Case Study Analysis

Introduction to Innovation and Entrepreneurship management

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1. Problem and objective

The problem involves two interconnected aspects. Firstly, there's a significant issue arising from rapidly changing skills requirements within companies. Technological advancements and evolving industry demands mandate a constant evolution of employee skill sets. This dynamic landscape poses a continuous challenge for companies to ensure their workforce remains proficient in the latest technologies and industry trends. Secondly, there's a deficiency in training resources and personalized educational services. Internally, companies often struggle to allocate sufficient resources, both in terms of time and finances, to adequately address the training needs of their employees. Externally, available educational resources in the market lack the necessary customization to meet the specific requirements of individual companies. Off-the-shelf training solutions often fall short, offering generic programs that do not align with the unique challenges and contexts of diverse businesses.

StartupX perceives this as a critical issue since the success of companies hinges on its resolution. Firstly, it's crucial to note that companies are pressed for time because learning new skills is happening fast with technology changing quickly. If they don't keep up with the digital changes, it can hurt how well they compete and stay relevant in the market. Small businesses also struggle to find good educational resources, making it hard for them to grow. Not addressing this issue can seriously hurt businesses, highlighting the importance of finding ways to fix these problems.

This problem is growing. As technology continues to advance rapidly, the demand for new and specialized skills within companies is on the rise. The skills required today may become outdated tomorrow, exacerbating the challenge for businesses to keep their workforce adequately skilled. Furthermore, the increasing complexity of digital transformation amplifies the need for tailored training and educational resources. As companies strive to adopt and integrate emerging technologies, the gap between the skills available and the skills needed widens.

This problem is today unresolved for different reasons. Firstly, the rapid pace of technological advancements creates a continuously shifting landscape of skills requirements, making it challenging for businesses to keep up with the evolving demands. Secondly, the lack of tailored and customizable educational resources exacerbates the issue. Many existing training programs and resources are generic and fail to address the specific needs of individual companies, hindering effective skill development within organizations.

Startup X has four main objectives that will enable us to overcome our problem and develop startup X even further. Firstly, they aim to deepen student loyalty by integrating additional technological features. This involves the infusion of social networking elements and the introduction of gaming-based rewarding functionalities. Our goal is to create a more interactive and engaging learning environment, fostering enduring connections with our student base. Secondly, recognizing the pivotal role of exceptional customer support, they are committed to fortifying this aspect of our services. This entails substantial investments in additional resources, comprehensive training for our support teams to deliver prompt and effective assistance, and the implementation of feedback mechanisms for continuous improvement. A robust customer support system is integral to addressing queries, concerns, and feedback, ensuring a positive user experience. In pursuit of expanding our reach, our third objective is to venture into the U.S. market. The vast opportunities presented by the American educational landscape serve as the impetus for this strategic move. Tailoring our offerings to meet the unique needs of the U.S. audience, startup X aspires to establish a prominent presence and contribute meaningfully to the educational ecosystem in this region. Looking beyond immediate horizons, our fourth objective entails future international expansion into the Latin American (LATAM) market. Recognizing the dynamic and diverse nature of education in Latin America, startup X aims to extend the benefits of startup X's innovative learning approach to students in this region. This expansion aligns with our commitment to making quality education accessible on a global scale.

2. Product

The following chapter describes the products and services offered by startup X. Therefore, in the first subchapter the target clients of the company are identified via using personas. After that, the developed personas are used as an input for the value proposition canvas created in the second subchapter.

2.2 Target clients for X in the United States

A product or service can only be successful if people are willing to pay for it. Therefore, it is crucial to put the clients in the first position. Personas are a great tool to describe target clients based on selected features. For the personas developed in the context of startup X, five different features have been selected. First some personal information, like the name and the job, are mentioned, to make the persona more tangible. After that, the challenges, the objectives and the expectations are described, for a more detailed analysis of the persona. In total, three personas have been developed.

The first persona is Sandra Meyers, who is an experienced Human Resources Manager in a small manufacturing company. Her main challenge is to ensure that employees can develop as best as possible. Therefore, she needs to create a landscape that enables employees to align their skills with the rapid technological advancements necessary for the company's growth. Even if the creation of this landscape sometimes collides with the budget constraints in the company, Sandra has a clear objective. She wants to create possibilities for continuous learning and career advancement, so that talented employees do not leave the company and the gaps between employee skills and the evolving technological needs of the company are bridged. Her expectations are clear. She wants a single platform that fits all the needs, to develop the current employees towards the new technologies. Additionally, she wants that solution to be as cost efficient as possible, to not harm the financial limitations of the company. The persona for Sandra Meyers can be found in Annex 1.

The second persona is Julian Miller. A technical product owner for a large car manufacturer. The main challenge he is facing is the speed of technological change. As a technical product owner, he is a subject matter expert regarding digital technologies within his company. Everyone expects him to know all the details of the latest trends to use that information for decision making. As technology advances that fast, it is impossible for Julian to have profound knowledge about every new development. Nevertheless, his objective is to be seen as a trustful source for the decision making regarding the technical orientation of the company on a strategic level. Therefore, his expectations are to have a platform that does not just offer on-demand knowledge, but also offers a possibility to connect and communicate with other experts on topics, where maybe no trainings are already available, due to the newness of the topic. The persona for Julian Miller can be found in Annex 2.

The third persona is Marco Engelman, who has been working for almost 40 years in the production of a medium-size manufacturing company. His main challenge is to adapt to the change. Every other year new tools and systems are introduced, and for him who is not grown up with technology, it is hard to learn to handle them. Marco loves his job, and he does not want to be the old guy, so his objective is to learn how to use the new technologies, as fast as possible. Therefore, his expectations are that the learning material is super intuitive and easy to understand. The persona for Marco Engelman can be found in Annex 3.

2.3 Value proposition offered by X

To describe the value proposition a company offers, the value proposition canvas is a very useful tool. Therefore, the first step is to draw up the customer segment with the customer jobs, customer pains and customer gains, before the value proposition of the company, including the gain creators, the pain

relievers and the products & services is developed based on the factors mentioned in the customer segment. To fill the customer segment, the personas described in the previous chapter are used as an input.

The main job Sandra Meyers must do in her role as Human Resources Manager is to organize the E-learning options the company offers its employees. The technical product owner Julian Garcia needs to know about the latest trends and give his input for the various decision making processes. Finally, Marco Engelman must produce goods, by using the tools he has been given by his supervisor and the company processes.

The customer gains Sandra experiences are inter alia highly motivated employees, she can do her part to a high skill level within the company, and she has a feeling of safety regarding her job and potential bonus payments. Julian can build up a high reputation in his company, as he can make a statement and has a clear opinion on all important topics. Additionally, he also has a safe job and the chance to receive a bonus. Finally, Marco enjoys the job he loves, as he feels valuable and accepted by his younger colleagues, which leads to the fact that he also does not need to be worried about his job.

On the other side, the customer pains Sandra experiences are being spoilt for choice, as there are many different providers. Additionally, she has a limited budget and needs to find a solution that fits all the employees. For Julian, the biggest pains are, the speed of the technology development and the fact that often there are no real sources, or trainings for these developments, as the topics are that new. Marco especially struggles with the facts, that new technologies always come up, which he must use in his daily work, but he has no natural understanding for the technology. For him it is always a tough learning process.

Looking at the aspects that create gains for Sandra, the diverse assortment of trainings can be mentioned, as because of this diversity, there are learning services for all the different interests of the employees. Also, for Julian, the large pool of knowledge that X provides with its learning services and the opportunity to communicate with experts, are a massive gain creator. Marco especially benefits from the customizable and high-quality learning content, which breaks down the complicated contents for him.

The pain relievers X offers for Sandra are for example, that X is a very flexible platform that can be adjusted to the customer needs, and therefore it can be the one solution that fits all the employees. For Julian the biggest pain relievers are, the direct contact to experts from the technology vendors, as well as the network of experts from other companies within X. For Marco the key pain reliever is the educational services regarding digital transformation topics that enable him to perform his jobs.

Summarized, the products and services X offers are in the first place high-quality cloud based digital education services, that can be customized based on the customers wants and needs. In addition to that, X offers a social network that connects, first, the subject matter experts of the customers with experts from the technology vendors. Through that, subject matter experts are enabled to ask questions, or get inputs directly from the technology vendors. This is especially valuable for technologies that are so new, that there is no learning material available yet. On the other hand, the technology vendors benefit by having an additional sales channel and a higher customer satisfaction. Second, the social network connects subject matter experts from different customers, so that e.g., topics like technology stacks or infrastructures can be discussed. The value proposition canvas can be found in Annex 4.

3. Market

The underlying chapter focuses on the E-learning market. Therefore the first subchapter contains a market analysis of the global market, before the second subchapter focuses on the market in the United States. The third subchapter completes the previous one with a PEST analysis for the E-learning market in the United States. The final of the chapter is the analysis of the competitors in the market.

3.1 The global E-learning market

E-learning is the short term for electronic learning and describes learning and training, delivered through digital resources. E-learning can be used in various areas, as for example in an academic or a corporate setting. As the startup X focuses on clients in the corporate world, the following market analysis on the global market also focuses on corporate E-learning. (Fox, 2023)

Overall, the global corporate E-learning market shows a significant growth as well as strong potential for transformation. The reasons for that are factors like technological advancements, the increasing importance of continuous learning, and the shift towards remote work and digital solutions. The following analysis covers the types of services offered in the market, the technological aspects as well as other relevant aspects, and finally the main players in the market.

Talking about the types of services offered in the market, it can be stated, that there are a wide range of services including inter alia online E-learning, content development, learning management systems, mobile E-learning, rapid E-learning, and virtual classrooms. Also, self-paced training is a dominant segment. Thereby learners are provided with the flexibility to learn at their own pace through web-based learning management systems, learning content management systems, and mobile E-learning platforms. (Skyquest, n.d.)

Focusing next on the technological aspects in the market, it is important to note that technological advancements play a crucial role in the corporate E-learning market. An ongoing trend is e.g., leveraging artificial intelligence and machine learning for personalized content recommendations and adaptive learning. Additionally the use of cloud-based systems inter alia enables remote access, security, data backup, and cost-effectiveness. Finally, it must be noted that mobile devices as well as the internet itself have revolutionized content delivery, which makes E-learning overall more accessible. (Skyquest, n.d.; GMI, 2023)

Other relevant aspects are for example the market size and growth, whereby the size was valued at USD 141.2 billion in 2022 and is projected to grow at a CAGR of over 15.5% from 2023 to 2032. (GMI, 2023). Another relevant aspect is the impact of COVID-19, as the pandemic forced businesses to shift towards online trainings. (GMI, 2023) Some key challenges in the corporate E-learning market are for example the design of effective E-learning courses for diverse age groups as well as managing the complexity and cost of content creation. (Technavio, 2023-a)

Talking lastly about the key players, it can be stated that the corporate E-learning market is a very fragmented one, as the education sector can be classified as fast-growing and as it contains many local and regional players competing with each other. Key players to name are Adobe Inc., Blackboard Inc., Cisco Systems, and Oracle Corp. (Mordor, n.d.)

3.2 The E-learning market in the United States

The E-learning market in the United States is experiencing substantial growth and offers therefore a promising landscape for the expansion of startup X. As it was hard to find information especially on the corporate E-learning market in the United States, the following analysis focuses more on the general E-learning market in the United States, with some deep dives into the corporate sector.

Looking first at the size and the growth of the E-learning market in the United States, it can be stated that the market was valued at USD 66.23 billion in 2022 and is projected to grow at a CAGR of over 12.5% from 2022 to 2030. (Research and Markets, 2023) The market is segmented into three sectors. Corporate, academic, and government. Thereby the academic sector currently holds the largest market share, because of the demand for online education at all levels. In respect to the sector of corporate E-learning, large enterprises are experiencing significant growth, recognizing the benefits of online learning for workforce development. (Research and Markets, 2023; Yahoo, 2023) As already mentioned, it is tough to find some actual figures. It is known that, in 2022 the North American market had a market share of over 35% of the global corporate E-learning market, which was valued at USD 141.2 billion. Therefore, it can be concluded that the North American market was valued at USD 49.42 billion in 2022. Nevertheless, this is no final number for the United States, as the North American market includes the United States and Canada. (GMI 2023)

Potential partners, startup X could collaborate with, can be split into two groups. The first of them are the content providers, as the learning content is a crucial component of X's product. Content providers could be on the one hand companies, offering content creation, or on the other hand academic institutions, like universities, which are known for their high standards in the United States. One example close to the newly chosen location Boston would, for example, be Harvard University. The second group are the tech giants, which are also widely represented in the United States. Examples would be Google, Microsoft or Amazon. These tech giants could publish trainings for their products exclusively via X's platform. Another use case would be, that experts from the tech giants could directly interact, with subject matter experts, of X's clients. X, respectively their clients, would benefit from a great support, while the tech giants could maximize their customer satisfaction. Additionally, they could also use this direct customer contact as an additional sales channel.

Other relevant aspects in the market are for example the challenges facing in the United States market. Thereby a significant one, which has not already been named in the global market analysis, is the competition from Massive Open Online Courses, which offer free access and a wide range of content. (Technavio, 2023-b) As market drivers, inter alia high internet and smartphone penetration, the evolution of cloud infrastructure, and the rising trend of adopting online courses as a realistic alternative to traditional classroom instruction can be named. (Research and Markets, 2023; GlobeNewswire, 2023) The technological trends are also largely consistent with the trends mentioned in the global market analysis. Additionally, the integration of technologies like Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality and smart wearables are exciting trends that can change the way users are interacting with E-learning content. (Technavio, 2023-b)

3.3 PEST analysis for the E-learning market in the United States

To get a better understanding of the chances for startup X in the E-learning Market in the United States, the PEST Analysis is a great tool that is used to analyze the environment regarding political, economic, social, and technological factors.

Looking first at the political factors, government initiatives play a key role. In detail, the government increased the support for digital education, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes investments in digital infrastructure and online learning ecosystems which has positively impacted the overall E-learning market. Nevertheless, it must be stated that this is not a huge factor for the corporate E-learning market. (Businesswire, 2023)

Regarding the economic factors, first the market growth needs to be named. The E-learning market in the United States experiences significant growth. This is underlined in the projections that the market size will grow from USD 66.23 billion in 2022 to USD 169.98 Billion by 2030, at a compound annual growth rate of 12.5%. This is definitely an interesting factor for X. (Research and Markets, 2023) A second factor is the corporate sector expansion, which shows that large enterprises are increasingly

using E-learning for workforce training. This trend is contributing to the overall market growth and very interesting for X, as the company is focusing on the corporate sector. (Research and Markets, 2023)

The social factors contain aspects like the increasing use of E-learning solutions from higher education, which offer a wide range of academic courses and materials online. This trend also needs to be mentioned but should not be considered as the biggest plus point for X. (Businesswire, 2023) A second social factor is that the acceptance and the trust in E-learning platforms as an educational instrument are growing. This can be interesting for X, as it could lead to a higher demand for E-learning within the companies. (Research and Markets, 2023)

Key technological factors are first, the advancements in technology. Cloud infrastructure becomes better and better, the internet is widely available, and smartphones lead to the fact that people can consume E-learning content almost everywhere at any time. Even if that is a pretty obvious factor, advancements in technology will enable X to further develop its products and services. (Research and Markets, 2023)

In conclusion, it can be stated that the E-learning market in the United States is experiencing substantial growth, driven by various factors that are interesting for startup X, like advancements in technology and a shift in corporate training approaches.

3.4 Competitors in the E-learning market in the United States

As mentioned earlier, the E-learning market in the United States is a highly competitive one. Therefore, there are various competitors for startup X. To identify the positioning of X compared to its competitors in the market, a profile chart analysis has been carried out.

Before starting with the analysis, it was necessary to select the competitors that should be compared with X. Therefore, multiple rankings were analyzed and as Coursera, Udemy for Business and LinkedIn Learning were found multiple times in the upper ranks, it was decided to select these companies. (Harve, 2023; Raouna, 2023) As a second preparatory task, the categories for the profile chart analysis were defined. It was decided to use the categories course offerings, market reputation, flexibility, technology adoption and customer satisfaction. As a last step it was decided to use a scale from 1 to 5 for the analysis, whereby 1 is considered as rather bad and 5 as very good.

Coursera collaborates with top universities and organizations to offer a diverse variety of courses with high quality. Therefore, the ranking for course offerings is a 5. The company is highly recognized for its partnerships mentioned before and its broad variety of courses. Therefore, the ranking for market reputation is a 5. The flexibility is rated with a 4, as most courses are self-paced, but some have specific start dates or schedules, which might limit the access. The technology adoption is also rated with 4, as Coursera implements effective E-learning technologies, including mobile learning and interactive content. On average, users are satisfied with course quality and the variety of courses. Nevertheless, some report challenges with customer support or platform navigation. Therefore, the ranking of the customer satisfaction is a 4. (Coursera, n.d.; EduReviewer, 2023)

Udemy for Business offers a huge library with a focus on professional and personal development. Nevertheless, the course quality can be inconsistent, as it is open for instructors. Therefore, the ranking for course offerings is a 4. The market reputation is also rated with a 4. The reason for that is, that Udemy for Business is known for the practical skills and the professional development courses. Nevertheless, the platform lacks the academic prestige associated with university partnerships. In return, the platform is extremely flexible with on-demand courses, allowing users to start and progress at their own pace. Therefore, the flexibility is rated with a 5. The technology adoption for Udemy for Business is rated with 4, as the company is not super innovative, but uses all the relevant technologies, a user-friendly E-learning platform needs. As users appreciate the practical skills and variety, but sometimes mention variability in course quality and depth as problems, the customer satisfaction is rated a 4. (Udemy, n.d.; Capterra, n.d.)

The course offerings of LinkedIn Learning show strength in the areas of business, creativity, and technology. They have a strong focus towards career development. Therefore, the rating is a 4. The rating for the market reputation is also a 4, as the platform gains credibility through LinkedIn's network, targeting corporate and individual learners focused on career growth. As LinkedIn Learning is extremely flexible with on-demand courses, allowing users to start and progress at their own pace, the flexibility is rated with a 5. The technology adoption is rated as a 4, as the platform is solid, reliable, and integrated with LinkedIn's networking features. Nevertheless, it is not groundbreaking in terms of educational technology. On average the feedback for LinkedIn Learning is positive, with appreciation for its integration within the LinkedIn network. Nevertheless, some users desire more advanced or specialized topics. Therefore, the rating for customer satisfaction is a 4. (LinkedIn Learning, n.d.; OMKB, n.d.)

Startup X specializes in digital transformation education, offering a focused but less diverse range of courses compared to larger platforms. Therefore, the rating for the course offering is a 3. As X is a smaller provider that newly joins the market, the company first needs to establish its market presence. Therefore, the rating for the Market Reputation is also a 3. In return, X offers easily adjustable solutions for its customers which leads to a flexibility rating of 5. In the case of technology adoption, X receives a rating of 3, as it uses basic technologies, as for example the cloud, but it needs to further develop the platform e.g. in the areas of gamification or artificial intelligence. Finally, X shows strong satisfaction, that is gained for example through the tailored solutions and the personalized approach. Nevertheless, this should not be overrated, which leads to a rating of 4. The following figure shows the profile chart of the different companies.

Figure 3.1: Profile Chart
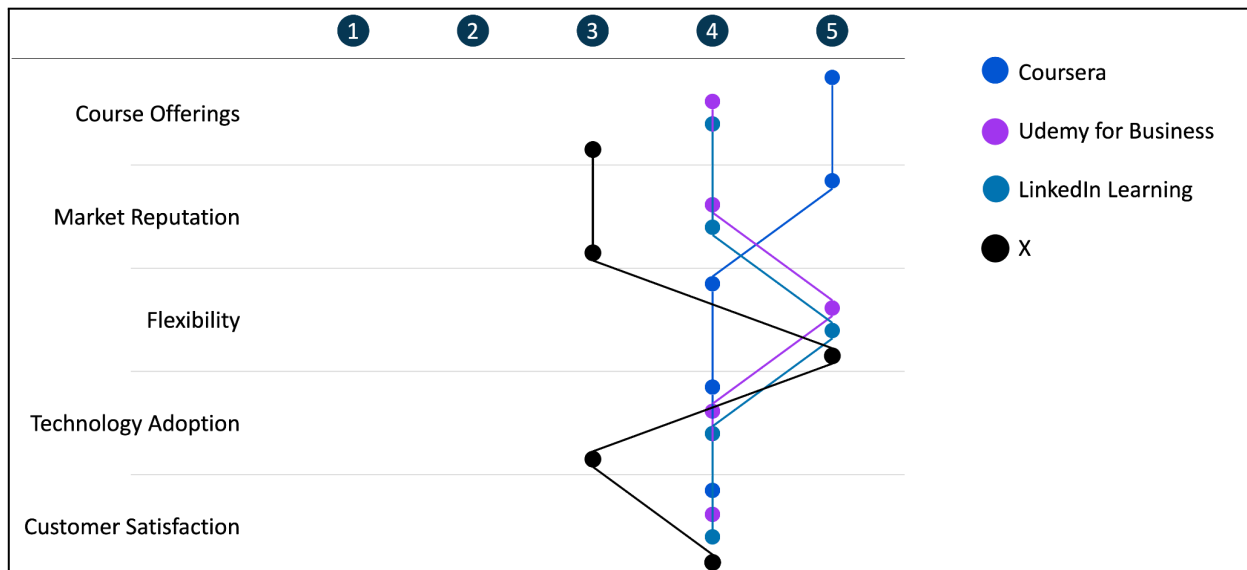
In conclusion X has some strong competitors in the market that are superior especially in the areas of course offerings, market reputation and technology adoption. Nevertheless, X is head-to-head with its competitors in the areas of flexibility and customer satisfaction. If X improves in the first mentioned categories, it definitely has the potential to be successful in the market.

4. Story

The story of startup X starts in 2019 in Spain, guided by a mission of delivering "cloud-based digital education services." By 2021, a pivotal moment arrived since X welcomed a CEO to guide its operations. At the same time, external investment amounting to EUR 200,000 (representing a 20% ownership stake) adding fresh capital into startup X.

The year 2022 introduced a notable shift in strategy: founders received bonuses for the first time, and a decision was taken to stop the practice of reinvesting all profits back into the company. However, the valuation of X in June 2023 fell short of expectations, raising the need for recalibration of the growth strategy. For this reason, X boasted a customer base comprising 15 SMEs and 3 large firms, all reaping the benefits of its "platform-based educational product."

While the world was facing the challenges of COVID-19 pandemic, in July 2023 startup X expanded its customer base to 20 SMEs and 6 large firms. September 2023 marked a milestone in product development, with the introduction of 100 learning modules featuring advanced content tailored for the digital transformation of manufacturing companies. This achievement leads to the formulation of a new strategic plan outlining the X's vision and goals for the next five years, extending until 2028.

Looking forward to 2024, X set its sights on international expansion, specifically targeting the United States. This phase involved adapting the platform, introducing new products, and boosting customer support. By 2027, the company planned to enhance its product by incorporating advanced technological features. In addition to that, aligned with the goal of global growth and expansion, startup X is considering expanding its footprint to Latin America (LATAM).

The following Figure 4.1 illustrates the X timeline, highlighting key past and future events mentioned earlier, encompassing business, team, and content aspects. This depiction aims to offer a comprehensive overview of the company's journey, from its inception to future endeavors, with a focus on pivotal milestones and strategic changes.
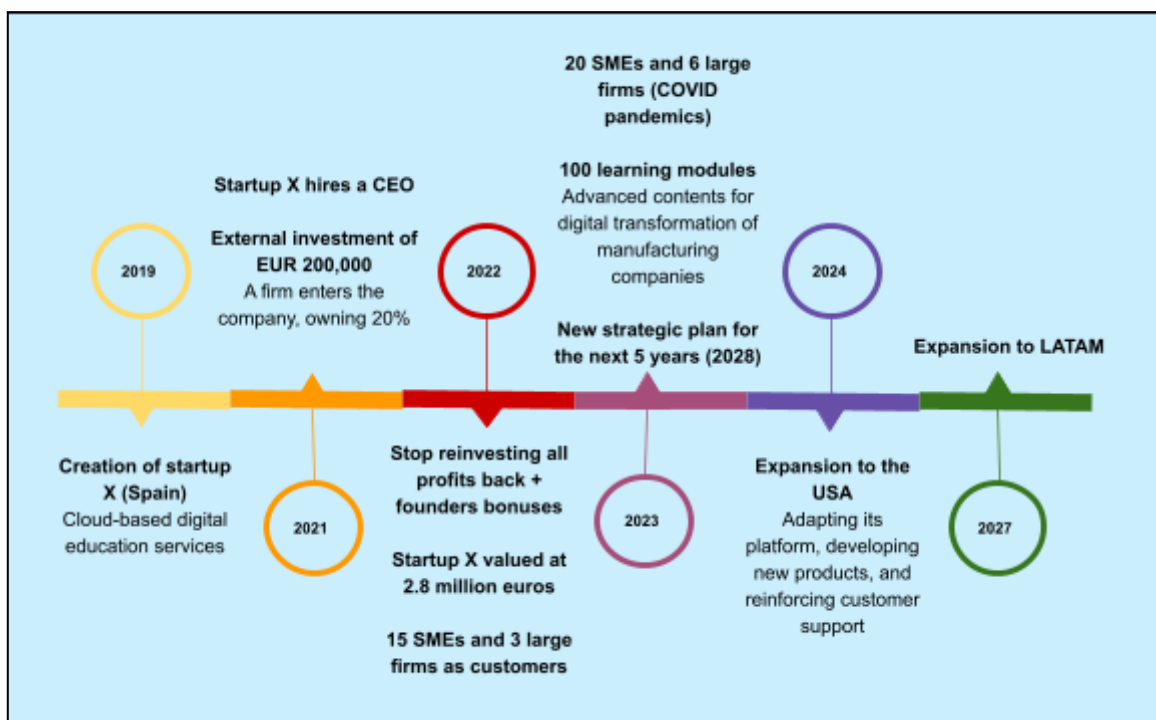

Figure 4.1: X's Story Timeline

5. Team

As illustrated in Annex 5, X team currently consists of nine members operating in Spain. Between 2019 and 2021, the software engineering team experienced growth, welcoming five new members, including the three founders from the company's inception in 2019. Among these additions, four are junior software engineers actively contributing to software application development and maintenance. Augmenting their efforts is a senior software engineer responsible for designing intricate systems, providing team leadership, and ensuring the overall quality and efficiency of the software development process.

In 2020, X appointed a new CEO with a background in engineering and economics, playing a pivotal role in providing leadership and strategic vision. This individual ensures the X's success by integrating technical expertise with a profound understanding of economic dynamics. To enhance day-to-day operations and organizational efficiency, two administrative employees joined the team in 2020. Tasked with managing schedules, handling paperwork, and coordinating logistics, they play a crucial role in facilitating the smooth functioning of internal processes.

Recognizing the significance of effective communication and market presence, in 2021, X brought in a marketing and commercial expert. Collaborating closely with the CEO, this expert leverages market insights to develop strategies aligning with the company's overall vision. Their expertise in commercial aspects ensures that X products and services not only meet customer needs but are also strategically promoted in the market. This diverse team structure allows for a synergistic approach, where each member's expertise contributes to different facets of the company's operations. The technical proficiency of software engineers, strategic vision of the CEO, market acumen of the marketing/commercial expert, and administrative support provided by the staff collectively form a well-rounded team poised for success in the dynamic business landscape. For content creation, X asked for the support of external experts, some from the academic sector and others specialized in various domains from different companies. Additionally, external experts assist X in legal, personnel, and tax matters through external services. The timeline presented in the following Figure 5.1 provides instead a summary of the recruitment activities X has been doing along all these years:
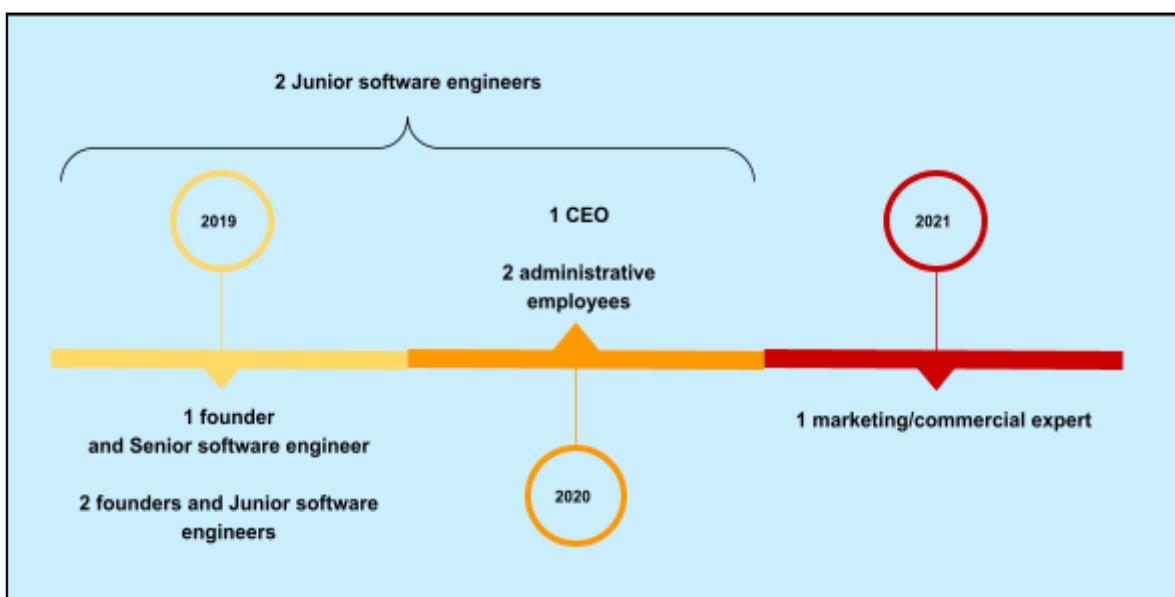

Figure 5.1: X's Team Members Timeline

6. Plan

6.1. Strategy of X (action plan)

Vision and mission

Startup X's vision is to democratize education internationally across the corporate landscape, ensuring that every company, regardless of size or industry, has access to top-notch educational resources.

In pursuit of this vision, X mission is to provide a wide range of high quality educational resources, tailored to the specific needs of each company, at affordable rates so that as many companies as possible can benefit from exceptional training.

Creativity

In the pursuit of enhancing customer loyalty, startup X has generated a plethora of innovative ideas through brainwriting, fractionation, association, random word, analogy, provocation, exaggeration, distortion, and idealization methods. While not all ideas may be feasible, the strategic implementation of concepts aligns with startup X's mission to create a unique and customer-centric experience.

For these creative ideas, startup X focused on the following question: *how can we improve customer loyalty in order to reduce abandonment rate?*

Brainwriting

The first idea to emerge from the brainwriting session is the introduction of an AI-powered Virtual Customer Assistant (VCA) as a proactive and personalized support system. The VCA can assist users in real-time, addressing queries, providing guidance, and offering personalized recommendations based on individual preferences and behaviors. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, the customer could receive instant, personalized assistance, reducing user frustration and potential abandonment. For startup X, this would demonstrate a commitment to customer comfort and support, contributing to customer loyalty.

The second idea is entitled "Loyalty rewards quests", and consists in introducing a gamified loyalty program where users embark on quests or challenges to earn virtual rewards and beat his friends or colleagues. In particular, this would involve a gamified interface design with visually appealing graphics and a storyline. We could imagine a weekly update of the table announcing the top players. This technique would encourage users to actively engage with our platform in a fun and interactive way, and so increase their loyalty.

Removing without replacing Fractionation

Let's start by defining the components that will keep the customers loyal:
- Regularly renew content
- Contents of quality
- External customer reminders (newsletters, SMS, …)
- Good customer service
- Good design

By removing the component "Regularly renew content", startup X could introduce a sustainable content curation strategy that focuses on timeless, evergreen material. Instead of constantly updating content, curate a library of high-quality, enduring resources that remain relevant over an extended period.

Change the focus of attention Fractionation

The first idea for achieving the simplified goal "How does startup X keep users loyal and satisfied?" would be to host virtual campus social events where users can interact, share experiences, and build a sense of community. This fosters connections beyond the learning content, encouraging users to stick around for the camaraderie.

Dependency attributes Association

By linking the following 2 independent elements: a good user experience and external customer reminders, startup X could create a dependency by allowing users to customize the visual elements of external reminders, according to their design preferences. This not only ensures a visually harmonious experience, but also increases engagement by providing reminders that resonate with the user's aesthetic sensibilities.

Random word

The randomly obtained word was "Constellation". Startup X thought about creating a loyalty program where users unlock distinct constellations by exploring various features and content on the platform. Each constellation represents a specific aspect of the user journey, and users are motivated to complete tasks or milestones to illuminate different stars within their personal constellation.

Analogy

The analogy method seemed natural enough to startup X, since they quickly found a reference to loyalty as a friendship journey. Imagine customer loyalty as a relationship journey. Just like in personal relationships, the dynamics of loyalty involve building trust, understanding needs, and continuously nurturing the connection. Analogous to a successful relationship, customer loyalty requires consistent communication, mutual appreciation, and the occasional surprise to keep the spark alive. By viewing loyalty through the lens of a relationship, strategies can be developed to enhance the emotional connection, making customers feel valued and understood.

Reversal provocation

The first idea is called "Abandonment Celebration Days". Instead of focusing solely on preventing abandonment, an unconventional approach involves the introduction of "Abandonment Celebration Days." In this context, specific days or events are designed to encourage users to take a break or temporarily step away from the platform without incurring any penalties. During these periods, users are pleasantly surprised with exclusive offers or personalized content upon their return. This reversal strategy yields several benefits. Users experience less pressure to constantly engage, fostering a positive and relaxed attitude toward the platform. Surprise and delight are achieved through unexpected rewards upon return, creating a positive and memorable experience that strengthens the emotional bond between users and the brand. The reversal approach strategically leverages abandonment periods as opportunities for positive engagement, shifting the focus from potential losses to strategic gains.

Our second idea of this method is called "Abandonment Transparency". In a departure from the typical discouragement of abandonment, the reversal strategy known as "Abandonment Transparency" promotes open communication about users' reasons for potential abandonment. This involves encouraging users to provide feedback openly, creating a feedback mechanism that rewards constructive input. The platform can then use this feedback proactively to address issues in real-time. This reversal strategy yields several benefits. Understanding user concerns facilitates targeted improvements, enhancing the overall user experience and satisfaction. Transparency fosters trust as users appreciate the platform's openness to listen and adapt based on user feedback. Proactive issue

resolution, achieved by identifying and addressing issues in real-time, reduces the likelihood of long-term abandonment, contributing to a more positive user experience.

Exaggeration provocation

The exaggeration idea is called "Extreme Loyalty VIP Club". Innovation takes a bold turn with the creation of an Extreme Loyalty VIP Club that transcends traditional loyalty programs. Within this exclusive club, loyal members revel in extravagant and exclusive benefits, such as a personal concierge service, immersive virtual reality experiences, and monthly surprise gifts delivered directly to their doorstep. This exaggeration strategy yields several benefits. Users, now treated as true VIPs, experience heightened engagement, deepening their emotional connection to the brand. The extreme nature of the loyalty program generates excitement, sparking word-of-mouth buzz as users eagerly share their extraordinary experiences with friends. Ultimately, the allure of exclusive benefits significantly reduces the likelihood of users abandoning the platform.

Distortion provocation

Let's move on to the distortion method. In a distortion of the norm, our idea is to alter the conventional relationship between abandonment and rewards. In this context, users are not penalized for abandoning the platform. Instead, they are offered credits or benefits when they return after a period of inactivity, with the magnitude of rewards increasing with the duration of their absence. This distortion strategy brings forth several benefits. Users experience positive reinforcement, being rewarded positively for their return, fostering a more encouraging approach to reducing abandonment. The distortion of the typical penalty system serves as a powerful reactivation incentive, motivating users to re-engage with the platform. The unexpected benefits contribute to an enhanced overall customer experience, as users appreciate the platform's unconventional approach to handling user engagement.

Idealization provocation

If startup X had all the money in the world, it could implement the idealization method entitled "Loyalty Singularity Network". In this revolutionary concept, loyalty becomes a universal currency, creating a seamless network that unifies loyalty across all digital realms. Within the Loyalty Singularity Network, users embrace a singular loyalty wallet, consolidating points, rewards, and status levels from every service, platform, or product. Loyalty transcends individual platforms as users navigate a borderless ecosystem, allowing points earned in one domain to be spent in another.

In conclusion, startup X won't be able to put all these creative ideas into action due to limited resources, and some of them might be a bit too idealistic. However, there are practical plans in motion. First and foremost, there's the Loyalty as a Relationship Journey concept. Treating the users well is a top goal for X, and this idea aligns perfectly with that mission. The second idea on the implementation list is the AI-powered "Virtual Customer Assistant." This involves creating a virtual assistant for X users. So, if users encounter a problem, they won't have to leave the platform – they can turn to the assistant for instant help.

Strategic plan

In navigating the dynamic landscape of digital education, startup X embarks on a strategic journey outlined in its comprehensive expansion plan. This multifaceted approach encompasses crucial elements such as digital transformation, intellectual property strategies, and funding analysis. Each subpart plays a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of startup X as it strives for innovation, market relevance, and sustainable growth. Let's delve into the nuanced strategies and analyses that underscore startup X's commitment to excellence and its mission to democratize education across diverse global landscapes.

Digital transformation

In the context of startup X's new expansion plan, digital transformation holds immense strategic importance. First, the introduction of new advanced learning modules, tailored for the digital transformation of manufacturing companies, exemplifies the company's commitment to innovative content delivery. This showcases how digital transformation isn't just a technological upgrade but a strategic enabler for staying ahead in the competitive digital education landscape.

As startup X looks to grow internationally, with a focus on the United States and Latin America, going digital is a key move. Digital transformation becomes like the secret ingredient that helps X customize the platform for different markets. Instead of one-size-fits-all, X is about making the platform work well for everyone in each place. This means paying close attention to the details and using digital skills to make sure the platform matches the unique qualities of each region.

IP strategy

For startup X, safeguarding its E-learning platform and brand identity is crucial. Since the platform is already in the market, patenting is not an option. Instead, startup X has chosen to protect its platform and educational content using copyrights. This means that the text, graphics, and videos in the courses cannot be reproduced or distributed without permission.

To safeguard its identity, startup X is also applying for a trademark. This will cover the company name, slogan, and logo design. With these protections in place, startup X can confidently share its data with research organizations, fostering stronger connections without the fear of theft.

In terms of business, startup X is a company created independently of the university. It licenses technologies from the university and secures financing from external backers. This setup allows startup X to commercialize its innovations effectively.

6.2. Funding analysis (economic-financial plan)

Startup X is embarking on an ambitious journey to revolutionize its E-learning platform, envisioning a comprehensive upgrade that integrates social networking and gaming-based rewards. To achieve this groundbreaking transformation, the company anticipates a funding requirement ranging from 500K to 1M euros. In a strategic funding approach, startup X proposes a two-fold strategy that harmoniously blends public and private funding.

The first facet of our strategy involves National Collaborative Funding, with a total budget of 500K euros. This approach entails securing a 100K euro grant and a 250K euro loan, complemented by a 150K euro contribution from the company itself. By adopting this strategy, startup X not only secures vital financial support but also opens the doors to collaboration with strategic partners. Leveraging their expertise and ideas, the company aims to enhance the E-learning platform's social media and gamification features. This collaborative effort underscores startup X's commitment to innovation and market growth, establishing a strong foundation for success.

In tandem with the collaborative funding approach, startup X advocates for Equity Funding specifically tailored for the AI initiative. Considering the high company value at 2.8 million euros, opting for Equity Funding becomes a strategic move. While presenting a high level of difficulty, the national collaborative effort serves to bolster this case by showcasing robust partnerships and a genuine willingness to invest in the platform's evolution. This strategic alignment not only secures the necessary funding for the envisioned upgrade but also aligns seamlessly with startup X's overarching goal of integrating cutting-edge AI technology. This infusion of AI capabilities into the E-learning platform is poised to elevate its market position and enhance competitiveness, solidifying startup X's position as a trailblazer in the E-learning industry.

This dual-pronged funding strategy underscores X's commitment to innovation. By actively involving collaborative partners, the company aims to think outside the box, ensuring that the platform's evolution aligns with cutting-edge trends and user expectations. Simultaneously, the venture into artificial intelligence, despite its high difficulty, is strategically backed by Equity Funding. This decision signals the company's confidence in the success of the AI initiative, with the national collaborative effort fortifying the overall funding strategy.

By harnessing both public and private funding avenues, X is poised to propel its E-learning platform into a new era of technological sophistication. This balanced approach not only addresses market demands but also positions the company at the forefront of educational technology, contributing to its sustained growth and competitiveness.

X also intends to apply for support from the European Innovation Council Accelerator, a funding avenue designed to fuel high-risk, high-potential innovative projects. If successful, X stands to gain substantial financial backing, enabling the acceleration of its transformative initiatives. This funding initiative not only provides a monetary boost but also serves as a platform for startups and SMEs like X to amplify their solutions, foster growth, and make a more significant impact on the digital education landscape.

7. How does innovation at X contribute to the expansion plan?

In the world of innovation, startup X carefully combines different ways of coming up with new ideas. This chapter looks at why it is important to be open to new ideas, how X manages it, and the partnerships it makes. We also check out the potential of doing scientific activities openly and using some new ways of thinking. The chapter talks about how X plans to stay ahead in the business. It also says why working together with others for innovation is important, giving a plan for growing and reaching different markets. Finally, it gives details about special projects in Europe, showing how X stays smart in the fast-changing education market.

7.1. How is innovation in X?

In an era of rapid technological advancements and changing customer needs, embracing Open innovation is something imperative for X, in order to remain competitive in dynamic markets.
The following list aims to present possible motivation for X to adapt Open Innovation strategy. In fact, by understanding these motivations and exploring possible activities open to cooperation with external actors, X can position itself as a frontrunner in the competitive education market:

- *Small Team and Lack of Product Expertise*: X operates with a relatively small team, and product development expertise may be limited. Open Innovation becomes relevant as it allows the infusion of fresh ideas and expertise from external collaborators. The absence of 'product people' within the organization makes it crucial to leverage external input for innovation.

- *Access to External Expertise*: One of the primary motivations for embracing Open Innovation is gaining access to a broader pool of expertise and knowledge. This collaborative approach enables X to tap into external perspectives and insights, potentially leading to innovative solutions and fresh pedagogical approaches.

- *Cost Savings*: Collaboration with external partners can significantly reduce research and development (R&D) costs. By sharing the financial burden of R&D activities, X can bring new products and services to the market more cost-effectively.

- *Research and Development (R&D)*: X can accelerate its product development and introduce cutting-edge technologies by engaging in collaborative R&D projects with universities, research institutions, or other companies. This not only expedites innovation but also enriches the organization's technological prowess.

- *Intellectual Property (IP) Collaboration*: Collaborative IP agreements allow X to share or license its intellectual property with external partners, fostering mutually beneficial innovation. This can lead to the creation of joint intellectual assets and the development of innovative solutions in the education sector.

Open Science: a new frontier to compete and survive the market

In today's rapidly changing world of innovation, Open Science (OS) has become a popular way for organizations, both public and private, to work together openly and share information. This approach is all about collaboration, transparency, and accessibility.

When thinking about whether X should jump into OS Activities, getting involved could actually be good for X, depending on its goals. Open Science brings many benefits, like teaming up with external groups such as universities or research institutions. This collaboration can bring in fresh ideas, creative solutions, and speed up research and development. X could gain a lot from this and improve what it offers. Different parts of Open Science, like Open Access, Open Source, or Open Data, have unique advantages.

If X decides to go for Open Science activities, focusing on Open Data might be interesting. This means collecting and making anonymous data about education levels in Spain and the USA, including details about how students use the platform. This information can be useful for creating new apps, products, or services that fit well with what X offers. Also, by taking part in Open Data projects, X can learn a lot from other groups, using industry standards or new trends to make its educational products even better. Besides that, it's also crucial to think about challenges and risks, like keeping data private and protecting intellectual property, and find good ways to handle them.

7.2. Innovation management used in X

In the realm of innovation management, X faces the challenge of balancing open and closed innovation strategies. Open innovation is vital for tapping into external expertise, cost savings, and enhanced research and development capabilities. While open innovation is essential and the company can benefit from it in several ways, some aspects necessitate a closed innovation model for protection and strategic focus.

Open Innovation

When X starts using Open Innovation, it means they are ready to do many things to make the most of it. They can use Open Innovation in different ways within the company. Here's a list of some things they could do specifically for the European market:

- *Content Creation*: X can follow an open approach similar to Lego, allowing clients to have a say in the creation of training materials. Collaborative content creation with clients and external experts can lead to tailored, innovative, and pedagogically effective learning materials.

- *Traditional IP Contracts*: While open innovation is a strategic focus, maintaining some traditional IP contracts for development of training is essential. This ensures the protection of proprietary knowledge and fosters a balanced approach to innovation.

- *Proximity to Customers*: X should strengthen its customer engagement through surveys and feedback. Understanding customer needs and preferences is essential for developing better products and services.

Open Innovation Budget: distribution and investments areas

The idea behind open innovation isn't just about trying new things; it's about doing them the right way, and that's not always easy. It's about creating an environment where people feel motivated to come up with fresh ideas. Managing Open Innovation means providing the right funds, tools, and a space where

it's okay to take risks and make mistakes while being creative. At X, the approach to encouraging innovation is centered around having one main budget for it. Since X doesn't have many employees, there is little value in having small budgets for different teams; that might put too much pressure on them to come up with innovations.

However, there's a risk that having one main budget might stop some employees from sharing their ideas since it's not a rule. To address this, X is committed to creating a culture where everyone trusts and supports each other in innovation. X provides everyone with the tools they need, like good computers and software designed for innovation projects. Each month, every employee has dedicated time for brainstorming ideas. X is also planning workshops to help employees improve their problem-solving and creative thinking skills, understanding that not everyone becomes an innovator overnight. To boost innovation, X will reward the most creative employees with bonuses and use metrics to monitor how well our innovation plans are progressing, ensuring we stay on track.

For a successful innovation effort, both culture and resources are essential. However, for X, the emphasis should be more on resources because in a startup, there should already be a culture of innovation. Startups naturally enjoy trying new things, and it's crucial to add the right resources to help turn those new ideas into tangible innovations. Having the tools, budgets, and time for innovation activities can significantly enhance X's ability to turn ideas into real innovations.

Closed Innovation

Concerning the X company, would be interesting for them to consider and maintain a closed innovation approach in the following aspects:

- *Newest Technologies in Training Tech:* X should safeguard their latest technological advancements, including innovations like Gen AI. Publicly sharing these innovations could compromise their competitive advantage. Furthermore, given the strong tech focus of most staff members, a closed model is crucial to protect in-house expertise and proprietary innovations.

- *Process Innovations, Especially in Marketing:* The company excels in innovative marketing strategies that set them apart from competitors. To preserve these unique techniques and maintain a strategic edge, it is recommended to keep them within a closed innovation framework.

- *Long-Term Competitive Advantage in Educational Content:* X's long-term success in the educational content sector relies on delivering a distinct user experience. Whether it's the visual appeal of their platform or the quality of their courses, these elements play a pivotal role in attracting and retaining users. Openly sharing this knowledge poses the risk of competitors replicating their unique concepts, potentially eroding their competitive edge over time.

All the closed activities mentioned above need to be sustained with a proper model. In the case of the X, the model that fits the best could be the Third Generation Models, whose schema is shown in Annex 6. Unlike older models that only focused on making products, this one smoothly blends science and technology: It sees innovation as a flexible problem-solving tool, able to handle both small improvements and big breakthroughs. The most important feature of this model is flexibility, allowing organizations to return to research, whether in basic or applied science, when lacking the necessary technology to realize an idea. It introduces feedback loops to enhance innovation but maintains some linearity, potentially negatively affecting decision-making speed. Despite these challenges, it offers an agile and interconnected approach to innovation, recognizing the multifaceted nature of the process and promoting adaptability for staying at the forefront of technology and problem-solving.

7.3. Innovation partnerships

After adopting Open Innovation, X can leverage its benefits by collaborating with external partners. By embracing this approach and engaging in various collaborative activities, X has the opportunity to position itself as a leader in innovation within the education sector. This strategy enables X to provide top-notch, customer-focused solutions, leading to growth and success in the competitive market. Open innovation can be implemented and fostered through various activities and partnerships, as described below:

- *Strategic Partnerships*: X can form open innovation partnerships with industry leaders like Microsoft for the development of Azure training materials. Such collaborations can provide access to advanced resources and expand market reach.

- *Open Innovation Community*: Integrating an open innovation community as a part of the product can be instrumental. This platform encourages knowledge sharing among users, allowing them to help and learn from each other, fostering a collaborative learning environment.

- *Market Expansion and Localization*: To gain a deep understanding of the USA market, X can collaborate with companies familiar with the American education system. This collaboration will enable X to adapt its offerings to the local market, catering to specific needs and preferences.

- *Increased Content Production*: Building on the successful model in Spain, X should expand its network of university experts in the US. This will result in the production of comprehensive, locally tailored content that meets the diverse needs of the American population.

7.4. Innovation projects in the European context

In the pursuit of innovation within the European context, startup X can strategically engage in collaborative projects, each playing a pivotal role in the company's expansion strategy. X is dedicated to working together with others to bring new ideas to life. In this section, we'll explore four possible projects that could help startup X grow. These projects range from adding social networking and gaming features to the E-learning platform to exploring the latest AI technology:

- **Social Media & Gamification Projects**: This initiative aimed at elevating the E-learning platform with social networking and gaming features. Through active collaboration within the 'Erasmus+ Program,' startup X leverages academic expertise to ensure innovative content development. This initiative strengthens the platform's appeal with gamification and social features, targeting a broader European user base and aligning seamlessly with the company's expansion strategy. This collaborative approach benefits both startup X and academic institutions, fostering a two-way exchange of expertise.

- **AI Integration Projects**: Startup X can its commitment to cutting-edge technologies while integrating AI modules into the E-learning platform. By participating in collaborative EU research initiatives under 'Horizon Europe,' startup X not only emphasizes collaborative projects aligned with digital and innovative goals in education, but also enhances its credibility and supports expansion into new markets, contributing to broader scientific and technological advancements in the European context.

- **Content Creation**: Collaborating through the 'Erasmus+ Program' for diverse perspectives, startup X explores collaborative opportunities with European universities for content, technology and knowledge exchange. This initiative tailors content creation to European needs, ensuring cultural relevance and diversity in educational materials.

- **Market Localization Projects:** While forming strategic partnerships within the 'Erasmus+ Program' and other regional initiatives, startup X can actively participate in or organize innovation challenges and awards within the European context. This ensures effective localization and market penetration, with a focus on understanding and addressing local challenges across different European regions.

By actively taking part in European projects and teaming up with academic partners, startup X wants to show that it's a company that works well with others, aiming for long-term success and expansion.

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Annexes

Annex 1: Persona of Sandra Meyers

	Challenges:	**Objectives:**	**Expectations:**
Name: Sandra Meyers **Sex:** Female **Job:** HR Manager	• Ensure, that employees can develop as best as possible • Create a central learning landscape • Sticking to the budget	• Create possibilities for continuous learning and career advancement • Retain talent in the company • Help employees to bridge the gap between skills and the evolving technological needs of the company	• Single platform, that fits all the needs, to develop the current employees towards the new technologies • The solution needs to stick to the budget

Annex 2: Persona of Julian Miller

	Challenges:	**Objectives:**	**Expectations:**
Name: Julian Miller **Sex:** Male **Job:** Technical Product Owner	• The speed of the technological change	• To be seen as a trustful source for the decision making regarding the technical orientation of the company on a strategic level	• On-Demand trainings • Communication possibilities with other subject matter experts and tech experts

Annex 3: Persona of Marco Engelmann

	Challenges:	**Objectives:**	**Expectations:**
Name: Marco Engelman **Sex:** Male **Job:** Production Worker	• Adapt to the technical change in tools for daily work • Not grown up with technology	• Learn how to use the new technologies as fast as possible	• Learning material that is super intuitive and easy to understand

Annex 4: Value Proposition Canvas

- Diverse assortment of trainings
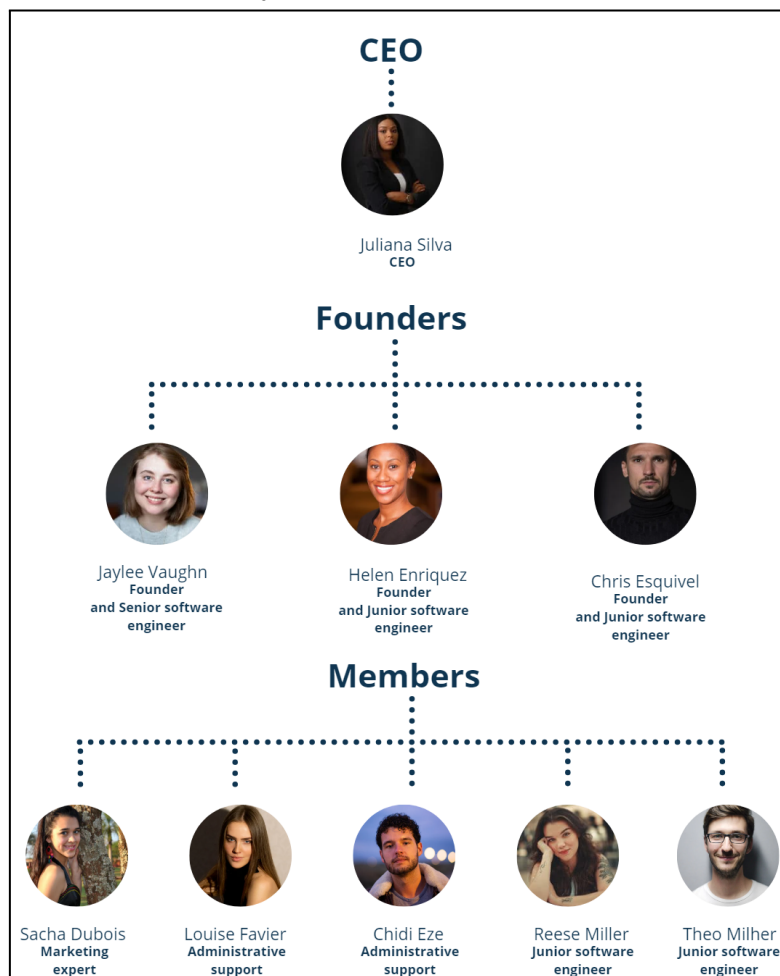- High customizability
- Opportunity to communicate with experts
- Easy to understand content communication

- Cloud based digital education services
- Customizable learning contents
- Social network, that connects, the subject matter experts of the customers among each other and with experts from the technology vendors

- Flexibility of the platform
- Direct contact to experts from the technology vendors
- Network of experts from other companies
- Learning content

- Highly motivated employees,
- Do the part for a high skill level within the company,
- Safe Job and potential bonus
- Build up a high reputation in the company,
- Feel valuable and accepted

- Organize the E-Learning options the company offers its employees
- Know about latest trends
- Give input for the various decision making processes
- Produce goods, by using the tools, given by the supervisors and the company processes

- Being spoilt for choice
- Limited budget
- The speed of the technology development
- Often there are no real sources, or trainings for technologies, as they are that new.
- Always changes in tool stack
- No natural understanding for technology

Annex 5: Internal Organization's Hierarchy

CEO

Juliana Silva
CEO

Founders

Jaylee Vaughn
**Founder
and Senior software engineer**

Helen Enriquez
**Founder
and Junior software engineer**

Chris Esquivel
**Founder
and Junior software engineer**

Members

Sacha Dubois
Marketing expert

Louise Favier
Administrative support

Chidi Eze
Administrative support

Reese Miller
Junior software engineer

Theo Milher
Junior software engineer

Annex 6: Third Generation Model's schema adopted by startup X