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**“Am I being monitored?”
A critical study of communication visibility on social col-
laboration tools in the modern workplace**

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Abstract

“Am I being monitored?” – A critical study of communication visibility on Social Collaboration Tools in the modern workplace

Social collaboration tools, such as Slack and Microsoft Teams, are highly appreciated in the modern workplace due to their enabling of efficient communication and collaboration. Research highlight that the tools are making communication more visible, which is said to increase collaboration, productivity, and knowledge-sharing between organizational members. This thesis problematizes the lack of previous research taking power dimensions into consideration when a large amount of communication in the workplace through these tools is highly visible, traceable, searchable, and has the potential of being monitored. In this qualitative critical study 12 Swedish employees in various sectors were interviewed through semi-structured interviews, to reach nuanced insights and perspectives on how they are making sense of communication visibility in relation to power dynamics, and how they are making sense of their communicative behavior and self-governance on the tools. By using concepts of power articulated by Michael Foucault combined with Actor Network Theory the findings from this study showed that the participants value communication visibility, but that the benefits do not come without concerns. The tools enable new ways of power and the potential risk of being monitored was present to several of the participants. The thesis contributes to strategic communication by understanding how transparency about gathered data on social collaboration tools can mitigate risks of employees making their own assumptions about how communication and data is being gathered and analyzed. Future research is encouraged to research if and when employers might be tempted to monitor their employees on social collaboration tools, and whether employees find such monitoring ethically justified in those situations.

Keywords: Social collaboration tools, communication visibility, internal communication, digital monitoring, power relations, Foucault, Actor Network Theory.

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1. Introduction

The best - maybe the only? - real, direct measure of “innovation” is change in human behavior. /.../ That’s why what we’re selling is organizational transformation. The software just happens to be the part we’re able to build & ship (and the means for us to get our cut).
(Butterfield, 2014)

Stewart Butterfield, former CEO of Slack.

After covid-19, a dramatic increase of social collaboration tools has been prominent due to the rise of remote work (Espersson et al., 2023; Heide & Falkheimer, 2022; L. Yang et al., 2022). In the aftermath of the pandemic, hybrid working models have become the most popular work arrangement for knowledge-intensive organizations (Hopkins & Bardoel, 2023), and the likelihood of returning to the pre-pandemic office-centered work arrangement is said to be very low (Heide & Falkheimer, 2022; Šmite et al., 2023).

As a result of this, the demand for online collaboration and communication tools has soared since hybrid and remote work challenged the traditional internal communication infrastructure. Market leaders Slack and Microsoft Teams have millions of active monthly users all over the world, Slack reached 65 million monthly users in 2024 (Shewale, 2024) and Microsoft Teams has an impressive number of 320 million monthly users (Curry, 2024). These social collaboration tools’ business idea is to offer their users one platform where the majority of the internal communication and collaboration takes place, rather than switching between emails, texts, and other platforms for communicating with your colleagues (Microsoft, 2024; Slack, 2024a).

Research has emphasized that social collaboration tools in knowledge-intensive organizations enhance better team communication, collaboration, innovation, and knowledge sharing (Anders, 2016; Pfeffermann & Schaller, 2023; B. Wang et al., 2021; X. Yang et al., 2021), and dissemination of information through social networks has been identified as essential for productivity and innovation (Anders, 2016). Valuable knowledge and communication is now said to be much more obtainable, visible, and shared with others through social collaboration tools (Leonardi, 2014). One feature that these tools enable is increased *communication visibility*

and this in turn can enhance employees' meta-knowledge, namely who knows what and who knows who (Leonardi, 2014; Leonardi & Treem, 2020). Slack emphasizes that this feature is something that makes their platform inclusive, now everyone has access to the same information and the whole system is searchable, which makes it easier to connect with other teams or coworkers in the organization (Slack, 2024b).

Social collaboration tools in the workplace are presented to enhance new and improved ways to collaborate, communicate, and communication visibility is mainly presented as providing positive outcomes for organizational members. However, research has paid little attention to the potential unintended usages that the tools and the communication visibility could enable. This thesis questions what happens when such communication in the organization that previously might not have been as visible, searchable, or monitored now has the potential to be.¹ The current research perspective could be argued is largely coming from a managerial or market perspective focusing on organizational efficiency. Focus on efficiency and productivity always is on the agenda in the digital age which we are embedded in (Lupton, 2014), even within strategic communication (Buhmann & Likely, 2018).

This thesis problematizes the lack of critical perspectives of power dimensions in regard of communication visibility on social collaboration tools and underlying assumptions that all organizational members benefit equally from communication visibility (Leonardi, 2014). The thesis investigates possible vulnerabilities that communication visibility could pose for employees and what implications this has. The study investigates how employees make sense of communication visibility on social collaboration tools in relation to power dynamics, and if they interpret that they regulate their communicative behavior on the tools due to the risk of feeling monitored.

Scholars within strategic communication have underscored the need to research communication effects from both technological developments in society and implications after the

¹ It should be noted that there is a difference between what can be monitored versus what is legal to monitor. While companies established in the EU need to abide to the GDPR law, which restricts real-time monitoring of private conversations (Wolford, 2018), investigations into suspected misconduct allow access to these conversations (Unionen Opinion, 2023). Reasons of security usually justifies monitoring, whereas reasons of improving productivity and efficiency are of a weaker nature (Bergling, 2024). Despite laws being in place, the current legal framework is a complex and not entirely clarified field (Bergling, 2024). It is said that it is difficult to say what an employer can or cannot do within this field, and that it is a question of balancing interests (Bergling, 2024).

covid-19 pandemic (Heide & Falkheimer, 2022). Zerfass et al (2018) underscore the need to research strategic challenges when new innovations within communication in organizations are developed. When traditional procedures are left by the wayside and new routines are implemented, whether these efforts are carefully planned for or happen unexpectedly, the relevance for strategic communication is especially important (Zerfass et al., 2018). To navigate such complex fields requires creative thinking when there is not yet any clear blueprint or pre-established solutions (Zerfass et al., 2018). As such, this thesis aims to contribute to the field of strategic communication by delving into the complex interplay between power dynamics and communication visibility facilitated by social collaboration tools between organizational members. By focusing on the connection between dissemination of information, power dynamics, and digital technologies this study aims to investigate how employees perceive and navigate these dynamics. Through understandings these nuances, the study ultimately aims to contribute to insights that can inform the development and usage of social collaboration tools in a way that fosters transparency and democratic usages of the tools within organizations.

By employing a critical interpretive research approach grounded in critical organizational studies from Alvesson and Deetz (2021), together with concepts of power articulated by Michael Foucault (1972, 1977), and Actor Network Theory (Callon, 1984; Latour, 2005; Law, 1992) which acknowledges non-human actants in social networks that can influence power dynamics, this study aims to contribute with a nuanced analysis of how employees interpret power relations on social collaboration tools. Employees are considered important key communicators in the organization, and as such organizations are reliant on the communicative behavior of their employees to reach successful outcomes (Heide & Falkheimer, 2022; Madsen & Verhoeven, 2016). Analyzing employees' perspective does not only contribute to practical learnings for organizations, but also contribute to bringing forward critical research grounded in empirical material, as traditional critical research has been criticized for being too radical in its approach and merely theorizing concepts (Alvesson & Deetz, 2021). Therefore, the aim is also to contribute with productive critical research, with providing both theoretical and practical contributions to strategic communication.

Power according to Foucault, Alvesson and Deetz is considered as something contextual, dynamic, and not necessarily possessed by one single actor of power, such as a top manager (Alvesson, 1996; Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Foucault, 1977). Rather, power is exercised and seen as something fluid, unconscious and something that happens through actions upon actions by several actors (Alvesson, 1996; Christensen, 2023). In Foucault's worldview power exists everywhere, it is something that is internalized in individuals and society, which makes

it sometimes difficult to deduce where the power comes from (Foucault, 1977). According to Foucault, when people are unaware of where the power comes, they will start to self-discipline (Foucault, 1977). By complementing the concepts of power from Foucault together with Actor Network Theory the goal is to analyze how employees perceive power dynamics not just between other human actors, such as between other colleagues or managers, but also in relation to how the social collaboration itself can shape and influence such dynamics.

Aim and research questions

This thesis aims to provide nuanced insights if and how power dynamics are visible on social collaboration tools from employees' perspectives. The aim is not to reject social collaboration tools as disastrous for internal communication or to decide if social collaboration tools are to blame for the heightened risk of being digitally monitored, nor is the aim to endorse the current order. Rather, the aim is to invite critical reflection of how the communication tools that have become an integral part of internal communication in the modern workplace could pose for vulnerabilities for employees, their communicative behavior and subsequently what implications this has. To successfully fulfill the aim of the study, the following research questions will be analyzed:

***RQ1:** How do employees make sense of communication visibility and power relations on social collaboration tools?*

***RQ2:** How do employees make sense of their communicative behavior and self-governance on social collaboration tools?*

Delimitations

This thesis identifies some limitations that warrants consideration. Firstly, the study focuses on employees' perspectives. Studying communication visibility and power dynamics from a managerial perspective could have given interesting insights as well, for instance examining if management feel more tempted to monitor their employees through social collaboration tools. Secondly, the study draws on Foucault's concepts of power due to their relevance to the study. However, it is important to note the vastness and complexity of Foucault's framework of power and acknowledge that other concepts could have been selected as well. Future research on the same topic might benefit from considering other concepts from Foucault or alternative

theoretical frameworks. Additionally, the interviewed participants in the study are in a similar age group, roughly estimated as millennials, and interviews with participants in other age groups could have given different results.

Lastly, the participants in the study are Swedish employees. Conducting the same research with participants working in other countries that has other forms of legislations regarding data privacy and monitoring could possibly have given different results.

Disposition

After the introduction, the thesis will continue with a literature review that focuses on social collaboration tools in the workplace and the critical perspectives that currently are lacking within communication disciplines, and especially strategic communication. Following this, the theoretical framework that guided this study will be presented. Further, the methodology will be presented with the strategic choices that were made for the gathering of the empirical material, its limitations, paired with thoughts on reflexivity and ethical considerations. After this, the analysis and its findings will be brought forward. The thesis is finalized with a discussion chapter covering the overall conclusions together with limitations as well as suggestions for future research.

2. Literature review

The purpose of this literature review is to enter the academic conversation regarding social collaboration tools in the modern organization. First, a definition will be made and how the term will be used in this study. Thereafter, an explanation will be made of social collaboration tools as an emerging media in digital society. Thereafter, a definition of communication visibility will be presented together with a section of the benefits that social collaboration tool contributes with in the workplace. Thereafter, an introduction to more critical perspectives on technological developments and communication platforms will be presented. The final segment synthesizes the overall lacking critical perspective regarding power aspects on social collaboration tools within strategic communication.

Social Collaboration Tools, emerging media, and communication visibility

Definition of Social Collaboration Tools

Literature names technologies that organizations are using for communicating and collaborating within the organization in different ways, such as team communication tools (Anders, 2016), social networking tools (Cardon & Marshall, 2015), social collaboration technologies (Pillet & Carillo, 2016), social collaboration tools (Skarzauskiene et al., 2013), and enterprise social media (Anders, 2016; Leonardi, 2014; Montrief et al., 2021; van Zoonen, Treem, & Sivunen, 2022) to name a few. While there are some slight differences between the different concepts, they essentially refer to different social media or digital platforms that organizations use for internal collaboration and communication. To adopt cohesion in this study, the term *social collaboration tools* (here on after referred to as SCTs) will be used and will depart from the usage of these tools for internal communication in the modern workplace for knowledge workers.

The choice to use this term is threefold. Firstly, it is the wish to emphasize the important social aspect that these tools enable. Secondly, they are more than merely a social tool, they are a collaboration platform in the workplace. Thirdly, using the term *tools* instead of *technologies* is motivated by the fact that it is the tool itself that will be investigated from the employees' perspective and not the broader understanding of the technological developments that made the tool possible.

Digital society and emerging medias

In today's society, the digital aspects of our lives have become so integrated in everything we do that they *are* our lives (Lupton, 2014). Whether we choose to be or not, we are increasingly becoming digital data subjects and digital technologies have the possibility to monitor our online communications (Lupton, 2014). Certain theorists argue that concepts of "culture" or "society" in contemporary life no longer can be understood in their full form without recognizing computer technologies and social structures as an inseparable connection (Couldry & Hepp, 2016; Miller & Horst, 2012). Computer software and technologies are not only supporting and channeling our social relations, social institutions, or social life; they are constituting it (Miller & Horst, 2012). Couldry and Hepp (2016) advocate that particularly social media networks comprise platforms where a majority of individuals today enact their social life, and Miller and Horst (2012) build up on this by arguing that digital technologies constitute what it means to be human today. Further, Miller and Horst (2012) mean that as the integral usage of digital technologies in life has become so widespread and pervasive, they have become invisible and unobtrusive to us.

The grand communications theorist Marshall McLuhan (1964) famously claimed that "the medium is the message" (p. 7), as he was referring to looking beyond the content of the media and examining the media in itself. McLuhan meant that as we reexamine one medium, another one emerges and he proposed that essentially, the human drive is to create tools and media that extend our senses and abilities. McLuhan was skeptical towards the "electronic media" that entered society and highlighted the risks of not fully grasping the effects new media could have on us. He argued that a lack of understanding of new media's functions leaves the modern individual highly vulnerable (McLuhan, 1964). He argued that surrendering control of the media to private companies is akin to giving up on one's rights. As electronic media frees communication from physical limits, allowing information to flow freely without geographical

hindrance, this does not only change how we communicate, but also how we perceive the world and ourselves (McLuhan, 1964).

These thoughts born fruit for theorists after McLuhan, for instance Couldry and Hepp, who point to the fact that new media should be understood as infrastructures of information *and* as sense-making processes of social life (Couldry & Hepp, 2016). Couldry and Hepp suggest an interesting materialistic phenomenological approach to study social life in the digital age. The authors critique social phenomenology for being too centered on the interpretation of the subject and mean that studying social life in the digital era requires a complete rethinking of how social life is constructed and its interconnection to the digital. The authors mean that “our account of that world must look closely at the material infrastructures *through which, and on the basis of which,* communication today take place” (Couldry & Hepp, 2016, p. 6).

McLuhan argued that in the human pursuit to develop new media and extend our senses lies a desire to alter patterns, relationships, and perceptions. This media development, he argued, is intrinsically linked to an ongoing expansion of *power* and *speed*, where control can be exerted in a higher degree, often without physical proximity (McLuhan, 1964). Couldry and Hepp (2016) further argue that “Technologically based media of communication are now fundamental to the construction of everyday reality, that is, to building and replicating the world in which we are embedded, but in ways that are producing new costs, tensions, and pain” (p. 10).

What could these new costs and tensions then possibly be? Fuchs (2020) approximates what he believes such a tension and cost could be in our digital society. He attempts to show that it is not the technologies themselves that are the root of the problem, but rather how they are used in the current society they are being used in. Fuch traces back to the origin of the word “technology”, deriving from the Greek word *technê*, which refers to skill making. The making is being shaped by an individual or a group, and the skill therefore lies in their possession. Fuchs means that the understanding of the word “technology” shifted after the Industrial Revolution to becoming something that could be exploited: “In capitalism, technology is a thing and means of production that is not controlled collectively by the workers, but by capitalists.” (Fuchs, 2020, p. 171). Fuch, even though having a quite radical anti-capitalist worldview, presents a valid point in how the communication within communication technologies have come to belong to companies wishing to create revenue. Fuch wishes to see a socialist society where the producers over the means of production are collectively owned and controlled by the producers. In this way, Fuch means that technology can turn from being a means of exploitation into what

technê was initially understood as; a means that the producers collectively could control, use, and shape (Fuchs, 2020).

So what do these authors try to grasp about our digital age? In summary, they point to the fact that life today is digital. This includes all aspects of our lives, not just our leisure time but organizational life as well, and that communication today is largely being situated in a socio-technical environment where we have become so used to digital technologies that they have become invisible and unobtrusive to us. These authors also underscore that as new technological media and tools emerge, they not only enable new ways to construct our social lives, but they also create vulnerabilities and enable new forms of power to emerge.

Communication visibility

One of the major identified benefits of communicating and collaborating through SCTs is the communication visibility they enable (Leonardi, 2014; Leonardi & Treem, 2020; C. X. Wang et al., 2022; X. Yang et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2023). Leonardi (2014) suggests a definition of communication visibility on SCTs as “once invisible communication occurring between others in the organization becomes visible for third parties, those third parties could improve their metaknowledge (i.e., knowledge of who knows what and who knows whom)” (Leonardi, 2014, p. 796). In other words, communication visibility on SCTs is defined as when a third party can observe others’ communication, for instance to gain knowledge about how others solved a task, to share knowledge or to not having to duplicate work that someone else already have made (Leonardi, 2014). This benefit of communication visibility and how it enhances team collaboration is supported by several other studies (Anders, 2016; C. X. Wang et al., 2022; X. Yang et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2023).

Leonardi points to two interconnected mechanism that make communication visibility possible; message transparency and the translucence of the SCT itself (Leonardi, 2014). The author argues that the platform plays a pivotal role since it makes previous invisible communication between coworkers visible for others in the organization. Rather than explicitly forcing knowledge-sharing between employees, a more fruitful strategy can be to simply let employees use communication tools that make their interactions visible to others (Leonardi, 2014).

While acknowledgment should be made of the vast benefits that communication visibility enables for work efficiency and productivity, other aspects of potential challenges they create have gained little attention. In Leonardi’s reasoning, there lies an assumption that everyone in the workplace benefits equally from communication visibility and the meta-knowledge it

creates. The author fails to take power relations into account when introducing the concept and considering that for instance employers and employees by the nature of their different roles have an unequal balance of power and knowledge, the meta-knowledge that an employer would gain and the meta-knowledge that an employee in a lower ranking would gain could look and be used differently.

Leonardi does briefly mention some critiques, such as increased communication visibility could lead to employees feeling more surveilled (Leonardi, 2014), but the author does not delve deeper into it. Other authors have raised their critique, arguing that communication visibility could pose challenges for information overload for employees as well as social pressure to always be visible on the tool (Anders, 2016). Van Zoonen et al (2022) also argue that there is a potential risk for self-censorship with the heightened visibility (van Zoonen, Treem, & Sivunen, 2022). Leonardi mentions that the behavioral changes that need to happen to take full advantage of the communication visibility, and the goal with the visibility, is unclear (Leonardi, 2014).

In a more recent article, Leonardi and Treem (2020) builds upon the concept with introducing *behavioral* visibility in the digital workplace. Due to technical infrastructures that enable connectivity online, behaviors of organizational members online are much more easily seen today. Here, the standpoint is more open toward critique of communication and behavioral visibility on SCTs. The authors mean that in the era of connectivity, the performance of an organizational member's behavior is no longer in their own possession. Rather, "Those performances belong to a broad and heterogeneous empirical audience that typically has to expend very little effort to become exposed to them" (Leonardi & Treem, 2020, p. 1608). The authors argue that due to digitalization, we live in a world today where it is difficult to be invisible and that through constant traces of data we are visible to others (Leonardi & Treem, 2020).

The authors conclude the article by encouraging future scholars to examine power structures in different ways through communication and behavioral visibility. For instance, collecting, storing, and analyzing data on the tools is based on someone's choice to do so, and the question of who has a voice to make such a choice is being raised (Leonardi & Treem, 2020). Additionally, the authors suggest that researchers should consider different levels of analysis, and include aspects of social, cultural, and political factors that could influence how people see and are seen online. Further, understanding people's motivations towards being visible (or invisible) online in the workplace should gain more interest and qualitative studies could examine people's thoughts and feelings regarding this visibility (Leonardi & Treem, 2020).

Benefits and challenges for communication in the modern workplace

Collaboration with both synchronous and asynchronous communication

Nearly a decade ago, both scholars and practitioners predicted that SCTs would be the dominating form of team communication in organizations in the future (Cardon & Marshall, 2015; Fang, 2017). During the covid-19 pandemic knowledge workers were catapulted into having to adapt to a remote working model (B. Wang et al., 2021; L. Yang et al., 2022), and as a result of the new working habits during the pandemic, the hybrid working model have become the most popular working model in knowledge-intensive organizations (Hopkins & Bardeel, 2023). Šmite et al (2023) and Yang et al (2022) argue that the chances of knowledge workers returning to the pre-pandemic office-centered work arrangement are low.

The geographically and timely dispersed nature of the modern workplace necessitates demands to be able to communicate and collaborate both in real-time as well as at separate times. SCTs enable both synchronous and asynchronous communication and collaboration online. Synchronous communication refers to situations when people connect and communicate at the same time, even when physically being at different locations (Wahl & Kitchel, 2016). Examples include real-time chats, video conferences, and collaborative editing tools where everyone works on the same document simultaneously. The opposite, asynchronous communication, refers to communication that is not dependent on communication happening at the same time. Emails are an example of this type of communication, but also other forms of collaboration in a shared space such as editing a file that several actors have access to (Wahl & Kitchel, 2016; C. X. Wang et al., 2022; L. Yang et al., 2022). Overall, it is said that SCTs improve collaboration in the workplace online (Anders, 2016; Pillet & Carillo, 2016; Wahl & Kitchel, 2016).

However, some research highlights potential challenges the tools pose for organizations. Anders (2016) emphasizes that the increased information flow on SCTs could affect attention allocation and that communication overload has negative implications for work productivity. This is a trend in other studies, as the discussion regarding both positive and negative implications of SCTs surrounds how it affects work productivity. One study emphasized that the use of SCTs is not inherently good or bad, but that the potential positive or negative consequences on the well-being of employees and the organization can greatly vary depending on the context at hand and how they are employed (van Zoonen, Treem, & ter Hoeven, 2022). Perhaps not so

surprising, excessive and additive usage may generate negative impact and can become detrimental. However, moderate usage of social media in the workplace can work beneficially for employees (van Zoonen, Treem, & ter Hoeven, 2022).

Community-building on SCTs

Another benefit that SCTs can enhance is strengthening the feeling of community. Espersson et al (2023) pointed to the fact that remote work can weaken work community, especially for newly hired employees trying to form bonds remotely (Espersson et al., 2023). Work community is important for all kinds of organizations, since without it an organization's development can stagnate (Espersson et al., 2023). In relation to this, another study emphasized the important role that SCTs have for employees in different physical places to provide social support for each other and the ability to form strong work collaborations (Zhu et al., 2023). The authors propose a model of how three factors - advice, friendship, and communication networks – together affect an employee's usage of SCTs. The findings suggested that those employees who had stronger social bonds with each other tended to use the tools more frequently and that the lack of social bonds led to the opposite (Zhu et al., 2023). Zhu et al succeeded in identifying a research gap on how most studies on SCT usage have focused on one single social network relation, and how the combined effect of multiple relations is needed to examine the usage of SCTs. However, this perspective can be subjected to criticism. Firstly, it could be argued that several other factors could affect the usage of SCTs. Secondly, the authors' overall aim is to investigate what factors hinder high usage of SCTs for employees, as other scholars also have attempted to do (Jia et al., 2021; van Zoonen, Treem, & Sivunen, 2022). Previous research seems to prioritize means to improve high usage and productivity, whereas little attention is given to employees' own thoughts and perspective on how they are managing high visibility of communication and what implications this has to their communicative behavior.

In the name of efficiency and productivity

Surveillance and platform capitalism

Surveillance and control in the workplace are not new phenomena and the topic has interested researchers throughout time. Some researchers argue that a surveillance society has long been in the making and the field has emerged as a prominent research field within media

and communication studies since the mid-2000s (Bratich, 2024). The urge to exert control over the workforce is a common thread that seeps through history, historian James Beniger (1992) means, as he refers to the increasing control in digitalized society as a result of a long historical process which he calls “The Control Revolution” (Beniger, 1992). He argues that society’s obsession with information technology occurred after the Industrial Revolution and that the new material production processes created a demand for new information technical mechanisms (Beniger, 1992). American sociologist Shoshana Zuboff (2019) takes this a step further by introducing the concepts of “surveillance capitalism” and “platformization” and situates the information technology obsession in the digital age as she argues that technological developments have enabled surveillance and control that is unparalleled. She argues that as private companies through the analysis of vast amounts of user data go beyond merely optimizing their service, they wish to constitute behavioral surplus (Zuboff, 2019). By commodifying human experiences online as “raw material” those behavioral data are subsequently integrated with computational algorithms to generate predictions of future human behaviors, Zuboff claims (Zuboff, 2019).

Even though Zuboff speaks from an American context, a country that has different legislations than the EU regarding data collection in the workplace, other researchers point to the fact that those less seemingly “intrusive” platforms that also are being used in the EU such as Microsoft 365 also gather amounts of data in the workplace created into simple charts and graphs for managers to overview what their employees are doing and analyze how they are performing (Aloisi & De Stefano, 2022). Further, critique is being put forward towards policymakers in the EU for not adequately addressing the potential misuse of employee monitoring, especially for remote workers (Aloisi & De Stefano, 2022). Weaknesses in the socio-legal systems regarding employee monitoring became especially evident after the covid pandemic and it is said that policymakers need to evaluate how well current regulations can handle the challenges of a rapidly changing work environment (Aloisi & De Stefano, 2022).

Another challenge also lies in uncritical acceptance of various technologies in the workplace, which can lead to more intrusive employee monitoring, potentially violating meaningful consent and collective involvement (such as employees having a say in how data is being used within the organization). This “platform capitalism” is said to create new ways of governing, and the risk is that platform users become habituated to the new systems without questioning them (Wood & Monahan, 2019). While some level of monitoring might be necessary both due to security reasons and to be able to see how employees are fulfilling their tasks, the concept of “platform capitalism” and “surveillance capitalism” raises concerns on the unawareness of

which data is being collected, what communication is observed and by whom. Manokha (2018) suggests that extending the thought of the “power of the gaze” in the workplace into all kinds of data collection can be relevant for analyzing modern surveillance. Manokha also argues that the relevance of the concept of the *Panopticon* still to this day is relevant for analyzing if and how panoptic gazes approximates the digital workplace (Manokha, 2018).

Aloisi and Stefano believes that the major concern is the lack of transparency surrounding tools that can monitor employees (Aloisi & De Stefano, 2022). This, in combination with their rushed implementation and a sense of inevitability (especially after the covid pandemic), can limit employees’ understanding of how they are being monitored and for what purpose (Aloisi & De Stefano, 2022). The authors conclude with a call for action to challenge “the unrestrained penetration of a culture of total surveillance” (Aloisi & De Stefano, 2022, p. 295).

While Aloisi and De Stefano (2022) are making their standpoints from an international labor perspective, the phenomena of perceived digital monitoring could be investigated within other disciplines on how to improve the current conditions. Strategic communication, for instance, can help organizations increase levels of trust by clarifying choices of products and services they provide (and how they are being used) as the least risky (Heide & Falkheimer, 2022).

Several scholars are raising their concern regarding “platform capitalism” and what it has created in terms of heightened surveillance and how technology companies hold a lot of power, at the same time they also underpin that they believe it possible to form and create a democratic notion of observational gazes in the workplace (Aloisi & De Stefano, 2022; Bratich, 2024; Fuchs, 2020; Manokha, 2020; Wood & Monahan, 2019; Zuboff, 2019).

Synthesis

This literature review has aimed to enter the academic conversation about emerging media in digital society, the many benefits that SCTs contribute with for the modern workplace but also the potential challenges they enable. A significant amount of the research lies in other fields than strategic communication, and many of the critical perspectives can be said are radical in their framing and are primarily theorizing concepts (see for instance (Manokha, 2020; Wood & Monahan, 2019)), without empirically investigating how employees perceive and make sense of communication visibility and digital monitoring. Research on SCTs within communication disciplines tends to primarily investigate implications SCTs have on productivity and efficiency, e.g. factors hindering high usage. Research on how employees make sense of

communication visibility and the potential risk of being digitally monitored is lacking, and this is where this thesis positions itself.

3. Theoretical framework

The aim of this study is to investigate how employees perceive and make sense of communication visibility and power dynamics on SCTs and how they perceive their communicative behavior and self-governance on the tools. Theoretical concepts used to answer the research questions will be analyzed through central concepts of power articulated from Michael Foucault in a combination with Actor Network Theory, to situate the study in a digital context where technology can be viewed as an actant that can influence power dynamics between participants in a communication network (Latour, 2005).

Foucault and power

The post traditions emerged from French linguistic philosophy during the 1960s as a critical response to the limitations of underlying structures in structural Marxism and perspectives on individualism within existentialism (Prasad, 2017). One of the more prominent figures that can be said to represent both postmodernism and poststructuralism is Michael Foucault. His perspectives on power brought forward in the 1970s challenged the previously widely held view on power in society (Prasad, 2017). Foucault was a provocative, disruptive and innovative thinker (Prasad, 2017; Smart, 2002), and his theoretical contributions are said to have been a focal point regarding views of power and knowledge (Wallenstein, 2013). His theorization of power and knowledge can be considered a “grand theory”, and his concepts are applicable to a broad range of different subject matters (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013). Applying Foucauldian perspectives to understand power dynamics in organizational settings is of particular relevance since he highlights the multifaceted origin of power in organizations (Alvesson, 1996).

His work can be difficult to categorize, however. In some extent, he aligns with the core principles of the critical traditions, however, categorizing Foucault in the critical tradition would not capture the nuances of his work (Prasad, 2017). Categorization of this sort was not something Foucault was relatively fond of either (Smart, 2002), and the desire to categorize his work does not rhyme with Foucault’s own desire to escape general interpretive categories (Gutting, 2005). Further, as his work at root is ad hoc, disruptive, and incomplete the interpretation becomes distorted. This can be one reason why scholars have had trouble and maybe have been

reluctant to come to terms with where to position Foucault in the theoretical landscape. However, to ensure a focused analysis within the scope of this thesis, this study will focus on some core concepts that emphasize Foucault's understanding of power as relational, in relation to individual practices on a micro-level, and these practices connection with wider societal institutions and discourses. In this sense, therefore, it is logical to primarily view Foucault as a poststructuralist (Prasad, 2017).

Disciplinary power

Foucault's perspectives on power dynamics hold a unique position as his views on power, discourse, and knowledge production were pioneering for his time, as he viewed power as something that is exercised rather than possessed (Prasad, 2017). Foucault's ontological understanding of the world derives from an anti-essentialist ontology, meaning that he rejects the idea that there are fixed or predetermined essences of knowledge, identities, or even understandings of reality. Foucault points to the fact that our knowledge is constructed through historical developments, through our language, and through discourses (Christensen, 2023). The goal is not to understand the past, but rather to understand how historical developments have led to something that is intolerable in the present (Gutting, 2005). Foucault, does not view historical developments as inevitable and does not view the route to where history has taken us as there were no alternatives. Foucault aims to show that the past ordered matters in a certain way and that the intolerable practices leading us to current practices by no means were inevitable (Gutting, 2005).

It was through his work with the history of prison penalties that Foucault challenged the traditional conceptualization of power (Christensen, 2023; Foucault, 1977) and this work resulted in Foucault's differentiation between two types of views on power; the juridical model and the disciplinary model. The juridical model derives from power as possessed; may it be by individuals, a social class, or citizens. It is characterized by a clear hierarchy where power comes from a central figure from the top to the bottom. When exercised, this power is primarily repressive, and enforcement of control is seen through means such as bans or sanctions (Christensen, 2023). The sovereign state in this model was more prone to violence, to instill fear in the population, and thus concentrating power to the state (Foucault, 1977).

The disciplinary model, however, is very different. This perspective of power is seen as a generative power and emphasizes power as exercised rather than possessed. Power in this sense is viewed as relational, as Foucault explores how power operates through a network of

relations. Power in this understanding can also be analyzed as something that can move from the bottom-up and is not conditioned by sovereignty but of discourse (Christensen, 2023). This power does not solely operate through repression, but also productively in the sense that it shapes individuals into subjects who internalize their own subordination (Christensen, 2023). Whereas in the juridical model the population avoided unlawful behavior with the fear of physical punishment, the disciplinary model shifts the character of the power to the individuals themselves and makes them self-discipline and self-govern (Foucault, 1977).

Foucault argues that discipline “makes” individuals (Foucault, 1977) and that discipline “is the specific technique of power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise” (Foucault, 1977, p. 170). Foucault argues that disciplinary practices extend beyond written texts and are embedded within everyday organizational practices. Foucault means that critical examination of dominant discourse that shape our understanding of the world and how those discourses might be used to control and regulate our behavior, even ever so subtly, are crucial for understanding how our worldview is formed (Foucault, 1972, 1977). Whether the discourses are true or not, they surround people in society in various ways and influence social processes, and they are central elements in understanding the link between knowledge and power (Foucault, 1972).

The Panopticon and surveillance

As mentioned, by analyzing the history of penal practices in prisons Foucault identified a paradigm shift on how power was exercised under the 17th century (Foucault, 1977). Foucault argued that the capitalistic society uses different *techniques* to control the population, and this could be seen in the modern prison environment. Previously, the punishment of criminals was primarily a physical punishment of the body with different torture methods. In the modern prison, however, the punishment took its form of a punishment of the mind, with the ultimate goal to create law-abiding and productive members of society (Foucault, 1977). Here, Foucault introduces the concept of the *Panopticon*, which is exemplified through the prison design of watchtowers in modern prisons. In this design, the guards have a panoptic view of the inmates from all angles, but the inmates cannot see the guards which means that they do not know when they are being observed. The constant unawareness of when the inmates are being surveilled leads them to alter their behavior, as they internalize the possibility of being monitored at all times, even though they might not be. Foucault points to how the surveillance reinforces disciplinary power by making individuals increasingly aware of the norms that they are expected to

follow and how they start to behave in the desired manner *without* coercion (Foucault, 1977). Further, it frames the surveillance as necessary for maintaining order and safety and it also creates a self-consciousness for individuals as well as a fear of potential punishment if deviating from the expected norms (Foucault, 1977). In Foucault's opinion, the exemplification of the panoptic prison design becomes a metaphor for how contemporary society with subtle measures uses different techniques to control their population.²

With the increased levels of security, openness, and freedom for the individual, the idea is that instances of power do not need to control the individuals, seeing that the individual will control themselves. Foucault also underpin the importance of communication channels within this system that enable centralized information and thus knowledge prone to analysis. Through surveillance, monitoring and collecting of information about people's behavior, predictions of their behaviors can ultimately exert power over the people in a more nuanced way (Foucault, 1977). Foucault means that the panopticon society produces a disciplinary gaze that spans across a large extent of society (Prasad, 2017). Surveillance does not even have to occur, it is the awareness of the potential that it *might* which matters (Prasad, 2017).

Governmentality

The concept of governmentality was introduced in the latter part of Foucault's career (May, 2014). Foucault introduced the concept and aimed to describe the historical developments of the idea all the way from its predecessors in the Christian pastoral to the practice of governmentality in contemporary neoliberalism (May, 2014). The term refers to "governmental rationality" and is essentially referred to the underlying logic of who is being governed in society. One of the first remarks Foucault make on the idea of governmentality is that it is not referred to the actions of the government or to the institutions of the state, as the name might imply (May, 2014; McKinlay & Pezet, 2018). Rather, governmentality is something embedded in practices rather than institutions and it is a way of examining how certain rationalities has become the norm as controls of the population started to emerge in modern Europe (McKinlay & Pezet, 2018). Governmentality, which builds on Foucault's work on disciplinary power, was meant to capture a more nuanced way of understanding how power operates in society. Foucault

² While the concept of "Big Brother is watching you" could be thought of as similar to the panopticon, the concepts are not exactly the same. Both concepts arise insecurities about constant surveillance, but the panopticon focuses more on the unawareness of not knowing when being monitored and when not. Further, the panopticon focuses more on how individuals are part of their own self-regulation and self-discipline (Prasad, 2017).

argues that everyone is subjected to governmentality, may it be through the construction of technologies that govern populations through control, the internalization of disciplinary practices for individuals grounded in their desires, or the construction of the self within society (Cannella & Lincoln, 2018). Foucault argues that governmentality encompasses a few key elements. Firstly, it includes various arenas for governing practices, such as through institutions (e.g. schools, hospitals, prisons) and encompasses “power that has the population as its target” (Foucault, 1977, p.144). The way that the government relies on these institutions is through “political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument” (Foucault, 1977, p.144). Secondly, governmentality concerns the historical development of a power-sovereignty developed in the Western world for several years, shaping what we call government today. The last element regards the governmentalizing of the state as merely an administrative apparatus (Foucault, 1977).

The concept of governmentality is meant to open up for understanding how the “governed” in society always will adapt, resist, or even ridicule the governing practices in varying degrees and not just to be viewed as passive recipients of instances of power (McKinlay & Pezet, 2018). It can be seen as a dynamic relationship, where the governors and the governed are connected in a strategic tension; the governors aim to dictate the conduct of the governed and the governed develop practices to avoid, minimize, or being differently governed by the instances of power (Asante, 2022). Even temporarily, these practices can create opportunities for the governed to remake themselves and potentially reshape the nature of the governance (Asante, 2022). The concept investigates how power operates through collective action and resistance against different instances of power (McKinlay & Pezet, 2018).

The concept of governmentality will be utilized in this study to analyze potential tendencies of certain expressed norms and internalized behaviors from the participants, in terms of how they view SCTs, monitoring on the tools and collection of data on the SCTs.

Critics of Foucault

Even though Foucault’s concepts of power and knowledge have been highly influential, there have been some critiques of his concepts. Some argue that his concepts of disciplinary power is highly overt and does not consider other ways that social subjects are being formed (Haugaard, 2022). Whereas Foucault views subjects resistance of disciplinary power as a means to escape and minimize being governed or subjected to power, Haugaard makes the argument that people might strategically embrace the disciplinary power in society to achieve their own

goals within the system (Haugaard, 2022). Haugaard means that “subjectivity is a source of agency, not merely a source of domination” (Haugaard, 2022, p. 363). While Haugaard is making a sound argument, it could be arguable if an individual always is aware of the disciplinary structures at play for them to strategically leverage them.

Another critique of Foucault is that his critical perspective that everyone is being subjected to governmentality could lead to an unnecessarily high level of skepticism and critical point of view to all kinds of social situations. As a researcher, it becomes vital to take this into consideration and not to pursue too much of a cynical point of view. How this was attempted to be avoided will be discussed further in the methodology section (Chapter 4).

Furthermore, Foucault wished that his concepts should be viewed as a toolbox that the researcher can pick and choose from and apply the relevant ones that fit the purpose of the study. However, a concept is never truly independent from its context, and highlighting the digital society that we are embedded in became important to put forward in the literature review. To address the digital context even further, and to conceptualize the role that SCTs can have as both mediators and intermediators of communication, Actor Network Theory will be added to the theoretical framework.

Actor Network Theory

Actor Network Theory (ANT) was developed in the 1980s and central figures such as Bruno Latour, John Law, and Michel Callon drew on poststructuralist ideas that the social world should not be viewed as built on pre-determined structures and but rather as constituted by interactions between different actors (Callon, 1984; Latour, 2005; Law, 1992). The interactions between the actors create a network that shapes our social reality. What is a central insight in ANT is that not only humans are viewed as actors within the social world that shape how we interact, but also non-human actors and materialistic matters, such as technology e.g. (Latour, 2005; Law, 1992).

ANT makes the differentiation between *actors* and *actants*, where actors can be anything that can produce an effect or activity and an actant is something that has the ability to exercise an activity (Gutiérrez, 2023). For instance, an employee communicating within an organization can be considered an actor; they can make choices, influence others, and intentionally participate within the network. A technology, such as a SCT, can be considered an actant. The actant does not have equal levels of agency as the actor, but the actant plays an important role in how the social world is created (Latour, 2005). ANT points to the fact that human and non-human

actors have equal potential to influence and shape the social world in symmetry and that it is the entanglement between the two that form the social world (Latour, 2005).

According to Latour (2005) technology specifically should be viewed as both a mediator and an intermediary. As a *mediator*, the technology is passive and acts as a medium or a tool to facilitate communication between actors. As an *intermediator*, the technology is a participant that influences the relationship itself by shaping communication styles, behaviors and even power dynamics between different actors within the network (Latour, 2005). The perspective that ANT offers can help to illustrate how also non-human actants, such as technology, play an important role in how our social worlds are formed.

Another central concept that will be used for analysis in this study is *enrolment* in the network. Callon (1986) argues that networks go through four main stages; problematization (actors identify a problem or goal and recognize the need for a network to address it), inter-essement (actors tries to convince other potential actors to join the network), enrolment (actors are persuaded to join the network and accept the terms, rules and roles in the network), and mobilization (the network is activated, and actors work together to achieve desired outcomes) (Callon, 1984).

Combining Foucault and Actor Network Theory

By complementing Foucault's concepts of disciplinary power with ANT, ANT can help to understand how SCTs, through their platform design, features, and functionalities, can shape power dynamics. Further, it can allow us to see how disciplinary power is enacted through the tools. ANT sees power as a relational phenomenon (Latour, 2005), just like Foucault, and means that power can be negotiated and co-constructed through different actors and actants in the network. These actors and actants can be both human (such as employees, managers) and non-human actants (such as SCTs), which provides depth to this study as it acknowledges also the tool itself as an actant in the organizational context that can have influences on how employees view power dynamics.

4. Methodology

This chapter outlines the research design and the strategic choices made for gathering of the empirical data. The purpose with the study is to explore employees understanding of communication visibility in relation to power dynamics and their self-governance on SCTs. To successfully reach nuanced and deep understandings, a critical qualitative research approach was undertaken. This chapter presents the research tradition and epistemological understanding of knowledge that guided the study. The motives behind choosing semi-structured interviews as the gathering of empirical material, explanation of the sample criteria, and the proceedings of the interviews will also be presented. Additionally, the critical interpretive approach that was used for analysis will be presented. The chapter is finalized with addressing reflexivity and ethical considerations.

Critical research, poststructuralism, and critical interpretive approach

Critical research and poststructuralism

This study has used concepts of power articulated by Michael Foucault together with Actor Network Theory to reach understandings of how employees make sense of communication visibility on SCTs with a special focus on power dynamics. The study is therefore critical, as it seeks to examine who (or what) has power, how the power is negotiated, and what structures reinforce the distribution of power (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). One key element in critical research is to “avoid seeing the social world as self-evident and familiar, and rather conceptualize it as a strange place” (Alvesson & Deetz, 2021, p. 152). The researcher should therefore try and form a “de-familiarization” to otherwise taken-for-granted matters in the social world and try to see these phenomena in novel ways (Alvesson & Deetz, 2021). However, it is important to not adopt “hyper-critique”, which can be explained as only focusing on negative aspects and therefore being too one-sided in its approach (Alvesson & Deetz, 2021). Especially when conducting critical research on organizations, the fallacy of solely focusing on negative

aspects not only creates problems of how both subjects and objects are presented, but also for demonstrating the importance of its concerns (Alvesson & Deetz, 2021). Critical research seeks to shed light on power dynamics in otherwise taken-for-granted situations to enable contestation of these relations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam also highlight that “the goal of critical research is generally to do research *with* people, not *on* people” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 92).

Prasad (2017) argues that since the beginning on the 21st century, critical research has come to be broadened in its scope and that many different positions can fall under the “critical” label, such as within the postmodernist, poststructuralist, and postcolonial positions (Prasad, 2017). Prasad argues that a clear definition of which tradition the critical research positions itself within is needed, as does the author of this study. Whereas both postmodernism and post-structuralism are critical to grand narratives and universal truths, postmodernism tends to be broader in its scope (Prasad, 2017). Poststructuralism, however, has a narrower scope and focuses on how language, thought, power relations, and historical developments shape the construction of knowledge and the “truth” (Prasad, 2017).

This research study adopts a poststructuralist lens for analysis. As stated, Foucault was a disruptive and innovative thinker (Prasad, 2017), and his multifaceted body of work aligns with various strands of critical thought. Depending on which concepts used from the theorist he could be considered more of a postmodernist or poststructuralist. As the chosen concepts for this thesis -such as disciplinary power, the panopticon, and governmentality- investigate how social structures, power relations, and discourses form reality, they align with acknowledging Foucault as a poststructuralist. ANT also derives from poststructuralist thought, by challenging grand narratives and the theory largely focuses on power dynamics in social networks (Latour, 2005; Law, 1992). Seeing that both of the theoretical frameworks derive from poststructuralist thought, they make a suitable fit for the study.

Poststructuralism challenges the idea of pre-fixed or definite structures of certain phenomena and it is a powerful lens for analysis when examining truths that are taken for granted (Williams, 2005). Poststructuralism does not aim to unravel simplistic truths, rather it attempts to botanize in the complexity of reality and the challenges that beset life (Williams, 2005). Through language, it is possible to reach insight into people’s view of reality, understand their knowledge, and what is meaningful for them (Mason, 2017). Without attention to language and the processes that constitutes people’s reality, our understanding of reality would be far too simplistic (Williams, 2005). The poststructuralist worldview aligns with the author of this thesis epistemological understanding of how knowledge is situated and that there is no single “truth”

“out there” that is to be revealed. Rather, as the poststructuralist perspective points to, reality is constructed by social forces, power relations, and through a plurality of discourses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Prasad, 2017).

Critical interpretive approach

This thesis has used a critical interpretive research approach which was formed by Alvesson and Deetz (2021). They wished to develop a critical research approach that would enable more sound thoughtfulness and critical reflection on social matters. The authors critiqued the critical tradition for merely theorizing concepts and being too drastic, as well as they questioned the interpretive tradition for not considering the larger social forces that influence individuals’ experiences (Alvesson & Deetz, 2021). By combining these two approaches, Alvesson and Deetz wanted to put forth critical research that draws upon the interpretive thinking but that is also supported by broader critical theory principles (Alvesson & Deetz, 2021). To accomplish this, the authors developed three overlapping tasks that would direct contemporary critical research. These are *insight*, *critique*, and *transformative redefinition*.

The first task, *insight*, is about gaining knowledge about a certain phenomenon and nearing the inquiry with curiosity. The researcher should focus on developing a generosity to others by wanting to understand the world as they experience it (Alvesson & Deetz, 2021). The next task, *critique*, is about counteracting the taken-for-granted ideas that shape the social phenomena. Here, the goal lies in relating the micro-level with the macro-level issues and the authors exemplify technocracy³ amongst others as a relevant theme of investigation that relates to all organizations, also on a broader global scale (Alvesson & Deetz, 2021). During this task, openness, creativity, and curiosity is needed to foster unexpected questions and dialogue. The researcher should as much as possible set aside their own prejudices about the phenomena and not condemn “the usual suspects” (Alvesson & Deetz, 2021, p. 19)

The last task, *transformative redefinition*, aims at providing practical understandings and knowledge that foster change and that can bring about new ways of operating. Alvesson and Deetz criticize previous critical research for merely raising awareness, and not provide solutions or being action based. Therefore, this task involves seeking alternative responses to the studied

³ Technocracy, in its most simplistic understanding, can be explained as an alternative form of democracy, such as a government where those who exercise power hold certain types of skills or competences (Brickerton & Invernizzi Accetti, 2021). However, the more common understanding of the word is explained as a trend in society where certain actors and institutions have been given increased levels of power due to their administrative expertise and technological competence (Brickerton & Invernizzi Accetti, 2017).

phenomena and integrate them with democratic practices. This is no easy task, but the goal is to make an effort to understand how often underestimated, likely subtle, and embedded micro-practices in everyday life can be signs of modern forms of control (Alvesson & Deetz, 2021).

These three tasks work together, whereas the first task helps to avoid broad generalizations, the second helps to relate the phenomena into the bigger picture, and the last task helps to prevent “hyper-critique” and foster positive action strategies (Alvesson & Deetz, 2021).

Qualitative research method

Qualitative research is appropriate to conduct when the focus is to reach a nuanced and deep understanding of how individuals make sense of their experiences, how they construct their realities, and how they create meaning to their encounters (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As the aim for this thesis aligns with this pursuit, the qualitative research method fits the purpose of the study.

Qualitative semi-structured interviews

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were used as the research method for collecting the empirical material for the study. When conducting qualitative interviews, the aim is for the researcher and the interviewee to have a conversation about the given topic and the interview serves the purpose of producing knowledge (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). The interview can be viewed as an inter-change of views between the researcher and the interviewee, as they converse about a topic (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). The interview situation should therefore not be viewed as the interviewee providing facts and the researcher neutrally obtaining these facts. An interview is a collective construction where the interviewee and the researcher create meanings together (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015).

The interview technique for the study followed a less strict structure by using open-ended interviewing, which is common in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The interviews followed a pre-constructed interview guide to make sure that the interviews covered areas that the researcher wished to converse about (See Appendix 1). The interview guide included several questions, but as the aim is to reach depth rather than breadth within qualitative research (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015) not all of the questions were asked for each of the interviews. If the researcher acknowledged that a question already had been discussed, those questions were not explicitly asked. However, for coherency, questions that were always asked were questions about: introduction, communication visibility, communication policy and privacy,

perceived surveillance, social collaboration tool analytics, the future, and concluding thoughts (See Appendix 1).

The semi-structured interview allows the researcher to change the order of the questions and ask complementary questions to reach a more nuanced reasoning from the participant. The goal is to cover themes rather than having the participant answer with ‘yes’ or ‘no’ (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). To reach nuanced answers and give the participants the possibility to give probing answers, the researcher cannot be stonily impersonal (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). They must be personal, but not too personal, as the goal is to have a certain social distance to the participant while at the same time not make them feel heavily scrutinized (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015)

Prior to the interview, the participants were given an information sheet as well as a consent form (See Appendix 2) that they signed or agreed to in written form through email, Facebook messenger, or LinkedIn’s messenger function. The information sheet covered broadly what the study was going to be about. The choice to not provide too much detailed information beforehand was made since this could affect how the participants would answer during the interview (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). The information sheet and the consent form provided information about the voluntary participation in the study, and that the participants could withdraw at any point in time (See Appendix 2).

Sampling criteria of participants

The sampling method for this study has been both *purposeful sampling* as well as *snowball sampling*. Purposeful sampling is a non-probability sampling and is used when the goal is to find information-rich participants, which can be explained as when the collected empirical data is from a certain type of context, individual, or profession (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To find suitable participants that would yield rich information to the study, certain criteria were developed to ensure the suitability of potential participants. The following criteria were applied:

- (1) The employee uses a SCT (e.g. Microsoft Teams, Slack) for internal communication in their daily work.
- (2) The employee works for a company that either has offices distributed throughout the country or internationally or offers their employees the possibility to work remotely.
- (3) The employee works for a medium-sized or large company (more than 50 employees).
- (4) The company that the employee works for operates under the jurisdiction of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

The first criterion was made to ensure that the employee communicates and collaborates with a SCT in their daily work. The second criterion was made to ensure that the employee is a *frequent* user of a SCT, as working with coworkers at different physical places increases the need to communicate on SCTs. The third criterion was made since it can be assumed that bigger companies have more complex work structures, and that it would not be sufficient to keep track of internal communication through e.g. email. The fourth criterion was made to make sure that all the participants worked under the same legal framework regarding what is lawful in terms of digital monitoring as well as what organizations are lawfully required to inform their employees about what data they are collecting about them.

To find participants for the study, a LinkedIn post was made (See appendix 4) from the researcher’s LinkedIn account to encourage employees that fit the above-mentioned criteria to take part in an interview. The post was reposted by seven people. Three people participated in the study through this approach. To expand the reach further, a snowball sampling approach was made from the participants that had already taken part in the study by asking them to suggest the researcher to suitable participants that fit the criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Snowball sampling is a beneficial sample approach thanks to its fast way to find participants and as it enables the researcher to find participants they otherwise perhaps would not have reached. However, being a convenience sampling, snowball sampling has its limits. The risk of participants referring to people they already know in their network is that it can create selection bias (Parker et al., 2019). Considering the timeframe for gathering empirical data for the study, together with the researcher’s limits to professional networks, the snowball sampling was still used despite its limits.

Table 1

Participant information

Participant	Sector	SCT	Gender	Interview length (min)
1	Security products	Slack	M	57:42
2	Cybersecurity	Slack	F	46:22
3	Cybersecurity	Slack	M	51:46
4	Cybersecurity	Slack	M	58:14
5	IT solutions	Microsoft Teams and Slack	M	59:53

6	Finance	Microsoft Teams	M	41:05
7	Package and logistics	Microsoft Teams and Slack	F	65:05
8	Information security	Microsoft Teams	F	57:08
9	Package and logistics	Slack	F	45:06
10	Web development	Slack	M	43:32
11	Communications	Microsoft Teams	F	65:58
12	Communications	Slack	F	47:09

Note. Created in Word, 2024.

The proceedings of the interviews

Correspondence with the participants through email, Facebook messenger, or through LinkedIn concluded the time and place for the interview that fit the interviewee. Ten interviews were conducted through Zoom and two interviews were conducted in person. Online interviews can limit access to important nonverbal cues such as gestures or physical expressions (Salomons, 2016). To mitigate this disadvantage, all online interviews were conducted through video, so the interviewee and the researcher could see each other. Benefits with conducting interviews online is that it enables the researcher to talk to people who are geographically distant and that the organizing of the interviews can be made faster than arranging for face-to-face interviews (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015; Khan & MacEachen, 2022). Online interviewing offers significant advantages for qualitative research, and it could be considered that the merits outweigh the challenges (Khan & MacEachen, 2022).

Six of the participants were men and six were women, and all the participants were Swedish. Seven of the participants used Slack as their primary SCT, three used Microsoft Teams and two participants used both tools equally much. The interviews were conducted between the 13th of March to the 14th of April. The interviews were held in English to ease transcribing and finding similar wordings and patterns for the subsequent analysis. This could have had negative implications as English was not the participants' mother tongue and therefore they might not have felt that they would be able to articulate themselves in a nuanced vocabulary.

To avoid this as much as possible, the participants were given the possibility to express themselves in Swedish whenever wished.

The interviews were recorded with the researcher's mobile phone. To secure the privacy of the participants, the audio-file was moved from the researcher's phone to her computer through cable, to ensure nothing was uploaded through internet. As interviews were conducted, they were transcribed through the transcribing tool Descript. The software tool was carefully chosen amongst other alternatives, as the data privacy of the participants was taken into consideration. Descript does not use the uploaded data in any other way than providing the service of transcribing (Descript, 2024). The audio file is confidential, even from Descript, and the uploaded data is stored in an encrypted database (Descript, 2024). Once a project is deleted on the tool, Descript permanently deletes it from its servers (Descript, 2024). Once the transcript had been created, the researcher deleted it from the tool immediately. Out of extra security, the participants' names were never inserted on the tool, and their participant numbers as presented in Table 1 were used instead. As interviews were successfully transcribed, the audio files were deleted from the researcher's computer and phone.

Analysis method of the data

The analysis of the empirical data was done in several stages and was guided by Alvesson and Deetz (2021) critical interpretive approach. After having conducted the interviews, they were transcribed within 4 days for the researcher to preserve nuance by having the content present in mind. After the interviews had been transcribed, the researcher listened to the recordings once more to review the transcripts and look for potential errors made by the transcribing program. After all interviews had been transcribed and reviewed, categorizations of relevant quotes, reoccurring reasonings and patterns was made, which can be identified as reaching the first step in the analysis method, *insight*. The categorizations were made in accordance with the research questions which surrounded the participants' thoughts about communication visibility, perceived surveillance and communicative behavior, but also included thoughts about data analytics, communication policy and privacy, thoughts about the future, and what they thought was especially important regarding the topic.

After having gained insights from the categorized material, the second step in the critical interpretive approach was made, *critique*. Here, the researcher adopted a critical approach towards the material, trying to find deeper insights about the material. An abductive approach was made, which is a combination of both inductive and deductive approach, as it lets the

researcher continuously switch between going back to theory and reviewing the material (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018). With an abductive approach, a deeper and more nuanced understanding of underlying structures can be made (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018).

To avoid hyper-critique, which is being too one-sidedly negative, and to contribute with both practical and theoretical learnings to the field of strategic communication, the last important step of analysis, *transformative redefinition*, was made to suggest for ways to move forward. Insights and critique are mainly brought forward in the analysis section whereas the transformative redefinition is mainly brought forward in the discussion and conclusion section.

Reflexivity and ethical considerations

Reflexivity

When conducting critical qualitative research analyzing power relations, tending to the researcher's reflexivity is of uttermost importance since there lies power relations in the research act itself (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In most critical research the primary goal is not to create change during the study itself (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The focus is rather to analyze how power relations currently are present in the participants' lives, however, it is acknowledged that change can happen as a result of the research process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In other words, introducing the topic of the study and discussing the issues during the interviews could potentially have changed the participants' consciousness about the issues. This was tried to be avoided as much as possible by constructing open interview questions, letting the participants freely express their perspectives on the subject.

Another relevant aspect to consider is how the researcher affects the interviewee through the "Self-Other conjunction", which is referred to whether the researcher is considered an "insider" or "outsider" of the investigated topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Given that the researcher for this study is a student and has not yet entered working life or has previous experience communicating with SCTs in the workplace, the researcher can be considered an outsider to the given context. It was therefore important for the researcher to create an open discussion climate where the participants felt that they could openly share their thoughts and experiences without feeling judged. The purpose was also to align with what critical research wishes to accomplish; to do critical research *with* people, and not *on* people (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Being an outsider can also affect the trustworthiness of the researcher (Salomons, 2016), which was tried to be avoided by sharing some of the researchers' own experiences of social media

platforms and linking this to SCTs in the workplace to gain trust from the interviewees. It is however a balancing act of incorporating the researcher's own insights while still maintaining objectivity to avoid biasing the study (Salomons, 2016).

Additionally, it is of importance to reflect upon the participatory role that the researcher has when conducting interviews, as the interviewee and the researcher together participate in the process of creating knowledge and meanings (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). Even though the researcher in critical research, as mentioned, should try and distance themselves from the otherwise familiar social world, the researcher is still a member of society as anyone else, shaped by cultural biases and perspectives (Alvesson & Deetz, 2021). The researcher therefore needs to be able to critique their own assumptions and viewpoints (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). Throughout the research process, the researcher continuously self-reflected on how she might have affected the material and reflected on the interpretations she made from the empirical material and subsequent analysis.

Ethical considerations

When doing studies that involve other people's stories and perspectives, it is important to inform the participants what the study is regarding and what the participation involves. It is also important to give the participants the opportunity to formally give consent to their participation. Therefore, an information sheet as well as a consent form was given for the interviewees to sign prior their participation (See appendix 2 and 3). Some participants signed the consent form digitally, and some approved to the participation through Facebook messenger, email, or LinkedIn. The information sheet stated the scope in broad terms, the aim and purpose of the study and it included information about how the material would be handled during and after the analysis. Information was given that the participant's anonymity would be secured, and that the researcher saw no risks with participation. Additionally, participants were given the possibility to refrain from their participation at any point.

5. Findings and analysis

This chapter presents the findings and analysis of the results from the study, divided into two sections based on the two research questions. The first section delves into how the participants make sense of communication visibility and power dynamics on SCTs. The second section delves into how the participants perceive their communicative behavior and self-governance on the SCTs. The aim with this chapter is also to fulfil the two first tasks according to the critical interpretive approach (Alvesson & Deetz, 2021), which is to show the gained *insight* about the topic as well as counteract the taken-for-granted ideas that shape the phenomena, namely raise *critique*.

Overwhelming benefits, but not without concerns

When asking the participants what they saw as benefits and challenges with the communication visibility on the SCTs it was evident that many saw the benefits with communication visibility on the SCTs as overwhelming. The findings showed that many of the participants appreciated how easy it is to communicate, to get in touch with different people, share one's knowledge with others, and build community online. However, the benefits do not always come without concern and the feeling that "someone" at some point in time might monitor what they are writing seems to be present.

Benefits with traceability, searchability, and connectivity

One of the most reoccurring benefits that the participants see with communication visibility on the SCTs is how it enables traceability of information. The participants see benefits with being able to track back communication and see how problems had been solved in the past, to better solve current problems. Participant 7's management tried to introduce a retention time for how long messages would be saved on Slack, but they received heavy criticism since employees saw their communication on the tool as a source of documentation and that they would lose traceability. Some participants also see the traceability as a positive feature if there had been some misconduct, that there is a possibility to trace back what had been said and done.

Connected to the traceability was another significant benefit specifically developed on Slack, which is the search function of communication. This is a feature that many participants appreciate.

Other participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P11, P12) value SCTs for fostering positive work culture and community-building. The informal tone with the usage of customized emojis, memes, and reactions to messages is appreciated, especially for those participants who work in bigger global companies where in-person interaction with some colleagues is limited. Participants P1 and P11 anticipated that restrictions on informality on the tools would face strong criticism. Based on these reasonings, it appears that the participants largely value the communication visibility afforded by the SCTs. They appreciate features like traceability, searchability of past conversations, and the ability to build community and form closer relationships with colleagues.

Essentially, many of the participants point to how the SCTs are considered an integral part of the organizational ecosystem. Many says that it would not be possible to operate in the work that they do without the SCTs (P1, P2, P3, P4, P7, P9, P12). One participant expressed challenges if there would be a malfunction with the SCT and that the organization would be locked out.

If Slack has issues or like, typical disturbances or something, that causes a lot of stress, like what should we do now? (P9)

This can illustrate how the participants perceive that the tools are an actant within the network (Latour, 2005) that holds power within the organization. If the tool was to malfunction, it would lead to considerable stress and hinder the employees' ability to work. This can highlight a certain vulnerability for the internal communication infrastructure not for merely the employees, but for the overall organization. Through the SCT, community-building and collaboration is being made, and the actors can form a stronger network within the organization thanks to the SCTs.

Concerns about visibility, who has access, and the speed of communication

When asking about the potential challenges that the communication visibility could pose for the employees, the responses could differ. Some did not view the communication visibility as particularly challenging but could see the visibility being a problem in other organizations

with poorer work climate than their own (P6), or within toxic workplaces (P1). Two participants express concerns about how long the communication on the tools is saved for and who reads it.

I mean, like the fact that everything is there forever or that it's visible for everyone or how it's visible and used as data for the software company, like for Slack. (P12)

I think that's also an interesting like setup thing in terms of how long these types of chat logs and stuff are searchable for and by who? (P5)

That's kind of the thing that makes me a little bit nervous from day to day. Because I always assume that there can be someone that is not supposed to be in this channel. And I don't even know it. (P4)

Participant 12, 5, and 4 are unsure about who has access to the data on the tools, how the data possibly could be used by the software company providing the tool, and express an uncertainty of who are included in the communication channels. The unawareness of who has access to the data and how long it is saved on the tools can create a sense of diffuse power. Foucault meant that disciplinary power in modern society often operates through subtle mechanisms that shape behavior rather than through direct force (Foucault, 1977). The extracts above can be an indication that these participants have an internalized expectation that the communication that they put into the SCTs could be seen by anyone, and that there is a possibility that the SCT itself could be an actant that holds power. According to ANT, even though some actants in a network do not hold equal levels of agency as the actors, the actants can still influence behaviors among the actors (Latour, 2005).

Participant 2, 3 and 4's organization had a 30-day retention period for saving messages on Slack out of security reasons. Participant 4 mean that long storage of messages pose a risk, as sensitive information accidentally could be sent on the tool. He worried that other users might not be aware that they could be monitored, and thus do not reflect about the data that they are putting into the tools. This concern was particularly significant for Slack due to the openness of the system:

In Slack you have very little, I would use the term privacy. Like, you have the ability to have private channels where only a few people can enter. But usually it's quite open for the entire organization. (P4)

Participant 4's thoughts that anyone could potentially read his messages on Slack can exemplify Foucault's concept of disciplinary power. He says that he keeps it in the back of his head that anyone could read the information he put into Slack, which makes him think twice before writing on the tool. His cautiousness about potentially being observed could be a pan-optic effect that shapes his behavior, which makes him think twice before he writes something on the tool, a form of self-regulation. The diffuse power, where the source of observation is unclear, creates anxieties (Participant 4 expresses it in nervousness) and a sense of vulnerability. From the participant's concerns about the openness of Slack, it could also be said that the tool does not only operate as a mediator of communication, which Latour explains as merely a passive tool that facilitates communication between actors within the network (Latour, 2005). It also operates as an intermediary of communication, as the design of the tool influences how the participant experiences levels of privacy and thus influences power dynamics.

Another raise concerns about passive viewers of communication in open channels. Participant 1, usually comfortable with communication visibility, acknowledged potential issues. He described a situation at their sister company in the U.S. where an employee vented his disliking in an open channel of a decision made by a manager. What the employee had forgotten was that several managers were part of the channel, even though they never interact there. Participant 1 meant that it is easy to forget who are included in the bigger channels, as they often consist of more than a hundred members and when certain participants rarely interact there, it creates an unawareness of passive viewers. The participant felt that it was not the employees' need to vent that was the problem but rather that the message was never meant to be seen by any managers.

Participant 7 felt unease about people who were not showing their presence in a channel. One concern was that other channel members might not realize the presence of passive viewers, while another concern was that the non-active colleagues could misinterpret conversations and miss crucial context. This had happened when an unknowingly included colleague in a channel brought up aspects about conversations in the channel in a separate meeting, and that the employee missed crucial context about the topic. Communication visibility is defined as when third parties can observe others' communication to gain their metaknowledge (Leonardi, 2014). Through the thoughts from participant 1 and 7 above, it seems that this practice can make some employees feel uncomfortable, particularly when not knowing who are included in bigger channels and that it can be problematic when third parties interpret communication too fast and miss crucial context.

Others also point to how the level of speed of communication on the tools is something that creates concerns. The participants generally agree that the fast communication is a benefit with the SCTs, but that it sometimes can create concerns. Participant 7 means that it contributes to less awareness of what you write and who is going to read what is being written.

When we increase the speed of communication, to the extent that we're at now, you're not really thinking about like, who's going to read this. (P7)

Another participant meant that the speed of communication on especially Slack can be a security risk.

If I want to send to something very quickly, I would probably use Slack. Let's say in the event of an emergency, like this secret key that I'm using to access this system doesn't work, or my password doesn't work. A person in a rush would most likely use Slack because it's faster. (P4)

This can serve as examples of how the participants express concerns about how the speed of communication contributes to less thoughtful communication on the tools. The norm to communicate rapidly on the tools can be seen as a subtle disciplinary power, as it can make employees feel pressured to conform to the pace set by the design of the SCTs. The speed of communication can possibly help employees to act quickly in critical situations, but it seems that it can also create vulnerabilities due to reduced awareness of what the employee puts into the tool.

Thoughts about gathered data and analytics

When asking the participants if they are aware of what data is being collected about them on the SCTs, only one participant (P4) (who had high knowledge about cybersecurity) had awareness about what is being gathered.

No. Yeah, I really would like to know that. I haven't thought about it, but of course that would actually... I would like to know that. (P11)

I don't know the data that's being collected, and I'm not sure where to find that information either /.../ I mean, I'm curious. Knowing that might affect how I use the tools, right? /.../ I mean, if I knew they were tracking my every move, I might not even want to work here. (P10)

I don't know. Actually. /.../ I mean, I think it's important that if I would ask for it, I get to know it. But I mean, I think it's very important that it is transparent. (P3)

Like I'm curious now, I wanna know what they've gathered. Not because I think it's gonna change much. I just wanna know, I think I've made assumptions. And I want to verify if they're true or not. /.../ I would assume there's a lot more people like me that also have made assumptions, but they don't know. I think it would be beneficial for basically everyone to just know what's going on. (P10)

No, I have no idea. I assume just like from a logical point of view, of course they can reach everything I've ever posted my, my metrics, my usage. /.../ I know this because I googled so intensely at the beginning of covid. Like I said, we need to talk about that at our company. I think the knowledge level is super low when it comes to that. (P7)

These extracts show that several of the participants did not know what is being gathered, and that they believed that transparency about it should be more acknowledged in the organization. Participant 2 expressed that if the gathering of data was just for tracking user metrics, it was not that much of a worry. However, if she would find out that management is using the gathered data to determine how productive the employees are, that would be very problematic. Other participants expressed similar thoughts and expressed that if they found out that management is monitoring their every move, the employee would consider resigning (P10, P5).

Callon (1986) means that the developments of networks go through four stages: problematization, interessement, enrolment, and mobilization. The employees' potential resignation if it would come to their knowledge that the SCT had been used to monitor them can illustrate how the employees has *enrolled* in the SCT network based on certain terms and rules that they have agreed on, and that were acceptable for them. If the terms of the network would change unexpectedly that would make them feel exploited, that would break the initial agreement of what the network is used for and they would consider leaving the network, even the organization entirely.

Even though organizations are lawfully obliged to inform their employees about what data is being collected about them in the workplace (Wolford, 2018), it seems that this communication does not reach the participants. Some participants suspected that they could have read it somewhere, but that type of information usually is part of a lengthy document that they simply click 'ok' to bypass. Participant 9, usually comfortable with communication visibility, argued that employees in general should be better informed about what is being gathered about them. She believed that how employees are being informed about that today is not optimal, and how that information is conveyed to employees needs to be better adapted for everyday users, and more readable than what it is today.

Some participants express that there is little one can do about the gathered data on the tools, even if being uncomfortable with it. One participant expressed that she is very aware that data is being created about her all the time, and there is little she can do about it.

I'm just like, giving away my data all the time without me being able to say no. (P8)

Another participant express that she does not think it is comfortable that the companies providing the tools have a large amount of data.

I'm not very fond of the companies delivering the systems for us, that they would have all these kinds of data. /.../ I think that's not very comfortable, but I'm also, pragmatic about it, like, 'what can you do about it?' I'm not gonna, like, go on strike and say that I'm not using the work tool here. (P11)

These participants' expression of not being able to reject giving away data and the rationality that there is little to be done about the usages of the SCTs can indicate that the participants feel pressured to adhere to potential controlling mechanisms. Participant 8 express a powerlessness of having ownership of her data and participant 11 express that she is pragmatic about it, that she is not going to go on strike and resist to use the provided work tool. This can be an inclination of governmentality, as certain rationalities about how there is not much to do about the visible communication and the gathering of data on the SCTs. Foucault means that power does not merely operate through centralized power from the top to the bottom, but rather how everyday practices, technologies, and discourses can influence how individuals govern themselves (Foucault, 1977). As seen from participant 8 and 11, it can be argued that they internalize certain norms and expectations on what is possible to change of the current situation.

Participant 7 highlights that according to the GDPR law, the individual owns their data. She also points to the imbalance of power between the employer versus the employee. She means that even though employers rely on their employees to do their job, employees rely more on their employers. This challenges the matter of collecting data on these SCTs, since it is not lawful to collect just of the sake of collecting. The lack of reflection on data collection from the other participants can be an indication of how ingrained SCTs have become in organizational life that they have become invisible and unobtrusive to the employees, just as Lupton (2014) and Miller and Horst (2012) suggest that digital technologies have become in digital society. The normalization of data collection on the SCTs become a natural part of what it means to use the tools and a natural part of a network-adapted communication in the organization.

It should be noted that some participants gained a more critical point of view of SCTs and gathering of data at the end of the interview:

I think that until this point I was happy with it. When I think about it, I might bring this up to the table and ask more information about it, like when you have the glasses on. (P11)

The risk of it being used. I haven't really thought about that before. So after our discussions, it's like an eye opener. Now I'm thinking, is Microsoft Teams actually that reliable? Because I think Microsoft is U.S. based. From what I know, the U.S. with integrity and privacy are not maybe the strongest. (P6)

As discussed in the method section (Chapter 4), it is always a factor that change of consciousness can happen during an interview, as the researcher introduces topics that the participant perhaps has not paid as much attention to previously (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is a factor that should be acknowledged and that the interview situation could have created new insecurities for some of the participants. Depending on the person's previous interest or awareness of digital monitoring, cyber security, or data privacy the answers from the participants varied.

The normalization of data collection on the tools aligns with the idea of governmentality, as the participants can be said are adapting to potential governing practices (Foucault, 1977). Important to bear in mind, however, is that the act of gathering data does not necessarily imply governance. Rather, it is the context and purpose behind the data collection that determines whether it relates to governance. If the collected data is meant to monitor or assess employee productivity it could be considered governance practices. The participants do not express strong

concerns about currently being governed but they do raise concerns and insecurities about the *risk* of being governed. Further, participant 3 express powerlessness of having a say in the matter if it would come up that his employer had monitored him in an unethical way.

Of course we are protected by GDPR, but that doesn't help, right. Let's say that that one of my managers would do something unethical. I mean, that's a big thing to go to court for. If my manager would do something like that towards me and it affects my work, it's a huge thing for me to start a whole police investigating into GDPR. Then I also know that if I do this, probably I won't be viewed equally well, from the team that the manager is managing. It's always social implications to someone for some kind of police thing. /.../ I think if something like that would have happened, you probably would be so mad at the employer that you would also ask yourself, is it really worth doing this or should I just quit and move on? (P3)

This reasoning can show how the participant means that even though being protected by GDPR, there are social aspects to consider if an employer would have done something unethical towards him on SCTs. The interpretation is that this participant perceives employers as having a lot of power in the matters, despite laws being in place, and that there are social implications that might hinder him from filing a report even though a manager would have done something unethical on SCTs. Similarly to previously mentioned about acceptance of enrolment in the network, this participant also expresses that if the terms for what the network is being used for would change, he would consider leaving the organization.

One participant emphasized that she in a team leader role also is a Slack administrator, meaning that she can take part of performance metrics and user analytics about her team members usage on Slack. For instance, she receives information about how many messages her team members have been writing in total per month and who they have communicated the most with. This can be seen as a way that the SCT itself plays a role as an intermediary that influences power dynamics, as it presents new information that this participant otherwise would not have access to. With the new knowledge, she is now being given the possibility to interpret and decide what to do with the new knowledge and whether she will be using it to “exert power” or resist it, or do something there in between.

This can serve as an example of how the SCTs can be seen as an actant that “presents” new knowledge to some of the actors on the SCTs which they possibly otherwise would not have had access to. While the SCTs lack the same agency as the actors on the tools, they still

influence power dynamics. By presenting new knowledge based on user metrics this can possibly influence actors in their decision making. Foucault means that power and knowledge is closely connected, even unable to be separated from each other, and that knowledge production is linked to power dynamics (Foucault, 1977). As SCTs presents user behavior and performances on the platform, they generate new insights, which could be viewed as a form of new knowledge production.

Further, something that several of the participants argue for is that using metrics and performance analytics from the SCTs does not serve as a good point of departure for interpretation on how productive employees are or if they are performing well. Participant 2 says that it would send management “down the wrong route” of interpreting communication on SCTs to determine an employee’s productivity performance. She means that depending on a person’s personality or work role, it can greatly vary on how much that person communicates on the tool but that they could still be a well-performing employee. Participant 1 argues that it is not the analytics or metrics per say that are “the problem” but rather how it is being interpreted. With the performance metrics that different SCTs present, it becomes up to the administrators, the managers and others that have access to the metrics to how they are translating the metrics into their own understanding of productivity or successful communication.

Trust

One recurring aspect that came back in all the interviews was the importance of trust within the organization. Those participants who did not seem to be too worried about communication visibility and collected data says that there is a high level of trust for management and among employees in the organization. Participant 7 said that she wishes to continue to be blissfully unaware of the information that might be collected about her. Participant 9 says that her high level of trust for the organization could play a role of how little worried she is.

Several participants says that if it would be known that digital monitoring had occurred in the organization, their view of the organization would radically change and that they most likely would not like to work for that organization anymore. One participant express that she believes that a reason for why she is not so worried about digital monitoring is a mixture between her role and the generation she is a part of, and how that generation is used to communicate on their private social media channels.

It's a mix of my role and my generation. I think we kind of, we're trusting the platforms. And I don't say that that is good, per say. A problem within my generation is that we are so, we're trusting the companies and... well, we're not, but we are so used to it. Especially if you're using like, Messenger, iMessage, LinkedIn. We're so used to it, so I don't think me, at least, are even thinking about it so much. We're not so worried. That's not good, I know. (P9)

This can show as an example of how the digital technologies have become so embedded in our lives that they have become invisible and unobtrusive to us (Miller & Horst, 2012). Another participant said that if she knew that they are not collecting anything, that would be even better for her continued trust for the organization:

Now I live more in the state of not even having reflected over it. Over those kind of issues. I mean, I do have a picture that my organization is very friendly and good to the employees, and that they're not supervising us. So maybe if I got the answer that, 'okay, they are not collecting any of that data.' Then that would be good for the trust aspect. (P11)

The participants who did not know what data is being collected about them says that they trust that their organization are not analyzing any data or that they are monitoring them.

Yeah, but hopefully then they are not looking at the information. (P8)

I'm probably trusting them that they wouldn't read if they didn't have the need to. (P2)

I think there is a possibility for others to see the communication. However, I don't think that they necessarily do. Only if they have to investigate something. (P6)

Several participants meant that the visibility of communication did not worry them, and that the collection of data did not worry them so much. However, the risk of *potentially* being monitored was present in several of the participants' responses, and that the issue is present for some of the participants. It was noticeable that those participants who worked with cyber security, information security, or package and logistics (who had awareness of GDPR-related questions towards customers), partially had the topic of potential monitoring and gathered data more present in mind. When Foucault talks about the panoptic gaze, he argues that surveillance does not even have to occur for individuals to regulate their behavior, but that it is the awareness of

the *potential* surveillance that matters (Foucault, 1977). From the material it can be seen that even though several of the participants trust their organization and the SCTs to not use their data in unethical ways, they still express concerns and anxieties about the potential risk of surveillance.

Communicative behavior

Previous habits, new platforms

When analyzing how the participants gave expression for their communicative behavior on the SCTs, they gave expression for how the design of the SCTs can influence their communicative behavior and make them less aware of how the communication is being stored and who might access it. Participant 5 expressed that it is a “completely different mindset” compared to for example communicating through emails. Several linked this to the influence that private social media habits have on the communication on SCTs.

Slack is extremely similar to Messenger or Facebook, Snapchat. Because you build closer relationships, people feel like your friends and co-workers. And that's good. Overall, that's amazing. But I do know, and I can only speak for myself, but based on like hundreds of colleagues over the years, that it leads to people using it as their personal, communication tool, like a social media. (P7)

It is so easy. We're kind of used to it in other platforms. It looks like other social media platforms, like messenger, iMessage, Instagram and so on. So I think it's quite easy to follow, easy to understand, easy to set up new channels, groups, well, yeah, it's easy. (P9)

I don't think I've thought about it much in that way, especially when it comes to like the direct messages, I just treated as any other chat room basically. (P12)

I would say it has an increased risk due to the way we'll be using chats as a very informal way of communication. /.../ So it's kind of like incorporating the behavior of how we use the system. Like growing up, we even had MSN messenger, or if you're using, WhatsApp, Instagram, iMessage, whatever. It's quick, nice and efficient. (P4)

The idea of governmentality can be visible here, as governmentality examine show certain rationalities have become ingrained in everyday practices, which influences behavior (Foucault, 1977). The participants express that the habits and familiarity that they and others have from private social medias - and how the SCTs resemble them - might nudge the participants' communicative behavior in a direction that resembles how they communicate privately. Foucault means that it is not merely laws and policies that shape behavior, but also social norms and technologies (Foucault, 1977; McKinlay & Pezet, 2018). The interpretation is that this can be a vulnerability for the employees, as they at the same time express that the tools are highly beneficial for fostering positive work culture and for building community, which means that they communicate informally on the tools. At the same time the participants give expression for the unawareness of how data is being used, who has access to the data, and raise concerns for the possibility of being monitored. The quotes above can serve as examples of how employees bring their experiences and expectations on communication from private social medias into the SCTs and how a normalization and expectancy is present on how people communicate on SCTs.

The panoptic gaze

Foucault's panopticon can help to illustrate how the thoughts of potentially being monitored can make people self-discipline and regulate their behavior (Foucault, 1977). One participant, after emphasizing that she thinks Slack is very beneficial for being able to reach out to people and find information says that:

...but it does also make me more aware of you know, having to write things that I can be held accountable for later. If someone searches for something I've written or just uses one key phrase, they're gonna find what I've written and it's open to everyone. Like, what if this boss's boss could technically find whatever I'm typing? That makes me more aware, I would say, or mindful of what I communicate, especially in open channels. (P7)

Participant 8 also expressed that she was more anxious about the possibility of being watched when she was working from home. When logging into Microsoft Teams, a check box turns green to signal that the person is online, and it continues to be green if the user is active on their computer. The participant expressed that this feature was very stressful, especially in the beginning of her employment, and she used to log in by the minute as her workday started,

to unlock the green check box. However, when she would be coming into the physical office for work, she was not as worried.

If I'm going to the office now, I would not be so concerned about the green box. Then I would be like, yeah, "I am at work." (P8)

Even though she was less concerned of the green box now compared to the beginning of her employment, it seems that when working from home she would be more concerned of being disciplined and showing colleagues on the tool that she is online and active. This can be an indication of the panoptic gaze, as the participant does not know when she potentially could be watched, and therefore she self-governs her behavior in order to act in a lawful way (Foucault, 1977). Another participant expressed that she does not want certain sensitive matters written down on the tools, as there is a potential that someone might look through it.

I don't know... maybe it's because, like, I don't want it to be written, because there is a record of it. If someone sees it or so, maybe, or if someone decides to actually look through the history or something, I don't know. (P6)

Based on the participants reasonings, it shows that the panoptic gaze does occur for some of the participants but that they do not self-regulate their behavior due to it in a high extent. However, concerns and uncertainties that they might be monitored sometime in the future is present for some of the participants.

Resistance, but also strategic leveraging, of power

Some participants did things when they did not want to be “visible” on the tools. Participant 3 expressed that when he would like to write something about a colleague that he did not want to be detected by the search-function in Slack, he would write a “funny name” instead of the real name of the colleague. This could be an example of Foucault’s view of how individuals wishes to resist or even ridicule the governing practices (Foucault, 1977).

Others moved over to voice-call to communicate when they did not want some matters written down on the tools, and thus have the possibility to be detected. However, some participants said that it could also be a combination of voice-calls being more efficient when

communicating sensitive or complex topics, as you can more easily grasp a person's emotions and respond to them directly, compared to text (P5, P7).

Participant 7 expressed that sometimes colleagues in her organization were more reluctant to using voice-calls to communicate, and therefore prefers written communication on the SCTs more. She could be annoyed at this, as she sometimes would prefer to communicate through voice-calls when discussing certain matters to not have it written down. This can be interpreted as even if she might wish to resist potential governing practices from third parties, she is still part of a network where other actors participate and where she might need to adapt her communicative behavior to the preferred form of communication to other actors in the network. This could lead her to having to communicate in written form, when she would prefer something else.

There was not only resistance to being detected by the search function, however. Participant 2 says that she sometimes adapted her writing style to the search function by writing out the entire name of certain systems or products to make sure that other colleagues could search and find her descriptions in the future. This can be seen as a way which the participant strategically embraced the search function, and not merely saw it as a way of being detected by management or the tool. Her writing adaption to the search function could be seen as a way of achieving her own goals within the SCTs, something that Haugaard (2022) meant is a sign of agency, and that disciplinary power does not always create domination for subjects but that the subjects might leverage them.

Rapid communication, rapid behavior

Further thoughts on how the SCTs are constructed can make the participants communicate differently compared to other communication platforms. Due to its fast chat-based communication two participants say that they reflect less of their phrasing and one of them even finds himself editing messages directly after having sent them.

And I find that to be quite interesting because I feel like there's a lower set of expectations in a way of what I receive or what I write through Slack for Instance, which in turn makes it faster. I'm not thinking about my phrasing, for example, I just get it out and I see other people do the same, so we're able to collaborate much quicker than over email. (P7)

I would also say that the level of communication is generally worse. I mean, you achieve less of an understanding per word or like using more text because of how fast and simple it is. That's part of the mindset, right? You kind of just throw out the question. It's very often that I edit my own text immediately after I've sent it because I phrased myself poorly. (P5)

The extracts above can show how the mentality to communicate rapidly on the tools sometimes seems to prioritize speed over careful phrasing.

6. Discussion and conclusion

This thesis has sought to contribute to strategic communication by exploring how employees make sense of communication visibility in relation to power dynamics and their self-governance on SCTs. Within this chapter the last step of the critical interpretive approach, *transformative redefinition*, will be attempted by a concluding discussion and by providing reflections of how the insights from the empirical material can contribute to the field of strategic communication, both theoretically and practically.

Discussion and theoretical contribution

This thesis took its point of departure from the problematization that current research about how employees use SCTs largely has a managerial or market perspective. This thesis has aimed to offer a productive critical approach to how employees make sense of communication visibility and power relations on SCTs and how they make sense of their communicative behavior and self-governance on the tools.

What become evident from this study is that the participants view communication visibility on the SCTs as overwhelmingly beneficial – it enables them to trace and search for previous communication to better solve current problems and it helps them to build community. The participants express stress if the tools would not function, and they consider them crucial for them to be able to work. It can be said that the tools have thus become an integral part of the internal communication infrastructure.

However, the participants express concerns about who has access to the communication and the data, may it be the software company providing the tools, their manager, or even other colleagues. This diffuse sense of power creates insecurities and a sense of powerlessness of the ownership of their data. A concern is also being raised about how long the chat logs are being saved for and who has access to them. Another aspect in the analysis that shows how the participants view power dynamics is how previous habits from communicating on private social medias could influence their communicative behaviors on the SCTs. According to Foucault (1977), certain rationalities and social norms can influence behavior and nudge individual into potential governing practices. It could also feel uneasy when non-active third parties joined a

channel and subsequently interpreted the communication between the other actors in a misleading way.

Through these concerns, it seems that the SCTs are not only being perceived as tools that passively mediate the communication but that the tools also are intermediators, an actant within the network that can influence power dynamics. Through the design of the SCTs and through some of the features that they enable, it seems that they are a part of how the participants view how power can play out. For instance, the design of fast chat-based communication nudges the participants to adapt to the rapid pace, which could lead them to not reflect as much about what they write on the tools, and unawareness of who potentially could read what is being written. Through the creation of user metrics and analyzed data, the SCT administrator can see how many messages have been sent and with whom the employees communicate the most with e.g., which provides the administrator new knowledge about the employees and thus enables the administrator power to choose how to interpret and use the new knowledge. Several participants point to the fact that interpreting communication on the SCTs to determine whether someone was a productive employee would lead management down the wrong route. When analyzing power relations on SCTs it becomes evident that the tools enable new ways of power, maybe not as an actor with agency, but as a way of presenting new knowledge which can be interpreted differently compared to who reads into it.

What becomes evident is that as communication becomes visible on these tools, concerns about potential exploitation of the visible communication are present for some of the participants. None of the participants, except for one, knew what data is being collected about them on the tools. Even though GDPR is supposed to protect the employees, one participant highlighted that if unethical monitoring of data would happen, he would hesitate to file a report due to social implications of it afterwards. It seems that the gathering of data on the tools have become so embedded in the organizational ecosystem that it has almost become invisible (Miller & Horst, 2012). Even though several were not concerned about digital monitoring currently happening in their organization, several expressed concerns about the *risk* of it happening in the future. If conditions would have changed and they would find out that digital monitoring had happened, a majority expressed that they would consider resigning. This can be an example of how the participants have agreed to certain conditions of the usage of the SCTs, but if the conditions would change in such a way that they would feel unethically exploited, they would consider resigning.

This links to another overarching finding from this study, which was the high levels of *trust* the participants enacted to their organizations and the provided SCTs and that they

believed their organizations would not abuse that trust. Scholars have pointed to the fact that we are increasingly becoming digital data subjects and that digital tools have the possibility to monitor our online communications (Lupton, 2014; Zerfass et al., 2018). When trust is high, employees might be less likely to question how, when, and why their data is being collected or stored, especially if the collection of data has become a such a norm that it happens unobtrusively. As this study was conducted with participants from Sweden, a country that generally is acknowledged for having high levels of trust for authorities, this could have affected how trusting the participants were.

Regardless, the importance that is given to trust in strategic communication in general is something that should be acknowledged and critically examined. Research often highlights how strategic communication can help to build trust within organizations and in society in general (Heide & Falkheimer, 2022; Zerfass et al., 2018). Essentially, trust is desirable, and is said to foster beneficial outcomes. What should be acknowledged is that trust also provides a lot of power to the trusted entity. The author of this thesis agrees with scholars that trust is a crucial element for fostering well-functioning democracies and organizations. What could be questioned is how much of trust we should enact, and if it is possible to determine when trust potentially might be abused? There is a common saying which states that “infrastructure is invisible, up until it stops to function”. Should democratic gazes of the highly visible communication on SCTs be implemented only after the first unethical monitoring has happened? The theoretical contribution to strategic communication is not to diminish the importance of trust, but rather to highlight potential implications that high levels of trust may bring and encourage further examination of the complex relationship between trust and power.

Practical contributions

When it comes to practical contributions to strategic communication, the aspect of trust should be taken into account for both management and strategic communication practitioners. As Heide and Falkheimer (2022) pointed to, with the abundance of information flow in contemporary society, individuals increasingly have to interpret and make choices on that information, which can be seen a risk factor. Strategic communication is emphasized as a means to help clarify certain choices of the organization’s products, services, or point of view as the least risky (Heide & Falkheimer, 2022). When it comes to data gathering through SCTs, it can be seen as a risk factor to leave it up to the individual employee to assume, guess, and hypothesizing if and how their communication, and thus data, is gathered and analyzed. Here, strategic

communication could be significantly valuable. With clear, transparent communication explaining if and how data is being used on the SCTs presented in an understandable and accessible way, could reduce uncertainty. As the participants in this study did not strongly suspect being monitored, they did not in a high degree self-governed or self-regulated their communicative behavior as a result of feeling monitored. What organizations could bear in mind, however, is that the discourse about digital monitoring in the workplace seems to have gained increased attention lately (Aloisi & De Stefano, 2022; Bergling, 2024; Unionen Opinion, 2023), and employees might be influenced by this discourse in the future. Concerns about global instability could potentially also fuel general worries about online security, which could lead to employees questioning monitoring. Organizations could mitigate the risks with employees' speculation about how data is being gathered and analyzed by proactively increase transparency, even if they are not gathering or analyzing anything. As Foucault suggest, it does not matter if surveillance occurs, it is the *perception* of it happening that could affect behavior. How employees perceive and interpret the usages of SCTs becomes important for the overall organization. If employees mistakenly believe that they are being digitally monitored, it could possibly not only affect communicative behavior, but even, as participants in this study indicated, make them consider leaving the organization entirely.

Another practical contribution is the hope for management and practitioners to reflect on what the usage of graphs, metrics, and analysis of employees' communication on SCTs will be used for. With communication being highly visible through these tools, the possibly to gather, analyze, and interpret such communication to optimize efficiency and productivity can seem tempting. A central question to ask is what the analysis of employees' communication on these tools, such as data not always understood in its context and as represented in digital scores on the administrator's dashboard, ultimately will lead to. What does the number of messages sent per month or with whom an employee has communicated with the most really say about productivity? The normalization of such data analytics, which might currently seem harmless, could potentially lead to a decrease of employees' awareness of potential exploitation through such monitoring.

However, if specific communication analysis contributes to value for the organization and the employees in ways to improve work, the aspiration to implement this in a democratic way should be aimed for. For instance, by informing the employees in an easily accessible way about such practices and preferably also involving them in discussions about how the data will be used. Through such an approach, a transparent and democratic environment on the tools could be cultivated.

Limitations and future research

How participants were recruited to the study can show a limitation, as the snowball sampling can be viewed as a convenience sampling. The number of participants can also be considered a limitation for making general statements, however, as the aim with this thesis was to reach nuance and depth rather than breadth, the qualitative research method was valuable. Future quantitative research could examine how many employees are aware of what data is being collected about them on SCTs, as many of the participants in this study did not know, and if the employees would consider resigning if they would find out that digital monitoring had happened in their organization.

As the current legal landscape surrounding digital monitoring presents some grey areas regarding acceptable practices, future research could explore this further by examining if and when managers might feel more tempted to monitor employees, and whether employees find such monitoring ethically justified in those situations.

As the findings from this study is based on participants from a Swedish context, future research could also examine the same phenomenon, but from a non-European context with different legislations on data protection in the workplace. Future research could also investigate more ways to create democratic gazes in the modern digital workplace, where employees are co-creators of policies regarding how data is going to be used in the workplace.

Concluding remarks

SCTs in the modern and digital workplace are currently a big part of the internal communication infrastructure. The wish with the findings from this thesis is to spark an interest for both strategic communication practitioners and researchers on how to enhance democratic organizational gazes, increase transparency of what data is being gathered, and how to create safe environments for employees not just in the physical office but also in the digital one.

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Appendix 1

Interview guide

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Could you tell me a bit about your work, what role you have in the organization, and how long you have been working for this organization?
- 1.2 What social collaboration tool/s are you and your coworkers using in your organization?
- 1.3 Are you satisfied with this way of communicating and collaborating with your coworkers?
 - Why/why not?

2 Communication visibility

- 2.1 By using a social collaboration tool, a lot of your communication becomes visible for both your employees and your employer. How does this visibility make you feel?
 - What benefits do you think increased communication visibility creates for you, your colleagues, and your organization? Why do you see these as benefits?
 - What challenges do you think increased communication visibility poses for you, your colleagues, and your organization? Why do you see these as challenges?

3 Formal and informal communication

- 3.1 Do you communicate informally with your coworkers on the tool, and how does that communication look like?
- 3.2 Have you ever experienced that your informal conversations have been viewed by someone whom the message wasn't meant for?
 - If yes, what happened?
- 3.3 What are your feelings about how formal and informal communication all happen on the same platform?
- 3.4 Do you and your coworkers talk about sensitive topics on the tool?
- 3.5 Do you talk about your managers, management decisions, or similar, on the tool?
- 3.6 Do you think that there could be situations where a manager or HR for instance should be able to view informal conversations with coworkers? For instance, if someone is being

harassed in an informal channel where you chat about non-work related topics.

4 Communication policy and privacy

4.1 Are you aware if your organization has a communication policy for the social collaboration tool that you are using?

- If yes, what are the features of that communication policy?
- If no, do you wish that there would be a communication policy? What features would you like to see in such a policy?

4.2 Under the GDPR law you have the right to know what data is being collected about you in the workplace. Are you familiar with what data is being collected about you on the social collaboration tool you are using in your work?

5 Perceived surveillance

5.1 What are your thoughts about how what you write and interact with on the social collaboration tool possibly could be monitored by the software company providing the tool, your colleagues, or your manager?

5.2 Have you ever had an experience when you had to alter your communication on the tool due to the possibility that you might be monitored?

- For instance, if there has been a situation when you have felt like you didn't want to post sensitive information on the tool, and that you would rather use another platform to communicate with your coworkers?
- If no, have you heard of anyone in your organization who had an experience when they altered their communication?

5.3 In general, even though you might not be monitored by your manager or the tool, do you think about the possibility that you might be? Does this affect how you communicate on the tool?

5.4 Do you talk with your coworkers about what information that social collaboration tools possibly could gather from you and your activity on the tool?

6 Control and pressure

6.1 Do you feel pressured to use the social collaboration tool that your organization uses?

6.2 Do you perceive that there is pressure to be visible on the social collaboration tool?

6.3 If yes, have you ever resisted the pressure of being visible on the social collaboration tool?

7 Resistance and negative feedback

7.1 Have you resisted to communicate on the tool at any point? What happened?

7.2 Do you feel like you can rise negative feedback about procedures or decisions on the tool?
If no, where does the negative feedback happen?

8 Social collaboration tool analytics

8.1 A lot of social collaboration tools gather analytics and metrics, such as user activity, about your activity and interactions on the tool. What are your thoughts about how the results of these analytics about you and your colleagues could be used?

8.2 Do you think that these analytics and metrics could be interesting for your manager or your company to take part of?

8.3 Do you think that these analytics/data could be used unethically in such a way that they could be used against you or to your disadvantage?

9 The future

9.1 In your opinion, do you think that how organizations communicate and interact on social collaboration tools in the workplace will change?

- Why, why not?

10 Ending

10.1 Out of everything that we have discussed, what do you think particularly sticks out or are aspects that you find especially significant/interesting within this discussion?

10.2 Could I contact you if any clarification or follow-up questions would arise after I have transcribed the interview?

Appendix 2

Information sheet

Master thesis study on internal communication on Social Collaboration Tools

Thank you for participating in this research project. Before signing the consent form it is important that you understand what the research project is about and what the participation will involve. Please read through this information sheet and ask any questions to the researcher you might have.

Focus and aim of the research

In the modern workplace, social collaboration tools such as Slack, Microsoft Teams or Google Chat, have become increasingly popular as an internal communication tool for knowledge workers. The focus of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how these tools affect employees' communicative behaviors and what thoughts employees have on the increased communication visibility on these tools.

Methodology

The collection of data for this study will derive from in-depth interviews with employees who are frequent users of social collaboration tools as their internal communication tool in their workplace. The interviews will be conducted either in person or through Zoom. The interviews will be held in English, but Swedish participants will be given the possibility to express certain phrasings in Swedish if they wish. The interview will take 40-60 min and will be recorded. The recorded interview will thereafter be transcribed and only the researcher will have access to the audio and the transcript of the interview. If wished to be reviewed, the transcript can be sent to the participant before analysis. Lastly, the audio and transcript will be deleted after the study has been accepted at Lund University and the finalized study will be uploaded on Lund University's database for student papers.

Ethical consideration

- **Confidentiality:** Any sensitive information such as employer, name, work position, or any other information that could identify the participant will be anonymized.
- **Risk:** There are no identified risks with participating in the study that could harm the participant in any way.
- **Withdrawing:** The participant can withdraw their participation in the study at any point in time.

Please do not hesitate to contact the researcher if any questions regarding your participation arises. Keep this document for your own record.

Sara Tjellander

██████████

██████████

Appendix 3

Consent form

Master thesis study on internal communication on Social Collaboration Tools

Interviewer: Sara Tjellander

Thank you for agreeing to be a part of this research project and agreeing to be interviewed. By signing this contract, you are agreeing to participate in a research study led by Sara Tjellander, master student from Lund University. By signing this contract, you are agreeing to the following conditions of your involvement:

1. Sufficient information about the research project has been given to you and you have understood the purpose of your participation as an interviewee.
2. The interview will be recorded (audio) and a transcript will be conducted after the finished interview.
3. The participation is voluntary, and you have the right to stop the interview or withdraw your participation at any time.
4. The recorded interview will be analysed by researcher Sara Tjellander, student from Lund University. The researcher may take notes during the interview.
5. Access to the interview transcript will be limited to researcher Sara Tjellander.
6. You have the right to withstand answering any questions. If feeling uncomfortable answering any questions, you have the right to withdraw from the interview at any point at time.
7. Your name, any summarized interview content, or direct quotations from the interview will be anonymized to secure your confidentiality as a participant in this study. Any

other sensitive information from the interview will be taken into consideration to ensure that your identity will not be revealed.

8. Your words may be quoted directly, even if anonymized. If wished, you may review notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the pertaining of your participation.
9. The recording of the interview will be destroyed after the research project is finalized.

By signing this consent form, I agree that;

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project.
2. I understand that I can stop the interview at any time.
3. I have read the information sheet.
4. I can request notes, or a copy of the transcript of my interview and make edits I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality.
5. I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions regarding my participation I may have.

Please keep this document for your own record.

Participant's full name: _____

Participant's signature: _____

Researcher's full name: _____

Researcher's signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 4

LinkedIn post

Hi there employees in various sectors!

I am currently writing my master's degree about Social Collaboration Tools (such as Slack, Microsoft Teams, or Google Chat) and how employees are navigating these internal communication platforms. Are you a frequent user of social collaboration tools at your workplace and would be interested in sharing some of your thoughts on how the usage of these tools affect how you communicate internally in your organisation? In that case, I would be happy to invite you to take part of an interview!

Do you feel addressed, or do you know someone who might be interested in participating? Please let me know - comment, share or write to me directly to help me find participants for my thesis.

Looking forward to hearing from you!