



Business Adaptive Strategies to Crisis: The Case of Ironhack Lisbon

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Abstract

Title: Business Adaptive Strategies to Crisis: The Case of Ironhack Lisbon

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The COVID-19 pandemic posed enormous challenges on organizations and their business models worldwide. Consequently, organizations had to find solutions in order to adapt to the new exceptional situation.

In order to provide a real-life case of how an organization has strategically dealt with this exceptional situation, this case study examines the specific case of Ironhack Lisbon and showcases the strategic decisions taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The case study of Ironhack Lisbon was developed for students in order to learn about and to apply strategic management concepts on a real-life example that mirrors the complexity of today's business world. Thus, this case study should serve as a pedagogical instrument and is intended to be used in a classroom setting.

After all, students should be able to identify the specific challenges of Ironhack Lisbon during the COVID-19 pandemic and consequently should be able to analyze the strategic drivers deployed by Ironhack Lisbon to combat the challenges faced.

Key words: Adaptation, COVID-19, Crisis, Dynamic Capabilities, Resources and Capabilities, Strategic Management

Resumo

Título: Estratégias Empresariais Adaptativas à Crise: O caso da Ironhack Lisboa

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A pandemia da COVID-19 colocou enormes desafios às organizações e aos seus modelos de negócio, um pouco por todo o mundo. Consequentemente, as organizações tiveram de encontrar soluções para se adaptarem à nova situação excecional.

De modo a fornecer um caso real de como uma organização lidou estrategicamente com esta situação excepcional, este estudo de caso examina o caso específico da Ironhack Lisboa e mostra as decisões estratégicas tomadas para dar resposta à pandemia de COVID-19.

O estudo de caso da Ironhack Lisboa foi desenvolvido para que os estudantes aprendam e apliquem conceitos de gestão estratégica num exemplo da vida real que espelha a complexidade do mundo empresarial dos dias de hoje. Assim, este estudo de caso deve servir como um instrumento pedagógico, que pode ser utilizado numa sala de aula.

Por fim, os estudantes devem ser capazes de identificar os desafios específicos da Ironhack Lisboa durante a pandemia da COVID-19 e, consequentemente, devem ser capazes de analisar os impulsionadores estratégicos destacados pela Ironhack Lisboa para combater os desafios enfrentados.

Palavras-chave: Adaptação, COVID-19, Crise, Capacidades Dinâmicas, Recursos e Capacidades, Gestão Estratégica

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List of Abbreviations

B2C	Business to Consumer
CEDEFOP	European Centre for Development of Vocational Training
DC	Dynamic Capabilities
F2F	Face-to-Face
RBV	Resource-Based View
Tech	Technology
Tech education	Technology Education
VRIN	Valuable, Rare, Inimitable and Non-substitutable
VRIO	Valuable, Rare, Inimitable and Organization
WHO	World Health Organization
YoY	Year over Year Growth

1. Case Study

“The world has changed forever. Organizations that embrace this new reality - and reimagine how to operate in it - will outperform and outlast the competition” (Boston Consulting Group, n.d.).

Following the previous mentioned quote, the COVID-19 pandemic has posed enormous challenges on different organizations worldwide and continuous to hold a great deal of uncertainty for business environments. When the World Health Organization (2020) characterized the spread of COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11th, 2020, it became rapidly clear that the world as we had known it until this moment would drastically change and so businesses had to adapt to the new situation.

In order to better understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on business operations and the subsequent conscious strategic choices made by organizations in order to deal with this crisis, the specific case of Ironhack Lisbon will be examined in detail in the following. This case study aims to illuminate the specific challenges that Ironhack Lisbon faced during the COVID-19 pandemic and presents the business adaptive strategic choices made in response to it.

1.1. Ironhack – At a Glance

Based on the observation that the way we learn has not significantly advanced over decades, Ariel Quiñones and Gonzalo Manrique, two Wharton School graduates, founded Ironhack in 2013. Frustrated about the lack of hands on technology education (tech education) opportunities, Ariel and Gonzalo started Ironhack with the ambition to challenge the way people learn about technology (tech) and with the primary goal of transforming the tech education sector by making it customer-centric and outcome-driven (Ironhack, n.d.a).

In accordance with one of Ironhack’s headlines showcased on the corporate website, *“Learn tech skills. Build a career you love.”* (Ironhack, n.d.b), the Madrid based startup aims to empower highly motivated people in finding fulfilling careers in the field of tech regardless of their background. Thus, Ironhack offers state of the art learning experiences which are combined with personal career support.

To equip people with the right knowledge and skills to thrive in the world of tech, Ironhack offers different educational courses which are referred to as bootcamps. These bootcamps are held at different Ironhack campuses which are located at different places across the globe, namely in Europe, the US and other parts located on the American continent (Ironhack, n.d.a). In total, 183 global Ironhack employees are jointly working together on educating and supporting Ironhack students across the globe (Interviewee A).

From a financial point of view, the startup is venture capital backed and has achieved a 100% year over year (YoY) growth since its ideation in 2013 (Ironhack, n.d.a). So far, Ironhack has raised US \$27 million over three funding rounds (Crunchbase, n.d.). During the last funding round (Series B), which closed in January 2021, the startup secured US \$20 million alone, to expand remote learning possibilities and corporate training capabilities (Ironhack, 2021).

1.2. Ironhack Culture – Mission, Vision and Values

Ariel and Gonzalo, the two founders, once said: *“When we started Ironhack in 2013, we knew we wanted to make a difference [...] but we were not sure how big this could get.”* (Tucker, 2021).

Even though Ariel and Gonzalo might not have foreseen the potential scale of their endeavor back in 2013, they nevertheless built a culture in accordance with their goal to generate positive impact for as many people as possible with their bootcamps. Fast forward nine years, it is clear that Ironhack’s mission, vision and values are the fundamental building blocks of the Ironhack culture and thus they are further examined in the following.

1.2.1. Mission

“Our higher purpose is to transform the education space by making it customer-centric and outcome driven” (Ironhack, n.d.a). In line with this statement, Ironhack’s mission entails two main focus areas: customer-centricity and outcome drivers - both being closely connected.

By offering bootcamps that impart state of the art knowledge and skills combined with personal career advice and training, Ironhack is able to serve the specific needs and wants of their customers and is thus focusing on customer-centricity. This also becomes clear when looking

at the organizational set up and the different roles specifically allocated to work towards achieving customer satisfaction. Note that these roles are further outlined in section 1.3.2.

With regards to outcome drivers, the ultimate goal of Ironhack is to equip students with the necessary skills, the needed mindset, the right tools and knowledge to grow their career in the field of tech. This is achieved by mastering the gap between not only offering students to learn about tech but also letting them apply it first-hand through practice assignments and realistic projects. Upon successful completion of one of the bootcamps, students are ready to get a new job, get the promotion they worked for or build their own business in a fast-paced digital world (Ironhack, n.d.a). *“Our mission is to become the most outcomes focused school in the world and we stick to this a lot”* (Interviewee A).

1.2.2. Vision

“Tech no longer lives solely in Silicon Valley – it is worldwide, and it is at our fingertips. [...] If you can learn it, you can make a career out of it.” (Ironhack, n.d.c)

According to Ariel and Gonzalo (TED x ESCP Madrid, 2014), we live in a fast moving and continuously changing world and thus the urgency to be agile, flexible and eager to learn is crucial to be able to succeed in today’s job market. This belief is rooted in their own career change following the financial crisis in 2008. From working as an investment banker and civil engineer both dared to become entrepreneurs building a tech education school.

Having had no background in the technology sector themselves, Ariel and Gonzalo thoroughly believe that if you are dedicated enough in acquiring up to date knowledge and skills, you can build a fulfilling career out of it, regardless of your previous background (TED x ESCP Madrid, 2014). Hence, by supplying the knowledge, skills and career support needed through Ironhack services, Ironhack envisions a world where everyone can pursue their aspired career in the field of tech, contrary to many stereotypes conveyed within this field (Ironhack, n.d.c).

1.2.3. Values

There are four core values that Ironhack adheres to in every part of its business. These are further examined in the following.

1. Can-do attitude:

Ironhack strongly believes that you can achieve anything that you set your mind to. The journey might entail taking risks and the ability to defeat possible failures but it will eventually provide the opportunity to learn from your mistakes and thus offers the possibility to grow personally and professionally (Ironhack, n.d.a).

2. Love people and their stories:

Ironhack is fully committed to build meaningful connections with others through authentic encounters and by learning from each other (Ironhack, n.d.a).

3. Passion above anything:

At Ironhack, people are committed to grow every day and to improve continuously by doing what they love and hence to pass on the momentum that arises from their own passion (Ironhack, n.d.a).

4. Collaborate to grow:

Ironhack strongly believes in the positive effects of collaboration. To Ironhack, helping and supporting each other is much more powerful and resourceful than trying to do it solely on your own (Ironhack, n.d.a).

1.3. Ironhack Lisbon

For the purpose of this case study, the specific case of Ironhack Lisbon will be further examined. Thus, the scope of this case and hence the scope of the expected analysis is restricted to the case of Ironhack Lisbon. Nevertheless, as Ironhack Lisbon is one of the eight physical campuses¹ of Ironhack and thus a crucial part of the corporate structure, it automatically adheres to corporate decision making which also partially includes the adaptive strategic decisions made in consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. These will be covered in more detail in section 1.4.

¹ Status Pre-COVID-19

1.3.1. History

The Ironhack Lisbon campus was opened in 2018 and is the only physical campus located in Portugal (Ironhack, n.d.a). The campus is situated in the city district Santa Apolonia, right next to the Tejo river. More specifically, it is located in the same building as Heden Lisboa, a start-up hub and coworking space. Furthermore, the campus location serves as an office location for Ironhack Lisbon employees as well as a learning environment for bootcamp students.

1.3.2. Organizational Structure

Each Ironhack campus is managed on an individual level and so is the Ironhack Lisbon campus. In total, eight employees work for Ironhack Lisbon. Nevertheless, there are a few specifics regarding the reporting lines which also impact the way the Ironhack Lisbon team works together and the way it adapts to changes.

The Campus Manager of Ironhack Lisbon oversees all campus operations and manages the overall campus performance. This person is the head of the campus and reports to the General Manager of the Iberia Region.

There are three roles that report partially to the Campus Manager and partially to global functional leaders. These roles include the Student Success Manager, the Program Manager and the Growth Manager. Additionally, there is one role - the Admissions Manager - who does not exclusively work for Ironhack Lisbon but also for other regions. Thus, this person does not report to the Lisbon Campus Manager directly but to the respective global functional leader. This role can be seen as a shared human resource among different campuses. All other roles, namely Teachers and Teaching Assistants report directly to the Lisbon Campus Manager and have no direct reporting lines to other global functional leaders.

To get a better overview of the latter, all roles and their respective reporting lines within Ironhack Lisbon are showcased in the following.



Figure 1: Ironhack Lisbon's organizational structure and reporting lines (Interviewee A)

Even though different roles have different reporting lines and may be part of other global teams, they nevertheless work closely together with their fellow Lisbon campus colleagues to achieve overall success. To better understand the responsibilities of each role, a brief description of each role is displayed in the following.

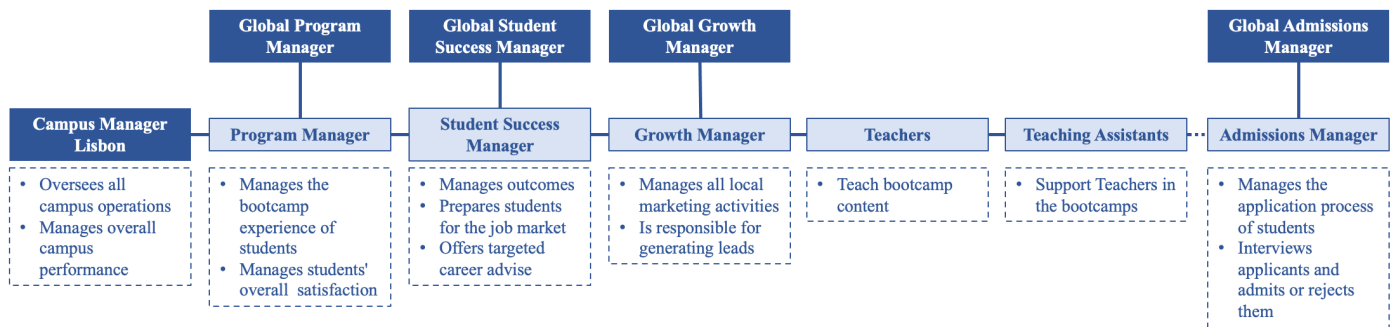


Figure 2: Roles and responsibilities (Interviewee A)

Even though each campus is managed on an individual level it nevertheless remains closely connected to global functions through a matrix like reporting line structure.

1.3.3. Products & Target Group

Ironhack Lisbon offers four different bootcamps covering different functional tech areas. In addition to that, students can choose from different format types, namely full- or part-time formats². The duration of a full-time format bootcamp is 9-weeks whereas the duration of a part-time format bootcamp is 24-weeks. Due to the difference in duration, the pricing for a bootcamp also depends on the format chosen. All full-time bootcamps are priced at € 6,000 and all part-time bootcamps are priced at € 6,500³ (Ironhack, n.d.d)

Aside from different format options, each bootcamp is essentially composed of two parts. The first part is all about acquiring tech knowledge and skills in accordance with the overarching topic of the bootcamp. The second part is all about receiving career advice including taking all preparatory steps needed to be successful in the job market. Both parts are mandatory and complement each other.

With regards to the tech knowledge and skills aspect of a bootcamp, Ironhack Lisbon offers four different bootcamps that differ in topic and thus differ in the expertise that is acquired upon

² Considering the pre-COVID-19 case

³ Information retrieved August 2022

completion of the bootcamp. The tech knowledge and skill contents of each bootcamp is taught by a teacher in a face-to-face (f2f) format. To get a better understanding of what areas of tech knowledge and skills Ironhack Lisbons' offerings cover, an overview including a brief description is showcased in the following.

Bootcamps offered	
Bootcamps	Bootcamp contents
Web Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learn how to code applications from scratch• Learn the fundamentals of Front-end design and Back-end architecture
Data Analytics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learn to use tools and programming languages to make sense of complex problems• Learn how to derive insights from complex data
UX/UI Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learn to design app experiences• Learn how to undergo user research, prototyping, user testing and evaluation
Cybersecurity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learn how to professionally protect the digital space in different contexts

Table 1: Bootcamp offerings (Ironhack, n.d.e)

With regards to the career support aspect of a bootcamp, Ironhack Lisbon provides thorough career advise by providing materials and resources as well as training sessions to prepare students for the job market. The career program of the bootcamp includes guidance on building a personal brand, searching for jobs, practicing interview conversations and building important networking skills (Ironhack, n.d.f). All of this support is managed by the Student Success Manager and relies largely on a f2f interaction.

Out of all students that have completed one of the bootcamps since the opening of the Lisbon Campus in 2018, 82% have chosen to complete one of the bootcamps in the full-time format, whereas 18% of all students have preferred to complete one of the bootcamps in the part-time format (Interviewee A).

After all and up until today⁴ the most popular bootcamp among students in terms of number of participants was the Web Development bootcamp, accounting for 45% of overall students. The second most popular bootcamps were the Data Analytics and UX/UI Design bootcamp, accounting each for 26% of students. Lastly, the Cybersecurity bootcamp accounts for 3% of

⁴ Status May 2022

all students (Interviewee A). Note that the Cybersecurity bootcamp was only available as of 2021.

The target group of the bootcamps is very broad and intends to be as inclusive as possible. According to Ironhack and thus also Ironhack Lisbon (n.d.c), anyone motivated and keen enough to learn tech skills can apply for a bootcamp. Upon application, the Admissions Manager will do a brief interview with the applicant to ensure the motivation and the student's expectations match the bootcamp offering (Interviewee A). If this is the case, the applicant is accepted into one of the bootcamp programs and can start their educational journey with Ironhack Lisbon.

1.4. Strategy

Having gained a better understanding of Ironhack's overall business model and the particular role of Ironhack Lisbon in the previous sections, the following section is going to showcase the strategic aspects of this case in more detail. As this case study aims to investigate the adaptive strategic choices Ironhack Lisbon consciously made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the following section will further examine different phases and the coherent strategic objectives of Ironhack Lisbon.

1.4.1. Strategic Objectives Pre-COVID-19

The primary pre-COVID-19 strategic objective of Ironhack Lisbon was to grow the business to consumer (B2C) segment and thus to scale the number of students in order to increase the overall profitability. This strategic objective was also completely in line with the overall Ironhack pre-COVID-19 strategic objective to grow the B2C segment by opening up new campuses (Interviewee A).

To achieve the primary strategic objective, Ironhack Lisbon planned and executed different marketing actions with the main goal to attract new potential customers and to create greater awareness of Ironhack's offerings in general. Within Ironhack Lisbon, it is the Growth Managers responsibility to plan and execute different marketing actions that reach the broad customer target. Additionally, it is also the Growth Managers responsibility to create awareness about Ironhack services amongst companies with the goal to create partnerships. In the following sections, the most important marketing actions are outlined in more detail.

1.4.1.1. Events

To attract new potential students, Ironhack Lisbon regularly organized different in-person events at its campus in order to foster interaction with potential students and to ideally convert them into leads. Common themes of recurring events included free coding workshops, data sprints, campus tours and alumni talks amongst others. The events were communicated through different social media channels such as Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook and Ironhack's own website. Furthermore, Ironhack kept in close contact with Alumni in order to use them as referrals in some event formats. To get a better overview of the events, an exemplary event calendar is showcased in Appendix B1.

1.4.1.2. Press releases and Blog posts

To attract new potential students as well as to raise general awareness about Ironhack Lisbon, blog posts and press releases were published regularly. On the one hand, Ironhack Lisbon posted blogposts about different topics addressing the technology sector on their website and on the other hand, Ironhack Lisbon tried to create more awareness around their brand by giving interviews or by being featured in any type of media release.

1.4.1.3. Company Partnerships

To create greater awareness about Ironhack Lisbon and also to sustain close relationships with companies, Ironhack Lisbon was closely managing and trying to attract companies as partners. The overall aim was to broaden the enterprise network to be able to refer Ironhack Lisbon graduates as potential employees to partner companies on the one hand. On the other hand, the benefits for a company partner included being sure of the educational background of potential hires as well as the opportunity to increase their own brand visibility amongst top talent (Interviewee A). The option of company partnerships was primarily communicated via the website of Ironhack and closely managed in direct contact with company representatives.

1.4.2. Impact of COVID-19

On March 11th, 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) communicated the result of their assessment regarding the COVID-19 virus and categorized the outbreak of the virus as a pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020). Following this classification, the Portuguese Government started to implement measures to contain the spread of COVID-19. On March 13th, 2020 the Portuguese Government announced that all academic and non-academic activities are

suspended as of March 16th, 2020 and should be replaced with distance learning. This state was prolonged on April 9th, 2020 (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020). As Ironhack Lisbon identifies as an educational institution, it obeyed to all measures and regulations that were put into place for this specific sector by the Portuguese Government at all times (Interviewee A).

After all, the development of the COVID-19 pandemic caused great uncertainty and only offered limited planning certainty, posing numerous challenges on educational institutions and hence also on Ironhack Lisbon. According to the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) (2020), the main challenges for such institutions included the organization of distance learning, the adaptation of the content to an appropriate e-learning methodology as well as assuring open communication and engagement with students at all times. In addition to these challenges, CEDEFOP (2020) also acknowledged the challenge to equip employees with the right skillset to combat the changing needs of the economy and the work environment.

In line with the observations of CEDEFOP, Ironhack Lisbon had to deal with several challenges posed by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Since in-person learning was no longer an option with the measures implemented by the Portuguese Government for an uncertain period of time, Ironhack Lisbon had to adapt quickly in order to be able to sustain the business which had been completely based on a f2f approach. Thus, there was the severe need to offer a remote learning format within a short period of time. Additionally, not only students were not allowed to continue f2f bootcamp classes, also Ironhack Lisbon employees had to adapt to the new situation of remote working and teaching.

Besides adapting to a remote bootcamp approach, the biggest concern was to keep the current students engaged and to simultaneously be able to build attractive remote bootcamps for future students. Another burden was to make sure to deliver upon the value proposition that Ironhack Lisbon offered to its students in order to be able to justify the price while keeping the same quality and experience. Additionally, the way Ironhack Lisbon employees worked and cooperated together had to change due to the fact that they had to work remotely and thus were not sharing the same physical working space anymore.

All of these great challenges were only the beginning of a cascade, leading to a severe need for action taking. Without a doubt, the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and the continuous uncertainty of its development, demanded to adapt quickly as well as strategically as the entire situation was business critical to Ironhack Lisbon.

To get a better idea of what the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was and how Ironhack Lisbon coped with it, the specific strategic implications are outlined in the following section.

1.4.3. Strategic Changes in Response to COVID-19

As pointed out in the previous section, the COVID-19 pandemic had an enormous impact on Ironhack Lisbon's operating model which up until that day relied solely on f2f interactions. The COVID-19 pandemic radically challenged Ironhack's way of operating and hence Ironhack Lisbon had to adapt its way of operating swiftly.

In a situation where f2f interaction is the greatest risk to human health and social distancing is instructed by the Portuguese Government, the most obvious response by an educational institution such as Ironhack Lisbon is to transition the f2f learning format into an online learning solution. However, this includes major changes in all aspects of the business.

Some actions needed to be taken as fast as possible whereas the need for other actions evolved over time and they had to be implemented on an ongoing basis as the COVID-19 pandemic progressed. Thus the different strategic responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of urgency are examined further in the following and can be categorized in three phases.

1.4.3.1. Phase 1: Immediate Response

With the suspension of all academic and non-academic activities as of March 16th, 2020, Ironhack Lisbon had to find a fast and efficient solution to tackle the consequences of this intervention – foremost compensating for the social distancing regulation.

“In this time of uncertainty, it is our priority - as it's always been - to provide the best educational experience in an environment that is both collaborative and safe” (Ironhack, 2020). With this clear priority in mind, the entire Ironhack Lisbon team worked sleepless nights in order to provide a temporary remote learning environment with the aim not to compromise

on quality and interaction possibilities. Due to the profound tech expertise combined with the pedagogic expertise that Ironhack employees have, Ironhack Lisbon was able to introduce a temporary remote learning program option within 3 days after the government suspended academic and non-academic activities. The speed of adaptation was especially important in order to be able to satisfy the learning experience of students completing bootcamps at that time.

Nevertheless, as nobody knew for how long this special situation would continue, building the temporary remote format was also essential in combating the great level of uncertainty that remained. The goal of the remote format was to focus on real-time teacher lead interaction, mentorship and continuous support throughout the entire learning path of a bootcamp as *“the challenge was to keep the value proposition and to make sure students are engaged”*. (Interviewee A).

As discussed earlier, an Ironhack bootcamp - no matter the format – is essentially composed of two parts. One part focusses on acquiring tech knowledge and skills whereas the other part focusses on obtaining career support. With both parts being crucial to the full Ironhack Lisbon experience and inevitable for the aspired outcome, it was not only important to transition the class content and interaction to a remote format but also to ensure that the career support did not fall short despite the exceptional situation. Thus, not only the class content was developed into a remote class format but also the career support had to become accessible online.

The way this was implemented was that the student platform, which up until that day had been used as an online access point for students to receive basic information, was developed further into a more developed version which then served as the single point of truth for students. The newly developed extensions to the existing student portal included a tech knowledge and skills section where study materials were stored as well as where the links to the interactive zoom sessions were shared. Additionally, a career program section was added where support materials were shared with students. Overall, the aim was to gather all relevant information, materials and support contacts in one platform in order to give students the immediate structure they had also experienced in a f2f environment. Nonetheless, the solution developed within the midst of days was just a fast fix and was simply assuring the continuation of the ongoing bootcamps at that time.

Furthermore, not only bootcamps had to transition from a f2f format to a remote format, also employees of Ironhack Lisbon had to stay at home and work remotely. This was a whole new experience and made the new situation even more challenging, especially in a situation where close collaboration was particularly needed.

Even though these fast fixes were a success with regards to the initial response of Ironhack Lisbon students and were inescapable of Ironhack's continuous operations, it soon became clear that the platform, the materials and the online support needed to become more sophisticated if the exceptional situation would persist for further Ironhack Lisbon bootcamp cohorts.

1.4.3.2. Phase 2: Continuous Adaptation

After Ironhack Lisbon was able to set up a rather temporary remote learning environment as an initial response to the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, it soon became clear that social distancing and contingency plans would stay relevant for an unpredictable period of time.

In consequence, there were two major challenges that Ironhack Lisbon had to tackle in a more profound way that they had done initially in order to stay competitive. Both challenges were closely connected with the overall decision making of the Ironhack headquarter as several Ironhack campuses around the globe experienced the COVID-19 pandemic in a severe and similar way.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continued to challenge conventional structures, Ironhack Lisbon and other Ironhack campuses saw the need arise to work closer together. *"We definitely felt the urge to become one Ironhack"* (Interviewee A). Opposite of the previous structure where all campuses including Ironhack Lisbon followed the same business model but had the freedom to do most things in their own way, including mastering the initial response to COVID-19, Ironhack as a whole felt the urge of implementing a higher degree of standardization with special regards to remote bootcamps and data management (Interviewee A).

In terms of remote bootcamps, Ironhack as a whole decided to take advantage of each other's expertise and to join forces on developing remote bootcamp concepts together that were more standardized in every aspect as all campuses were affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As remote bootcamp offerings reached a much larger target group and the location

of students became less important, it became crucial to offer a standardized core product with the possibility to enhance the experience by location specific insights offered by the local team. Consequently Ironhack as a whole developed a holistic remote approach. As the tech knowledge and skill aspect of each bootcamp was already largely standardized and easier to transition to an online format, the larger focus was on developing the career aspect of each bootcamp further. As a result, Ironhack introduced a platform called Careerhack which was implemented in the student portal in addition to the tech content and information about virtual classes. Contrary to how career services were offered before the remote format was developed, the platform now offered students a clear structure and virtual development path that they needed to follow alongside their technical training. As all steps within Careerhack were standardized, and thus independent from the location of a student, the location specific career support and the support after completion of the bootcamp were still done on a local level to enhance the student experience. As a result and in addition to the physical campuses, Ironhack, as a whole organization, opened up two remote campuses, namely a European one and an American one in order to account for the different time zones. The main reason for opening up the new remote campuses was to keep being able to offer bootcamps to students despite the exceptional and highly uncertain situation as well as to continue practicing Ironhack's mission, vision and values and thus working towards the goal of shortening the talent gap in tech - no matter of the exceptional situation. Thus, in the long term local campuses such as Ironhack Lisbon were thought to still be responsible for managing their on-campus operations as well as supporting remote students throughout their career learnings. In order to better understand the content of the newly implemented Careerhack platform, please refer to Appendix B2.

In terms of data management, each Ironhack campus had conventionally been using google sheets as a tool to store and share data amongst employees. In a startup environment this had conventionally been working well, however, as all employees of Ironhack Lisbon and also other physical campuses had to work remotely, this approach was challenged in terms of the tool handling. *“With the pandemic we needed to be even more focused on numbers and clear data to be more efficient”* (Interviewee A). Furthermore, as processes were being standardized more and more across campuses, the urge for a clear data management tool arose. *“From March 2020 onwards, we used our metabase as a tool”* (Interviewee A), allowing Ironhack to use, compare and share data across all campuses and employees much easier and thus enabling easier decision making and communication without being located at the same physical location.

1.4.3.3. Phase 3: Full Commitment

After the aforementioned changes were implemented and continuously worked on, Ironhack in general but also Ironhack Lisbon realized that even though on-campus learning was not possible for a great period of time, the remote bootcamp offering was well received by students. Nonetheless, the commitment to complete a remote bootcamp varied depending on the status of the pandemic. Surprisingly, in the beginning *“we had more people interested in changing their own lives and using the COVID-19 pandemic as the perfect pause for it”* resulting in a high acceptance of the remote bootcamp format (Interviewee A). On the other hand, *“in the beginning of 2021 people got really scared of investing 6000€ in their education”* (Interviewee A). Even though the adoption rate varied, the remote bootcamp offering allowed Ironhack in general but also Ironhack Lisbon in specific to stay in the market and to be able to keep operating.

Consequently, Ironhack as a whole made the decision to keep the remote bootcamp format regardless of the development of the COVID-19 pandemic as the resulting opportunities including the option to scale the number of students prevailed. With this decision made, Ironhack Lisbon renamed itself to Ironhack Portugal. *“This decision was made because we wanted to be able to communicate with the whole territory of Portugal and sometimes, given our name, people did not even know that remote was an option”* (Interviewee A).

1.4.4. Strategic Objectives Post-COVID-19

Considering the current state of the COVID-19 pandemic⁵ the new normal for the sake of this case study, the strategic objectives of Ironhack Portugal (formerly named Ironhack Lisbon) have not changed significantly when comparing them to the pre-COVID-19 strategic goals.

The main strategic objective of Ironhack Portugal remains to grow the B2C segment and thus to scale the number of students completing one of Ironhack Portugal’s bootcamps. In line with this strategic objective it is also Ironhack Portugal’s goal to reach more potential students who are located in the more rural areas of the Portuguese territory (Interviewee A).

Especially, as remote working opportunities have become more common at companies and thus amongst potential employers, even more people should be eager to aspire a career in the field

⁵ Status September 2022

of tech and hence this should be an opportunity for Ironhack Portugal to extend the target group of potential students.

To achieve this goal just like in the pre-COVID-19 situation, Ironhack Portugal continues to offer events, to release blogposts and press releases and to foster company partnerships. However, as the target group got broader, Ironhack Portugal now offers a variety of on-campus and online events. To get a better overview of the event schedule in a post-COVID-19 situation, please refer to Appendix B3.

Additionally, Ironhack Portugal aspires to develop the product range even further in order to serve other potential educational streams as well as to continuously adjust to the current demands of the ever changing world.

1.5. Challenges and Outlook

Afterall, there is one major challenge which directly results from the strategic decisions taken throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This challenge only became completely apparent once on-campus offers could finally be offered again due to less strict COVID-19 regulations.

The challenge evolved and continues to evolve around the risk of product cannibalization as the local Ironhack Portugal campus as well as the European remote campus are trying to attract students for their primary bootcamp formats. In fact both campuses compete with each other in the same market with different bootcamp formats. As this was not the intention when the decision was made to keep the remote bootcamp format, Ironhack kept working on strategies that follow the “One Ironhack” guideline, eliminating the risk of product cannibalization and profiting from the prevailing benefits of offering all formats.

Afterall, the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the conventional business- and operating models of many entities worldwide and thus can only serve as a reminder to stay agile, flexible and unique as an organization.

2. Research Note

The following section aims to explore different key academic- and business knowledge principles relevant to the case study of Ironhack Lisbon. Furthermore, relevant frameworks to this case are further examined. Thus, the following section serves as the basis of theoretical knowledge needed to analyze the aforementioned case study. Nevertheless, all theoretical principles discussed in the following are derived from the broad research stream of strategic management.

2.1. SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis is a well-known strategic management tool and was introduced in the 1960s. Since then it has continuously received considerable awareness and is a common tool used in the field of strategic management (Helms & Nixon, 2010). The acronym stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The SWOT analysis “*provides a general summary of the strengths and weaknesses explored in an analysis of resources and capabilities and the opportunities and threats explored in an analysis of the environment*” (Johnson, Whittington, Scholes, Angwin & Regnér, 2017). Thus, the SWOT analysis provides an overview of the internal and the external perspective of an organization whereby strengths and weaknesses provide an internal perspective and opportunities and threats provide an external perspective.

According to Helms & Nixon (2010), the SWOT analysis is commonly used in analyzing case studies whereby it serves as an opportunity to develop a profile of the presented organization. Additionally, the SWOT analysis can also be a good basis for a discussion around the future strategy of an organization (Johnson et al., 2017).

2.2. Resources and Capabilities

In the context of a resource-based view (RBV) which will be explored further in the following section, Barney & Hesterly (2008), define resources as “*tangible and intangible assets that a firm controls that it can use to conceive of and implement strategies*”. In other words, resources are assets that an organization possesses (Johnson et al., 2017). Capabilities on the other hand are defined by Barney & Hesterly (2008) as “*the tangible and intangible assets that enable a firm to take full advantage of the other resources it controls*”. In other words, capabilities are

the means to deploy the resources (Johnson et al. 2017). Consequently, resources and capabilities are closely related and both needless without the other.

2.3. The Resource-Based View and the VRIO-Framework

Over the years, the strategic management research has tried to understand different sources of competitive advantage. Wernerfelt (1984) argues that organizations can be analyzed from different perspectives, namely the product- and the resource perspective, which in the end will determine different insights. Even though the external environment of an organization and the resulting strategic opportunities and threats that arise from it are certainly important to consider when assessing an organizations performance and its potential to be a source of competitive advantage (Johnson et al., 2017), advocates of the resource-based view (RBV) suggest that sustained competitive advantage derives from the internal characteristics of an organization and the ability to apply them well in the long-term (Barney, 1991; Prahalad & Hamel 1990). Thus, this argument is based on the premise that organizations within the same industry differ with regards to their resources which in consequence may lead to competitive advantage.

More specifically, Barney (1991) argues that the distinct resources of an organization have the potential to generate sustained competitive advantage if the resources are valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable by other resources not meeting the latter criteria (VRIN). Though, the aforementioned statement only holds true under the assumption that (I) resources are heterogeneously distributed amongst organizations and (II) that they are widely immobile over time (Barney, 1991).

After the RBV started to thrive in the 1980s and 1990s, Barney (1995) introduced an analysis tool which after all aims to assess the potential of generating competitive advantage for firm-specific resources and capabilities – the VRIO Framework. The acronym stands for valuable, rare, inimitable and organization. According to Barney (1995), the VRIO framework stands for four different questions that should be answered to assess the competitive potential of a resource and/ or capability. The specific questions introduced by Barney are the following and are retrieved from Barney & Hesterly (2008):

1. *The Question of Value:*

Does a resource enable a firm to exploit an environmental opportunity, and/ or neutralize an environmental threat?

2. *The question of Rareness:*

Is a resource currently controlled by only a small number of competing firms?

3. *The question of Inimitability:*

Do firms without a resource face a cost disadvantage in obtaining or developing it?

4. *The question of Organization*

Are a firm's other policies and procedures organized to support the exploitation of its valuable, rare and costly-to-imitate resources?

Thus, the VRIO analysis solely focusses on the internal perspective of an organization in order to assess the competitive advantage potentials and it disregards the external environment.

Even though the RBV has shaped our understanding of “*describing, explaining and predicting organizational relationships*” (Barney, Ketchen Jr & Wright, 2011) and encompasses a widely renowned perspective (Gruber, Heinemann, Brettel & Hungeling, 2010), it has also received considerable critics regarding its usefulness with regards to how competitive advantage is specifically achieved (Priem & Butler, 2001). Furthermore, the focus within the RBV lies predominantly on the resource aspect which hence may enable competitive advantage (Collis & Montgomery, 2008). Therefore, different spin-off concepts, namely the dynamic capability (DC) concept, have tried to address aforementioned critics. Hence, the DC concept is explored further in the following section.

2.4. Dynamic Capabilities

Even though the RBV recognizes the resources and capabilities of an organization, it fails to address how competitive advantage can be achieved (Priem & Butler, 2001; Ambrosini & Bowman, 2009). Furthermore and contrary to the complexity of the business environment, the RBV mirrors a static approach due to its underlying key assumptions. In contrast to this static approach, Teece, Pisano & Shuen (1997) observed that only organizations with the ability to

develop and adapt their capabilities in response to external changes have the opportunity to achieve competitive advantage. Hence, Teece et al. (1997) refer to this ability as dynamic capabilities (DC) which they define as *“the firm’s ability to integrate, build and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments”*. According to Ambrosini & Bowman (2009), the DC concept can be seen as an extension to the RBV with the difference that it addresses how an organization can achieve competitive advantage even in an environment prone to changes. Furthermore, in contrast to the RBV, the focus within DC lies on the capabilities rather than on the resources which might also be due to the fact that the value resources tends to devalue faster in dynamic environments (Collis & Montgomery, 2008).

Following Teece’s, Pisano’s and Shuen’s prominent article in 1997, Teece (2007) adds on the previous research by categorizing DC’s in three generic types. Thereby, DC’s can be categorized in the capacity to *“(I) sense and shape opportunities and threats, (II) to seize opportunities and (III) to maintain competitiveness through enhancing, combining, protecting and, [...] reconfiguring [...] assets”* (Teece, 2007). This categorization aims to offer guidance on how to analyze DCs.

Nonetheless, according to Teece et al. (1997), the ultimate question that scholars in the field of strategic management generally try to answer evolves around how to achieve and sustain competitive advantage. Therefore, it is no surprise that the DC concept has gained considerable attention amongst scholars over the years leading to disperse understandings and different conceptualizations of the latter. According to Barreto (2010), *“alternative conceptualizations of dynamic capabilities may vary in terms of the nature, specific role, relevant context, heterogeneity assumptions, and purpose”* making it difficult to gain a clear understanding of the DC concept afterall.

With the attempt to unify the different views on DC’s, Barreto (2010) offers a new definition of DC, incorporating the different views and remarks of scholars. Thereby, Barreto (2010) defines DCs as *“the firm’s potential to systematically solve problems, formed by its propensity to sense opportunities and threats, to make timely and market-oriented decisions, and to change its resource base”*.

2.5. Achieving Competitive Advantage

From a RBV perspective, resources must meet the VRIO criteria in order to have the potential to achieve competitive advantage (Barney, 1995). On the other hand, capabilities have been introduced as the means to deploy the distinct resources of an organization (Barney & Hesterly, 2008; Johnson et al., 2017) and thus are being referenced to the routines and processes of an organization.

As the “O” criteria within the VRIO framework refers to the organization itself and thus is referencing to the processes and systems used and arranged within an organization, Cardeal & António (2012) suggest that the “O” in VRIO refers to the DC concept as such. Consequently, Cardeal & António argue that an organization must meet the VRI criteria with regards to capabilities rather than resources in order to achieve competitive advantage and thus managing the resource bundles of organization with VRI capabilities.

Afterall, it is clear that the RBV, the DC and the alterations from VRIO resources to VRI capabilities as a source of competitive advantage, are closely connected and should be seen complementary as they evolve from and build on the same origin of thought – an internal perspective as a source of competitive advantage.

2.6. Types of Change

According to Balogun & Hope Hailey (2008) there are different types of change that mainly differ among two dimensions, namely the end result of change and the nature of change. With regards to these two dimensions, the end result of change refers to the extent of it and the nature of change refers to the speed of it. This results in four different types of change that can be classified using the two dimensions just mentioned.

Along the nature of change dimension, change can be either classified as incremental or as a big bang whereby incremental change happens gradually and a big bang requires rapid change. Along the dimension that measures the extent of change, change can either lead to a transformation or a realignment of an organization whereby a transformational change requires major strategic and cultural changes that impact the organization greatly. In contrast, realigning change requires change with regards to certain aspects of the organization but does not change the business model or the organizational culture as such.

Following this logic, change can be classified as an ‘evolution’ meaning it is incremental and transformational. Change can be classified as an ‘adaptation’ if it requires incremental change and a realignment. On the other hand change can be classified a ‘revolution’ if it follows a big bang and requires transformational change. Lastly, change can be considered a ‘reconstruction’ or ‘turnaround’ if it follows a big bang and requires realigning change (Balogun & Hope Hailey, 2008).

3. Teaching Note

Having established a case study about Ironhack Lisbon and their accompanying challenges in light of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as having provided relevant theoretical background knowledge in the previous section, the following section aims to give guidance on how to use this case study in an educational environment.

Thus the following section is intended to be used by the instructor and should serve as a brief guideline on how to use the case study in the most effective way possible. The underlying idea of using a case study in an teaching environment is to offer students and practitioners the opportunity to practice their profound strategic management knowledge by applying it to a real-life example that mirrors the actual complexity of the business environment.

Note, that the case study was established between March and September 2022 and hence all information provided throughout the case study are bound to this timeframe.

3.1. Synopsis

The aim of this case study is to illuminate the major challenges that organizations had to deal with in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. To emphasize these challenges using a real-life example, the case study focusses on the case of Ironhack Lisbon. Furthermore, the case study shows what specific challenges Ironhack had to deal with and what specific strategic choices they made and implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ironhack as a whole organization is a tech education company with the purpose to change the way people learn about technology. It offers state of the art learning experiences through its bootcamp offerings. With the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and f2f interactions representing the greatest risk to human health, Ironhack Lisbon had to swiftly find solutions

that allowed them to keep operating despite the fact that their conventional bootcamp formats relied solely on f2f interactions.

Afterall, this case study showcases the strategic choices made by Ironhack Lisbon in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications for the “new normal”.

3.2. Teaching Approach

The case study provided is intended to be used in a strategic management course but may also be used in any closely related course. However, it should be a strategically oriented course as all theoretical background information covers theories and frameworks that are derived from the strategic management research stream.

For the effective use of the case study, it is advised to use a duration of 80 minutes and thus to take full advantage of a commonly scheduled class. Nevertheless, as the suggested session plan is tightly planned, please reassure that students are on time and hence the class can start right away. However, to be able to use the time in class as effective as possible and to foster collaboration and discussion, students are expected to familiarize themselves with the case study as well as with the theoretical background information as preparatory work for the class. Taking the previously mentioned suggestions into account the following session plan is recommended.

Recommended session plan (80 min)		
Question	Mode	Minutes allocated
Open questions	Class discussion	5
Question 1	Group work	10
	Class discussion	5
Question 2	Group work	10
	Class discussion	5
Question 3	Group work	10
	Class discussion	10
Question 4	Group work	5
	Class discussion	5
Question 5	Individual work	5
	Class discussion	10

Table 2: Recommended session plan

As it can be retrieved from the session plan above, students are expected to answer the questions asked in a group format in order to foster interaction and collaboration. Each group should have 3-4 students. However, depending on the class size the instructor may change the recommended group size according to their own teaching preference. After each phase of group discussion, a class discussion follows where the instructor is expected to guide the discussion. In the beginning of the class there are 5 minutes allocated that can be used for unclear or open questions that might have come up during the student's preparatory work. The last question is intended to be answered individually and to be discussed with the entire class.

After all, the instructor may choose to use this case in a remote as well as in an in-class environment. If the remote option is chosen, the instructor should allocate students into break-out rooms before the session starts as students are intended to answer all questions in the same allocated group. If the instructor chooses an in-class approach, students within one group are encouraged to sit together to be able to start the case analysis right away.

3.3. Guiding Questions & Teaching Objectives

By providing the following questions to students as a starting point for their case analysis, the instructor can make sure that all teaching objectives and their underlying theoretical background are going to be dealt with as the questions are formulated with regards to these aspects. Nevertheless, the instructor may also feel free to add or remove questions depending on their own teaching objectives. However, the following questions are developed in a way that they cover all intended and important aspects of the case study provided.

Question 1:

- **Guiding question:** Given the information you have been provided in the case study, please analyze the internal and external environment of Ironhack Lisbon differentiating between a pre- and post-COVID-19 case.
- **Teaching objective:** Students are expected to perform a SWOT analysis and thus should be able to understand the internal and external environment of Ironhack at different points in time.

Question 2:

- **Guiding question:** Given the information you have been provided in the case study, please identify the pre- and post-COVID-19 resources and capabilities of Ironhack Lisbon in a structured manner and discuss the resources and capability categories that have undergone most change subsequent to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Teaching objective:** Students should be able to identify resources and capabilities of Ironhack Lisbon at different points in time. Furthermore, students should be able to elaborate on the relationship between resources and capabilities and consequently should be able to highlight the most impacted categories of resources and capabilities following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Question 3:

- **Guiding question:** Given the information you have been provided in the case study, please assess the DCs of Ironhack Lisbon in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Teaching objective:** Students should be able to apply the DC concept on the case of Ironhack Lisbon and they should do so by using the definition of Barreto in order to assess the DCs of Ironhack Lisbon.

Question 4:

- **Guiding question:** Given the information you have been provided in the case study, identify the type of change Ironhack Lisbon had to undergo in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and justify your answer.
- **Teaching objective:** Students should be able to identify the type of change that Ironhack Lisbon had to undergo in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Students are expected to do so using the two different dimensions of change introduced by Balogun & Hope-Hailey.

Question 5:

- **Guiding question:** Given the information you have been provided in the case study, please choose one strategic recommendation that you would like to give to Ironhack Lisbon and elaborate on your choice.

- **Teaching objective:** Students should be able to zoom out in order to look at the broad picture taking their group analysis, the class discussion and the case study into account. By doing so, students should be able to identify at least one recommendation that they then formulate and share with their class as a starting point for a discussion.

3.4. Guiding Questions and Expected Answers

In the following the previously provided guiding questions will be answered. Please note that due to the limited information provided in the case study and the complexity of it, there may be different answers to the guiding questions. Thus, the following answers only represent one possible solution but are surely not the only conceivable answer. Consequently, the questions and answers may result in discussion points among students which is greatly welcomed and the overarching intention of providing this case study.

3.4.1. Question 1

Given the information you have been provided in the case study, please analyze the internal and external environment of Ironhack Lisbon differentiating between a pre- and post-COVID-19 case.

The overall aim of this question is that students apply the SWOT analysis in order to gain a good overview of what Ironhack Lisbon is about. By doing so, the goal is to establish a thorough understanding of Ironhack Lisbon's profile as an organization which will be used as a starting point for upcoming questions. As the case study is predominantly focused on the internal aspects of Ironhack Lisbon, this part of the analysis clearly prevails also in terms of the expected analysis. Nevertheless, students are expected to analyze the external environment of Ironhack Lisbon with regards to the development of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the following the different quadrants of the SWOT analysis are examined in more detail. Note that the post-COVID-19 characteristics of each quadrant should be seen as additions to the already presented developed strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Pre-COVID-19 Strengths:

- **Lived core values:** Ironhack as a whole organization, including Ironhack Lisbon is a fairly young organization (established in 2013 and 2018 respectively) and was

established out of the belief that you can achieve your aspired career as long as you are determined and motivated enough to learn and develop. This belief is anchored in the four core values and rooted in the founder's personal career change. Thus, it can be assumed that through the founder's personal connection with the core values, the values are lived throughout the organization as the founder's exemplify it.

- **Low resistance to change:** Following the previous strengths, the two Ironhack founders dared to change their own career paths even though both had no background skills in the paths they were going to embark on. Furthermore, the encouragement to change career paths by acquiring new skills is also deeply rooted in the business model of Ironhack nowadays as seen in one of the catch phrases on the corporate website (*Learn tech skills. Build a career you love*" (Ironhack, n.d.b)). Thus, both arguments above may imply a low resistance to change as change in fact is even encouraged.
- **Small team and short communication paths:** In total, eight employees work at Ironhack Lisbon which can be considered a rather small team. Furthermore, through the matrix like reporting structure Ironhack Lisbon's organizational structure is characterized by short communication paths, enabling faster decision making.
- **Customer centricity:** Through Ironhack Lisbon's service offerings (e.g. bootcamps) Ironhack Lisbon is in close contact with customers and hence can receive feedback right away. Therefore, Ironhack Lisbon can adapt quickly.
- **Networking skills:** Ironhack Lisbon uses its networking skills with regards to company relationships well and thus creates continuous awareness and stays close to the job market demands.

Post-COVID-19 Strengths:

- **Exploiting collective organizational knowledge and skills:** Through the COVID-19 pandemic Ironhack as a whole organization has moved towards becoming "One Ironhack" and thus is able to better exploit collective organizational knowledge and skills.

- **Organizational and product agility:** Both, the set-up of the whole Ironhack organization as well as the agility of the service offerings as such have proved to be agile and versatile throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. introduction of the remote bootcamp format).

Pre-COVID-19 Weaknesses:

- **Rather undiversified product portfolio:** Even though the different bootcamps have different topics, the product (e.g. bootcamps) as such is not diversified and thus subject to higher risk in case the demand for this type of product decreases.
- **Data management handling:** By following a startup culture and by always working closely together at the same location, the data management handling was not maturely developed to endure major changes such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Post-COVID-19 Weaknesses:

- **Management of different channels:** With the development of the pandemic, Ironhack had to find a solution to deal with the potential risk of product cannibalization. Even though they have developed strategies to overcome this risk, it will still have to be monitored closely.

Pre-COVID-19 Opportunities:

- **Increasing awareness and demand for digital skills:** The demand for digital skills in today's world is increasing and Ironhack exploits this trend with its offerings well.

Post-COVID-19 Opportunities:

- **Scale & scope:** By adding the remote bootcamp format Ironhack as a whole organization is able to reach many new potential customers, regardless of their location.

Pre-COVID-19 Threats:

- **Location specific product offerings:** Pre-COVID-19, Ironhack Lisbon's bootcamp offerings were bound to the prerequisite of attending bootcamps on-campus and in-person and thus reduced the scale and scope to a restricted area.

Following the above mentioned strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, the SWOT analysis is displayed in a graphic format below.

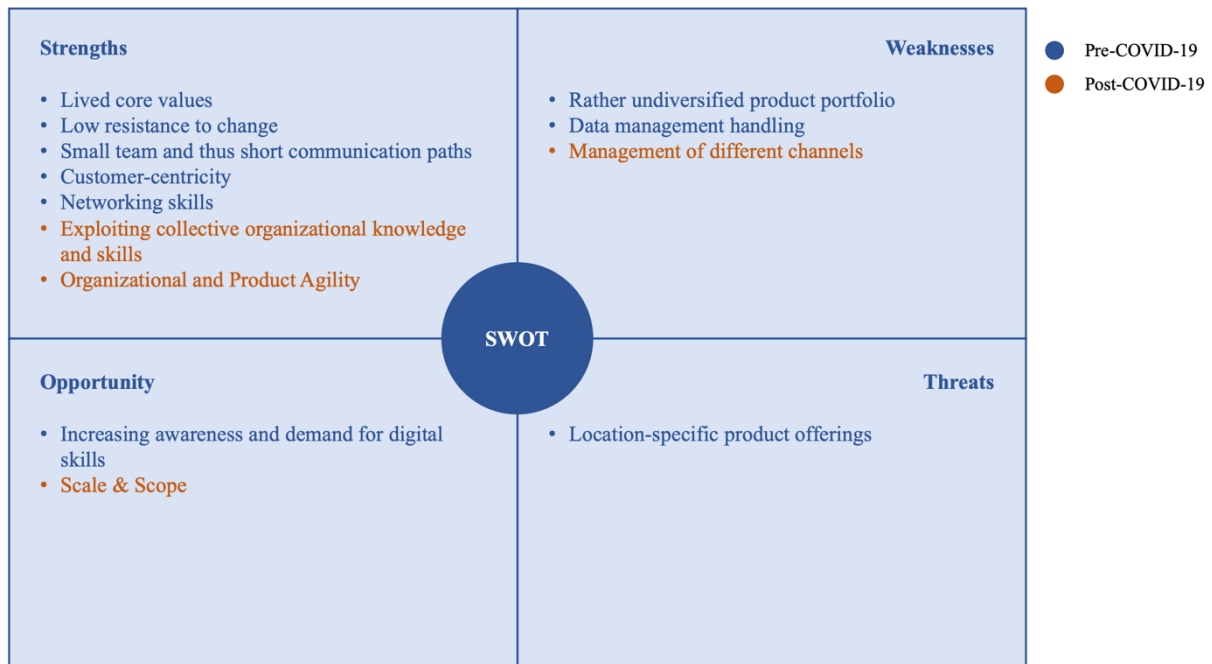


Figure 3: SWOT analysis

3.4.2. Question 2

Given the information you have been provided in the case study, please identify the pre- and post-COVID-19 resources and capabilities of Ironhack Lisbon in a structured manner and discuss the resources and capability categories that have undergone most change subsequent to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The aim of this question is that students are able to identify the resources and capabilities of Ironhack Lisbon in a pre-COVID-19 environment as well as in a post-COVID-19 environment. Furthermore, students should not only be able to show the relationship between resources and capabilities but they should also be able to cluster them into different categories to show what part of the business these resources and capabilities have an impact on. Consequently, students should be able to identify which category was impacted most by the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, this question aims to make students aware of the different resources and capabilities of Ironhack Lisbon and also prepares them for question 3.

The following table shows the identified resources and capabilities in a pre-COVID-19 environment. Note, that students may identify additional resources and capabilities throughout their own analysis. Therefore, the following table should only be taken as a broad guideline.

Resources and capabilities of Ironhack Lisbon: A pre-COVID-19 view			
Resources			Capabilities
Type	Category	Specific resource	
Tangible	Physical	Campus	Ability to use the location as a unique selling point due to its prime location
		Office	Ability to work closely to customers and to share the same space as the office has the identical location as the campus
	Financial	Funding	Ability to raise venture capital funding in order to grow and develop
	Organizational	Organizational structure	Ability to take decisions fast due to short communication paths
Intangible	Human	Highly skilled employees	Ability to use the knowledge and skills of employees to offer state of the art service offerings e.g. bootcamps and career support
	Innovation	Customer-centricity & Outcome focus	Ability to be in close contact with customers and thus being able to incorporate feedback timely to enhance outcomes
	Intellectual	Company partnerships	Ability to establish and manage company partnerships in order to add value to product offerings e.g. enhancing outcome opportunities for customers
		Alumni network	Ability to stay in touch with alumni and to use them as referrals of product offerings
Brand		Ability to create brand awareness across potential customers and potential company partners	

Table 3: Resources and capabilities of Ironhack Lisbon: A pre-COVID-19 view

The following table shows the identified resources and capabilities in a post-COVID-19 environment. Nevertheless, only additional resources and capabilities will be displayed to avoid repetition. Note, that students may identify additional resources and capabilities throughout their own analysis as the following table should only be taken as a broad guideline.

Additional resources and capabilities of Ironhack Lisbon: A post-COVID-19 view			
Resources			Capabilities
Type	Category	Specific resource	
Tangible	Organizational	Standardized procedures	Ability to use resources provided by the whole of Ironhack more timely
		Agility	Ability to adapt organizational structures and processes as demanded by exogenous influences
		Data management system	Ability to use data more effectively and to base decisions upon collected data
Intangible	Human	Highly skilled employees	Ability to exploit collective knowledge and skills across all of Ironhack
		Remote working	Ability to collaborate and work effectively together even when employees are not located at the same location
	Innovation	Channel development	Ability to use and manage an additional channel that the bootcamps are being supplied through e.g. remote bootcamp format
	Intellectual	Brand	Ability to attract a larger target group due to the renaming of Ironhack Lisbon to Ironhack Portugal

Table 4: Additional resources and capabilities of Ironhack Lisbon: A post-COVID-19 view

From the developed tables above, it can be retrieved that Ironhack Lisbon has gained resources and has developed coherent capabilities throughout the development of the COVID-19 pandemic. The additional resources and coherent capabilities fall into both types - tangible and intangible assets. Furthermore, the additional resources and coherent capabilities are mainly concerned with being able to use resources more efficiently as an organization and thus to be able to exploit existing systems, structures and collective knowledge better. In the category organization for example, Ironhack as a whole and thus also Ironhack Lisbon has developed capabilities that allow the organization to benefit from standardized resources, a higher degree

of organizational agility by becoming “One Ironhack” and exploiting the insights of data more extensively and timely in order to make better decisions.

Following the same logic as the example stated, Ironhack has developed its capabilities with regards to the following broad categories, namely organizational, human, innovation and intellectual.

Nonetheless, this view on resources and capabilities only allows the comparison between the status just before the COVID-19 pandemic and the “new normal”. Consequently, this view disregards temporary developments during the COVID-19 pandemic such as the non-usage of the campus due to social distancing regulations. Taking this example into account, Ironhack Lisbon was not able to deploy its campus as a resource during this time. However, comparing the pre-COVID-19 situation and the “new normal”, it becomes clear that Ironhack Lisbon was able to build up its resources and capability repertoire without having to let go of any others as the changes that were made during the COVID-19 pandemic can be more likely characterized as an opportunity rather than a real threat in the retrospective.

Nevertheless, this does not imply that all resources and capabilities stated above can be considered key resources and capabilities which is why in the following section the existence of dynamic capabilities will be explored further.

3.4.3. Question 3

Given the information you have been provided in the case study, please assess the DCs of Ironhack Lisbon in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following the previous question which was concerned with identifying resources and capabilities as such, this question aims to apply the concept of DCs to the case of Ironhack Lisbon. To do so, students are expected to base their analysis of DCs on the definition of Barreto (2010) which suggests that *“a dynamic capability is the firm’s potential to systematically solve problems, formed by its propensity to sense opportunities and threats, make timely and market-oriented decisions, and to change its resource base”*.

Without a doubt, the COVID-19 pandemic has been an extreme force in changing the external environment of Ironhack Lisbon and thus required the development of DCs within the midst of

time. Hence, in the following, the different parts of Barreto's definition of dynamic capabilities will be evaluated with regards to the case of Ironhack Lisbon.

- **Sensing opportunities and threats:**

When the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic was categorized a pandemic on March 11th, 2020 by the WHO, severe concerns with regards to the development of the spread of this virus started to arise amongst the general public but also key figures within organizations. This did not exclude the management of Ironhack Lisbon. Even though, the Portuguese Government announced the suspension of academic and non-academic activities only until April 9th at first, Ironhack Lisbon sensed quickly that this exceptional situation could stay for an uncertain period of time. Thus, the decision to develop a temporary remote solution as described in the case study in phase 1 was taken right away. This decision was arguably rooted in combating the risk of not being able to operate as a business and hence decided with regards to sensing a business critical threat.

- **Timely- and market oriented decisions:**

As briefly described in the paragraph above, the decision to react towards the sensed threat was made almost simultaneously with the decision of the Portuguese government to suspend academic and non-academic activities. Therefore, this decision can be characterized as utterly timely. However, this assessment can only be made considering the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic as such was difficult to sense and was surely not an event that could have easily been predicted nor the development of it.

Furthermore, as Ironhack as a whole was able to improve upon the initial remote solution swiftly, they soon sensed the market opportunity of permanently introducing a remote bootcamp format. As a whole, Ironhack decided that by offering a permanent remote bootcamp format they could not only follow their strategic objectives of the pre-COVID-19 situation but they had also professionalized a way of staying in business and thus they were able to cushion the foreseen threat of not being able to keep on operating. Furthermore, Ironhack as a whole sensed that the development with regards to remote and digitized experiences would most likely persist even after the COVID-19 pandemic and thus demonstrated a market-oriented decision.

- **Altering resource base:**

In order to follow through with the decision to permanently offer a remote bootcamp format, Ironhack as a whole and thus also Ironhack Lisbon had to develop, alter and reconfigure resources and coherent capabilities. Many of these have been identified in the previous question when looking at the post-COVID-19 resources and capabilities.

However, in order for Ironhack to be able to offer a remote bootcamp format, coherent outputs had to be standardized and developed as “One Ironhack”. Hence, Ironhack had to develop organizational agility and a collective knowledge approach. They have done so on the basis of their joint purpose, their high engagement and their flexible organizational structure that nonetheless existed before. Furthermore, as the profound technical as well as the pedagogical knowledge was already anchored within Ironhack, Ironhack had to only apply it within the new format option. Alongside other handy capabilities that Ironhack had to use in order to adopt to the change that the COVID-19 pandemic posed on the business, these are the main DCs developed by Ironhack.

Afterall, it can be concluded that Ironhack as a whole and thus also Ironhack Lisbon were able to combat the changes that the COVID-19 pandemic posed on them by developing and reconfiguring capabilities in their favor.

3.4.4. Question 4

Given the information you have been provided in the case study, identify the type of change Ironhack Lisbon had to undergo in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and justify your answer.

The aim of this question is that students are able to identify different types of change depending on the two dimensions introduced by Balogun & Hope Hailey (2008). By doing so, the goal is that students become aware of what type of change the COVID-19 pandemic posed on Ironhack Lisbon. Furthermore, by identifying the specific type of change, students should also become aware of the differences with regards to the extent and speed of change in general in order to be able to sense different indicators of change in the future more easily.

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic posed a big challenge on Ironhack Lisbon and equally on other organizations. In terms of the speed dimension, the COVID-19 pandemic can be categorized as a ‘big bang’ as the majority of the world would probably not have predicted

an outbreak of a virus that would be classified as a pandemic and thus had an impact on the entire world. Even if someone had predicted it, only few would have probably been able to predict the development of the spread of the virus with regards to the speed and its subsequent measures. Thus, the strategic changes made by Ironhack Lisbon in response to the COVID-19 pandemic had to be made rapidly in order to keep operating.

The extent of the change that Ironhack Lisbon had to undergo in response to the COVID-19 pandemic is slightly more difficult to characterize. Nevertheless, the changes implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic did not affect the business model nor the culture in a fundamental way. Therefore, the extent of the change can be categorized as a 'realignment'. Essentially, Ironhack Lisbon and Ironhack as a whole organization realigned its business model in response to the external changes by introducing the remote bootcamp format.

Consequently, Ironhack Lisbon had to undergo a 'reconstruction' in order to stay in business. By offering the remote bootcamp format, which is arguably the biggest change that Ironhack Lisbon and Ironhack as such introduced, the organization was able to generate revenues from different sources that otherwise would not have been generated at all. Therefore, Ironhack Lisbon as well as Ironhack stabilized their market position while dealing with the change posed on them by the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.4.5. Question 5

Given the information you have been provided in the case study, please choose one strategic recommendation you would like to give to Ironhack Lisbon and elaborate on your choice.

The aim of this question is to open the discussion amongst students and to offer them an opportunity to comment on the case study provided in a less structured and predefined manner. Note that this question is especially prone to a variety of answer opportunities. This is implicitly desired as it will hopefully generate an interesting class discussion.

Amongst a variety of different strategic recommendations that one can provide to Ironhack Lisbon, there is one recommendation in particular that the following elaboration will be based on.

Derived from the SWOT analysis, one weakness of Ironhack Lisbon that has been identified has to do with the rather undiversified product portfolio. In this case the product portfolio does not refer to the variety of different bootcamp options with regards to the overarching topics but with regards to the fact that Ironhack does not offer different products or services other than these bootcamps. This does not imply that a completely unrelated new product or service should be developed but it may be worthwhile to think about extending the existing portfolio by related product- or service development options.

In fact, Ironhack Lisbon actually mentioned the goal of developing new products within its post-COVID-19 strategic objectives. However, this decision can only be encouraged in order to mitigate overall risk, especially with regards to potential future crisis.

4. Conclusion and Limitations

After all, the goal of developing this case study was to provide students with an interesting, real-life example that mirrors the complexity of the real world. Furthermore, the aim was to mentally put students into the shoes of the key decision makers and to tease their critical thinking by letting them apply relevant key concepts.

It is arguably always more interesting to be able to learn about a specific management problem when provided with a real-life example. Nevertheless, this case study about Ironhack Lisbon is not only providing an interesting real-life example but is also bound to a very specific point in time – a crisis situation. Thus, applying different key concepts becomes even more challenging and relevant to today's fast moving world.

Furthermore, by learning how Ironhack Lisbon strategically adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic situation, students may also get a feeling for how it must feel like to operate under a great amount of pressure and within an environment which can be characterized as highly uncertain.

Nonetheless and especially because of the exceptional point in time that the case study is anchored to, there are different limitations that need to be taken into account. Even though we could consider the current state of the COVID-19 pandemic the “new normal”, we are still not able to fully assess the effectiveness of the strategic changes made by Ironhack Lisbon in

response to the COVID-19 pandemic as the development of the pandemic remains uncertain. Furthermore, throughout the case study only limited information could be provided due to confidentiality reasons. Even though a relatively complete picture of the status quo has been given throughout the case study, sensitive data has not been displayed and thus it may lead to less complete analysis opportunities for students.

After all and despite the mentioned limitations, the provided case study should provide students with an interesting example of an organization and its strategic responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and thus offers a great learning opportunity and a great discussion start within a pedagogic environment.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Data Collection

Next to publicly available information which has been referenced throughout the case study, different interviews were conducted in order to be able to enrich the case study with relevant information. In order to do so Interviewee A, an Ironhack Lisbon representative was interviewed on several occasions. Furthermore, the exchange of E-mails also contributed towards the data collection and the development of the case. The protocol of this is shown in the following.

Time protocol			
Interviewee	Date	Mode	Method
Interviewee A	05 th April, 2022	Online	Semi-structured
	02 nd May, 2022	Online	Semi-structured
	10 th May, 2022	E-mail	Structured
	10 th August, 2022	E-mail	Structured

Table 5: Time protocol

Please also note that the case study was validated by Interviewee A as well as another Ironhack representative after its completion to ensure the truthful representation of information.

Appendix B: Case Study

Appendix B1: Exemplary Event Calendar: Pre-COVID-19

Exemplary Event Calendar for Q1, 2019 (Pre-COVID-19)	
Date	Event Name
10 th January, 2019	New Year New Career: Open House - Ironhack
16 th January, 2019	Drink and Code: Javascript Workshop
23 rd January, 2019	UX Panel Discussion: All Paths Lead to UX
24 th January, 2019	Full day Workshop: Intro to Coding
30 th January, 2019	Workshop: Intro to coding (HTML & CSS) at Ironhack Lisbon!
31 st January, 2019	Design Sprint: Build and test an app in 2 hours
06 th February, 2019	Introduction to Programming: full day Workshop
13 th February, 2019	Learn the keys of success of Tinder while designing a Tinder's s
23 rd February, 2019	We/Code Women Edition
07 th March, 2019	Get started to UX/UI Design Full Day Workshop
08 th March, 2019	Women in Tech Panel Discussion
14 th March, 2019	Grab your Helmets for some Extreme Programming
15 th March, 2019	Introduction to Design Sprint: Build and test an app in 2 H
21 st March, 2019	The Future of UX in Portugal

Table 6: Exemplary event calendar - Pre-COVID-19 (Facebook, n.d.h)

Appendix B2: Careerhack

Careerhack Contents			
Stages	Focus	Contents	To be completed
0	Discovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gain clarity on your values and objectives Gain clarity on your strengths and how to use them Start building a personal brand 	During the Bootcamp
1	Digital Foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Navigate the digital ecosystem Build your perfect digital profile and start using it 	During the Bootcamp
2.1	Job Hunt Warm-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start practicing interview conversations Warm up your job hunting skills 	During Career Week
2.2	Job Hunt Sprint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Master the job hunt Receive weekly one-on-one guidance Get matched with hiring partners from Ironhack's network 	Offered after the Bootcamp

Table 7: Careerhack Contents (Ironhack, n.d.g)

Appendix B2: Exemplary Event Calendar: Post-COVID-19

Exemplary Event Calendar for Q1 & Q2, 2022 (Post-COVID-19)		
Date	Event Name	Format
26 th January, 2022	Python for Beginners: Football Points and Matches	Online
26 th February, 2022	Learn how to create a digital product in Figma and brunch with us	On-campus
24 th March, 2022	Build your game with Javascript	Online
6 th April, 2022	Help Data tell a story with data visualization	On-campus
13 th April, 2022	Como conseguir uma bolsa de estudos com a Fundação José Neves	Online
20 th May, 2022	Celebrate 3 years of Ironhack in Portugal with the Alumni Summit	On-campus

Table 8: Exemplary event calendar - Post-COVID-19 (LinkedIn, n.d.i)