Sensemaking on the intranet: The meaning of the global organization from an employee perspective

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Meningsskapande på intranätet: Ett verktyg för att främja arbetskulturen och föra samman den globala organisationen

Medarbetare i globala organisationer använder intranätet för att skapa mening kring organisationen vilket har resulterat i att intranätet har tilldelats en ny roll som sträcker sig över den traditionella rollen som informationskanal.

Intranätet har en stor betydelse för att skapa en *vi* känsla i den globala organisationen. Resultatet visar att utöver informationssökning så används intranätet i syfte för att inspireras av kollegor, hitta nya idéer till projekt och för att skapa en förståelse för vart organisationen är påväg. På så sätt skapar medarbetarna mening kring organisationen. Denna studie är baserat på femton semistrukturerade intervjuer och en fallstudie av global organisation som visar att medarbetarna ser intranätet som en digital plattform som för samman organisationen. Det finns en positiv inställning till intranätet då medarbetarna uppmärksammar intranätets potential att främja arbetskulturen och medarbetarengagemanget genom att lyfta fram medarbetarnas insatser på intranätet. Samtidigt uttrycker de en osäkerhet kring deras användning eftersom att tiden inte räcker till för att engagera sig på intranätet i lika stor utsträckning som förväntat. Osäkerheten beror också på att intranätet inte alltid anses vara rätt kommunikationskanal för kunskapsutbyte. Medarbetarna har med andra ord en kluven inställning till intranätets användning. Organisationer rekommenderas därför att ta fram riktlinjer för hur intranätet bör användas för att legitimera användandet och uppmuntra till ökat medarbetarengagemang.

Vad som kan läras av fallet är att intranät kan användas i fler syften som kan gynna organisationen. Detta är särskilt relevant för globala organisationer med utspridda medarbetare över flera länder där kommunikation öga mot öga inte är tillämpbart. Där har intranätet en betydelsefull roll att främja arbetskulturen och skapa en samhörighet. Under de senaste åren har allt fler organisationer blivit medvetna om intranätets potential och har därför implementerat intranät med förhoppningen om att det ska bidra till en förbättrad intern kommunikation. Intranätet har sedan dess varit en traditionell informationskanal med syfte att göra kunskap och information tillgängligt för alla. Denna studie problematiserar organisationers förväntningar och traditionella synsätt på intranät genom att studera användandet av intranätet utifrån ett medarbetarperspektiv. Detta är särskilt intressant eftersom att det finns i både praktik och forskning en tendens att glömma bort att det är medarbetarnas användning som utgör intranätets värde.

Abstract

Sensemaking on the intranet: The meaning of the global organization from the employee perspective

Although successful intranet requires active employees that engage in dialogues to exchange knowledge, the employee is neglected in the research within the field of internal communication on intranet. This study problematizes organizations' high expectations on intranet and highlights the employee perspective. The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of sensemaking in global organizations by focusing on how employees use the intranet. To address this purpose, I conducted a case study on Business Sweden. The analysis shows that the employees give meaning to the organization based on stories from different perspectives that explain the organizations' work. Furthermore, this study shows that the employees' use of the tool is characterized by both a positive and critical attitude towards the intranet. This study does also show that the intranet is not mainly used to find information, it is rather used as a social platform that creates sense of belonging that unites the global organization.

Keywords: enterprise social media, intranet, sensemaking, internal communication, employees, global organizations

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Sammanfattning

Meningsskapande på intranät: Den globala organisationens mening ur medarbetarens perspektiv

Ett framgångsrikt intranät förutsätter aktiva medarbetare som engagerar sig i dialoger för att utbyta kunskaper, samtidigt är medarbetarens roll åsidosatt inom forskningsfältet intern kommunikation på intranät. Den här studien problematiserar organisationers höga förväntningar på intranät och lyfter därför fram medarbetarens perspektiv. Syftet med denna studie är att erhålla en djupare kunskap och förståelse av meningsskapandet kring en global organisation genom att fokusera på hur medarbetaren använder intranätet. För att förstå medarbetarens meningsskapande har jag gjort en fallstudie av Business Sweden. Analysen visar att medarbetarna skapar mening utifrån berättelser som från olika perspektiv förklarar organisationens arbete. Vidare visar studien att deras användning präglas av både en positiv och kritisk inställning till intranätet. Studien visar även att intranätet används inte enbart i syfte att söka information, den används snarare som en social plattform för att skapa samhörighet som förenar den globala organisationen.

Nyckelord: Enterprise social media, intranät, meningsskapande, intern kommunikation, medarbetare, globala organisationer

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Preface

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to those who have helped me along the road during the process of writing my master thesis. First of all, I would like to give a special thank to all the respondents for their participation and contribution that ultimately made this thesis. Secondly, I am grateful for the support and guidance from Marcus Tagesson and Business Sweden's engagement that gave me access to the organization. Thirdly, I would like to thank my supervisor Åsa Thelander for always being available and supportive during this intensive semester.

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Apollonia Contreras San

1. Introduction

In the past decade, social media such as Twitter and Facebook have radically changed how people communicate with one another. In October 2015, 65 percent of American adults used at least one type of social media, which is nearly a tenfold jump in the past decade, according to a survey from Pew Research Center (Perrin, 2015). Driven by the success of these public social media platforms, many organizations are rapidly deploying similar social platforms within the corporate arena – more commonly referred to as Enterprise Social Media (ESM) with the promise of more transparent, open and collaborative communication within the organization (McAfee; 2009; Huy & Shipilov, 2012; Cardon & Marshall, 2015). According to a global report from McKinsey 72 percent of organizations use ESM (Bughin, Hung Byers & Chui, 2011).

These platforms are dramatically changing the way in which people communicate especially in global organizations that operate in different countries and time zones. At the same time, the office rather than being just a workspace is now becoming an opportunity for employee to get involved in organizational culture and participate in the values of the organization (Bell et al., 2008). Contrary to traditional media tools where communication flows in a linear manner, ESM enables employees to interact with each other, thereby making communication a two way process (Korzynski, 2014). But for remote workers and employees that rarely meet in person, it becomes increasingly difficult to immerse oneself in the organizational culture, especially when the employees are spread out worldwide. It is therefore relevant to study how the intranet, which is one form of ESM, is used in global organizations, as the intranet plays a crucial role to maintain the culture across geographical boundaries.

Organizations have in general high expectations in ESM with grand visions of increased engagement and improved communication between employees in different departments and countries at the same time as time and space will be reduced (Heide, 2015; Lai and Turban, 2008 & Berger, Klier, Klier & Probst, 2014). Despite the organizations' high expectations, ESM success is not guaranteed. These expectations assume that employees, in addition to their regular duties want and have time to be engaged on

the intranet. Previous research indicates that there is a difference between organizations' purpose of implementing intranet and how employees actually use it within the organization (Heide, Johansson & Simonsson, 2012; Lipiäinen, Karjaluoto & Nevalainen, 2014). I regard this complexity as a relevant reason for studying the phenomenon of how intranet is being used from an employee perspective.

In the workplace, e-mail remains the dominant communication tool, as nearly 78 percent of the employees consider e-mail as "very important" for executing jobs tasks while only 4 percent say ESM are "very important" for the their tasks (Purcell & Rainie, 2014). While people are using social media outside the workplace; integrating their social media habits and routines professionally at the workplace tend to develop more slowly. This is an interesting fact, given that people are already embracing social media (Perrin, 2015). Several researchers (Denyer, Parry & Flowers, 2011; Wagner, Vollmar and Wagner, 2014) argue that employees' underutilization of the intranet has become one of the main challenges for successful adoption of ESM. Prior studies show that gaining the employees' acceptance can be challenging since many employees are not motivated to use or even resist to use ESM (Pirkkalainen & Pawlowski, 2014; Matschke, Moskaliuk, Bokhorst, Schümmer, & Cress, 2014). Furthermore, Cardon and Marshall (2014) argue that the usage of ESM tools in organizations will require employees to acquire new skills and attitudes. In the light of this broad complex of problem, I argue that it is relevant to further investigate how the intranet is used to add new insights to the research field but also to provide practitioners with a deeper understanding of how these tools are understood by the employees.

I argue that the problematic aspect is the lack of knowledge of how employees use the intranet, rather than the lack of skills and attitudes since people already are embracing social media outside their workplace. So far, research has highlighted that communication on ESM leads to improved communication and knowledge sharing (Vuori & Okkonen, 2012). Many studies have been conducted from a managerial perspective e.g. how online social networking can help leaders to communicate or best management practices for the development of intranet and its role in employment decisions among others (Korzynski, 2014; Stoddart, 2001; Thomas, Rotschild & Donegan, 2014). Other research has mostly been focused on the individuals' motives for using public social media like WhatsApp and Facebook (Al-Jabri, Sohail & Ndubisi, 2015; Yang & Brown, 2012). Few have empirically examined employees' usage related to a sensemaking per-

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spective in an organizational context and I share the opinion with Leonardi, Huysman & Steinfield (2013) that it remains much to be done in how employees use ESM.

Little research has looked at *"what's in it"* for the employees to use ESM such as social intranets. This study problematizes organizations' high expectations as I argue that one must understand how employees use and perceive the intranet, before organizations can achieve results like improved productivity and communication. This is essential due to organizations' increasing use of ESM. This topic has mainly been studied from a strategic perspective with remarkably little research attention on the role of the employee as an active communicator. I argue that a greater focus on employees in strategic communication research will provide a better understanding of how the employees use the intranet and how they through their actions and interpretations make sense of the organization.

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand how employees make sense of the global organization through the intranet. The aim of this study is to provide new insights on the research field of internal communication on social intranets by investigating how employees' create meaning through the intranet and the role of the intranet in a global context. Based on the purpose and aim of this study, my ambition is to problematize and create new knowledge of the role of the intranet in facilitating employees' sensemaking of the global organization. In order to address this purpose, I have formulated the following research questions.

How do the employees make sense of the global organization through the intranet?
- *How do the employees use the intranet?*
- *What does the intranet mean for the employees?*
- *What has the organizational culture for meaning for the employees' usage of the intranet?*

The research questions are linked to the employees' usage of the intranet and the organizational culture because I do not view employees or organizations as static entities. Instead, they consist of multiple actors and interaction on an ongoing basis, and continue to become throughout their existence. Thus, it is essential to include the culture when

studying this phenomenon in order to understand and explain the employees' usage of the intranet. Similarly, emerging research indicates that successful use of ESM is most often linked to organizational culture and communication (Huy & Shipilov, 2012; Cardon & Marshall, 2015).

In order to fulfill the purpose of this study and answer its research questions, Business Sweden, the Swedish Trade and Investment Council is used as a case study. Business Sweden is an example of a global organization with high expectations on the intranet, where it is perceived as an important communication tool with the aim to drive toward behavior that in turn leads to the strategy's effectiveness. I will introduce Business Sweden and how they work with the intranet in the second chapter, *the case organization Business Sweden*.

1.2 Delimitations

Enterprise social media refers to any social platform that is used within the organization and that is not accessed by the public such as the public social media Facebook for instance. In this study, I have studied the employees' usage of the intranet. This study will focus on organizational communication in regards to the employees' usage of the intranet and how they make sense of the organization through the intranet, emphasizing the communication concentrated on how the intranet is to be understood by the individuals. As mentioned in the problem statement, the employees' role has yet not been highlighted in the previous research to fully understand how they use the intranet. Therefore, I have chosen to include employees that work as associates, consultants and project leaders. For that reason, I have not included country managers nor trade commissioners in this study since they are employees with managerial responsibilities. Due to the time limitation, I have chosen to interview employees that are located in Asia and Europe. Weick's (1995) theories concerning sensemaking are extensive and for the sake of the relevance of this study and analytical simplicity I have chosen to include some parts of his theories in my theory review and analysis in order to address the purpose of this study.

1.3 Disposition

This study is organized as follows. I will in the second chapter introduce the case organization Business Sweden. Previous research concerning ESM and social intranets are examined in the third chapter, as well as the gap that this study aims to cover. The following chapter presents the theory that will be used in the analysis to understand how employees give meaning to the organization. Further, the fifth chapter motivates my research strategy to address the purpose of this study. After that, the analysis and its findings from the case study will be presented. Finally, this study concludes with a discussion of the results, contributions suggestions for further research.

2. The case organization – Business Sweden

Business Sweden is a global organization with the aim to help Swedish companies to reach their full international potential and attract foreign companies to invest in Sweden (Business Sweden, 2016). Their purpose is to "*help every Swedish company to reach their full international potential and help companies abroad to reach their potential by investing in Sweden*" (Business Sweden, 2016). The organization support Swedish companies to expand in existing markets, reach new export markets and identify business opportunities to grow internationally by offering a wide range of services such as market analysis, search of collaboration partners and recommending strategies. Business Sweden is jointly owned by the Swedish Government and business sector through the Swedish Foreign Trade Association. Business Sweden's purpose is to strengthen Sweden as a dynamic, innovative and competetive business partner by helping every Swedish company in their internationalization processes. Business Sweden has a local presence both in Sweden and in 46 countries with approximately 500 employees working at 55 offices around the world. The majority of their employees are from Sweden and works abroad at their various offices. Some offices in countries such as China, Japan and South Korea have also local employees. This means that the majority of their employees is originally from Sweden and speaks Swedish fluently.

There are five career levels at Business Sweden; *associate*, *consultant*, *project manager, senior project manager* and *trade commissioner* who is also the *country manager*. The associates' duties include market analysis, partner searches and client support. The consultants' are responsible for conducting market analyses and providing recommendations on strategic issues as well as developing knowledge and network in priority sectors. The project managers work with sales and project management in relation to the clients' international business development such as market entrance and growth. The senior project managers have the same tasks as the project managers but they are also involved in delegations and governmental projects as this is a part of Business Sweden's

mission. Lastly, the country managers and trade commissioners are responsible for the offices sales and to set a positive high performance culture in the teams. The offices in each country are responsible for their own sales and consultancy since the market they operate in differ in market size, culture and business opportunities. This means that the offices need to adapt to the countries' working conditions while simultaneously acquiring solid knowledge about the market as a whole.

2.1 Business Sweden's Intranet

Marcus Tagesson, Communication Officer at Business Sweden, stated that the intranet's purpose is to mobilize employees and drive toward behavior that in turn leads to the strategy's effectiveness. He explained that the intranet is expected to be an important communication channel for the entire organization where the employees can interact with their colleagues globally. The intranet has technical functions that allows the employees to create personal profiles, share news and documents, read news about Business Sweden, access various tools such as the 'best practice portal' where previous projects are storage. Business Sweden's internal communicator has the overall responsibility for the intranet such as maintaining the intranet and publishing content. However, all employees have the opportunity to engage in the intranet in terms of sharing articles, comment and like posts. The employees can also create their own profile and tag their skills and competences.

All the employees work towards the same mission; to help Swedish companies in their internationalization process. Practically, this means that it is advantageous to cooperate although they work in different countries. It exist possibilities to collaborate when they organize delegations in certain sectors and areas such as start-ups, transport or retail since their clients often are located in more than just one country, which enables the employees at Business Sweden to share information and collaborate. In some cases it is possible for the employees to interact and collaborate, sometimes impossible, depending on the context and its conditions. On the other hand, there are some cultural differences and legal aspects that makes it difficult to collaborate at some times, for example, helping a Swedish company to establish in China requires a local Chinese partner while it is not required in Spain. All in all, there are incentives to collaborate despite the distance, time zones and business cultures. This is of particular interest for my study because it may give rise to organizational global challenges where the intranet

is of importance to enable these incentives. I argue that Business Sweden is an example of organizations with expectations on the outcomes that the intranet can provide.

The following chapter will present the literature review of ESM and social intranet where I will identify the literature gap that this study will cover.

3. Previous research

This chapter provides an overview of previous studies within the fields of enterprise social media (ESM) and social intranets. The first section will go through previous research about ESM where much of the research has mainly been focused on the social platforms' benefits. The second part will introduce the research field within social intranets where a growing interest for studying social intranet from a communication perspective has been noticed. Lastly, a synthesis will be presented to summarize interesting findings from this chapter. I have noticed that there are numerous of white papers provided by IT and consulting firms that encourage grand dreams of increased employee engagement, more efficient communication and knowledge sharing across departments (e.g. IBM, 2016). The whitepapers are excluded from the analysis because its findings are not based on scientific research.

3.1 Enterprise social media

Enterprise Social Media (ESM) platforms are specifically designed for organizational internal communication with an aim to facilitate and improve the internal communication (Young & Hinesly, 2014). ESM contains several functions such as blogs, wikis, personal profiles, as well as document sharing (Leonardi et al., 2013). Employees become visible through the ESM to the whole organization when their names appear next to their likes and comments, and this visibility alters interactions and social relations (Leonardi et al., 2013). For global organizations, the ability to communicate virtually can have profound implications on message reach and communication speed. The increased speed of image and video sharing means that any co-worker can distribute messages with high media richness to a large audience when face-to-face meetings are not possible (Lewandowski, Rosenberg, Parks & Siegel, 2011). For example, CEO-to-employee communication in top-down organizations is not feasible in larger organizations. Video streaming of live town halls with the CEO answering employees' question

provides a more meaningful exchange as it allows a two-way communication between a CEO and employees that everyone can take part of (Young & Hinesly, 2014).

Young and Hinesly (2014) argue that a successful implementation of an ESM can have dramatic impacts on team collaboration, organizational alignments and cultural transformation. Majchrzak, Wagner and Yates (2006) surveyed managers at 168 different organizations that had implemented internal wikis, which showed that wikis had a positive impact on work processes as the collaboration and knowledge sharing improved. Kuegler, Smolnik and Kane (2015) surveyed 529 co-workers and found that using social platforms for connecting within teams has stronger effect on both employee innovation and task performance. Jackson, Yates and Orlikowski (2007) observed how internal blogging in a global IT company informational and social benefits including a better grasp of the organization and belongingness to a community while the informational benefits included assistance on solving problems and obtaining feedback on ideas.

Much of the previous research about ESM has been focused on the social benefits and the impacts on employee performance and internal communication (Majchrzak et al., 2006; Jackson et al., 2007; Kuegler et al., 2015). There are fewer studies that aims to understand how and when employees use ESM and for what purposes. I argue that it is essential to understand the employee perspective since they are viewed as active communicators who can influence the organization. Their roles as communicators "are broader and more consequential than the role they traditionally have been given" (Heide & Simonsson, 2011, p. 202). This chapter will continue with examining previous research within the field of social intranets.

3.2 Social Intranets

An intranet is defined as a platform that aims to improve internal communication, to facilitate access to and exchange of information, and to function as an interactive working tool (Heide, 2015). Intranet consists of three components including hardware, web standards and virtual meeting places for communication and information (Gonzalez, 1988). Heide (2002) stated that most of the research about intranet has been conducted from what he describes as an *efficiency perspective* with the purpose to improve organizational learning for instance. Heide (2002) claimed that there is a lack of research from an *understanding oriented perspective.* I share this opinion with Heide to a certain level

but do not fully agree since I have noticed a growing interest in studying enterprise social tools entirely from communication perspective. For example, Madsen (2016) shows how employees through their usage of intranet co-construct organizational identities and become actors in their own stories. Uysal (2016) shows that employees develop a higher sense of community by posting on the intranet and also by observing posts. In fact, the study found that most employees were characterized as lurkers, those individuals who consumer or observe content on the intranet but rarely contribute content (Uysal, 2016). On the other hand, Lüder (2013) concludes that there are two archetypical users – the reluctant user and the contributor. The reluctant user does only use the intranet as an information source and not for engaging in dialogue or interaction. From a sensemaking perspective, I argue that using the intranet, as an information source does not necessarily mean that the user is reluctant as the user gives the content meaning to make sense of it, which I interpret as an interaction and activity.

Uysal (2016) and Madsen's (2016) studies show that the transformative potential of intranets depends on a communicative perspective, something that is missing in previous research from the 1990s and beginning of 2000s from my point of view. Similarly, emerging research seems to indicate that successful use of social platforms such as intranet is most often linked to positive communication and organizational culture (Huy & Shipilov, 2012; Cardon & Marshall, 2015). In fact, Young and Hinesly (2014) argue that there must be a "critical mass" of users for social media to be successful and a leadership that facilitates a collaborative organizational culture. Treem and Leonardi (2012) state that the use of a social platform can lead to that employees experience that its work tasks are more appreciated since their contributions become more visible for the entire organization through the platform. Pellegrino (2003) claim that intranet can be seen as an identity and tool for communication, where the organization's social capital is collected and stored. In addition, Pellegrino (2003) found that the interviewees interpreted the intranet as a community that reinforced the identity and belonging to the company. According to Rice and Leonardi (2014), factors such as organizational culture and intra-organizational norms can influence the employees' usage. On the other hand, there are situations where employees prefer to communicate through other platforms, which requires that the intranet is perceived as relevant in order to be used (Mishra, Boynton & Mishra, 2014). Marketwire (2012) argues that the management team must be committed and engage in conversation in order to make sure that employees' find it relevant.

To conclude, based from the previous research presented above, organizational culture and employees' experience of an intranet seems to have a significant for how employees' make sense of an organization through the intranet. This study aims to provide a better understanding for how and why employees use the intranet by focusing on the role of employees and culture from a communicative perspective.

3.3 Synthesis

Most of the research within the field of ESM concludes that the use of these tools affect the organizations' performance. Expectations on how social intranets will improve communication and collaboration in organizations are, therefore, high. Yet, research into user patterns of ESM demonstrates participatory divides. Above all, there is a gap between organizations' grand expectations and the employees' usage. I argue that such a functionalist view on ESM where the employees' voice is less included reduce the employees' role in the contribution to the organization, which is essential in order to understand how these tools actually are used.

I have noticed a growing interest in studying intranet from a communication perspective, with this in mind I argue that more research from an employee perspective is needed to understand how employee makes sense of the organization. The sections above indicate that previous research limits the understanding on the use of ESM and intranet, which can explain why organizations are facing the problem of limited use of ESM platforms. It is argued that adaption of social media among employees tends to be a *people problem*, which is often explained by suggesting that employees lack digital literacy or are hesitant about new technology (Young & Hinesly, 2014). I find it hard to imagine that digital literacy is the problem, because otherwise it could easily be solved by a user-friendly overview or education provided from the organization. The findings from the previous research above show that culture and leadership have significant roles to encourage employees' usage. In addition, employees are more likely to use an intranet when the information is perceived as relevant.

There is a gap between organizations' expectations and the reality, as stated above, which I believe that this study with its' contribution of knowledge can reduce in this particular area. In fact, research from an employee perspective and how they make sense through any ESM such as intranet has not yet been fully discovered. I argue that previous research only scratches the surface, and to fully understanding how organiza-

tion can use social media one has to shed light on the role of the employee and not solely on the social media as a tool.

The next chapter will present the theory in which a sensemaking approach has been applied in order to contribute with a more reflective approach to the intranet and the employees' understanding of it. Organizational identity and culture will also be presented, as I believe that these two have significant roles for how employees give meaning to the organization.

4.Theory

The sensemaking approach brings a social constructionist ontology that involves a fundamental view of reality that is constructed through social interactions. For that reason, this theory is the most appropriate theory in this context since I am interested in studying how employees make sense of the organization through the intranet. Sensemaking is used as a theoretical approach to understand how meaning is constructed whereby identity and culture is regarded as an interpretation framework that facilitates for the employees to construct meaning. Significantly, identity and culture is central to how meaning is created. For that reason, I regard these theories as a means to conduct the analysis and to address the purpose of this study to understand how employees construct meaning and make sense of the organization through the intranet.

4.1 Sensemaking

Sensemaking is the process by which people experiences something and retrospectively assigns meaning to it (Weick, 1995). It is the on going process of organizing, labeling and categorizing event into something that is understandable and makes sense. When employees encounter moments of uncertainty or ambiguity, they seek to clear up what is going on by interpreting cues from the environment, using these as the basis for a conceivable account that "makes sense" of what has occurred (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005). Sensemaking involves the framework for understanding and the active authoring of events, as people play a role, in constructing the very situations they attempt to grasp (Weick et al., 2005).

There is a rapidly growing body of research of sensemaking within the organizational literature where researchers are examining how sense is made in organizations (Sonenshein, 2007; Whitemen & Cooper, 2011), as well the impact of sensemaking in organizational changes (Rerup & Feldman, 2011) and organizational learning (Weick, 1990; Catino & Patriotta, 2013). Hence, sensemaking is a central activity in organizations that lies at the very core of organizing according to Maitlis and Christiansson

(2014). As presented above, we can see that sensemaking theory has been used to understand a variety of organizational processes but not much has been done on the field of ESM and social intranet from an employee perspective. Further, Weick (1995) stresses that organizations are in constant organizing process, which means that in my study, it will only be possible to capture parts of the employees' sensemaking as meaning is created in certain ways.

4.1.1 Sensemaking through actions

Weick et al. (2005) explains that thoughts and actions should be treated as cycles and not as two separated things. Action and thought are required to enable people to create meaning because action is an indistinguishable part of the swarm of flux until talk brackets it and gives it some meaning (Weick et al., 2005).

Sensemaking involves the continuous development by rationalizing what individuals are doing and connecting the abstract with the concrete (Weick et al., 2005). First, actions are important because they create raw ingredients for sensemaking by generating stimuli or cues. For instance, employees can quickly learn more about a situation by taking action and paying attention to the outcomes generated by that action. Second, action can also test provisional understanding generated through prior sensemaking. Third, action shape the environment for sensemaking because the same actions that help individuals make sense of what is happening can also alter what individual encounter and consequently change the situation. The exchanged influence between the environment and action during sensemaking is known as enactment that is premised on the idea that individuals play a key role in creating the environment in which they find themselves (Orton, 2000; Weick et al., 2005). Weick et al. (2005) state that sensemaking links managers, who are in charge of the organizational strategies, with the employees who implement the strategies by acting on it. The employees' sensemaking on the intranet is therefore not only a matter of how they understand it but also how they choose to act on it based on their understanding.

4.1.2 Meaning is created through social activities

Weick et al. (2015) explain that people always relate to other individuals when they act and create meaning. Sensemaking is a social activity in many respects (von Platen, 2006). First, the personal interpretation has a social dimension that takes place on the

basis of our social perceptions that are shaped (Berger & Luckmann, 1998, cited in von Platen, 2006). Second, an individual's sensemaking does always take place in connection to the people in his or her environment. Sensemaking in a workplace is created in contact with the closest co-workers according to Heide et al. (2012). Third, meaning is a social activity because it is created when we communicate with each other. Communication is largely about discussing what and how certain things should be done and we tend to get new ideas when exchanging ideas with others. An organization and its social reality is therefore something that is constantly created and kept alive by organizational members through communication and actions (Burr, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). The organization and its formal structure exist because of the interaction, which leads to a constantly evolving organization according to von Platen (2006). These structures created by employees' dialogue affect how employees make sense of events and situations (von Platen, 2006).

In this study, employees' sensemaking can be influenced by a variety of social factors that might include for example previous discussions about a certain topic, interaction with others – some of who encourage or inspire he or she to take initiative and those who do not. In this study, it could mean that employees in dialogue with colleagues create common frameworks of interpretation, which then influences why and for which purposes they use the intranet.

4.1.3 Meaning through narratives

Communication is a central component and seen as an on going process of making sense of the circumstances in which people collectively find themselves and of the events that affect them (Weick et al., 2005). Narratives can therefore also serve as interpretative frameworks for individuals' sensemaking processes (Weick, 1995). Indeed, many researchers equate narrative with sensemaking, describing narrative as the "preferred sensemaking currency" (Boje, 1991, p.106, cited in Maitlis & Christiansson, 2014, p.81). Examining sensemaking through a narrative lens does not only reveal who is involved and what they are doing but also the meanings that they are constructing in the process. An example is that by explaining for employees how the organization is using ESM, narratives can guide how employees should use ESM. Sensemaking as a narrative is an important part of the sensemaking process in this thesis, as Business Sweden have informed in what ways ESM can be used. Czarniawska (1997) and Weick

(1995) emphasizes that narratives serves both as an interpretative framework and a tool for how employees can take actions.

4.2 Sensemaking and identity

Sensemaking, i.e. the process by which people give meaning to experience (Weick, 1995) is closely associated with identity. Weick (1995) states that both interpretation and perception is made in relation to or on the basis of a personal identity, which makes identity central to how meaning is constructed. Organizational identity has been studied in different strands of research in the organizational identity literature. From a social constructionist perspective, organizational identity resides in collectively shared beliefs and understanding about central and relatively permanent features of an organization (Gioia, Schultz & Corley, 2002). Identity believed to be continually under construction i.e. more organically evolved and less seen as under the thumb of executive decision-making. Organizational identity is, according to Heide et al. (2005), essential to align all the employees in an organization. Ravasi and Schultz (2006) stress that it is the employees through the sensemaking processes that constructs the organizational identity and its characteristics with external stakeholders. The employees are likely to play a role as well when organizational identity is understood as something that is organically evolved and less seen as under the thumb of executive decision making in the same manner as external stakeholders constantly influence organizational identity (Scott & Lane, 2010).

In global organizations such as the case organization of this study i.e. Business Sweden, activities and employees are spread over vast geographical areas and different time zones. The shared meanings that construct the organizational identity are established communicatively through social interaction, which can be both be on an interpersonal level or virtual level in terms of communication through e-mail or intranet. The perception of organizational identity being socially constructed by employees makes it relevant to adopt a sensemaking perspective (Weick, 1995). Sensemaking processes are triggered when the organization changes or when employees "simply become uncertain about what the organizational identity is" according to Maitlis and Christiansson (2014, p.75). In this way, sensemaking processes are also triggered when employees are experiencing uncertainty in everyday work processes and situations. Weick (1995) argue that sensemaking then becomes a social process whereby employees communicate with each other to arrive at a shared understanding of what is going on within the organization.

4.2.1 Organizational identification

Employees' need to make sense of organizational identity is rooted in the need to belong to and to identify with the organization (Cheney, Christensen & Dailey, 2014). The on going construction of organizational identity creates patterns of shared meaning and collective sensemaking that provides employees with a sense of belonging (Cornelissen, 2012). Organizational identification occurs when employees perceive oneness to the organization and feel that they belong to it (He & Brown, 2013). Organizational identification has, according to previous research, potential capacity to generate a range of positive outcomes such as employee performance, organizational citizenship behaviour and employee satisfaction just to mention a few (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Riketta, 2005, He & Brown; 2013). Matschke et al. (2014) explains that if an individual is identified with the group, he or she feels as a member of the group and thus regards successes as "ours" that is belonged to the group. Organizations tend to exchange more information when knowledge is considered as an organizational good (Mclure, Wasko & Faraj, 2000). In support of this finding, research found that identification with a group does increase individual contributions (Tyler and Blader, 2003). This means that employees who identify strongly with their organization are more likely to engage in conversations to improve the perception of organizational identity.

Research in the social constructionist tradition examines how members develop collective understandings of their organization (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006), which is an interesting aspect for my study as I am interested in how employees' create meaning through the intranet. In this study then, organizational identity is merely how employees define and view their organization. By viewing organizations as processes of sensemaking and systems of shared meanings, identity can be understood as an outcome of the sensemaking activities organization and its members are involved in.

4.3 Sensemaking and culture

The social constructionist understanding of culture is consistent with the idea that organizational members obtain meaning from the set of beliefs shared by the members who constitute it (Alvesson, 1995). Organizations consist of its collection of socially transmitted beliefs, understandings, norms, and cultural artefacts that act as generative devices in the construction of an organization (Yanow, 2000). Weick (1995) understood that the invoking of a sense of culture is about interpretation and expression of certain

senses of the organization. Culture is therefore a sensemaking device where organizational members enact reality through reflection and discussions about central features in their organization. Organizational identity and organizational culture have similar meaning since they both act on common values in the organizations, which explain why they partially overlap each other (Heide et al., 2005; von Platen, 2006). However, organizational cultures are more extensive, tacit and conceptual than organizational identities. Organizational identity is formed within the organizational culture (Hatch & Schultz, 1997, cited in von Platen, 2006, p. 53).

Fichter (1999) suggests that intranets are inherently about organizational culture and employees who take part and interact with the available systems. According to Rupper and Harrington (2000) the success of the intranet depends strongly on employees using them, not merely on the existence of an intranet. Culture has been identified both as a major catalyst and a major hindrance, to knowledge creation and sharing according to Alavi and Leidner (2001). Moreover, De Long and Fahey (2000) did also found that culture is a major barrier to creating knowledge because it shapes assumptions about which knowledge is important and creates a context for social interaction. Employees are more willing to share and collaborate with each other when the organizational culture is open. Organizations need to undertake some actions before promoting online networking tools such like building an open-organizational culture (Huy and Shiplov, 2012). Open culture is often associated with start-ups, in which everyone feels comfortable raising their voice and sharing opinions (Korzynski, 2014). Moreover, scholars argue that an organizational culture of openness is fundamental to a social workplace (Korzynski, 2014). This way, open culture can also facilitate employee engagement according to Thomas, Zolin and Hartman (2009).

Another aspect that is mentioned in the intranet literature in relation to culture is the importance of trust. Trust has especially received a great deal of attention within the knowledge management field, as it is a culture of trust that enables learning to take place at all. Employees must be willing to trust others to share according to Ruppel and Harrington (2001). Without established trust, employees will feel reluctant to share information or valuable stories with others according to Kaps (2011). Chou (1998) also contributes to the importance of trust, as he states that there may be less need for privacy guidelines and monitoring where a trusting culture may already exist. Trust is therefore needed to support social relations and organizational citizenship behaviour (Tzafrir, 2005). Given this, establishing trust can be complicated in global organizations where it

is not feasible to meet in person with each colleague. Employees communicating online at work have therefore limited possibilities to establish relationships because they often work in different countries and time zones such as Business Sweden. Yet, Jarvenpaa and Leidner (1999) states that an initial trust called swift trust can be also developed even among employees who are working online.

4.4 Reflections

This chapter has provided an overview of the theories that will be used in the analysis. Given that the purpose of this study is to understand how employees make sense of a global organization through the intranet, I argue that theories on sensemaking and culture will be of value for the analysis. Weick (1995) argues that sensemaking occurs through narratives, social actions and in connection to others, which will shape the arrangement of the analysis and understanding of how and in what ways the employees make sense of the organization. Culture has also been found to be an important aspect to consider when studying the intranet as it creates the context for social interaction. This is of particular interest for this study because Business Sweden is influenced by the Swedish heritage but also by the local culture where the organization operates in. In addition, trust within the organization is of particular interest in this study because most of the employees have not met in person, which may have implications for weather they trust each other when it comes to sharing on the intranet.

The following chapter will present the research design and how I through the chosen methods gained a deeper knowledge about how employees make sense of the global organization through the intranet.

5. Methodology and research design

The purpose of this study is to understand how employees make sense of the organization through the intranet. A qualitative approach was undertaken to understand the particular phenomenon with the integration of a social constructionist point of view to support the case study while uncovering the complexity of employees' usage of the intranet. This chapter will describe the epistemological standpoint and present the research strategy of how I practically proceeded with the interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. This chapter will firstly describe the epistemological perspective that shapes this thesis, before describing the selection of case, the method of choice, the selection of interviewees, the interview proceedings and analytical process as well as the methodological implications and ethical reflections raised during the course of the study.

5.1 Social constructionism

This study was based on a social constructionist point-of-view of the reality. From a social constructionist perspective, organizations are seen as a potentially fluid field of meaning making (Gergen, 2009, cited in Burr, 2015). Alvesson and Sköldberg (2008) argues that one must be aware that the empirical material can be studied and interpreted from different perspective and that one have the freedom to choose their own perspective, as long as you do not believe it is the correct perspective. In line Alvesson and Sköldberg (2008) the choice of theory was given for this particular phenomenon because it requires a perspective that seeks to understand the complexity of human interaction on intranet while examining the underlying factors involved such as the construction of sensemaking within Business Sweden and how the employees perceive the intranet. My intention has therefore not been to locate one objective truth, but examining Business Sweden's social world and how its social actors i.e. the employees construct meaning and make sense of the organization through the intranet. It is the employees' experiences and how they make sense of the organization through the intranet that I

wish to capture. Reality and knowledge is not something naturally given and insists that we take a critical stance toward our taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world (Burr, 1995). Thus, reality and knowledge is constructed in interactions with others. This entails that studying how employees understands the intranet and which values it fulfills in their work but also in what ways they are using it, as a socially constructed phenomenon. More specific, the perspective entails that I as a researcher view how the employees use the intranet as well as how they use and construct meaning through it, as a socially constructed phenomenon. I am aware that social structures appear differently depending on the contexts (Berger & Luckmann, 1996; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008). For that reason, I have chosen to study how the employees experience the organizational culture in order to see it from an organizational context. The phenomenon of intranet should thus be seen as a social construction that has developed and shaped over time by organizational members' interactions. I want to highlight that intranet in itself consists, just as public social media does, of several features such as creating and sharing posts, making personal profiles and active participation, which itself is viewed as a social construct.

Adopting a social constructivist perspective had some implications on my interview proceeding as I had to be aware that interacting with the interviewees could change my role as a researcher to a co-creator of the discoveries that was made. In order to avoid this, I was critical and treated the interviewees and the empirical material with respects and tried to minimize and confront prejudice and bias. I have done so by asking open questions and making sure that the employees understand that there are no right or wrong answers.

5.2 Selection of case organization

I have chosen to do a case study because I argue that it will give a deeper understanding and knowledge of the studied phenomenon; understand employees' sensemaking (Patton, 2002). Heide and Simonsson (2014) describe case studies as a research strategy, where the researcher strives to reach as detailed knowledge on a limited number of cases as possible. Flyvbjerg (2006) argues that case studies is vital in learning and insights, which is appropriate for this study because the employees' insights of how they make sense of the organization through the intranet is central in this study.

I have chosen a purposeful sampling (Suri, 2011) with criterions in order get an in-depth understanding of how the employees give meaning to the organization The criteria are (1) allowing direct access to the intranet, (2) having an established intranet, (3) using the intranet for communication purposes and (4) being a global organization with employees working in different countries. The selection of the case organization was determined by the requirement to select an organization that makes extensive use of intranet as a communication platform to support internal communication in order to be able to study how employees understand the intranet. Business Sweden does also have other characteristics, which makes them a relevant as a case organization. Business Sweden is a relevant organization because their teams are internationally distributed groups of people. This means that they rarely meet in person, except the ones who works at the same offices such as in Italy or Japan among others. But in general, the remote employees have little or no direct contact with the management team or their colleagues that work at the headquarters in Stockholm. They play an increasingly important role in accomplishing Business Sweden's mission to promote trade and investments where the majority of the communication with the other offices and the headquarters takes place on technology platforms, where the intranet is included. In addition, their intranet is one of the main communication platforms, from which one can learn a great deal about how the intranet is used in global organizations. Assuring that Business Sweden are using intranet is of high importance because it means that the employees are already familiar with the intranet, which allowed me as a researcher to conduct my study and get the knowledge I was seeking for. I argue that Business Sweden consist of information-rich cases, which will address the purpose of this study since I seek rich information about how employees' make sense through the intranet (Flyvbjerg, 2006). I argue that this case study is suitable because it is particularly well suited to the research field of strategic communication, focusing on employees, which previous research and theory seems inadequate. I argue that this study will provide opportunities for learning about how employees construct meaning through the intranet than studies that are only based on rules (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

5.3 Qualitative interviews

To obtain an understanding of the case on how employees create meaning through the intranet, I conducted qualitative interviews. In line with the sensemaking approach, I

consider qualitative interviews as a context in which researchers and interviewees jointly construct new knowledge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As the purpose of this this study is to understand how the employees' make sense of the organization through the intranet, I conducted semi-structured interviews because the employees' insights are central in this study, which means that asking open-ended question gave the interviewees the opportunity to describe how they made sense of the intranet based on their experiences which produced the knowledge I was seeking for (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Additionally, it also provided the opportunity to identity new ways of understanding the topic at hand and lead me as a research closer to the aim of obtaining descriptions of the interviewees' world and interpret their experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014).

5.3.1 Selection and criteria of interviewees

In order to address the research purpose, I applied the purposive sampling where the participants were selected on the basis of their anticipated richness and relevance of information in relation to the study's research questions (Patton, 2002; Gentles, Charles, Ploeg & McKibbon, 2015). Since the research questions are strongly anchored in the essential role of the employees, the main criteria for participating in the study was that the interviewees had to be employees without managerial responsibilities. In total 15 interviews were conducted where the interviewees were selected based on these criteria; *employees without managerial responsibilities* as mentioned before, *employees' work location* and *length of employment*. Given the limited time to conduct this study, I consciously limited the study by only including employees from two continents: Europe and Asia within Business Sweden. I argue that this decision did not inhibit my empirical material because Business Sweden has the majority of their offices in these continents. In total, seven employees from Asia and eight employees from Europe were included. Their length of employment varied from eight months up to 11 years, but most of them, in average, have worked at Business Sweden between two and five years.

Most of the previous research about ESM and intranet has mainly studied how organizations can benefit from the usage of intranet. I aim to cover this gap by putting the employees' perspective in the limelight. I argue that considering the employees' working locations, Asia and Europe, in this study is of importance since they might have different views on the intranet. The employees that are located in Europe are closer to the headquarters both in distance and in time, which I believe may be of importance

for the employees' sensemaking of the organization. For instance, they can easily stay in touch with the headquarters by telephone or e-mail in real time without any adaptions to the different time zones. They may not be as dependent on the intranet to inform them about what is happening within the organization as those employees located in Asia might be. Lastly, the length of employment is an important criterion because I believe that employees who have worked for a longer time and employees who have recently begun their employment may have different perspectives on how they make sense of the organization and use the intranet. Therefore, I have interviewed employees with varying time of employment.

Marcus gave me a list with six employees that I could start to interview. These employees had different positions such as *project leaders*, *senior project leaders*, *consultants* and *associates* and their length of employment did also vary. I searched for their names on LinkedIn to make sure that they met the selection criteria. Six interviewees were not enough, therefore I asked two interviewees for recommendations of colleagues that might be interested in participating in this study in order to get the knowledge I was aiming for. Snowball sampling is beneficial to studies when one seek about details of other 'information-rich cases' in the field and need to track down interviewees who could share useful insights to the research purpose (Patton, 2002). I complemented the list with a few employees that I searched for on Business Sweden's website and made a last control by visiting their LinkedIn to make sure that they meet the research's criteria. In addition, I would like to mention that only one interviewee was selected based on the snowball sample.

It is also worth to mention that the interviewees have different position within the organization but their main task regardless of the role is to represent Sweden and contribute to the Swedish export by helping Swedish companies in their internationalization processes but also to attract foreign direct investment to Sweden. I will therefore refer to them as employees and not to their role as I am interested in how they make sense of the organization.

5.3.2 Access to Business Sweden

I had weekly contact with Marcus in order to get access to the interviewees. He helped me with finding relevant interviewees to include in the study that met the selection criteria. Marcus did also inform me about the organization both before and under the re-

search process, which was helpful since it provided me with an understanding about the organization that made it easier to conduct the interviews. The benefit of having an established contact is, as Heide and Simonsson (2014) describes, the possibility to get in contact with the employees. Having Marcus as my contact person was efficient as it facilitated the process to invite the employees to the interviews, which saved a lot of time. One should be aware of the risk that a contact person can influence the selection of interviewees in order to avoid critical employees' to the study. I believe nevertheless that I interviewed different types of employees within the organization since I applied the snowball samples and suggested selected employees as interviewees based on my own research from LinkedIn and their website. Additionally, Marcus did not question any of my selections, which makes me confident that there was no hidden agenda to frame the image of Business Sweden. On the other hand, I am aware that there is a risk that the employees might felt an obligation to participate since they received the information internally from Marcus. However, some of the selected interviewees could not participate since they were busy with current projects. The impression overall was that the employees were satisfied to participate and contribute with their insights since they expressed their excitement during the interviews. Therefore, I believe that the employees felt that they had the flexibility to choose whether they wanted to participate or not. I think that it would be difficult to schedule the interviews without Marcus' introduction.

The access to Business Sweden and its employees enabled me to explore employees' perspective on the intranet in-depth and in its context, i.e. as a context specific case, the results might shed light on similar issues found in other organizations. This is also known as the claim of generalization or as Flyvbjerg (2006) would describe it: "*Through the power of the good example*". In addition to this, the findings could very well prove to be an *exemplifying case* (Flyvbjerg, 2006) as there is limited research from the employee perspective. Consequently, the findings in this study can be related to scenarios in other organizations, which as a result could to some extent make generalization feasible.

5.4 Interview proceedings

Before conducting the interviews, I constructed the interview guide (see interview guide appendix) based on themes to facilitate the gathering of data-rich descriptions in order

to understand how employees make sense of the organization through the intranet (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). Based on the literature review and previous research, I decided to focus on questions regarding *organizational culture*, *identity*, *their usage of the intranet* and *the intranet's role*. Initially I asked questions about the employees' role and how they experienced the organization. Then I asked questions about how they perceived the values and culture of Business Sweden at their workplace and work tasks. Further, I touched upon the intranet as a tool and asked them questions about how they used the intranet, the expectations on the intranet and how it contributed to their understanding of the organization in order to get an insights about *what's in it for them* to use it and *how they make sense of the organization through the intranet*. The interviews were explorative and semi- structured (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014), meaning that I sought an open approach where the aim was to make the interviewees comfortable in sharing their experiences. I was aware that conducting interviews may not result as expected, and that I might had to go back and forth between my questions in order to make sure that the information I was aiming for was covered and to follow up their answers (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). Therefore, I tried to keep the interview-guide as flexible as possible. This resulted in new insights that I did not thought of when I structured the interview guide that resulted to be valuable for my analysis.

The interviewees received e-mails from Marcus to inform them about the research's topics and that I would contact each and one of them to schedule the interviews. I believe that by doing so increased their willingness to participate since they were informed from Marcus internally, which created certain trustworthiness. I conducted 15 interviews in total over a period of three weeks. In total 15 interviews were conducted and they lasted between 45 and 65 minutes. All the interviews were conducted via Skype due to the geographical distance. Skype offered the obvious benefits of convenience (Seitz, 2015), which made it possible to interview all of them despite the distance and different time zones. Business Sweden is a global organization where the employees are both accustomed to and comfortable with interacting through technological mediated communication devices such as Skype. As such, I argue that conducting the interviews via Skype did not inhibit my empirical data. The idea of conducting the interviews via Skype made me reflect over the disadvantages such as loss of intimacy compared to traditional in-person interviews or inability to read body language (Seitz, 2016). The skype calls disconnected unexpectedly two or three times due to poor Internet connection, which could have a negative impact on maintaining good interview

flow. However, I did not notice any of this as it seemed to make them more relaxed, as they did not have me in front of them in person looking at them while sharing their experiences. There is always an asymmetry in power between the interviewer and interviewees when conducting interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014); but it seemed like the use of Skype helped to balance it out. A significant different between traditional in-person and Skype interviews is that interviews over the internet limit the physical presence, and to see each other entirely (Seitz, 2015). On the contrary the limited physical presence was not decisive for my study as I am interested in the employees' practical usage of the intranet. Due to technical problems on Skype, I only managed to video record 13 of the 15 interviews. The other two interviews were held through Facetime, a video tool on iPhone that is not compatible with Ecamm. All in all, I argue that conducting the interview through Skype did not cause any difficulties in obtaining in-depth responses to my questions.

Lastly but most importantly, there are certain ethical aspects that need to be addressed. The interview situations can entail consequences for the employees, for example, that the person experiences stress or that the interview changes the interviewees' view of the organization (Patton, 2002; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). The execution of this study conformed to the good practice guidelines such as abidance and transparency. This entailed that the interviewees were fully informed about the nature of this study; the purpose of the study, their contribution value of their participation and an overview how the study will be used after completion as well as who will read it. I have therefore through responsiveness and clarity strived for making the interviewees comfortable in participating in this study by informing them verbally that their participation is anonymous. For that reason, I will not include their name when presenting quotes in this study. The interviewees agreed to record the interviews as I told them that the records would only be used to remember what has been said and then to transcribe it. All the interviewees agreed to this. I also informed them about confidentiality, that is to say that only I would listen to the recordings and not share them with others parties. The videos were also deleted after the transcripts were made. Lastly, I explained that I was interested in hearing their experiences and that there were no correct or incorrect answers to these questions because the aim is to hear the interviewees' experiences based on themselves and not what they think is the correct answer. The transcripts were sent to the interviewees to make sure that their answers were correctly transcribed.

5.5 Analytical process

I have had an abductive approach when reading and coding the empirical material from the interviews. This entails that preliminary categories were constructed on the basis of the research questions, purpose of the study and theory (Eksell & Thelander, 2014). I have used Spiggle's (1994) analytical framework and Halkier's (2011) methodological strategy *ideal typologizing* for analytical generalization of the empirical data.

I conducted the interviews during the period of mid March to the beginning of April. Short after, I transcribed the interviews at the first available moment to ease the analytical process (Eksell & Thelander, 2014). This provided me with the possibility to set up structure of all the collected material by allowing me to highlight the different units of text, which Spiggle (1994) describes as *categorization*. The coding-categories emerged as an abductive process, which is a combination of deductive and inductive process (Eksell & Thelander, 2014). This gave me the possibility to be both open and flexible as new categories apart from the preliminary ones emerged from the empirical material. The categorization facilitated it to discover patterns, similarities and differences within the empirical data from which I created three themes. Spiggle (1994) describes these as *abstraction* and *comparison*. During the phase of *comparison*, I read the transcript and quotes again in order to develop the themes. By going back and forth i.e. focusing on single interviews and then reading across the interview, I found larger intelligible topics in the material that helped me to describe the themes and its characteristics. This is referred as dimensionalization (Spiggle, 1994). These are also the foundation for the themes in the analysis that I will go into details in the next paragraphs. After reviewing all the empirical material, I realized that some parts of the empirical material are not relevant for the purpose of this study. Therefore, it has been excluded from the analysis, which Spiggle (1994) describes as refusation.

As this study is based on both a sensemaking and social constructionist-perspective, this will also guide how the empirical data and the findings are presented in the analysis (Eksell & Thelander, 2014). Since I am aiming for generating knowledge about how employees use the intranet and how they construct meaning from it, I was inspired by Nylén (2005) and decided to apply what he describes as coercive case-description on the presentation of the analysis. I believe that this approach is consistent with the sensemaking perspective as I argued before that the narrative is central for the sensemaking process. Nylén (2005) describes that the ambition of coercive case-

descriptions of presenting empirical material is to introduce knowledge about the studied world thorough descriptions of the empirical material and through the use of quotes from the interviewees. In order to produce analytical generalization, I structured my analysis based on an ideal typology, which was defined by Max Weber as an one-sidedly focus synthesis of discrete empirical phenomena unto a unified abstract analytical construct (Halkier, 2011). I condensed the coded data patterns into a limited number of descriptions that underlined particular characteristic. These descriptions were labeled in three different types: *the employees' usage of the intranet, the role of the intranet and the impact on Sweden*. I began to trace through the material how some of these categories were systematically related. Through the tracing, emerging patterns of using the intranet and employees' sensemaking were organized according to differences and similarities. Further, I reduced the emerging patterns of differences and similarities by conceptualization (Halkier, 2011) at an applied level what these patterns represented. This step involved a lot of reflection and discussion whether some patterns in the data material belonged to a certain emerging type or if they were sufficiently like to count as being similar or sufficiently dissimilar to count as being different.

5.5.1 Translations

All the interviews were held in Swedish. As such, all the transcriptions are in Swedish because I did not wanted to lose the original meaning of the answer given by the interviewees. This means that the quotes in the analysis were translated from Swedish to English. I acknowledge the issues that arise when translating interviews. Translating interview quotes can be problematic, since definitions can have altered meanings and nuances in the other languages. I am aware that there is a risk of misunderstanding the original message when translating the interviews from Swedish to English. Cassinger (2014) argues that the translator's own values and worldviews that will help shape the translations and this means that one cannot be disconnected from it. The interview quote is always a product of translation between the interviewees and interviewer, which happens under as well as after the interview according to Cassinger (2014). I have tried to minimize the risk of changing the original message during the interviews by asking follow up questions to verify that their answer were interpreted correctly and also after the interviews by sending both the original and translated quote to the interviewees. None-

theless, the translations need to be acknowledged in regards to the notion of transparency in this study.

This chapter has presented the chosen methods and my research strategy that is the foundation for how I collected the empirical material in order to be able to conduct the analysis in the following chapter.

6. Analysis

What follows is an analysis of the employees' usage of the intranet as a narrative process in which stories are used to construct meaning. The first theme explains how the intranet is used with the focus on how employees' experience and understand the intranet based on their usage. One of the key findings was that the intranet was used for more purposes than finding information. These purposes are linked to the second theme *the intranet's role*, which indicates its significant role in bringing Business Sweden, its employees and the 55 offices together. The employees create meaning by sharing and co-creating knowledge while simultaneously engaging with the content to show appreciation for their colleagues' projects on the intranet. The third theme *we represent Sweden abroad* illustrates how employees give meaning to the organization and Sweden through actions such as their work tasks and representing Sweden as a country. It is through these narratives in which the employees make sense of and construct their identities within the organization.

6.1 How is the intranet used?

When asked why the employees used the intranet it became evident that the purposes were contextually bound. The findings showed that their usage was related to what they were seeking for. The employees stated that they used the intranet in three different ways: *to grasp the organization, find inspiration* and *to streamline their work.*

6.1.1 To grasp the organization

> It is easy for one to feel that we are 55 different organizations when we actually are 55 offices in one organization. Working with your own projects that you are driving at the moment makes it easy to

perceive the office as one organization, which looses the feeling of belongingness that we are one jointly organization. I see the intranet as a really good platform [...] we can take note of what each of office is up to, which projects have been done, new ways of working or if a goal has been achieved or if anyone has succeeded to solve a difficult project [...] It is a way to stay in contact with the other offices like you do on Facebook.

As the quote above displays, the intranet works as a central information hub where they can find information about Business Sweden's latest news and projects, while simultaneously providing them with the opportunity to explore new ways of working. The employees expressed positive remarks towards the intranet because it allowed them to keep track of their colleagues' work no matter geographical distances or time differences. Furthermore, the employees indicated major appreciation towards the intranet because it allowed them to get an overview of their colleagues' previous work with specific client case studies and their previous involvement with Business Sweden. As such, it helped them to offer relevant services to their current clients based on the previous case studies that operated within the same domain. For instance, one employee stated: "*If I know that it has been a project about airplanes in Indonesia, then I can inform clients that are interested in airplanes about this project*".

The employees make sense of the organization by reading, receiving, co-creating and sharing information on the intranet, which provides the entire organization and its involved organizational members with continuous up-to-date information related to their work. This practice assists the employees to keep track and better understand their line of work specific to their clients and industries they operate in. I perceive this as the basis for the employees' sensemaking process of the organization. The employees expressed that the intranet creates a sense of belonging to the organization, which is what Jackson et al. (2008) define as informational and social benefits. The employees argued that the intranet increased the sense of belonging for the employees' and their association towards Business Sweden that shortens the distance to the headquarters and other offices. Heide et al. (2012) argues that sensemaking in a workplace is created in contact with the closest co-workers, but in this study, we can see that closest is not restricted by distance since the employees make sense of the organization across boarders through the intranet. The sensemaking is a social process (Weick, 1995), in which the employ-

ees interpret their environment through interactions with their colleagues on the intranet. I interpret that the employees make sense of the organization through the knowledge about their colleagues' projects, which on the other hand give rise to a perception of closeness to Business Sweden, which generates engagement to being involved in the organization by paying attention to the information mediated on the intranet. According to these findings, I argue that the intranet plays a crucial role for the employees' sense-making process since it provides them with a platform where all the employees can connect virtually at the same time as they construct meaning while feeling a sense of belonging to the organization. The study conducted by Matschke et al., (2014) showed that individuals regard success as something shared within the group, which could explain why the employees see a value in sharing information about clients with each other. This notion helps to understand the second purpose of using the intranet: *to find inspiration.*

6.1.2 Inspiration for better performance

> I believe that information on the intranet could provide inspiration to other offices and market since many markets are similar and work with the same industries. It can also create a positive image of Business Sweden internally by sharing interesting projects and success stories, which create a positive feeling towards being part of an organization that can, achieve those results and impact for our clients.

The intranet is used to find inspiration and new ideas of how to execute a project. It is common that the offices publish *success stories* on the intranet, which literally is about a project that has resulted in great achievements for represented clients within their respective field. These success stories are a driving indicator for engagement as it makes the employees excited and proud of their colleagues' results. The employees also stated that the intranet had a crucial role in highlighting their work because it would otherwise be impossible to know about the organizations' previous and current projects due to the fact that most of them have no or little direct contact with each other. They did also mention that reading the success stories and asking their colleagues about how they achieved these results inspired and motivated them to overall perform better. However,

some of the employees were critical against these success stories. One interviewee explained:

> I am aware of the reasons for why they are published. They would not be published on the intranet if an employee did a bad project. You have to take it for what it is, and of course it does give inspiration. But everything gives you new ideas, whether it is of high or low quality.

When asked what they thought of these success stories it became clear that some of them were critical towards them since they perceived the success stories as an activity for internal marketing. They argued that it is common that the success stories are framed with achieved results only in contrast in presenting; what and how these projects achieved the particular goal presented. The employees argued that the value of these success stories is to learn from them, which is the reason for why they are curious about the challenges their colleagues faced along the road. This may have implications on the organizational learning and development since these success stories excludes the challenges faced throughout these projects by faming them with end-goal oriented results, which ultimately does not provide the entire image of what and how things were done for employees to gain a more realistic perspective on the projects and operations as a whole.

The sensemaking process takes place on two levels. Firstly, the sensemaking occurs on a group level through social interactions and communication (Weick et al., 2005), which means that the employees through enactment make sense of their colleagues' input by taking further actions such as engaging in dialogues to exchange knowledge that provides them with inspiration and new ideas. Secondly, on a personal level where the employees create meaning when reading what their colleagues have achieved. To conclude, the employees have a positive attitude towards these stories as they create meaning through them, which assists them to perform better and execute their projects more efficiently for their clients.

Furthermore, and as mentioned in the beginning of this section, it is important to understand the employees' thoughts of the success stories, as they are perceived with lacking further in-depth information about challenges faced throughout the projects. For instance, the employees' find the stories inspirational, but on the other hand they perceive these stories as an internal marketing activity that is meant to benefit the specific

office's visibility within the organization. I interpret that the lack of full transparency in the represented projects creates a conflict for the employees' sensemaking because how can they give meaning to something when they do not understand it? The empirical material indicated that their positive attitude towards the stories results in curiosity where the employees engage in dialogue to get new insights that will help them to perform better while their critical attitude resulted in questioning how their colleagues achieved the result. The limited information about how the employees achieved the results affects how the employees make sense of the organization since the information can only be given a purposeful meaning when the employees can relate to it. If the employees feel that they do not understand how the colleagues achieved particular results, how can they then learn from it and take actions on it?

What can be learn from these findings is that being transparent about the faced obstacles and challenges might be of greater value for the employees' organizational learning, as they are interested in knowing how the teams' achieved the results. Their critical mindset can be beneficial for Business Sweden, especially from a learning perspective since it encourages them to be fully transparent about these details when sharing their projects. The fact that the employees are critical towards the success stories can have consequences on the organizational learning since the stories might lose their whole purpose, which is to spark new ideas, inspire to innovate, and challenge the status quo to further develop Business Sweden's work. The dynamic of this interaction are further specified in what Weick et al. (2005) referred to as *the reciprocal relationship between ecological change and enactment*" (p.414). I argue that their scepticism against the details in the success stories can also have consequences on the trust of Business Sweden, which affects how they react on what the organization communicates. Organizational members do not only react on the information, but also enact actively on the organization's social reality. This means that employees will already have interpretations that they will act upon in the future. There is a risk that the employees might act on their interpretation that the success stories are not fully transparent, which affects how they give meaning to the organization. This could be problematic for the organization as a whole since the intranet plays a crucial role for how the employees' sensemaking process occurs. It can also have implications on their own contribution to the intranet, meaning that this could affect their contribution of the success stories as might not want to be perceived as internal marketers.

6.1.3 To be efficient

> I use the intranet mostly for accessing our tools. A lot of information is shared in these tools to get inspired and to learn about other markets. [...] I am working with a delegation right now and I know that there has been another office that has worked with a similar delegation. I know this because it showed up on our intranet, which I took action on by calling them to get the information [...] if it were not for the intranet, I had not known about it.

The employees explained that they used the intranet to access tools such as the *best of practice, Customer relationship management (CRM), and Business monitor* to execute their job efficiently. One of the employees explained that due to the intranet the employees abroad could work more independently without waiting for inputs from their colleagues in Sweden.

> I can access the information on Business monitor directly without going through my colleagues in Sweden […] Sweden is seven hours behind us, which means that I might get an answer in the middle of the night each time I would request information during the day from them. In these situations, I think that the intranet is perfect.

The intranet is their starting page from where they can access the various tools that are necessary for executing their tasks. When asking the employees about what it is important for them it was clear that the employees require the information to be relevant and efficient to access. The employees described that there are tools and functions that needs to be improved such as the search engine. Some employees expressed challenging concerns in the search of information related to their domain. When asked how it affects their usage of the intranet, they stated that the irrelevant information and information overload have in some situations discouraged them from using it due to its inefficiency in regard to their particular domain. They explained that they instead have gone through other channels to find relevant information. The employees did also express that they do not regard all the communicated information on the intranet as relevant to their particular practice. Information concerning Business Sweden such as organizational changes, information about particular markets, industries and clients is crucial for them to know

to move forward pragmatically with their client projects. Some employees highlighted that much of the information was related to headquarter operations, which is irrelevant for employees abroad since it has little to no impact on their current activities. They also expressed that they would appreciate a variety of information from the offices around the world such as, *"There is a good average on information related to Stockholm and the employees who works there. I would like to see more about what the other offices have in their pipelines"*.

Weick (1995) explains that sensemaking occurs in specific contexts that are relevant to what people notice and how they interpret what happens. Weick (1995) explains that these various contexts do also consist of norms and expectations, which have an importance for individuals' interpretations. As Mishra et al. (2014) agues, the intranet must be perceived as relevant in order to be used by the employees. I claim that the intranet's information overload and inefficiency can have challenging effects on their day-to-day usage of the intranet. As a consequence it becomes more convenient to use other resources when information is needed, that could rather be distributed on the intranet to centralize the information. This is something I highly emphasise that one should look further into because it is a problematic factor since it can endanger the intranet's primary role as being a central information hub for the employees to seek information in order to be more efficient and updated about what is happening within Business Sweden. As Weick (1995) states, meaning is creating within the employees' frames of reference, meaning that organizational members constantly receive cues from their surroundings that either do or do not fit with that frame. This means that the employees give the intranet a meaning only when the content fit the frame, which helps them to streamline their work by providing them with relevant information.

6.2 The role of the intranet

The intranet plays an important role in bringing us together.

The quote above summarise and answers the question of *what role does the intranet have*. Although the employees answered this question differently, it became clear that the role of the intranet is to bring the organization together. The employees described

the roles of the intranet in relation to the functions it provided: *uniting Business Sweden* and *knowledge sharing*. I will in the next sections present the roles of the intranet.

6.2.1 Uniting the 55 offices into one organization

> We belong to Sweden in a context and it is therefore important to feel a belonging and a connection to the organization as a whole. This means everything from being familiar with our overall strategy, values and how we as an office contribute to the big picture and I think that the intranet is an important tool to create the connection for us.

The employees explained that one important role of the intranet is to unite them as one organization by providing overviews of which direction Business Sweden is heading to. This included the organizational strategy, goals and achievements. Those employees who have been employed for a longer time compared the current intranet with the one they had a couple of years ago, and stated there is much more activity on the current intranet in terms of updates, comments, likes and information from the management team. The employees did also mention that the leadership style had developed on the intranet. They explained that their CEO posts a video each month where she presents the financial numbers, the pipelines and their current strategy to achieve the goals. One of the employees said:

> The CEO's videos are a communication channel that feels more personal. The information is not communicated in a written form with what is expected from us and this makes it more personal. I think the video is a good method for building a team.

The employees explained that besides providing them with an understanding of the current strategy and the direction they are heading towards, the CEO's videos did also create a team spirit that made everyone feel involved. The employees argued that the intranet shortens the hierarchy since the information reaches them faster than before. The intranet facilitates for them to feel a connection with the CEO as she feels closer to the offices when communication through the webcasts, which is appreciated since the em-

ployees abroad usually have little or no direct contact with the CEO or any colleague at the headquarters. On the other hand, many employees felt that the time limited their engagement on the intranet as they had important work to do as well, which can also be a reason for why some employees do not watch all videos. The employees said that the videos were relevant when the CEO addressed information about specific projects, success stories or information about events or happenings that is important for everyone to be aware of. There is a huge interest in finding out what the other offices are up to as the majority of the employees stated that they would like to hear more about what each office or region currently are working on and with which clients.

Similar to the challenges expressed regarding the success stories, I noticed that the employees are ambivalent when it comes to their engagement on the intranet. On one hand, the employees regard the intranet as a platform that creates a belonging and unite the organization. They show their engagement by reading, liking or commenting the shared information. According to Weick's (1995) reasoning, sensemaking begins with a belief or a faith in something. The employees give meaning to the organization because they believe what the CEO is communicating. In line with Young and Hinesly's (2014) study, the CEO's webcast allow a two-way communication between the CEO and employees that is more meaningful. As a result, the webcasts improves the team spirit as it gives the employees a feeling of inclusivity and engagement. The employees' engagement on the intranet is a result of their strong identification with Business Sweden as previous studies showed that employees that are identified with an organization are more likely to engage in conversation (Tyler & Blader, 2003). On the other hand, they are uncertain on how much time they should be engaged on the intranet due to the time limitation but also because they do not want to be perceived as someone who puts less effort into their line of work by spending more time surfing on the intranet. I argue that this concern is problematic because the intranet is one of the few tools that unite the organization, where this sense of belonging is created. This can have implications for how the employees give meaning to the organization, as a limited use of the intranet would mean that the employees might not get a holistic view of the organization, which ultimately aligns their practice with strategy and vision. I argue that the intranet's content such as the webcasts are significant for the employees' sensemaking, especially in the global organization as they barely get the opportunity to meet the CEO or management team in person due to the geographical distances. Further, the employees explained that the intranet facilitates for them to feel like one organization and being

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aware of what the organizations' activities creates a belonging to Business Sweden. I view this as an example of the sensemaking process where the employees create and maintain a world and produce a shared sense of meaning, which is the belonging to the organization in this particular case. Furthermore, it shows how the employees make sense of the organizational identity. It is through the intranet and its content such as the videos, success stories and information that the employees construct meaning.

6.2.2 Sharing knowledge across boarders

> I use the intranet to share articles about what we are working on within China […] my colleagues from China organized a seminar about opportunities on the Chinese market in Gothenburg. So we published an article about the seminar on the intranet to share with our colleagues and also to inform them about our activities so they can mention it if they run across companies that are interested in China, and what we are doing here. So it is an internal way to inform everyone how we work and it might give other offices ideas on how they can work.

The employees said that the value of the intranet was to exchange knowledge across boarders where everyone was given the possibility to engage in conversations and read information about specific markets and industries. Further, they stressed that the knowledge exchange gave them new insights that was beneficial for their own projects. They argued that they were aware that the Asian working structure or activities for instance might not work in their particular country, but it was worth a try to try their colleagues' way of working in their own projects. They also claimed that having knowledge within the different markets have an importance for their personal career since it is common to move and work across different countries. Exchanging knowledge can be understood as a social interaction (Weick, 1995) where the employees interpret and might arrive at mutually definition of what the organization is all about. Through the process of collectively constructing and sharing stories about their work, they understand that their office is not just one single organization but part of the 55 offices that constitute Business Sweden. An example is when some of the employees stated during the interviews that the intranet is the only tool for them to be aware of what is happen-

ing in Asia or South America, which means that the intranet plays a crucial role for the employees to understand and make sense of Business Sweden.

When asking how often the employees exchange knowledge with their colleagues, it became clear that they do not share knowledge to the same extent as they take part of what their colleagues has shared. This is an interesting finding given the fact that the employees expressed the importance exchanging information through the intranet. Firstly, some of the employees mentioned that they were unsure if their projects were worth to be shared, as it might be irrelevant for the audience. As one employee explained:

> What is a success story? I would say that it is quite subjective. Some projects might also be success stories even if they are not shared. It depends on who writes it […] some employees might be humble and think that there is no need or value to share their projects while others feels that they want to share it immediately.

Secondly, the employees said that another reason for not sharing is because of the time limitation. As one interviewee explained, "*Sometimes it feels like we just want to get it over with when writing articles. It has become a task that we must do*". The employees often felt that they wanted to proceed with other projects when finish a project, which means that writing an article about the project and its learnings have become a task they feel obligated to do. On the other hand, the employees highlighted the importance of sharing their experiences and knowledge within the company. During the interviews, I noticed that the employees felt uncertain about what is relevant to share. One employee explained that:

> Everyone might not be comfortable with writing to 500-600 colleagues directly. You might feel the pressure to be specific in your subject, and because of that you rather write an email to someone you already know instead of asking if anyone globally has prior experience within a specific industry to discuss an incoming assignment. You might feel that you are spamming when writing on the main intranet page since our CEO also uses the intranet to send important information […] A suggestion would be to add another parallel channel where it is allowed to ask questions where you not intervene in more important headquarters related information.

This quote illustrates the difference between how the intranet is supposed to be used according to the employees and how they actually use it since they are unsure about what their colleagues will think of the information they share. They claimed that they do not know what others will perceive as relevant and valuable. When asking them counter-questions on what is relevant and valuable for them, in order to understand what kind of information they appreciate. The employees answered the questions in different ways but it was obvious that all of them regard information concerning the markets and industries, previous projects as relevant to share. The fact that the employees are uncertain about how much information is accepted to be shared has anything to do with being reluctant to share as they expressed that they preferred to share knowledge through e-mail when their colleagues ask for it.

The employees' uncertainty about what is of relevance to be shared can be understood by the fact that they know how frustrating it can be when reading about information that is not related to their work tasks. The employee stated that they use the intranet to streamline their work and some of the information such as information that only concerns the headquarters takes too much time and space on the intranet. The employees are facing a communication problem in this situation that Weick (1995) defines as ambiguity where the employees do not know which information they should focus on. Further, I claim that the uncertainty about what is socially accepted to be shared on the intranet has implications on the development of the organizational learning at Business Sweden where employees on the lower levels in the hierarchy might feel strange to share information in the same forum as their CEO does. It is important to have in mind that it is the organizational members who socially construct the reality for the organization. The reasons for why the employees feel uncertain might be related to how they experience the culture. According to Delong and Fahey (2000) culture is a barrier since it shapes assumptions about which knowledge is important. Therefore, I believe that in order to arrive at an understanding of how the employees make sense of the organization and the value of the intranet, it is essential to put this in a context with how the employees experience the culture. I will, therefore, examine how the employees identify themselves with Business Sweden and its culture in the next section.

6.3 We represent Sweden

> Our whole purpose is to contribute to Sweden's internationalization and growth. I am proud of that. And also, in projects or deliveries to the clients or conversations with clients when I feel that we are adding a value to them. I notice that the clients are coming back and see us as partners that they can turn to for strategic issues. That makes me very proud because we have built a trust. And also when we as a team develop and make progress.

The employees feel a pride to work for Business Sweden because of several reasons. Firstly, they value their impact on their client's business performance. Secondly, they claim that they through their work contribute to Sweden's growth and reputation abroad. I will go deeper into this in the next sections. The employees express Business Sweden's culture and identity through narratives. These narratives are both a means for them to make sense of the organization and a framework for how they express their belonging to Business Sweden. Three narratives were identified during the interviews: *their international impact, the high-performance culture* and *the "tale of two identities" story*. The narratives is about: their contributions abroad and in Sweden, the work environment and the subcultures within Business Sweden.

6.3.1 Their international impact

> I come from a small city that is very dependent on the success of a few exporting companies. I am aware of the importance of growth for employment and wealth in Sweden. I find purpose in contributing to Swedish' companies competitiveness internationally. These companies might not be located in my hometown but might be crucial contributors and employers in someone else's hometown […] I want to work for an organization where I can explain why I am going to work every morning. Making a difference for the companies that I am working for feels important. This makes my job meaningful.

As the quotes above displays the employees expressed their pride in working for Business Sweden, which for them is to be part of something bigger that impacts on Swe-

den's growth. Their sensemaking is rooted in the belief that their work tasks make an impact on both Sweden and the international markets. When asked how the employees identified themselves with the organization and its values: *impact, collaboration* and *responsibility*, it became evident that the employees are strongly attached to Business Sweden. They emphasised on this by sharing past experiences of when their Swedish clients expressed how satisfied they were with their job. These actions are understood as the foundation of the employees' sensemaking of the organization. The employees' are making sense of the organizations through their work tasks such as finding distributors to Swedish companies or organising exhibitions for particular industries, but they also make sense through their faith to make a difference, which Weick (1995) describes as a linear sequence that consists of actions and thoughts. I argue that employees make sense and create their organizational reality in interaction with the external world such as clients, colleagues outside their office and Sweden. Thus, Business Sweden as any organization can hardly be understood as a closed world with purely organizational meanings constructed by employees only. Rather, some of the employees' meaning systems are found within organizational boarders that are also external to the organization. Sweden was central during the interviews since the employees did often mention their work in relation to their home country. The employees described Business Sweden as a relevant organization because of its legitimacy and involvement in various happenings such as politics and companies' internationalisation processes among others. I argue that by relating everything they do with Sweden, it increases the intranet's significance for their sensemaking since it is one of the few technological tools that invite the employees to be part of what is happening within Business Sweden and its involved stakeholders. I argue that the information on the intranet converts to thoughts and actions that the employees construct meaning from.

The employees made sense of the organization through the narrative *Business Sweden is a relevant organization* by explaining what it feels like to work for an organization that is considered as relevant and important for other stakeholders. When asked what makes them proud to work for Sweden, one employee explained:

> I am proud of Business Sweden because it's an organization that is relevant and everyone knows about us. For example, my colleague was invited to Nyhetsmorgon to discuss Iran and business opportunities in Iran. We are an organization that is relevant […] another example is when we had a delega-

tion where Arla and Orkla were participating. They were really satisfied with our performance and that made me proud.

The word *relevance* becomes a metaphor for how the employees describe their contribution to their clients. Alvesson (2005) states that metaphors serve as illustrations that affect how individuals relate to reality. The word *relevance* illustrate the pride of working for Business Sweden where the employees view instant feedback from clients and colleagues' involvement in news and politics as concrete examples on their contributions. The *relevance* can be significant for those employees who at some point might feel unmotivated by reminding them that their work has impact on Business Sweden's image and appearance.

6.3.2 The high-performing culture

The narrative *the high-performance culture* is about the employees' performance and how it shapes the culture. The employees' express their dedication to the organization and its clients, and how they through their value *responsibility* strive to put the client first.

> I have the drive to do my best for our clients […] if someone send me an email in the middle of the night and needs help, then I immediately want to do what I can to help the client. When you know you can solve a client's problem you really know you have an impact.

The employees described their culture as a high performing culture with talented people that have a lot of knowledge and expertise in different areas and industries. Provided that Business Sweden is hierarchical in terms of having different career levels that clearly describes the roles and responsibilities, the employees experience the culture as open where everyone has the opportunity to speak up whenever it is needed.

I argue that the high performing culture influences how often the employees share content on the intranet as it sets a certain level of what is regarded as valuable and relevant to share. The employees did also mention that the limited time also play a crucial role for why they did not share as often they wanted to. I argue that the limited time in combination with the high performance culture creates a pressure among the employees where they shy away from sharing information because they feel that the content has to

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be of high quality in order to be accepted. Hence, the uncertainty creates a conflict because they respect the colleagues' timetable since they know how demanding their work is. In an organization with an easy-going culture, it might be different; as the employees would not feel the same pressure to make sure that their shared information is both relevant and valuable for others. Knowing that Business Sweden consist of 55 offices with over 500 employees might also play a crucial role in this context since most of the employees do not know each other personally since most of them have not met in person. The personal relationships do also play a crucial role in how employees feel about sharing information. They explained that their annual conferences were highly appreciated because they got the chance to get to know and talk with their colleagues from other offices. The personal relations affected what the employees gave response to on the intranet, as they said that they were more likely to give response in terms of liking or commenting on posts that concerned colleagues they once have met or knew. The high performance culture is collectively constructed by the employees, which set the boundaries for what can be shared on the intranet. It is the employees' interpretation of the culture i.e. high performance culture that constructs the organization, as Weick (1985) describes.

6.3.3 The "tale of two cultures" story

> Which of the cultures? Do you refer to our office culture or to Business
> Sweden's culture in general?

When asked about Business Sweden's culture, the employees were confused and unsure which culture I referred to. It became clear that the office cultures are different depending on the countries and therefore varies from office to office. Some of the employees did also mention that their office culture differs from the culture at the headquarters in Stockholm. To illustrate this struggle, I will refer to a few selected stories that mainly represent the employees' perceptions.

> There are quite many who have been employed for a while and they
> have become real experts in their markets […] we are a strong as a
> team since we know our markets quite well, which might lead to that
> the work culture sometimes can be perceived as high performing and

stressful in the sense that you have to keep very up to date. I guess it depends on type of projects, but you generally need to catch up with the latest market trends and investments […] but also general things such as digitalisation, internationalisation processes and everything that happens within Business Sweden. From a global perspective, I think that it is quite challenging having the headquarter in Stockholm in a Swedish cultural context with offices all around the world that are influenced by many cultures […]

The employees explained that it is inevitable to separate the countries' culture as it affects their way of working. An example is the Chinese term *"Guanxi"* which is about building a network of mutually beneficial relationships that are used for business purposes (US-Pacific Rim International, 2014). The employees explained that all these cultural factors influence their office culture, which automatically means that the office culture differs from the organizational culture. Nonetheless, they remain to the Swedish culture and image since they work for a Swedish organization. However, when asked other employees how they would describe their culture, one of them replied:

The culture varies a lot depending on the office. I would describe our culture as a culture where everyone helps each other. We have a lot of knowledge in this office It is also a competetive culture since we work with sales […] In general, we support each other because most of us are Swedish and sometime is can be quite challenging to live in China since we do not speak the language fluently. We have therefore become a family not only at the office, but outside the office that helps each other.

Words like teamwork, collaboration and high performance were often mentioned when the employees described the culture. This is an interesting finding since the employees claimed that the various offices have different cultures. This might not be the case since all of them use the same words to describe their office culture. On the other hand, the cultural influences should not be ignored because it shapes the office cultures that create a feeling that the office is one organization. This was particularly evident when some of the employees said that they are selective with the content they share because it is regarded as an opportunity to stand out and market their office by showing their achieve-

ments and results. In this context, the intranet does not only function as a tool for receiving information, but also as a way to market the offices internally.

The subcultures within Business Sweden can be beneficial for the organization because it drives the employees to share their projects, which is driven by an inner force to show what they as an office have accomplished. As the empirical material shows, the employees get inspired when reading about their colleagues' projects and give meaning to the organization. It contributes to the organizational learning where the employees through social interactions and action make sense of the organization. Conversely, I claim that the subcultures can also be a disadvantage because it contributes to the existing uncertainty about what is considered as accepted to share on the intranet. What can be learned from this is that the employees tend to generally see and understand actions in similar ways, which means that they collectively construct meaning as they described the culture with similar words and share the same view of sharing content. This view is collectively constructed. After all, Business Sweden's culture does not seem to be different although the employees separate their office culture from the general culture at Business Sweden.

7. Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how employees made sense of the global organization through the intranet. This study problematized the high expectations on ESM by shedding light on the employees' usage of the intranet. My interpretation is that the employees give the organization meaning by believing on their impact both on Sweden and on the local markets. Furthermore, employees' sensemaking paints a picture of engagement, pride, inclusivity, as well as uncertainty and distrust. The results indicated that the employees made sense of the organization by using the intranet to find inspiration, knowledge sharing and finding information that are relevant for their work tasks. The employees also made sense of the organization based on narratives that from different perspectives explain the role of the intranet.

7.1 Contributions of this study

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes with key findings that describe how employees use the intranet to make sense of a global organization. This study shows that the intranet is not only used in the traditional way to find information but it is also used as a platform that creates a sense of belonging, which unites the global organization. This study found that the employees use Sweden as a framework to make sense of Business Sweden where they expressed their responsibility to represent Sweden and help Swedish companies to succeed abroad. The employees' described different situations on how they worked in line with Business Sweden's mission. Even though the employees have different professional roles and worked in different countries that were influenced by cultural aspects, the employees described Business Sweden in similar ways, using the similar words. To conclude, the link to Sweden and the organizational identity is a common denominator for how the employees give meaning to the organization in a global context.

The main contribution of this study is that the employees have an ambivalent approach to the intranet, which is characterized by a positive attitude towards the intranet's potential and a critical attitude how the intranet is used. Their positive attitude drives them to engage on the intranet as they view the intranet as a source to exchange knowledge where they get inspired by their colleagues' projects. On the other hand, the critical attitude is grounded in the concern of being perceived as someone who puts less effort into the work tasks by spending more time surfing on the intranet. There is also an uncertainty about what is appropriate and acceptable to share on the intranet's wall. These attitudes is a recurring pattern in all the interviews indicating that the geographical distance does not have the same impact on the employees' sensemaking, as I first thought and mentioned in the methodology chapter. This means that employees whether they are working in Asia or Europe share similar attitudes towards the intranet and the usage.

I argue that this ambivalent view have implications on the sensemaking process because the uncertainty may prevent them from engaging on the intranet which is problematic since the intranet is one of the few platforms that provides the employees with a wider perspective on Business Sweden including the organizations' strategy, goals and client projects. In other words, it is an important platform for how the employees interact with each other and Business Sweden overall, because as part of social constructionist thinking, sensemaking is a pervasive on going activity that retrospectively ascribes meaning to the happenings while facilitating forward action at the same time. As the analysis showed, meanings were construed through social interactions with their colleagues on the intranet where they engaged in dialogue or read the success stories. The employees made sense of the organization and responded to it collectively by co-creating knowledge and sharing information. All this leads us to the conclusion that the intranet plays a crucial role for the employees' sensemaking as it facilitates for the them to understand where they stand, what they do, why they do it, where they want to go and how they can get there.

In line with the latest research (e.g. Madsen, 2016; Uysal, 2016) of social intranets, this study demonstrates the critical role of identity and culture in understanding the employees' usage of social tools in the workplace. The employees must understand the organization's purpose and the happenings within the organization in order to be able to interpret the information and give meaning around it.

In this study, the employees described that their mission to help Swedish companies abroad was grounded in the organization's culture and core values. I concur with the idea that nor employees or organization are static entities; instead, they consist of multiple actors, thoughts and interaction on an on-going basis and continue to become throughout their existence.

Lastly, this study emphasizes the importance of making the intranet relevant and the important role of active employee participation in intranet communication for sensemaking. Without a critical mass of engaged, connected and attached employees, the survival of the intranet's role as being something more than just an information source depends primarily on the content creator alone. As long as employees are not engaged in participating or sharing content on the intranet, intranets are likely to remain as yet another means of traditional internal communication. To conclude; when it comes to intranets, relevance equals value.

7.2 Contributions to the case

This study makes a number of contributions that other organizations can learn from. First, it investigates organizational culture, which ensures the likelihood of encountering other employees on the platform and the sense of being allowed to communicate. For that reason, it is important that organizations develop a code of conduct for the intranet to avoid or minimize the employees' concern as well as encourage employees to spend more time on engaging in dialogue and exchanging knowledge on the platform. Second, organizations can take advantage from the emerging role of the intranet that enables to strengthen the culture and create a sense of belonging. Furthermore, this study shows that the employees use the intranet for finding inspiration. This is particularly important for global organizations to enhance the organizational learning virtually when face-to-face communication is not feasible. Third, if organizations can recognise sensemaking as a fundamental need in the usage of the intranet and provide with more relevant information, they can raise the level of engagement and knowledge sharing on the intranet. The employees have a much more active and broader communication role, which means that the existence of an intranet does not automatically result in the organizations' high expectations. Therefore, it is up to the employees to find the intranet relevant and through their usage give meaning to the organization.

7.3 Suggestions for future research

As the findings from this case study are based on one organization, I suggest that research could further develop this study with a larger sample of interviewees and organizations in combination of an ethnographical study to uncover the way employees communicate on the intranet and the overall impact it has on the employees' sensemaking. An ethnographical study would also further investigate how employees' attitudes translate into the actual usage of the intranet as this study found that the employees had an ambivalent attitude toward the intranet.

Intranets have the potential to evolve into a socially beneficial workplace community that can be used in more ways than it traditionally had been used. With a focus on culture and communication, future research can provide a better understanding of how employees use (or do not use) social platforms. This communicative approach will also yield in more valuable insights to communication practitioners about how to employ social platforms to engage employees and to strengthen the culture.

7.4 Concluding remarks

Through this study, I wanted to examine the importance of studying how the intranet helps the employees to give meaning to the organization. I hope that the findings of this study contribute to an increased interest in studying social intranets from an employee perspective. Furthermore, I hope that my study reminds organizations that a successful intranet requires employees to use it and their acceptance. By listening to the employees, I believe that organizations' dreams of improved communication can become a reality.

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Appendix

Intervjuguide

Jag skriver en uppsats inom strategisk kommunikation som handlar om hur medarbetare förstår organizationen via intranätet.

Den här intervjun beräknas ta cirka 45-60 minuter och för att underlätta analysen behöver jag spela in intervjun både i video och audio för att sedan transkribera den. Det kommer bara vara jag som kommer att lyssna på interjvun och i uppsatsen är ditt bidragande anonymt. Jag kommer att skicka transkriberingen till dig för att få ditt godkännande och även säkerställa att jag tolkade informationen rätt. Jag är intresserad av dina tankar och upplevelser kring ditt användande av intranätet. Det finns därför inga rätt eller fel svar på frågorna. Du får gärna ställa frågor innan vi börjar.

1. Inledning - bakgrundsinformation
- Vill du berätta om din roll på Business Sweden?
- Hur länge har du arbetat på Business Sweden?
- Har du arbetat i fler länder under din anställningstid hos Business Sweden?
- Vad är du stolt över i att vara anställd hos Business Sweden?
- Kan du ge ett exempel på när du kände dig stolt över att jobba hos Business Sweden?

2. Kultur och ledarskap
- Hur upplever du Business Swedens arbetskultur?
- Hur upplever du ledarskapet på Business Sweden?
- På vilket sätt identifierar du dig med Business Swedens värdeord?

3. Frågor om privat användande av sociala medier
- Vilka sociala medier använder du privat?

- Hur ofta använder du dig av sociala medier?

- Hur kommer det sig att du använder just dessa medier?

- Vilka är de sociala mediernas viktigaste egenskap enligt dig? Förde-lar/nackdelar?

4. Frågor om intranätet som en Enterprise social media – om man tänker på din arbetssituation

- Hur ställer du dig till utvecklingen av nya interna sociala medier som exempel-vis intranät och möjligheterna i användandet av dem internt?

- Hur ofta använder du intranätet?

- I vilka sammanhang använder du intranätet i din roll som X?

- Kan du ge ett exempel på en situation när du har använt det?

- Hur kommer det sig att det är just den situationen?

- Vilka funktioner tycker du att intranätet uppfyller?

- Vilket värde tillför intranätet i ditt arbete?

- Vilka förbättringsområden finns det hos intranätet?

- Vilka utmaningar ser du med intranätet?

- Vilka möjligheter ser du med intranätet?

5. Frågor om intranätet som ett verktyg

- Hur upplever du informationen som finns på intranätet? Kan det hjälpa dig i ditt arbete – på vilket sätt?

- På vilket sätt är du aktiv och delar saker och med vem?

- I vilka sammanhang har det funkat bäst med att dela information?

- När funkar det mindre bra?

- De personer du brukar dela info med, har du någon relation till dem?

- Brukar du dela med dig av tidigare egna projekt på intranätet?

- På vilket sätt tror du att dina tidigare egna projekt kan hjälpa dina kollegor?

- Hur ser du på att dina kollegor delar med sig av egna projekt?

- Om dina kollegor delade med sig av egna projekt kontinuerligt, hade det moti-verat dig att också göra det?

- Vilka utmaningar ser du i att dela dina egna projekt på intranätet?

- På intranätet brukar det oftast publiceras information om kommande event eller när det har gått bra för ett visst kontor eller team – vad känner du när du läser om interna framgångshistorier från de olika utlandskontoren?
- Hur upplever du ledarskapet via intranätet?
- Vilket kommunikationsverktyg använder du främst om du vill ta reda på något?

5. Frågor om förväntningar på intranätet

Jag ska också ställa frågor kring organizationens förväntningar på intranätet. Business Sweden ser intranätet som den primära kommunikationskanalen för att hålla sig uppdaterad om vad som händer, dela med sig av projekt och att samverka i form av att dela artiklar och övrig information.

- Vilka förväntningar har du på intranätet?
- Hur tror du att du i din roll kan bidra för att dessa förväntningar ska uppnås?
- Vad krävs det för att du ska bidra till att dessa förväntningar ska uppnås?
- Vad motiverar dig i att vara aktiv på intranätet i relation till förväntningarna?
- Är det något annat du kommer att tänka på som kan vara bra för mig att veta?

6. Avslut – Nu har vi pratat om intranät och täckt många områden som ditt privata användande av sociala medier. Är det något mer som du tror kan vara viktigt för mig att veta? Om det är så att jag glömt något, är det ok att jag tar kontakt med dig igen? Tack för ditt deltagande. Jag kommer att skicka transkriberingen inom den närmsta veckan.