

Thesis for The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Frame Shifting and Frame Blending in Digital Transformation

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Abstract

As organizations embrace digital technologies in new ways, they experience a process known as digital transformation. This process is not just about technological changes – digital transformation also involves organizational changes that enable and result from engagements with digital technologies. Despite the growing knowledge base about this topic, extant digital transformation research is largely inattentive to how meaning-making shapes digital transformation.

In this thesis, I outline an approach to unpack meaning-making in digital transformation with the concepts of frame shifting and frame blending. This conceptual framework approaches meaning-making through discursive interactions, or “talking”, where (1) frame shifting manifests when exploring what could be new in potential futures which involve digital technologies, and (2) frame blending manifests when identifying what might remain of an organization’s past in such potential futures.

This work builds on insights from a longitudinal case study of meaning-making in digital transformation at the incumbent firm Sydved operating in the Swedish forest industry. The empirical research was carried out between 2018 and 2022. At Sydved, I studied the meaning-making associated with “injections” of new digital technologies into Sydved’s existing digital ecosystem. I noticed the temporal character of the meaning-making process and engaged in exploring how to understand theoretically the role of time in this process. This led me to the concepts of frame shifting and frame blending. I also studied changes connected to Sydved’s established digital application “My Forest” between 2013 and 2022 to illustrate how meaning-making shaped Sydved’s digital transformation.

The thesis contributes a different conceptual framework to the digital transformation literature for approaching both meaning-making and temporality - as in the interplay of potential futures and the past - in digital transformation. It also contributes to the framing literature by elaborating on the theoretical understanding of frame shifting and frame blending as well as extending their field of application to digital transformation as an area of concern. Finally, it contributes to practice by outlining insights for arranging and participating in meaning-making during digital transformation.

Keywords:

digital transformation, meaning-making, temporality, organizational change

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