Kurskod: SKOK11
Termin: Vårterminen 2019
Handledare: Ilkin Mehrabov
Examinator: Carolina Lilja

SEE YOU AT LINKEDIN

- The complex link between employees and organizations

AGNES GUSTAVSSON LARSSON & SOFIA STEINBOCK

Lunds universitet
Institutionen för strategisk kommunikation
Examensarbete för kandidatexamen

Abstract

See you at LinkedIn

– The complex link between employees and organizations

The purpose of this study is to contribute with knowledge about how employees perceive their LinkedIn usage in relation to their organization. To increase the awareness of how organizations can work strategically with LinkedIn the link between organizations and employees has been studied. Other studies examining LinkedIn have mostly had a recruiter perspective or have not considered users as employees at an organization.

The research is conducted by using a qualitative method, where the authors interviewed eleven employees at three different corporations. The interviews were made to gain a deep understanding of the employees' perception and usage of the networking site. The origin of the study is within strategic communication, with contributing research about the Corporate Value Circle, alignment, and vision, culture, and brand. Additionally, the Uses and Gratification theory is used to gain knowledge about the participant's motivations of using LinkedIn.

The findings show that sharing organizational related content at LinkedIn goes beyond just sharing content with organizational values, but rather, it is a channel where they can manifest. Employees can be seen as vital third-party endorsers, although the relationship is both complex and needs careful ethical consideration. The study also showed that for the organization to create shareable content on LinkedIn the employees' needs and finding the right tonality is the most vital aspects.

Findings from this study findings shows that through communication activities, such as through the creation of relevant LinkedIn content, organizational values can get reflected through their employees. Further research could be able to investigate if this can create a stronger alignment for the organization as a brand.

Keywords: LinkedIn, Employee perspective, corporate communication, strategic communication, alignment, branding

Sammanfattning

Ses på LinkedIn

– Den komplexa länken mellan medarbetare och organisationen

Syftet med denna studien är att bidra med kunskap om hur medarbetarna ser på sin användning av LinkedIn i förhållande till sin organisation. För att uppnå detta krävs en djupare förståelse för medarbetares användning och upplevelse av LinkedIn. Tidigare studier som undersöker LinkedIn har främst fokuserat på hur rekryterare kan använda plattformen och inte hur enskilda medarbetare använder plattformen. Genom att undersöka den komplexa länken mellan organisation och medarbetare i det digitala rummet kan vi öka medvetenheten om hur organisationer strategiskt kan arbeta med plattformen.

För att uppnå syftet har författarna använt en kvalitativ metod bestående av elva intervjuer med anställda från tre olika företag. Detta gjordes för att få en djupare förståelse för medarbetarnas perspektiv och deras motivation till att använda LinkedIn. Studien tar avstamp i strategisk kommunikation med ett ramverk av teorier såsom Corporate Value Circle, VCI-modellen och Uses and Gratification Theory.

Resultatet från undersökningen visar att medarbetare är angelägna att representera sin organisation eftersom det även kan främja deras egen aktivitet på LinkedIn. Däremot har medarbetarna olika motiv till deras användning som påverkar hur de använder sig av plattformen. Därför är det viktigt för organisationen att skapa delningsbart innehåll som utgår från vad medarbetarna önskar och anpassa tonaliteten därefter. Medarbetarna kan fungera som tredjepartsintyg för organisationen om det finns en förståelse för relationens komplexitet och de anställdas integritet.

Nyckelord: LinkedIn, medarbetarperspektiv, organisationskommunikation, strategisk kommunikation, varumärke, alignment

Thank you to Ilkin Mehrabov, our supportive and optimistic supervisor, and to the Department of Strategic Communication at Lund University. We would also like to express our gratitude to Campus vänner for the scholarship who made this study possible. As well as the participating organization and their employees who openly shared their thoughts with us.

We would like to emphasize the thesis has been equally constructed by both authors.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

One of today's most popular social media and networking sites is LinkedIn. It is the world's biggest professional network, with more than 546 million users all over the world (LinkedIn, 2019). Alison Attrill defines LinkedIn as "a networking site for professional connection that thrives on linking people with similar work interests, promoting themselves, their achievements and their connections to like-minded others" (Attrill, 2015, p. 41). Compared to other well-known social media platforms a strong LinkedIn has a professional connection. This makes LinkedIn a hybrid between a professional and private platform which can create uncertainty among its users. Not only when it comes to how the personal user can use LinkedIn, but also how an organization can best manage the communication channel.

Despite the large number of users on LinkedIn, there is a lack of knowledge about the perceptions of the platform from an employee perspective. The emerging media landscape has resulted in a new level of transparency, where all communication activities are taken into account when stakeholders form an overall impression of an organization. Thus, it increases the need for organizations to adopt a more holistic view of their communication, which might include their employees' online presence on platforms like LinkedIn to be aware of how it reflects the organization.

In order to implement developed communication activities and strategies, there is a need for knowledge within the area. Today there are few conducted studies about networking sites from an organizational perspective, including the perceptions of the employees. However, the existing and most relevant studies have been closely examined to find a starting point for this thesis. For instance, a useful study provided insights by investigating motivations for being at a professional networking platform with a comparison between individual members and organizational members. The results revealed the definition of two types of motivations: contextual and generic, by applying the Uses and Gratification theory (Grissa, 2017). Another study, specifically about LinkedIn examined what motivates or inhibits students usage of the networking platform (Florenthal, 2015). Thus, it became clear that motivations also might provide a rich starting point for an employee perspective.

In this thesis we have chosen to further investigate the link between the organization and its employees at LinkedIn. It can be considered a rather unexplored external communication channel to the surrounding world that we will try to contribute with more knowledge about to gain further understanding of the employee's perspective.

1.2 Problem formulation

A common definition of strategic communication is "the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission" (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Verčič, & Sriramesh, 2007, p.3). To successfully create communication that contributes to a unified image of an organization and a consistent voice, scholars emphasize the creation of alignment. Volk & Zerfass (2018) argues that there is a research gap about which activities promote the key concept alignment and how it can manifest in an organization.

To orchestrate all outgoing messages, it is vital for organizations to embrace digital developments in order to stay relevant. For organizations to successfully and respectfully integrate professional digital platforms into their communications strategy, they foremostly need to consider the employee's perception of using them. Hence, the lack of awareness of the employee's preferences of professional forums, such as LinkedIn, can create confusion for all parties in how to use and act on professional digital platforms.

Based on the employee perspective, this study thrives to give organizations useful insights about which approach they should have and how they strategically can work with the platform LinkedIn. With the awareness of the employees having the ownership over their personal profile we are in this thesis examining if specific content can gain both the employee and the organization.

The knowledge-gap about what motivates employees to use LinkedIn and the possibilities for an organization to be represented made us interested in how the platform can be used efficiently for both parties. It also made us curious about how we, as professional strategic communicators, can work strategically with the platform. In our profession, we should both be active users of the networking site but also know how to use it from an organization's perspective. At the same time, the digital development and emerging media landscape might blur employee’s distinction between employees professional and private roles, which can create ethical dilemmas. For instance, how much the organization is allowed to indirectly or directly affect what the employee’s write about their organization online.

The insights in this study are conducted by interviewing employees about their perception of using LinkedIn and how they view their professional appearance online in relation to the organization they work for. The interviews in this research are an attempt to find new ways of creating alignment in value-driven organizations. The three organizations that have made it possible to diving into the queries of using LinkedIn are; Intrum, Öresundskraft, and Collector bank.

1.3 Purpose and research questions

The purpose of the study is to contribute with knowledge about how employees perceive their LinkedIn use in relation to their organization. The employee perspective enhances the overall goal for strategic communication to achieve alignment when interacting with organizational communication activities. Thereby this study can increase the awareness of how organizations can work strategically and include LinkedIn in their overall communication strategy. We aim to contribute to a broader view of communication strategy when new digital solutions change the emerging media landscape, which further can be a contribution to both the research field and organizations.

- Why do employees choose to communicate organizational related content in their own LinkedIn feed?
- To which extent are the organizational values reflected through the employee’s personal LinkedIn?

- How can an organization work strategically with their employees LinkedIn presence?

1.4 Delimitations

We have decided that the interpretation and possible effects on the receiver, in this case, external stakeholders will not be considered. It would be a too extensive research for the available time and resources we had. Instead, the focus point lays in researching the interplay between the employees and their organization on LinkedIn and exploring the outcome of their activity on the platform.

Lastly, it was required to make a distinction in how much the question of identity could be investigated since the aim has been to maintain an organizational perspective within strategic communication and not dive too deep in the field of psychology and creating of the self.

1.5 About LinkedIn

LinkedIn is as mentioned, defined as a networking site for professional connection. It is free to create a standard account, which allows the user to be part of the network by requesting to add a contact they either know or want to get to know. The connection will only be confirmed if the other person chooses to accept the request. Additionally, with their profile, the user can create a digital version of their resumè, exemplify their key competencies, and write a summary about themselves. For organizations, LinkedIn has become a platform where businesses can display who they are, share their own content, or buying ads. For individuals, it can be used as a platform for sharing different sort of content with their network and promoting themselves (Linkedin, 2019).

2. Previous research

In this section, studies about the newer phenomena alignment have been collected, reasons behind why people use or are passive on social networking sites and lastly research about how we choose to present ourselves online.

2.1 Defining alignment

Volk and Zerfass (2018) illuminate the current absence of practical ways to achieve purposeful use of strategic communication to fulfill an organization's missions productively. In order to develop appropriate tools and reach knowledge, the key concept alignment is elaborated. The study is based on an extensive literature review to form their definition. Alignment is explained as a combination of outcome and ongoing processes that can be divided into multiple perspectives and to different levels (Volk & Zerfass, 2018).

Their narrow clarification of the concept uncovered some implications about how to apply the reconceptualizing to further research. In this study, it is of interest to investigate the type of alignment established by definitions offered by Christensen et al., (2008) and Hatch and Schultz (2001) titled "communication strategy and activities alignment" (Volk & Zerfass, 2018, p. 438). It comprises alignment as an activity favorable for the organization's reputation and increased attractiveness by using consistent coordination by strategic communication. The concept classifies as a secondary alignment and provides suggestions for further research to find practical tools for orchestration of consistent communication in all communication channels.

Gulbrandsen and Just (2016) have similar reflections about alignment in their literature, which is also based on a foundation connected to Hatch and Schultz (2001) theories about vision, culture, and image. Their focus point is the increase of blurriness in the distinction between internal and external communication. They view strategy as a dynamic process, both inside-out and vice versa, which involves the entanglements of the external and internal in the current media landscape. Consequently, it increases the pressure on organizations to orchestra cross-media communication (Gulbrandsen & Just, 2016).

Further, the developments of cross-media communication could impact the significance of communication activities that gain third-party endorsements. According to Morris and Goldsworthy (2016), third-party endorsements are favorable publicity without direct connection to the organization it regards. For this reason, the independent endorsement might be of higher value than, for example, paid-advertisements. Connecting the third-party endorsement to the concept of alignment, it is interesting to reflect upon the ways the employees might represent the organization, and further, if their communication in external channels can work similarly. Hence, a study investigating employees positive word-of-mouth impact on brand equity is highlighting exciting aspects of what third-party endorsements might look like going forward (King & Grace, 2009).

A further extension of the concept is to consider employees and the created culture within the organization as a part of the alignment. Thus, the organization culture can reflect on how well communication activities are adapted within the organization. The organizational culture has proven to be vital for creating an interface and a sense of meaning for employees, which further impacts employee engagement (Byrne, 2015). However, Alvesson (2001) amplifies that besides the benefits of a strong organizational culture, it needs to be considered that it is of dualistic character. In other words, the culture might also constitute a limitation for the organization by enforcing a particular set of rules that could constrain the imagination.

2.2 Use of social networking sites

In order to provide a rich understanding of the use of social networking sites (SNS), it is crucial to raise the question of why people use SNS at all. Studies have been conducted that investigate popular sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and MySpace. A comprehensive study conducted in 2009 summarized motivations to clarify the usage with three following explanations as main reasons; primarily, to get to know new people (31%), secondly, to communicate with existing contacts and friends (21%) and lastly as a form of general socializing (14%). In order to gain the results, 1,200 participants contributed to the study to add further knowledge about how to improve social networking sites (Brandtzaeg, Heim, Ozok & Zaphiris, 2009).

Another significant study that researched the underlying reasons for using social platforms conducted cartography of motivations built upon four components. The cartography presents a framework for possible further research on social media with the basis of friendship and interest on a histone ax, self and content on the vertical ax (Stenger & Coutant, 2013; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008).

Additionally, some studies specializing in professional networking sites (PNS) has provided insights by examining the motivations for being part of a network both from an individual and organizational perspective (Grissa, 2017). Additionally, Grissa (2016) researched motivations for opinion leaders to share organization related content on different professional networking sites, which has been of relevance for the research about PNS.

On the contrary to motivations of being active on SNS, some scholars have examined the reasons for being passive. To fully be able to understand people's behavior on SNS, it is crucial to look at why they are not active as well. Zhu and Bao (2018) discuss possible reasons for passiveness in their article, such as how feelings of envy, loneliness, or anxiety could appear when interacting on SNS. These symptoms can lead to individuals feeling uncomfortable and depressed, which ultimately can result in fewer visits to the sites, or even leaving the sites.

In addition, when an individual is unsure about how to convey a positive image of themselves, the uncertainty can lead to reduced engagement on SNS. Something that can reduce the feeling of uncertainty is if the individual experience a feeling of membership and familiarity. In turn, it can create a perception of emotional safety, which can give the opposite effect of uncertainty of an image. In a group where the feeling of membership is high, the user is less likely to feel anxiety or a need to recreate their self-image (Zhu & Bao 2018).

Another finding the authors came to reach was that even though the user may trust their friends on the SNS, the intense feeling of membership does not have an obvious correlation when it comes to privacy concern. A possible explanation discussed by Zhu and Bao (2018) is that the individual still feels like other people than their friends can access what they share. In today's society where a big amount of data flows every day, it gets harder and harder to know what other people can found out about us no matter what privacy settings we think that we have.

2.3 The presentation of self online

In today's society, it has become relevant not only to be aware of the presentation of oneself offline, but also how the presentation of the cyber-self should be portrayed. Among traditional scholars about the presentation of self is the sociological perspective, with Goffman as the leading figure. The essence of his study of the self reveals how humans construct their daily life to create a positive image of themselves for other people (Goffman, 1956). An example of a study using Goffman to illustrate the presentation of self online, in particular on social media, is Bernie Hogan (2010). He suggests that an exhibition approach should be combined with Goffman's dramaturgical perspective to obtain a comprehensive overview of self-presentation in a digital age.

While on the other hand, Shuck and Wollard (2010) argue for engagement as a psychological state of motivation and not a reciprocally based process. From the authors point of view, the traditional perspective undervalues the complexity of the process of engagement construction. Instead they argue that engagement emerge in safe and meaningful work environments, where the employees feel like they have the possibility and resources to finish their work tasks.

Lastly, Attrill (2015) discusses the underlying motives behind posting on social media in her book The manipulation of online self-presentation: create, edit, re-edit, and present. Her research about cyberpsychology the motives underneath the creation of the self online, by looking at what one chooses to share online versus offline. Offline people are often more aware of why they do things and the motivations behind the behavior, but online there tends to be larger unawareness of reasons behind engaging in certain activities or sharing (Attrill, 2015).

To understand behavior online, the author looks at research about the underlying motivations for the behavior offline. Different approaches are applicable when trying to understand human behavior. Social psychology focuses on how the social environment impacts learned behavior, while the biological personality perspective, in contrast, sees humans as a product of nature. What the perspectives all agree upon is that all human behavior comes from internal processes (Attrill, 2015).

3. Theoretical framework

In the following section, relevant theories about corporate strategy, motivations to using media base on the Uses and Gratifications theory and the classic vision, image, and brand model are introduced. The theoretical framework will later be applied to our empirical material and further presented in the analysis section.

3.1 Uses and Gratification theory

In present time, digitalization is part of everyday life, and there are concerns for the possible influence that increased screen-time can cause. However, from the opposite perspective, the question can be turned around from how media impacts us, to why we choose to use media in the first place. The second point of view is the essence of what the Uses and Gratifications theory (UGT) examines, the possible connection between certain needs and what motivates the media usage. It has been widely used in studies during the 21st century since it comprises essential factors of audience behavior (e.g., Florenthal, 2015; Stenger & Coutant, 2013; Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008). The origin of UGT is mass media communication theories, with its founding fathers Jay Blumer and Denis Katz. According to Blumer and Katz (1974), the audience is as an active media consumer by their selection to use media might have motivations intentionally. Components for the motivations are suggested, such as social factors, to be amused or to calm down, which likewise has been acknowledged to be similar to Maslow's well-known hierarchy of needs.

The four suggested needs connected to media usage to evaluate are surveillance, personal identity, personal relationships, and diversion. These are estimated based on if the gratification might fulfill a certain need or not. The surveillance regards external monitoring for being aware of our surroundings, while the personal identity and personal relationship is a basic need in both identifying who you are with recognition in media or a sense of belonging by forming relationships. Lastly, the diversion is about distracting or entraining from everyday life (Blumler & Katz, 1974).

In similarity to how media can bring a positive gratification to the individual, the opposite of a contrary gratification sought from media is also likely. Regardless, UGT can only assess media use in a novel aspect that competes with a lot of other ways of satisfying the mentions needs.

When applying the theory, an awareness of some conceptual problems needs to be considered, according to Blumler and Katz (1974). Primarily, there is no naturally visible link between hidden motives and the media gratification. Instead, it builds upon a systematic classification. Another difficulty to consider is to recognize the motivation that could consist of multiple layers. In other words, the spectrum becomes quite broad. On one side consuming media as a passive activity, having it in the background, or on the other, intentionally searching for specific information in media. Hence, both consist within the same contexts of being motivation but are far apart. For this reason, the importance of finding a systematic order to make applicable categories becomes essential. Thirdly, an aspect of importance is that it is not only one motivation that could be the reason for a behavior. Preferably a composition of several motivations might be behind a specific type of media. To retain validity when applying the theory to data the recognition of these implications is useful to have in mind. A way of avoiding them is to use self-report as a measurement. Thus it requires that the individuals keep an open and honest approach to the researcher.

Accordingly, when discussing UGT while trying to understand audience behaviors, different approaches can be applied. The most common perspective to withtake is the functionalist due to its capacity to correlate behavior with suitable motivations (Blumer & Katz, 1974). Scholars have debated intensely about whether the perspectives could be viewed as complementary or should be separated. However, there is an agreement that no perspective is superior to the other but rather different viewpoints for attain knowledge. Thus, it is of importance to reflect upon what way the theory has been applied concerning the results and also to have critical awareness about that the theory only capture a limited aspect of a complicated matter.

3.2 Corporate Value Circle

One of the world's largest communication project made by the Academic Society for Corporate Management & Communication, in 2015, led to the establishment of the Communication Value Circle (CVC). The key concept of the project was to create legitimacy for the communication profession and explain how strategic communication can contribute to the organization's overall success (Academic Society for Corporate Management & Communication, 2019). The model is a result of a gap in research regarding how to link communication goals and overall business goals, that has been an issue to practitioners for a long time. The difference between other corporate communication models and the CVC is the mix between soft and hard value creation. The CVC is a foundation for researchers and practitioners within the field to help integrate communication activities and goals into the business strategy.

In this thesis, the framework outlined by Zerfass and Viertmann (2017) is one of the groundworks for analyzing the empirics. The CVC is an updated and applicable theory in today's emerging media landscape highly relevant for analyzing the complex online relationship between employees and organizations. On the other hand, the theory tries to rationalize the complex communication function to one simple wheel which can be seen as a paradox. In this thesis the CVC is therefore not seen as the only solution but rather a support to understanding the empirics. In their literature review, Zerfass and Viertmann (2017) have found four rationales within value creation that explain the link between corporate communication and stakeholders attitudes and behaviors. The different streams in the research are; tracking links between communication and stakeholder behavior, creating intangible assets, value being created through proactive work and strategic alignment, and the adaptation of business valuation and management concepts such as measuring Return on investment (ROI).

Value creation is by Zerfass and Viertmann defined as "the transformation of resources into goods or services with a higher financial value" (Zerfass & Viertmann, 2017, p.72), which supports the overall objective of any corporation "to work efficiently and effectively to create financial value today and enable value creation in the future” (Zerfass & Viertmann, 2017, p. 72). In CVC, all four streams of research are being considered in the model, which can be useful for corporate management, which aims to create value for an organization with different activities.

As Zerfass and Viertmann (2017) developed the framework, they found four dimensions to within communication and corporate value. With the base from stakeholder theory, they found the following four generic types of corporate values essential for business success: tangible assets, intangible assets, room for maneuver, and opportunities for development. Based on the resources and positioning of the organization, corporate management use the mentioned dimension of values to develop overall goals. The corporate communication department can contribute to all four dimensions and have developed their own goals. Looking at the model, the CVC further breaks down the four dimensions of corporate values into 12 separate communication values.

The CVC is a sophisticated visualized matrix that can be seen both vertically and horizontally (Zerfass & Viertmann, 2017). Starting from the horizontal perspective, the categories tangible assets and room for maneuver looks at the current value creation while the other two represent the future value creation. From the vertical point of view, tangible assets and intangible assets contribute to the corporation's value creation, and opportunities for development and room for maneuver represent enabling value creation. By implementing the model, every function within the organization contributes to the four dimensions of corporate values, which in turn create alignment. It means that the model can be used in sales or human resources as well, but in this thesis, the theory is used to look at how corporate communication is aligned.

Below the four dimensions and their categories will be presented in detail:

Enabling operations: in this category, ways communication activities support the business goals internally and externally can be found. Examples of operating support mentioned in the model are stimulating publicity, customer preferences, and employee commitment. By frequently having a dialogue with both the stakeholders and the employees, the organization builds a foundation for delivering the value to relevant parties. Enabling operation is dimension is essential to create legitimacy for the profession and defending the work for the management.

Building intangibles: another important aspect of the organization's communication is soft values such as the brand, reputation, and culture. Together the intangible assets create the corporate's overall identity perceived by stakeholders. Often these values can be overlooked or seen as a primary task for the communication department when, in fact, this should be included in the overall business strategy. Therefore prioritizing creating intangible assets can lead to an unexpected shift of power.

Ensuring flexibility: in times of change or crisis, the most crucial aspect is the level of trust among the key stakeholders. In this category, we can find relationships, trust, and legitimacy. Having leg-room enough to be flexible as an organization is all about caring about relationships. Prioritizing networks are not something new within the public relations discipline is not something new, but the actual value needs to be more discussed.

Adjusting strategy: this dimension is not about sending out press releases or performing certain activities but rather about listening and monitoring shifts in society. The communication department can make adjustments through thought leadership, innovation potential, and crisis resilience, which contributes to identifying competitive advantages and disadvantages. It can help adjust the strategic goals and creates value to the management board when taking strategic decision. The value is as a result of this created in a longer perspective and is vital to ensure the corporation's future value creation.

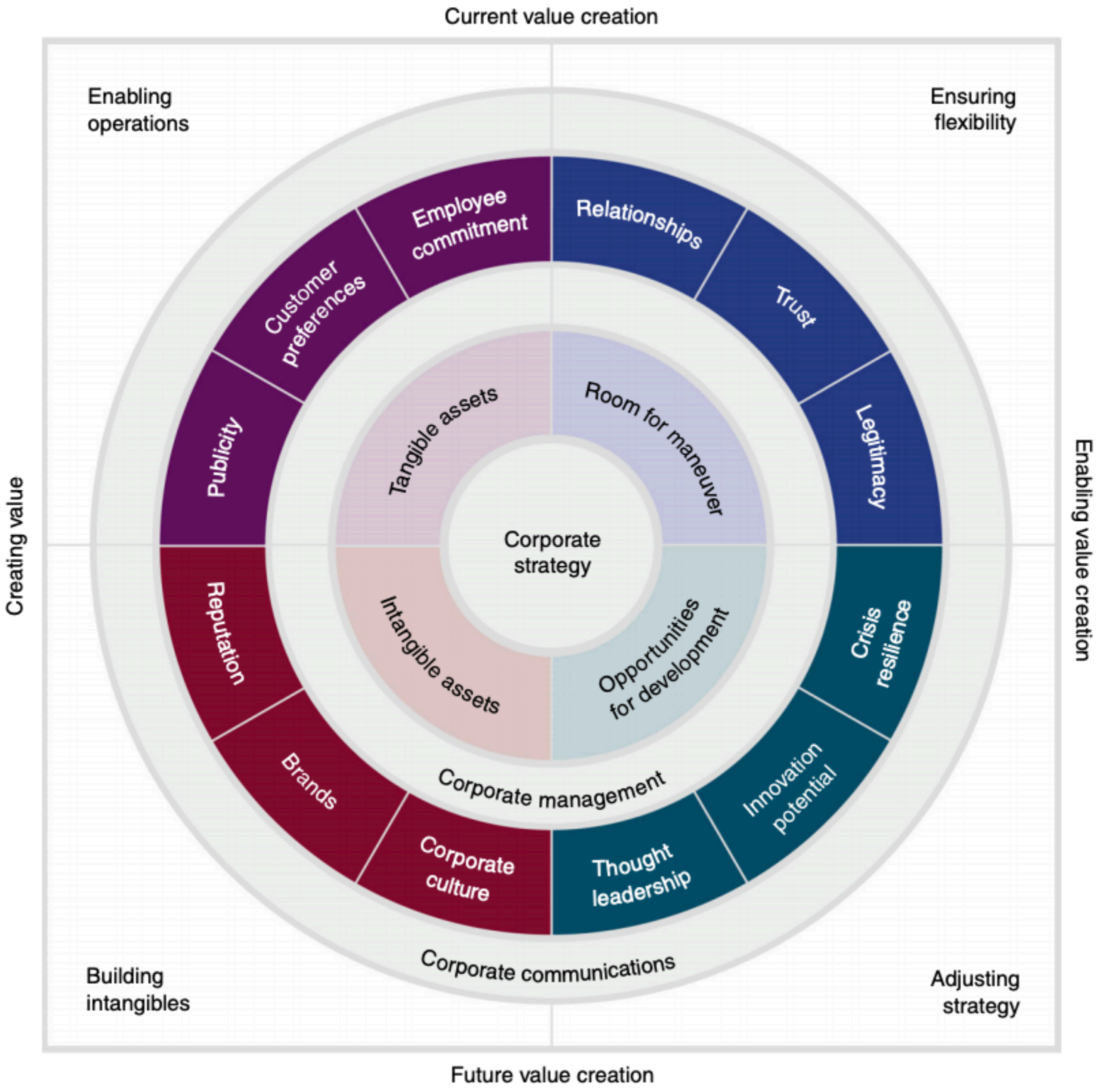

Figure 1. The communication value circle by Zerfass & Viertmann (2017, p.73).

3.3 Vision, culture and brand

The idea of branding has transformed the past two decades from being just a marketing activity to being seen as one of the essential parts of businesses. Schultz and Hatch (2008) have led the development with their research about the importance of aligning the corporate's official image, vision, and organizational culture. To manage to create alignment within the organization it requires resources in time and management but moreover a shift in perspective. In the original version of the theory the authors does not reflect upon the required resources and possible difficulties that could arise when implementing the guidelines. Although, since the theory is the foundation for today's view of creating a balanced and aligned organization the ideas, even though they at times lack connection to reality, have been a contribution to this study. Furthermore, the modern outlook of alignment is more about listening, both within the organization and from the outside than giving instruction.

The concept of alignment has already been introduced in previous literature, but in this section, we will go into detail by looking at a specific model. The research about organizational alignment by Schultz and Hatch (2008) resulted in the VCI (Vision, culture, image) framework which is based on elements of previous studies on organizational culture and strategic vision by Collins and Porras (1997).

When first creating the necessary changes in the organization, it is vital to map the voices from stakeholders and employees to get a sense of what is being said about the corporation today. The ground stones in finding the organizational identity according to the VCI-model is for the organization to ask ‘‘Who have we always been?’’, “What do others say about us?”, ‘‘What will we be in the future?’’ and “What will our stakeholders think about us along the way?”. A fundamental analysis lays the foundation of how to create the right strategy for the specific brand. When this work has been done the organization should be aware of the organizational identity, the values and the existing gaps in creating consistency.

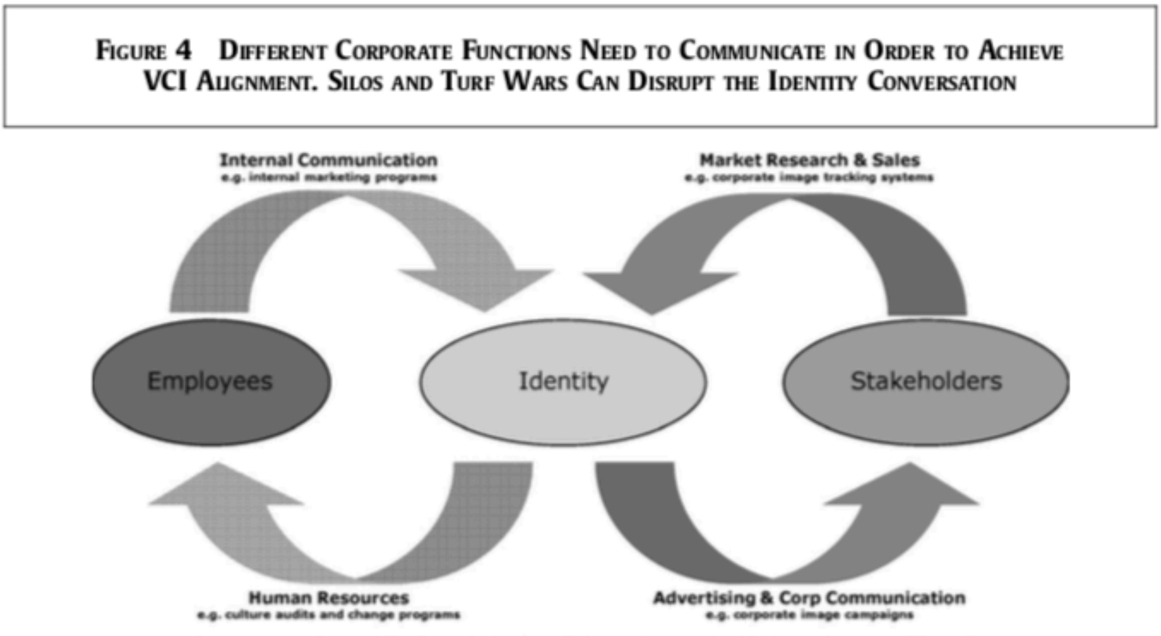

Figure 2. Managing a cross-functional brand by Hatch & Schultz (2009, p.126).

The key to balance vision, culture, and image are to look both inside and outside to get a clear picture of both the internal culture and the external stakeholder image (Hatch and Schultz (2009). Secondly, it is important to look both up and down, to involve both the employees and the top management. Thirdly it is necessary to start looking backward and into the organization's heritage before moving into the future.

According to Hatch and Schultz (2009), the following steps will help create alignment within and outside the organization.

- The alignment starts already in the recruitment process. Since alignment starts with their employees the organization needs to be cautious in hire people who align with the mapped values.

- Although management is a significant part of the process, the leaders need to start looking inside the organization. The employees should be indoctrinated in the outside message and vision but need to interpretation as it suits them. In the digital era where everyone is publicists, it is more important the employees find their way of communicating the brand. The manager needs to be a role model and "live the brand." Be aware that you cannot force the brand on the employee to take part in the real identity construction conversation.

- The next step is to identify the outer conversation about your brand. What kind of relationship does your stakeholder have to your product/service/organization? Is there any way you can involve the stakeholder in the process of development? Before formulating och reformulating the vision, make sure the stakeholder is engaged and could make their voice heard.

- When the stakeholder is involved, it is time to look inside again and make sure the employees not only are sharing the values and vision but also are involved in the process of acting. Some would call it living the brand. The importance is they get to be part of the decision-making process and fully know the organizational identity inside-out.

- Any critics might be exploited in the light of change is valuable insight for the brand management independently if the feedback or complaints come from the employees or stakeholders. Even if it far away from the original idea listening to ideas from those around the organization will help create a long lasting business that grows over time. Another aspect that will be revealed in this part of the process is who is responsible for aligning the organization. There are just as many answers as organizations, but in general, it has to be a combination between the communication, marketing, and HR department. A well-functioning system is to have a cross-functional team working across the borders of different departments.

- When different actors are involved, it necessary to identify any gaps between strategic vision, organizational culture, and stakeholder image threatening the brand. At this point, it is time to go back to the questions asked earlier in the VCI -framework about who we are, whom we want to be, and how others see us.

4. Method

In this section, we transparent present how we have conducted our empirics and how we have been able to come to the conclusions in this thesis. Thus, we have not wanted the examined organizations to be in focus in this thesis, we have shortly summarized them below. In the last part of this chapter, we discuss our methods validity and any possible ethical concerns.

4.1 Scientific approach and choice of method

In order to reach the aim of the study, a qualitative method has been used to inductively seek for motivations and perceptions of the employee's LinkedIn usage. As mentioned in the background, there are few studies about the use of Linkedin from the employee's perspective. Therefore, interviews are an appropriate method for the research, due to its explorative nature. Kvale (1997) describes interviews as a qualitative method for deep understanding and interpretations of people's life worlds. A conversation with a clear purpose is required to investigate the interpreted reality of the interviewees to reach knowledge.

Likewise, the choice of the scientific approach, which is postmodernism has a similar purpose of examining the reality without striving after a universal truth but rather exploring a wide range of explanations and interpretations of the same subjects (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994). The alignment between the scientific approach, selection of material, and, the analysis method is vital to reach valuable results according to Eksell & Thelander (2014). Additionally, the analysis method has been narrowly selected to contribute with a more profound understanding of the subjects examined and provided a clear connection to the results through thematization. The transcribed interviews were examined by finding common themes by using a systematic course of action to recognize patterns.

The origin of the postmodern perspective is commonly viewed as a reaction to the previous era of structuralism, where objective truths and a set of holistic explanations were part of the essence. In contrast, the postmodern perspective argues for skepticism when striving towards an accurate overview of reality (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994). Instead, the conversation is about paying attention to how theoretical frameworks are conducted and framed. The main concern is the multitude of interpretations and possible inconsistency; thus, the need for finding one way to represent a universal reality becomes irrelevant. By preference, the focus instead lay in the "subjects" ability to construct their actions, thoughts, feelings, and experiences in connection to their surrounding world.

4.2 Selection of organization

The selection process of the organizations was a combination of reaching out to suitable organizations with explicitly mentioned values and approaching existing contacts at suitable organizations. The preferred aim was to find organizations within different lines of business to integrate a variety to the study. It is related to the purpose of striving for comprehensive knowledge about how employees perceive their LinkedIn use in relation to their organization, in contrast, to conducting a case study about the employees at one specific organization.

In the end, contact persons at three organizations were found and helped coordinate the interview sessions. The contact persons (usually in Human resources) reached out to employees that had a LinkedIn account and an awareness of the organization's core values. Similarly, as including different lines of business, we considered it to be a benefit to include employees from multiple departments in the organizations to retain a broad perspective of the employee's awareness. In contrast, the reflection gained by only having participants from one department. Therefore participants from both finance, sales, communication, and management have been part of the study.

Accordingly, it has been of relevance for the study to investigate larger organizations, were communicating a common-ground of values and identity might require more effort from internal communication and regular activities for aligning throughout the organization. Likewise, it can make the organization culture more visible when it has developed over time. The results became the three following organizations with a total of eleven interviews:

4.2.1 Description of organizations

Collector bank: A Swedish bank started in 1999 with 390 employees in Sweden, Finland and Norway and a yearly turnover of 2321 MSEK. They are describing themselves with the following "Collector is much more than a bank. We are also an entrepreneur-driven technology company that is passionate about realizing ideas - our own and others." (Collector, 2019). To establish their core values the employees have been involved in choosing three suitable words explaining their beliefs; Engagement, entrepreneurship, and ethics. Four employees were interviewed for the study.

Öresundskraft: They are describing themselves with the following: "Öresundskraft is an energy and communication company in Northwest Skåne that creates the services our customers need for their everyday life, whether it be for smart office properties or intelligent homes" (Öresundskraft, 2019). The organization has 400 employers and has today 125 000 customers they provide their services to. Their three core values are Courage, engagement, and delivery. Three employees were interviewed for the study.

Intrum: Market-leaders within credit management with over 8000 employees in Europe. During 2017 Intrum had a pro forma revenue of 12.2 billion SEK and are assisting 80 000 companies around Europe. They are describing themselves with the following description "An important part of the company's mission is to ensure private individuals and companies receive the support they need to become debt free" (Intrum, 2019). Their four core values are; empathy, ethics, dedication, solutions. Four employees were interviewed for the study.

4.3 Interview method

Since our study aimed to increase the awareness of how the employee uses LinkedIn in relation to the organization, it is of a descriptive and exploratory nature. In other words, we wanted to map out the use with an open-minded approach and search for answers from our interviewees. Kvale (1997) defines this type of interview as with an empirical purpose, so as mentioned earlier, the choice to perform interviews was established with wanting to attain this kind of information for the study. Yet, there is different ways of planning and conducting interviews. In our case, it became clear in an early stage that a need for a pre-structure and clear thematization was needed before the actual performing situations. Hence, there was a need to conduct an interview guide for a semi-structured performed interview.

The ambition was to perform the interviews face to face at the organization's office. However, one of the interviewees were based in another country, which made it necessary to use Skype as a tool for the interview. After deliberating, we found we would gain an extended perspective from including the interview even though we had to compromise with not performing it face to face.

The empirics are based upon eleven extensive and in-depth interviews with employees who are active on LinkedIn. After the last interviews, we experienced what Kvale (1997) calls data saturation, which means that repetition of answers occurred, and we no longer felt that additional empirical material would add value for answering the research question. Hence, we experience that similar responses were gained both between the different organizations but also from different departments, which made us confident in that we reached a suitable amount of interviews.

4.3.1 Semi-structure

After reading relevant literature about studies of LinkedIn and other networking platforms, it was possible to narrow down common topics and essential themes to include in the interview guide. For instance, it became clear which questions combine to create categories aiming to reach in-depth knowledge within each theme. Additionally, the order of the themes was conducted to create a natural development and depth in the conversation.

Likewise, the semi-structured method complements the analysis method, which also is based on themes and will be described later on. However, during the interviews, there was a balance of including all themes with specific questions, yet keep an open atmosphere and be conscious about if new themes could appear. Accordingly, the questions have been carefully conducted not to be leading and have room for new viewpoints. In other words, this means the interview was semi-structured. The approach was beneficial in our study since it allowed preparations of the question and a preferred order but additionally had the flexibility for follow up questions or to ask new relevant questions. In agreements with the organization, only one interview opportunity per person was possible. Therefore we considered this structure appropriate for maintaining a clear purpose in the conversation.

4.4 Meaning condensation

To manage the collected data systematically, to attain profound insights into the analysis section, we chose a fixed analysis method for processing the transcribed interview. The process of transforming a dynamic conversation into a fixed text has a significant role in reaching reliable results (Kvale 1997). Since this study aims to examine what is actually being said and interpret the meaning rather than how it is said and underlying meaning, it reflects upon how we have coded the material. So to answer our research questions, we have thematized our empirical material and after that striven to find meaning by categorizing our material.

The thematization was constructed in advance and was used as guidance throughout our project. Additionally, we tried to stay open to finding new themes and patterns after the material had been conducted. The focus on finding pattern is a method of analyzing empirics that Kvale (2007) calls meaning condensation. It belongs to the mode of analyzing which is looking to create meaning rather than language. This method allows looking beyond what is written to find more in-depth meanings in the material. To create structure the themes from the interview guide was a framework, whereas sub-themes could be composed out of the empirical material and form new patterns in the analysis process.

Each interview is by manner, coded by two persons individually to retrieve reliable results. A benefit of this method is to withhold a broad overview as well as an understanding of complex conversations in a large volume of material (Kvale, 1997).

4.5 Method reflection

4.5.1 Quality criteria

When it comes to the quality criteria of the study different parameters should be taken into account. The quality of interviews can be valued based on to which extent the answers are relevant and rich of meaning, accompanied by verifying the interpretation of the answers during the performed interview. Besides, interviews need to be self-contained (Kvale, 1997). Another common aspect of validation within qualitative studies is to assure that the version of truth presented and the results have been established in empirical evidence and presumption has been set aside when assessing the data (Silverman, 2005). As researchers, we have been challenged to maintain a neutral mindset and work pragmatically to reach relevant answers.

In regards to reliability, we actively chose to perform the first four interviews together, two each where we lead the conversation and the other person handled technology and made follow up question if necessary to cover all themes. The purpose of this was to increase the reliability and assure that the interviews were performed similarly. Accordingly, we individually wrote keynotes after each interview that later on could be compared with each other. By being two researchers with the same interview guide reaching similar response and conclusions, and critically challenging each other's analysis we have strived for reliability. Finally, we have throughout this project strived to achieve analytical generalizability based on the empirical material, in both the choice of methods and in the selection of organization.

In regards to the transcription, it is at times challenging to assure the validity. According to Kvale (1997) it could be problematic to maintain high validity when transcribing due to the fact that conversation and the written word has different set of rules. Researchers have argued for the dilemma but agreed upon that the question of relevance is what meaning and purpose is searched for in the transcribed material should be the main focus.

4.5.2 Ethics

We have offered the interviewees confidentiality, which means their name, exact title, and other information that can lead to their identity being revealed has been removed from the thesis. With the three organizations, we have a mutual agreement that the result and the corporation's name can be shared publicly. The answers have, therefore not to been defined per organization in our thesis to protect the confidentiality. A reason for this choice is the consequences of the low number of persons interviewed in each organization. The decision was made to protect the interviewees' identity and promised confidentiality. Accordingly, we have been in dialogue with our supervisor and the course leader to assure that the way of handling the information has been aligned with traditional manners within the academy.

5. Analysis & discussion

In the analysis below, we have deeply examined our collected material with above mentioned theories in combination with a discussion of what the insight could contribute. The section is divided into the four main themes we have identified in our empirical material. The first part examines the cross-road of LinkedIn usage, the second part the employee's role on the platform, the third part looks at content strategy and lastly the fourth part covers how the values are being communicated. It has been done to answer our research questions that as known are:

- *Why do employees choose to communicate organizational related content in their own LinkedIn feed?*
- *To which extent are the organizational values reflected through employees personal LinkedIn?*
- *How can an organization work strategically with their employees LinkedIn presence?*

5.1 Can LinkedIn fulfill your needs

After conducting our study with the aim to understand the employee's relation to LinkedIn through our before mentioned research question, we discovered a common ground of the function of LinkedIn, a cross-road for the motivation of the usages. The common ground was a repeated phrase within all organizations, of LinkedIn as their digital resumé or the simile as their professional Facebook page. The first cross-road consisted of viewing LinkedIn as a private tool to create a professional identity. The second way of using LinkedIn was stronger connected to the participants job task and linked to their current position at the organization. The last category will be discussed further in section 5.3, while the first will be more extensive investigated by examining through the Uses and Gratification theory below.

For the participants in the study to view LinkedIn as a platform for the possibility to create an accurate self-presentation and professional identity for aspiring work roles might not be astonishing, hitherto it has been an accepted attribute to the platform. However, to achieve a more profound knowledge examining the needs fulfilled and underlying motivations is of interest. In comparison with other social media mentioned during the interviews, it seems like LinkedIn has managed to fill a gap of were to shape representation of yourself in a professional context.

"It is a bit like a professional Facebook page. Since there is still the possibility of being interactive, talking to others, sharing articles and doing that part, but the focus is on your professional life and who you are in your professional life and not in your private" (Participant 1)

According to Blumler and Katz (1974), the need for personal identification is one of the four basic we strive to fulfill by using media. It relates to finding media content that can confirm an image of whom one want to be or define an identity one is aimed for. Whereas in this sense, the frame built up in certain groups of how to create a professional representation might be enhanced at this platform. Furthermore, the idea of seeking out to media for fulfilling a need of identification is to reinforce the person's values and beliefs in order to create a personal picture of who you are or want to be. In this context, it might be a way to figure out what kind of professional image you want to adopt and the contemporary roles within a field of work.

In regards to answering the first research question, about why employees communicate organizational content some gainful insights were made by the concluded patterns of interviewees. Thus, the need for showing up this active profile at LinkedIn usually was motivated by being attractive to an external recruiter might come across their profile.

"I see it more as a tool - if I decide one day, now I will search for new opportunities, now I just got a new job, so it is not relevant, but if I would decide to search for something new, I would probably become more active (on LinkedIn), to show a future employer that I am active and interested. It is something I would do in that case, but nothing I do at all times". (Participant 1)

The majority of the participants expressed a correlation of being active on Linkedin by sharing more organizational content or articles, with searching for new job opportunities. It would make them look both engaged and interested and thereby portrait them as loyal employee. Even though loyalty was considered essential at their current working place, it was mentioned to also function as a selling point to proclaim to be an engaged employee for recruiters. Thereby, a similar pattern in the interviews is the connection with timing to seek new job opportunities and to build an attractive professional identity. The function of being visible and digitally presence was underlined as important by several participants in order to feel relevant at today's labor market.

The underlying reasons for the employees to share content produced by the organization does not necessarily have to do with the quality and creativity of the organizational content itself. Instead, the participants expressed a need for the content to relate to their personal interest, contain relevant information for their contacts or favor a personal agenda of job searching. In that case, the participants felt enthusiastic about communicating the organizational content, which provides rewarding knowledge to the first research question in the thesis. The discovery had a distinction depending on how the participant viewed the purpose of being active on LinkedIn was. For those who saw LinkedIn as a professional tool, but not connected to their employer, this was briefly seen as a possibility to look like a hirable employee.

On the topic of identity, it was of interest for some of the participants using LinkedIn as a private tool to also being in congruence with the meaning of the content before sharing it. Some interviewees were firm about only communicating content reflected upon their interest or could add dimension to their personality traits, as a way to contribute to the more static digital resumé laid out, with a dynamic version that can enhance their more soft values and niche expertise segments. A quote that covers these thoughts was the following interviewee, telling if LinkedIn behavior would change if he/she would be searching for a new job right now:

"Then maybe I would become more active, I think. Just to show a picture of who I am, it is easy to send a resumé or register a profile on any staffing company, but it

only describes my hard values, such as what I have done before and so on. So it is a good tool, to instead give a whole picture of me and what I want to emphasize as well, so then I probably would have been more active and share something that I think is interesting". (Participant 8)

Moving on from professional identify, to another crucial aspect of U&G theory, defined by Blumler and Katz (1974) is the need for surveillance. Many interviewees expressed concern about being updated and informed about both what their own and other organization's post but also to see where acquaintance has ended up. Thus, the need for surveillance or to seek actively for information was often mentioned as a motivation to use LinkedIn. Several participants experienced that LinkedIn is filtered from irrelevant information and is a more solid professional sphere compared to other platforms, which makes it a rewarding source for fulfilling the need for surveillance.

"I went from looking for jobs and following companies that I might be interested in applying for jobs at, to now primarily do external monitoring and competitor surveillance, but also to lift what we do (the organization)." (Participant 11)

An annoyance was expressed when the norm of professionality was broken since it interrupted that kind of solid surveillance, since most of the participants agreed LinkedIn should be a pure professional platform. Often a specific tonality was mentioned and the question of how to balance self-promotion, which will be further discussed in section 5.2. The below quotes are an example of the implicit disturbance of using LinkedIn in the wrong way:

"I would say that LinkedIn is just job-related, in principle or so, there is only the facade that you put up of your professional part of life, so I would never share private parts on LinkedIn or write private posts or such, but there are quite a few who do it too, I actually have a lot of contacts on LinkedIn that use it as some kind of personal forum, but it doesn't feel relevant at all for me, then you can use private facebook or private Instagram instead, so I only see LinkedIn as kind of like a professional Facebook page". (Participant 1)

"The difference between LinkedIn and Facebook - or like this: now it, unfortunately, has come in a lot of those who share something that I really think would be more to post on Facebook, so at the beginning when someone was like " Hi, testing the network here, I have no apartment" - it was like fun once or when it was done in a playful way, but for me when it becomes the average citizen being like "I have nowhere to live" and post it, I do not think LinkedIn is the forum where to do it. (Participant 5)

An additional aspect of relevance in regards to the needs is the subject of personal relationships. Looking at LinkedIn, it was described as a way of managing business contacts in an organized way. On the other hand, it was viewed as a kind of common ground of topics to discuss with others in and outside of the organization. The need for connecting with others and making personal relationship is part of Blumler and Katz (1974) definition of basic needs, this concept is about how people might be using media to fulfill certain needs online might not have been met offline. In this case, it instead becomes a combination of a sort of belonging that can be created online but also transferred to offline settings where it gets discussed. The type of belonging was mentioned several times by the interviewees' and an extension of the common ground was also indirectly mentioned in the form of gossip within a field of business in regards to which acquaintances are working were and so on.

"It (LinkedIn) also creates, much like this: oh, do you know that person, or did you know that one - so it creates a certain type of community without even having to be a community in a way" (Participant 5)

Returning to the online setting and personal relationships, it would have been of interest to investigate further the perceived quality of these interactions and how authentic the relationships became. Several participants elaborated strategies for how they reflected upon adding or accepting contacts, but little attention was put on the existing qualities and if the contacts provided a useful network for personal and professional relationships. Previously in this thesis, we have presented how passiveness on SNS can occur because of anxiety and insecurity about how to portrait oneself positively. It is further in line with Zhu and Bao (2018) suggestion about how membership or community can decrease unpleasant feelings, which has resemblance with the ascribed gratification U & G assign to the need for personal relationships.

In brief, Blumler and Katz (1974) theory have been applied to the study and provided a structure. Three of the four fundamental aspects of need have been found in our empirical material, the forth need of diversion was not mentioned, thus it might not be a need in relation to this type of media usage. Below is a conducted schedule of a repeated pattern of answers in regards to the usage of LinkedIn connected with certain needs:

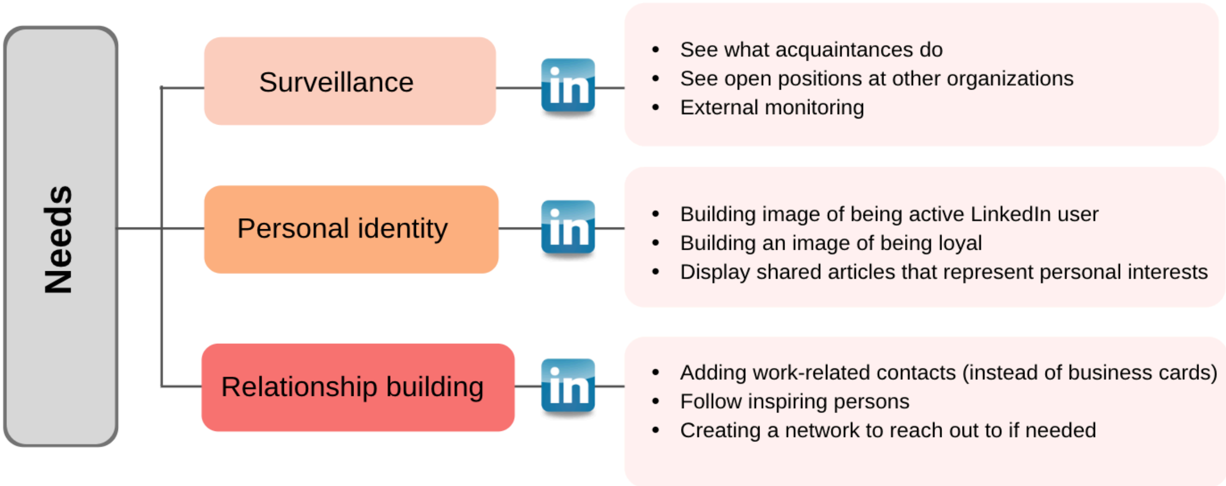

Figure 3. Needs and LinkedIn usage.

However, a common criticism of Uses and gratification theory is it might fail to address both sides of media effects and mainly see the needs in a positive aspect. In order to attend this concern and maintain a reflexive approach, it is of importance to highlight that some interviewee's additionally expressed a sort of pressure of LinkedIn being "yet another" social media to use. There was a division between those who did not take LinkedIn serious and those who did. Users who had a unproblematic relationship to the plattform did not express the pressure as a concern.

The pressure could be further examined by looking at the underlying motivations. If the interviewee experience that everyone in their surrounding is using LinkedIn and thereby are building a network or see new opportunities it can intensify the stress of missing out on fulfilling this needs by media. In the sense that an absence of the mentioned motivations might create stress and motivate the usages of LinkedIn, it could even be possible to speculate about a negative impact of a feeling of exclusion or having a disadvantage. It is again of interest in relation to the research made by Zhu and Bao (2018) which investigate feelings of loneliness, anxiety or envy as a reason for not being active at social networking sites, which we will look into further in the next section. Finally, these thoughts can form an alternative answer to the research question of why employees choose to communicate, as a probable consequence of feeling stress or pressure of being active.

5.2 Tonalities influence on LinkedIn

The fragmented view of how to define your identity and manage impressions was not an intended path for this study, but the repetition of participants elaborating with their view of "their professional self" and struggle to present an appealing facade, left us curious about how this affects the usage of LinkedIn in a more profound meaning. The professional self was brought up in several ways. On the one hand, the participants reflected upon what the professional self consisted of and how related it is with their private self. While some who were very firm about keeping two identities separated was still worried about portraying their professional facade correctly. By being present at Linkedin, the user can be considered to be sharing their cyberself, which Atrill (2015) explains has some different motives affecting the decisions to post on social media. According to her research about cyberpsychology, the creation of the self online versus offline might differ. When we are representing ourselves online, it might be a more unaware but complex process.

"I follow industry colleagues in order to know what they do... or friends who also work in banking and other organizations, to see how they share, and are at sometimes like, I had never shared that for my company, or maybe I could also do that ... so you get some ideas but I don't know how to apply it - I don't feel completely confident in just posting something." (Participant 4)

"There are other forums for private things and if you want to keep the value of Linkedin, you probably have to keep it job-related...otherwise people will get tired of it" (Participant 7)

Still, when the participants started to reflect on their online selves, insecurity about having a correct approach on the platforms seemed to exist. We found a pattern of interviewees feeling hesitant about in what way they could match the existing tonality they experienced at LinkedIn. It is of interest in combination to the discussion in 5.1 about the expressed disturbance occurred among the participants when they felt the norms of how LinkedIn should be used was broken and additionally with the above quote about how the platform will lose it significance if it becomes too private.

A central theme for the study was the motivations behind being active at LinkedIn, therefore it was unexpected that our empirical material showed passiveness was often more common than being active. Except for a reason earlier described of a correlation of becoming more proactive when searching for a new job, a new root cause to being passive came forward with the explanation of insecurity. One participant did not consider themselves an active user at LinkedIn at first, yet on second thought it became clear a post was recently shared. The following quote indicates how the participant wish to match the perceived existing tone of voice at the platform but also what and how one should post.

"Then I put some pressure on myself that, because everyone else writes very marketing and selling posts about themselves, then mine must be at least as good as that, so, yes what could that be? Well, maybe now when I got my current role, I was very pleased that I got it because I really wanted it - so I posted and was like: yes this role is mine!" (Participant 8)

An additional theme that was revealed during the interviews was implicit envy in combination with an expressed annoyance of others behavior. When a participant was asked about any disadvantage of the platform, the following answer was given:

"Bragging - because that's what I notice, or a reason I can't bear to be on LinkedIn, because I feel that people; or it gets a little Americanized; that "I have this role" and you ask yourself what is this made up thing. That people use their title very much and it does not feel very Swedish, but maybe it is okay. Then it is a lot of

people at LinkedIn saying that they are "Marking manager and brand influencer" and in reality, they work sitting in Photoshop" (Participant 4)

As the participant suggested it might be the case of cultural difference, thus the Swedish mentality with the often spoken law of Jante might make us uncomfortable at a platform were it feels obligated only to present your best accomplishments. It can start an internal struggle regarding if the user want to brag or not and what they consider bragging, which instead might result in the form of passiveness. Not in direct relation to Zhu and Bao's (2018) findings but still a passiveness due to an unpleasant feeling. The same participant later stated:

"After all, I have a friend who uses LinkedIn like Oh go, my girls, I am so proud to be the manager of my group ... But then (if I posted that) I think I would annoy my employees like now you are trying to be on some pedestal here, maybe we should go back and work instead of posting stuff" (Participant 4)

The above answer made us expand our original research question, why employees communicate organizational related content, by also asking why not? The empirics showed that the participants seem to experience an insecurity regarding what tonality to use on LinkedIn and a pressure to post good enough content in comparisons with what their contacts post. An explanation for why this leads to passiveness is provided by Zhu & Bao's (2018) research that suggests if we are insecure about how to conduct a positive image of ourselves we choose to decrease the engagement on SNS. In the case of wanting to post accomplishments but being anxious about sounding self-absorbed, a possible consequence is not posting at all.

Our findings revealed the participants are looking for a specific tonality that the organization needs to address when conducting content relevant for their employees. In the same way communication practitioners always adapt to the target audience, the content intended for LinkedIn needs to be adjusted to the right tonality that employees feel are adequate. The employee's aim for creating a professional facade by shared content needs to be considered and can be connected to the specific needs of personal identity emphasized by Blumler and Katz (1974). Many employees have an urge of showing off accomplishments they feel proud of without appearing being flaunting. For organizations it could be a useful insight since it gives an opportunity to construct organizational related content that can show off their employees in a more natural way than for them to write the post themselves.

In addition to matching the tone with appropriate information to share, several participants mentioned how they avoid talking politics at LinkedIn. Some because they believed it was a preferable approach on the platform and not relevant, while others avoided it to not be judged by others. Both cases are connected to maintaining their preferred professional identity and seems to be aligned with the view of separating your private and professional identity.

"Linkedin is factual discussion, it is very good, it is business and it is plus that people behave well in general, in comparison with Twitter where it can become aggressive if someone wants to talk politics" (Participant 2)

”You are afraid of being judged by it (politics); she votes for that then she can not work with this, or how can she think this when she votes for that, and so on, I think it becomes problematic, and therefore I am more restrictive, now it is not very much politics on LinkedIn yet but still” (Participant 5)

In an attempt to visually demonstrate the participants answers of how they perceived the tonality on LinkedIn and how it correlates to the insecurity of what content to share themselves, the below figure has been constructed:

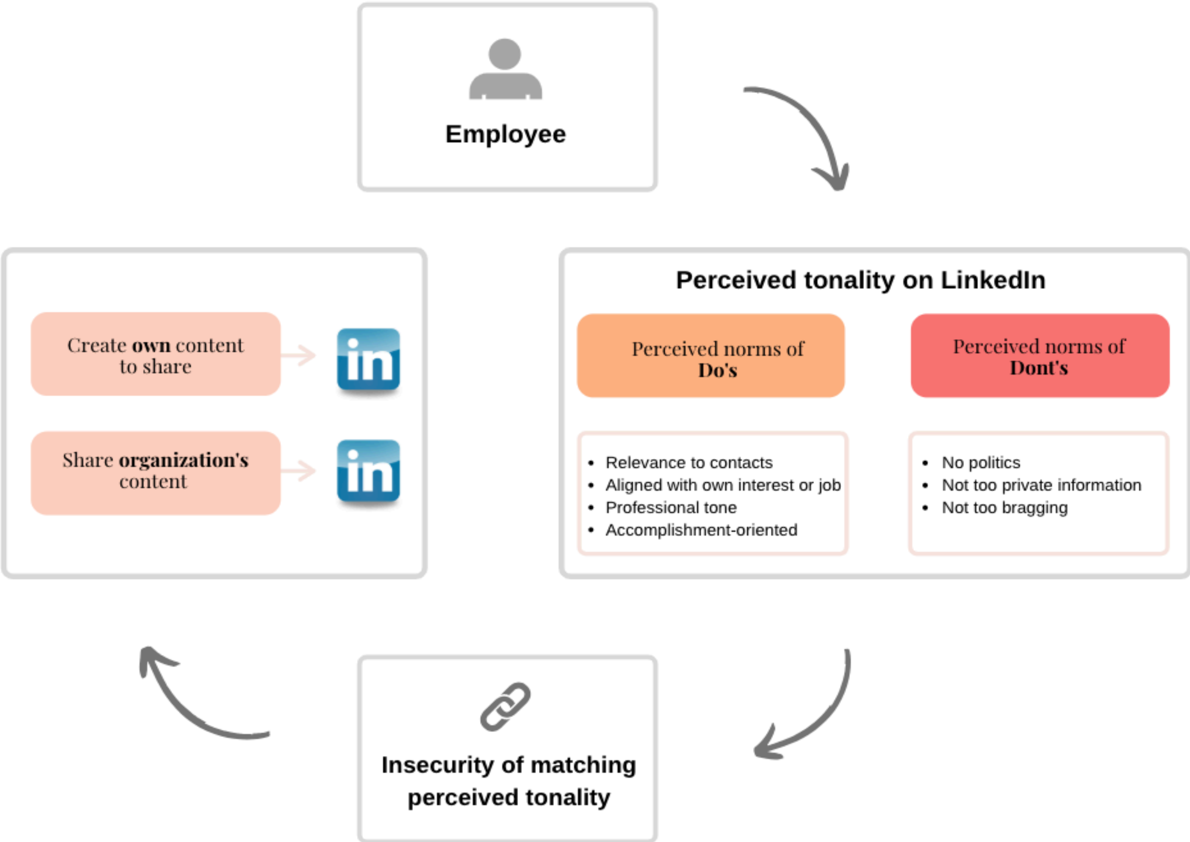

Figure 4. Perceived tonality.

5.3 The values living inside the employee

To answer the research question about to which extent the organizational values are reflected through the employees LinkedIn, we first need to examine the relationship between the employee and the organizational values. A recurring topic among the participants was the importance of a strong correlation between the organizational values and the employee's values. Numerous times it was mentioned the employees would not work for the organization if they did not stand for the values. As if it was a common ground one must share with the organization to fulfill the duties as an employee.

"I also believe that is why I love it so much here because I am so dedicated to the values that the organization have." (Participant 4)

Two participants took it a step further by saying they did not believe anyone could even work for an organization if their personal values did not align with the organizational. If an employee does not align with the organizational values and in turn identity, there was a unified voice regarding the consequences.

"I do not believe you will stay very long in an organization who have values you cannot stand for." (Participant 3)

Another interesting point of view collected from the study is whether the employees will be affected by the organization's values whether they want it or not. If the values are the foundation of how an organization operates, they will change the way of working and the relationships within the organization. In Hatch and Schultz (2008) study about Vision, Culture, and Image alignment, they argue about the importance of having the employees onboard early on as the culture inside the organization will reflect upon the outside. With other words, the values carried out by employees as organizational culture, will affect the image of the organization. Applying the ideas by Hatch and Schultz (2008) on our empirical material, we can see the relationship between how the values that control the employees have a strong correlation to the message to the outside stakeholder. In our case, it will be what the employees actively choose to communicate through their personal LinkedIn page.

"Everybody is affected by them whether they want it or not. They seem strict to only hire people who fit the profile they want. I guess it is why there are many younger people here since they want ambitious employees with drive who wants to develop and run things independently." (Participant 3)

In our study, we have also detected how the organization strives to only hire people who fit in their profile and who can stand for the decided values. It has further been discussed in previous literature by Hatch and Shultz (2008), who argues it is an essential part of creating organizational alignment. On the other hand, it raises ethical dilemmas the organization needs to address. How do we make sure the group has a diversity of employees, and how the group does not become homogeneous if we only hire people who fit a specific profile? A consequence might also be that the organization loses the top talent they could profit from hiring. Is it possible to hire people who fit into the profile but still have various backgrounds and experiences? Before diving into these dilemmas further, we need to make a distinction between sharing the same values and fit a specific profile. A significant number of participants mentioned that sharing the same values are a ground stone in working for an organization while only one employee at one particular corporation said they hire to fit a certain profile.

"They are very welcome to encourage it as much as they want but if it is something I do not stand for I will not do it. I understand they want us to do it because they want us to be ambassadors." (Participant 3)

By hiring people who align with their culture and will be positive to share the values, the organization lessens the risk of having employees who are not willing to function as ambassadors. According to Hatch and Schultz (2008), it is a great benefit for the organization to have employees who share the values from the start. It goes hand in hand with the empirical data we have collected in our study from the employee perspective. To avoid ethical dilemmas, the organization needs to critically evaluate the organizational values so a variety of people can share them. Leaving a specific profile behind and focus on connecting people with different expertise and background around the same values could be a possible solution. One participant shared the following reflection about why he shares organizational related content on LinkedIn:

"Not as in being an ambassador rather lighten the values the organization has and how important it is in the industry. I do not have any reason to attract new customers or make myself look better but I believe the value work is more significant. It is important to uplift to set an example since what we communicate externally is often what communicates internally in that type of forums. It can be very important to strengthen it, especially when the organization is in such a transformative phase it is easy to lose the good values we have had before. We have also reformulated the

values which can confuse people and then it is important to share what I believe is the key insights." (Participant 6)

Another aspect from our empirical material is that the employees themselves have been a part of deciding the values upon the already existing organizational culture. Which leaves us with a chicken or egg situation if the values affect the culture or the culture affects the values. Moreover, it is reasonable to argue the culture is built upon relationships between people, which is far more significant than three words to live by. When asked about the organizational culture and the connection to the values, one participant answered the following:

"I would say it has become worst since we have had a big reorganization. When there is a big reorganization, there are many who starts looking for new opportunities and leaves. The values are often in the people, and when new people come into the organization, they usually have not done the same value and evaluation work." (Participant 6)

What is interesting further to explore is if the organizations chooses only to hire people who align with the values. In turn, they will come in and relive a culture based on the values they were hired for following. A well-known concept within the strategic communication discipline is the concept of confirmation bias, meaning we instead look to confirm what we already know than facing the unknown. As humans, we like to feel like we did the right thing, as well as an organization wants to feel like they want to confirm their strategy is a winning concept. If they only hire people who already align with their values, there is a risk the employee will agree upon what the organization are teaching without challenging the already existing culture and brand. It is a concept not mentioned by Hatch and Schultz in their classic VCI-model but is relevant criticism as we live in a global, intercultural society. Personally, it raises questions regarding how it will affect critical thinking if an employee is told what to believe from the very start. Potentially it could have consequences regarding the development and innovative progress for the corporation.

"Here we have to solve new situations all the time since we are a such a young organization, which is entrepreneurship. If you do not have that in you it is only going to be about problem-solving all the time." (Participant 3)

One of the corporation's words they live by is entrepreneurship. Explained by one of the employees as an ever moving relationship towards the work process as they continuously are adapting to the latest change. Since the organization has the ability and openness to change as one of its core values, it affects the culture and how the employees are supposed to do their job. A problematic side of the ongoing change mentioned by the interviewee is when the organization constantly are renewing themselves before the latest revision has manifest. In the end, the employees stop taking new ideas seriously. In the previous literature about organizational change, a recurring theme is a state of mind called resistance to change. Meaning, if new changes are introduced before the last one has settled, it can create numbness among the employees. Why this gets important is that it can backlash on the intended effect of having strong values to guide the employees. If the employees stop taking the values seriously than repeating them will not create the alignment Hatch and Schultz (2008) are preaching for with their VCI-model.

Finally, what does the discussion about the employee's relationship to the set core values have to do with LinkedIn? As we intended to examine how the organizational values are spreading through LinkedIn via the employees, our empirical data showed the correlation was more deeply rooted than we expected. How the employees feel about the values and representing the organization has everything to do with how they function as ambassadors online. We discovered the best way for the organization to inspire the employees to share content about the organization the strategy needs to start from the inside.

5.4 Strategic posting

To answer our last research question about how an organization strategically can work with their employees LinkedIn presence, we needed to examine what the employees are asking for. When it comes to what type of content the employees are willing to share, we discovered they prefer to share content previously posted by a third part in comparison to create a new post. Possibly due to the identified insecurity of matching the tonality and present yourself correctly as earlier discussed. As the participants have different backgrounds and position, they craved another kind of content, but we could see a strong correlation and a longing for content with high relevance for their contacts. If a participant worked in the sales department, they wanted to see more articles or post about sales since it would be more relevant to share with their contacts. It is a valuable indication for the organization to produce content the employees relate to and are genuinely interested in since they then are more likely to share it. Hence it can generate the experience of a kind of "win-win situation" if it can add to their professional identity and reflect upon their interest.

When deciding to examine the topic from an organizational point of view, our aim was not to find a way the organization can use the employee. Instead, we wanted to see what support the employees are looking for their gain. As the labor market more and more turns into service industries, the employees need to nourish their personal brands. When we were first started to study LinkedIn, it was this correlating beneficial relationship between the employee's and organization's use of the platform we found most interesting. In the service industry, the role of the employee often expands over the walls of the organization. It makes it tricky to know where to draw the line when it comes to the professional and private role, both for the employee and the employer. As the roles more and more emerge, the employees seem to have a higher awareness of integrity, as confirmed in our study, which can be complex to achieve if an organization aims to be aligned. As mentioned in our previous research about alignment, it is vital for the organizational strategy to be a dynamic process with an inside-out approach. It means the employee perspective of integrity needs to be considered before setting a strategy.

In a sense, the content voluntarily shared by the employees might reflect the organization values and intended identity in a more natural way than marketing and can, therefore, create a form of third-party endorsement. If using the Communication Value Circle (CVC) by Zerfass and Viertmann (2017) as a framework, the shared content might even be able to represent an intangible asset for the organisation, since it could strengthen the reputation, the brand and define the corporate culture by confirming an agreement from inside the organization to the outside surroundings. Additionally, tangible assets in the form of publicity made by engaged employees also contribute to finding activities that create value and align the communication goals. However, since we have not investigated the organization's overall business strategy, we are not able to compare that with the communication goals but rather get a perception of the possibility for alignment by these activities.

"I do not have a need to keep my different roles apart since my job is a big part of who I am, especially regarding the role I have with leadership and ambassadorship, it is part of my personality. It might have been different if I had another position but I am passionate about what is going on in the company and want people to be happy and develop here." (Participant 4)

Our primally thought was that there is a bilateral connection that could benefit both the organization and the employee if used right. The empirics showed a relationship between the employee's LinkedIn usage and the organizations use of the platform but not necessary in the way we first expected to. None of the participants expressed they have received official guidelines regarding their use of social media on their time off. Instead, it is encouraged or indirectly a pressure to function as an ambassador to seem like a loyal employee.

"There are no guidelines from the organization, rather it is one's own responsibility. We usually tell each other, in between colleagues, if one has done something and prepare the other that a post is coming so one can open LinkedIn and support."

One participant expressed a slightly different need for more relevant content to share. It is common for an organization to only have one LinkedIn page for the whole organization and not divided per country.

"I would like it to be more adjusted to the specific country, now a lot of it is very general which is not so relevant." (Participant 2)

In this case, the participant felt like the content produced by the marketing department mainly focused on the country where the headquarter is. It made it harder for the participant to share organization related content since most of his contacts live in another country. For him, the main reason for sharing was to show his contacts what they are doing at the organization and by that perhaps get new clients. As this specific participant tells us he uses LinkedIn as a working tool, it is contra productive not to produce content he could share. On the other hand, if an organization have many countries to please and have a different amount of business in each country, it is hard to know what is right to do. In the end, the organization only have a certain amount of post that can be made and what target group every post should focus on depends on many factors. As identified before, the selection can either be made with the employees as the primary targets, to receive new client or spread their values. What is essential looking at the Communication Value Circle (CVC) by Zerfass and Viertmann (2017) is to include it in the communications strategy from the start to create alignment within the organization. As our empirics shows, it is hard for a corporation to prioritize this type of communication activities as it can be hard to measure the results. The CVC can help the management to disturb resources to increase both tangible and intangible value evenly.

It is a complex task for the marketing department to satisfy all different needs. When it comes to LinkedIn, it is not clear if it is only the marketing department who have the primary responsibility. As mentioned by our participants, this is a relevant topic for the Human Resources department as well since it involves employee satisfaction and branding. Regarding if the interviewees were longing for support or guidelines, about LinkedIn, it was referred to as a management level task. It shows the complexity and confusion regarding who carries the responsibility within the organization.

"We could absolutely work more with LinkedIn but then I am not sure if it should be HR or the marketing department or who's responsible for it. Is it for marketing purposes, for information or for recruitment?" (Participant 4)

We argued for this to be a shared responsibility to be handled across the organization. Here we believe the framework outlined by Zerfass and Viertmann (2017) will help the organization create alignment within the organization that is necessary to work strategically with employees LinkedIn presence successfully. It brings us back to what content the organization chooses to post. We wanted to examine if the employees agree that what is communicated on LinkedIn goes hand in hand with their image of the corporation. When asked about what the organization post reflects what happens inside one participant said:

"Since I have worked here for so long I know what is happening in the building I would say so. News about what is going on, new business deals and we have also had some replacement on management level and since we are listed on the stock exchange it needs to come out. In that case, we have used LinkedIn to spread the information, so it mirrors a lot of what is happening within the company even though I believe we can use it even more." (Participant 4)

"It easily becomes isolated islands, were they in marketing are one island, and sales are on their island, but not aware of the whole picture. So we should talk more about the bigger picture and how everyone is a part of it had probably helped, possibly through dialogue. The marketing department might be trying to create one image of something and already have a lot of information within the organization that just does not have the chance to come forward. Both positive and negative but things we need to talk about and work through together." (Participant 1)

We could identify a pattern in our empirics that the employees want to be even more involved in the marketing process, both by having a saying when it comes to what content to share, but furthermore to be prepared on what information goes out to media. According to our participant, it would as well benefit the internal communication and could thereby create smoother collaborations within the company. It is a complicated matter for a company listed on the stock exchange considering some information has to reach all stakeholders at the same time. On the other hand, a lot of the information and campaigns made by the organization could legally be shared internally before being externally shared. It could give the employees a higher sense of belonging, but again, it is a question about available resources.

"People are aware of the values but since we are growing so much we need to put a lot of resources and money to build a culture." (Participant 4)

As a corporation needs to create a strategy based on value creation as demonstrated by Zerfass and Viertmann (2017) with their corporate value circle, the organization needs to evaluate what will give the highest value for employees as well as the corporation based on the available resources. The important is to find a balance between tangible and intangible values. Often an organization can easier see the value of more accessible measured value such as the number of views or new customer while the intangible values can be hard to measure but can be more of a long term investment.

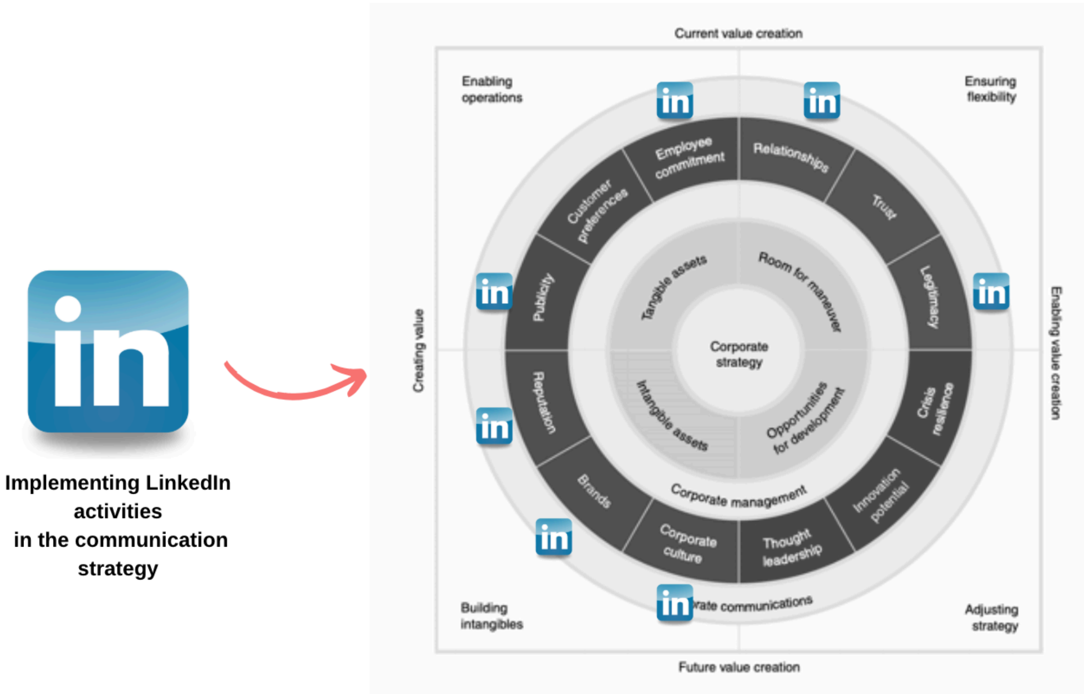

Figure 5. Implementing LinkedIn activities.

5.5 LinkedIn toolbox

Lastly, in the analysis, we have chosen to apply the gathered insights by making a proposition of real actions for practice. In reality, we always need to consider available resources and other complex aspects, however, with the premises of the empirics the study has provided, we have conducted a toolbox adapted for use in an organization.

Based on the themes discovered in the analysis, we have found that the employee perspective consists of their motivations, needs, and perceived comprehension about how LinkedIn should be used. On the other side, we have an organizational perspective, which includes the communication strategy, strategic posting, and value-based grounds. Our findings show that a combination of the two viewpoints is preferred in order to create activities that contribute to a well-balanced alignment within the organization. Together with the perspectives, based on our empirics, we have refined our findings into concrete advice with the intention of fulfilling organizational goals in mind. It resulted in the following figure that guides organizations on how to create a LinkedIn strategy but also how to adapt the content to the platform.

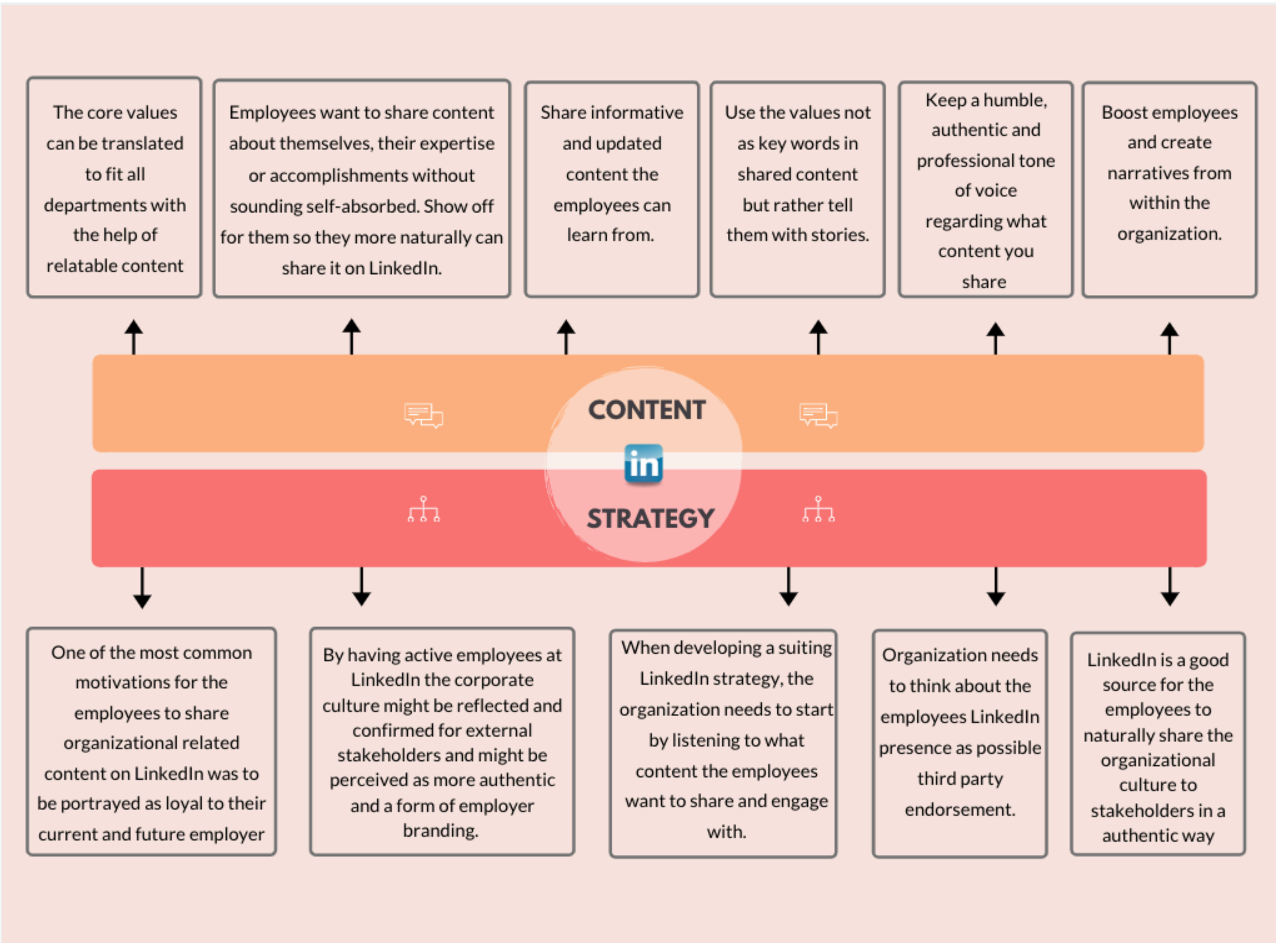

Figure 6. The LinkedIn toolbox.

The figure narrowly demonstrates our answer to the third research question in the study. As well as it can be helpful for organizations when integrating professional networking sites in a strategic and rewarding way to their overall communication strategy.

6. Conclusion & further research

In the concluding part, we have summarized the most vital remarks from our study. The following conclusion is divided into two different sections; the first one sums our previous discussion about needs and tonality, organizational values and content strategy. The second part takes a broader perspective and looks into possible further research.

6.1 Concluding remarks and our contribution to the field of strategic communication

To summarize the most significant contribution of our study, a recap of the findings will be provided in combination with concluding remarks. The Uses and Gratification theory, has offered possible explanations for ways LinkedIn as a media platform can fulfill specific basic needs. In the broader sense, it can suggest reasons for why employees choose to be active at the platform, with the main findings that organizational content mainly are communicated in the purpose of showing an active LinkedIn profile to be attractive to external recruiters. Alternatively, due to a perceived pressure of having a disadvantage if not following the digitalization and having an online presentation of yourself.

When it comes to tonality, the study has provided evidence for insecurity to use the platform in a perceived “right way”. In brief, the insights of the perceived tonality can contribute with answers to our research questions. When it comes to why employees choose to communicate organizational related content, we discovered it is more interesting to look at the question from the other side. Instead of asking the original question, it is rewarding to ask why employees do not communicate organizational content. A cause could be the insecurity of matching the tonality rather than disapproval of the available content from the organization in combination with the described uncertainty of portraying the professional facade correctly. A possible solution could be to proactive work within the organization to decrease insecurity to obtain a digital presence of the employees. The insights about tonality do also contribute to answering the third research question regarding how organizations can work strategically. The content needs to be seen from more aspects than previously realized to be both relevant and attractive for the employees to communicate it. Hence, the purpose of contributing to knowledge about how employees perceive their LinkedIn use in relation to their organization has become more visible after the study.

Looking at the contribution to the field of strategic communication, this could imply an even bigger focus on maintaining insights from public relations for creating relevant organization content. The ideas from the public relation discipline can be useful when an organization wants to generate earned publicity completed the employees. We have seen evidence of employees wanting to share more content about themselves and the organization to build a robust professional identity - which can be valuable from the organization's point of view. With specific needs as premises of understanding the use of LinkedIn and the communication knowledge of how to create engaging content that is matching the tonality, useful activities for alignment are identified.

Drawn from our empirics, we discovered the link between organizations and employees is both a complex and a mutual relationship which requires a thoughtful strategy. The study gave interesting insights regarding the importance of integrating the organizational values into the content shared on LinkedIn. In part of having an overall holistic view of communication strategy, LinkedIn is one way of achieving the goal of an aligned organization. It fulfills our intended purpose of contributing to a broader view of communication strategy when new digital solutions change the emerging media landscape.

6.2 A broader perspective & further research

If taking a broader perspective of the current communication research, it is of interest to highlight how we communicate in today's society continually changes and as the digital development evolves it also gets harder to define corporate communication. As the communication landscape shifts and change form, it is essential corporations stay open for new possibilities and challenges, but furthermore, make sure the messages are aligned. When every stakeholder connected to the company functions as communicators, we need to broaden our view of corporate communication.

To answer our last research question regarding how an organization strategically can work with their employees LinkedIn presence, we need to evaluate if it is even on the agenda. From what we found in our study and the attention we have received around it, we can conclude organizations find the topic interesting. The question is rather if it is interesting enough to prioritize and include in the communication strategy. The multi-dimensional modern organization does not only need to be aligned but continuously renew their communication strategy based on available resources and the stakeholder's activity. If it is LinkedIn, then the organization have to take the channel into account just as much as any other communication outlet. Furthermore, it is not only about publishing content but leaning into a third party endorsement thinking where and what the employees want to share are in main focus.

A subject of interest to look further into for other scholars would be to investigate the possible effects on the receivers, for example, external stakeholders on LinkedIn. To be able to measure if a higher employee activity at the platform can strengthen some of the activities in the corporate strategy such as reputation, publicity, or organizational culture. As we have come across but only mentioned briefly in the thesis, the personal brand has become important for several employees. Thus it would be interesting to analyze what effect the employees personal brand on LinkedIn have on the organization and how to work strategically with the employees branding. Additionally, it would be rewarding to investigate LinkedIn's impact on individuals from a more psychological perspective, elaborating how the usage impact individuals in contemporary digitalization.

Our study function as an example of the complexity of having employees who are guided by values set by the organization while creating a diverse team who complement each other. As we earlier have concluded, the organization and its member needs to be aligned to reach communicative success. On the other hand, we have also been forced to address the ethical dilemmas it can create. What we find meaningful is not to stick with only a specific profile of employees but instead focusing on creating a team with different expertise and backgrounds but who share the same vision. In all of the organizations we have studied, they have interpreted values as three words. If we go back to the very core of the idea of being a value-driven organization, it is interesting to question the interpretation. For obvious reasons, it is pedagogic to use three words to gather the employees around, but can value be reduced to simple words?

There is an existing ideal of creating organizations where the employees breathe and strongly identify with the organizational values, but little research has been done regarding how authentic it is. An organization exists of people who naturally comes and goes, and the values might follow with them. When it comes down to it, we argue for the importance of sharing the same vision and include the three words as watchwords rather than building the organizational culture based on them. The culture and values inside the organization perhaps need to grow side by side with the people who are the organization. A diverse group of people who thrives and share the same vision are much likely to drive the development forward and welcome innovative ideas. As Walter Lippmann famously said; Where all men think alike, no one thinks very much.

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Appendix

Interview template

Hej, Mitt namn är Sofia / Agnes. Jag studerar Strategisk Kommunikation vid Lunds Universitet och håller på att skriva min C-uppsats tillsammans med en medstuderande. Ämnet vi undersöker är LinkedIn och jag har fått veta att du använder LinkedIn.

Intervjun är anonym dvs det kommer inte att synas i C-uppsatsen vem man har intervjuat. Jag spelar in därför att jag annars har svårt att komma ihåg allt, men jag raderar intervjun direkt efter C-uppsats examen. Jag räknar med att intervjun tar ca 45 min. eller mindre.

LinkedIn

- Varför använder du LinkedIn?
- Vad är din personliga uppfattning om LinkedIn?
- Vilken typ av innehåll tycker du om att dela? (hur resonerar du?)
- Är det något innehåll du inte tycker om att dela? (hur resonerar du?)
- Vad finns det för fördelar med LinkedIn?
- Vad finns det för nackdelar med LinkedIn?
- Hur ser du på LinkedIn som arbetsverktyg?
- Hur tänker du när andra inom din bransch delar innehåll från organisation?

Organisationen:

- Anser du att din LinkedIn har att göra med ditt jobb?
- Tycker du att din arbetsroll kräver att du representerar din organisation online?
- Anser du att din organisation påverkar det som du delar på LinkedIn?
- Finns det riktlinjer inom organisationen för hur man bör bete sig på sociala medier?
- Finns det riktlinjer inom organisationen för hur man bör bete sig på LinkedIn?
- Skulle du vilja ha (flera) riktlinjer för hur man bör bete sig på LinkedIn från organisationen?
- Är det något innehåll du skulle önska organisationen producerar mera av i syfte att dela på LinkedIn?
- Är det någon typ av stöd från din organisation du skulle vilja ha, i syfte att stärka representationen på LinkedIn?
- Hur skulle din närmsta chef kunna bistå med support för att stärka din närvaro på LinkedIn?
- Är du intresserad i utbildning arrangerad av din organisation angående hur LinkedIn kan användas?

Motivation:

- Vad är det som får dig att dela ett inlägg?
- Vad finns det för anledningar till att du skriver ett inlägg på LinkedIn?
- Hur känner du dig om din organisation omnämns i media? (beskriv)
- Tror du det är någon som ser en relation mellan LinkedIn och ens framtida karriär? (på vilket vis tex?)
- Har du blivit uppmanad av din organisation att vara på LinkedIn? (kan du ge ett exempel..) – (uppmanas du att vara aktiv?)
- Har du blivit uppmanad av andra medarbetare att vara på LinkedIn? (uppmanas du att vara aktiv?)
- Har du blivit uppmanat från annat håll att vara aktiv på LinkedIn? Isf vart?

Värderingar:

- Kan du berätta lite om organisationens värderingar?
- Vad är din relation till värdeorden?
- Upplever du att värderingarna påverkar företagskulturen? – på vilket vis?
- Kommer värderingarna till uttryck i ditt arbete? – på vilket vis?
- Är det bara internt i organisationen eller blir det också externt?
- Positivt/negativt?
- Hur skiljer sig organisationens värderingar i relation till dina privata värderingar?
- Har det hänt att du har delat innehåll på LinkedIn som på något vis avspeglar organisationens värderingar?

- **Identitet: (professionell vs privat)**
- Är det viktigt för dig att särskilja din privata och din professionella roll? Varför, varför inte?
- Känner du ett ansvar att representera din organisation även i privata sammanhang?
- Hur ser du på LinkedIn som länk mellan din professionella och privata roll?
- Vad är för privat för dig för att dela på LinkedIn?
- Har du några andra tankar kring LinkedIn, något jag inte har tagit upp?

Tack för intervjun!