



Organizational maturity through employee experiences: A Case Study of the Digital Department in Denmark's Largest Retail Group

Master's Thesis in Information Studies

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Abstract

The study explores the organizational maturity of the Digital Department in Salling Group by examining employees' lived experiences. Furthermore, the study seeks to identify workforce practices that shape their performance and capabilities. It adopts a qualitative approach of a case study research design, using purposive sampling to collect 10 semi-structured interviews with employees across the department. The People Capability Maturity Model (P-CMM) provides the main theoretical perspective, focusing on the workforce practices associated with the Level 2 maturity: Staffing, Communication and Coordination, Performance Management, Training and Development, Work Environment and Compensation. Other aspects such as organizational Culture and Change are identified as complementary constructs to P-CMM Level 2 maturity, therefore investigated throughout the data collection. In interpreting the findings, the Organizational Behavior model was applied to deepen the understanding of how themes related to each other across the individual, group and organizational level.

The results of the thematic analysis reveal an inconsistent employee experience both across the Digital Department and across the wider Salling Group organization. A lack of general structure and standardization of human capability management practices was found, inhibiting adoption of change and inducing a culture of resistance.

Additionally, findings indicate that workforce practices such as Communication and Coordination, Performance Management and Staffing impact performance, capabilities and employee perception of organizational maturity.

Nevertheless, the findings highlight the critical role of leadership within the Digital Department and its impact. Employees consistently emphasise the need for an active and motivated new Head of Department to drive change, provide a sense of direction and vision, ultimately enabling managers to lead their teams.

Overall, the insights contribute to the understanding of the interdependent relation between workforce practices and organizational behavior across all levels, ultimately influencing perceptions of organizational maturity.

Keywords: organizational maturity, organizational behavior, organizational culture, change management, performance and capabilities.

List of abbreviations

Research question - (RQ)

(When a particular RQ is addressed/being discussed, the specific number associated with the question will follow (eg. RQ1). If a general discussion about all research questions is elaborated, it will be referred to as RQs.)

Literature Review - LR

People Capability Maturity Model - P-CMM

Human Capital Management - HCM

Processes and Practices - P&P

Communication and Coordination - C&C

Work Environment - WE

Performance Management - PM

Training and Development - T&D

GT - Grounded Theory

Thematic analysis - TA

Motivators & Feelings - M&F

Staffing - STAFF.

Compensation - COMP.

Key process area - KPA

Digital Delivery Model - DDM

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I . Introduction

1. Setting the scene:

Salling Group is Denmark's largest retail group, in constant development process on a large international scale. With a long history and strong position in the retail industry, the group currently owns more than 9 brands in the portfolio (known internally as formats), and more than 59,000 employees in 3 countries: Denmark, Poland and Germany (*Figure 1*) (Salling Group). The group is not only positioned as a top competitor in the Danish market, but new acquisitions in the Baltic region show a thorough development strategy at an international level.

October 2024 marked a significant point in the history of the organization, with the launch of the first public group strategy, Aspire'28 (Salling Group, 2024). The groups' strategic investments are raising organizational goals and aspirations for future growth and expansion, investment in innovation and strengthening the core business. The strategic development is paired with a detailed corporate identity and definition of formal organizational culture, known as the '5 k's': customers, colleagues, co-diversity, culture and climate.

With the adoption of the overarching group strategy, every format has developed an individual strategy and future plan to align with Aspire'28.

Even though the thesis does not address the strategies and their development, they are indeed an influential factor determining a lengthy series of changes in the organization. This includes how the organization will adopt new ways of working to support strategic implementations, their success, and how (or if) change is embraced. This change will ultimately impact the employees, and it becomes an interesting area to investigate how organizational maturity impacts employees, and their performance. Change is inevitable, therefore it is interesting to inquire how the current state of the organization is able to support it, potentially enabling higher performance and competitive positioning.










BRAND/ FORMAT NAME	PROFILE	STORES	LOGO
Bilka	Hypermarket chain	19 stores in Denmark	
Fotex	Supermarket chain	108 stores in Denmark	
Netto	Discount market chain	Denmark: 531 stores, Poland: 663 stores, Germany: 342 stores	
Carl's Jr.	Fast-Food restaurant chain	16 restaurants in Denmark	
Starbucks Denmark	Coffee shop chain	16 coffee shops in Denmark	
BR	Toys and play accessories	29 stores in Denmark	
Salling	Stormagasin: Multi-store/ Universal store	2in Denmark: Aarhus and Aalborg	
Skagen Food	Fresh fish delivery	Online shop platform	
FLOWR	Flower boutique delivery	Online shop platform	

Figure 1. Salling Group Formats

Defining factors that generate success amongst businesses has been a continuous topic of interest, and both practitioners and academia have focused on identifying the key success factors that influence business success. Success can be defined as a business performance, with regards to criterias such as profitability, 'which is superior to the performance of the businesses it is competing with', and therefore success becomes a task of explaining variations in performance (Grunert & Ellegaard, 1992).

While maximizing profits or returns of investment is one essential aspect of a successful business, building a competitive advantage and sustaining it over time has to be paired with a high perceived added value to customers, ultimately relying on skills and competencies the company possesses (Grunert & Ellegaard, 1992). New views on business development have focused on internal resources and capabilities to generate a competitive advantage, placing dynamic capabilities (human resources) at its center (Barney, 1991). The development of human capital management associated with implementing and sustaining workforce practices is demonstrated to strengthen the organizational maturity, which demonstrated a higher competitive positioning and performance (Curtis et al., 2009).

A famous quote of Benjamin Schneider states: 'The people make the place'. Even though a large body of evidence points towards people being the most valuable asset of any organization, businesses don't seem to truly live up to that statement. This is mostly due to a common problem of making a case for change (Barnett & Mallon, 2020) or perhaps by lacking experience in handling human capabilities.

This thesis examines the potential impact of organizational maturity on performance and capabilities of human capital in Salling Group. In times of change, assessing the internal resources, capabilities and understanding the reality employees experience during their everyday life generates a clear picture of how change could be enabled and sustained. The study is not limited to just understanding the level of organizational maturity, but understanding aspects that influence performance and capabilities of employees. Nevertheless, the study has a practical orientation seeking to elaborate on recommendations that support the organization in times of change and growth.

With growth comes plenty of transformation which modifies and intensifies the challenges of business. Determining which are the necessary decisions to be made towards good strategic choices can be difficult without knowing the current status of an organization (Barnett & Mallon, 2020). Considering the size of the organization, the study will focus on the Digital Department of the large IT & Digital organizational unit of Salling Group. As no organizational maturity assessment has been previously done, the study starts on completely new grounds with no frame of reference.

The study is placed in an interesting time where the Digital Department is suffering changes independently to the newly defined group strategy. Two years ago Digital was merged with the IT department, forming now the big unit of 'Digital and IT', where both departments are seen as sister components that complement each other. The merger led to a restructuring in the organizational design of 'Digital' producing changes to its overall layout, with some teams being relocated to entirely different business units outside 'Digital'. Furthermore, the role of 'Head of Digital' has seen a lack of stability - having been held by multiple individuals and, most recently, remaining vacant altogether.

A preliminary list of definition of terms is created to provide alignment throughout the thesis. Even if some literature might address the terms differently (which will be addressed if needed), this list defines the understanding and perspective the study adopts.

Performance is viewed as the extent to which employees/teams in the Digital Department meet work expectations, such as execution of tasks, achievement of goals or outcomes of daily operations.

Capabilities are viewed as the knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors or resources that employees/teams in the Digital Department possess and apply through their work to perform effectively. Nevertheless, referring to 'capabilities' means human resources.

Maturity is viewed as the level to which the organization (the Digital Department) is currently able to impact and manage the existing capabilities and performance. The complete term is 'organizational maturity', however in the scope of this thesis 'organizational maturity' refers solely to the Digital Department.

To sum up, as the organization is expressing higher levels of ambition with Aspire28' change is forecasted throughout the entire organization. As without a doubt the organization seeks higher returns and financial gains, the thesis chooses to focus on internal capabilities and performance. Examining how people describe their experiences in the Digital Department could indicate the level of organizational maturity. With this short summary together with the list containing the definition of terms, a Problem Statement is formulated to set the direction of the study, as follows:

How can the organizational maturity of the Digital Department in Salling Group be assessed, to determine elements that impact the capabilities and performance of employees?

2. Defining the purpose of the research

The Problem Statement gives indications of the area to be researched, mentioning a clear issue or need of research that needs to be addressed. With the Problem Statement formulated, the objective of the research can be defined, in a clear, specific and informative manner, using the concept of Purpose Statements. As (Creswell & Creswell, 2023)) discuss the applicability of a Purpose Statement using different interpretations and variations, its usage indicates why the research is conducted and what the study intended to accomplish. To clarify the use of a purpose statement, the thesis follows the indications discussed by Cresswell & Creswell (2023) with regards to the relationships among the problem, purpose, research questions and data (Figure 2).

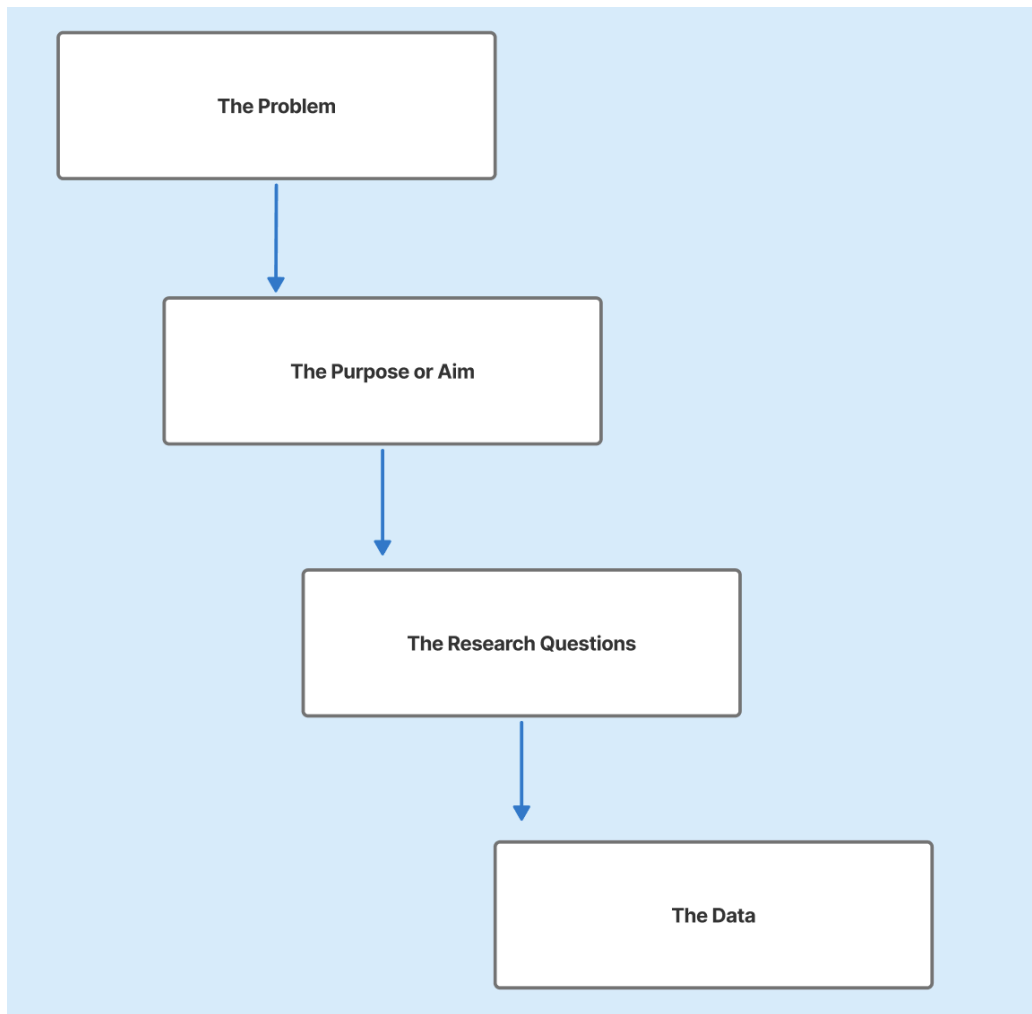


Figure 2. Relationship Among the Problem, the Purpose (Aim), the Research Questions, and the Data. From *Research Design* (6th Edition, p.125) by J.W. Creswell & J.D. Creswell, 2023, SAGE Publications. Copyright [2023] by SAGE Publications

In Research Design (Creswell & Creswell, 2023), the research problem (in the current study addressed as the Problem Statement) is described as an issue leading to a study need, whereas the purpose (or aim) specifying the specific study addressing the problem. The Purpose Statement formulation is defined around the central phenomenon to be studied - the one single concept that is being addressed during research, using a qualitative research script. The use of a qualitative purpose statement enforces the emerging design and provides flexibility to adapt the procedures used during the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Therefore the purpose statement is formulated as:

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to assess the organizational maturity of the Digital Department using a constructivist perspective, by understanding the lived experiences of employees and identifying elements or workforce practices that influence their performance and capabilities. At this stage in the research, the central phenomenon of organizational maturity is defined as the level in which the organization (the Digital Department) is leading and enforcing workforce practices in the daily operations of employees that influence their performance and capabilities.

All aspects of philosophical assumptions, qualitative inquiry approaches and methodological choices are elaborated in detail within further chapters of the thesis.

3. Research Questions

With a defined Problem and Purpose Statement, the research questions can be defined. In the Introduction chapter, the research questions are listed to provide a general understanding of the area the thesis seeks to examine, however a thorough view on how the research questions are defined will be present in the 'Methodology' chapter.

Therefore, the defined list of research questions of the thesis is:

***RQ1:** What is the employee's experience of organizational maturity in the Digital Department of Salling Group, as reflected through the workforce-related practices of P-CMM Level 2 Maturity?*

***RQ1.1:** Which workforce-related practices are perceived as barriers or enablers of employee performance and capabilities?*

***RQ2:** How can the current organizational maturity of the Digital Department of Salling Group be understood when positioned within the levels of the Organizational Behavior model (individual, group, organization), and how might the variables of OB, in turn, shape the department's maturity?*

***RQ3:** How can the level of organizational maturity be increased in the Digital Department of Salling Group?*

4. Report structure

To better understand the stages of the study, this subchapter summarises the structure of the report and what is to be expected of each chapter.

Chapter I - Introduction: presents background on the problem the thesis is examining and defining its scope. It outlines what is to be expected, defining a list of terms providing a common understanding of the research area, and lists the defined Problem Statement, Purpose Statement and Research Questions.

Chapter II - Literature Review: The chapter provides an overview of the literatures present in the field and how they are categorised. It stands as an academic and theoretical foundation of the thesis, presenting different perspectives on models, prior research, and thereby placing the study in the broader academic context.

Chapter III - Philosophy of science: Lays the grounds of the underlying assumptions that the thesis adopts throughout research. Clarifies how the study approaches the epistemological and ontological orientations, framing how knowledge is generated and understood.

Chapter IV - Use of theory and frameworks: here the choice of theoretical lens is elaborated, in connection to previously outlined literature review and philosophical assumptions. Each theoretical choice is followed by a detailed description of its institutionalization and expected purpose.

Chapter V - Methodology: the operational aspects of the thesis are represented here. It contains a detailed description of the Research Question formulation, choice of research design, sampling strategy and data collection & analysis procedures.

Chapter VI - Presenting the findings: Here the results of the data analysis (thematic analysis) are provided at a latent level, first presenting the individual themes, concluding the chapter by connecting the research questions with findings.

Chapter VII - Discussions: this chapter contains critical reflection on how literature review, choice of theory and methodology, limitations of research influenced the results of the thesis. Nonetheless, the 'Future work' section briefly formulates suggestions for future studies concerned with the thesis topic.

Chapter VIII - Conclusions: the chapter contains the final reflection and closure of the research. Findings are summarised in connection to the research questions, implications and significance of the study are stated and noted in the final statement of the thesis.

II . Literature review

Literature review (LR) is a critical aspect of understanding the problem area that is to be researched. With a clear definition of the Problem Statement, Purpose and the Research Questions, the LR process provides an overview of previous studies and status of the industry.

Applicability of LR varies and therefore can be used in multiple thesis phases. For example, Creswell & Creswell (2023) address the topic of LR prior to the formulation of research questions/hypothesis, but right after determining the topic to be researched - 'a first step in conducting research is to identify a topic and review the literature written about it'. On a different note, Bryman (2021) begins describing LR as a process performed 'once you identified your research questions', therefore later in the development process of a research.

The use of reviews is undoubtedly valuable in academia, and depending on the source they are categorized differently, distinguishing between narrative and systematic reviews (Bryman, 2021), dividing them based on inquiry type (Creswell & Creswell, 2023), and even more thoroughly divided based on characteristics and perceived strengths/weaknesses (Grant & Booth, 2009).

Following the descriptions and divide between the different review types, the thesis adopts a combination between narrative, literature and mapping reviews within a qualitative inquiry type, that will be further elaborated on.

Following the differentiation presented by Bryman (2021), the thesis adopts a narrative LR approach. Narrative reviews are described as establishing an overview of what is already known about the certain topic to be studied, 'by providing a reasonably comprehensive assessment and critical interpretation of the relevant literature' (Bryman, 2021). Additionally, Bryman (2021) emphasizes the importance of conducting a narrative review to reflect on the choice of theories and critical literature and justify the choice of research questions. Nevertheless, the same source addresses the importance of performing a LR as an ongoing process, meaning a phase of constant reflection most importantly performed when interpreting and evaluating the findings of the study. However as outlined by Bryman (2021), the narrative review is criticised as being unorganized or not presenting a comprehensive picture of the whole area of inquiry, as opposed to systematic reviews. That said, as systematic reviews are complex and elaborate in nature they surpass the scope of the thesis.

Generally characterised, LR's are seeking to review materials that are generally peer-reviewed, have some degree of permanence and can cover different levels of completeness and comprehensiveness (Grant & Booth, 2009). Grant & Booth (2009) acknowledge the reviews as allowing for consolidation and development of previous studies, however they have a subjective nature, where the researcher can choose literatures that are supporting the desired worldview, potentially developing a bias. As the LR is limited in the scope of how many reviews it contains, it is similar to the narrative review perspective presented earlier by Bryman (2021).

Creswell & Creswell (2023) provide a divided perspective on LR's, based on inquiry type, namely qualitative and quantitative reviews. As presented in the previous chapter, the study follows a qualitative inquiry approach. Creswell & Creswell (2023) further elaborate on qualitative reviews as having an exploratory nature 'this usually means that not much has been written about the topic or the population studied, and the researcher seeks to listen to participants and build an understanding based on what they hear'. As LR has multiple usages in qualitative research, the thesis includes the LR process in the introduction, therefore used to frame the problem prior to the commencement of inquiry, as it 'provides a rationale for the problem or issue' (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Another type of review described by (Grant & Booth, 2009) is the mapping reviews. They are defined as a way of performing reviews where the literatures are added to a map and categorized, allowing for a thorough evaluation of the gaps of knowledge within that particular topic. This perspective is seen as similar to systematic reviews, as described earlier by Bryman (2021). A perceived strength of the method lies in the transparency in which the researcher can argue for the need of research, however they are seen as lacking a system of quality control and are time consuming (Grant & Booth, 2009).

Yet, in the process of performing a LR (Creswell & Creswell, 2023) outline the use of a literature map to organize the literature. This seems to be a simplified version of a systematic review, with the scope to ‘present a visual summary of the literature, positioning the current research study within this existing literature’, where ‘the researcher begins to build a visual picture of existing research about a topic’ (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Even though more complex, the thesis will adopt the categorization nature of mapping reviews, and providing a visualisation of the connections between the selected literatures.

Before elaborating on the LR process, it is important to discuss its primary scope and use. Firstly, the thesis initiates the process of LT after the definition of Problem and Purpose Statement. Its primary scope is to identify and support concrete areas that direct the formulation of Research Questions. Lastly, LR is seen as a continuous process of identifying relevant sources that support answering the questions, which is revisited when interpreting and discussing the findings of the research.

Creswell & Creswell (2023) recommend a step by step approach in conducting a LR, which enables a systematic approach that captures, evaluates and summarizes the identified literatures. The report presents a detailed view of the last two steps of the recommended LR process: grouping the literature on the topic and critically assessing it, and putting together the LR map to identify how the study is positioned in the existing body of knowledge.

In the initial stages of performing the LR a large body of texts has been selected, from vast areas of interest such as ‘organizational development’, ‘organizational maturity’, ‘organizational performance’, ‘business performance’, and a combination of synonyms and concatenation of terms is created (Appendix B). Multiple academic databases were used in the process, such as Aalborg University Library, Jstor, Science Direct or Google Scholar.

For selecting relevant literatures, several evaluation criterions have been established:

- Literature has to be added to a reputable academic database, and the article/journal/book has to be thoroughly peer reviewed or used as academic standard.
- Industry or practice-based literature: even if the article/journal/book is not thoroughly peer-reviewed, it has to be published by a renowned publication or institution, with authors representing organizations that are recognised contributors in their particular field - literatures that have become norms or standards.
- If a selected literature is older than 20 years, it is assessed whether the information provided is still mentioned or referred to in other more recent literature.
- The literature is written in English and has to be available online.
- The literature has to address the central phenomenon being studied (organizational maturity and employee performance/capabilities).

The snowballing method has been adopted, when identifying a relevant literature: search for references of other potentially relevant studies within the selected literature - when reading the list of references. This technique provided an additional list of literatures that were later on evaluated.

Before grouping the literatures into relevance of topic, a final list of 10 sources, from which 3 books - 2 of them which will also set the theoretical lenses of the thesis (will be further elaborated on the theories and their use in the 'Use of Theory' chapter). From the remaining 7 articles, 3 are industry specific (developed by reputable sources that are considered norms in the field of business development), and the remaining 4 peer reviewed articles.

The identified LR categories are: Organizational maturity, Organizational culture and Behavior, Performance and Health.

Organizational maturity

Maturity or organizational maturity has become a popular concept in the world of organizational or business development, signifying the progression from an unorganized ad-hoc organization to one that is able to implement repeatable practices.

Maturity is often measured using different models and through time there have been plenty of models or frameworks defined to address different contexts or domains.

A generalized view over the topic of maturity is presented by (Bitici et al., 2015) in the context of performance management. Maturity is defined as 'the ability to respond to the environment in an appropriate manner through performance measurement and management practices'. Maturity models are defined as 'a matrix of practices that define, for each organizational area the level of formality, sophistication and embeddedness of practices from ad-hoc to optimizing'. Lastly, a maturity assessment is defined as 'the systematic use of a maturity model to position current practices of an organization against the maturity scale' (Bitici et al., 2015).

One influential literature in the field of organizational maturity is the People Capability Maturity Model (People CMM or P-CMM), where maturity is seen as the extent to which workforce practices and processes are integrated and institutionalized within an organization for improving workforce capabilities (Curtis et al., 2009). The authors further argue that the higher the organizational maturity, the greater are its capabilities to attract, develop and retain talent within the business. Further, Curtis et al. (2019) describe maturity as defined to be increasingly measured in levels, where each maturity level is seen as an organizational development that introduces workforce practices and processes in stages. Each increase in maturity determines a succession of changes in the culture of the organization. Surrounding the idea of organizational development and maturity advancement, the incremental introduction of workforce practices and processes supports alignment with the organization's business objectives, performance and changing needs.

(Barnett & Mallon, 2020) present the concept of maturity from the perspective of human resource management, seeing people as the most valuable asset of an organization. They proceed to present the undeniable value of maturity assessments concerning the triangulation between business strategy, capabilities and positive results. In the article a model is presented in how maturity is interpreted, from a low maturity model of 'becoming intentional', while being reactive, inconsistent, ad-hoc and focused around essential activities; to a high maturity where organizations are "becoming wise", having a strong sense of their unique practices, defining clear, targeted strategies and acting in a predictive manner. Barnett & Mallon (2020) ultimately address the importance of using maturity assessments for anticipating business needs, and how they can be used to look at root causes of internal or competitive issues, instead of addressing symptoms

(such as decrease in revenues). In the end, maturity should not just indicate where a company is placed within a model, but “when to build skills internally but also when to access skills externally”.

From these selected literatures a number of sub-categories have emerged: Human-Capital management & Performance, and Level-Based division.

- **Human-capital management & Performance**

As Barnett & Mallon (2020) strongly claim, ‘people are an organisation's most valuable asset’. However, when referring to people within an organization, very so often the discussion is limited to HR practices, rather than understanding the real value they produce (Barnett & Mallon, 2020; Curtis et al., 2009).

Both Barnett & Mallon (2020) and Curtis et al. (2009) further emphasise the need of implementing a series of good management practices to enable the advancement of organizational maturity. Nevertheless, the implementation of successful practices is also determined by the experience level of management. Bitici et al., (2015) look into the relationship between management style and performance management practices and long-term performance of organizations. Low performing firms are often associated with a ‘more closed, command and control management style’ (Bitici et al., 2015), (Curtis et al., 2009) stating that ‘Generally managers and supervisors in low-maturity organizations are ill prepared to perform their workforce responsibilities’.

Nevertheless, the role of management is detrimental in enhancing organizational maturity, as their role is to adopt a series of human capital management practices, reinforcing organizational learning that reveal the relationship between capabilities and outcomes (performance) (*Omni-channel retailing*; Barnett & Mallon, 2020; Bitici et al., 2015; Curtis et al., 2009).

When looking at the aspect of performance management, Bitici et al. (2015) elaborate on the adoption of behavioral and cultural aspects to traditional management and model maturity models. These aspects are primarily concerned with how managers use structures ‘to manage performance of the organization and include managerial routines such as communication, facilitating informed decision-making, establishing organizational culture, managing change’ (Bitici et al., 2015).

- **Level-Based Division**

Barnett & Mallon (2020) and Curtis et al. (2009) different perspectives of organizational model assessments or models, however the common denominator being a level-based approach. Both sources look into the development of organizational maturity models as a progression scale. With each level of maturity, a new set of human management practices or business-critical activities is introduced.

According to Barnett & Mallon (2020) and Curtis et al. (2009), at the base level of understanding, increasing the maturity of an organization represents a continuous exercise of organizational change, developing a new organizational culture that needs to be solid enough to support further progressions.

Even though the two literatures picture different level division (Barnett & Mallon (2020) presenting a 4-level division and Curtis et al. (2009) a 5-level division), they both start from a low level of organizational maturity characterized by ad-hoc, inconsistent or reactive practices; to a high level or organizational maturity where strong change-management practices are institutionalized.

At the core of each maturity level stands the concept of standardization, or the capacity in which a company

can implement a series of repeatable practices, which allows the organization to use their resources on activities that improve maturity over time (Curtis et al., 2009), often presented as ‘managerial routines’ by Bititci et al. (2015).

Organizational Culture and Behavior

With the evolution in maturity models, besides the technical aspects of performance measurement (what to measure), cultural and behavioral aspects have been introduced to address concerns with the technical aspects of performance and how it is measured (Bititci et al., 2015).

The concept of culture or organizational culture is a core element presented in literature that addresses organizational maturity, change, performance or capabilities and ultimately business development.

Culture is mentioned as a measurement tool in addressing an organization's capabilities (Barnett & Mallon, 2020), essential part of performance measurement in organizational health (De Smet et al., 2014) or as ‘shared values and resulting patterns of behavior that characterize interactions among its members’ (Curtis et al., 2009)

However, none of the sources above define the term ‘culture’, but only presents its implications in different practical aspects. To better understand the concept and importance of culture, (Schein, 2004) provides a formal definition as *“the culture of a group can be defined as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problem of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems”*.

Schein (2004) and Robbins & Judge (2019) further elaborate on the different levels of culture, starting from the most visible and hard to decipher structures and processes, to the unconscious taken-for-granted beliefs which are the essence of culture: artifacts, beliefs and values, and underlying assumptions. Each level of culture helps to uncover different aspects that influence perceptions, beliefs or actions, and even though the essence of culture lies in hidden underlying assumptions, they become visible and immediately observable through artifacts (Schein, 2004).

Organizational culture has been pictured as an essential element of organizational maturity, undoubtedly described as essential in relation to change and performance.

Through the People Capability Maturity Model framework, (Curtis et al., 2009) organizational development is seen as having an immediate reflection in organizational culture. In their view, development and culture are seen as mutually influencing factors, which create a succession of changes. The purpose of applying the maturity model is to integrate a series of workforce practices that continuously create a change in the organizational culture. With a solid base of culture, the organization can keep changing and developing.

However, for a culture to get formed, there are several characteristics that have to be addressed (Schein, 2004): structural stability, due to its characteristic of defining a group by providing meaning and predictability; depth, as it is usually the most unconscious part of a group; breadth, as “it influences all aspects of how an organization deals with its primary tasks, its various environments, and its internal operations”; and lastly the patterning or integration, by tying together into a coherent whole rituals, climate, values and behaviors to reduce disorder or senselessness that produce anxiety. By being aware of these characteristics, it becomes easier to understand the different levels of culture, without which change becomes difficult, time-consuming and highly anxiety provoking (Schein, 2004).

Another perspective on organizational culture is presented by (Robbins & Judge, 2019), such as “a system of shared meanings , held by members that distinguishes the organization from other organizations”. They further elaborate on the applicability of what cultures do, as defining “the rules of the game”. The concept of culture supports different functions in creating distinction between organizations, conveying a sense of identity, facilitating commitment, enhancing stability and finally being a control mechanism that shapes attitudes and behaviors (Robbins & Judge, 2019). Additionally, a strong or low organizational culture is seen to have a direct impact on employee performance and job satisfaction (Robbins & Judge, 2019).

Nevertheless, organizational culture is seen as a component, which is part of the greater discipline of Organizational Behavior, as outlined by Robbins & Judge (2019). It is the outcome or a series of inputs and their processes, that is recognised at the group level. The outcome reflects a set of behavioral variables at the individual and group level that impacts the organizational one that ultimately affects future variables at their input and process stage and different levels.

Performance and health

Performance is a complex topic, entailing plenty of perspectives, nuances, and interpretation. Nevertheless, most companies strive for higher financial performance and find strategies to enhance it while maintaining costs low.

When looking at the general human capability management(HCM), performance was traditionally seen as how well employees were performing their tasks. However in modern OB interpretation of performance, (Robbins & Judge, 2019) describe it as being a three types of behavior evaluation: task performance, citizenship and counterproductivity. The new interpretations evaluate the quality of performing duties and responsibilities, the way in which an employee contributes to the quality of the environment and social interactions and ultimately, whether an employee actively damages the organization.

Throughout the thesis, performance is reviewed from the perspective of human capital practices. Throughout the review, multiple identified sources present evidence on the connection between HCM, firm performance, competitive advantage and organizational health. Therefore, a series of sub-categories has been developed: business strategies and competitive advantage, and organizational health.

- Business strategies and competitive advantage

In traditional business practices, the original perspective of discussing firm performance was based on the external environmental analysis of opportunities and threats, based on Porter’s ‘five forces model’ (Barney, 1991). The model therefore assumes that competitive advantage is based on external factors that are placed outside the company. This orientation has been challenged by scholars by shifting the perspective. Newer perspectives look at internal factors of firm performance that can generate a position of sustained competitive advantage - the Resource-based view (RBV) (Barney, 1991).

While Barney (1991) develops the theoretical basis of the RBV, (Farida & Setiawan, 2022) and (Erdil et al., 2010) provide empirical evidence of applying the model in studies focusing on correlating HCM and firm performance. Starting first with the generalized view, Barney (1991) looks over all types of firm resources (assets, capabilities, organizational processes, firm attributes, information, knowledge etc.) which can enable

an organization to gain sustained competitive advantage.

In the practical studies, Farida & Setiawan (2022) focuses on the role of performance and innovation in business strategies and competitive advantage, while Erdil et al. (2010) seeks to identify the effects that core employees and organizational capabilities have on firm performance.

The common denominator of the two articles is defining the concept of dynamic capabilities and their applicability in research. Farida & Setiawan (2022) defines dynamic capabilities as the combination of key strategic management practices in adapting, integrating and reconfiguration internal and external organizational skills, resources and functional competencies to the ever changing environment, with the capacity of adapting to business requirements. Additionally, Erdil et al. (2010) defines capabilities as 'a complex bundle of skills and accumulated knowledge that enable firms to coordinate activities and make use of their assets'. Together, the two studies suggest that organizational performance and competitive advantage are driven not by static resources, but by continuous investment in organizational capabilities, which enable firms to adapt strategically and foster the development of critical innovation (Erdil et al., 2010; Farida & Setiawan, 2022).

- **Organizational health**

Another perspective is on the balance between performance and organizational health (De Smet et al., 2014; Gagnon et al., 2017). Both sources are industry articles from reputable sources, with extensive practical experience.

First, (De Smet et al., 2014) indicate that 'the organizational health of an organization is based on the ability to align around a clear vision, strategy, and culture'. Both articles are outlining the central concept of 'Organizational Health Indexing (OHI)', representing a nine dimensions (or outcomes, or 'recipes') model, which aggregate the views of employees and managers on a set of management practices: Direction, Accountability, Coordination and Control, External orientation, Leadership, Innovation and Learning, Capabilities, Motivation, Culture and Climate (De Smet et al., 2014; Gagnon et al., 2017). Nevertheless, both articles elaborate on the link of increased financial performance and organizational health, as opposed to organizations where the focus is primarily on outcomes.

Additionally to the previous perspective on business strategies and competitive advantage (Erdil et al., 2010; Farida & Setiawan, 2022) organizational health looks into a general representation of specific areas of interest for leaders where investment is required to build a healthy, performance driven organization. The 4 core areas of interest are: Leader factory, Continuous Improvement engine, Talent and Knowledge core, Market shaper (De Smet et al., 2014; Gagnon et al., 2017). These areas ('recipes') can be seen as essential pillars for developing a performance culture (each area consists of different combinations of management practices). However, for them to be successfully implemented, they have to align with the defined business strategies and reach full alignment.

In this sense, organizational health can be seen as a 'missing link' that comes with a set of practical approaches in connecting strategy and performance, providing alignment between people, organization and strategies. It can also be used as an index of the quality of management practices and how much they enable the organization to adopt a healthy performance culture.

Taken together, the different perspectives on business strategies, dynamic capabilities, and organizational health is to prove that performance can't be reduced to financial outcomes or be addressed in a vacuum. It is therefore seen that HCM plays a significant role balancing out strategic development and business outcomes. However, the articles hold limitations in regards to the central phenomenon of the thesis. What remains less explored is how organizations institutionalize, develop and sustain these practices over time, without a clear

indication of how to initially assess the current state of the organization.

Each literature listed has a direct relation to the central phenomenon to be studied - organizational maturity and the connection with capabilities and performance. *Figure 3* represents a LR map, where the overview of relations between the selected literatures is drawn. With the use of the map, it is easier to understand the areas of interest that are shaping the research. As none of the literatures address in detail all aspects of the central phenomenon, they will be used to complement each other throughout the study.

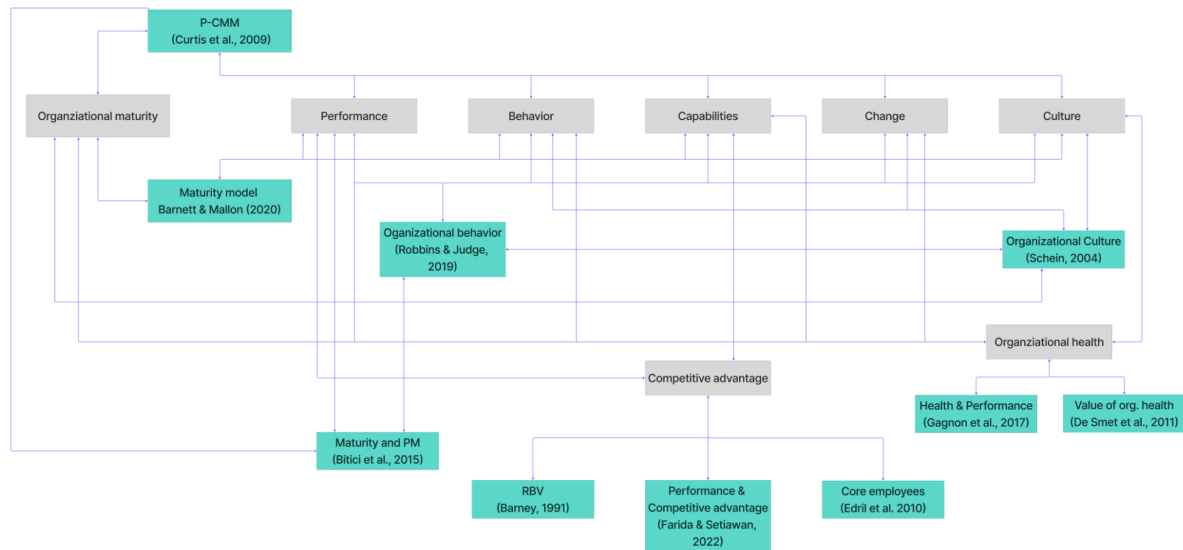


Figure 3 - Literature Review map

III. Philosophy of science

This chapter outlines the philosophical foundations that shape the thesis. The scope of this chapter is to elaborate on the worldview or paradigm, together with the epistemological and ontological orientations that define the research approach, design and methodology.

As described by Creswell & Creswell (2023), ‘before a study begins, a researcher brings a point of view and a set of beliefs to the research that informs their approach to conducting the study’. They introduce a framework that explains the relationship between philosophical worldviews, research approaches, research design and the research methods (*Figure 4*).

In this chapter the choice of philosophical assumptions and the research approach will be elaborated, research design and methods to be presented in the Methodology chapter.

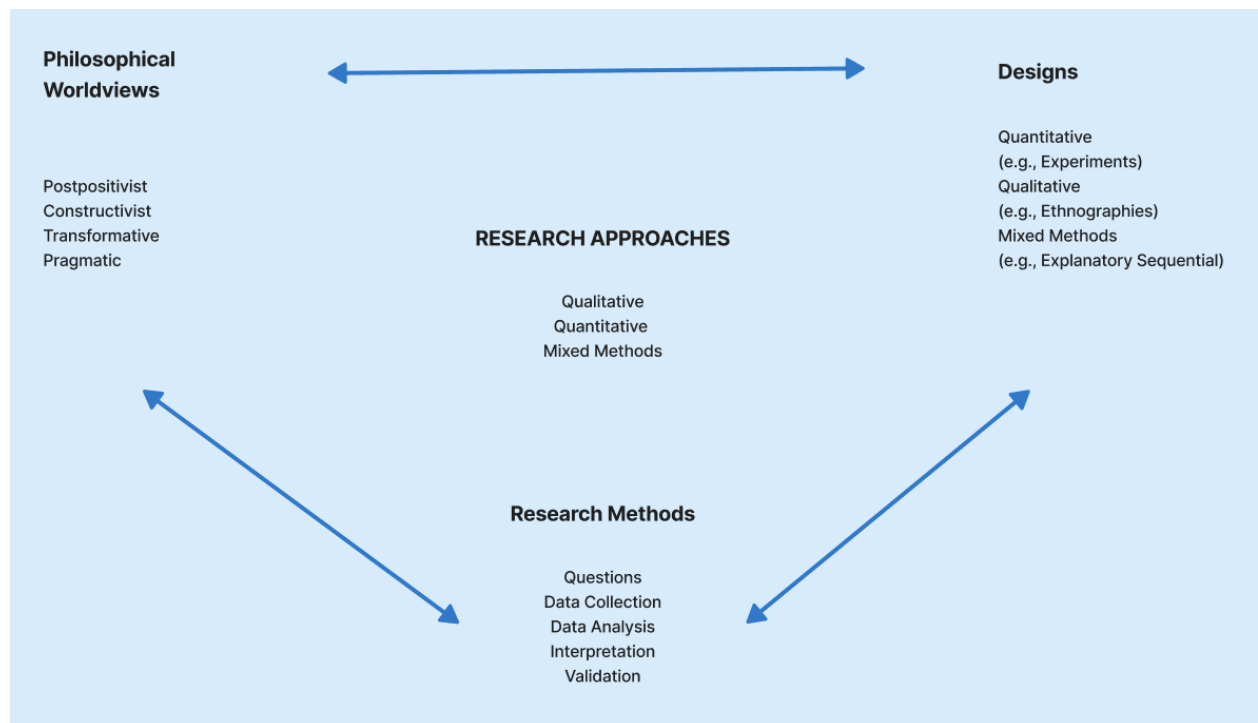


Figure 4. A framework for Research - The interconnections of Worldviews, Design, and Research Methods. From Research Design (6th Edition, p.6) by J.W. Creswell & J.D. Creswell, 2023, SAGE Publications. Copyright [2023] by SAGE Publications

Philosophical assumptions

Some clarification needs to be drawn between the two terms: paradigms and worldviews. The terms will be used interchangeably throughout the thesis report, essentially meaning the same thing. Creswell & Creswell

(2023) define the term philosophical ‘worldview’ as “*a basic set of beliefs that guide action*”, (Guba, 1990, p.17 in Creswell & Creswell, 2023) even though others refer to the same concept with different terminologies such as paradigms or epistemologies and ontologies. Bryman (2021) refers to the term ‘paradigm’ such as “*a cluster of beliefs and dictates which for scientists in a particular discipline influence what should be studied, how research should be done, [and] how results should be interpreted*” (Bryman, 1988a, p.4 in Bryman, 2021). However, Bryman (2021) focuses more on the concepts of epistemology - “*the question of what is (or should be) seen as acceptable knowledge in a discipline*” - and ontology - “*the nature of social entities*” .

Given the interest in investigating the employee experiences in relation to organizational maturity defined in the Problem and Purpose Statement, and even more segmented in concrete areas of research, the thesis tries to adopt a Constructivist worldview.

Constructivism, or social constructivism seeks understanding of the world that individuals live in , and how they develop a subjective meaning of their experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Given that the employees are part of a department or ‘community’, and part of their daily work life involves collaboration, constructivism looks at individual subjective meanings as formed through interactions with others (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Looking at how knowledge is acquired, this study adopts an interpretivist epistemological orientation. Following Bryman’s (2023) description, interpretivism enables a thorough investigation of the shared lived experiences of the employees, and what their experiences actually mean in practice, potentially how they interpret the world around them . The study draws influences from Hermeneutics, Verstehen and Phenomenology as traditions in interpretivism. This gives the opportunity to understand the lived experiences of employees, and how they make sense of their ‘world’ in the Digital Department of Salling Group. The direct interpretation and applicability of the interpretivist traditions will be elaborated further in the Methodology chapter.

The thesis adopts a constructionist ontological position. Constructionism assumes that social phenomena and their meanings are continuously constructed by social actors during their interaction, and it is in continuous state of revision (Bryman, 2021). As the lived experiences of the employees are in continuous change, the constructionist approach enables the study to present a specific version of reality, rather than a definitive one that is seen as a constant through time.

Research Approach

Following the framework for research by Creswell & Creswell (2023) (*Figure 4*), the research approaches (or methodologies) are a central element that tie together the philosophical assumptions, the design and the methods chosen for a certain research.

Considering the choice of philosophical lens and the constructivist or interpretivist orientation, following a Qualitative approach would allow for detailed investigation of the experiences that construct the reality of the employees.

The qualitative research is concerned with exploring and understanding the meanings of individuals and groups (Creswell & Creswell, 2023), focusing more on the meanings and words, rather than quantifying the findings from the data analysis, while seeing reality through the eyes of the people being studied (Bryman, 2021).

Creswell & Creswell (2023) present a detailed view on the importance of context, which is a main characteristic of the qualitative approaches, which is broken down into separate definitions. Firstly participant's meaning, where "the researchers focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue". With the use of the qualitative approach, the constructivist philosophical orientation can gather deeper insights into the lived experiences and the construction of reality of the employees. The researcher is the key instrument of the research, conducting the inquiry by itself, which gives direct insights to the data being collected. Having direct contact with the employees while collecting data gives first hand impressions over their personal opinions, allowing for observing, hearing or understanding the meanings behind the responses.

One definitory characteristic of qualitative inquiries is the emergent design (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). It allows the study to maintain a flexible and adaptive, incorporation of alternative theoretical perspectives, and refinement of data collection protocols. This ensures that the research design remains aligned with a constructivist understanding of organizational maturity and its influence on employee performance and capability development.

On the contrary, there are plenty of critical concerns about potential weaknesses of implementing a qualitative approach (Bryman, 2021), to which steps have been taken during the study to address them. To reduce subjectiveness, literature review is used as systematic and critical reflection, providing rich descriptions and critical reflections on different stages of research. While full replication might be hard to achieve due to the interpretivist orientation of the study, using the same method of rich and detailed descriptions throughout the Methodology chapter provides a guideline that could potentially identify similar results in other organizations. Even though generalization to population will not be achieved through this research, the findings identified using data collection methods will be critically assessed against frameworks, theories and models from literature review. Lastly, to overcome the lack of transparency, triangulation is used to describe and evaluate the results of the study, by using multiple theoretical lenses before formulating a definitive answer, which will be further detailed in the upcoming chapter.

Lastly, Creswell & Creswell (2023) present the foundational method that shapes a qualitative inquiry and the analytical framework-oriented procedures (*Figure 5*)

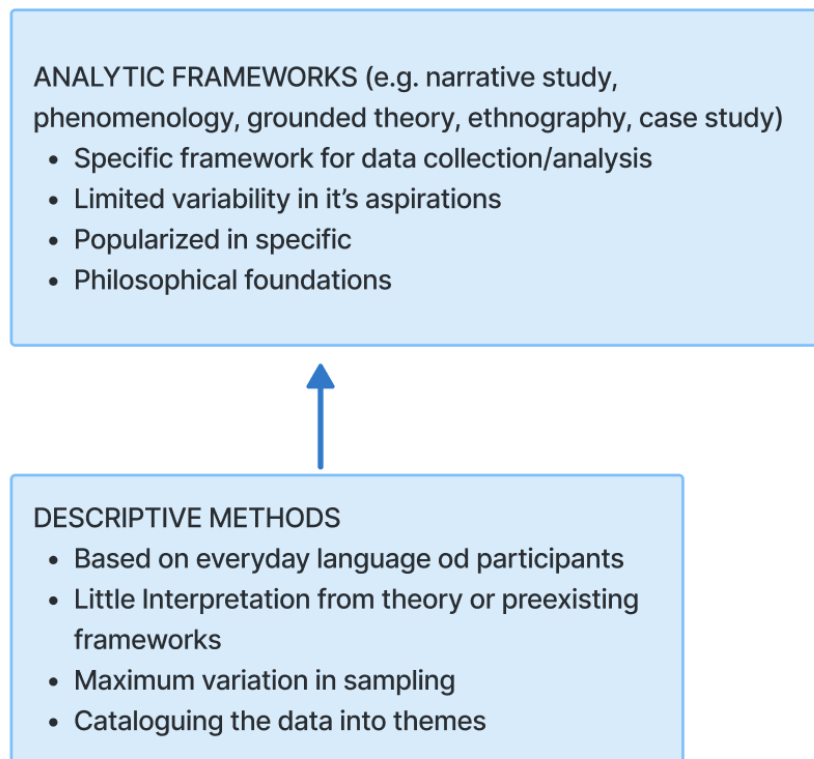


Figure 5. Foundational Methods and Methods Drawn From Traditions. From Research Design (6th Edition, p.196) by J.W. Creswell & J.D. Creswell, 2023, SAGE Publications. Copyright [2023] by SAGE Publications

Briefly defined by Creswell & Creswell (2023), the descriptive methods contain the so called “foundational methods” in qualitative research, the descriptive and thematic analysis, being an approach to research where the researcher keeps close contact with the data, analysing it using themes. The analytic frameworks are defined as the frame where the results of the procedures of interpreting the data are being stored. These elements will further be detailed in the Methodology chapter, where the choice of Research design and research methods is presented in detail, together with their relation and the connection to the philosophical assumptions.

IV. Use of theory and frameworks

Part of the literature review process was to identify potential theories to use throughout the study. The way a theory is used varies across different types of research, and even within a single study, it can be applied in multiple ways. As the study uses a qualitative approach, it inclines towards an inductive theoretical tendency. Bryman (2021) mentions grounded theory formation as a preference of qualitative research, where an inductive reasoning is adopted to draw generalizable inferences from data.

Similarly, Creswell & Creswell (2023) define the ‘theoretical end-point’, where the qualitative study ends with a theory, or a conceptual model.

In contrast to the inductive reasoning, is the deductive perspective, or the ‘theoretical standpoint’, where the theory provides an overall orientation to the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Bryman (2021) brings more details in terms of deductive reasoning, where concepts within theories are transformed into researchable entities.

As presented in the previous Philosophy of Science chapter, the research follows a social-constructivist worldview, where the lived experiences of employees from the Digital Department in Salling Group are going to be research, to understand more how their realities are constructed in the current scenario. Nevertheless, the study goes beyond maturity levels, but looks into aspects of organizational behavior and change, and how these aspects influence the performance and capabilities of employees. Creswell & Creswell (2023) describe the ‘theoretical standpoint’ (or deductive) as a ‘transformative perspective to bring about change [...] It shapes the questions asked, informs how data are collected and analyzed, and provides a call for action or change’. Furthermore, the deductive lens supports the social construction of reality, as it focuses on the people being studied, and examines important issues in people’s lives.

However, Creswell & Creswell (2023) present an additional theoretical lens, called ‘discipline-based theory’. Even though the form is linked with mixed-method research, the thesis could benefit from its adoption, as it looks into different variables or constructs drawn from discipline-specific literature, that are interrelated and used to explain expected results from individuals and organizations (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). These ‘discipline-based theories’ could also be similar in definition to Bryman’s (2023) ‘middle-range theories’, which operate in a limited domain and have a higher focus on empirical evidence. As the area of research that the thesis aims to investigate is limited, guiding the inquiry using a discipline-based theory could be more beneficial in providing empirical evidence rather than a more abstract ‘grand theory’.

Before looking into specific theories, it is important to mention what is the applicability of theory in the thesis. Firstly, the thesis adopts a mainly deductive reasoning, where theory is selected and institutionalized before the process of data collection. The theories are part of the ‘discipline-based’ category, where a set of constructs are used to define the data collection and analysis. That said, due to limited evidence in the particular field of research, the abductive reasoning is not fully rejected when interpreting the findings, as it would help to explain the highest probability of why different findings are different than expected. Lastly, the theories are used more as a model or framework that guides the methodological approaches such as in data collection and analysis, rather than just presenting philosophical social phenomena.

During the LR process multiple theories and models have been identified, from which some have been selected for further review. People Capability Maturity Model and Organizational Behavior model have been selected and will further be detailed.

People Capability Maturity Model

The main theoretical lens, or discipline based theory used throughout the thesis is the People Capability Maturity Model (P-CMM) developed by the Software Engineering Institute.

P-CMM is a level-based maturity model developed from the Humphrey's process maturity framework (Curtis et al., 2009). The model has a direct industry applicability and its successor CMM (Capability Maturity Model) has been developed and implemented in software engineering more than 30 years ago. P-CMM is described as a continuous model for capability improvement of an organization's workforce and it is addressed primarily towards human capital management (HCM).

A core belief of P-CMM is that HCM should be seen as valuable part of strategic business development, as the benefit of workforce practice implementation has been empirically proven to increase the ability to manage resources, share prices, overall organizational performance or uplifting organizations to a world-class level (Curtis et al., 2009). Moreover, research proves that technical operational models do not perform as expected without the support of a well implemented HCM.

The progressive stages (or levels) of P-CMM help organizations to address change in workforce practices gradually, with each level producing a "unique transformation in the organization's culture, by equipping it with more powerful practices for attracting, developing, organizing, motivating and retaining its workforce" (Curtis et al., 2009). Ultimately, the objective of the model is to improve the capabilities of the workforce, where capabilities are seen as 'the level of knowledge, skills, and process abilities for performing an organization's business activities', and to create a change in the organizational behavior and culture by adopting a continuous improvement approach. With each workforce capability improvement, the level of organizational maturity is lifted and new increments of practices are introduced.

Curtis et. al (2009) emphasise that in abstraction, the maturity framework builds an environment where practices can be repeated and fastly transferred across groups, reducing variations in performance across best practices and providing continuous improvements across practices (called key process area in literature - KPA) to enhance capabilities. Ultimately, the model does not address maturity solely, but is seen as a result of systematic changes in organizational behavior and culture that impact maturity, therefore the performance and capabilities of HCM.

As the P-CMM is based on the standard maturity frameworks, it consists of five maturity levels: starting from complete ad-hoc practices and processes, reaching continuous improvement practices where change management is adopted (*Figure 6*).

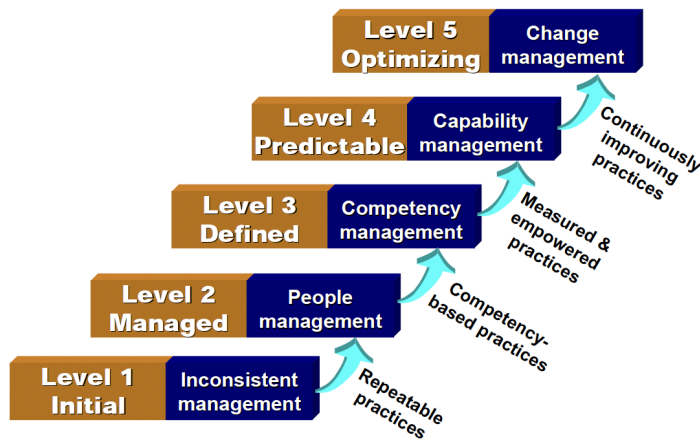


Figure 2.1: The five maturity levels of the People CMM. Adapted from Humphrey [1989] and Carnegie Mellon University [1995] with permission.

Figure 6. The five maturity levels of People CMM. From *People Capability Maturity Model (P-CMM)* (2nd ed., p....) by B. Curtis, B. Hefley, S. Miller, 2009, Software Engineering Institute. Copyright 2009 Carnegie Mellon University.

Each maturity level is characterised by a set of well-established and interrelated KPAs in critical areas of workforce management (Curtis et al., 2009). The Initial Level 1 is an exception to the model, therefore not containing any defined KPAs. As Curtis et al. (2009) present, the Initial level is characterized by: inconsistency in performing practices, displacement of responsibility, ritualistic practices and an emotionally detached workforce.

The Managed Level 2 is the first step towards improving the capability of the workforce where managers need to take responsibility for the performance of working units. The KPAs introduced in the level 2 maturity focus on the manager's efforts towards the unit level, by building a solid foundation of workforce practices (Curtis et al., 2009). The literature emphasises on the importance of addressing the unit level first, as evidence shows that implementing HCM practices at an organizational level first is prone to failure, as usually management (and managers) is inexperienced. In sum up, 'In Maturity Level 2 organizations, managers are vigilant for problems that hinder performance in their units', where these problems can be lifted with a proper adoption of KPA's, such as: Staffing, Communication and Coordination, Work Environment, Performance Management, Training and Development, Compensation (Curtis et al., 2009).

Since the Initial Level 1 of P-CMM can't be directly evaluated for (due to the lack of defined KPAs), this thesis will focus on evaluating the Digital Department of Salling Group against the Managed Maturity level 2. Level 2 Maturity is the first stage that provides a clear set of KPAs suitable for systematic evaluation, as no prior evidence of previous maturity evaluation within the organization has been identified.

A strength of using P-CMM as a main theory is the detailed documentation and descriptive nature of all maturity levels, KPAs, architectural components and interpretation methods for evaluating certain KPAs and maturity levels. However, as the thesis is limited in time and scope, the heavy documentation can be seen as a weakness when institutionalizing the theory, as adaptations in its complexity need to be made.

Organizational Behavior model

Organizational Behavior (OB) is the second theory selected, which adopts a more broad and generalized understanding of the constructs selected from the P-CMM theory.

Robbins & Judge (2019) define OB as ‘a field of study that investigates the impact of individuals, groups, and structure have on behavior within organizations for the purpose of applying such knowledge, improving an organization’s effectiveness’. In short, is the study of how people within organizations behave and how it impacts organizations performance. Some of the core topics addressed in OB are: motivation, leader behavior and power, interpersonal communication, group structure and process, attitude development and perception, change process, conflict and negotiation, and work design. At the core of OB lies the assumption that management, and managers implicitly, play a pivotal role in shaping the behavior at individual, group, and organizational level.

With roots in multiple disciplines (psychology, anthropology, sociology etc.), the OB model combines multiple parameters and concepts (Figure 7) which aims to inform regarding different management approaches, and enables spotting issues and opportunities within the organization (Robbins & Judge, 2019).

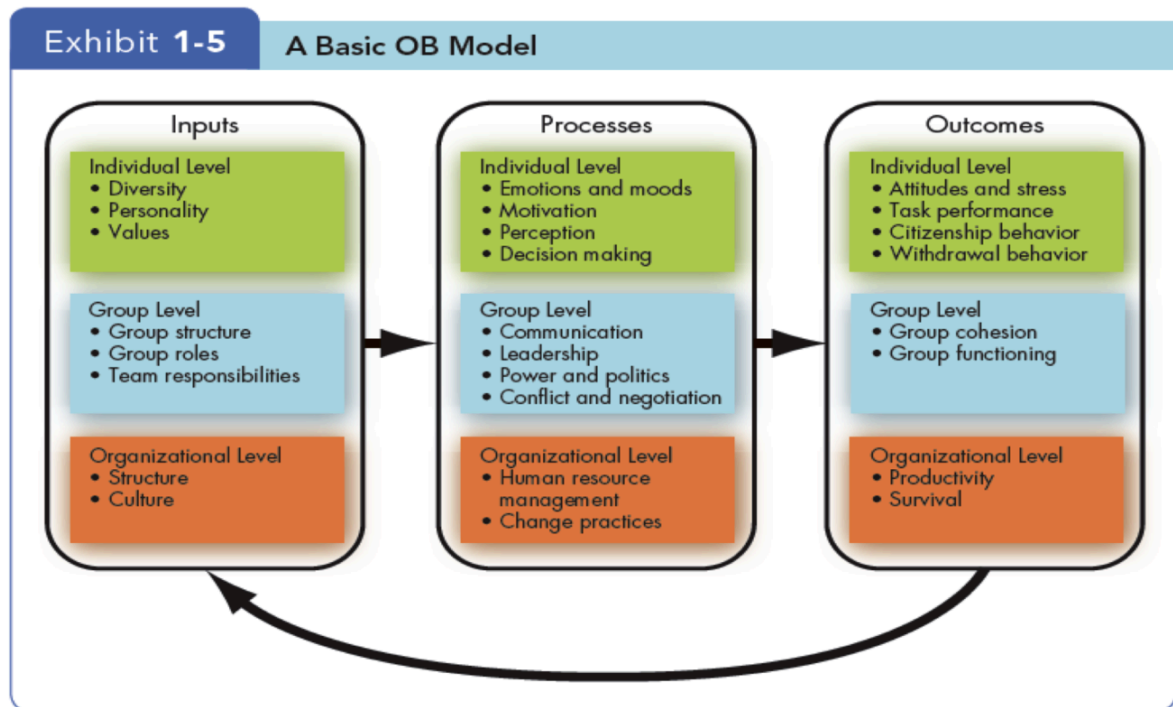


Figure 7. A basic OB model From *Organizational Behavior (18th Edition, p.58)* by S. Robbins & T. A. Judge, 2019, Pearson Education. Copyright [2019] by Pearson Education Limited

The first block of the model is represented by inputs, which are variables that are usually determined prior to employment. The middle block represents processes, which are ‘actions that individuals, groups, and organizations engage in as a result of inputs and that lead to certain outcomes’ (Robbins & Judge, 2019).

Lastly, the right block represents outcomes, which are key variables that an organization wants to predict, which can also be affected by other variables. Robbins & Judge (2019) further present that the model is not just starting at inputs and ends at outputs, but it can have a loop-like effect, where due to the broad-reaching effect of OB, outcomes can influence the future inputs of an organization.

One of the most relevant outcomes to the thesis that is mentioned in the model is Task Performance. As the thesis aims to look into aspects such as performance and capabilities of employees, potentially with the help of the OB model, a clear set of inputs and processes can be mapped out, to further understand and identify issues and opportunities within their everyday work life.

As the model looks into three different progressive levels, individual, group and organization, it potentially enables the research to get a clearer understanding of the social construction of employees of the Digital Department. Even though the thesis focuses on the department overall, it is impossible to deny the individual experience, and how individuals shape behavior within the complex picture of an organization. As individuals come with a defined set of attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs or motivations, their social and professional interactions influence the overall group and organizational behavior.

Therefore, using the insights of the OB model, behavioral elements that influence performance, capabilities and overall general maturity of the department could be mapped at a certain level, to potentially generate a list of recommendations for future change and improvements.

The benefit of implementing the OB model lies also in its complexity. Each variable within the model is described in detail and besides empirical evidence, they are connected with associated theories that present and explain the nature of each variable.

Relation between the theories

Both theories selected, P-CMM and the OB model, are discipline-based theories that bring industry specific knowledge, structure and evidence. However, each of them is onset in different phases of research (*Figure 8*) and serves different purposes. As the research gravitates around the topic of organizational maturity, P-CMM (Level 2 maturity) is the main theory that shapes the research, implicitly the data collection phase. Therefore, it is institutionalized prior to data collection, and remains a main overarching theory throughout the research. The OB model is introduced mainly during the analysis phase, where together P-CMM is used to identify, explain and interpret the research findings. The main role of P-CMM is to determine the maturity of the organization, whereas the OB model identifies and explains elements regarding performance and capabilities as subsets of maturity.

Both theories are used interchangeably during analysis and going forward, together with auxiliary literature identified during the literature review phase.

		RESEARCH PHASE			
		DATA COLLECTION	DATA ANALYSIS	INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS
THEORIES	P-CMM	People Capability Maturity Model			
	OB MODEL		Organizational Behavior Model		
	Auxiliary literature			Auxiliary literature (literature review)	
Usage and relation		P-CMM : define researchable constructs.	<p>P-CMM: analyse constructs to evaluate the level of maturity.</p> <p>OB MODEL: identify inputs within P-CMM that influence performance and capabilities of employees.</p>	<p>P-CMM: explain and interpret findings against Maturity Level 2.</p> <p>OB: Explain and Interpret findings from P-CMM that influence performance and capabilities of employees.</p> <p>Auxiliary literature: support the explanation and interpretation of findings, together with the selected theories.</p>	P-CMM, OB, Auxiliary literature: present a list of potential recommendations to increase the level of maturity and improve overall performance and employee capabilities.

Figure 8. Relation between theories and their usage

V. Methodology

The methodology chapter contains all procedures adopted throughout the thesis, from elaborating on the research questions, defining the research design, choosing and implementing a data collection and analysis method. According to Bryman (2021), the methodology chapter should give clear and detailed explanations on the processes used during the study, which should be broad enough so that the study could potentially become replicable.

The methodology section combines two elements from the Creswell & Creswell (2023) framework for design (Figure 4): the Designs and the Research methods, additionally to the already defined Philosophical worldviews. Each element from the Research Methods model is addressed in different designated sections, namely the Research questions definition, Data Collection, Analysis and Interpretation of findings. Validation will be addressed in each individual section, and more detailed throughout the Discussions chapter.

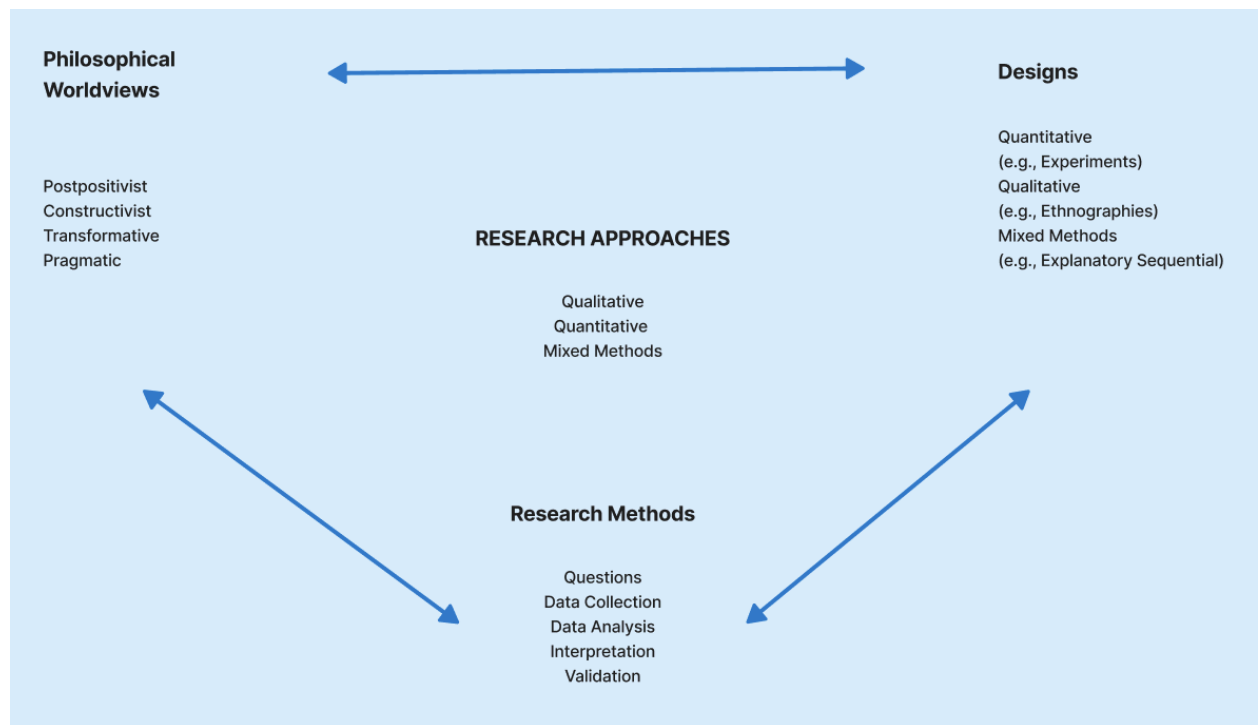


Figure 4. A framework for Research - The interconnections of Worldviews, Design, and Research Methods. From *Research Design* (6th Edition, p.6) by J.W. Creswell & J.D. Creswell, 2023, SAGE Publications. Copyright [2023] by SAGE Publications

1. Research questions

With the Problem and Purpose Statement formulated, the identified LR areas of interest, choice of philosophical assumptions and theoretical lenses defined, formulating actionable Research Questions(RQ) comes as a follow up. Through the Introduction chapter of the thesis, the RQs have been briefly mentioned, following that in this section a detailed view is being presented.

Following the Creswell & Creswell (2023) model of relations between the identified Problem, defined Purpose Statement and RQs (*Figure 2*), the latter are used to narrow the study into concrete questions to be answered with researchable information.

Similarly, Bryman (2021) defines RQs as ‘explicit statement of what you intend to find out about’, which narrows down the area of interest by explicitly figuring out what to research.

The formulated questions are as follows:

RQ1: What is the employee's experience of organizational maturity in the Digital Department of Salling Group, as reflected through the workforce-related practices of P-CMM Level 2 Maturity?

RQ1.1: Which workforce-related practices are perceived as barriers or enablers of employee performance and capabilities?

RQ2: How can the current organizational maturity of the Digital Department of Salling Group be understood when positioned within the levels of the Organizational Behavior model (individual, group, organization), and how might the variables of OB, in turn, shape the department's maturity?

RQ3: How can the level of organizational maturity be increased in the Digital Department of Salling Group?

Bryman (2021) presents further a general list of evaluation criteria for determining the quality of RQs, such as: respecting the scope of the thesis, be researchable, connected with theories and previous research and be linked with each other.

Firstly, each of the questions is formulated around the central phenomenon and defined problem statement, namely organizational maturity, and how the employees of the Digital Department in Salling Group experience it.

As previously established, a mainly deductive approach is to be implemented throughout the thesis, meaning the RQs are formulated to investigate the central phenomenon using actionable questions, with the help of the chosen theoretical lenses: P-CMM and the OB model.

The questions are linked with each other, using both a descriptive and exemplary nature. As no previous evidence of maturity assessment in the Digital Department exists, RQ1 initiates research to describe the lived experience of employees, by evaluating it based on the Maturity Level 2 of P-CMM. The aim of the exploratory sub-question RQ1.1 is to further research how/whether the experienced organizational maturity influences performance and capabilities of employees - which can be understood using both theoretical lenses, P-CMM and the OB model.

RQ2 enables an exploratory perspective of research, by connecting the two theoretical lenses to present and interpret the findings, potentially to map an interconnected relation between the two - whether/how P-CMM and the OB model influence each other. Here the findings from RQ1 and RQ1.1 are plotted on the OB model and related with P-CMM literature to investigate a potential relation between the two theories.

Lastly, RQ3 uses both descriptive and explanatory elements, as its aim is to describe from the findings what KPAs should be either implemented or modified to increase the level of maturity in the Digital Department of Salling Group. The RQ addresses both theories and additionally the auxiliary literature.

In a simplified version, all RQs follow a cascade model, each of them being connected and interdependent of the previous question's findings. They could be seen as representing different stages in the research process, RQ1 (together with RQ1.1) describing and understanding the current practice, RQ2 connecting maturity with organizational behavior and RQ3 recommending and identifying potential areas of improvements.

2. Research Design: Case study

Research design is part of the three part framework presented by Creswell & Creswell (2023) in the Philosophy of Science section, with the triangulation between the Philosophical worldviews, Designs and Research Methods (*Figure 4*). This section focuses on the deliberate decision on the type of research study and how it influences the research methods, such as the choice of data collection and data analysis. As Creswell & Creswell (2023) present, the research designs are the type of inquiry within a research approach that provide the direction of the study, or as some might see them as “strategies of inquiry”.

The chosen approach for this thesis is the qualitative case study. A case study is a detailed view and analysis on a particular single case, centered around the particular nature of the case being researched (Bryman, 2021). Bryman further presents case studies as usually being associated with an organization or community, here the emphasis usually is set upon “intensive examination of the setting”. Creswell & Creswell (2023) supports the definition, additionally specifying further characteristics such as the bound in time and place (or setting) of a case study.

Case study is a suitable research design for the thesis as it enables the study to get a detailed view of a particular case. As the study is centered around a particular organization (context) - the Digital Department in Salling Group, the research is concerned with uncovering and understanding the particular construction of reality of the employees, and how the central phenomenon of organizational maturity has an impact on their performance and capabilities. Using detailed contexts of the particular case, the research can benefit from gathering an in depth-view of the inquired scenario, which provides rich findings and understandings of the experienced reality in the current organizational maturity context.

At the same time, using the constructivist philosophical assumption, the case study can help uncover the meanings of the shared lived experiences, compared to a positivist view where case studies are seen more like experiments or empirical evidence (Sena, 2024).

Bryman (2021) addresses that there is no particular formula in defining or choosing a case study, however the RQs play an important role in guiding the decision of adopting a case study research, ‘as the more your questions seek to explain some contemporary circumstances (e.g. ‘how’ or ‘why’ some social phenomenon works) the more the case study research will be relevant’. The source further defines the case study as an empirical method where the boundaries between the phenomenon to be studied and the context may not be clearly evident. This aligns closely with the social constructivist and interpretivist philosophical perspectives, as the case study approach emphasizes the inseparability (or vagueness) of the human experience and their social context. From this standpoint, the thesis sees knowledge and personal experiences as contextually co-constructed through social interactions, making the case study research approach particularly suitable for exploring the lived experiences of participants and their perspectives relating the context with the central phenomenon.

Sena (2024) and Bryman (2021) present the different types of case studies and their purpose, based on the classification of cases developed by Robert Yin (Yin, 2018 as cited in Sena, 2024 p.72). Due to thesis constraints (time and scope), the research will adopt a single case format, limiting the research to observe and analyze data from a single social phenomenon, namely investigating the organizational maturity from the perspective of employees within the Digital Department of Salling Group. The selected case study qualifies for a meso level, as the research focuses on explaining and understanding a case that is ‘more or less large, or

more or less complex organizations or communities or groups of people are studied in relation to a particular problem, process or social phenomenon' (Sena, 2024).

Furthermore, in terms of case study designs, the thesis adopts what Bryman (2021) and Sena (2024) describe as a representative or typical case study. More specifically, it aligns with Yin (Yin, 2009, as cited in Bryman, 2021, p. 241) notion of an exemplifying case, where the aim is to capture the circumstances and conditions of an ordinary, commonplace scenario.

The case can be considered exemplifying or representative, as the researched central phenomenon is related to the broader field of organizational development and change, as reflected in the new initiatives undertaken by Salling Group. This nonetheless makes it relevant for better understanding the current situation of the Digital Department and how well it could potentially align in the future with the large organizational goals.

Secondly, the case contains revelatory elements, providing the opportunity to investigate a social phenomenon that has been previously inaccessible (Bryman, 2021; Sena, 2024). It could be seen as revelatory, due to lack of previous organizational maturity assessment within the Digital Department, therefore providing insights related to constructs that have not been researched before in the exact same context.

Another perspective on case studies is presented by Flyvbjerg (2006), which outlines the roles of case studies in human learning, and how they are used in producing knowledge that develop people from “rule-based beginners to virtuoso experts”. Research on case studies (Flyvbjerg, 2006) addresses a list of misunderstandings to argue for the role and importance of adopting case studies as a research approach, and its role in human learning. The research starts from gradually addressing different aspects of the Dictionary of Sociology (Abercrombie et al., 1984 in Flyvbjerg, 2006) definition on case studies:

Case Study. The detailed examination of a single example of a class of phenomena, a case study cannot provide reliable information about the broader class, but it may be useful in the preliminary stages of an investigation since it provides hypotheses, which may be tested systematically with a larger number of cases. (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 1984, p. 34)

These misunderstandings are examined by analysing individual elements from the above-presented definition, which Flyvbjerg (2006) criticizes as being oversimplified and grossly misleading. Further each misunderstanding is outlined, alongside the approach adopted in the thesis.

Theory versus practical knowledge

The first misunderstanding discusses the contrast between the context independent (theoretical knowledge) and context dependent (practical knowledge), considering the first one as more valuable compared to the latter. Flyvbjerg (2006) sees context independent as bringing a rule-based beginner level into human learning, whereas “context dependent knowledge and experience are at the very heart of expert activity” or as achieving the so-called virtuoso level, by developing “tacit skills”. The thesis adopts a series of theories (context-independent knowledge) that shapes the structure of the research, such as looking into industry-specific knowledge and selecting a list of constructs to be inquired. However, as previously specified, the study only uses context independent knowledge as a model of framework, instead of absolute truths, or universals. The study focuses on the social construction of reality, where context independent knowledge provides the foundation level for a deeper understanding of the context dependent knowledge, precisely the lived experiences of employees and their perceptions.

Generalization

The next misunderstanding addressed the lack of generalization in case study designs, which are not seen as valuable contributions to scientific development. Flyvbjerg (2006) addresses this misconception from the perspective of common research practice in theory testing, questioning whether due to the context-dependent and particular nature of case studies, such research can produce theory testing outcomes that are generalized. Flyvbjerg further discusses the overrated value of generalization, whereas “the force of example is underestimated”. Firstly, concerning generalization, as the thesis focuses on the social constructivist worldview part of a qualitative research approach, the study does not aim to produce a statistical generalization, as compared to a positivist philosophical assumption. However, as Bryman (2021) presents, generalization can be achieved in qualitative studies if the aim is to generalize based on theory. As the thesis adopts a mainly deductive approach, the findings will be compared to the choice of theory and the LR, however giving room to potentially emerging themes if needed to contribute to scientific development.

Reflexivity

Another misconception is that case studies contain a bias toward verification, representing the researcher’s preconceived notion. Flyvbjerg (2006) demonstrates that case studies do not contain a higher verification bias compared to other methods, however, “experience indicates that the case study contains a greater bias towards falsification” - which is seen as “critical reflexivity” in social science. Reflexivity is the practice of examining one’s own ‘embodied subjectivities’ in order to gain new insights into research (Longhurst, 2009 as cited in Bryman, 2019, p.1200). Creswell & Creswell (2023) also provide a definition of reflexivity, additionally mentioning the two important aspects required in discussing it, from the perspective of the inquirer (researcher).

Firstly is the mention of previous experience with the research problem, or with the participants and setting, secondly explaining how these experiences might potentially shape the interpretation of the results during the study.

To address reflectivity it is important to mention that the researcher has previously been an intern in the organization, prior to conducting the current study. This has facilitated the study collaboration, by having contacts and connections in the department. During the previous experience in the Digital Department, the inquirer did not work or study related to the field of organizational maturity, but mostly in the area of User Experience Design and Digital Strategy definition. The latter however signaled the potential value of investigating the more general layer within an organization, in how HCM supports the implementation of strategies in the department.

Further aspects of reflexivity and the potential advantages or disadvantages will be further presented during the study.

Case Strategy

Another misconception of adopting case study research is that case studies are good for generating hypotheses, however other methods are needed to test and build theories (Flyvbjerg, 2006). The article demonstrates that case studies are useful for both generating and testing hypotheses, where the theory testing and building aspect reinforces the previously discussed critical aspect of generalization. As previously presented based on the Bryman (2021) categorization of case studies (exemplifying or typical case study with revelatory aspects), the thesis does not aim to generate a theoretical perspective, as in grounded theory.

However, by adopting a case study approach and acquiring a rich description of the particular case (and the context dependent knowledge) a parallel between the findings and the theories can be investigated.

Nevertheless, by using the case study, the limitations of each theoretical lens can be uncovered when interpreting the findings.

The quality criteria in qualitative research, in particular in case study designs is a topic of debate. The method of triangulation is presented by Sena (2024), where multiple theoretical approaches are introduced to validate the research. Theoretical triangulation is achieved by combining two deductive theoretical lenses (P-CMM and the OB model), together with auxiliary literature to avoid potential bias or subjectiveness in analysing the findings. Bryman (2021) additionally mentions that adopting a theoretical triangulation, reliability can be increased as well. Ultimately, the criteria of reliability will be addressed by presenting a detailed view of each implemented methodological method, namely in data collection and data analysis.

While the case study is a well-suited research design to implement, besides of its great strengths of capturing the social construction of reality, it is not without any weakness or limitation. As with most qualitative research designs, case study can be time consuming, which calls for a limiting sampling size that potentially introduces bias.

3. Sampling and recruiting

Finding the right sample size and type is an important aspect to be determined prior to the data collection. Defining the sampling strategy, not only potentially removes bias, but also assures that the research addressed the right participants.

When discussing sampling strategies, Bryman (2021) mentions that qualitative research tends to revolve around non-probability samplings, most likely purposive sampling.

Purposive sampling aims to identify the right candidates or locations for the research, in order to understand the problem and the research questions, as opposed to random sampling as in quantitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). It's called 'purposive' as it intentionally involves identifying the specific reasoning for choosing cases, such as people, organizations, places etc. (Bryman, 2021). As further explained, the RQs should give clear indications of the group to be selected for research, and the participants are strategically selected based on the kind of information they can provide for the study.

Sampling in case study designs is a topic of discussion for a lot of researchers, considering the topic of generalization. Bryman (2021) discusses this issue of sampling in case studies, reinforcing again the idea that outcome of a case study is not to general findings to a larger population, therefore a random sampling approach would not be representative to the case being studied.

Furthermore, Bryman (2021) addresses the two levels of sampling, first addressing the sampling context. The context of the thesis is clearly defined and recognizable from the defined set of RQs - explicitly the Digital Department in Salling Group. Next, the second level is the sample participants, which is represented by the actual employees of the department.

The type of sampling in this study falls under the big non-sequential or "fixed sampling strategy" type/category (Bryman, 2021), as it is predetermined before the start of data collection and it remains fixed through the research.

Multiple sampling strategies have however been considered before contacting participants for data collection. To better understand the different scenarios, in *Figure 9* the organizational design of the department and the representative areas can be observed.

As the Digital Department is part of the bigger 'IT & Digital' business areas in Salling Group, the highest immediate authority in Digital is the Head of Digital, which is a level 3 leadership position in the large Salling Group leadership context (CEO - level 1, CTO - level 2).

The Head of Digital leads 5 department areas, such as Digital Delivery, UX Design, Frontend Development, Digital Backend Development and Product Ownership. Each department area has a "line manager" who is responsible for the representative area and the team. Each team consists of multiple employees, each having different levels of professional experience and tenure or seniority in the company. Different department areas have more or less professional levels, but generally, the ladder starts from Junior, Middle, Senior, Lead, Architect, Manager (as in the line manager)*. (*Note that this is a generalized view over the different areas within Digital, as different teams might have slight variations in their professional levels. Also the organizational design is representative of the spring of 2025).

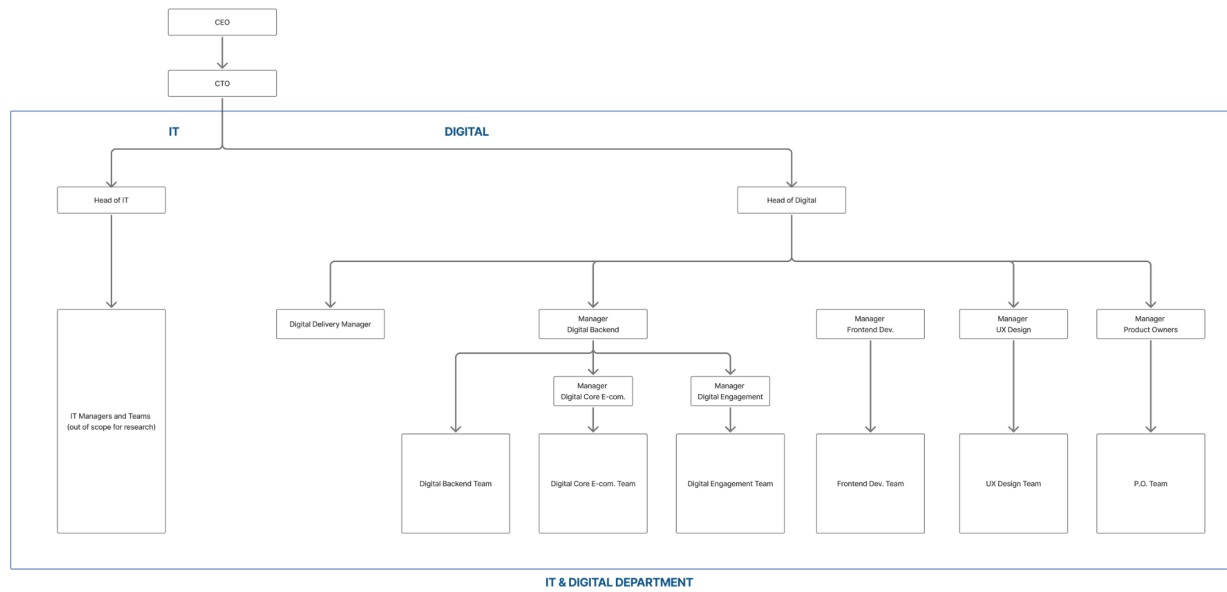


Figure 9. The Organizational design in Digital

The ideal scenario represented a full maximum variation or stratified purposive sampling across all areas of the department.

In the ideal scenario (Figure 10), multiple criterions would be considered during sampling:

- Each department area has to be represented;
- At least one employee from a Junior and Senior professional level per department area has to be represented;
- Consider a high variability in terms of seniority in the company (for how long an employee has been in the department);
- Include the Head of Digital data collection.

The scope of defining these inclusion criterions is to catch all potential variations from the department and the representative areas, as different styles of management, the level of professional experience and tenure could potentially influence the lived experiences and the construct of reality of employees within each team, and how performance and capabilities are handled across different department areas.

With these inclusion criterions, an estimated number of 20 participants would be selected for data collection.

This ideal scenario comes, of course, with big limitations in its implementation. Considering the independent nature of research (the researcher is not part of the company), there is limited access to human resources. Secondly, employees are not required to participate in the data collection process, therefore the probability of attracting such a high number of participants is unlikely. Lastly, the biggest limitation of the ideal scenario is the lengthy duration required to sample participants, and both to collect and analyse the data, which is not doable for a single researcher.

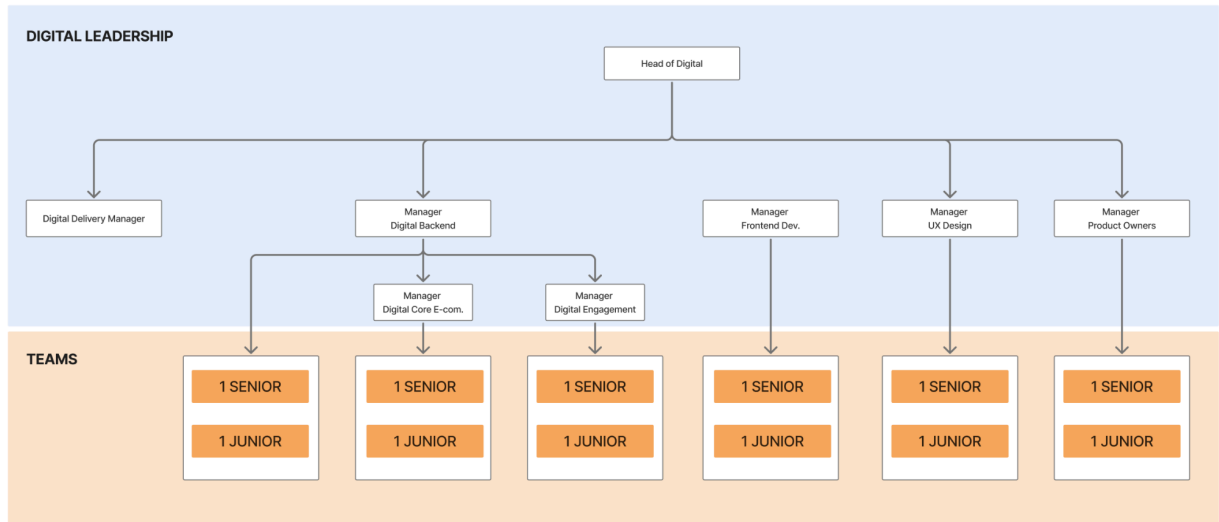


Figure 10. The Ideal sampling scenario

A second more realistic sampling strategy is developed, still having a maximum variability and stratified type, but a more condensed version (Figure 11). In the realistic strategy, the inclusion criteria are:

- Select at least one employee from each department area
- Pick a varied distribution of professional levels - make sure to select diverse participants from juniors to managers
- Pick a varied distribution of tenure, make sure to select at least 1 newly hired employee, to employees that have been hired in the company for multiple years.

With these sample criteria, a minimum of 6 participants would be selected. Even though this sampling strategy is still influenced by most of the limitations of the 'ideal scenario', it is more attainable as there is less pressure in mobilizing a large number of participants. Therefore, the 'realistic sampling' strategy is implemented for data collection.

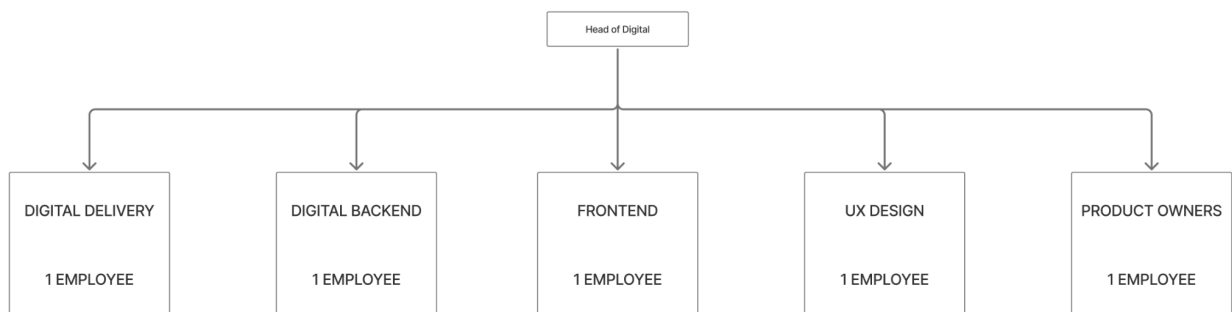


Figure 11. The Realistic sampling scenario

A questionnaire has been developed to assure adherence to the inclusion criteria (Figure 12). The questionnaire consisted of multiple fields - such as the suitable date, time and location for participating in the

study, together with questions regarding department area, professional level, seniority in the company and personal details for further contact.

Before the fields are completed, the questionnaire contains information regarding the scope of the research, the duration of the data collection sessions (up to 90 minutes), and most importantly, the participants are specifically informed about the anonymization factor to protect their identity.

EMAIL

LOCATION

INVITEE TIME ZONE

Central European Time

QUESTIONS

What department area are you part of? If none of the options apply, please write the option that represents your position by checking the 'Other' option.

What is your seniority within the role? If none of the options apply, please write the one that represents your experience by checking the 'Other' option.

For how long you've been part of Salling Group, and specifically the Digital Department?

Could you please share your phone number? In case of technical difficulties in an online setting, or access within the office location, it would be easier to get in contact.

Figure 12. Questionnaire for participant sampling

25 Potential participants have been individually contacted using LinkedIn, from where 10 expressed their interest to participate in the study and filled the questionnaire.

Looking at their responses, 6 out of 7 department areas are represented, with all professional experience levels represented, and seniority in the Digital Department varying between less than a year to over five and a half years. Each participant could choose between the preferred medium for participating in the study, therefore 6 participants wish to attend in person and 4 using online platforms.

Figure 13 represents the final version of the sampling distribution of participants, in a simplified version that protects their identity.

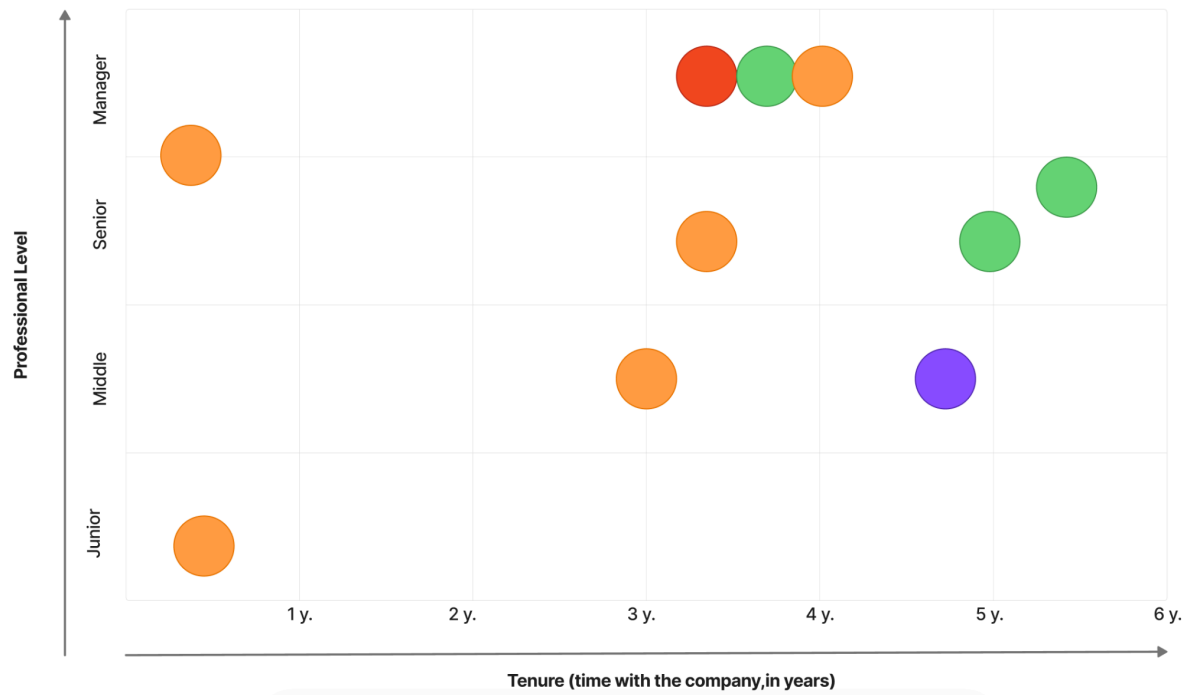


Figure 13. The Final Distribution of Participants

4. Data Collection Method: Qualitative interviews

Data collection is the following step in research, which Bryman (2021) defines as ‘gathering data from the sample with the aim of providing answers to the research questions’. Further Bryman generates an overview of different perspectives while choosing data collection methods, where strictness levels are associated with the scope of research and theoretical lenses. As the aim of qualitative research is to capture a rich and detailed view of the studied phenomenon, the collection methods need to enable the capture of substance. Focus groups, participant observations or qualitative interviewing are some of the most popular data collection methods used in qualitative social research.

The choice of method not only has to capture a rich description, but to support the choice of research design (case study) and to provide an answer to the RQs.

An additional list of criterias has been defined when evaluating the different options for data collection methods, such as: efficiency, access, capability to capture the data. As the thesis is bound in time constraints, it is important to choose a method of collection that is realistic to be implemented (not a time consuming method). Second, the researchers should have access to the setting or the participants enough to collect sufficient data for answering the RQs. Lastly, the method needs to be suitable for a single researcher, therefore it should not require the researcher to focus on too many aspects of data collection simultaneously, or to be outnumbered.

Ethnography and participant observation are a great data collection method that enable the researcher to ‘capture the meaning that people give to things’, while being part of the naturalistic setting of the research (Bryman, 2021). While participant observation and ethnographic methods employ multiple forms of data collection (observation, interaction with participants, interviews, note-taking etc.) they are limited in the requirement that the researcher has to be fully immersed in the research context, especially in its physicality aspect. As previously mentioned, the research is performed independently, without the researcher having prolonged access to the context of research - the Digital Department office area in Salling Group. Even in the limited times that the researcher could organize to be present in the physical setting, it would not be sufficient to capture the full spectrum picture.

Focus groups are another potentially useful method to consider. Bryman (2021) defines focus groups as ‘a method for facilitating discussion on a particular topic or issue that involves more than one, usually at least four interviewees [...] they are explicitly concerned with revealing how the group participants view the social world in relation to their own life experiences’. By using this method, the participants could engage in an open discussion where each other’s opinions and perspectives on the central phenomenon can be addressed. Using focus groups could give a great extent of detail when analysing and interpreting the findings against the OB model, as the method enables data collection at multiple levels, the individual and the group (Bryman, 2021). This approach could engage discussions and foster debate sessions around a shared vision of organizational maturity. However, it requires a significant degree of planning and coordination, which can be a challenge given the difficulty to accommodate each participant’s schedule. Nonetheless, the method is demanding for a single researcher, as it is difficult as a single person to observe, take notes and initiate discussions while in a group setting.

Bryman (2021) highlights that often qualitative case studies are linked with descriptive data collection methods, such as interviews, which aim to produce an intensive and detailed examination of a case. Qualitative interviewing is seen as a popular option of data collection when the researcher can’t directly

observe the participant, and the different mediums of collecting data are possible (face-to-face, telephone, e-mail or internet interviews) (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The method still allows for a rich capture of data, where the participants are engaged to share their thoughts and perceptions on the researched topic, however interviewing allows the researcher to have more control over asking the questions and controlling the conversation (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Qualitative interviewing differs significantly from standardized interviewing in quantitative research. It is characterised as flexible and dynamic in nature, holds a greater interest in the interviewees point of view, researchers often encourage spontaneous discussion, which can depart significantly from the interview guide (Bryman, 2021). These characteristics are in direct alignment with social constructivism, making qualitative interviewing a valuable research method to implement. The interactive and dialogue nature of interviewing allows the participants of the study to articulate their experiences, adding a detailed view of their impressions of the topic.

Nevertheless, with implementing qualitative interviewing the study can adapt to the requirements of the participant to provide flexibility in the mediums of data collection: face-to-face and online.

According to Bryman (2021), when implementing qualitative interviewing, there are two main types that can be adopted, such as semi-structured and unstructured interviewing. The thesis implements a semi-structured interview type due to multiple considerations. Firstly, the thesis follows a deductive (potentially abductive) theoretical perspective, institutionalizing P-CMM and the OB model early on in the research process. As previously outlined, the models provide a list of constructs to be investigated, which must be addressed during the interviewing process to ensure that data collected responds directly to the RQs. Without a predefined list, discussion topics or researcher intervention, the collected data is probable to be incomplete or irrelevant. Secondly, by implementing a rough structure to data collection, a level of consistency throughout participants and collection mediums can be maintained, while still allowing for individual variation in responses. Nonetheless, semi-structured interviews are seen as a professional conversation designed to access a participant's lived world, where knowledge is actively co-constructed through dialogue rather than merely extracted (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). This ultimately aligns with the constructivist worldview, by capturing the lived experience of employees using their own words and direct perceptions of reality.

However even with a degree of structure in place (a rough interview guide), the participants are encouraged to detail on their construction of reality and their perceptions. The interview guide is mainly used as a 'check list' for the researcher to make sure all topics are covered during the interview, which Bryman (2021) refers to as a 'list of issues that the researcher wants to address'. Even with the guide in place, participants are always encouraged to revisit previous topics and add more details or nuances if further ideas arise.

Both Bryman (2021) and Creswell & Creswell (2023) provide detailed descriptions of how to develop and use an interview protocol. Before creating the protocol, a revisiting of the formulated RQs and choice of theory was essential. In *Figure 14* an overview of the main protocol sections and the scope is presented, together with a time estimate for each section. The full interview protocol with notes and auxiliary questions is available in Appendix C.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL PHASE	SCOPE	CONSTRUCTS
<p><u>Pre-interview / Introduction (est. 25 minutes)</u></p> <p>General: (est. 2-3 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce the researcher; • Remind the participant of the scope and duration for the session; • Remind the participant that the interview is anonymised; • Ask for permission to audio record the session (and explain how the recording will be handled); • Are there any questions?; • Start recording. <p>Background and professional experience: (est. 5-10 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go through each point from the pre-interview questionnaire • Describe the role in the department • Additional information? <p>Introduction: (est.10-12 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the existing processes and practices from the department • Discuss about personal motivators & feelings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build alignment of what to expect during the session. • Make sure the questionnaire information is accurate. • Get an initial impression of the environment and the participant's state. • Ice breaker and build an initial rapport between the participant and interviewer (establish a comfortable environment for the interviews). • Understand if there are any initial concerns or factors that can influence the quality of the participation. • Build some context for the actual interview. <p>Introduction for P-CMM & the OB model.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General background & Professional experience • Practices and Processes - P&C • Motivators and Feelings - M&F
<p><u>Interview (est. 60 minutes)</u></p> <p>Part 1 : P-CMM Level 2 Maturity constructs (est. 30-40 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staffing • Communication & coordination • Work environment • Performance management • Training & development • Compensation <p>Part 2 : OB elements (est. 20-30 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisational culture • Change (change readiness or change management in the department) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect data for each defined construct. • Understand the personal experience of the participant in relation to the defined constructs. • Look for aspects such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • past experiences that can shape the current one, • influence of performance and capabilities, • feelings and perceptions • Recognise contradictions in discourse - address them if encountered. • Ask for details, build more context. • Explicitly ask for recommendations : <i>if you could, what would you change/ shift in the current department approach to generate a better internal capability management and performance?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staffing - Staff. • Communication & Coordination - C&C • Work environment - W.E • Performance management - P.M • Training & Development - T&D • Compensation - Comp. • Organizational Culture - O.C • Change - Chg.
<p><u>Debriefing (est. 5 minutes)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address any misunderstandings • Does the participant have any questions? • Stop recording - save file • Thank you message. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check for any area where the participant might not have clarity - are there more information to add? • Allow the participant address any concerns or interests in regards to the topic of research. • Close down the interview session. 	

Figure 14 - Interview Protocol Overview

The protocol begins with the ‘Pre-interview/Introduction’ phase. It establishes the context of the interview, clarifies the purpose and addresses the expectations or concerns of both parties - the participant and the interviewer. This phase is essential for building an initial connection with the participant, establishing trust, and gathering a sense of the participant’s attitude, comfort level or engagement.

The main Interview protocol section is split into two parts, both addressing different aspects of the theoretical lenses. P-CMM and the KPAs associated with Level 2 maturity are examined in the first part, where each KPA is introduced individually as a topic of discussion. The participant is asked to elaborate how the KPA is currently addressed in the department, the personal experience and impressions, but also encouraged to present any historical aspects that could influence the current state. There is no strict order of topics, therefore the protocol is adjusted to address directly the natural flow of discussion.

Descriptions and definition of terms are presented in the protocol, in case of unclarity for specific terms or the answer of the participant does not seem to match the intended purpose.

The second part covers the topics of Change and Culture, which represent a combined view of both the P-CMM and the OB theoretical lenses. Again, same as Part 1, the topics are presented broadly, encouraging the participant to provide a detailed description and reflect critically. In case the participant does not give a detailed answer, some guiding questions are listed to provide different nuances in building a more detailed description.

Nevertheless, the Interview Part 2 ends with asking the participant to provide recommendations to improve the organizational maturity, by changing or shifting the current state of the department to generate a better capability and performance of employees. This is an essential aspect of the interview, as it forces the participant to critically reflect on all previously discussed topics, review them, supplement with additional information if needed, and lastly envision change for the future.

When all topics are covered and the protocol is double checked to verify no area has been omitted, the interview reaches the debriefing protocol phase. Here the participant is encouraged to ask any question in case of personal interests or unclarity throughout the interview. If no questions are asked, the interview and the audio recording ends.

Throughout the whole interview session, the researcher uses note-taking as a tool to monitor the progression of the discussion and to remember aspects or particular interests that need to be addressed later during the session. Nevertheless, the notes are used to evaluate whether all constructs have been checked at the end of the session. It is important to mention that however during the data analysis phase the interview notes will not be evaluated - the analysis will solely focus on the transcript of the interviews.

In the end, 10 semi-structured qualitative interviews have been collected - 6 in person and 4 online. On average all interviews lasted close to 90 minutes. In some special cases the interview had to be reduced to around 60 minutes. There has not been significant variations of differences in collection when comparing the two mediums - face to face and online, as the interview protocol was flexible and dynamic to accommodate both. The main difference is the quality of capturing non-verbal cues or a more detailed observation of the participant, however this is not an aspect of interest for data analysis.

Initially the protocol has been developed to separate the perspective of managers to the one of employees (team members), as personal experience related to the constructs might vary. Yet, due to limited scope of the thesis and the small sample size, such separation would overcomplicate analysis and interpretation of findings.

Although the qualities and strengths of implementing semi-structured qualitative interviewing have been acknowledged, several notable limitations emerged during and after the data collection process. As Creswell & Creswell (2023) note, participants vary in their levels of articulation and perception. During data collection, some provided a richer and more complex view of their experiences, whereas others offered more limited responses. This can be taxing on the researcher, as more interventions and creativity had to be employed to extract a rich answer.

Nevertheless, the qualitative interviewing is a time consuming method, as each interview session required a preparation session (review of participant questionnaire, review of protocol, preparation of tools and materials for the interview) and a reflection session right after the interview. Additionally, each interview requires manipulation and transcription before the actual analysis part.

5. Data analysis method: Thematic Analysis

To make sense of the previously collected dataset, going further it has to be analysed. Yet, finding the right analysis method or protocol is essential to properly capture the essence of the data, and respond to the set RQs.

Bryman (2021) presents the act of analysing data as an act of reduction, where a large body of information is boiled down by the researcher to make sense of it. Further, the advantageous nature of capturing depth and richness in data using qualitative research is discussed.

In quantitative research, data analysis is seen as a linear process that starts after the data collection strategy has been fulfilled, whereas in contrast, qualitative data analysis strategies are seen as a continuous and iterative process that revisits the data set and can influence the data collection (as in inductive analysis, such as Grounded Theory) (Bryman, 2021). Some of the most common methods for analysing qualitative data are narrative analysis, thematic analysis, grounded theory or other methods simply called 'qualitative data analysis'.

Most common qualitative data analysis procedures use the concept of 'coding' or 'indexing' as an essential aspect of the analysis process, such as in Grounded Theory (GT) and Thematic Analysis (Bryman, 2021). Creswell & Creswell (2023) define coding as 'the process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks [...]it involves taking text data or pictures gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term, often based in the actual language of the participant.'

As the research is guided by the institutionalization of theories, GT as an approach of qualitative data analysis is excluded, even though the approach is suitable for a constructivist world view, as the theory is grounded in the shared living experiences of the participants. GT follows the inductive analysis principles, where 'researchers seek to explain phenomena by collecting data until they no longer find cases that are inconsistent with a hypothetical explanation of a phenomena' (Bryman, 2021). Simply put, GT seeks to develop theories that are identified through data saturation, which are grounded in the data itself.

Narrative analysis is another method for analysing qualitative data, that in contrast to breaking the data into patterns and themes, looks at the whole meaning of the dataset, focusing on how people make sense of what happened and what is the consequence of the action (Bryman, 2021). However even if the method would allow for a rich understanding of the meaning behind a shared participant story, it is not suitable for the research. The lack of segmentation and pattern recognition makes it hard to directly answer the RQs.

Thematic Analysis (TA) uses coding as a process of analysing the data, similarly to GT, however TA is used essentially as a method of analysis, instead of potentially influencing the process of data collection (Bryman, 2021).

Braun & Clarke (2006) argue that TA should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis. They define TA as a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data, by organizing and describing the data set in rich details. Flexibility is seen as a great advantage of the method, enabling adaptation for a variety of research types. Therefore it can be applied easily within different analytical worldviews (paradigms) and whether or not there is a theoretical or technological knowledge guiding the research. Braun & Clarke (2006) argue that it can be a constructionist method of data analysis, 'which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of

discourses operating within society’. However, in TA reality is constructed by ‘searching for certain themes or patterns across an entire data set, rather than within a data item, such as an individual interview or interviews from one person, as in the case of biographical or case study forms of analysis, such as narrative analysis’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Since TA and qualitative research have been seen as easily subjective, Braun & Clarke (2006) emphasise the need of taking a number of deliberate decisions before beginning the analysis procedure, which should be explicitly mentioned to ensure transparency. Firstly, it is important to mention that the thesis will focus on a deductive or theoretical thematic analysis. Braun & Clarke (2006) define the approach as a ‘top-down way’, therefore focusing specifically on a detailed analysis of some aspects of data, where ‘TA would tend to be driven by the researcher’s theoretical or analytic interest in the area’. As mentioned in previous chapters, the thesis applies a set of chosen theoretical lenses to research and answer the predefined RQs, therefore the deductive approach allows the analysis to seek for patterns and themes within data that follow the theoretical lens and answer the RQs directly. However, as the thesis is open for a combination of deductive and abductive theoretical perspective, emerging themes or themes outside the defined categories are open for interpretation. If different themes form outside the defined list of constructs, then they will be mapped and interpreted. To be more specific, the defined list of constructs will represent the main themes or categories of interest. Within each theme, subthemes will emerge that can either be formed deductively or abductively.

Latent themes will be used to interpret the underlying meaning of the identified pattern, by corresponding the data to the theoretized literature. As defined, ‘the latent level goes beyond the semantic content of data, and starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations that are theoretized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During the analysis, the semantic level will be addressed first, by looking at what the data indicates, following the latent level where interpretation to the data is added by connecting the themes in relation to the selected literature.

As the thesis adopts a social constructionist worldview, the latent level of analysis looks deeper than words and speech, by diving into the sociocultural contexts, experiences and structures to understand the reality of employees from the Digital Department. The deductive theoretical approach connects the socially constructed patterns identified to the selected set of theories, ultimately answering the defined RQs.

Bryman (2021) briefly describes the general process of performing a TA analysis, however Braun & Clarke (2006) elaborate on a step-by-step approach (*Figure 15*) that guides the process of data analysis.

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Figure 15 - Phases of thematic analysis. From Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology by V. Braun and V. Clarke, 2006, Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), p.12, (<https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>). Copyright [2006] by Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd

Phase 1. Familiarizing yourself with your data

Starting first, as the interviews were audio recorded, the initial step is to transcribe each recording. The transcription of the data was done using an online software and verified manually to ensure the transcription is true to the original recording. Each interview transcription was anonymized to protect the identity of participants. If any mentions of names are identified in the transcripts, they are anonymised as well.

The pre-interview transcript section is not data that is going to be used for analysis, but used to understand more the context of the participant and their experiences. The transcription files range from 21-36 standard pages of collected data.

In the first TA analysis phase, familiarization of data is achieved both by proof-reading the transcription of the audio files and also thoroughly re-reading the transcriptions to fully immerse and gain a deeper understanding of the context. During the familiarization phase is where a significant limitation of the study is identified, namely the lack of human resources to handle all transcripts throughout the analysis. Verifying the transcriptions and re-reading the files at least twice took on average 5-6 hours per transcript, longer for longer transcripts. Here is where an executive decision has been taken to limit the scope of research to only 5 transcripts for the continuation of the TA. As the thesis is driven by a single researcher, the volume of required hours to analyse the entire dataset surpasses the time available to complete the thesis. The 5 transcripts are picked in a randomized order, without specific criterias in place.

The implications of this executive decision are further elaborated on in the Discussion's chapter of the thesis. Transcripts of interviews are available in Appendix D.

Phase 2. Generating initial codes

The second phase of TA is concerned with initial coding of the transcripts. After a thorough familiarization with the data in the previous analysis phase, here initial codes are created. As according to Braun & Clarke (2006), 'codes identify a feature of the data that appears interesting to the analysis, and refers to the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon'. The source further elaborated on the different types of coding, semantic or latent.

The second phase of the TA is further divided into multiple sections. Each transcript is added to a different file and placed in a table structure, one column representing the transcript and the other the area where codes can be added (Appendix E). While initially coding the transcripts, semantic coding was used as much as possible, making sure to capture the exact words used by the participant, and latent codes were used as sparse as possible, only when the actual wording used by participants did not generate a short and concise code. At this point of coding a little interpretation is used, to capture the exact experience of the participants. For each transcript a rich list of codes has been generated, coding as many items as possible that are related to the list of constructs/ deductive themes.

As the TA follows a deductive approach, the main themes of the analysis are already pre-defined, containing the list of constructs previously presented in the Data Analysis section (*Figure 14*). After all five transcripts were coded, a general list of codes was developed where under each deductive theme, the representative codes from all transcripts are listed (Appendix F).

Phase 3. Searching for themes

The third phase involves 'sorting the different codes into potential themes, and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes'. As the main themes of the analysis are already predefined due to the deductive approach (generated by the theoretical lenses institutionalized - the list of constructs), the main goal of this phase is to mainly determine the underlying sub-themes and to collate the codes into clusters of similar context.

This phase consisted of two iterations. Firstly, all codes were collated into sub-themes, following the concepts of homogeneity and heterogeneity (Braun & Clarke, 2006), meaning codes with a similar pattern were added to a sub-theme of similarity, and others of diverse or opposite pattern forming different sub-themes. If a code was suitable in multiple sub-themes, it was multiplied in all of them. Here pattern means a general idea of the subject matter, under the large umbrella, for example roles, processes, capabilities etc.

The second iteration involved creating an even deeper sub-division of the sub-theme, by creating categories of meaning within the divided sub-category. Again here the concepts of homogeneity and heterogeneity were used. Meaning is understood as the underlying significance, implication or interpretation of the particular set of codes. An example could be positive or negative effects of different roles, or different types of perceptions.

A detailed view of this phase for each deductive theme can be accessed in Appendix G.

Phase 4. Reviewing themes

Phase 4 consists of a final thorough review and refinement of the previously defined themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Again in this phase the previously mentioned criterions of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity are applied throughout the refinement and review.

According to the literature, this phase is organized at two different levels.

First, phase 4 starts the review and refinement at the level of codes. All codes from the sub-themes clusters have been evaluated to see whether they would make more sense into other clusters, or whether clusters can be collated to provide more meaning and a deeper description of the lived experience of employees in regards to the discussed construct.

At this level a lot of sub-theme clusters have been merged or some discarded in case they did not contribute to the meaning of another cluster or they did not provide enough evidence to support the formation of a sub-theme. This process consisted review of the codes and continuous revisit of the Phase 2 TA, where initial codes were created, to review the code together with the associated context of the transcript.

As an example, in theme 'Communication & Coordination (C&C)', initially in Phase 3 of TA, 'Sub-theme 1: Formalization of Communication & Coordination Process' clusters 'Roles and governance in C&C' and 'Positive progress (incomplete yet)' were created. After reviewing the clusters at the code level, it was easy to spot that cluster 'Roles and governance in C&C' was redundant due to original code context, therefore discarded; and codes in 'Positive progress (incomplete yet)' were allocated to another cluster - 'Development and improvements'.

At the second level, the attention was brought to a more 'macro' representation of the sub themes, reviewing and refining collation of clusters within a sub-theme. In this process, clusters have been again using the internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity judgement criterias. Following the new organization of

clusters, sub-themes had to be reevaluated. Some sub-themes were completely discarded and some suffered alterations in their meaning.

Taking the theme ‘Staffing’ as an example, in Phase 3 TA ‘Sub-theme 1: Staffing & Resource allocation’ contained 5 clusters of codes: ‘Perceptions of Staffing’, ‘Managers experience with Staffing’, ‘Need for staffing’, ‘Upcoming processes and improvements’ and ‘Allocation of resources’. In phase 4, only 3 clusters remained allocated to the same subtheme- the rest either merged or discarded : ‘Perceptions on staffing’, ‘Need for staffing’, ‘Upcoming processes and improvements’.

A detailed view of the Phase 4 TA is available in Appendix H.

Phase 5. Defining and naming themes

In this phase a final definition and refinement of the themes was performed. According to Braun & Clarke (2006) this phase focuses on identifying the essence of what each theme is about. This was the final check for the previously reviewed and refined clusters and subthemes in Phase 4, and review whether some connections of clusters within sub-themes makes sense. For example, during a thorough review, in the theme ‘Training & development (T&D)’ it made more sense to group the clusters referring to Managers and Management together, and separate them from the Employee related clusters, in this way emphasizing the different points of view on the subject matter. Another example of sub-themes emphasizing contrastful meanings is the theme ‘Change’, where clusters were reviewed and the sub-themes ‘Positive views on change’ and ‘Negative factors influencing change’ were developed.

In Figure 16 an overview of the final distribution of themes and sub-themes is available.

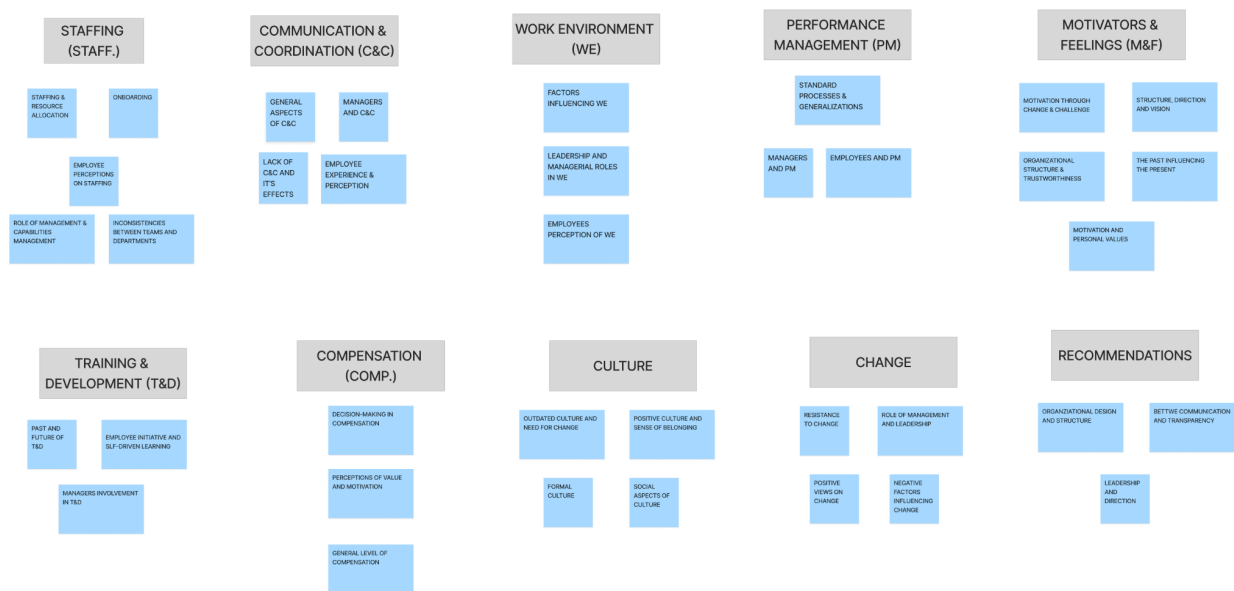


Figure 16. Final Thematic Analysis themes and sub-themes

After Phase 5 TA, a total of 10 themes and 37 sub-themes were developed, each containing multiple categories/clusters of codes.

VI. Presenting the findings

This chapter consists of the final phase of the TA framework by Braun & Clarke (2006). Here each theme will be presented and analysed, showcasing extracts to ‘demonstrate the prevalence of the theme’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006), more than just presenting their narrative description. In this final phase, the meaning of data goes beyond the semantic level, into the latent interpretation of themes, sub-themes and clusters.

The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate a detailed account on key experiences of employees from the Digital Department and how they make sense of the organizational maturity in connection with the defined set of constructs.

The chapter is structured around 9 themes and their sub-themes containing clusters of codes, representing patterns of experiences. Each theme is introduced and examined independently, at a latent level. This means it will not only be exemplified with codes (quotes), but interpret the deeper meaning of each collection of clusters. Direct quotation is used throughout the chapter to exemplify how the results are grounded in data. By adopting a latent level of interpretation, the analysis develops a richer description of findings, allowing the socially constructed nature of employee experiences to be explored beyond words, considering how language, context and interpretation interact. The interpretative level is a co-creation between the shared experiences of employees and their understanding of the central phenomenon, together with the analytical lens of the researcher.

The presentation of findings also serves as a knowledge basis for the sequential Discussions chapter, where the findings of the analysis are associated with the chosen set of theoretical lenses, LR and RQs.

Presenting and interpreting the themes

1. COMMUNICATION & COORDINATION (C&C)

C&C is a central theme where separation in perceptions is easily identified. A strong division of opinions in relation to management, the overall organization and the needed improvements is mapped from the employee perspective (*Figure 17*). From C&C, a generalized view of how things work in the department can be identified.

Nevertheless, the impressions that people have in regards to C&C is segmented to showcase the particular elements that either influence or are influenced by the lack of C&C practices. While employees have made some improvements in terms of how C&C is carried out by management (by taking a hands-on approach to supplement the lack of management involvement), there is still a clear need for improvement and change.

COMMUNICATION & COORDINATION (C&C)

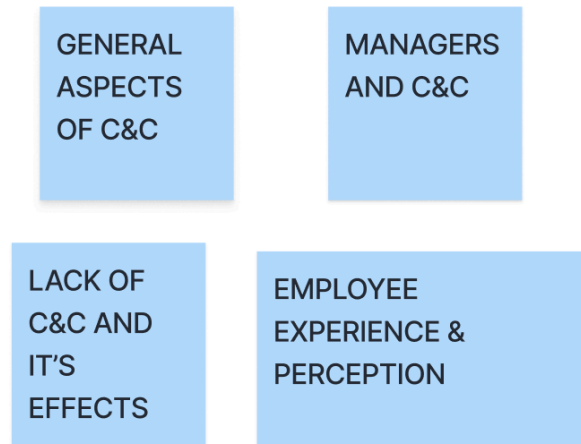


Figure 17. Theme 'Communication & Coordination'

The sub-theme 'Managers and C&C' pictured a negative perception of how managers handle C&C in the department, mainly being reactive to requests and not taking responsibility for the overall alignment of the department. The lived experiences of employees varies drastically, underlying a lack of consistency in management - based on the level of understanding of each manager in regards to the particular decision such as 'a lot of it (C&C), and maybe too much as well is dependant on the individual manager to communicate to their team'. This not only signifies a lack of equal understanding of the subject matter between managers, but ultimately a lack of single point of contact that centralizes all information and provides a single point of truth to all employees 'there is not a single point of communication across the department - it is dependant on each manager to C&C the teams'. This generates misalignment and frustration in employees.

This provides a ground for understanding the 'Lack of C&C and its effects' subtheme.

As managers are not actively engaged in keeping employees updated to the latest decisions, they feel a sense of confusion, disorientation and lose sense of the purpose behind their work, feeling like the discussions are more nuanced around monetary benefits of the company instead of producing real value to clients - 'so I don't know what's next, I know now', 'what is the purpose of this business', 'a lot of people talk money instead of value'. Unawareness of who makes decisions and how they are made creates a lack of alignment between teams, which ultimately influences the team performance and capabilities of employees.

Subtheme 'Employee Experiences & perceptions of C&C' shows that where managers do not get involved in handling C&C, employees become proactive and to figure out their work in collaboration with project managers or other responsible people. Employees underline the strong need to become better at aligned C&C practices, especially when addressing issues in alignment and planning for future activities.

2. STAFFING (STAFF.)

STAFF. Is one of the largest themes from the whole analysis (*Figure 18*). This is a significant area that affects how work is organized and managed in the department, and presents how employees are supported. The findings reveal mixed feelings about resource allocation, onboarding processes, role of managers and employee perceptions related to how human capital is handled.

Starting with 'Staffing & Resource allocation', upcoming improvements are foreseen in the department with the development of the new 'Digital Delivery Model' (DDM), which implies some essential restructuring of not only ways of working, but how HCM is handled in the department 'DDM - now requires managers to provide an overview of workforce allocation', 'now people can be rotated around', 'teams are starting to work more interdisciplinarily'. The DDM also imposes some critical aspects in terms of technical requirements, by aligning the technology stack around the department 'new tech stacks are adopted meaning people can work across things'. Employees state a clear need for additional staffing as they are spread too thin and can hardly keep up with the volume of work, 'there is a clear idea that we need more people', however it seems that only the head of department is the one that can add to the head count. This goes to show that leadership plays an essential role in defining the organizational design, directly influencing the capacities and performance of employees.

However, onboarding seems to be still a controversial topic, as outlined in subtheme 'Onboarding'. Employees express mixed feelings when remembering their personal experience (from old to new employees), stating a clear absence of onboarding practices and standardization across, presenting it as being ad-hoc 'Lack of onboarding program', 'i think it's a bit chaotic, it doesn't seem to be a clear direction', 'no clear onboarding'.

However, there are employees that reported their great onboarding experiences which were probably caused by pure luck, as they are unaware whether management had any implication in planning it 'looking back to when I got hired I had a great onboarding', 'great onboarding even though the manager did not have a particular plan'. Some employees reported that part of their unofficial or informal onboarding was job shadowing different more senior members of the department, which helped them immensely.

When reviewing subtheme 'Role of Managers & Capabilities/resources management', it shows that managers do not seem to be supported in the process of onboarding or staffing, 'managers feel like they are a bit on their own', whereas Salling Group as an organization is extra cautious to expand the human capital number. Nevertheless, as they are generally seen as more distant (can be recognised in other themes as well), employees stating that managers don't really know what is needed. Nonetheless, they try to do their best with the available resources and allocate them in the best ways possible, enabling employees to pursue their professional desires '(manager) will find a project where I can really prove myself', 'managers allow the employee to define the desired path for the future'.

Looking at subtheme 'Employees perceptions on staffing', they state a clear negative perception 'the talk about staffing is very unprofessional in general', where the subject is either seen as completely not addressed,

chaotic and ad hoc, seen as generally managed ‘very poorly’. Overall, employees do not seem to be aware of the existence of any process or how staffing is handled throughout, here connecting with the ‘Compensation’ theme findings, where employees do not know how promotions are handled by management (which are the decision factors).

Lastly, subtheme ‘Inconsistencies between teams and departments’ brings up more important aspects than just STAFF., but trustworthiness of Digital in the whole ‘IT & Digital Department’, and overall in the organization. It is evident that there are significant differences in how IT is structured and handled, compared to Digital, even though the two areas form a whole big department together ‘digital is staffed up differently compared to IT’, ‘IT has more types of roles and teams’, ‘I can feel that it’s a difference between us and them (Digital and IT)’. Here some strong connections between themes such as ‘Compensation’ and ‘T&D’ are signaled, which will be elaborated on in future themes.

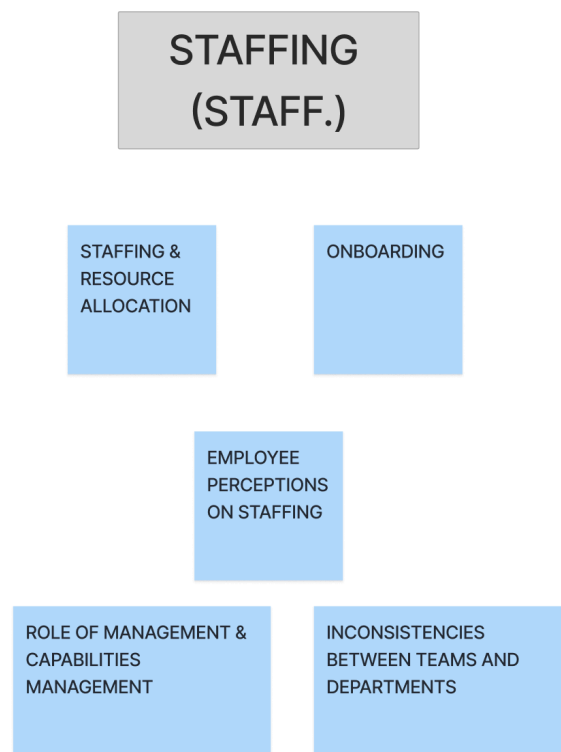


Figure 18. Theme ‘Staffing’

3. COMPENSATION (COMP.)

Compensation surfaced as a sensitive subject and widely recognised negative aspect of being employed in Salling Group. Even though it is a smaller theme, it provides insights into more than just monetary compensation and employee perception of remuneration (*Figure 19*). It is well known that in general Salling

Group follows a lower compensation plan as opposed to competitors in the field, however it is shown that even internally, there is a differentiation in how IT is compensated compared to the Digital Department 'compensation in Digital is lower than in IT', 'everybody is aware that you will not get a high pay in SG'. This goes to underline previous examples of differentiation between the two 'sister' departments, where it could also be concluded that lower remuneration is linked to the overall low credibility of the department in the organization.

When discussing promotions, employees emphasise on the lack of negotiation of their new salary, as it is seen more like a 'salary dictating, salary information'. In cases of promotions, it is believed that neither management can influence the value of compensation, as it's beyond their decision making - budgets and salaries being managed in HR.

When looking at the subtheme 'Decision-making in compensation', it becomes easy to understand that managers do not have a lot of say in terms of promotions and salary brackets. Overall there is no process on determining promotions and when or why others are promoted compared to the rest, as management does not seem to make a clear plan for it. Here are some strong connections to the theme of 'Performance management' where due to lack of effective PM, there is not a clear indication of parameters to evaluate employees on. Therefore, managers are unable to transparently handle promotions or close down the gap between the two departments - Digital and IT.

Looking at the 'Perceptions of value and motivation' subtheme, employees definitely express the negative connotation of compensation which is associated with a risk of losing talent. This negativity is indirectly reflected in the employee perceptions of the value provided compared to the compensation plan.

However, there is a disconnect between the feeling of unbalanced ratio between value provided to the company and compensation, as employees seem to find other aspects of their job more valuable than financial remuneration. They appear more intrinsically motivated, finding it more valuable to have access to an environment where they can learn and develop or having a community of good teammates around 'i would much rather have more knowledge and a lot of good teammates that i can learn from'.



Figure 19. Theme 'Compensation'

Overall the theme of Compensation presents a lot of paradoxes, from the unclear ways and lack of transparency in which people are promoted, to the lack of option to negotiate or influence the level of compensation and openly discussing about its negative connotations in the organization, to the devotion to learning and feeling committed to the department through a real sense of intrinsic motivation.

4. WORK ENVIRONMENT (WE)

WE is another theme where the aspects of change are directly influencing its quality (*Figure 20*). Yet, generally the WE of the department is seen as having a positive connotation. In subtheme 'employee perception of WE', all codes indicate an overall satisfaction with how the topic is addressed in the department, describing a positive place to be, where employees can't complain about their allocated resources, office amenities or facilities provided both by the company and the managers.

When discussing change, subtheme 'factors influencing WE' emphasises that due to structural and strategical changes in the department (and the overall organization), 'people feel now on uncommon grounds', implying the need to change their current work approaches and potentially also how they interact with each other. This underlines the overall perception about change that surpasses WE as a construct, that it brings up different levels of fears 'there are a lot of fears of change'. This change is induced by the development and introduction of DDM, as mentioned previously in the theme 'Staffing'.

Nevertheless in the subtheme 'Leadership and Managerial Roles in WE' the importance of leadership and management is brought up. Here an extensive cluster of codes highlights how much employees miss the presence of a dedicated, and present head of digital to give a sense of direction and certainty, providing a purpose or a vision 'what is it going to happen with digital?', 'people have not been in a good state', 'the lack of a head of department created a long period of uncertainty', enhancing a sense of helplessness 'there was no lighthouse [...] to say a direction'. It is undoubtful that employees have high expectations of what the new head of department should both do and represent to his people. Making sure to provide a direction, a vision, a sense of alignment and nevertheless hold the responsibility of driving change 'the head of digital has the ultimate responsibility to handle change', '[...] should give a direction', '[...] lead through the other managers'.

Additionally, management seems to overaddress WE concerns and solve issues fast, potentially seen as a coping mechanism to escape bigger problems in the department 'WE seems to be an escape of reality when there are bigger problems - when there are bigger problems we tend to focus on the environment, things that we can of course control'.

Lastly, addressing 'Employees perceptions on WE', employees express an overall positive feedback on WE, describing it as being social, feeling quite happy with the environment, and not being a stressful place to be in. Overall, they express their lack of complex requests when it comes to considering a WE as positive, referring to the basic needs which are already accommodated 'I can't complain, I have everything I want', 'to be honest I can't complain'. In this context, the overall satisfaction of employees can potentially be connected to the direct implication of managers, as WE is thoroughly addressed. Here a parallel can be drawn between this theme, and others where management involvement tends to be passive, therefore employee perception being more negative.

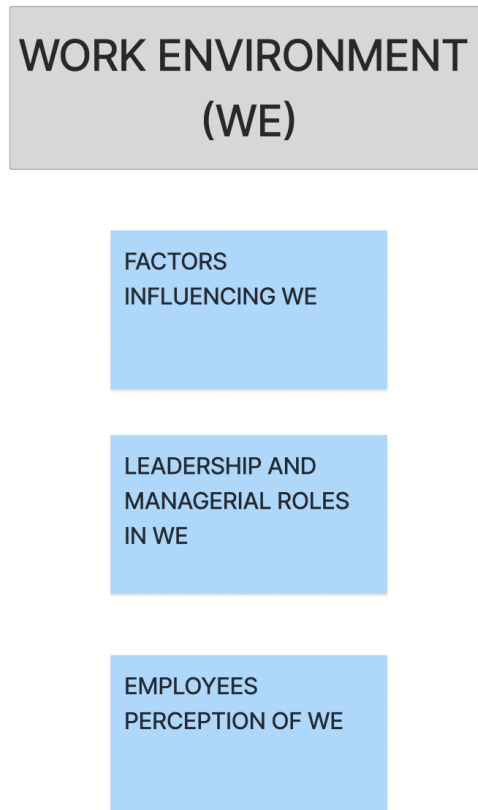


Figure 20. Theme 'Work Environment'

5. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT (PM)

Performance management comes in as being one of the central themes of the analysis, from where clear connections with other themes can be observed. In *Figure 21* the theme together with the subthemes relation is showcased.

While some sort of standardized or formalized PM is performed throughout the year (like the yearly review of the career ladder), it is seen as superficial and just for the sake of performing the ritual 'it's just a one day evaluation, and then we don't really talk about it anymore'. Besides it being seen as a pure formality, employees express their dissatisfaction by either not feeling heard in their responses or by not having the option to influence the personal goals or objectives set in the reports for them. In the subtheme 'Managers & PM', the focus is set on management and how they handle the topic in general. Here a distant role of managers can be observed, as they are either mitigating the PM talk using other representatives (like the POs or the project managers) as they are not directly involved in project work 'manager is not hands-on involved in the projects, just looks for updates and check-ins', 'managers need others to be observant of performance and have a structure on gathering feedback'. In this situation an even deeper discussion is uncovered, as before being able to measure the outcomes of performance, employees state that managers need to understand

what is happening first, while the influence of different stakeholders that do not hold sufficient knowledge of the department's area/activity can disrupt performance reviews.

This goes to show that employees feel generally dissatisfied with how PM is handled and it suggests a strong urge for improvement. Nevertheless, employees state their frustration in not knowing what managers actually expect of them and their competencies, skills and role 'management could use more PM', 'lack of standardized process perpetuates a low performance behavior', 'employee is unaware what the management expects in terms of skills, competencies, knowledge etc.'

Nevertheless, the lack of hands-on implication from the manager's side seems to pose some questions for employees in how fairly some are recognised in the department. Employees feel due to proper handling and monitoring of PM, the real contributors are not seen, therefore creating a sense of injustice where others underperforming receive the recognition 'there seems to be two sets of people: the overperformers and underperformers (underperformers seem to get the good positions, overperformers don't get the same recognition)'.

This can get directly connected with the previously mentioned lack of thorough evaluation and seriousness of addressing the already standardized PM processes in the department. This can even further be interpreted as the lack of experienced management and the overall 'young environment', together with the lack of direction and vision from a strong and positive leadership figure.

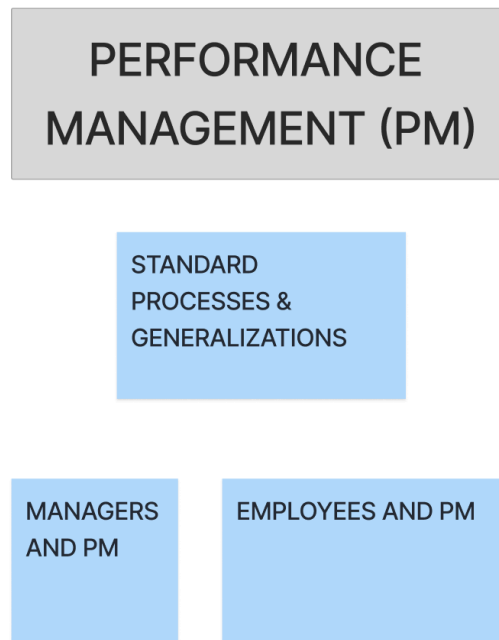


Figure 21. Theme 'Performance Management'

6. TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

While T&D did not immediately appear to be a theme of concern, it comes up as one of the less considered topics in the Digital Department (*Figure 22*). Employees seemed to contempt and were not immediately affected by the lack of consistent procedures and opportunities to gain T&D.

In the subtheme 'Past and future of T&D' a clear evolution in how things were previously handled can be seen, looking like a topic under development in the department. Employees mention the potential connection between the current development and the influence of the new head of department. This is a great improvement compared to not having any opportunities in the past, even though there is still a fixed budget in each department area, and most available resources are relying on shadowing people internally, or if you want to self train 'there is access to resources if you want to train yourself.'

Even with the current changes, employees remain a bit skeptical and do not see T&D as being a seriously addressed topic 'is actually a bit shocking for me when I have been used to getting nothing', 'T&D has not been discussed much'. Nevertheless, T&D still remains a mainly self-driven process, where the employee has to show interest and present the need for training, doing all the necessary work for the manager to approve it as easily as possible 'I'll do it as easy for him to say yes as possible', 'make it up by yourself'. Even so, there is evidence that employees that benefited from T&D have a very high motivation and excitement level, looking forward to participating in future courses and training 'I'm really looking forward to gaining some experience', 'now I am really trying to focus on my self-improvements'.

This goes to show that employees that did benefit from T&D find it relevant to their needs and aspirations, feel a higher level of motivation to engage in their jobs.

However, when looking at the management side, in the subtheme 'Managers involvement in T&D' even though generally management seems open to the idea of T&D opportunities, they remain passive and do not provide concrete suggestions to employees. Here employees stated that throughout their '1-to-1' with the manager it's usually the time when they mention the need for T&D, however the manager does not create a clear training plan. Generally, no employee from the department has an active training plan developed by their manager.



Figure 22. Theme 'Training & Development'

The results of this theme can definitely be connected to previously mentioned ones, and an underlying impression of 'reactive management' can be already observed. At the same time, as managers do not push the idea of T&D in the department, employees do not seem to take it seriously into consideration or see it as a deal breaker.

7. CHANGE

Change is a continuous topic addressed in all themes, either recognised as need (in things that need to be addressed to increase the overall organizational maturity), or seen as an influence of why certain perceptions are different compared to the past. This theme addresses the direct reflections and considerations of employees when discussing change, separate from other previously discussed constructs (themes) (*Figure 23*). The theme of 'Change' consists of a wide range of employee experiences, from resistance and hesitation, segmenting the positive and negative aspects that influence it, together with a detailed representation of management and their role in managing change.

Looking at the subtheme 'Resistance to change', it is easily observed that employees do not describe it as simple or relaxing, in contrast describing it as scary, potentially restricting their flexibility, and being perceived as hard. This addressed an underlying issue of fears of change, as now due to the development of new ways of working (DDM), some people might lose their power, some might have to become more active and perform more, while all address questions of why that change needs to happen in the first place. It is proof that even if current approaches are ad-hoc, chaotic, management does not support teams actively in all aspects of their daily work, employees still developed methods of coping with their tasks and got attached to

them. This can be boiled down to the impressions of ‘change is scary’, ‘change is challenged by people’, ‘people question change’, ‘why we need to do things this way and not the way we used to’.

Subtheme ‘Role of Management and Leadership’ provides a potential explanation to the previously addressed concern of resistance to change. First, without support from top leaders in the organization and a deliberate avoidance and separation in how IT and Digital are handled, managers do not have the strong leadership position to have the final say. Even though they play a crucial role in handling change, even managers themselves are perceived to have a hard time to accept its relevance and need ‘managers are not present in the work itself or understand how things are done’, ‘managers had a hard time accepting change’, ‘(managers) also hindered a positive and faster change because they also needed to adapt to it’. Even though not thoroughly supported in this theme, but definitely highlighted in others, the lack of management is mentioned again, as a potential effect of resistance to change. Nevertheless, employees highlight again the need for a strong head of department, ‘a real team leader...to give direction’.



Figure 23. Theme ‘Change’

8. CULTURE

The theme of ‘Culture’ provides a multifaceted picture of the general environment and what it is like to be part of the Digital Department in Salling Group, where outdated practices and formal culture coexist in a strong sense of belongingness and social cohesion (*Figure 24*).

A recurrent perception that the existing culture does not reflect the current state of the department is outlined in the subtheme 'Outdated culture and need for change'. This close culture can be connected to the previously mentioned resistance to change, where it feels like a leftover of what the department once was, while emphasising the need to align with the newly adopted practices.

Yet, in the subtheme 'positive culture and sense of belonging', employees reflect positively on their experiences in the department. Diversity is underlined, where the young mindset, tolerance, flat and informal culture describe what is perceived as a 'welcoming and friendly culture', 'strong unit that can do a lot together'.

Resilience seems to be part of the description of the department, where the strong sense of community acts like a safe zone for employees to rely on each other and give each other support whenever needed 'we are colleagues, we are friends, we celebrate each other'. Nevertheless, the ease of communication between each other is mentioned as a strong characteristic of the culture. This however emphasises that poor handling of C&C within the department (as described in the C&C theme), is mainly due to lack of alignment and active participation of management and leadership.

When describing culture, the aspect of formality is mentioned repeatedly (subtheme 'Formal culture'). The so-called '5ks' are described as the formal understanding of culture, which are defined by Salling Group, in scope to create a sense of community and alignment throughout the entire organization. However, after mentioning the existence of such a formal definition of culture, none of the participants knew what they actually meant and how to describe them 'our culture is the 5ks, I don't know what they are'.

Lastly, in 'Social aspects of culture', clusters such as isolation and need of adaptation are mentioned, which potentially influence the sense of belongingness and inclusion in the department. This is due to the current segmentation of the department where employees are placed in a silo-like structure, where they are not forced to collaborate and communicate with people outside of their immediate team. Still, this seems to be a solvable issue already mitigated in DDM, as people are starting to be placed more in an interdisciplinary set up and forced to work more outside of their team.

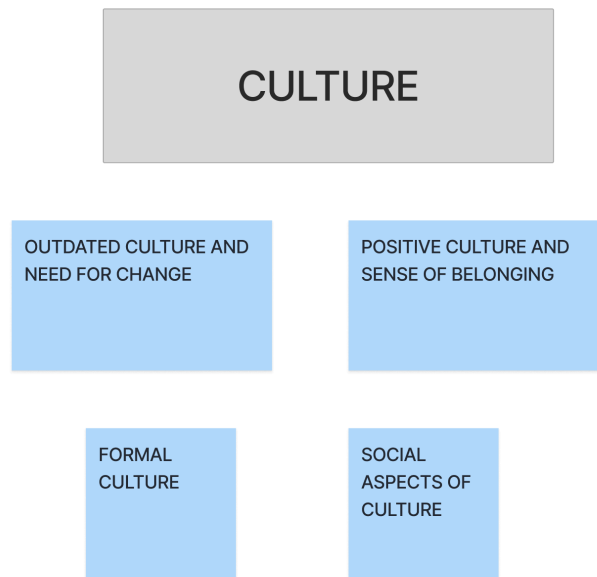


Figure 24. Theme 'Culture'

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

The last deductively developed theme is 'Recommendations' (Figure 25), where employees were asked to mention their wishes of what they think is needed to overall increase the organizational maturity, and create an environment where performance and capabilities are better managed. These recommendations are centered around 3 main categories, which have already been recognised as issues or underdeveloped topics in the department.

Starting with the subtheme 'Organizational design and structure', a restructuring of the department is mentioned, together with the real integration of the Digital Department with IT. This emphasises the need of closing the gap between how the two sister departments have been handled so far, where differences in trustworthiness, processes, compensation, credibility to top management cause a sense of inferiority that employees request attention to. The need for additional staffing and better allocation of capabilities and resources is highlighted again, as 'people should not be spread so thin anymore', and 'given more specialised roles'. At the level of ambition and workload is expected to change and increase with the implementation of the DDM, it is heavily signaled that an upscale in human resources is needed to keep up with upcoming workload.

Looking at the subtheme 'Better communication and transparency', again the need of internal alignment and more active management is emphasised, as employees need to know what their roles, responsibilities and overall planning is.

Once more, subtheme 'Leadership & direction' highlight the core need of the department, where better goals, priorities, direction vision and overall department responsibility had to be taken by top leadership.



Figure 25. Theme 'Recommendations'

Link with the RQs

While the main scope of the chapter is to present and interpret the findings at the latent level, it is also important to consider how findings are connected with the defined list of RQs.

Besides providing a concise, coherent and logical description of the findings, Braun & Clarke (2006) additionally state that 'narrative needs to go beyond description of the data, and make an argument in relation to your research questions'.

Therefore, in this section each RQ will be addressed individually and briefly connected with the findings. At the same time, this connection between findings and RQs provides a consistent introduction to the subsequent 'Discussions' chapter, where deeper reflections on LR, theoretical perspectives, RQs and findings are drawn.

RQ1: What is the employee's experience of organizational maturity in the Digital Department of Salling Group, as reflected through the workforce-related practices of P-CMM Level 2 Maturity?

The findings portray the general employee experience in relation to organizational maturity, specifically as reflected through P-CMM Level 2 maturity as inconsistent and insufficient. With a combination of emerging processes and ad-hoc practices, there is no alignment between department areas, teams and significant differences between Digital and IT. While some themes like WE are perceived as sufficient, others like C&C, COMP. and PM are understood as deficitary and highlighted as requiring significant changes and improvements. Even though sufficient, it is directly affected by the constant state of change the department is currently in.

The effects of lack of standardization in themes like C&C, PM, STAFF., provides evidence to how individual styles of management generate inconsistencies in employee experiences. While some structures exist such as the Yearly Review or Career ladder, these are rarely taken seriously and followed through.

Undoubtedly, the current level of organizational maturity is a consequence of absent top management, lack of direction, vision and experience. Management is mainly perceived as passive, even though reactive when requested, employees feel the need to fill in the gap, actively becoming part in C&C activities, onboarding practices, and even questioning whether they should not emphasise more the need of PM and T&D (creating a sense of guilt). However, this bottom-up approach only generates more inconsistencies throughout the department, which is recognised in the contrasting experiences of employees (the positives and negatives).

RQ1.1: Which workforce-related practices are perceived as barriers or enablers of employee performance and capabilities?

The findings present a clear duality between the practices that act as barriers compared to the enabling ones.

First, lack of transparency in decision making and communication, superficial PM, unclear division of roles and responsibilities are consistently addressed as barriers. These practices fall under the larger C&C, STAFF., and PM workforce practices. Following a pattern with RQ1, it is recognised that practices that are unorganised and insufficient, also act as barriers of capabilities and performance.

Although not part of the defined workforce practices of P-CMM Level 2 Maturity, lack of direction is mentioned as an inhibitor of performance, which can further be linked with themes like C&C, STAFF., T&D. Unexpectedly, when elaborating COMP. findings and uncovering the negative connotation it has throughout the department, it is not perceived as having a direct influence on performance and capabilities. Employees report their motivation lying in other aspects of their job, therefore more valuable to them than monetary compensation.

RQ2: How can the current organizational maturity of the Digital Department of Salling Group be understood when positioned within the levels of the Organizational Behavior model (individual, group, organization), and how might the variables of OB, in turn, shape the department's maturity?

When positioned within the levels of the OB model, maturity can be understood as unevenly distributed across the individual, group and organizational level.

Looking at the individual level first, employees express an extensive eagerness to learn and develop, bringing diversity not only through their background, but ultimately through their professional variety and expertise. However, lack of transparency and clear HCM practices affect perception (developing contrastful interpretation), understanding of decision-making and overall developing an individual resistance to change. This is not only expressed to influence performance, but a withdrawal behavior where employees decide to focus on themselves at an individual level when C&C, respectively planning and direction/vision are missing.

At the group level, structure is perceived as siloed, where employees are grouped around their function, and the unclear responsibilities (which now starts to be broken down with the development of DDM) generate unclarity. Leadership specific processes and C&C are seen as uneven, insufficient and lacking hands-on involvement. At this level, employees try to step in and compensate for poor formal structure/processes.

Lastly at the organizational level, structure and culture are seen as polar opposites, providing contrasting evidence. While there isn't any evidence of formal and consistent structure throughout the whole department, culture is perceived as a strong binder, fostering a sense of belongingness and resilient unit.

Overall, when positioned on the OB model, the interconnectedness of findings between each level becomes evident. Each level influences the other, both from a bottom to top perspective (individual to organizational), but also the other way around (organizational to individual).

RQ3: How can the level of organizational maturity be increased in the Digital Department of Salling Group?

The findings point to concrete areas of the department where change and further development is needed to increase the overall organizational maturity. This is explicitly captured in subthemes, where employees provide direct suggestions to what is needed to uplift the maturity, performance and capabilities of the department. Clearer department structured and standardized processes are needed to alleviate misalignments. Moving away from ad-hoc inconsistent practices nevertheless addressed internal lack of coordination (within Digital), and overall closing the gap between Digital and IT.

C&C are critical aspects to be improved, as they represent the main cause of misalignment, as employees do not know how, when and who takes decisions, ultimately who holds different responsibilities and in which context.

As a foundational, underlying recommendation, leadership implication is seen as detrimental to drive change and enable managers to better lead their teams. It is understood that the absence of a strong leadership figure (head of department) is the cause of resistance to change, inconsistent practices and management, where the effect is losing sense of vision and direction.

VII. Discussions

In the Discussions chapter, the interpretation of findings goes beyond the latent level of description, but are brought up from a critical academic reflection by understanding what implications the findings have in connection to selected literature and previous studies.

Additionally, the implication of each significant research component is discussed in designated sections. Therefore the chapter contains sub-sections such as: addressing the RQs, addressing the theoretical perspective, the methodological components (data collection and analysis), and lastly the identified list of limitations and indicators of future studies.

The scope of the 'Discussions' chapter is to provide awareness of the implications of each decision taken in the study, and how it influences the final result. At the same time, a clear idea of how things could be addressed in future studies is presented (or what should be avoided) to potentially get to better outcomes in future iterations. Beyond the academic, methodological, theoretical and limitational reflections, this discussion also highlights the contribution of the thesis to the organizational practice (value provided to the company) and the academic literature (how the study aligns, contradicts, connects or expands the existing body of knowledge).

Addressing the RQs

Starting first in the Discussions chapter, each RQ (*Figure 26*) is addressed to evaluate whether the finding provided an answer to the question. Here a detailed interpretation of the findings connected to the RQ is framed, together with critical reflections of the theoretical lens and LR. This means that the discussions go beyond just providing connections between the findings and RQ, by placing them in the broader academic debate. Here alignments, connections, contradictions or extensions to the selected body of LR and theories are highlighted.

- **RQ1:** What is the employee's experience of organizational maturity in the Digital Department of Salling Group, as reflected through the workforce-related practices of P-CMM Level 2 Maturity?
 - **RQ1.1:** Which workforce-related practices are perceived as barriers or enablers of employee performance and capabilities?
- **RQ2:** How can the current organizational maturity of the Digital Department of Salling Group be understood when positioned within the levels of the Organizational Behavior model (individual, group, organization), and how might the variables of OB, in turn, shape the department's maturity?
- **RQ3:** How can the level of organizational maturity be increased in the Digital Department of Salling Group?

Figure 26. List of RQs

- **RQ1.**

The findings indicate that employees perceive organizational maturity in the Digital Department as inconsistent and dependent on management style. There are areas where some sort of formality is already adopted (PM processes, new DDM), others where processes and standardization is emergent (STAFF processes), some however lacking any consideration (T&D). This is aligned with P-CMM Level 2 Maturity, where management starts to build a foundation of repeatable practices and processes, ensuring employees to not perform their tasks ad-hoc, but get some structure in their professional work (Curtis et al., 2009). However, findings outline a distant and reactive management style, where managers are in most cases reacting when employees address different topics or give their support when taking initiatives. This comes in contrast to what Curtis et al. (2009) emphasise, where ‘the first step toward improving the capability of the workforce is to get managers to take workforce activities as high-priority responsibilities of their job’. On the same premise, employees mention the lack of inexperienced management as a cause of inconsistent practices, which Curtis et al (2009) mention as the cause of failure to implement workforce practices, where ‘they (managers) often lacked the experience and skills needed to implement sophisticated practices’.

Comparing the findings with the P-CMM literature, the organizational maturity of the Digital Department in Salling Group does not suffice the requirements of the Level 2 Maturity. As mentioned in literature ‘when the goals of all process areas at a maturity level and lower levels have been satisfied, the organization will have achieved the maturity level and established a new level of capability in managing its workforce’(Curtis et al., 2009). It can be concluded that currently the Digital Department is in an in-between state between the unstructured and ad-hoc Level 1 Maturity and the Managed Level 2 Maturity of the P-CMM model. Looking more closely to the individual workforce practices, reinforces this conclusion. STAFF, even though emergent from the development of the new DDM, shows no emergent processes of handling onboarding or resource allocation to projects/products. This contradicts the literature as part of the requirements to develop the workforce practice is to ‘establish adequate staffing plans and aligning people with work requirements’ (Curtis et al., 2009). Next, looking into PM, even though some degree of standardization exists (yearly reviews, the career ladder etc.), the employee perception indicates a lack of involvement and seriousness from the manager's side. This comes in contradiction with Level 2 maturity, as PM requires meaningful and regular feedback sessions (Curtis et al., 2009). C&C is however aligning with the interpretation of low levels of maturity in P-CMM, as it is ‘left at the discretion of individual managers’, providing an explanation for the inconsistent experiences employees have. As T&D is almost nonexistent, employees rely on their own self-driven initiatives where management is yet again seen as reactive. This finding comes in contrast to the P-CMM Level 2 maturity, as T&D emphasizes the need to equip employees with the right skills, competences and knowledge and development opportunities. (Curtis et al.,2009)

This partial maturity and inconsistent management style highlights the risk identified by Curtis et al.(2009) where unless workforce practices are institutionalised across all process areas, organizations remain vulnerable ultimately affecting the culture and performance of employees. This reflects the broader organizational maturity literature, which emphasises that partial implementations of practices creates ‘plateaus’ where organizations fail to capture the performance benefits of higher maturity (Bitici et al., 2011).

- **RQ1.1**

The findings reveal a duality between the enabling and constraining workforce practices.

Barriers are more systemic. Lack of transparency in communication, unclear decision making processes, superficial and inconsistent PM, unclear role and responsibility definition are all seen as factors that influence performance and capability of employees. These findings are yet again understood as a consequence of reactive and inexperienced management, underlined by Curtis et al.(2009) when addressing the characteristics of low maturity organizations. Nevertheless, the young environment and employee limited experience can as well influence the employee's knowledge on what to expect from their managers. Therefore, employees take a self-driven approach in workforce practices such as C&C or T&D, which is surprisingly seen as positive. This is in alignment with the organizational health literature stating that employee involvement and knowledge sharing practices are among the stronger indicators of sustained performance improvement (Gagnon et al., 2017).

Interestingly, even though COMP. had been described as having a negative connotation in the Digital Department, it is not perceived as a barrier of performance. This is aligned with the P-CMM literature where 'compensation systems serve to ensure equity and prevent dissatisfaction, but they do not by themselves create commitment or develop capability' (Curtis et al., 2009). Employees find a high level of motivation from practices that support their internal value system while gaining experience and knowledge developing higher career opportunities. This aligns with the organizational health perspectives (Gagnon et al., 2017; De Smet et al., 2014). Additionally, this resonates with the RBV, which highlights that employee skills, knowledge and development opportunities are more enduring sources of competitive advantage than financial incentives (Barney, 1991).

When addressing the barriers, an underlying general issue is outlined on the lack of direction, vision and leadership figure that brings the department together and supports change. The finding aligns with the assumption describing 'the importance of visionary leadership can be understood in this context, in that the vision sometimes serves the function of providing the psychological safety that permits the organization to move forward'(Schein, 2004).

Another barrier lies in the aspect of culture. Even though the culture of the department is seen as positive, mentions of a culture of resistance to change and its irrelevance to maintain old habits are defined. This aligns with the Schein (2004) perspective on organizational change, as groups become attached to their set of shared assumptions of what has been proven to work over time, therefore groups or organizations will try to preserve their integrity and autonomy when facing change, if they do not suffer enough disequilibrium to challenge their already in place assumptions.

While enablers of performance positively affect the motivation of employees, they can potentially feed the set of shared assumptions which is tested and validated over time, making change even harder in times where leadership and vision are lacking. These findings mirror studies on core employees as 'carriers of organizational capability' where their motivation and skills can enable or hinder change depending on alignment with leadership direction (Erdil et al., 2010).

- **RQ2**

By positioning the themes in the OB model by Robbins & Judge(2019), organizational maturity can be seen beyond descriptive themes by placing them across the individual, group and organizational level. The model allows for a more thorough reflection of what people actually do (behavior) and the way in which their

behavior affects organizational performance.

While previously in findings it's been elaborated on how different workforce practices are identified on the OB model, together with interpretations of organizational maturity and performance/capabilities. When addressing organizational maturity from the OB perspective it is ultimately essential to address the role of the manager and leadership. As organizational maturity is the result of management efforts (Curtis et al., 2009), Robbins & Judge (2019) address the role of manager as central in understanding the OB of an organization.

When looking at the inconsistencies and barriers of performance that employees experience, yet again inexperienced and uninvolved management behavior, either absent leadership is emphasised. Looking at the base sets of behavior managers should enforce, Robbins & Judge (2019) list them as : planning, organizing, leading and controlling. From STAFF planning and alignment of the department have been identified as lacking. Robbins & Judge (2019) see planning efforts as that 'encompass defining an organization's goals, establishing an overall strategy for achieving those goals, and developing a comprehensive set of plans to integrate and coordinate activities'. This evidence links the previously mentioned findings of lack of alignment and planning(STAFF), no unified single source of C&C and generally lack of direction.

Another link is defined when connecting lack of clear definition of roles and responsibilities, unclarity of what managers expect from employees, and understanding of how decisions are taken in the department. This is supported by the 'organizing' behavior of a manager's primary activity (Robbins & Judge, 2019).

Reactive management, improper allocation of resources and capabilities, misalignments of C&C practices and not addressing sources that hinder employee performance are linked in the 'leading' behavior managers should possess. This is in total contradiction with the perspective presented by Robbins & Judge (2019), where managers should 'direct and coordinate people, direct their activities,select the most effective communication channel, or resolve conflict'.

At last, superficial PM practices, inconsistencies and lack of focus on monitoring performance and aspects that influence it in a systematic/standardised manner come in total contradiction to the behavioral aspect of 'controlling'. Here managers should actively and thoroughly monitor the organization's performance and maintain formal evidence of it to capture any potential deviation and be able to redirect the organization towards achieving its goals (Robbins & Judge, 2019).

• RQ3

Findings highlight concrete areas where the organizational maturity can be increased. They indicate the strong signals of change that employees find essential from their managers.

Employees state the need for improved organizational design & structure and better communication & transparency. This aligns with the previously addressed mentions to RQ1, where according to the P-CMM model workforce practices of STAFF and C&C are discussed as incomplete and lacking standardization. This highlights the importance of standardization underlined by Curtis et al. (2009) as essential in enabling an organization to increase its maturity.

The need for leadership and direction supports previous statements in regards to the role of the manager. Robbins & Judge (2019) endorse this recommendation, seeing leadership as an essential aspect of organizational performance and defining it as 'the ability to influence a group toward the achievement of a vision or set of goals'. Nevertheless, they support the need for strong leadership because 'organizations need strong leadership and strong managers for optimal effectiveness'.

Furthermore, as the employees express their need for a strong leadership figure to drive change, it aligns with Schein's(2004) perspective on the importance of leadership in connection to change. Visionary leadership can create a strong sense of psychological safety which permits the organization to move forward, by allowing people to unfreeze (face disequilibrium, address fears and anxieties, ultimately supporting the team in the process of unlearning old habits and learning new ones) (Schein, 2004).

Addressing the Literature Review

Every active choice taken throughout the study shapes its outcomes, including the selection of LR.

When reflecting on LR choices, the aspect of diversity should be acknowledged. The thesis draws heavily on three comprehensive works: Schein (2004) with Organizational culture, Curtis et al. (2009) with P-CMMM and Robbins & Judge (2019) with OB. While the overall number of sources in LR is limited, the depth and breadth of these foundational texts provide sufficient theoretical grounding, as all above-mentioned books represent academic norms in their fields.

However, as the thesis mainly adopts their perspectives, there is a limited diversity in comparing perspectives and interpretations, compared to focusing on selecting mainly journals or peer reviewed articles.

This choice of LR reflects a deliberate prioritization of conceptual depth as opposed to breadth, looking for complex sources that can address a whole model. A strong emphasis on peer reviewed articles and journals could have introduced a wider range of perspectives, including more contemporary views and diverse interpretations.

Nonetheless, given that the topic of inquiry is relatively new to the researcher, the choice of focusing on complex and comprehensive literature offers a strong theoretical foundation throughout the thesis.

Theoretical reflections

Even though originally considered, the abductive reasoning was no longer addressed in the research. However, adopting another theoretical interpretation of the findings such as the Communities of practice or Organizational theories could better frame the understanding of employee experiences.

When addressing the existing choice of theory, due to their complexity and heavy segmentation, the thesis only covered surface level interpretation of findings. Developing a simplified version of the frameworks and cleared interconnectedness could have potentially provided greater insights on workforce practices and OB variables.

Methodological reflections

This sub-section addressed the critical considerations and reflections in relation to the choice of methods of the thesis. It is important to discuss these aspects as potential choices and ways of applying methods as they influence the way in which research was performed and the quality of results.

• Choice of research approach and design

It is undoubtful that choosing qualitative research as the thesis approach provided valuable empirical evidence in connection to the studied central phenomenon. By adopting the qualitative case study, the study acquired deep and rich descriptions connected to the experiences and perceptions of employees, emphasising the social constructivist philosophical perspective.

However, as it is already previously mentioned, it is a time consuming approach. In addition, the interpretative and context-dependent nature of the qualitative case study makes results more dependent on the interaction between researcher - subjects and evaluation of findings.

Even though more uncommon, potentially adopting a quantitative approach using self- rated questionnaires could have been a more time efficient alternative to research the social constructivism lens in regards to employee experiences in relation to organizational maturity and performance/capabilities.

- **Data collection**

One detrimental aspect that influenced the processes is the amount of interviews collected. A limitation of the study is not considering the concept of data saturation throughout interview collection. As defined by Bryman (2021), data saturation is a principle where the researcher should continue sampling cases until no new insights are apparent in the data. When presenting the sampling size (specifically 10 interviews), there was no apparent explanation or consideration for the number of chosen interviews, other than it representing the number of respondents to the pre-interview questionnaire. Without a clear set of criterias and understanding when saturation was achieved, all 10 interviews were conducted, generating an immense volume of data to be handled and translated. Translation and formatting of files for all interviews took a valuable section of time from the total time available for the thesis. With a clear set of criteria to assess when enough data was achieved, potentially more valuable time could have been used in analysing and interpreting the findings.

Another limitation of the data collection phase was the lack of proper introduction of the researched constructs. Participants possessed diverse interpretations of what diverse terms meant and it was reflected directly in their speech. Additionally, the diverse understanding of terms and experience working with them was directly recognised in the volume of details, depth of reflections and critical assessment. Experienced and knowledgeable participants went on a deeper level and connected constructs and respective elements between each other throughout the interview.

However as the interview sessions were already lengthy, extending the duration of the interviews was not a viable option. Another option of handling this issue of alignment/ lack of knowledge of the meaning of each discussed topic could have been to send out an extended description of the central phenomenon to be reached during the interview sessions, or a printed out version with descriptions for each term/concept.

- **Data analysis**

Reflecting on how data analysis and interpretation of findings was conducted, there is definitely a room for improvement. The study focused on an explicit deductive theme approach, generated by the theoretical lenses. When performing the TA, a different theme structure could have been used, in a mode 'inductive' manner. For example, the findings could have been clustered and themed by role and responsibility: individual themes for 'managers', 'employees', 'head of department' or by type of perception 'positive experience', 'negative experience'. This way a lot of different subthemes could merge together and therefore reduce the overall number of duplicates. This alternative would also emphasise the constructivism lens of the study, placing focus on the explicit experience of employees, instead of having a central focus on a theoretical model.

However, even though the current approach is more 'code heavy' and subtheme/cluster dense, it provides an immediate response to the RQs and addresses the central phenomenon of organizational maturity and influences on performance/capabilities. At the same time, in the current approach it is easier to spot the relation between themes (and implicitly subthemes/ clusters). An example is the influence the Head of Department/ leadership identified in constructs (C&C, PM, Recommendations etc.), or how much C&C overall influences other themes, implicitly the performance and capabilities of employees. With each repetition of similar clusters, the underlying struggles and expectations of change are emphasized.

Nevertheless, the decision of only analysing 5 interviews out of 10 deliberately influenced the results of the study. As the selection of the 5 interviews was done fully randomized without a criterion of selection, the

previously defined and elaborated sampling size and procedure became redundant. Additionally, when performing Phase 3 & 4 TA, it was brought to the attention that 1 of the interviews did not contain direct responses to all constructs. 3 out of the 5 randomly selected interviews represent participants from the same department area, in total only having 3 total department areas out of the 6 previously sampled areas (from a total of 7 in the entire department). Here a responder's bias can be considered, even though the results can't be deemed irrelevant in connection to the RQs.

Limitations

Every research project is shaped by certain boundaries, and this thesis is no exception. While the thesis produced valuable knowledge combining organizational maturity with behavioral components, it is important to acknowledge limitations that shape the outcomes of the thesis.

Opposed to previous sections in the 'Discussions' chapter that represent deliberate and active choices made throughout the study, this section focuses on aspects which were limited in control or anticipation prior to research start or unforeseen throughout the research process. These limitations discuss larger topics such as access to the natural setting, available time for research, access to data, lastly the position of the researcher and bias.

- **Access to the natural setting**

Building on the reflections in the Methodology chapter, limited immersion in the participants' natural setting introduced a series of consequences to the study. The research was conducted independently by the researcher, without the involvement of the Salling Group as an organization. Although Salling Group employees and representatives were open and collaborative, the study did not gain recognition or adoption as part of an internal research process. Additionally, the study was not mentioned or endorsed at the management/leadership level. This lack of formal recognition of the research restricted the researcher's access in the physical environment, or the 'natural setting of the participant'.

Therefore the physical access to the environment was limited to the duration of interviews, for the interviews that were conducted physically. When discussing the online interviews, there was no level of immersion in the natural setting of the participant.

If physical access for an extended period of time was granted, then the study could have adopted vastly different research designs. This means that participant observations, focus groups, more thorough interaction with the subjects and generally the option of acquiring multiple sources of data would have been higher. With multiple sources of data, triangulation could have been used as a thorough quality criteria in evaluating the results of the analysis.

- **Access to data**

Connected to the previously mentioned point of 'access to the natural setting', due to the lack of formalization of the research, no data was provided by the company in relation to the central phenomenon being studied to provide a base of evidence.

However an important aspect to mention is the lack of any documented or acknowledged maturity assessment of the department (or organization). As there is no historical evidence of such study conducted prior, the participants did not hold any information that could guide the research or support the process. Consequently, the thesis relied solely on the participant's experience and interpretation of the researched constructs, which

even though valuable, are highly subjective. The use of a single data source and perspective further limits the study, as triangulation of sources was not possible, ultimately reducing robustness of findings.

At the same time, as there is no previous experience working with organizational maturity in the department, employees do not hold extensive knowledge in the field or in the meaning of the constructs. Therefore, the individual knowledge and interpretation of meaning of each topic varied. Nevertheless, providing additional explanations and description of the discussed term (eg. like Staffing, or Performance Management etc) took time from the interview session, meaning that depth of discussion in other areas had to be reduced.

- **Single researcher and available time**

Conducting a research project as a sole researcher imposes limitations from the starting point. The capacity to collect, code and interpret data was inevitably limited, and a series of decisions to reduce the scope of the thesis were therefore taken to reduce the volume of work as manageable for a single researcher.

Furthermore, as the thesis relied on a single researcher, there were restricted opportunities of triangulation or multiple perspectives when analysing or interpreting the data.

- **Researcher bias - hard to distance from personal interpretation and feelings**

The previously mentioned point of 'single researcher' develops further concerns and nevertheless 'researchers bias' has to be addressed.

First, the position of the researcher has to be first acknowledged, as the researcher has had previous interactions with the team and the company. The prior familiarity with the topic may have influenced the framing of questions or the interpretation of findings. To ensure objectiveness, strict procedures and frameworks were used to formalize processes (like the Braun & Clarke TA process, and the use of two theoretical lenses to interpret the findings).

However, as the researcher was involved in all phases of research, emotional attachment and development of preconceived ideas is hard to fully alleviate as a single researcher. With the previously mentioned 'randomized' choices throughout diverse thesis phases, the bias can't be fully rejected, as it could actually represent an unconscious decision.

Future work

While this study provides an initial qualitative assessment of the organizational maturity in the Digital Department in the Salling Group, there are still several areas that remain open for discussions for the future. As this thesis provides an overview of the current employee experiences, more thorough and narrowed down studies addressing individual workforce practices would provide a deeper understanding of maturity on segmented areas. Additionally, a more thorough study addressing the role of management and how specifically managers perceive organizational behavior could offer valuable insights into the alignment (or misalignment) between the managerial role and employee experiences of maturity.

Nevertheless a longitudinal research study would be valuable to capture the progression of changes within the department and observe how the organizational maturity develops over time.

VIII. Conclusions

The thesis seeks to investigate the experiences of employees from the Digital Department of Salling Group in regards to organizational maturity and elements that influence performance and capabilities. By combining the P-CMM and OB theoretical lenses, the study does not just reflect on organizational maturity as a series of workforce practices, but presents a deeper interpretation of the connection between organizational behavior, culture and change to shape the experiences and perceptions of employees.

By adopting a qualitative approach and case study research design the study can adopt a constructivist philosophical worldview, gaining a detailed view of the lived experiences of employees, and how the relation between them as individuals and together as an organization shape the construction of their experiences. The adoption of semi-structured interviewing and pairing it with thematic analysis enables a deeper and richer understanding of the perception of reality. Using a latent level of interpretation provides meaning, looking beyond pure descriptions of employee experiences in relation to a set list of constructs.

In relation to the research questions, the study revealed an inconsistent and heavily manager-dependent experience of organizational maturity which is still mostly ad-hoc. Workforce practices such as Staffing, Communication & Coordination and Performance Management have been found as both not living up the definition of the Level 2 Maturity in P-CMM, but also as critical factors influencing performance and capabilities of employees. Moreover, organizational maturity has been shown to vary when reflecting it on the individual, group and organizational levels, revealing the undeniable importance of leadership, sense of direction and aligned vision. At the same time, the findings present how maturity is unevenly distributed across workforce practices, raising significant concerns on the gaps between different areas of the department. Nevertheless, these concerns address the differentiated levels of credibility between the IT and Digital Department at an organizational level.

As with any research, the thesis carries a list of limitations. A notable one is not considering the concept of data saturation throughout data collection, which resulted in a large data set to be handled by a single researcher. Another significant limitation lies in choosing a deductive perspective of thematic analysis centered around the workforce practices of the P-CMM theoretical lens, resulting in a theme and subtheme heavy list of findings which overlapped.

In conclusion, the thesis reveals that the Digital Department is undergoing a transition in its state of maturity, where existing structured and standardization coexist with ad-hoc practices, where employees often compensate for the passive management style. This underlines that maturity is not achieved in isolation, and a deeper understanding of organizational behavior is essential to increase the level of maturity. It shows how visionary leadership is a much needed role, to drive change, align the entire department together and ultimately enable managers to lead their teams. This is not just a study about organizational maturity, it's a study of how employee experiences, managerial practices and behavioral dynamics interconnect to shape performance and capabilities.

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X. Appendixes

Appendixes have been uploaded in a separate document entitled 'Appendixes - Masters Thesis'. Please check out the separate file to view the sections.

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