Culture inside the walls, without walls

The use of communication strategies to generate digital organizational culture

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Foreword

We would like to express a big thank you to our supervisor Maria Ruitz for all the help we got during the process of writing this thesis. Your help contributed to new insights and challenged our thinking throughout the process. After two months of hard work together, we have finished the last project of our Bachelor's degree.

Thank you.

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Abstract

In recent years, more organizations have offered employees the opportunity to work remotely. This research aims to investigate how communication strategies are used in digital organizations to create and maintain organizational culture. To investigate the research question, interviews with communication specialists at five Swedish digital healthcare organizations and an analysis of internal strategy documents were performed. The selection represents a group established as digital within a relatively new market. Based on the theories Three Levels of Culture, Hostede's Onion Diagram, Social Identity Theory, and a deductive approach, themes have been identified in the analysis, in line with the thematic analysis. The result shows that communication strategies are needed to create organizational culture, including formally communicated guidelines, visions, values, and symbols. It should be mentioned that heroes can not be generalized as a strategy for creating an organizational culture in digital companies. As such, the study contributes to research in the field of communication in a branch of strategic communication.

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Sammanfattning

Under de senaste årtiondet har det skett en förändring där allt fler företag erbjuder möjligheten för medarbetare att arbeta digitalt, oberoende av arbetsplatsen. Syftet med denna uppsats är att undersöka hur kommunikationsstrategier används i digitala organisationer för att skapa och upprätthålla organisationskultur. För att undersöka frågeställningen har intervjuer av kommunikatörer hos fem svenska digitala vårdgivare samt analyser av interna dokument för strategier utförts. Urvalet representerar en grupp som etablerat sig som digitala inom en relativt ny marknad. Med utgångspunkt i teorierna Three Levels of Culture, Hofstedes Lökdiagram, Social Identity Theory, och ett deduktivt tillvägagångssätt har genomgående teman identifierats i analysen, i linje med den tematiska analysen. Resultatet visar att kommunikationsstrategier behövs för att skapa organisationskultur, däribland formellt kommunicerade riktlinjer, visioner, värden och symboler. Det bör nämnas att hjältar inte går att generaliseras som en strategi för att skapa organisationskultur i digitala bolag. Detta innebär att studien bidrar med forskning inom området kommunikation i organisationer, en gren inom strategisk kommunikation.

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1. Introduction

In our rapidly changing world, digitalization has altered how people live, work, and socialize and has gained fundamental importance in our society (Cöster & Westelius, 2021). The general idea behind societies' digitalization is to enable communication in different forms. Given that communication is a prerequisite for organizations, the way they work and communicate has evolved with the digitalization of society. Today, we are in a situation where digitalization is a vital component of people's lives; individuals use digital tools daily, whether through electronic payments, emails, or even electronic healthcare services (Cöster & Westelius, 2021). The market continually offers new digitization of services and products yet to exist. In later days, due to demand and changes in behavior among customers, working remotely from home at digital organizations has become increasingly common (TRR, 2022).

In 2013 the first Swedish digital healthcare provider was founded (Min Doktor, n.d). Today digitally-based healthcare is well established in the Swedish market, as around 80 percent of the Swedish population uses these digital services (Internetstiftelsen, 2021). These organizations offer employees to work remotely as well as physically at the organization, having physical headquarters and clinics. Digital companies depend on new technology and communication methods to organize and officiate as usual (Cimperman, 2023). Strategies and operations change to better apply to the digital environments. With this development, it is interesting to investigate how digitally-based companies organize and adapt to their digital environment. As strategic communication and digital media students, we want to gain further knowledge of communication and its impact on today's society. With the increased demand for remote employers and digitally based companies, it is interesting to understand how culture is created and maintained through different communication strategies in these types of organizations. The following paragraph concretizes the problematization of this study.

1.1 Problematization

In recent years, virtual workplaces have become more embraced (Cimperman, 2023). Due to this change, companies need to adapt to different platforms, work methods, and ways of communication to make the organization function (Cimperman, 2023). Research conducted by TRR (2022) shows that more than 49 percent of private Swedish companies have introduced new guidelines regarding remote work. Even though this was an effect of the

Covid-19 pandemic, the report shows that 67 percent of the participants are satisfied with the new guidelines that allow them to work remotely (TRR, 2022).

Due to the advancement of society's digital development and the increased opportunities for remote work, examining how culture is created and maintained through communication strategies in digital organizations becomes an interesting phenomenon to research. Therefore, a deeper understanding is necessary. The following section will introduce the background of the companies chosen for this study.

1.2 Background

As mentioned in the introduction, digital healthcare is increasing in Sweden. Therefore, our research will emanate from this sector, selected to represent Swedish digital healthcare providers. A background of the companies is in this section presented and the selection is further discussed in the methodological chapter.

1.2.1 Kry

Sweden's most prominent digital healthcare provider, was founded in 2015. Kry has had over four million patient consultations and has over 1300 doctors, nurses, and psychologists available around the clock, every day of the year, in 30 different languages (Kry, n.d).

1.2.2 Min Doktor

Sweden's first digital healthcare provider was founded in 2013 by doctor Magnus Nyhlén (Min Doktor, N.d). Today, Min Doktor has had over three million patient consultations and can handle care from uncomplicated ailments to complicated chronic problems digitally on their app (Min Doktor, n.d).

1.2.3 Yazen

Yazen is aiming to defeat overweight and obesity globally. With doctors, dieticians, psychologists, and personal trainers, the service combines medicine, support for diet, exercise, and mental health to make their customers reach their goals (Yazen, n.d). Yazen was founded in 2021 by the doctor and founder of *Min Doktor* Magnus Nylén (Yazen, n.d).

Doktor24 was founded in 2017 to create accessible and sustainable care with a patient focus. Today the company is Sweden's biggest digi-physical healthcare provider (Doktor24, n.d). Together with Apoteket AB, Doktor24 has physical health centers and a highly-rated application for digital healthcare visits (Doktor24, n.d).

1.3 Aim and Research Question

This study aims to examine how communication strategies are used in digital organizations to create and maintain organizational culture. By examining this, the study aims to contribute new research and knowledge about how organizational culture is created through communication strategies in a digital environment. The following research question will be answered to fulfill the aim of this research:

RQ: What strategies are used to internally communicate and maintain an organizational culture in digital organizations?

1.4 Limitations

This research question would be interesting to study in a broader sense, but due to limitations of time and resources, the study focuses on Swedish organizations. Further, a selection of four Swedish companies is suitable, aiming to perform a deeper analysis of the collected empirical material. Sweden is selected as the country of study since the Swedish government strives to be the leading country in e-healthcare by 2025 (Cornell, 2019), making healthcare in Sweden an attractive market to research as they invest resources in the e-healthcare field.

Furthermore, professionalism and identification with one's professional role could affect how digital organizations strategically communicate and work regarding organizational culture. Therefore this could become a limitation of this study. Gough and Siobhan (2020) argue that professionalism is the process by which society recognizes occupations as having a special status separating some professions from others. Millan et al. (2005) suggest that the doctor's professional role, identity, and status contribute to people choosing that career path. They highlight that it's an exclusive profession, where only those with accredited qualifications have the right to perform a particular type of work. It is understood as a limitation that may affect the outcome of the results. Regardless, this information can give a deeper

understanding of how digital healthcare providers communicate to create and maintain organizational culture.

2. Literature Review

This section will examine current and relevant research regarding the research's aim. The previous research is selected to understand the topic and is used to guide the methodology, and is a central part of the discussion.

2.1 Organizational Culture

Mumby (2013) explains that organizational culture creates shared frameworks and mindsets, making employees of an organization more unified. Furthermore, shared values and everyday actions determine the organizational culture, and when a strong culture occurs, it will result in more motivated and engaged employees (Mumby, 2013). As the opportunity to work remotely increases, Mumby's insights must be considered. The importance of creating shared values and mindset through organizational culture might differ in digital organizations, as employees' ability to participate in daily face-to-face communication is reduced.

Mikušová et al. (2023) explain that leadership is essential when creating organizational culture, as the management will mirror the organization's culture. Heide et al. (2021) argue that a crucial part of leadership is to guide the employee's understanding of the values and their meaning, which one does through communication. Thus, the organization's culture will be formed through the leader's actions and adapted by the employees (de Amorim Cantermi & Antonieta Lizote, 2022). Much research has been done regarding organizational culture and the importance of leadership during change and crisis, such as remote work during the covid-19 pandemic (Łukansik-Stachowiak, 2022). There is still a lack of research regarding communication strategies used in digital organizations to create organizational culture. Since the digital transformation in the corporate sphere, the importance of understanding organizational culture in such a context has increased (Cruz-Cárdenas et al., 2022). Therefore, our research is relevant as it seeks to understand the role of management's communication strategies in creating an organizational culture in digital organizations.

While there is some research on organizational culture and communication in healthcare organizations, most studies focus on traditional organizations rather than digitally-based healthcare providers. Mutonyi et al. (2022) argue that organizational culture is crucial for survival in today's competitive market. Additionally, most studies on organizational culture and communication have yet to consider the unique communication challenges in digitally

based organizations, particularly those in the healthcare sector. Organizational communication of different forms is essential to acknowledge in the study and is further discussed in the next paragraph.

2.2 Internal Communication

Internal communication refers to communication within a company and can be divided into two main categories: formal and informal (Larsson, 2014). Formal internal communication includes policies, rules, and goals, while informal internal communication includes stories, small talk, and discussions. Regardless of the type of internal communication, the main goal is to evoke employees' desired mindset, behavior, and understanding. Larsson's (2014) understanding of internal communication lacks its character on digitally based forums and how strategies are used to communicate formally and informally in organizations.

Şomácescu et al. (2016), as well as Heide et al. (2021), argue that there is a correlation between organizational culture and communication. Through internal communication, culture can emerge and be passed on to new company members. Thus, the culture will also affect the communication environment of the organization. Linke & Zerfass (2011) also research the importance of internal communication in creating an innovative organizational culture. Their research concludes that dialogic, two-way communication models are more suitable for creating an innovative culture. Communication will positively impact the employees and generate satisfaction and motivation, affecting the company's culture (Şomácescu et al., 2016). Our interpretation is that digital organizations exist through communication. Thus, communication and its effect on culture are relevant as we investigate further the importance of strategic communication in creating culture.

Yue et al. (2020) define systematic internal communication as communication from management to its stakeholder. Systematic internal communication leads to a "positive emotional culture" among employees. Emotional culture is an effective aspect of organizational culture that sets the tone for employees' feelings. A leader's way of communicating with employees will affect the shaping of the culture. If the leader communicates in a motivating way, it will most likely result in a positive emotional culture (Yue et al., 2022). Previous studies have examined the importance of internal communication and different communication strategies for creating organizational culture but lack the

understanding of communications' role in digitally based companies. It is understood that organizational culture impacts employee feelings and engagement greatly. However, findings from previous studies must be reevaluated and put in a digital context to develop in step with society's digitalization, making our study relevant.

Tkalac Verčič & Špoljarić (2020) argues that the influence of new technologies has changed the environment of internal communication. The study concludes that there is great relevance in face-to-face communication. However, formal internal communication is preferred on digital platforms (Tkalac Verčič & Špoljarić, 2020). Toledano et al. (2023) argue that the Covid-19 pandemic forced organizations to adapt their digital communication platforms and strengthened internal communication's role in daily work. Sudden adaptation positively influences organizations, and online communication has become a standard (Toledano et al., 2023). Even if the Covid pandemic greatly influenced society's digitalization, it is interesting to understand how digital organizations established before the pandemic communicate internally.

Ruck (2020) argues that identification in an organization is mainly created through everyday, informal internal communication practices and that this identification can apply culture to one's identity. Toledano et al. (2023) study revealed that digital platforms endangered two-way communication and dialog, which is highly sacred by organizations. Even if Tkalac Verčič & Špoljarić (2020), and subsequent studies, argue for the relevance of face-to-face communication, we believe that this is suitable to investigate further. There are companies today that offer fully digital employment. As face-to-face communication is minimized in digitally based companies, it is relevant to understand how the chosen companies have organized and communicated to maintain identification amongst employees without face-to-face communication.

2.3 Remote Organizations and Communication Tools

Working remotely has increased and is argued to impact the future working nature (Mlonyeni, 2023). Pianese et al. (2022) define remote organizations as employees working far from their colleagues and mainly relying on information- and technology communication to keep in touch.

Discussing previous research on this topic is essential, as there are not enough studies examining how culture can be handled and communicated in digitally-based companies. Therefore, we are examining research on remote organizations and the importance of digital communication tools and strategies. According to Cimperman (2023), communication in digitally based companies should focus on the professional aspect and informal meetings and discussions. His study concludes that virtual socializing with colleagues is fundamental in building internal relationships and trust, even if they do not meet face-to-face. Previous studies have examined remote work and its impact on employee engagement and job satisfaction (Bareket-Bojmel et al., 2023; Basol & Çömleki, 2022). These studies show that remote work has minimal effect on engagement and job satisfaction, challenging the widespread assumption that remote work impairs these subjects (Bareket-Bojmel et al., 2023; Basol & Çömleki, 2022). As such, this strengthens the purpose of our study, as we want to examine remote work. Now we understand that remote working is an alternative way of working that does not significantly impact engagement and job satisfaction. As Mutonyi et al. (2022) argue, organizational culture is essential for an organization's survival. Therefore, further research must be done to understand how these organizations can create and maintain it.

English et al. (2021) conclude that fully remote organizations must prioritize relationship-building and culture, understand the importance of leadership, and have dialogic conversations to empower employees. This study has a similar aim as it researches communication strategies used in digital organizations. Krajcsák & Kozák (2022) also concluded that employees like the ability to work remotely and describe it as an expectation from their company and that strong organizational culture determines the effect of remote working. These studies research the topic from a post-pandemic perspective and conclude that culture is essential and has led to success in the shift from physical work to functioning remote work. However, we study an industry that has had a groundbreaking change in healthcare and started as a digital work provider before the pandemic. Therefore, these companies have other conditions and needs that will affect the study's results. We understand these companies' communication strategies as guiding stars for upcoming digital companies.

3. Theory

The following section presents the theoretical framework and states assumptions and understandings of the chosen topic of study. The theoretical framework is based on three theories; Hofstede's Onion Diagram, Schein's Three Levels of Culture, and Social Identity Theory. These influence the interpretation of the empirical material.

3.1 Hofstede's Onion Diagram

Geert Hofstede et al. (2010) define culture as shared among people living in the same social environment. It is built upon unwritten rules familiar to the people within a group, which distinguishes them from other groups (Hofstede et al., 2010). Sun (2008), referring to Hofstede (1997), argues that culture affects people's thinking and behavior. Hofstede's model intends to explain culture as a phenomenon, using an onion diagram divided into four layers; *symbols, heroes, rituals, and values*. It's worth noting that the diagram is commonly used in cross-cultural research to understand differences between cultures. Although, we argue that this is a suitable theory for this research, as the layers guide understanding how they influence behavior and values (Hofstede et al., 2010).

Symbols are words, gestures, acts, and objects that have a particular meaning for a group. The outermost layer of the onion diagram is easy to produce and reduce as it tends to be inspired by other cultures' symbols. Furthermore, symbols within the culture can be observed and easily understood, such as the dress code and the use of language (Hofstede et al., 2010).

In his model, Hofstede includes heroes, which is the second layer. They can be both living or deceased, real or imaginary, and are understood as role models with highly valued characteristics in a group (Hofstede et al., 2010). Bretsch (2013) states that the hero is a guiding star in developing cultural behavior. They are prized motivators, and people count on them when problems arise (Sun, 2008). Furthermore, Palm & Åkerström (2019) argues that role models are an effective strategy to generate belief or affect a particular behavior. In this sense, the role model should not be a celebrity but someone the receiver can identify with, such as someone in their surroundings (Palm & Åkerström, 2019).

Rituals are the third layer of the model before reaching the core and are socially significant, as they help bind a group through norms. An example is how the members show each other

respect and perform different ceremonies and daily ways of acting. The three discussed layers are all observable, therefore, put under the term practices (figure 1). Although, heroes and rituals are more inner layers since they are not as easily replaced as symbols. Even though they are observable to someone outside of the group, their meanings are only to be fully interpreted and understood by the group and their context (Hofstede et al., 2010). The outer layers create and influence the fourth and last layer, values (Bretsch, 2013). It represents aspects of how we prefer things over others, and they are feelings that generate positive or negative emotions (Hofstede et al., 2014). Values evolve in our human function from the day we are born and continue to develop throughout our lives. Therefore, they are unconscious and difficult to change, impacting how we understand the world and behave (Mikušova, 2023).

3.1.1 Individualism and Collectivism

In their book, Hofstede et al. (2010) present how this model can be used to understand different cultures and how values affect what is meaningful within a particular culture. When analyzing an organization's culture, Hofstede et al. (2010) underline the importance of understanding the concepts of individualism and collectivism as they affect how the culture is shaped.

Individualism is defined as every man for themselves. People in an individualistic context understand their fellowman by their personalities rather than their belonging to different groups or cultures. In contrast, collectivism is characterized by a society where every man integrates into a group with strong cohesion, which protects every individual in exchange for granted loyalty (Hofstede et al., 2010). From an organizational perspective, individualism builds upon the belief that freedom and challenges are essential. The collectivistic approach understands the individual as dependent on the organization. Practice, a good physical work environment, and using one's skills are essential parts for the individual in a collectivistic organization. The culture within an individualistic organization is constituted based on acting on self-interest, and the project is always the most important. While the culture of a collectivistic organization is always based on doing what is in the group's best interest, and the relationship between the company's individuals is more important than the project itself.

In summary, this model is based on the onion diagram and is understood from the perspective of individualism and collectivism. To generate knowledge concerning the research question,

it is necessary to understand how the companies of research work from an individualistic or a collectivist perspective. By peeling the onion, we understand how communication strategies are used in remote companies to create and maintain a culture.

3.2 Schein's Three Levels of Culture

Edgar Schein (2010) proposes that organizational culture can be analyzed through three levels; *artifacts*, *espoused values,* and *basic assumptions*. The model's values reflect organizational strategies to create culture (Łukansik-stachowiak, 2022). Furthermore, similar to Hofstede's onion model, the first level of Schein's theory represents the most shallow aspect of culture, and the deeper levels represent more fundamental aspects. When understanding the term culture, it is stated that there is no difference between a group and an organization (Schein, 2010). In this thesis, the model is applied to organizations.

The first level of culture is artifacts. These are the visible items of an organization and can be understood as the things one can hear, see, and feel. As such, this can be the products and architecture of the environment, the group's use of language and style, including dress code and emotions. Artifacts include the organization's stories, values, and rituals (Schein, 2010). Macqueen (2020) refers to Schein (2016) and simplifies artifacts as an organization's processes, structures, and observable behaviors.

Since the elements of this level are visible, they are easy to observe. Although, if the researcher tries to generate a deeper meaning of the organization's culture by only observing the artifacts, interpreting what is studied would interfere with the researcher's assumptions (Schein, 2010). Therefore, studying the deeper levels of the model is essential because it gives a genuine understanding of what the artifacts mean to the organization.

The second level of the model is espoused values, which are based on the first solution to be proposed when the organization faces a new situation, issue, or problem. It will reflect the proposer's assumptions and understanding of what is wrong or right in the situation (Schein, 2010). The proposed solution must be tested before the rest of the group can identify a shared value or belief about the action. When the action is proven to work, the group can create a shared assumption that the particular solution will solve similar situations. Espoused values contain ideals, goals, values, aspirations, and rationalizations that produce a shared behavior

that corresponds to the value, norms, and artifacts of the culture within the organization (Macqueen, 2020).

Commonly, the espoused values are communicated by the organization's leaders to reduce uncertainty in different areas of the group. The values are guidelines for how different situations should be handled and how one should behave in the organization. When analyzing this level, one needs to be aware that the values may only reflect the rationalization and future aspirations of the organization (Schein, 2010). Therefore, studying how organizations communicate values in documentation can be useful for identifying future aspirations and comparing them with the Participant's understanding.

The espoused values significantly correlate with the third level, basic assumptions (Schein, 2010). When a solution is proven to work several times, the organization takes it for granted. Basic assumptions are deeply rooted in the organization and become unconscious behaviors and values, which makes them undebatable and, as such, difficult to change. Although, when new members appear in the group, they will bring their cultural learning from former experiences and eventually modify and create new basic assumptions within the group (Schein, 2010).

The essence of the culture is arguably created in the basic assumptions. Schein debates in his book that to understand the different levels of culture, one must first recognize the level of basic assumptions and values to interpret the artifacts and understand the belief of the espoused values. When the three levels are aligned, actual values are created. If there is a lack of consistency between the values at the different levels, the organization is at risk of facing surprises that are hard to comprehend. Therefore, when analyzing an organization's culture, it is essential to compare the espoused values with the basic assumptions (Schein, 2010).

Schein (2010) highlights that culture emerges from leadership and when an organization is founded, the culture will immediately start to emerge. In that sense, Schein argues that the organization's founder and leader will create and influence the culture, but first, when the culture is embedded in the group, it guides what type of leadership is accepted.

3.3 Social Identity Theory (SIT)

Henri Tajfel and John Turner developed the social identity theory (SIT), which focuses on the social-psychological perspective on group identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). SIT argues that all social entities, including the self, can be categorized by social categories defined by different groups, including membership in an organization, religion, age group, gender, and more (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Therefore, groups are essential when forming identity (Mackie & Smith, 2017).

Social identity theory is divided into three parts of a process: *social categorization, social comparison, and social identity*. Ashforth & Mael (1989) refer to Tajfel and Turner, which explain that people's social identities are created through interpersonal and intergroup interactions. People assign themselves social categories through one-on-one communication. The theory identifies this process as social categorization. (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Individuals create and maintain shared identities with different groups, contributing to shared meaning and behavior. Ashforth & Mael (1989) argue that people identify with groups or social categories that improve their self-esteem. Social comparison is the second part of the social identity theory process. Ashforth & Mael (2008, p.348) explains this as a comparison of the "in-group" (the individual's group) with the "out-group" (other groups surrounding the in-group) based on the will to maintain a positive social identity. Social identification answers questions about who an individual is and how they differ from other groups. Gender, nationality, membership in a particular group, and more are traits that define us. Social identification is not an all-or-none phenomenon; the extent of identification can vary depending on the degree (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

The last part of the process is social identity. This part clarifies the importance of social identity as it serves as a basic human need. It creates, builds, and maintains meaning, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging (Ashforth & Mael, 2008). People need to make sense of themselves and the world around them; social identity is the process of doing this by assigning themself social categories of belonging to different groups. As mentioned, an organization's shared culture and identity can define and co-create an individual's social identity. Ashforth & Mael (1989) argues that organizational identification is a specific form

of social identity. Therefore organizational identification will be further explained in the following paragraph.

3.3.1 Organizational Identification

Organizational identification focus on shared values and goals between individuals and their organizations and refers to maintaining, creating, and modifying the relationship between individuals and an organization's identity (Harahsheh et al., 2023). Another definition is given by Hall et al. (1970, p.176-177); "the process by which the goals of the organization and those of the individual become increasingly integrated or congruent".

As in SIT, Ashforth & Mael (1989) acknowledge that individuals partake in group success and development to increase their self-esteem. Social identities are based on the organization's shared goals and values but may also originate from the individual's department, lunch group, age, and gender. Organizations are separated into two groups, *holographic organizations* and *ideographic organizations*. Holographic organizations are organizations where individuals across sub-groups and departments share a common identity, goals, and values. In contrast, ideographic organizations emerge when departments or sub-groups have specific identities amongst the different groups. Therefore, the organizational identity may alter depending on the organization's structure. Individuals often retain several identities, affecting the organizational identity and how the culture is understood (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

The sub-theory of SIT was new to the literature on organizational behavior in 1989. It has since shown relevancy for research in employee engagement and identification. Organizational identity is explained by Ashforth & Mael (1989) as crucial for organizations as it increases the connection between individuals and their organizations. A study by Harahsheh et al. (2023) addresses that organizational identification provides several advantages for organizations. They explain that it improves employees' performance, as working correlates with the individual's aspirations and growth. Organizational identification is shown to increase belonging and loyalty. Therefore, this theory is interesting to further use in the research analysis.

The social identity theory explains how individuals create shared identities that contribute to creating a culture in a group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). As this research aims to understand

how culture can be created and maintained by communication in digital companies, understanding how shared identities are built on digital platforms where members have a different physical presence and do not share the same physical workspace is significant. SIT, in this research, aims to explain how individuals create and maintain this shared identity with different shared digital platforms to communicate and connect. The theory could also explain the role of communication and different communication strategies that emphasize shared values and goals that foster the organizational culture and the sense of community in a digital organization.

3.4 Theoretical Summary

This study combines three theories to analyze communication strategies and their role in creating organizational culture. Hofstede's onion diagram and Schein's three levels of culture can be understood as similar. As Mamatha & Geetanjali (2020) explain, both models include different levels or layers to understand the culture in an organization. The deeper one gets, the more fundamental understanding will be generated about the culture (Schein, 2010; Hofstede et al., 2010). The two researchers define the phenomenon differently. Schein defines it as something that exists when the members have had a shared learning process throughout history, which will be passed on to new members of the organization (Schein, 2010, p. 18). In contrast, Hofstede understands culture as something between people within the same environment. Organizational culture is created through assumptions, meanings, and values. Employees identify with these assumptions and values and their workplace (Ruck, 2020).

The social identification theory explains how individuals create shared identities that contribute to creating a culture (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). As this research aims to understand how culture can be created and maintained, understanding how shared identities are built on digital platforms where members have a different physical presence and workspace is significant. This theory is interesting to add to the analysis as it further explains the importance of internal communication that forms and merges groups. It could also explain the role of communication and strategies emphasizing shared values and goals that foster the organizational culture and sense of community.

4. Methods and Materials

This section discusses the study's method and includes the scientific approach, collection and sampling methods, analysis methods, and ethical dilemmas. The primary analysis method of this research is thematic analysis.

4.1 Scientific Approach

Our research uses a qualitative approach to understand what communication strategies are used to create organizational culture in digital organizations. This approach seeks to understand the human interpretation and understanding of a socially constructed situation (Stake, 2010). The approach is based on words, generating a deeper description of the subject of study (Kvale & Brinkman, 2014). In contrast, the quantitative approach aims to test the theory with numeric data (Stake, 2010) and understands the world as something objective (Bryman, 2008), making the qualitative approach more suitable for this study.

Furthermore, this study has a social constructivist ontological perspective. Bryman (2008) explains that social constructivism is based on the idea that the world is continuously constructed and created through interactions with our surroundings. The empirical material is reviewed through this lens since Mumby (2013) argues that organizational culture can be understood as a social construction. Epistemologically, this research is based on a phenomenological perspective. According to Kvale & Brinkman (2014), the phenomenological approach is suited when the researcher seeks to understand how individuals view social phenomena through their experiences. It is relevant for this study, as it aims to generate knowledge about how communication specialists in Swedish digital healthcare organizations use communication strategies to create and maintain organizational culture. We seek to understand the participant's perceptions and knowledge of organizational culture through the chosen collection method.

As this research is generated from theory, it's based on a deductive approach, commonly used when the empirical data is tested concerning a predetermined theory (Eksell & Thelander, 2014). Kennedy & Thornberg (2018) argue that deduction used in qualitative research analyzes the empirical data through a specific theoretical framework rather than testing a theory. Unlike the inductive approach, this study is not based on a process in which a case is studied to understand a theory in general terms. It does not aim to seek a secondary

explanation for the studied phenomena, as in the abductive approach (Kvale & Brinkman, 2014). As our study uses Hofstede's Onion diagram and Schein's Three levels of culture as analytical tools and themes to find patterns in the empirical material, it can be understood as a deductive study, thereby based on the perspective the study is approached from. Since we are examining how organizational culture is created through communication strategies, it is crucial to base the study on theoretical background demonstrating how culture is created. Kennedy & Thornberg (2018) address a potential drawback of deductive studies: the possibility of only attending aspects prescribed by the theory missing relevant data codes. This issue has been recognized, and categories have been created from the coding of the collected empirical data and placed under relevant themes afterwards. The following section will present our collection and sample method, a necessary framework for the study.

4.2 Collection and Sampling Methods

There is often a lack of clarity in qualitative studies regarding how participants were selected and how many the researchers chose to interview (Bryman, 2008). The following section clarifies and argues for the chosen sample method to avoid this.

4.2.1 Sampling Method

A representative sampling method is needed for this study. It aims to provide qualitative value and gain detailed knowledge about a specific phenomenon rather than draw statistical conclusions (Trost & Hultåker, 2016). The population consists of communication specialists at digital companies. Therefore we use an intentional sampling method to select those representing the population. Although there is a risk of sampling bias associated with this method (Trost & Hultåker, 2016), we intend to interview employees from four companies to increase the likelihood of reflecting the selected population. An intentional sampling method seems most fitting as we aim to gather people with the right insights and knowledge to unveil patterns, ideas, and themes in the collected data. We aimed to have a mixture of snowball and intentional sampling methods. However, with a lack of availability and participants with the proper knowledge, we are limited to an intentional sampling method.

4.2.2 Sample

The empirical data is gathered from communication specialists in the digital Swedish healthcare sector. These are chosen since digital healthcare has become increasingly popular in Sweden (Internetstiftelsen, 2021). As the introduction mentions, Min Doktor is the first

Swedish digital healthcare provider, Kry is Sweden's most prominent digital provider, Doktor24 is Sweden's most prominent digi-physical provider, and Yazen is a recently founded company within the same sector. Combined, the proper knowledge can be gathered to gain insight into how digital healthcare providers both maintain and create organizational culture. Thereby the participants will be gathered from these chosen organizations. The participants are interviewed to gain knowledge, understanding, and reflection on the research question. The interview structure and process are further discussed in the next paragraph. Further, the empirical material includes one communication document from each company, which is used to support the collected material from the interviews and gain a deeper analysis of the topic, which is further discussed in the upcoming paragraph.

4.2.3 Interviews

The data collection method selected for this study is qualitative interviews. Qualitative data gives the researcher insights into complex behaviors and activities, focusing on the participant's understanding of life and the world around them (Rennstam & Wästefors, 2015). Qualitative interviews collect in-depth and detailed information about participants' opinions and experiences within a particular field (Hallin & Helin, 2018). Ahrne and Svensson (2015) explain that 6 to 8 interviews are adequate for collecting empirical data and reaching a nuanced understanding of the subject. With a total of nine sources, we reach these guidelines.

It is essential to consider how detailed the interview questions should be to gather the correct information (Hallin & Helin, 2018). Considering our research question, interviews are a suitable method, as we aim to search for patterns, relationships, and in-depth information about how communicators perceive organizational culture and use communication strategies to create and maintain it within the organization. These interviews are further analyzed with the addition of internal communication documents from the organization to further understand the interview material

As our research is deductive, we base the interviews on the chosen theories (Bryman, 2018). Hallin & Helin (2018) argue that questions formulated in advance can risk narrowing the conversation. Hence, this study will consist of semi-structured interviews. We have an interview guide in advance but encourage asking critical or follow-up questions to allow the interview to develop naturally. The interview guide will serve as a framework to ensure that the right areas of inquiry are covered (Hallin & Helin, 2018). Our goal is to understand and

develop knowledge within theories of organizational culture to adapt them to the phenomenon of remote workplaces. Hence, a qualitative research method is advantageous for us.

To avoid language barriers and favor dialog, the interviews are conducted in Swedish and later translated to English in the transcription process. This may affect the analysis process as slang, metaphors, and proverbs are translated and can risk losing their meaning, which is considered in the transcription and analysis process. The interviews take place online through the virtual meeting platform Zoom, for 60 to 75 minutes.

Regarding validity, it is important to ensure that the study observes what is said to observe (Bryman, 2008). Kvale and Brinkman explain how validity is assured when using interviews as sampling. They argue that it is important to ask nuanced questions and follow up with questions if something could be misinterpreted, which is possible through the semistructured interview guide.

4.2.4 Documents

The empirical data will include one internal communication document from each company, which will be used to support the collected material from the interviews and gain a deeper analysis of the topic. These include reports about company aims, mission, vision, and values. By analyzing these documents, we can better understand the company's strategic internal communication and its influence on creating organizational culture. It is worth noting that these documents are considered internal and private. The companies have clarified the importance of keeping the documents anonymous, making it impossible to quote or refer to them. Although, the material will support the participant's argument to increase the study's validity and will be referred to as Document 1-4.

4.3 Analysis Method

4.3.1 Thematic Analysis

The study uses a thematic analysis method, an exploratory content-driven method based on the researcher carefully reading and sorting collected data to identify themes, patterns, trends, keywords, and ideas that shape the analysis (Guest et al., 2012). This analysis method is suitable as it seeks patterns and correlations between the different participants and

communication documents. Guest et al. (2012) suggest that thematic analysis requires greater interpretation and involvement from researchers, as they must understand what participants say but also what is not said and what this might mean for data analysis. Therefore, a deductive approach uses the theories as an analytic lens to identify categories correlated to the theories' levels. In this study, the semi-structured interview guide aims to collect data codes to identify categories related to the theories and gain a deeper understanding of the strategies expressed. Therefore, thematic analysis is deemed appropriate for this study.

Reliability is of significant concern in the thematic analysis method (Guest et al., 2012). As the researcher's interpretation and understanding are essential for analyzing the collected data, it can affect the study's reliability, mainly if there is more than one researcher involved (Guest et al., 2012). This issue is acknowledged and the two researchers analyze the material separately to compare and gain a similar understanding of the collected material. Clear documentation of all collected, coded, and analyzed data is also conducted to facilitate understanding and tracking of the researchers' processes. Researchers should also address how the empirical data is related to the analysis process (Kennedy & Thornberg, 2018). In this research, a linear sequential approach is used, which indicates empirical data is collected, and thereafter the analysis process begins.

Tables are created to clarify identified themes from the chosen theories, their definitions, and categories from the coded material. As Schein (2010) explains, basic assumptions are analyzed and based on the two other levels of the model; thereby, it is analyzed through the previous categories. Clear ontological and epistemological guidelines are presented in the section on the scientific approach, creating a unified analysis and understanding of the coded material. After establishing problematization, aim, theory, and method, Hallin & Helin (2018) address the importance of considering ethical dilemmas that may come with the study's design. Therefore it's discussed in the next section.

The following tables illustrate the different themes, categories, and their definitions.

Themes	Definitions
Artifacts & Symbols	Things within the culture that one can see, hear and feel.
Espoused Values	Ideals, goals, values, aspirations, and rationalizations that produce a shared behavior within the culture
Basic Assumptions	Deeply rooted unconscious behaviors and values, making them undebatable and challenging to change.

Theme Artifacts and Symbols	
Category Dress Code	**Category** Heroes
Category Communication Channels	**Category** Rituals

Theme Espoused Values	
Category Values	**Category** Requirements and Guidelines
Category Ambassadorship	**Category** Professionalism

4.4 Ethical Dilemmas

In discussing ethical dilemmas, it is essential to be transparent with the possible subjectivities in the study's writing process. Therefore it's fitting to address some ethical restrictions that are made. According to Hallin & Helin (2018), ethical guidelines are divided into four requirements. The confidentiality requirements address protecting the participant's identities

(Hallin & Helin, 2018). Therefore, we aim to keep all participants anonymous to protect their thoughts and beliefs. The participants will be known as Participants 1-5.

5. Analysis

This section of the paper is divided into three categories with subcategories. The themes are identified through the theories and the subcategories through the coding of empirical material. The analysis will combine the theories discussed in the theoretical section. A model has been created to visualize the analysis process and structure.
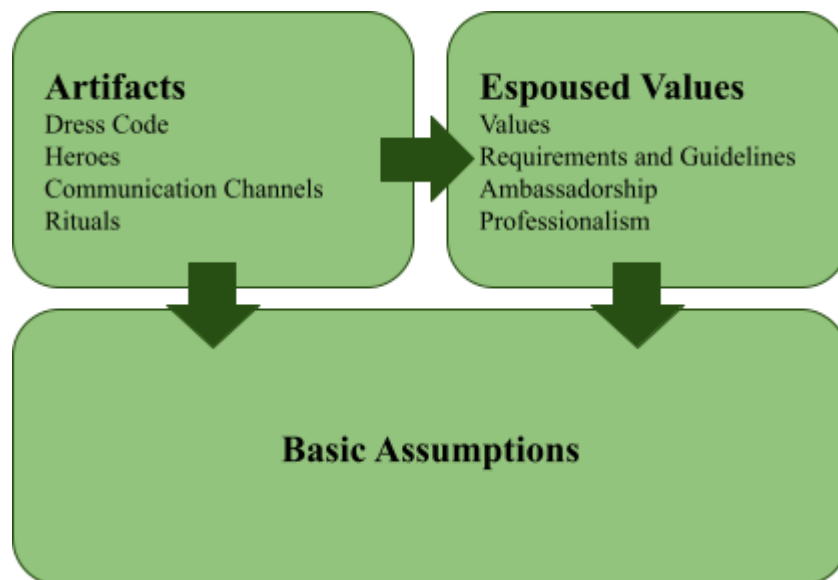
5.1 Artifacts and Symbols

Artifacts are the most easily observed level of Schein's model. However, it is worth noting that the understanding of the organizational culture will not be complete without analyzing the two other levels. Hofstede's onion diagram explains symbols as the utmost layer of the diagram. Therefore the analysis in this chapter will be a combination of Schein's first-layer artifacts and Hofstede's top three layers of the onion diagram. We combine it with social identity theory to answer the research question.

5.1.1 Dress Code

Dress code is one of Schein's expressed artifacts, and has varied in significance among the organizations that have been part of the study. All the companies share the requirements for their coworkers to look representable. As Participants 1, 2, and 5 describe their companies as digi-physical, they have different dress codes depending on whether they work at the headquarters or digitally with patients. Participant 2 explains that they do not require any special uniform for physicians working digitally since they primarily chat with the patients.

When physicians video meets with patients, they must look representable. In difference, both companies 1 and 4 require physicians to wear scrubs. Participant 1 describes the dress code for the physicians as follows:

> We do not have a dress code in the office. But if you meet patients, just like in a healthcare center, you must wear your scrubs. (Participant 1)

Ashforth and Mael (2008) argue that the second part of SIT is social comparison. The requirement to wear scrubs in companies 1 and 4 can be related to social comparison. It can be understood as identifying more with their profession and, in that sense, becoming their own in-group; having a separate dress code for digitally working physicians might contribute to the belonging of their profession.

The dress code could be analyzed to separate work and private life. During interviews, we could identify a need to separate the working self from the private. Interviews 1, 3, 4, and 5 argued the need for a private workspace, dress appropriately, and "leave home" and walk into your office, leaving your private life at home.

> I sit at home with a work shirt to signal that I am working [...].
> (Participant 4)

Dress code can be understood as a strategy or even a symbol for companies that do not have a physical workplace to create a work environment that permeates the work culture the company wants to maintain. One dresses up to work and walks to their home office; their mindset leaves home and goes to work. By communicating these requirements to employees, the dress code is analyzed as a communication strategy and a symbol, an act with a particular meaning for employees that helps create and maintain a work environment culture.

5.1.2 Heroes

In their book, Hofstede et al. (2010) argue that heroes are people with highly valued characteristics and the guiding stars of cultural behavior. In our research, it became clear that only one of the organizations has an outspoken hero or role model. Participant 1 mentions their CEO as a role model of the organization:

> Our CEO is a communicative person who really shows up and takes
> his place. So we use him and a couple of others in the top management
> team as role models. (Participant 1)

Schein explains that culture will emerge from the organization's leaders, which indicates why Participant 1's organization uses the CEO as a role model. As Palm & Åkerström (2019) explains, role models are a strategy used to generate common beliefs and behavior within the group. The CEO's position is analyzed as a strategy used to create culture. As only one company mention this as a used strategy, it can not be identified as a common strategy for the sample of this study.

The other participants indicated they do not have an outspoken role model or hero within the company. However, Participants 2 and 4 mentioned the CEO, board, and founder with a clear leadership role when asked the question. Similar to Participant 1, Participants 2 and 4 mention the CEO and founder as essential leaders and role models:

> No, not expressed. Of course, we have a CEO, who has a clear
> leadership role, and we have a board and a founder. (Participant 2)

> If you do it as a doctor - then you have the right attitude. Then you
> want to taste your own medicine, and then you are a good person in
> my book. (Participant 4)

Schein's view on leaders being necessary to establish culture is mirrored in these quotes. If leaders are interpreted as guiding stars, it will most likely permeate the employee's view of the action and generate positive feelings towards the leader.

Participants 3 and 5 have another take on how heroes within the organization can be interpreted. None of the participants spoke about a particular person, but they highlighted other valued characteristics used as strategies to establish a culture. Both used stories as a reference to the hero.

> [...] it is that we break new ground [...] We can help many patients, and
> we can help with many different types of ailments and we have the

high availability. But delivering good quality in a controlled manner is

what is important to them. (Participant 5)

In Schein's model, stories can be understood as an artifact, making it interesting how the participants used this as a reference to heroes. Participant 5 points out that looking at only one hero is hard, and one should understand that digital healthcare is groundbreaking, making it a hero itself. The statement made by Participant 5 is interesting for this analysis concerning what is stated by Palm & Åkerström (2019). When referring to digital healthcare as groundbreaking, it generates a feeling of belonging among the employees, making them believe in the organization's purpose.

5.1.3 Communication channels

Artifacts are explained by Macqueen (2020) as structures, processes, and observable behavior. During all interviews, it became clear that the structure of the communication channels is of great significance. It's shown that chat forums are used to fulfill some kind of dialog between coworkers and, in some cases, to create communities between employees. Most organizations used the same platform for the whole organization, except for Participant 1, who explained that their company uses different platforms for those working in the headquarters and the physicians. The Participant argued that physicians are more familiar with Microsoft and Teams, while the employees working at headquarters are more used to Slack and Google Suite:

Then we mainly have two. Partly, we use Slack and Google Suite. But

that is very office focused. With the healthcare staff, we work with

Teams and Microsoft instead [...]. (Participant 1)

In that case, communicating information on two different platforms is at risk of creating a gap between the employees in the organization, which can be related to SIT, particularly social comparison. It separates the organization into two groups, the ones using Teams and Microsoft and those using Slack and Google Suite, and minimizes unbound communication throughout the organization. Although, they communicate all information on both platforms and everyone reaches the same information regarding the organization. Acknowledging this is relevant, as it can generate employee organizational identification. As organizational identification is divided into two types of organizations, this knowledge could be interpreted

as the organization of matter striving to be holographic. It is an organization where individuals across different sub-groups share goals, values, and identities (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

In contrast, participant 5 explains that everyone in the organization communicates through the same platform and calls it "their whole universe," where all the information and everyone in the organization is "just a Slack away." Participant 5 explains how they use the digital communication tool in the organization regarding general information, as well as how the language is used.

> [...] we have this social channel, [...] congratulate each other on their birthday. We diligently have that on our calendars, always writing congratulations even to so-called doctors; the managers have a close eye on them. [...]. (Participant 5)

This encouraged social communication is interpreted to generate a positive culture and cohesion among the employees, even though they do not work in the same office space. This use of the communication platform is analyzed to generate a collectivistic organization, meaning that the employees strive for a healthy work environment and focus on the group's best interests (Hofstede et al., 2010).

> [...] and then you know that he wrote it, but no, then you have to start again. So it's messy. That logistics takes too much time, but I have no idea how to change it. (Participant 3)

> And you know that the most challenging thing about communication is the constant noise, there are so many people who want to say so much, so we have to make a balance for what is relevant. (Participant 5)

Both Participants 3 and 4 indicate the importance of using one communication platform. Both Participants argue that many different communication platforms exist, including email, text messaging, and similar. In addition to this, participant 5 emphasizes reducing as much noise as possible when communicating on digital platforms. Participant 4 further states that having too many platforms will increase the amount of time to search for information which

strengthens the statement made by Participant 5 about reducing noise in digital communication.

5.1.4 Rituals

Rituals are considered socially significant as they help bind groups through norms; examples are different ceremonies considered daily acts (Hofstede et al., 2010). When analyzing the interviews, it was clear that organizations arranged different rituals to structure meetings and employee communication, where employees can casually chat and discuss business-related subjects.

> I believe in this, that you have a meeting culture where there are both set agendas but also that you allow easier meetings where you have agile ways of working, especially in a digital environment. [...] so that you know that you get the opportunity to get an overall picture as well, [...] to know what is happening as a whole in an organization. (Participant 3)

As mentioned, all participating companies have rituals that structure how people meet; as such, they had common monthly meetings digitally. Participants 2, 3, and 4 argue that it can be challenging for some people to call or have an open dialog with their colleagues, which the Participants believe is an essential part of daily work life. Therefore rituals in the form of meetings, both with set agendas and more open-ended conversations, are essential strategies to gather employees and create dialog amongst them. Participant 2 addresses the problematization with participation in digitally-based meetings:

> Some find it easier to talk to others. You have to work so that everyone feels comfortable taking a seat, having workshops where everyone has to write on post-it notes, and maybe not so much the person who raises their hand first gets to speak. But then it also applies that you create coffee groups where there is space for a little bit of what you talk about at the coffee machine [...]. (Participant 2)

Even Participants 1, 3, and 4 address this problem and argue that making all employees comfortable with the digitally based platforms is essential. They explain that it is up to the

leaders of the organization and teams to encourage and empower employees to join every meeting and participate in creating a feeling of solidarity. Schein (2010) argues that the organization's founder and leader will create and influence the culture. The importance of leadership, in this case, can be analyzed as a crucial part and even strategy for creating organizational culture.

> I believe in the personal meeting, but then I really believe that the personal meeting can take place digitally. It depends entirely on what managers and leaders you have; it is entirely in their hands [...]. (Participant 1)

These rituals are analyzed as a significant part of creating a shared culture and importantly, opening doors for dialog within the organization. A digital organization needs this type of structure to adapt employees to work online. These meetings can be understood as symbols. All interviewed companies have named their different meetings; some are called All-hands, Stand-up, and more; these names can be analyzed as symbols creating a particular gesture or way of acting understood by the whole company. For example, when the company has All-hands, employees understand that the meeting has a business-related agenda, and so on.

> And then we have something that always stays; it's called All Hands; for example, when we have meetings with the entire company, it always ends with a line called "let's get started," and then people start working. (Participant 1)

These symbols are analyzed as communicative strategies to create a shared understanding of what these rituals mean and what they require from employees. With meetings of both business-related and small talk agendas, companies can create a space for employees to communicate, work and get to know each other from different geographic locations.

Although organizations meet online regularly, all participating companies argued for the importance of meeting face-to-face with organizational members. All participating organizations aim to meet at least once a year and understand this meeting as essential for creating and maintaining organizational culture.

The few times we did not have annual meetings and skipped meeting each other, it was clearly noticeable [...]. You get so much when you get to see the management and when you get to hear them talk and hear discussions and get to see people talking to each other, you simply get to know each other, [...]. A strong brand has a bit of insurance against negative events. And the same thing happens when you get to know a person; if you respect or like a person and feel that that person respects me and sees that I am important, it is much easier to bring changes and bad things and also easier to carry the values that these meetings give, you create your own local world in the office. (Participant 3)

All organizations argue that these meetings create opportunities to get to know coworkers in a completely different way. Participant 3 addresses this and argues that meeting employees creates trust and relationships that imprint future teamwork and communication among colleagues. Participant 2 also argues that these face-to-face meetings are essential for everyday digital work. They make it easier for colleagues to later communicate in digital contexts where the same casual communicative possibilities don't exist. Ashforth & Mael (1989) argues that a personal meeting is where people co-create their identities with a group. Face-to-face meetings are not only argued to create trusting relationships but also to streamline collaboration and work. Participants 3 and 4 argue that work efficiency increases when colleagues are gathered in the same location.

We had it last Wednesday, and all of a sudden, all five of us sat together, and then we got five times as far. Because I mean, when we're sitting and working at home, there's a text message, and then the doorbell rings, it's not compressed. (Participant 4)

Therefore, meeting in person positively impacts employees' work lives. This ritual is essential for organizations because it allows employees to get to know each other and streamline work and collaboration. Therefore, this ritual can be understood as a crucial strategy for digital companies for efficiency and employee cohesion. However, Participants 1 and 3 also emphasize the importance of creating opportunities for employees to get to know and socialize with each other digitally.

Meeting in person is important for people to be able to create relationships, [...] but conditions must also be created for people to get to know each other. This can be achieved through digital Christmas parties and team-building activities like building gingerbread houses together, even if they are all doing it in front of their screens at home - it can be done just as well as in a conference room. Dare to do things differently, think outside the box, and dare to use the physical things we do, also digitally. (Participant 1)

Participant 1 argues that people don't take advantage of all the digital world's opportunities. They suggest we have to consider digital meetings as crucial as in-person meetings. Participant 1 suggests that getting to know people online is possible if the right opportunities are created for employees.

This further reinforces the analysis that rituals and structured meetings must be created for employees to get to know each other. Communication professionals must be creative and think outside the box to create the right digital opportunities for employees. While meeting face-to-face is shown to be an essential strategy for employees, this analysis highlights the importance of creativity for what a digital meeting can provide and addresses not to be limited by the interpersonal meeting. Thus, structured rituals are essential for organizations to create an organizational culture in both interpersonal and digital contexts. Communicators should start regarding the digital meeting and its opportunities as a relevant strategy for creating relations within a common group.

All Participants expressed that values, shared purpose, and mission are important for creating organizational culture through internal communication. According to Schein (2010), espoused values are the second layer of culture; they refer to ideals, goals, values, aspirations, and rationalizations (Macqueen, 2020). They addressed various types of rituals to create shared values among employees. Each organization utilized workshops to involve and engage the entire organization in developing these shared values.

We had a meeting where we worked together to come up with these words, so it's not something the management team came up with on

their own; it comes from the organization, what they think. [...]
through workshops where the whole organization will come together
in different groups to discuss how to behave according to the words
[...]. (Participant 2)

To work with the organizational culture is both what you say and what
you do. So we get it in writing and speaking, but also in activities [...].
(Participant 2)

Participants 1, 2, and 3 claim that values must be created from the bottom up. Employees
must actively work to understand what these values mean to them, not just in their day-to-day
work but also as individuals. Hence, this can be analyzed as a strategy to encourage
employees to consider how they identify with the organization and its purpose. All
Participants stated they look for employees who want to make a difference and be part of
their purpose. If analyzed through the social identity theory, these rituals can be understood as
a way for employees to create a common identity for the group. The creation of values can be
analyzed as a strategy where employees socially categorize the values and identity of an
organization, making it the first step in creating a social identity. Understanding what the
organization's values are and how they can be applied to you as an individual can ensure that
employees around the world, regardless of their cultural background, share the same identity,
shaping the way they think and understand problems. By creating rituals where employees
both read, discuss, engage in dialog and act with each other, values are not only
communicated from management to employees. However, they are also co-created to form a
shared understanding of the organizational culture. This communication strategy can be
understood through analysis as a highly effective ritual for creating organizational culture.

5.2 Espoused values

Schein mentions in his book that an organization's culture emerges when the organization is
founded. To establish espoused values, the organization must concur with new situations,
problems, and issues. In the interviews, all the participants argued that the digital healthcare
industry is a relatively new phenomenon.

During the interviews, it became clear that all companies have defined values used as strategies in different ways depending on the organization. They are used prominently in daily work when hiring new employees and guiding the organization.

Participant 2 argues for the importance of including all the employees in setting the values, especially talking about them regularly.

> We have a value base that we work with: we are empathetic, innovative, and with a good heart. [...]. And we talk about it often and have worked with it for periods. And now we have a project led by our HR department to start delivering it again through workshops where the whole organization will come together in different groups to discuss how to behave according to the words. (Participant 2)

As Schein (2010) explains in his book, espoused values ought to produce a shared behavior within the organization, which will mirror the values and norms in the organization's culture. In Participant 2's organization, discussing the values and how they should generate a common behavior among the employees is essential. Likewise, participant 3 argues for letting every employee understand the meaning of the organization's values. Both organizations 2 and 3 have documents that clearly state the organization's values, vision, and mission. Documents 2 and 3 can be understood as documents to formally concretize the values, making them an eminent part of the organization that can be analyzed as a formal strategy.

> We have a mission, vision, and set of values that are very pronounced, which is the basis for working with culture. [...] People need to understand what the values, vision, and mission mean to them [...]. We need to illustrate the workshops and the discussions that take place there. Employees must be allowed to reflect on why these words have been chosen and their impact on their identity and work life. (Participant 3)

As mentioned in the quote, the leaders incorporate the values into the organization and invite employees to understand what the values, vision, and mission mean to them. Participant 3 argues that discussing the words could open up the reflection on how they impact the individual's identity. Ashforth & Mael (1989) argues that social categorization emerges when people are exposed to communication with a larger group. Through communication, the employees can make sense of themselves and their surroundings, generating a sense of belonging to a group.

Participant 5 also agrees with the importance of dialog and working with the values through workshops. As the company is reworking its values, the participant argues that the words must benchmark the organization and label what they stand for.

> We will have workshops to clarify and have a dialog about what we stand for today and where we strive to stand. You want to put words to what we actually stand for. Keywords are super important to rally around and benchmark yourself. Healthcare with warmth and concern - it sits in the backbone for us. (Participant 5)

As the organization is still working on its values, it is interesting to understand that they use workshops to establish new ones, so everyone is involved, which could be associated with organization identification. Ashforth & Mael (1989) notes that organizational identification increases the connection between the employees and the organization. Involving everyone in the work to develop new values can increase each individual's sense of belonging and loyalty to the organization. Expected behavior can be generated if the employees get a voice in the values; they will permeate each individual's perception of what the organization stands for, which relates to Schein's explanation of espoused values. Further, participant 4 confirmed the importance of having meaningful values:

> It is one of our most important values; even though values can be silly, it is together. But it really is together, and that really applies to almost everything. (Participant 4)

Further, this statement relates to how organizations continuously work with their values. They are a guideline to how the organization members should understand the organization and its

aim. It can be interpreted as a common ground that sets the frame for what is wrong or right in particular situations.

5.2.2 Requirements and Guidelines

Schein's model proposes that employees reflect upon the proposer's assumptions and understanding of what is wrong or right in a situation (Schein, 2010). Participants 1, 3, and 4 discussed the importance of clear rules and guidelines for employees' everyday work.

> You have to be clear about setting expectations for your employees. You have to be strict about timekeeping and listening [...]. This is about respect, and it is important to be clear. There are certain guidelines when working together, such as not using your phone during a meeting or having your phone on the table. You should be where you are [...]. (Participant 3)

Participants 1 and 3 argue for clear guidelines and restrictions and explain that these will help employees separate personal and work life and create a specific quality of work and service. Participant 1 addresses the restrictions that their organization has on customer service:

> We expect them to deliver. We sort of have clear goals and clear KPIs that we measure. [...] We measure, for example, if you are a doctor, how long you spend with the patient, and measure everything and expect that you reach different levels and deliver things on time. We have a lot of data that we can then use to set requirements. (Participant 1)

These requirements can be analyzed as an espoused value, where organizations set precise requirements for employees to create a shared mindset amongst employees. According to Schein (2010), culture is built upon shared mindsets inside a group. These requirements can alarm employees on how to act and think in different situations, in contact with customers and other employees. Participants 3 and 4 argue that it is essential to set boundaries and requirements to show respect for one another. These requirements could also be understood as a symbol, a way of dressing, acting, or even working with others in the organization to show respect and create a shared way of working and thinking. Clear restrictions can be

analyzed as a communication strategy for creating an organizational culture with a shared mindset.

5.2.3 Ambassadorship

Ambassadorship is identified as a theme and can be understood as an expectation the management has on employees. When analyzing the way organizations use ambassadorship, it's identified that it is used as a strategy to create organizational culture, both internal and external.

> We expect you to be a good ambassador; you should work at X because you want to, not for any other reason. Because you want to make a real difference [...] We work very hard to ensure that people understand why we are here and what difference we will make. (Participant 1)

Participants 1, 2, 3, and 4 discuss the topic of ambassadorship and explain that employees are expected to spread their knowledge of the organization's experience. With this expectation, organizations can spread the organizational culture internally and externally. Participant 2 expresses the importance of having an internal ambassadorship in the socialization of new employees.

> We put everyone in a very long line from the ones who had been with us from the beginning to the ones who hadn't started working yet [...] we paired people like that. They were asked a couple of questions related to why did you apply here. And what do I think it means to work at X. And it's a way to talk about the culture and sort of a way to work with it and try to ensure [...] that it comes from within. (Participant 2)

The requirement or expectation of ambassadorship can be understood as an espoused value that imposes a demand on how employees should behave and think, both towards new employees and external stakeholders. Participant 2 organization uses ambassadorship as a ritual, which can be identified as a clear strategy for creating a shared identity among employees, where veterans set a standard for how work should be carried out and what the

culture means to them. It is a way for the organization to create a shared mindset and understanding of the organization strategically.

In an analysis of Documents 3 and 4, ambassadorship is used to showcase images of practitioners in their clinics, which can also be understood as a clear strategy for giving new employees and external stakeholders insight into the organization's internal culture and building on the communicated culture. In the interviews and analysis of Documents 3 and 4, ambassadorship can be identified as a clear and formal communicative strategy for creating and maintaining organizational culture.

5.2.4 Professionalism

One aspect of culture discussed in this study is the impact of doctors, psychologists, and nurses' role identification. This aspect was discussed with all participants and was widely mentioned by Participants 1, 2, 3, and 5. According to SIT, individuals partake in group success and development to increase members' self-esteem. Social identities can be based on the organization's shared goals and values but may also be derived from the individual's department, group, age, or lunch group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Analyzing the interviews showed that professionalism and identity are based on their impact on how organizations work and communicate with their employees.

> [...] in defense of doctors, [...] They can make their own judgments with the science and proven knowledge they have, and that must be respected by those who are not knowledgeable in the subject. [...] Those of us who are not doctors or similar, we try to support them, make it as easy as possible [...]. (Participant 3)

When analyzing interviews, professionalism impacts the organization and its way of working, which can be understood as a basic assumption. Schein's (2010) three levels of culture explain basic assumption as the third level of culture. Basic assumption significantly correlates with the model's second level, espoused values. When a solution has been proven to work several times to solve problems, it will be taken for granted within the organization. Basic assumptions are deeply rooted in the organization and become unconscious behaviors and values, which makes them undebatable and, as such, difficult to change (Schein, 2010). The identification and culture of their profession can be analyzed as a basic assumption

impacting how employees work, think, and act unconsciously. Participants 3, 4, and 5 addressed this analysis when discussing the overall purpose of physicians. They all argue that physicians' primary purpose is to help people; they are in charge of people's lives; the Participants explain that this impacts the company's overall culture. This mission can be understood as a basic assumption that significantly impacts the organization's culture.

> In defense of doctors, it is the case that they are responsible for people's lives. (Participant 3)

> There is great pride in being a clinician, regardless of whether it is a psychologist, doctor, or nurse. I think that's right, [...], but it's fantastic that they help patients, customers, fellow human beings out in society with their profession. (Participant 5)

Although this overall purpose is understood to impact the organization's culture and mindset of employees, Participants 1, 3, 4, and 5 address the importance of having a unique purpose and mission to get physicians to choose their organization. Participant 3 claims that their purpose and vision help a specific and vulnerable group, giving employees purpose and something to be proud of.

> The important thing is capturing the strength of "damn, we're doing something good for people." We are helping a very vulnerable group that has not received any support at all, and we can do much work to talk about it. Showing all the positive comments that come from patients and showing doctors and other staff the good work they do for people [...]. (Participant 3)

Thereby, it can be analyzed as a strategy against the basic assumption of professionalism to gain a common identity and purpose among Physicians. These specific missions and purposes are analyzed as built upon the common purpose of "helping people" while gaining a unique selling proposition for employees. Participant 1 addresses this issue and claims that their organization works towards minimizing hierarchy and subcultures between different professional roles. Their organization actively works with reports showing why their organization is the best choice; these are internal documents that can be analyzed to identify

its unique characteristics and purpose. In an analysis of Document 1, it can be understood that many of the communicated reasons were related to sustainability from an economic, social, and environmental perspective. Document 1 can be analyzed as a way for the organization to get physicians to identify with and be proud of the organization they work at, rather than their professional role, realizing the organization's greater purpose and meaning.

> There was a media image that X was sucking the system dry, that X only wants to make money. We have worked very actively to create internal pride. It is communication to make them feel internal pride, why they are here, why X is good. With everything from creating reports that show how we are making a real difference, how we are doing better for society [...]. On our website, we also have 10 reasons why X is good, and it is both external but also something we talk a lot about internally [...]. (Participant 1)

According to SIT, group comparison allows individuals to compare their group with other external groups. This process increases identification with a particular group to maintain a positive social identity (Ashforth et al., 2008). In organizational identification, individuals participate in group success and development to increase their self-esteem (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Document 1 can be understood as strategies that shift identification and status from profession to organization and create a common identity and culture by comparing their organization with other outstanding organizations. Doing this creates a greater identification with the organization's overall culture.

Participants 2 and 5 contradict this statement, meaning that organizations must respect and understand that some people have these jobs as secondary incomes due to financial aspects or a desire for additional work.

> Some individuals truly want to identify with the culture and believe in the purpose, while others simply want a job and then go home. When working in this context, one must acknowledge and address both perspectives, finding levels and modes of communication that work for everyone [...]. (Participant 2)

Thereby, the overall purpose of physicians has to be discussed. The idea that all physicians want to help people may not always influence an organization's overall culture. Participant 5 also addresses this by discussing why employees work at the organization. They explain that factors such as salary and availability can influence the chosen workplace. The role may not always act as a basic assumption impacting the overall organizational culture.

With this discussed, it can be analyzed that role identification can be understood as a basic assumption that impacts how these organizations work, create, and communicate culture. Although this is something that all participating organizations know and actively work with and sometimes exploit to create and maintain culture. Some organizations even emphasized the importance of minimizing hierarchy and using communicative strategies to gain organizational identification and culture. These strategies can be understood as an espoused valued strategy that can minimize subcultures and create a common organizational culture.

5.3 Basic Assumptions and Values

To understand basic assumptions, the three levels are analyzed and interpreted together. Aimin understands how these values on the different levels are aligned, to further recognize the culture and how it is embedded. As the chosen industry and the way of working and organizing are relatively new, it's hard to identify any clear basic assumptions from the empirical material. Although strategies are identified as basic assumptions that influence how employees think and act. This section analyzes the different levels, combined with Hostede's onion diagram and the Social Identity Theory. As this is a thematic analysis, we analyze basic assumptions to find themes and patterns in communication strategies to create and maintain organizational culture.

Professionalism is one occurring theme that can be understood as a basic assumption influencing all identified themes. As mentioned in the previous section, espoused values and professional role identification are basic assumptions that create unconscious organizational behaviors and values. When analyzing all the previous sub-categories, one can argue that all the discussed themes are based on and developed from the basic assumption of professionalism. When analyzing the empirical data, one can easily identify that all organizations had an overall mission based on the physician's purpose.

I always share when I receive positive feedback so that the data understand that what we're doing is for a real person. [...]. (Participant 4)

We're helping a very vulnerable group that hasn't received any support at all [...] To show all the positive comments that come from patients and give doctors and other staff proof of the good job they're doing for people [...]. (Participant 3)

These organizations' overall mission and values are built on the foundation of helping people in need, which can be understood as the purpose of the physician's profession. This basic assumption can be understood to affect and influence all other themes such as values, dress codes, ambassadorship, rituals, and guidelines and, thus, influence the overall culture in the organization. By identifying this, further themes will be understood and analyzed as connected to the role identification of physicians.

One other theme that is found to potentially produce basic assumptions is creating possibilities for people to meet, even in a digital environment, which was identified in rituals, guidelines, channels, and values.

See what the need is and what the basic need is for meeting. Is it to tell what you did over the weekend or is it to receive appreciation from someone else, and how can we transform that need or meet it in a different way. [...]. (Participant 5)

Participant 5 addresses this and argues that the management has to meet underlying needs and try to figure out how to create digital opportunities for appreciation, small talk, and business dialog. Participant 1 also addresses this issue when saying that management has to start understanding digital meetings as personal ones; start being creative in the possibilities and prerequisites for employees to get to know each other. This strategy was identified in most subcategories. For example, in communication channels, used to create opportunities for employees to communicate in different contexts, all organizations had channels with both chat functions and channels for video, email, newsletters, and more. As such, this can be

analyzed to give employees opportunities and create expectations of where to find the correct information.

Even different rituals were designed to get a meeting culture of small talk and business-related agendas. Organizations set these strategies to create prerequisites and a shared understanding of how to act and think in different parts of the organization from home. The culture will immediately emerge when an organization is founded (Shein, 2010). In that sense, strategies made by management and founders will create and influence the culture, but it's first when it's embedded in the group that it will guide what type of leadership and behavior is accepted (Schein, 2010). Thus, when analyzing the empirical material, it was clear that different strategies were created to allow employees to meet and get to know each other in digital settings to create and maintain a culture within the organization.

Lastly, guidelines can be identified as potentially creating basic assumptions. When analyzing the empirical data, guidelines are a common theme. Organizations use guidelines and requirements for employees when meeting customers and how to act internally and externally through ambassadorship and within the organization at meetings. These guidelines can be analyzed as strategies to create clear expectations for employees, what to expect in different meetings, workshops, dress codes, and rituals. In digital settings, the interpersonal meeting disappears, but there are also other important aspects that have been described as relevant to the creation of culture.

> Where one knows that there are many things that disappear, such as how humans smell. These are things one does not think about, but they are incredibly important, [...]. (Participant 4)

> But the advantage you have in an office is that you can hear what others are talking about, you can follow what's happening, and which decisions are being made in a different way when you're in an office, [...]. (Participant 3)

> Because everything that disappears in this interpersonal communication otherwise, a smile, a greeting, body language, what

someone does or doesn't do during lunch, everything that one signals,

[...]. (Participant 5)

When these aspects disappear, it is crucial to articulate and communicate the management's expectations and requirements for employees. Therefore, guidelines serve as a strategy and a clear plan for creating a shared understanding of, for example, how to dress, behave, work, and communicate and which types of meetings allow what types of communication. These guidelines can thus function as walls in a room, rules that make it easier for employees to know how to think and understand different situations, allowing employees to get to know each other and thus build a common culture. Therefore, guidelines can be analyzed as a basic assumption that gives employees the opportunity to create a shared identity for the group. The following section will discuss and conclude the argument analysis by contrasting it with previous research.

6. Discussion & Conclusion

The following section provides a general discussion and conclusion on how the research provides new knowledge within the field of strategic communication. Suggestions for further research within the field of organizational culture in digital companies are presented.

The aim of this paper is to investigate how communication strategies are used in digital companies to create and maintain organizational culture. By conducting deductive research, the theories work as a relevant foundation for the findings; thereby we are able to answer this research question by searching for themes and patterns in the empirical data. As such, the study contributes with research to the field of organizational communication and strategic communication.

First, our findings suggest that communication strategies are essential to creating an organizational culture within the digital companies of research. Cimperman (2023) explains that digitally based companies must focus on internal communication, which should aim to be both informal and professional. In the interviews, all participants confirmed that informal and formal communication was essential to implement organizational culture. As Şomácescu et al. (2016) argue, communication and culture significantly impact each other, as communication creates culture and affects the climate for communication. In relation to the empirical data, we argue that communication is proven to have a crucial impact on how the organization succeeds with culture and adapts it among the employees. It was identified in all three of Schein's levels of culture and Hofstede's onion diagram that the organizations of research use communication strategies to establish a set of common goals, behavior, and values. The one strategy proven not commonly used in research organizations was Hoftstede's layer of heroes. Only Participant 1 indicated that this strategy was used to create culture. Previous research has studied how internal communication impacts employees, proving that it generates positive emotions (Yue et al., 2020). Unlike our research, Yue et al. conducted a study on traditional organizations. Our findings extend this research to understand how internal communication creates an organizational culture in digital companies.

Furthermore, previous research (Bareket-Bojmel et al., 2023; Basol & Çömleki, 2022) suggests remote work will not harm the employee's engagement. Unlike previous research,

our research does not aim to research employees' engagement in digital companies but rather how different strategies are used to create a culture that results in engaged employees. The study concludes that communication strategies such as established guidelines, values, mission and vision, scheduled meetings for both chat and business-related agendas, workshops, different communication channels, and communication of dress code help establish a common culture amongst employees. The findings show that by implementing guidelines and different strategies, organizations can derive and contribute to a common organizational identity and create a framework for how employees should think, act and behave, resulting in a more holistic organization. Furthermore, social comparison was identified as a result of different strategies to differentiate organizations from others, contributing to creating a unique culture.

Previous research on remote work primarily emanated from the COVID-19 pandemic (Toledano et al., 2023). Our study shows that digital companies face other conditions and expectations than traditional companies that were forced to adapt to remote work due to the pandemic. Digitally founded companies must create digital opportunities for employees to chat and work; this research concludes that communicated strategies help organizations and employees create shared identities, contributing to organizational culture. SIT states that shared identities create organizational cultures that unify the way employees think, act, and behave (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This study concludes that strategies that create and discuss identity are present in the studied organizations making them a useful tool in the creation of organizational culture. Furthermore, the findings show that strategies such as dialogic workshops and rituals generate a good work environment resulting in collectivistic organizations. As Mlonyeni (2023) argues, remote work is an increasingly prevalent way of working. More research is required on how digitally-based organizations shall operate in digital environments. Therefore, our study contributes knowledge on how organizations should strategize internal communication to meet employee expectations and create and maintain organizational culture.

We argue that general conclusions can be drawn from our study since it is based on companies that originally positioned themselves in the digital market. The three levels of culture and the layers of the onion diagram can be used as building blocks of culture. The study identifies communication strategies that can be used to reach the different layers and build a culture in a digitally-based company.

6.1 Suggestions for further research

Future research should be conducted in this field; an example of future research can be based on how employees, such as physicians, perceive organizational culture within the industry conducted in this research. This can be qualitative or quantitative research, aiming to understand the identification with digital organizations and their culture. Using a qualitative approach would preferably be done through interviews, as it would give deep insight into how remote employees perceive the phenomenon. From a quantitative approach, a survey can be conducted to seek relationships between used communication strategies and the perception of them resulting in organizational culture.

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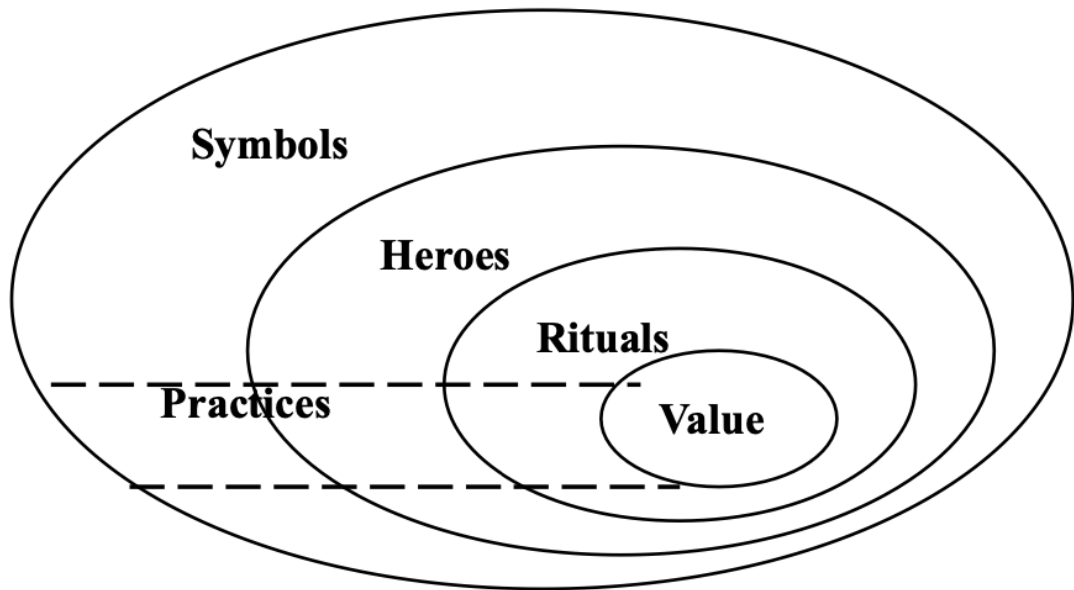
Figures

Figure 1. Hofstede Onion diagram: cultural manifestations on different levels (Hofstede, 2010).

Appendix

The appendix includes the interview guide used for all participants. The transcriptions can be sent out on demand and are thereby not included in this section.

Interview Guide

We will start by introducing ourselves. Isabelle Englesson will ask all the questions. Gabriella Ekman will transcribe during the interview.

An explanation of the study: This study aims to investigate how communication strategies are used in remote organizations to create and maintain organizational culture. By examining this, the study aims to contribute new research and knowledge about how organizational culture can be created through communication in a non-interpersonal context. The following research question will be answered to fulfill the purpose of this research:

RQ1: What strategies are used to communicate and obtain internal organizational culture in remote organizations?

We will record this interview on an external device. Is that okay with you? We will also keep you anonymous so this study will not use anything you say about yourself.

Can the company name XX be mentioned and visible in the thesis? What does XX usually do in these circumstances?
Are there any other questions before we begin?

Opening questions
- Tell me a bit about yourself and your career.
- Please tell me briefly about XX and what it means to be a digital healthcare center.
- What is your view on organizational culture? Is this important for organizations?
- Do you believe there is a difference between digital and traditional companies regarding organizational culture?

Espoused Values

- What are your values and mission/vision, and do you work and communicate these in your daily work?
- Who is XX's ideal employee, and what do you look for when hiring personnel?
- What do you expect from your employees, and do you communicate this, and if so, how?
- What is XX organizational culture, and how is it created and obtained?
- What communication strategies do you use/believe are important for creating organizational culture?

Artifacts

- Is there a dress code for employees?
- Are there any declared role models within the company that are communicated about and referred to?
- What digital channels do you use to communicate internally?
- Do employees work in teams, and do they have team leaders if so, what role do they have?
- Is there communication between the different teams and professional groups?
- Do your employees ever meet on the organization's initiative? For example, through company events, workshops, or similar.

Basic Assumptions

- Will removing interpersonal meetings, such as meetings between employees in break rooms, affect organizational culture?
- For people with the professional role of a doctor, nurse, etc., it's common to identify more with the profession than its organization. How do you experience XX's employees identifying themselves - with their professional role or with XX?
- How does XX integrate new employees into the company through digital media at XX?
- Are there the right tools to succeed digitally? (digital platforms, etc.)

Closing questions

- What's important for succeeding with a digital company? Communicatively speaking
- Do you think more companies will become digital, and how will it impact organizational culture?

- What are the biggest challenges of working digitally?

Thank you for your time and insight on this subject. One last question: do you have any other colleagues you believe have the right knowledge or interest in this subject that we could contact for an interview?