems. An in-depth case study investigates the microfoundations of dynamic capabilities within a market-leading cloud platform ecosystem. Further research addressing nearby challenges is about to come.

I would like to thank many people who have supported me through the completion of this thesis. First of all, thank you for my supervisor at the Chair of Information and Communication Management at the School of Economics and Management of the Berlin Institute of Technology for guidance – Dr. Christopher Hahn. Furthermore, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to my family and friends who have supported and encouraged me during the process.

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Abstract

Dynamic capabilities (DCs) refer to a firm's abilities to continuously adapt its resource base in order to respond to changes in its external environment. The capability to change dynamically is crucial in business ecosystems that are composed of a variety of actors.

Amazon Web Services (AWS), the leader in the cloud platform industry, is a promising cloud platform provider (CPP) to show a high degree of dynamic capability fulfillment within its highly fluctuating ecosystem. To date, the full scope of dynamic capabilities in cloud platform ecosystems (CPEs) has not been fully understood. Previous work has failed to deliver a combined perspective of explicit dynamic capabilities in cloud platform ecosystems applied on an in-depth practical case.

With our mixed-method case study on the AWS ecosystem we deliver a thorough understanding of its sensing, seizing and transforming capabilities. We generate a set of strategy management frameworks that support our expectations, lead to unexpected insights and answer the questions of what, how, why and with whom AWS uses DCs. In detail, we provide an understanding about DC chronological change, DC network patterns and DC logical explanations. Our research is based on a self-compiled case study database containing 16k+ secondary data pages from interviews, blogs, announcements, case studies, job vacancies, etc. that we analyze qualitatively and quantitatively. We find out that AWS develops and holds a large set of interacting dynamic capabilities incorporating a variety of ecosystem actors in order to sustain tremendous customer value and satisfaction.

The thesis infers significant theoretical and practical implications for all CPE actors, like partners, customers, investors and researchers in the field of IT strategy management. Managers of all CPE actors are encouraged to critically evaluate their own maturity level and complement a CPP's DC explications in order to boost business by implementing sensing, seizing, transforming and innovating capabilities.

