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Controlling for Value Creation in Platform Organizations

A Case Study of Evaluative Infrastructures

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Abstract

This qualitative case study examines the processes of controlling for value creation in platform organizations. We show that when going from a hierarchical organizational context towards one of heterarchical nature, there is a need for a corresponding change in theoretical notion in order to understand the control mechanisms. Therefore, the theoretical framework of Evaluative Infrastructures, developed by Kornberger et al. (2017), is used as analytical lens. This framework builds on three concepts: Relationality (linking heterogeneous objects into a context), Generativity (the disclosing of new opportunities) and Protocol (a decentralized control, while the power is kept centralized). We find that platform companies control for value creation through building trust, gathering a surplus of data, and creating self-managing platforms. Furthermore, transparency is suggested as a possible additional dimension of the theoretical framework of evaluative infrastructures. Motivating studies in this theoretical field is the increasingly digitized environment together with the rising awareness of the benefits of sharing, which has made platform companies like Airbnb and Uber grow in a rapid pace in recent years. Value exchange now, to a larger extent than ever, takes place between peers on platforms rather than between a company and its customers. The empirical base of the study comes from the case company Qasa as well as the two calibrating case companies Workaround and Heetch.

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1 Introduction

International organizations such as Airbnb and Uber, and Swedish counterparts such as Qasa and Workaround, represent a rapidly growing phenomenon in society, namely that of the sharing economy and the rise of platform organizations. These, arguably disruptive, economic structures affect the society's capitalism logic, are transforming how organizations are built up and interact with their surroundings, as well as affect how the distribution of wealth and ownership are set up among people (Kornberger et al. 2017), just to mention a few of the effects of these phenomena.

As illustrated by the companies mentioned above, sharing economy platforms are present in many different industries, resulting in new ways of thinking about value creation and resource utilization (Laurell and Sandström, 2017). These new phenomena are disruptive in their nature and are generating institutional turbulence (ibid). Even though people have been sharing limited resources with each other since long ago, libraries and car rentals for example, it is only recently that the phenomenon platform organizations really boomed. The platform organizations and their business logic emerged as the internet grew and became more and more important in society. Belk (2014) even goes as far as suggesting that we are entering a new era where sharing, and not owning, is the norm.

If it started as non-profit maximizing online activities and initiatives of sharing knowledge and content such as YouTube and Wikipedia, it is now increasingly associated with profit maximizing capitalist players and institutions (Belk, 2014). One would perhaps think that companies would advocate for buying and the more traditional consumption of things, and not the sharing concept, where many consumers are using the same product. So even though sharing and collaborative consumption are disrupting many of the world's established businesses, and result in fewer purchases and less ownership in society, some companies have found a way to build successful businesses and make money through this phenomenon. Companies such as Uber, Airbnb and Amazon have millions of daily returning users all over the world, and the valuations of these companies are enormous, at least when taken into consideration how young this phenomenon and these organizations actually are (Kornberger et al., 2017).

According to Belk (2014), who defines sharing as “*the act and process of distributing what is ours to others for their use and/or the act and process of receiving or taking something from others for our use.*”, sharing is “*a distinct, ancient, and increasingly vital consumer research topic*”. However, what is evident when searching the established accounting and management control research databases is that it from a sharing economy and business perspective, is room for a deeper theoretical and empirical understanding of the topic. This is reinforced by several other researchers, for example Möhlmann (2015). Also, there is, as often with new theoretical concepts, somewhat of a label and concept confusion. To name only a few documented variations of the concept: “co-creation” (Lanier & Schau, 2007; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004) “access-based consumption and access economy”, (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012), and collaborative consumption (Botsman & Rogers, 2010). The concept has also been interpreted and analyzed in different ways, even when the specific term Sharing Economy has been used, for example Laurell & Sandström’s (2017) analysis regarding the sharing economy’s market and non-market logics.

The phenomenon of platform organizations often takes place on digital online platforms where demand basically meets supply. Consumers or buyers meet producers or sellers on the platform owned and managed by the platform owner. So, the platform owner does not necessarily have any actual control over the value creation, but is merely making the interaction possible and, hopefully, trustworthy. Two underlying concepts in almost all platform organizations’ business models are first of all “*their use of temporary access and non-ownership models of utilizing consumer goods and services and, secondly, their reliance on the Internet*” (Belk, 2014).

So, how do these emerging business models actually work from a management control point of view and what is the logic surrounding the setup where the value creation for an organization is primarily this kind of matching between supply and demand? It is an accounting concept that this paper, based on the theory developed by Kornberger et al. (2017), describes as evaluative infrastructure. This concept will be the theoretical framework for analyzing the research question at hand.

When developing the concept of evaluative infrastructures, Kornberger et al. (2017) concludes that one must go beyond traditional management control theory, and for that reason uses two other

branches of literature. The first one being the one analyzing interorganizational relationships, which in many ways can be compared to platform organizations and their setting. However, the problem with this literature field is, according to Kornberger et al. (2017) that it assumes that there is a hierarchical presence in the organizations and in their contexts, which not necessarily is the case. The second branch of literature that they are investigating and using as a springboard for their theoretical development is the branch of literature analyzing supply chains and networks. But the problem that they identified with that branch is that it assumes that there always is a central power present affecting the stakeholders to act as more or less independent islands, even though the network logic is present. So, Kornberger et al. (2017) concludes that the current literature is not enough for investigating platform organizations and their characteristics, and for that reason they develop the concept of evaluative infrastructures.

The main intention of the thesis is to analyze how platform organizations control for value creation. This will be done through the recently developed theoretical framework of Kornberger et al. (2017). In analyzing this control concept, we also make an empirical contribution to the theoretical framework. These intentions are motivated by the nascent nature of the theory, and the rise of the phenomenon of platform organizations and the sharing economy in today's society. Altogether, this leads to the following research question:

How do platform organizations in the sharing economy control for value creation?

In addressing this question, we build upon, and contribute to, the literature on evaluative infrastructures (Kornberger et al., 2017), and how that concept can explain control mechanisms in platform organizations. Our specific research focus concerns the theory of how platform organizations control for value creation.

The study will start with an analysis of the conceptual development of the phenomenon of evaluative infrastructures. As Kornberger et al. (2017), we will investigate the current management control theories that have been used to analyze complex organizational settings such as networks and supply chains. When the theoretical framework is established and explained we go through the empirical method, which consists of explorative, semi-structured interviews. We are using three case companies, one main company and two companies used for contrasting and calibration

of the findings in the main company. A deeper explanation and motivation for this chosen method will be addressed in the method chapter of the thesis. The empirical data and findings will be analyzed through our theoretical framework, which is that of Kornberger et al. (2017). Given the explorative and semi-structured approach we have also had the opportunity to do findings outside of the initial scope, which we will return to in later chapters.

2 Theoretical Background and concepts

2.1 Empirical setting of theory

To set the theoretical stage of this thesis one could start off with a quote by Tom Godwin, senior vice president of strategy and innovation at Havas Media: *“The world’s largest taxi firm, Uber, owns no cars. The world’s most popular media company, Facebook, creates no content. The world’s most valuable retailer, Alibaba, carries no stock. And the world’s largest accommodation provider, Airbnb, owns no property.”* (The Independent, 2015, read in Kornberger et al., 2017). This quote is often used and naturally pinpoints the very motivation for research in the field of platform organizations and the sharing economy, so also from a management control point of view.

Usually, management control, and thus the control of value creation, concerns production inside hierarchies (Kornberger et al., 2017). Platforms on the other hand require decentralized control beyond the organizational borders, and even beyond interorganizational borders (ibid). They are concerned with matchmaking between peers in digital interfaces, usually through mobile or web (Kornberger et al., 2017). Peers that the platform has no hierarchical control over (ibid). Given that their primary purpose is to facilitate matchmaking, and let the value creation take place externally between peers, they usually hold limited fixed assets, and are small lean organizations in relation to their user bases (Kornberger et al., 2017).

2.2 Background of theory

Kornberger et al. (2017) uses two strands of literature to articulate their research question. The first is that of supply networks and supply chains which lifts the changing role of accounting in settings like joint ventures, strategic partnerships, and cooperation between independent units. In this context Kornberger et al. (2017) mention, among others, Håkansson and Lind (2004) and Mouritsen and Thrane (2006). The second strand is that which addresses accounting as “a power/knowledge apparatus” (Miller and Power, 2013), as well as “non-traditional forms of accounting”, suggesting on the use of rankings and ratings, here primarily drawing on Kornberger and Carter (2010), Jeacle and Carter (2011), Pollock and D’Adderio (2012), Fourcade and Healy (2013), and Power (2015). The common denominator here is seeing accounting processes “*extend*

beyond organizational boundaries” (Kornberger et al., 2017). Following is an analysis of these two strands in order to better understand Kornberger et al.’s framework.

2.3 Theory track 1 - Accounting in Interorganizational Networks

To be able to compete in a globalized world companies have been practically forced to work in new and different ways, therein including cooperating with other companies specialized in what the own company lacks. This has given a multitude of inter-firm relations, as joint ventures, supply chains, and outsourcing, to name only a few. The dynamics in these inter-organizational relationships rendered interesting settings for research. Håkansson and Lind (2004), talk about the dyadic relationship between telecom firms, but recognize the network dynamics and that inter-organizational relationships contain a mix of bureaucracy, market and relationship structures. Mouritsen and Thrane (2006) investigate the network to a larger extent and the use of accounting and controls within them. Mouritsen and Thrane (2006) propose that *“accounting can be conceptualized as an actor helping to mediate, shape and construct inter-organizational relations through self-regulating and orchestration mechanisms”*. The self-regulating mechanisms are described as something *“allowing interaction and exchange to occur unobtrusively”*, and the *“orchestrating mechanisms involve structuring these interactions”* (Mouritsen and Thrane, 2006). Accounting in inter-organizational networks goes into the more lateral relationships of supply chain and network accounting. But by pointing to research by Frances and Garnsey (1996), Kraus and Strömsten (2016), and Seal, Berry, and Cullen (2004), Kornberger et al. (2017) claim that in practice accounting is here *“concerned with the formation of relative hierarchies between a powerful and a less powerful (set of) firms”*, hence the notion of hierarchy is still present, however with less defined boundaries.

2.4 Theory track 2 - Accounting as a “power/knowledge apparatus”

The other theoretical track that Kornberger et al. (2017) builds upon is a track in which they label accounting as a *“power/knowledge apparatus”*. They are referring to Miller and Power (2013) as the inventors of this theoretical concept, which basically has to do with more recent forms of non-traditional accounting such as rankings, ratings and other types of classification mechanisms (Jeacle and Carter, 2011). It is further described as *“processes of accounting which extend beyond organizational boundaries”* (Kornberger et al., 2017). What this strand of literature has in common

with more “traditional” views of accounting and management control is that power remains centralized, and that the accounting is functioning as a device of governmentality (Kornberger et al., 2017), as a way of bringing order, authority and structure to the organization.

Kornberger et al. (2017) further cites Miller and Power’s (2013) description of accounting as something that gathers different actors and give them a joint set of vocabulary, which leads to networks, relations and an understanding that goes beyond the sphere of the actual company. Kornberger et al. also addresses what Miller and Power (2013) call “*territorialization*”, and how it “*suggests the domination or mastery of one space through the articulation of control (...)*”. However, here too Kornberger et al. find that the vocabulary and conceptualization rests on the thought of that accounting has a theoretical center from which power is channelized. What Kornberger et al. (2017) arrive at is that in order to be able to grasp and articulate the concept of accounting beyond its hierarchical aspects and functions, which they assume necessary in order to better describe the role of accounting in platform organizations, they formulate that one “*(...) need[s] to discard of the notion of center and periphery which has been embedded in conceptions of territorialization*” (ibid). Further, one should consider the possibility that accounting in platform organizations may not have the same nature as the existing research in the fields suggests.

2.5 Why previous theory is not sufficient to explain the management control in platform organizations

2.5.1 Hierarchical Consciousness

Kornberger et al (2017) recognizes these two theory tracks as a foundation on which to investigate accounting in platform organizations. What they do not find satisfactory is however that they both rest on the notion of what Hopwood (1996) calls “*accounting’s hierarchical consciousness*”. What this means is that despite that the two literature strands talks about accounting in a more lateral setting and in less traditional means, they are still “*wedded to notions of hierarchy and the visible hand searching for efficiencys in closed supply chains*” Kornberger et al. (2017). Elaborating on this, Kornberger et al. (2017) claim that the existing literature does not let go of the fundamental thought of that there always is a hierarchy and center of power and control.

Kornberger et al. (2017) further bring up the relation between the accounting as such and the people of the organizations undertaking the accounting, to whom in reality the accounting is referring to, and how the “*hierarchical consciousness*” is embedded herein as well. Therefore, they develop the concept of “*evaluative infrastructures*”, which takes a more heterarchical point of departure. According to Kornberger et al. (2017), Evaluative infrastructures can help to describe the “*accounting practices that enable platform based organizations*”. Because, to be able to stay on par with the way that businesses, in particular platform companies like Airbnb and Uber, are developing, Kornberger et al. (2017) suggest that one must be able to find new ways of talking about the business, and not be stuck in the “*constrained vocabulary currently at our disposal*”. Succeeding in this, these researchers hope that it will be easier to understand and address platform organizations properly.

2.5.2 Not interorganizational, but something else...

What makes platform organizations tricky to understand and grasp is not necessarily the setup of people who are employed by the company, it is the relationship between the various stakeholders that makes these organizational forms complex, and at the same time very interesting. In order to understand platform organizations and the context they are active in, one has to understand who is who in this whole set up. Take Airbnb for example. The supplier of the organization, that is the one owning an apartment that is up for rent in one town, is hence a user and customer of the platform’s solution. So, if the stakeholder owning the, arguably, most important asset in this example actually also is a customer, it is perhaps natural that this stakeholder (and customer) therefore have another type of control and power than what a customer usually has in a more “traditional” setup. So, this complex structure of an organization calls for a new way of looking at the management control in them. In other words, the platform organization have no formal hierarchical control over a large part of the value creation process, since that happens decentralized between peers (Kornberger et al., 2017).

2.6 Evaluative Infrastructures

As concluded, the existing accounting literature cannot fully explain the accounting and management control logics in platform organizations in the sharing economy. Therefore, Kornberger et al. (2017) develop the concept of evaluative infrastructures, which takes a more

heterarchical point of departure. According to Kornberger et al. (2017), evaluative infrastructures can better help to describe the accounting practices that enable platform based organizations to exercise control. The concept consists of three sub-parameters: relationality, generativity and protocol. These three parameters can be used to characterize evaluative infrastructures as a “*novel mode of accounting and to go beyond the ‘hierarchical consciousness of accounting’*” (Kornberger et al. 2017), and they will in detail be presented below.

2.6.1 Relationality

Evaluative infrastructures are, contrary to traditional hierarchical accounting, relational rather than referential. This means that, in the infrastructure, networks and ecologies are created, where relations give way for trust and reputation. Through putting together elements that don’t necessarily belong to the same context, Kornberger et al (2017) mean that evaluative infrastructures are created and act as “*contextualizing machines*”. Elements that can be connected are decisions, behaviors, events and actions. The assembly then creates a form of context, and with more data as input the context becomes more and more clear. This can be accomplished with algorithms that assemble thousands of data points making the context relational. Otherwise, as is the case in for example auditing, data is referential and evaluated through the help of predetermined standards, and “*in this sense accounting “constructs” its objects...*” (Kornberger et al. 2017). This can be interpreted as that accounting in a way forces elements into categories that are already

known and named. This should however mean a limitation as it will fail to properly incorporate concepts and contexts emerging from an economy not built on the traditional hierarchical structure. With relationality a far more accurate and individualized context can be created as it connects input with input into a “web of context”.

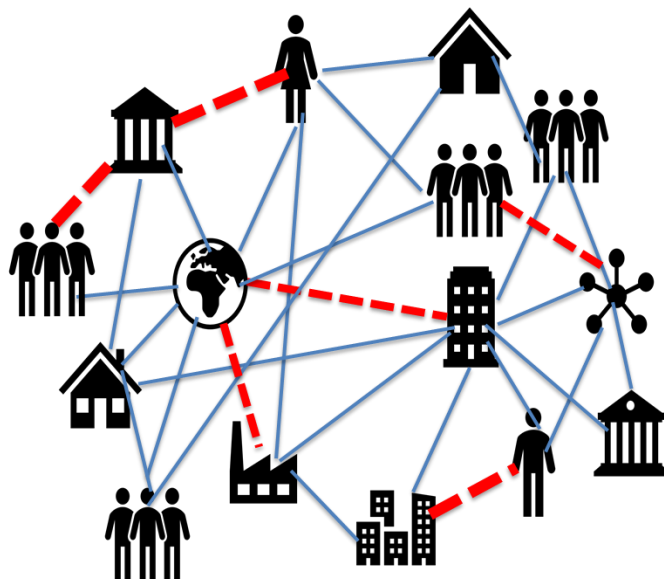


Figure 1. Illustration of the Relationality Dimension

Kornberger et al. (2017) puts forward the relationality perspective and highlight the

relationships that platform organizations facilitate and demands in order to function. This is one of the potential differences between the evaluative infrastructure perspective and the interorganizational perspective. Relationships, of all kinds, are important in most business situations, but in an interorganizational setting the relationships are governed in more of a formal and hierarchical nature. There is usually one party, or at least units within a party that is considered hierarchically above the counterparty (Håkansson & Lind, 2004), even though it is not outspoken. The logic of how the relationships are to be carried out is governed more by the power structure and hierarchy (ibid), even though it might be informal, than what it is in this kind of network setting. It is perhaps natural that the network relationships become more complex when your customer also might be the party owning your key value- driving assets.

2.6.2 Generativity

Kornberger et al. (2017) explains how platform organizations are using their network and their environment to open up new markets and create new opportunities, a concept they describe as generativity. This is, in part, also what the interorganizational relationships does, and to some extent, are meant to do. This could be described as a joint feature of both evaluative infrastructures and interorganizational relationships compared to the “traditional” organization, where the company has to rely more on the internal competences and abilities to create new possibilities.

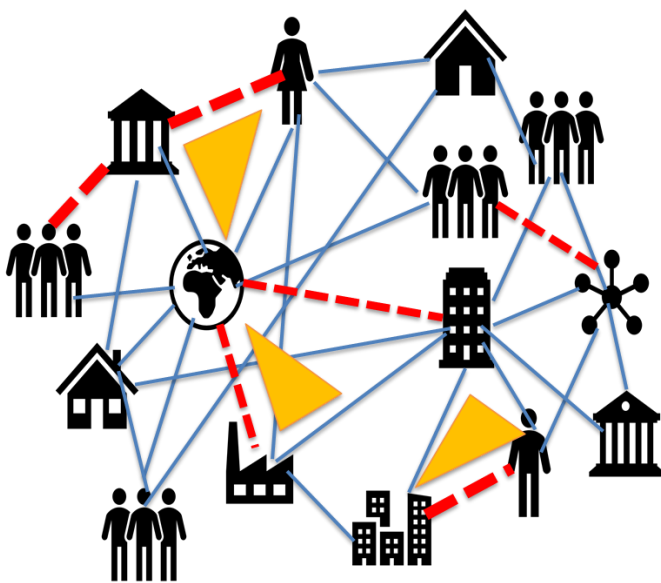


Figure 2. Illustration of the Generativity Dimension Added to the Relationality Dimension

But to go further, and analyze the difference between interorganizational relationships and evaluative infrastructures, Kornberger et al. (2017) analyses how accounting can lead to the disclosure of objects, that accounting has the tendency to frame objects in the sense that it can “territorialize” them. The disclosure mentioned is not meant as in disclosing financial information that otherwise would not have reached the surface, but rather to create a form of space and possibility for unexpected things to be

created. Through this they lift accounting's "generative" function, and formulate that accounting can be a "*means of disclosing a new world, of exploring, opening up, generating new opportunities and new subjectivities (...)*" (Kornberger et al., 2017).

Here the contrast to other forms of accounting and control is that the evaluative infrastructures "*do not territorialize or capture objects through their operations*" in the sense of referentially "*forcing*" concepts into already known categories. Rather evaluative infrastructures can "*disclose new worlds*" (Kornberger et al. 2017). As an example, Kornberger et al. (2017) look at how eBay through its evaluative infrastructure has managed to create the condition for trust to develop. This despite the fact that users stay anonymous and have never met in person, which historically has been something that would be required in order to develop trust. What this means is that through the "*evaluative infrastructure, eBay created the non-economic values it relies on for its economic success*" (Kornberger et al., 2017).

The way that Kornberger et al. (2017) mean that the new opportunities emerge in evaluative infrastructures is that "*evaluative infrastructures do not calculate what is there but disclose new worlds through creating objects that are not so much the outcomes of programmatic aspirations, but of a surplus of data and traces, which produce new possibilities of discovery and invention.*" In other words, new opportunities and ideas should not be produced through some particular method or plan. Rather, they emerge from the collecting of a surplus of data. What these kinds of companies are doing is to create the environment for opportunities to appear, but they are not looking for them using predefined, sequential actions.

2.6.3 Protocol

The third insight that Kornberger et al. (2017) present regarding evaluative infrastructures is that of protocol. Where in hierarchical structures power is distributed from the center, in evaluative infrastructures the power is kept in the center while the control is "*radically distributed*". This relation between power and control, Kornberger et al. (2017) choose to, drawing on Deleuze (1992), analyze as protocol and as a "*contradistinction to disciplinary power*". Kornberger et al. (2017) argue that evaluative infrastructures can show the difference between power and control, where control is "*exercised as part of production and consumption processes*". What this means

is that control is exercised by everyone using and being part of the platform. Power however is kept centrally at the platform company in the sense that it is the company that sets the arena on which control is exercised. This could for example be decisions regarding who stays on the platform and what information is shown. The centralized power can almost be illustrated as the company's competitive advantage, what they keep to themselves. Many aspects of the business are visible and even controlled by the users as mentioned above, but some other pieces of information such as computer code or matchmaking logic for instance, the platform organization might keep to themselves, as a means of exercising power. As Kornberger et al. (2017) formulate it: *"The heart of evaluative infrastructures, where the designers of its elements and operations sit, is shrouded in mystery and secrecy."* Using the example of eBay Kornberger et al. (2017) describe how the center can decide on measures and how to measure, as well as exclude users and introduce rules. In a way, this outsources the control to the users, which reasonably should be advantageous, if not necessary, when the user base becomes so large that control over it would not be possible to do centrally.

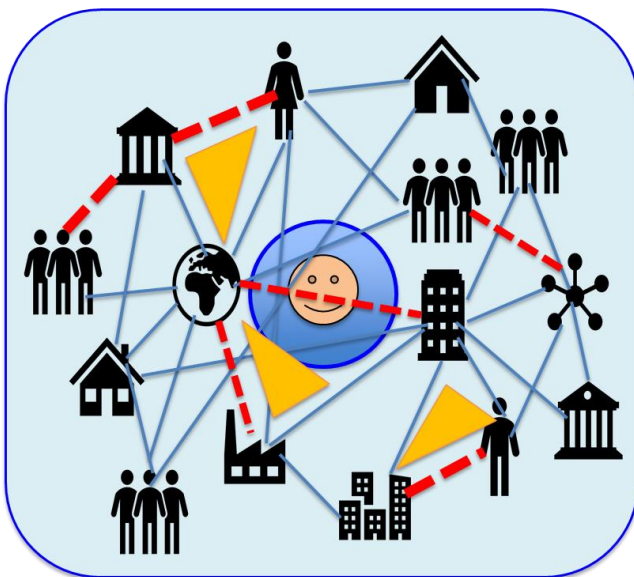


Figure 3. Illustration of the Protocol Dimension Added to the Generativity and Relationality Dimensions

As Kornberger et al. (2017) further clarify, the power tends to be centralized in platform organization networks since the company is owning the data and knowledge about the network's behavior. So, it seems as if the control aspects are another one of the clear differences between platform organizations and "traditional" ones. Also, platform organizations tend to be lean. They tend to build scalable, agile business models that are run through economies of scale, and much of this is allowed because of the decentralized control. In other words, few people are serving many customers, by basically letting the customers serve each other (Kornberger et al, 2017). And this further seems to be a prerequisite for being successful in this setting. In their study of eBay, Kornberger et al. (2017) noticed that the *"kind of centralized "adjudication" that eBay's founder sought to avoid"*, meaning the meddling and checking of the quality of the offerings and ads was something that questioned

the scalability. The problem for eBay at that time was basically that the manual labor of quality checking and such limited the firm's ability to scale up the business.

2.7 Other Features of Evaluative Infrastructures

A core in evaluative infrastructures is, perhaps not so surprisingly, the evaluative aspect of them. What Kornberger et al. (2017) find about the evaluation however is that it does not necessarily have the same features as we are used to. For example, the evaluations and calculations that takes place in evaluative infrastructures are not necessarily concerned with finding a predetermined good or bad. The evaluation and measurement of, for example, usage of peers on the platforms can often not be classified as good or bad. What this creates, according to Kornberger et al. (2017), is that it actually, rather than clarification, creates debate and questions. There is other research saying that in the case of no clear predetermined ranking systems, buyers might actually engage in considering other types of detailed information, such as peer reviews (Weinberg & Davis, 2005, read in Kornberger et al., 2017), so the debate and the questions is perhaps a natural consequence. A related point that Kornberger et al. (2017) are doing is that indicative for evaluative infrastructures is that the matching that often takes place on these platforms are not necessarily concerned with finding the objectively best peer, product or service, but rather about finding the best match (Kornberger et al., 2017).

What the evaluations, and especially the peer reviews, further create is trust. The logic behind this creation of trust is according to Jeacle & Carter (2011) the unbiasedness of the feedback and the reviews. It basically rests on the thought that a user has no reason to give an evaluation other than an honest one, and the platform organization cannot control it, this creates trust and credibility according to this theory. What Kornberger et al. (2017) also conclude regarding evaluative infrastructures is that much of the accounting that takes place in the platform organizations actually is done by others than accountants, namely the users. The gradings, ratings and reviews that belong to the accounting information is often performed by the very users of the service. According to their study, this actually leads to that the accountants become de-skilled, as their roles basically are intruded by the users of the platform.

2.8 Theoretical framework - Evaluative Infrastructures

The theoretical framework will be used to analyze the empirical data collected from our case company and the calibrating cases. Accordingly, our framework provides the foundation for our empirical contributions to the previous literature in the field, as well as a possibility to highlight suggestions for future theoretical research.

2.8.1 Dimension 1 - Relationality

As mentioned above, elements that are connected in an evaluative infrastructure are decisions, behaviors, events and actions. The assembly then gives a sort of context, and with the more data as input the clearer the context becomes. As Kornberger et al (2017) puts forward, the relational character of evaluative infrastructures is not only created in platform organizations, it is also something that is demanded for them to function. So, an analysis of the relations that are created among the above-mentioned elements, and many more, will be carried out in the case and calibrating companies.

2.8.2 Dimension 2 - Generativity

Since platform organizations are using their network and their environment to open up new markets and create new opportunities, an analysis of how this is done in our empirics will also be carried out. Kornberger et al. (2017) describe how the accounting regime in evaluative infrastructures can create a form of space and possibility for unexpected things to be created. Theoretically the new opportunities and ideas should not be produced through some particular method or plan but rather emerge from collecting a surplus of data, so the data collection process and the data management will further be investigated and analyzed.

2.8.3 Dimension 3 - Protocol

Finally, Kornberger et al. (2017) describe thoroughly how evaluative infrastructures are keeping the power centralized while the control is “*radically distributed*”, and further that the control is “*exercised as part of production and consumption processes*”. So, in order to fully understand the case company, an analysis of the distributed control and the centralized power will be conducted.

3 Research Method

In this section we will present the research methods used in the study. We will start by presenting the empirical method, continue with the research design and the research approach, and we will then present the method for data collection as well as data analysis. Finally, we will present a critical discussion regarding the research quality of the thesis through elaborating on our view of the validity and reliability of the study, and, perhaps more importantly, the trustworthiness and plausibility (Ahrens & Chapman, 2006), of it. General for all sections is that we will present the sections underlying rationale and link to the objectives of the study in order to clearly motivate chosen research methods.

3.1 Research design

3.1.1 Research approach

The two most common, and contrasting, research approaches are the deductive and the inductive approaches. In a deductive approach the researcher is developing propositions from current theory and investigate them in an empirical setting. In the contrasting approach, the inductive approach, theory is systematically generated from data (Dubois and Gadde, 2002). The problem with both of these approaches, from our research's point of view, is that both have a linear view of the research process.

Instead, as argued by Dubois and Gadde (2002), *“by constantly going back and forth from one type of research activity to another and between empirical observations and theory”*, the researchers are able to gain a deepened understanding of the theory and the empirics at hand. So, for the purpose of this study we have used an abductive research approach. According to Dubois and Gadde (2002) it is especially useful with an abductive approach if the aim of the research is to discover new phenomena, which in many ways is the aim of this thesis, given that the subject field is relatively new. Dubois and Gadde (2002) also suggest an abductive research approach especially when the research topic has not yet been extensively explored, which is the case for the current study.

More concretely, the specific type of abductive approach used is called “*systematic combining*”, which consists of continuous movement between an empirical world and a theoretical world. The benefit of this method is that the researcher can adapt the research issues and the analytical framework depending on the empirical findings and breakthroughs. Empirical observations might result in identification of unanticipated yet related issues that may be further explored in interviews or by other means of data collection, which is beneficial for us since the subject is nascent and there are room for exploration of future research fields within the field.

3.1.2 Selection of case companies

Drawing on Flyvbjerg (2006) and his “*Strategies for the Selection of Samples and Cases*”, we chose an “*Information-oriented selection*” where one selects cases on the basis of their information content in order to “*maximize the utility of information from small samples and single cases*”. When doing this, several boxes needed to be ticked. The first was that the company was operative in the sharing economy as defined in this paper. Further, a physical presence in Sweden was preferred as multiple face-to-face interviews were to be conducted over a period of time. Having access to companies that act in the same context was also deemed ideal as this could contribute the most to maintaining the credibility of the study. A balance of having companies operating in the same context but without being too similar was desired. Companies going through approximately the same phase was also deemed important, as contrasting findings between the companies should not be primarily attributable to how far along they are in their respective company journeys. The same reason applies to finding companies similar in size, where we looked at both size in organization and size of customer base.

Many companies were in the process discarded, at a final stage contact was established with five companies, of which three were judged to constitute a good balance between spread and comparability. The three companies that remained after the selection process were Qasa, Workaround and Heetch. Qasa represents the main case, while Workaround and Heetch function as calibrators. Qasa was chosen to represent the main case because of that their business model takes an action that is normally associated with a high degree of involvement, subletting your apartment, and through technology lowers the hurdle for this action. The way that Qasa is successfully using technology to infuse trust and simplicity into a transaction and thus increasing

resource-efficiency makes the company the best example of a platform company in the sharing economy. Workaround was chosen as it operates in the same domain of matching hosts and tenants, but with a more business-to-business or business-to-consumer strategy, and thus serving as a calibrator on one side. On the other side there is Heetch. Heetch operates in transportation, an entirely other domain but bears a closer commonality to the C2C-character of Qasa. The companies will be used to give bearing to the empirically somewhat thin research field of management control in platform organizations operative in the sharing economy. The calibrating companies contribute with complementing and nuancing empirics. And as mentioned above, the two companies bear both similarities and contrasting traits from Qasa.

3.1.3 Methodological Fit

When assessing the previous literature and research made in the subject of management control in platform companies one can, using Edmondson and McManus' (2007) archetypes of methodological fit in field research, call the theory nascent. The companies driving the development are in themselves relatively young, with the research around them subsequently even younger. After classifying the theory as nascent, Edmondson and McManus' (2007) suggest following their framework in order to achieve an internal consistency in the research. With that in mind, research questions, the type of data collected and the way it was collected, as well as the analysis of the data was carried through using the framework. The most clear contributions of Edmondson and McManus' (2007) article was the way they advocate for an iterative approach and that when *“Working within the nascent theory arena requires an intense learning orientation and adaptability to follow the data in inductively figuring out what is important”*. The point is to be attentive and flexible along the research process, and work back and forth between theory, empirics, and analysis. This way we hope to have created an internal consistency in the research process which in turn give the best possible conditions for new contributions to surface.

3.1.4 Data collection

3.1.4.1 The interviews

For the purpose of this study 16 in-depth interviews, one company visit as well as analysis of the web platforms was conducted. The interviews were held with six individuals with top positions in their respective organization. The ten interviews at Qasa were split between the two founders, one now functioning as CEO and the other as Market Director, as well as their Customer Satisfaction

Manager. Having access to founders and other people with strategic mandate was deemed the best approach to get a combined holistic and penetrating view of the company. In Workaround three interviews were conducted, one of the interviewees was a founder and operating as product owner, the other interviewee was involved in business development and held a strategic role. Heetch is yet a rather young company in Sweden with few people employed in the office, meaning that our interviewee object is involved in all levels of the company, both operational and strategic, giving insight into the whole organization. Three interviews were conducted with the Swedish Country Manager of Heetch.

The interviews were split into three rounds. Two structured rounds, and a follow-up round. The first round held a quite broad and explorative character, as suggested by Dubois and Gadde (2002), in order to after the introductory interviews have a broad empirical base and iterate back to the literature. In the second and third round of interviews fewer but more focused questions were posed, enabling a more effective use of interview time. The interviews lasted 25 to 85 minutes with an average of around 55 minutes. The shorter interviews were found in the second and third rounds of interviews. Ten interviews were conducted in person, and the other six were conducted through telephone. Also, we had the opportunity to perform an office visit at Qasa in order to get insight into the organizational environment and level of formality between staff. The third round of interviews was mainly conducted through telephone, as this round of interviews mainly regarded clarifications and follow-up questions that didn't require physical presence.

3.1.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

Considering the explorative nature of the research approach a semi-structured interview format was chosen. As more was learnt about the subject many initial questions were dropped while others were added. Being prepared to depart from the planned questions in order to follow interesting issues addressed by the interviewee enabled additional information to surface, in line with DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree's (2006) recommendation of qualitative in-depth interviews.

3.1.4.3 Transcription

After the interviews were conducted, the recordings were transcribed. The transcribing process filled multiple functions, not only the obvious practical function of not having to listen through a

whole interview to find a specific quote. Also, carefully listening through the interviews, piece by piece, small signals and choice of words could also be noticed, adding to the depth of the output from the interviews. Some of the follow-up interviews were not transcribed since the benefit of this was considered to be marginal, given that they often served a more specific purpose, clarifying details in other interviews. They were however recorded and analyzed in the same manner as the other interviews.

3.1.4.4 Order of interviews

The order of the interviews was such that a first round, after the intro interview and company visit, was made with all the interviewees during the course of three days. Conducting the interviews during a short period of time enabled a generic point of departure in all the companies. Following the completion of the first interviews we returned to the literature. After some calibration of direction, a second round of interviews was carried through. Later in the process the interviews were held on a more ad hoc basis, since the benefit of managing the order of interviews and days in between them were considered to be marginal.

3.1.4.5 The interview questions

The questions posed had, as mentioned, a quite broad character to start with. They were open-ended to encourage the interviewees to elaborate on their answers. In the course of the interviews the interviewees highlighted certain issues and dynamics that they had noticed in their respective companies. With the semi-structured interview format follow-up questions could be posed to further investigate what the interviewee regarded as important. In the later interviews the questions tended to be more specific, and tailored towards the interviewee as well as towards previous answers and discussions with the person in question. Weighing in the interviewee's position in the company, the questions were slightly altered to get their view on their specific area, but the underlying aim of the questions did not necessarily change with the interviewee.

3.1.5 Data analysis

With the iteration to literature that Dubois and Gadde (2002) encourage, the process of interviewing, analyzing the interviews and then preparing more interviews was not linear. Going back and forth, the direction of the questions and subject changed, making it important to keep a big picture perspective that permitted change of direction without losing bearing.

The data from the interviews was analyzed using the framework of evaluative infrastructures (Relationality, Generativity and Protocol), all the while being attentive to recurring themes or issues addressed by the interviewees. The first step after an interview was to identify answers and quotes from the interviewee that, looking through the lenses of the evaluative infrastructure framework, could be tied to control in the company. The second step was to look more overall over the round of interviews, where traits found in Qasa were analyzed with the help of the two other companies, primarily looking at commonalities, contrasts and trends. The gathered information and the identified key topics, as well as gaps in the data could then serve as foundation when reentering the literature to further develop and problematize the data. In turn, the analyzed data and literature constituted the basis when formulating questions for the next round of interviews. This way of working created a dynamic funnel through which the interesting topics surfaced almost organically and key findings stood out surprisingly clear.

3.2 Research quality

3.2.1 Validity

The validity of research is concerned with accuracy of it. In a way, it describes how well it actually measures what it is supposed to measure (Merriam, 1994; Yin, 2009). One can also say that the validity of research describes how well the research corresponds accurately to the real world. Before continuing, it should however be clarified that given that this is a qualitative study, and the aim of it not necessarily is to find an objective truth in our empirics in order to describe a population. So, the following discussion of validity, and also the discussion on reliability will be brief and rather serve as a bridge into our discussion regarding the plausibility and trustworthiness of the study, which better suits qualitative research approaches (Ahrens & Chapman, 2006). Concerning the generalizability of the study, which often is a central part of the validity discussion we can just conclude it is not necessarily in the nature of case studies in general, and in our case in particular, to in the first hand be generalizable. The aim is often instead, just as in this case, to do interesting and fruitful theoretical findings. Findings that for example can be tested with other research methods that are more geared towards improving generalizability, if that is the aim.

3.2.2 Reliability

The reliability of research is a measure of how consistent it is. It measures if it would produce the same results if it would be done again with the same research process. In other words, it describes how well other researchers would get the same results (Merriam, 1994; Yin 2009). However, reliability is, just as validity, mostly relevant for quantitative studies. Our aim is not to find an objective truth and produce a study that other researchers can replicate. Our aim is to empirically theoretically develop the concept of evaluative infrastructures.

There are researchers who argue that subjectivity is in general a problem when analyzing qualitative data (Merriam, 1994), and this approach would thus affect the reliability of our study. However, as mentioned above, our aim is not to find an objective truth in a sample in order to describe a population. The empirics are in our case more a snapshot of the case companies' current situation, viewed through our theoretical framework as well as other subjective influences, rather than an objective truth about it. Furthermore, the sharing economy and the context of platform organizations, is a young, disruptive and fast-changing environment, and one should, in our opinion, not necessarily see this as a problem or risk that should be taken away, but instead see this is part of the analysis and findings.

3.2.3 Plausibility and trustworthiness

As mentioned above, there are different opinions regarding how research quality should be discussed in qualitative research. Ahrens and Chapman (2006) argue that discussions of validity and reliability might not be the most appropriate way to assess research quality in qualitative research. They mean that a specific research project need a specific methodological approach, and that predetermined methodological and analytical checklists rather can be counterproductive. According to them it is natural that one does not get identical results when two different researchers study the same organization, since they will have different points of view (ibid). So, questions of replication in qualitative field research is according to them inappropriate. What instead should be looked at is that the results from the two studies, in this example, does not *"implicitly or explicitly contradict those of the other"* (Becker, 1970, p. 20, read in Ahrens & Chapman, 2006), and that the two results are compatible with each other. Their conclusion is that analysis of research quality in qualitative studies rather should have a focus on trustworthiness and plausibility (ibid).

This goes in line with the findings of Lincoln and Guba (1985) concerning evaluative criteria. They also mean that trustworthiness of a research study is important when evaluating its worth. According to their findings, trustworthiness concerns establishing four elements: credibility, which describes the “*confidence in the 'truth' of the findings*”, transferability, which shows “*that the findings have applicability in other contexts*”, dependability, which shows “*that the findings are consistent and could be repeated*” and finally confirmability, which describes how “*a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest.*” The following discussion of plausibility and trustworthiness will be based on the findings of Ahrens & Chapman (2006) and Lincoln and Guba (1985).

The main action we have taken in order to maintain as high trustworthiness as possible is, perhaps not very surprisingly, documentation of the research process. The main aim has been to do it as structured and logical as possible, so that other various stakeholders can follow the process, and most importantly understand the structure and methods used in this thesis, which would strengthen the credibility of the findings.

Further commenting on the credibility of the findings, a critique against our own research setup is that we have interviewed with only six different people in the three case organizations. However, all of the interview objects are holding key management positions in their organizations. The reasoning behind choosing key management staff as interviewees was that they were deemed to have the most qualified view of the company considering their involvement in both strategic and operational decisions, giving them a combined detailed and holistic insight. Considering the small size of the case companies and their level of involvement the key management staff was judged to be a fitting group to deliver an adequate overview of the organization and the situations that they are facing. This was something that was also reinforced in interviews, for example by the Customer Satisfaction Manager at Qasa: “*Everybody has a very good overview. Very, very good view. Everyone is involved in everything.*”. Also, we had the opportunity to perform an office visit at Qasa in order to assess and judge the informal relationships and the office environment, which helped us understand the key management’s overview of the organization.

The risk of getting biased points of views in qualitative, semi-structured interview situations, is perhaps always hard to hedge against, but the risk of getting an uninformed point of view was in this case considered very low due to the reasons mentioned above. Further, in Qasa, our main case company, we interviewed the CEO, the Marketing Director, and the Customer Relationship manager in order to get multiple yet deep perspectives. To a large extent we also asked them the same, or at least very similar, questions. This was something that we could use as a control mechanism and reality check. Another control mechanism used was ocular observation of the websites/platforms as well as other secondary data points in order to double check some of the information learned in the interviews. All in all, the trustworthiness and plausibility were deemed to be maintained high given the above-mentioned measures.

This study uses one main case company and two other companies for calibration of the findings. The fact that three companies were used in the data collection is something that can limit the possibility for deep analysis compared to if only one company would have been used. However, what potentially is lost in terms of deep analysis is instead gained in nuance. Because, in order to not be vulnerable to extreme views, the risk of getting uninformed answers, and the risk of our own misinterpretation, we had the possibility to compare and contrast some of the answers in the main case company with our calibrating cases. This was in other words a measure to maintain high confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

In the industries we have decided to analyze, there are bigger, more established, and more international companies. Some would perhaps argue that it, from a transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) point of view, would have been more suitable to choose three companies that are in different lifecycle phases. But in order to maintain control of the data collection process and to also be able to analyze deeper we have chosen to analyze three companies that are in the same kind of lifecycle phase. We want to make sure that when we are analyzing the dynamics in Qasa and then using the two calibrative cases the calibration should be made from a platform organization point of view, and not by analyzing something else, such as life cycle theory. This was, in other words, a tactic for lowering the risk of misinterpretations of the data, and to make sure that we are studying what we are intended to do.

3.3 Limitations

The use of one main case and two calibrating cases, with interviews as the main source of empirical data, naturally leads to a few limitations that need to be addressed in order to assess the plausibility, and to some extent also the validity and reliability of the results.

The method of using one main case and two calibrating cases is not the most used approach when it comes to multiple case studies, so there are certainly those who would argue for another approach. This specific method did however suit our study for two reasons. Firstly, given that the companies in questions are young and relatively small, we wanted to minimize the risk of putting too much emphasis on issues that potentially were very company specific. The calibrating companies gave us the opportunity to sanity check some of the findings in the main case. Secondly, even though that was not the main aim of the method, it gave the study's findings an increased degree of generalizability.

Another limitation with the current study is the number of interviews held, especially with the main company. However, we have had the opportunity to meet with three key members of the main case, two of them founders. Also, we had the opportunity to perform an office visit and get insight into the informal interaction and the office environment.

The theory of the study is somewhat limited. The anchor article, Kornberger et al. (2017), plays a very central part in the theoretical development, and one could argue that the study would have benefitted from a richer theoretical base. However, the field is nascent, and there are a limited number of studies investigating the field. It should be mentioned though that this very fact is what most strongly motivates the study.

4 Empirics

4.1 “Dysfunctional and old fashioned” industries

A few years ago, the Stockholm rental market was “*dysfunctional, old fashioned and characterized by low transparency*”. This is at least the view of the founders of Qasa, and this is where they saw their opportunity. After being accepted to the renowned business incubator at the Stockholm School of Economics in 2014, the founders, describing themselves as “*a group of young entrepreneurs with a nerdy obsession for data, design and customer experience*”, set out with the mission to turn “*the dysfunctional market*” for apartment rentals in Stockholm upside down. What was noticed was that hosts had a hard time finding the tenants that they were looking for, and did not know what a reasonable charge for their apartments was, so the focus became to sophisticate the matching process between supply and demand.

Also emerging in Sweden the last three years are Heetch and Workaround. Two platform companies operative in different domains. Workaround is, like Qasa, also a young, Stockholm-based company with the ambition to effectivize the rental market. Workaround is however focusing on the office rental market, and has been called the Airbnb for office space. What the founders saw was that there was a large amount of vacancies at the same time as there were high rents, long rental periods and new offices being built. The transport service Heetch was founded in Paris in 2013. It bears many similarities to the more famous competitor Uber, specifically Uber Pop, with low tariffs and drivers that have other primary means of providing. Using a mobile application, the user can “hail” a car, and go from A to B for a lower price than a regular taxi. This background sets the stage for the empirics section. Further description and quotes from the three companies, with an emphasis on Qasa, are added throughout the following section.

4.2 The reality of the companies used in the study

4.2.1 The industries

As touched upon above, the market for housing in Stockholm is by Qasa described as non-functioning and in some ways obsolete. “*The market is very transactional, and it does not work particularly well. Blocket.se for example is built for transactions, and the problem with that is that*

there is an information asymmetry in the market, and there are also large transaction costs.”. Marketing Director (MD), Qasa. It is also described by the CEO of Qasa how there is a lack of transparency in the market, especially when it comes to the renting price levels. It is further described, perhaps not so surprisingly, as one of the most important pieces of information for people when making renting decisions. Initially, Qasa also had problems related to the asymmetry in the market regarding prices. *“People were putting way too high prices on their ads. There were unreasonable expectations in the market. It was overheated, and often biased towards the host’s advantage, so a false norm was created. But it turned out that the willingness to pay was not there, and many of the apartments remained unrented, which led to a lack of revenues for Qasa in the combination with unhappy customers.”*. MD, Qasa.

4.2.2 The transparency in the industries

So what role is Qasa then trying to play in this market? What Qasa is doing is not creating value for the customer with a new marketplace for housing: *“Our value is not necessarily created on the market. That has been done on Blocket since 1996. What we are doing, apart from showcasing apartments on a marketplace is that we, in a smarter and more sophisticated way, compared to Blocket or any other actor, are pairing tenant and host.”* CEO, Qasa. So, the business model and mindset of Qasa is quite different from the existing and market leading housing alternatives. Still, when asked of their role in the system, they do not necessarily see themselves as a party who are revolutionizing the housing market with a sharing economy alternative. *“I would not necessarily say that we are sharing economy, I would rather say that we are disruptive economy. We have not created a new market, as perhaps Airbnb has. What we have done is to make an existing market smarter, easier and safer.”* CEO, Qasa. Disruptive or not, and sharing economy or not, one of the clear differences between Qasa and the existing alternatives on the market is, at least according to Qasa, the level of transparency, which have been a problem in the industry for long. Not only towards the customer, but towards all different stakeholders.

The issue with a lack of transparency is not only found in the housing market. Heetch are telling a similar story about the taxi industry. *“The transparency to the drivers is too poor when it comes to many other companies. Also, there is too much control of what they should do, when they technically are independent contractors. Of course you want control, but not explicitly control*

them. As far as transparency is concerned with drivers, when there is a problem, being honest is highly appreciated. Then they are onboard on the journey [of the company] too, then they become ambassadors in this journey. And who are actually your number one ambassadors? It is the drivers. They are the ones who meet passengers all the time." Country Manager, Heetch. The transparency is not only directed towards the drivers, it is also something that the customers can benefit from: *"...we show the price before you even accept the trip. There is actually no one else in the world who does that."*

The lack of transparency is not a coincidence according to Workaround, *"I think that we are the first market place in this context that is somewhat transparent, in terms of that there are prices presented. The individual actors on the office rental market want to keep the transparency as low as possible. That is their business model, their margin. And that is also why people are choosing us; we offer something that the individual actors cannot. Because you are tendentious as individual actors. You do not want other actors to have the market information that you have. Every company is a form of monopoly wannabe."* Co-founder, Workaround.

4.3 Platform organizations

4.3.1 The user benefit of a platform - Making sense of information

One of the true benefits of a platform like TripAdvisor, Airbnb, or Qasa for that matter, from the user's perspective, is that the he or she can gain information and make sense of data that usually, in a traditional B2C setting, is not available to a customer. Through looking at reviews, ratings and gradings the user can get an, at least usually, unbiased view of what other users think of the product or service. If we take the example of Heetch and the taxi industry, it is natural that a user of the service would like to have information about who they, literally, are getting into a car with. This is exactly what a platform company is offering its users. *"...as a passenger, you see the driver's rating, you'll see the name, you'll see the car, and then when the driver arrives you will get the sheet of record, like a push-notification. We try to make it as easy and simple as possible for passengers to see who the person is and that's where the first connection comes with a new person you do not know."* Country Manager, Heetch. An important clarification is that this goes both

ways. In a platform setting it is as much about letting the driver, in this case, know who he or she is offering the service to.

However, with this system of ratings comes complications. Heetch describe how they never will be able to have *“110% control of what's happening on the platform, it's completely impossible”*. The unpredictability of the user feedback is part of the platform companies' reality and something they have to deal with. What the Customer Satisfaction Manager (CSM) at Qasa further elaborates on is that also part of the control is what is happening between peers outside of the platform is outside of the control of the company: *“It is key to keep the users on the platform. When they leave the platform and start communicating outside of it is where the largest drop happens.”*. She further explains how complicated it is from a branding point of view to go after users that have made arrangements outside the platform. Even though they have used the value of the service. The way to go is rather to make the platform as lean and user friendly as possible so that people do not want to leave it. *“The conversion increases significantly with every change that makes the platform become leaner and more user friendly”*. CSM, Qasa.

4.4 The business of the companies used in the study

4.4.1 Qasa's offer

What Qasa offers, matching a tenant and a host, is made possible through an algorithm. The algorithm takes into account different data points, for example desired length of lease, other applications made by the tenant, behavior during previous leases and willingness to pay. More available points of data are then weighed together and used as input to find the best possible match between a host and tenant.

4.4.2 Two stages of delivering value

4.4.2.1 In the Transaction

Qasa argues that there are two stages in which value is delivered in their business. The first step is the transaction, when the contract is signed, which they mean today *“does not work so well because it is controlled by actors such as Blocket, which are built for transactional purposes and transactions of smaller values.”* MD, Qasa.

An issue that Qasa notes in this transactional environment is the *“information asymmetry that makes it very problematic to trust a counterparty.”* MD, Qasa. In general, the seller has lot more information about the sold object, and a buyer needs to invest a great deal of trust in that what the seller says is true, which is not always done with ease. The seller can simultaneously be unknowledgeable of the prevailing market price of the object that is to be sold, meaning that it can either remain unsold or be sold for a price below its fair value, both outcomes negative for the host.

4.4.2.2 During the relationship

The second step Qasa formulates is to deliver value not only in the transaction but also over time, and forming a more long-term relationship. As Qasa describe this second step *“We are handling the transaction all the way through to the deal. We manage reference controls, credit controls, provide tailor-made digital leases, all done digitally and very easily, just to mention a few of the services provided in that process. But after that we do not let go, but are present and act as an intermediary during the whole rental period.”* And further elaborated, Qasa want to *“shift more and more into making money on the relationship, rather than the transaction. Then the marketplace becomes a funnel to drive in customers.”* They want to leave a “Blocket-model”, where what you earn on a rental is *“perhaps 100 SEK from the advertisement. The value for us is up to SEK 4-5000 today, and that will only increase as we add more services.”* MD, Qasa. As the CSM at Qasa formulates it, *“the ad on the website is more of a plus”*, meaning that the true value is in the matching and the long-term relationship.

This role of an intermediary that Qasa plays after the transaction is according to the MD primarily a financial role, and he even goes so far as to call Qasa a factoring company. He recognizes the value for the tenant in that Qasa handles the deposit and the rent payments. Qasa guarantees the payments to the host and can step in as a neutral actor in any case of disagreement regarding the deposit.

4.4.3 Matching tenant and host

Loosening up the market and matching host and tenant is, like Qasa, where Workaround produces the value. However, the matching process in Workaround is not as sophisticated as in Qasa. Even though Qasa of course does not want to reveal any specific details regarding the logic of their algorithm it is made clear that it is not about finding the “best” user and present him or her to the person renting out their apartment. It is rather about finding the best match between tenant and host, so that the likelihood of a successful, long term renting contract being established is maximized. It is further clarified by the MD of Qasa “...so that we, on the basis of probability, can make sure there is an agreement, by matching the right tenant with the right landlord. And this probability can be based on a thousand different data points.”.

The Qasa MD also mentions their reference tool, a function on their platform that allows a tenant to receive a reference from an employer or previous host. The process is entirely automatic as the reference is demanded from the tenant and a message is sent to the reference who in its turn just needs to accept. Also, pairing this function with other platforms, like Airbnb or LinkedIn, is addressed as a possibility.

Qasa uses an algorithm for their matching, but that is not the case in all platform companies, the platform in Workaround for example functions as more of a marketplace than a service. Workaround leaves a lot of the searching and filtering to their users to do on the website. A service provided is that they assist in the showing and signing of office spaces. Here Workaround takes on more of a role as a realtor and mediator as employees join customers in viewings. “We have probably had the philosophy that we start with basic, just mediation and try to do well.”. There are also trials going on with services around the viewings, Workaround BD explains “Nowadays we are constantly testing. For example, we are offering taxi to and from views, but we will only start building it into the platform when we notice that many people really request this.”

4.4.4 Level of automation and personal interaction

Hence, when it comes to Workaround, the automation progress of their core business, matching host and tenant, is not as far along as Qasa. They recognize that they will benefit from bringing a more automated solution with less interference in the exchange, but this they mean will come at a

later stage. *“Technically, our product is still in the early stages. The smarter the service becomes, the less meddling there will be, which we obviously strive for.”* BD, Workaround.

Simultaneously, Workaround BD mention that they believe that they will never totally escape the personal interaction, naming the magnitude and complexity of the transaction as a reason for this. *“Personal relationship and follow-up is very important. This may be because offices are a bit more advanced to buy, compared to e.g. the business of Airbnb.”* BD, Workaround.

Turning our heads to Heetch, the company that matches drivers looking to make some extra money on the side with passengers looking for a cheap, safe and regulated ride, we see a similar business model. Heetch also provides a matching between a supply and a demand, and also in this case the revenue comes from taking a share of the transaction. Considering the relatively low amount of money involved in an average trip (SEK 185 for a trip from Skanstull to Solna) the involvement from the customer is also considered rather small.

4.5 Characteristics of Qasa

Even though they are different in their exact business models, the logic behind how these companies are making money is similar. They take a cut of the fee between the peers. In the case of Qasa, it is 5-8 % of the monthly rent between the tenant and the host, where the host technically is the customer of Qasa. It is the hosts that are giving up 5-8% of their rent in order for Qasa to provide their service. As mentioned above, it is in Qasa's interest to achieve longevity, and the above perhaps explains that statement.

Qasa's idea is that the better the match, the larger the possibility that a long-term lease can be achieved. A lower turnover of tenants means that the host can have a higher degree of usage and avoid the hassle of having to find a new tenant each quarter. This is where Qasa's offer, and the users' money, lies. The host is willing to pay for sealing a lease that renders longevity and safety. As Qasa takes a fee on each monthly payment, a high number of matches giving contracts and longevity is in their interest. *“What we are most concerned about is to be long-term. You want a good tenant who pays the bills, who does not break stuff, etc. But what tears most on an apartment is when people are moving in and out. And that also costs a lot in administration for the property*

owners, because of how regulated the market is. The only way to make money on real estate today is through low interest rates. It is a low margin-low cost business. If you want to make more money, you cannot raise prices, you need to lower costs. So what we are doing is to try to find tenants that make you lower your costs in being more long-term. This logic is of course most relevant towards the private real estate actors.” CEO, Qasa.

Another aspect of the sharing economy and platform organizations, which is seen in Qasa as well as the two other companies, is how they invest in inventory and stock. It is more concretely described by the CEO of Qasa. *“Another company would, when investing in inventory, put it on the balance sheet. When we invest in housing, our “stock” (available apartments on the web platform), it is through marketing. And we will never be able to put that on the balance sheet. Even the most generous accountant would not approve of that as a balance sheet item.”* The CEO continues to describe the implications of having merely marketing as your “inventory” and the financing issues that ensue. *“These are of course very risky investments for us. It's just marketing. So, for us it is about doing smart marketing campaigns. And why is this a problem then? Well, we cannot borrow money for that. The way you finance other inventories is that you use the investment in itself as collateral. Then it might have a cost of, let's say, 30% of the investment. Plus risk and interest etc. But we won't be able to negotiate a loan from a bank, or even from Almi, for marketing. Even though that technically is our inventory. This is the case for all who does not own the asset, all marketplaces. I would say that this goes for the whole sharing economy, and that is of course interesting.”* CEO, Qasa. However, what also is discussed in interviews is that the most effective marketing in the sharing economy actually is not traditionally bought marketing in the forms of ads. The key factor for getting PR and buzz is to be good at business development. *“...If you work as we do, it's almost more about business development than marketing. It's something like a buzz word, in the startup world, is called growth hack.”* MD, Qasa. In the light of this it is also described that to be top of mind for the user, i.e., effective in your marketing, is one of the biggest challenges, if not the biggest, and one the most important goals to work towards.

4.5.1 The Web Platform of Qasa

Without needing an account in Qasa you can easily browse available apartments, on the basis of your desired filters, like area, price, and size. However, before being able to come into contact

with the host it is needed to sign up and create an account. This way you can apply for the apartments you are interested in, and hosts looking for tenants can also browse and suggest their apartment. The candidates are sorted on the basis of best match, which is indicated with a percentage on the profile, applied not only for the host to see the tenant's match to the apartment, but also for the tenant to see how much the host and apartment matches his or her standards. With both showing interest in each other, starting a chat is the next step that is encouraged. Now contact is established and a mutual interest shown, meaning the first step of the match is made. Entering into the chat means that Qasa loses some of their control. In the chat the users can exchange telephone numbers and arrange viewings, both actions meaning that they are in contact outside of the platform. A lot of effort has been put into honing the user experience on the website Qasa.se, but it is in this stage, as the CSM also highlights, that the biggest risk of losing the customer is. Here it is possible that the website only functions as a matching mechanism, and ends there when the host and tenant agree to meet halfway in the level of rent (removing Qasa's cut). This is however what Qasa seeks to avoid, partly because they do not charge anything for ads, but mostly because they want to be a part of the relation, that is when the monthly payments come in, as this is where they see the value being created, both presently and in the future using add-on services. Only using the website to find a tenant or host, but then not carrying on to use the in-site function of contract signing, is actually a violation of the user agreement, this is however something that the Customer Satisfaction Manager mentions as something they don't follow up on, pointing to the effort it takes and potential badwill. Rather, she talks about how efforts are focused on making users realize the value in using Qasa throughout the whole rental instead of forcing or threatening them into doing so.

4.6 Platform organizations are built on data

Through the nature of the companies' business models there is a large amount of data available, data which the companies are completely reliant on. "Data" is however a somewhat vague term, so before continuing, an elaboration on what data actually means in this context ensues. Data spans from already available secondary information (like name and address) to how users behave on the online platform. It can be the written content between peers on the platform, but it can also be data of a more quantitative nature such as average prices or length of contracts, as is the case for Qasa. It can be the number of trips a user has done, and the kind of route that the user usually takes, as

in the case of Heetch. In the case of Workaround it, apart from the mentioned points, could also be the number of offices rented in the past, business related data, such as how the company renting an office is doing financially and more qualitative content as feedback from previous partners who have rented out an office or a work space.

So, data is a key aspect of the sharing economy and platform organizations, but as the CEO of Qasa puts forward, *“It's easy to believe that you can do everything with data and collecting information. But it's much more complicated than you can first imagine. First of all, you need a lot of users before you begin to see patterns.”*. And besides the volume that is noted as needed in order for much of the data to be useful, another point is made, regarding what to do with the data. *“It is not the data that is the problem, there are endless amounts of data that can be reached, and that is already collected, the problem is to process the data.”* CEO Qasa. It is explained in almost all of the interviews how hard it actually can be to process data, and to make sense of it. And even with the same data and the same types of tests and models an analyst can come up with very different findings. Further, data can mean one thing today and something else tomorrow. The CEO of Qasa shows humbleness to the future and the role the data will play in the future. *“We don't believe that we know exactly which data we will use in the future. We extract as much data as possible, then we'll process it. Once we have an idea, there is data to download and test.”*. It is then explained that Qasa not necessarily are collecting data for the sake of data collecting, much of the collection just happens naturally, and is available if needed, given the digital context. Qasa also show humbleness when it comes to the increasing complexity of the business model's development. *“There will be more challenges as we add more services during the rental. At the moment, our relationship under the lease is quite limited.”* MD, Qasa.

Another point that is put forward, that perhaps is a misconception regarding data, concerns the presentation of information to the user. *“The problem is not to have enough data to present to the user, the problem is rather which data to present.”* CEO, Qasa. It is explained that in a decision context you want to make it easy for the user and only present the data that is relevant for the decision. There are thousands of data points to present sometimes, but Qasa's point is that only the ones that make the difference are the ones to present.

This overall approach to data collection is not necessarily shared with the other case companies. Heetch Country Manager (CM) for example describes that *“The philosophy of the founders is not to collect much data, nor is it that of the company, so we do not extract that much data from people”* Simultaneously, he mentions that they do collect data, but it is solely for one purpose: *“...we collect [behavioral data] to make the service better, it's not for a sales perspective, but it's to make the service better.”* Country Manager, Heetch.

4.6.1 What to do with the data

Having established that platform organizations are exposed to vast amounts of data given their large user bases and, often, digital context, one can contemplate on what possibilities this information gives the companies. In the case of Qasa, the ideas and visions are many and big. *“It's really interesting if we can be relevant to you even after the rental is over. We can handle your electricity bills for example. That was not the plan in the beginning, and we're not there yet. Development of financial services is also an option, and what more we can do with our role as a financial intermediary. We can start giving loans. We can become a bank.”* CEO, Qasa.

The common denominator for basically all of the ideas and visions is however to start to make more money on the relationship, rather than the transaction. *“We can offer added value that can be tied to the rental, for example a rental insurance. So, we are shifting more and more to making money on the relationship.”* MD, Qasa. It is explained how there are new ideas all the time, and that the challenge, rather than coming up with new ideas, is to choose which ones to bet on.

4.6.2 It does not have to be that complicated

As described by Qasa, data gathering and analysis does not have to be too complicated either. *“The data gathering is not that complicated, it's just that we know if someone has paid their rent on time for two years, then we are prepared to take a higher risk on that person. Rather than if a person has paid two or three weeks delay on several occasions over the past two years.”* CEO, Qasa. So, even if one can cluster an enormous amount of data points and do advanced analysis of the information, it is also, as illustrated by the quote above, about using simple pieces of information to draw logical conclusions, as you would in any other business-related context. Further, the information and the data does not only come from the users, or “customers” if you will, it is also

about letting the drivers, in this case, contribute and give feedback. Data, information, and making sense of it, both the trivial and the complicated parts, is put forward as the true key to success, in all case companies.

4.6.3 The system is bigger than any management accountant

An interesting aspect of platform organizations is that much of the traditional accounting is done by others than the accountants. The users of the service become a part of the accounting process when they are leaving gradings and ratings, which can be considered to be part of the accounting information. This is further nuanced by Qasa's MD who states that *"the basic idea is that we want to build a marketplace where we digitally take over, with more of an AI mind-set."* So, first of all, much of the actual accounting information is produced by others than the accountants, namely the users, and, secondly, much of the analysis and decisions based on this information is, at least according to the vision of Qasa, outsourced to an AI-logic. One could in other words say that the control is a somewhat self-managing system. And the outspoken goal is to *"...on the basis of probability, make sure there is an agreement, by matching the right tenant with the right landlord. And this probability can be based on 1000 different data points."* MD, Qasa

What is further made known in the interviews with Qasa is that in the case where decisions have to be made based on accounting information, there is a clear system-thinking involved. *"Everything is very synchronized between the teams, unless everyone has bought into the idea, nothing will happen"* CEO, Qasa. Made more specific, it is explained how the projects and initiatives that Qasa chooses to go for have to solve more than one problem at a time. *"Business development takes place very much from the information gathering that has been done in different parts of the organization (...) and you agree that this creates value for every business area (...) the most important thing in product development is that it's not just solving one problem; you have to solve five problems for it to be worth doing."* CEO, Qasa.

4.7 Control and power in platform organizations

4.7.1 Outsourcing the control to the value creation process, while remaining in charge

The three companies have different approaches to control, but what is interesting is how they use the platform users as informal auditors of product quality or evaluating user experience. Because that is what their gradings, ratings and feedback constitute: control information. Heetch employs the most clear model of evaluation and steering through this evaluation, exemplified with the quote: *“Drivers are driven primarily by the rating system.”* Country Manager, Heetch. However, what is not possible to steer is what happens on a more user-to-user level basis. Qasa mentions the chat function on their platform. This is the first point of contact in a transaction, and a lot hinges on the first impression. They recognize their limitations and the potential drawbacks of not being able to interfere. *“We can of course help people to post their profiles, and tailor the platform designedly, but then they will communicate in the chat, and then people who are bad at spelling, bad at writing, insensitive in their communication, they will suffer from it. And even those they communicate with will be suffering, and it gives a bad experience and then it seems that Qasa is not good. But we cannot fully check that.”* CEO, Qasa.

A concrete way of how Qasa is remaining in charge of their platform while still employing this decentralized control is perhaps best exemplified by the following quote: *“...the requirements that we put on users in what's in the profile. (...) You look very much at the balance in the marketplace. If you have a marketplace, you want the number of sellers and buyers to merge. That's the limit. Now it is very easy to find people who are looking for housing in Stockholm. And then we can put the bar quite high. And make sure there is a requirement that you have a credit report, you should have an updated presentation about yourself, etc. All that is possible because there are many housing applicants and tough competition. It is very linked to the balance of the marketplace.”* CEO, Qasa. So, they can through their platform steer and decide what type of user that is let in, but they cannot steer them and how they behave in detail once they are in.

4.8 Going forward in the sharing economy

Going forward the companies obviously have grand plans for their future, yet they are humble to the task they are up for. Believing in their idea and seeing the potential that lies within it is only half the work, execution and penetration is, at least, as important. Qasa is now an established actor on the Swedish market, and even though they are not comfortably content with the volumes they see the structure in Sweden as quite finalized. The next step for them is an international expansion. The Swedish rental market was already from the beginning considered a small and also tough market, mainly for regulatory reasons. But as described by one of the investors, according to the MD of Qasa, *“If we can make it work in Sweden, we can make it work everywhere”*.

During the year Qasa is moving into the market for first-hand contracts, which means that a larger share of B2C is handled. The Qasa CEO is however wary of how *“Working B2B can almost be negative, to take a chunk of customers just to get some economies of scale, it may rather steal focus since then they call from that office and want tailor-made help, and that's what you want to come out of.”*. This need for keeping the service as lean and free from interaction as possible is something that the CSM of Qasa further reinforce. *“We have decided to stay out of for example personal showings. It basically takes too much time and is hurting the scalability of the service and company.”* This argument is further strengthened by the fact that the factor considered to be the biggest threat, or at least challenge, for scalability with the service, as it is today, is the human interaction: *“The biggest bottleneck for scaling is today probably the support function, i.e. the call center”*. CSM, Qasa. Hence, the platform structure is supposed to remain the same going forward. This new part of the business will mean that Qasa receives larger amounts of data as the supply gets larger.

Through the interviews with the case companies it became clearer along the way that Heetch and Workaround are not, or rather cannot, focus on envisioning the future in the same way as Qasa. The Heetch Country Manager describes the situation in Sweden *“We have had so many crises, so it's about surviving all the time. So then we have to get business development to focus on what makes us survive until tomorrow.”* Workaround has also needed to reiterate their business idea and is, as mentioned, for the moment focusing on the basics.

5 Discussion

Kornberger et al.'s (2017) advocacy for a movement away from the hierarchical consciousness proved to be reasonable, as focusing on the existence of a center or trying to find a clear hierarchy in this context would be counterproductive and even incorrect. Rather, when investigating how a platform company controls for value creation, using the framework of evaluative infrastructures in the analysis of the empirics provided a structure and a useful framing. The three concepts Relationality, Generativity, and Protocol are first handled and linked to their respective roles in value creation, and then a fourth concept, Transparency, is introduced as a potential tool for controlling for value creation.

5.1 Relationality

Relationality, the notion of relating data points and weaving them into a web of context, where every data point, every element, behavior and action makes up a part of the context, carries explanatory value when the processes of controlling for value creation are to be assessed.

5.1.1 Evaluative Infrastructures creates a web of context

Our findings clearly relate to one of the, if not the, most apparent aspects of evaluative infrastructures, namely how they create contexts. As described in the theory section, evaluative infrastructures are putting events, actions, behaviors, decisions, among many other things, into context (Kornberger et al., 2017). It gives the user something to relate to, a relationship between the user and the context is created. Standing alone, data points, or pieces of information, might not mean much to a user of a service. However, what emerged in our interviews is that it is really when several data points are put together that a context, something to base decisions on, is created. So, evaluative infrastructures create contexts and relationships, but how is this done in our cases and what is the benefit of it? Our empirics point towards that it creates a common language for the users. Being able to compare and assess the suitability of a rental or the pleasantness of a taxi ride is what drives users to the platform. What also is discussed in interviews is how gradings and ratings are relative. A user does not necessarily have to know what a rating of 4 exactly means, but the user can understand that a rating of 4 is better than a rating of 3.

5.1.2 The context creates trust

One of the more specific and interesting aspects of evaluative infrastructures is peer feedback and the fact that it comes from, at least usually, independent and unbiased sources, namely the peers using the service. Through reviews, ratings and gradings the user on a platform can get an unbiased view of what other users think of another user's service or product. And what this unbiasedness leads to, according to Jeacle & Carter (2011), is trust, which also is one of the key terms raised in our case interviews. Taking Heetch as an example, a user can, instead of relying on an internal audit process certifying the quality of the trip, rely on what other user have thought of the service.

But how is this trust, or lack thereof, actually created, and what is the difference compared to when a traditional company (not platform organization) themselves are describing their service on their website? Our empirics point towards that it, perhaps not so surprisingly, and in line with the theoretical support above, boils down to unbiasedness and independence. The fact that the platform organization in many ways actually cannot control what is said about them on their own platform, gives the feedback credibility. So, if it is concluded that peer feedback, at least usually, is unbiased, and that unbiasedness creates trust, this has impact on the control of the platform. Because if it also is assumed that trust is something that drives users to the platform, one could actually conclude that peer feedback creates value for the platform, since it drives users there. In other words, the platform organization, in order to control for value creation, build their platforms, and control them, to facilitate feedback, unbiased feedback, since that creates trust, which drives users to the platform, which in turn creates value for the platform organization.

As already concluded, the above-mentioned phenomenon of trust creation is present in the context of our case companies as well, but perhaps not in an identical way for the three companies. It seems as if it depends on the context and the specific company if ratings of e.g. quality and trust are presented on the platform to the user. As a start of analyzing these differences one could straight away mention that it could be the case that there are fewer relevant data points to look at in the case of Heetch compared to for example the reality of Qasa. Qasa might also be able to gather more data points concerning their users and their respective user experiences relative to Heetch, who operates an, arguably, simpler service.

The case companies present user-related data on their platforms in varying ways, and a reason for this might thus be the complexity of the service, but this finding can be further developed. It can be the case that the benefit of presenting a large amount of data to the users actually decreases with complexity of the service or product. It would make sense in a way that a complex service, as for example finding an apartment to live in, would be complex enough as it already is, and that a substantial amount of information actually only would make the decisions harder. That is at least what the interviews with Qasa indicate. To clarify, it is not that Qasa are hiding any data, or trying to mislead the users. Quite the opposite. They are actually very transparent with data, and are for example keen on providing data, information and insights to journalists and other stakeholders. But discussed here is rather the interface of the platform, and how the company can ease the decision process. So, the control for value creation on platforms includes control and management of which, and how much, information the company presents on the platform to the user, since that has bearing on the user's decision process and the likeliness of matching.

5.1.3 Evaluation and calculation without a predetermined good or bad

According to Kornberger et al. (2017), evaluative infrastructures sometimes evaluate and measure, for example, usage of peers on the platforms even though it is necessarily not clear if the evaluation result can be classified as good or bad. This is something that is only partly found in our empirics. Or, to clarify, such information, as ratings and gradings where it is unclear whether they are good or bad, is not presented on the platforms.

What can be found, even if not to any large extent, is qualitative feedback from peers to other peers and from peers to the platform in general, where it is quite unclear whether it is good or bad. This is perhaps not surprising since we are discussing qualitative information, which in its nature can take multiple forms. So, with a more nuanced interpretation of Kornberger et al.'s (2017) article, one can conclude that we from the empirics see similarities with their claims regarding the phenomenon of neutral feedback without a predetermined scale.

So, what does this neutral feedback lead to then? According to Kornberger et al. (2017) it actually rather than clarifies, creates debate and question. And even if that may seem odd that might actually be one of the qualities of the evaluative infrastructures. If it is concluded that one of their key

objectives, or at least key functions, is to create a context, then the debate and the questions might actually be something to base that context on. That is at least what our empirics point towards. Further, there is research saying that in the case of no clear predetermined ranking systems, buyers might actually engage in considering other types of detailed information, such as peer reviews (Weinberg & Davis, 2005, read in Kornberger et al., 2017). This research actually indicates that the neutral feedback has the role of contextualizing and giving the user a richer image.

5.1.4 It is not about finding the best; it is about finding the best match

What also is indicative for evaluative infrastructures is that the matching that often takes place on these platforms is not necessarily concerned with finding the objectively best peer, product or service, but rather about finding the best match (Kornberger et al., 2017). This is something that clearly is reinforced in interviews, especially with Qasa who more or less uses this formulation literally. Even though Qasa does not want to reveal any specific details regarding the logic of their algorithm it is made clear that it is not about finding the “best” rental object or user and present him or her to the other user. It is rather about finding the best match between tenant and host, maximizing the likelihood of a successful, long term rental contract being established. This is one of the clear empirics pointing to Kornberger et al.’s (2017) theory regarding evaluative infrastructures and the way Relationality trumps referentiality when controlling for value creation.

If it is concluded that matching on platforms goes beyond finding the objectively best of something and present that to the user, there are control aspects to consider. The platform companies, rather than measure what is good or bad, measure for matching. This can in some cases concern measuring things as good or bad, but it can also be completely different kinds of measurements, such as measurements of a more qualitative nature. What the empirics point towards is that this kind of measurements can help facilitate the matching process. It should however be mentioned that what is up for debate depends on the kind of platform. Heetch for example does not work in the same way, but on the other hand, as also discussed above, provides another kind of service. It is not to the same extent about finding a match, or at least, the matching principles are not as sophisticated. One could therefore guess that Kornberger et al.’s (2017) theory about finding the best match rather than finding the best object is growing in relevance as the matching principle grows in sophistication.

It can be the case that in order to reach a sophisticated matching process, of for example two users on a platform, one can benefit from information that is more qualitative than predetermined ratings of good or bad. This is however something that we at the moment cannot answer. One would need more insight into the matching logic, the algorithm or whatever kind of logic it may be, in order to draw these kinds of conclusions. It is thus a clear suggestion for future research.

5.2 Generativity

From the concept of relationality we now turn to the concept of generativity, where the web of context woven from the data points can, if given the right conditions, give way for disclosing new and unexpected businesses, developments and opportunities.

5.2.1 Surplus of data

As Kornberger et al. (2017) describe, discovery and invention come from a surplus of data, rather than from “*programmatic aspirations*” where you know what you are looking for before-hand and by following a predetermined method. Opportunities arise and are disclosed when data is amassed and woven together into a web of context. New domains are, even though not yet tangibly created, hinting on where future business opportunities can be found. When the Qasa MD mentions the large amounts of data that they don’t yet know what to use for, but that renders new ideas they did not plan for or expect, he gives a clear example of how this generativity occurs with the surplus of data amassed through their somewhat opportunistic process of collection.

The approach of accumulating all data you get your hands on, even though you are not sure of the purpose of it or how it should be interpreted, would reasonably make the occurrence of generativity more likely. If a company has the opportunity to accumulate the data, to actually be able to see the online behavior of their users and log their activity even though unsure of the purpose, but then chooses to not do so, one can argue that the conditions for generativity as argued by Kornberger et al. (2017) are not really optimized.

The collection of data found in Qasa’s operations is not employed by Heetch. Pointing to the philosophy of the founders and that data is only logged to enhance the user experience and nothing

else, it can be argued that no surplus of data is collected. The risk in their case is that the data collected is only collected for predetermined purposes, exemplifying what Kornberger et al. (2017) call “*programmatic aspirations*”, and hence lowering the chances of a data surplus encouraging the disclosing of new opportunities.

Shifting the focus back to Qasa, they have managed to identify how they can advance their positions and take advantage of the possibilities arising. Through generativity moving into other domains and letting adjacent or enhancing services to the base product emerge allows the company to be present along, and even create, a larger and broader value chain. The increase in market size and/or market share gives more users and consequently, more data points.

5.2.2 Self- reinforcing feedback loop

Relating to the mentioned increase in data points, an aspect that is not clearly addressed by Kornberger et al. (2017) is the possibility of a self-reinforcing feedback loop in this context. More data accumulated by connecting more services that can gather information and hence expand the web of context would reasonably mean that an even larger surplus of data is accumulated. If there is a linear relation between the amount of data and level of generativity can of course be discussed, but intuitively and using the metaphor coined by Kornberger et al. (2017), the larger the web of context, the larger the amount of spaces where new opportunities can be disclosed.

This would be where the feedback loop occurs, the new opportunities will render more data, and the increase in data will render new opportunities, creating the loop. With this reasoning, the loop could reinforce itself into infinity. It is a rather theoretical thinking and having a self-reinforcing feedback loop going to infinity can be a bit bold to suggest, however, what was seen in the empirics was that the lack of a surplus of data (note that it is not a *lack of data* but the *lack of a surplus* of data) hampered the occurrence and development of new opportunities, hence the generativity suffered. What this boils down to, is that in a rapidly shifting environment having the skill to catch on to emerging trends and exploit opportunities is a clear value driver, and can prove to be the difference between survival and failure.

5.2.3 Relating references

When listening to the MD of Qasa and the way he describes their reference tool, it is interesting how the combination of its automation and the assembling of references and ratings from other platforms like Airbnb or LinkedIn can be regarded as a clear example of Kornberger et al.'s (2017) description of the phenomenon: *“As over time different infrastructures are layered on top of each other, they will give rise to a layering of spaces which interfere or resonate with each other in multiple ways.”* In this way the effect from the resonance will be an environment that exploits usage on other platforms, and using the reputation from here to spread trust on other platforms. A user on a platform does in this way not need to build up a reputation on each platform in order to be a trusted counterpart in a transaction. Achieving this network would mean an expanded spread of trust in the market, and considering that trust is, if not a prerequisite, at least a lubricant for transactions, it can increase the transaction frequency. Driving more transactions on the market, through the platform, constitutes value for the platform company.

5.2.4 Manual and automated

The way in which Qasa uses the reference tool at present, enabling individually validated references from e.g. employers, and doing this without needing to interfere, can be considered sustainable also in a larger scale. In their study of eBay, Kornberger et al. (2017) notice the *“kind of centralized ‘adjudication’ that eBay's founder sought to avoid”*, meaning the meddling and checking of the quality of the offerings and ads. The problem that eBay faced and managed at that time, which Qasa seems to have solved, was that *“[s]uch adjudication would have limited eBay's ability to scale, because of the resources required and because doing so would make the company liable for the claims made in its site.”* (Kornberger et al., 2017). Keeping this in mind is crucial if they want to be a global player and be able to handle the high volume that would ensue. Otherwise human interaction can constitute the bottleneck when a large number of transactions and, in particular, relations need to be processed. Ridding of the bottleneck is in that way imperative for value creation when reaching a certain size of user base.

A point that Workaround BD makes in an interview is interesting as it ties to the minimization of meddling and personal interference that Qasa strives for. She mentions a skepticism towards being able to entirely automate their business, the reason being the complex nature of offices and the

deals connected. The large number of factors that need to be taken into account when deciding where a company with many different people are to spend almost as much time as they spend at home naturally calls for a thought-through decision. The larger the transaction, the more commitment is made, both from tenant and host and it is a high-involvement decision as it is important and expensive (Kassarjian, 1981). Also taking into account what the company's financial position will be in some time adds a dimension of complexity. This should reasonably mean that more aspects and elements are weighed in, forcing any automatic matching to need an advanced algorithm to function properly. Creating and then honing this algorithm into something that can supersede manual handling will take time and investments, which partly could explain the varying levels of progress by the companies.

In turn, what this means is that the skepticism that Workaround BD expresses should come from either a disbelief that their company can produce such an algorithm, or that their customers will always demand a personal interaction to help with the search and signing of an office, or both. Whichever the reason, putting this opinion in contrast with Qasa's processes one can question the doubt that Workaround BD expresses. The transactions made through Qasa's platform are also preceded by high-involvement decisions and based on a complex set of factors, similar to the ones in Workaround. Yet Qasa has managed to take this high-involvement decision and grease the transaction to the extent of one made in Heetch, a clear low-involvement decision. If there is a way to carry through with the high-involvement decision of apartment rental without interference there should reasonably be a way to do the same with office rental. Refraining from figuring this out will, as mentioned, have implications when reaching a critical mass. Workaround will then not be able to keep the organization slim or act as merely a platform for matching users, but rather as a real estate agent with a partly digitized user-interface, substantially capping the potential value, reach and penetration of the service and platform.

When summarizing the section regarding generativity, what is noticed is that to control for value creation, platform organizations create the conditions for generativity to occur and for the disclosure of new opportunities. Failing in this can mean that the potential value in the company is not properly extracted because of missed opportunities and hampered growth.

5.3 Protocol

The third concept that Kornberger et al. (2017) addresses is Protocol. It is described as how the hierarchical notion is partly disposed of. Instead, with a heterarchical “structure” evaluative infrastructures keep the power centralized while having the control decentralized, and in the hands of the users of the platform.

5.3.1 Centralized power, decentralized control

One can actually, as we did in the empirics chapter, say that the platform organizations’ users in a way are functioning as accountants and auditors, and we will elaborate further on this concept later on in this chapter. Apart from the trust that is created and comes with the decentralized control, there is also a business-related aspect of having centralized power and decentralized control. These organizations are small and slim, so there is just not enough people, nor enough resources to take care of and control all of the interaction that takes place on the hub. Instead of personally controlling that user A is delivering to user B, you let user B rate the service of user A, and in the long run, users who are not delivering are naturally sorted out from the platform. The above is of course very simplified, but is still how it is described by the companies in this study.

5.3.2 Not control in the traditional way

The aspect of the centralized power is explained in both the theory and the empirics part, but can also be reinforced here, since it so clearly shines through in the interviews. As described it can be illustrated by the management of managing supply and demand on the website. One way that platform organizations, seen in Qasa, are exercising their centralized power is basically through deciding who stays on the platform, or at least who is presented to other users. It boils down to the requirements that they put on their users. In a scenario where supply is high, Qasa can increase the requirements in order to make the supply better, and through that increase the demand. However, as illustrated above, while the actual users are chatting with each other or exchanging information, there is little room to control that in detail. That is instead something that is “outsourced” to the ratings and gradings. Because, the company has no formal or informal hierarchical control over the information exchange from and between the peers on the platform. One therefore has to take a more heterarchical stance when evaluating the control mechanisms of platforms. In conclusion one can thus say that the control is very different from the traditional internal accounting control as we

know it. As with any kind of outsourcing it is a responsibility that is handed over to another party. The difference in this case is that the other party might be millions of daily users, over which you have no hierarchical control.

5.3.3 The role of the accountant

An interesting thought in the above discussed context is that a lot of the accounting actually is done by others than accountants. Kornberger et al. (2017) suggest that this leads to that the accountants become de-skilled, but that is not something that our empirics points towards. It should be mentioned, that this is not something that has been in focus in the interviews and there is room for empirically developing these concepts further. However, what is found in our empirics, which actually naturally would lead to the finding of Kornberger et al. (2017), is that we see that the platform and the system in many cases are self-managing systems. The control, as well as the usage of the service, is carried out by the peers to a large extent. And in the case where the system becomes self-managing it is perhaps natural that the control and the role of accountant takes on other forms than what we are used to. However, it must not necessarily mean that the accountants become de-skilled in general, it can rather be just a shift of focus. The accountants may become de-skilled in traditional accounting, but more skilled in the new type of accounting and analysis that platform organizations demand. This is also something that should be further investigated in future research.

5.4 The fourth dimension

Using the three dimensions of evaluative infrastructures put forward by Kornberger et al. (2017) when analyzing the platform companies produced many insights, and is according to us hitting its target in “*serving as an analytical concept with which to attend to the accounting practices that help to structure platform organization and in doing so extend accounting beyond its hierarchical consciousness.*” (Kornberger et al., 2017). Also, the heterarchical point of departure that Kornberger et al. (2017) supports provides the analysis with a better toolbox. Following the nature of the research method, that is being attentive to emerging phenomena that were not expected in the outset, we found that an aspect that carried interest and potential explanatory value in how platform companies control for value creation needed to be analyzed further. This concept is Transparency.

5.4.1 Transparency

All three of the companies interviewed addressed the issue of transparency. They all took great pride in being transparent, and saw transparency as something that separates them from the other actors on the market. Transparency is hence a dimension that we would like to highlight and suggest take a larger part in the evaluative infrastructure framework by Kornberger et al. (2017). If the companies, without us asking about it, talk about the importance of transparency there is need for closer analysis. All of them established that there is need for more transparency in their respective markets. Seeing themselves as disruptors in these markets it is then quite natural that adding transparency would be a step on the path towards a changed market. With this as background the companies have included transparency in their business models. When a market is characterized by low transparency, it can be a part of the market's largest actors' business models to exploit this information asymmetry. One way to then act disruptively in their respective industries would be to induce transparency and thereby diminishing and disturbing the established actors' advantage. This way Qasa can use transparency in margins and general price levels to make it easier for the user to compare the actors' offers and encourage better educated decisions. If the user values transparency in a transaction and in a relation, being able to offer that will be a clear value creator for a company.

5.4.2 Selective transparency

However, what was picked up in the interviews was that the companies employ a sort of selective transparency in their businesses. Qasa chooses to post rental levels in order to lift the veil from the market, but simultaneously does not reveal the workings of their algorithm. Kornberger et al. (2017) do mention this aspect, with the words: *"The heart of evaluative infrastructures, where the designers of its elements and operations sit, is shrouded in mystery and secrecy as Canetti (1973: 253) observed so aptly: 'Secrecy lies at the heart of power'".* Keeping the core of your value-creating mechanism secret is obviously not something that is strange, but rather points to how the industry will possibly lack transparency in another way. It could mean that we are going from a market where margins and reasonable price levels were kept opaque, to a market that instead hides how matchings and recommendations are made for the user. One can draw a comparison to Adam Smith's invisible hand where the market, if left alone, solves the equilibrium. Only here it is not an invisible hand but rather an algorithm, shrouded in darkness, that decides which apartment or

tenant that will solve the issue of matching for you. This ultimately means that if trusted with enough data about a person's habits and preferences, the algorithm can make decisions for the person, also far more complex decisions on what to rent. Delving into the implications of this is outside of the scope for this paper, but is a topic that would be fruitful to develop.

Transparency and in particular selective transparency can hence be called a part of the case companies' business models with a prominent example found in Qasa. Splitting the effect of transparency into three sub effects, one can better understand the part it plays in controlling for value in the company.

The first sub effect of having transparency in the business model is that of attracting users to the platform. Being able to, through the platform, offer access to a market with higher efficiency, i.e. the host's and tenant's expectations of the level of rent is better aligned, will drive users, and hence value, to the platform.

The second sub effect is retention, connected to the first effect of attraction but with another value driver. Where attraction is instantaneous but also temporary, retention drives longevity, which in this case can be argued to be the most effective value driver relative to the effort put in. Keeping the users on the platform as a result of the access they enjoy to a more transparent market is, as established, what the companies strive for.

The final effect is more tied to the selective nature of the transparency employed in the companies. It is part of the business model in the sense that despite working for a more transparent and effective market, the catalyst of value creation, in this case the matching algorithm, is actually entirely opaque. The selectiveness in where to be transparent and where to be opaque is at the platform owner's discretion, making the emphasis on transparency somewhat contradictory, yet at the same time central to the business model. Being entirely transparent with how their matching algorithm works would mean that their offer and competitive advantage could be employed by someone else on the market.

This fourth aspect of Transparency is something that we consider is a part of the way that platform companies can control for value creation. We refrain from commenting whether it should be a separate part in an evaluative framework, in parity with the three original concepts by Kornberger et al. (2017), but at least want to highlight the part it plays in controlling for value creation in platform organizations.

6 Conclusions and Suggestions for Future Research

The general aim of this study is to contribute to existing research on control for value creation in the sharing economy. More specifically, we have focused on the control mechanisms for value creation in platform organizations. The theoretical framework used for analysis is the framework of evaluative infrastructures by Kornberger et al. (2017). Our research ambition is illustrated by our research question:

Research question: *How do platform organizations in the sharing economy control for value creation?*

In addressing this question, we build upon, and contribute to, the literature on evaluative infrastructures (Kornberger et al., 2017), and how that concept can explain accounting mechanisms in platform organizations.

6.1 Conclusions

6.1.1 Evaluative Infrastructures create a web of context, and the context creates trust

Using the framework of evaluative infrastructures in the analysis of the empirics, we can discern what underpins the way that platform companies control for value creation. What emerged in our interviews is that it is when several data points are put together that the creation of contexts, something to base decisions on, is most significant. What further was found was that peer feedback, and the fact that it comes from, at least usually, independent and unbiased sources, namely the peers using the service, leads to the creation of trust (Jeacle & Carter, 2011). The main reason for this is that peer feedback is assumed to be unbiased. The trust on the platform then increases the chances for a match to be made, constituting a big step in the value creation process. So, to conclude from a control for value creation point of view: platform organizations build their platforms, and control them, so that they facilitate unbiased peer feedback, since that creates trust, which drives users to the platform, and in turn creates value for the platform organization.

6.1.2 Evaluation and calculation without a predetermined good or bad

Another phenomenon that we found in our empirics that we could use our theoretical framework to explain and develop was that platform organizations evaluate and calculate without a predetermined good or bad. It was also concluded that this actually rather than clarification, creates debate and question, and it is this very debate that is part in creating the above-mentioned context.

A related concept, sprung from the above-mentioned evaluation and calculation, is that the matching (key for our main case company) that often takes place on these platforms, is not necessarily concerned with finding the objectively best peer, product or service. Rather, it is about finding the best match between peers (in this case). If it is concluded that matching on platforms goes beyond finding the objectively best of something and presenting that to the user, there are control aspects to consider. The platform companies can in that case, rather than measure what is good or bad, measure for matching. This can of course in some cases concern measuring things as good or bad, but it can also be completely different kinds of measurements. What the empirics point towards is that this kind of measurements can help facilitate the matching process. However, further research in the field is necessary in order to fully conclude this phenomenon.

6.1.3 Self-managing systems

Analyzing how Qasa uses the data that is collected, one can conclude two things. Firstly, the way the surplus of data is collected without a particular outlook should pave the way for generativity to occur in the organization and network. The disclosing of new opportunities that arise from this generativity is a clear value creating process, as allowing opportunities to emerge endogenously from the network and then exploiting these will keep the company in the forefront of a highly competitive and fast-moving industry. In this sense, allowing for generativity through data collection is a way to control for future value creation and gives it the potential to manage itself.

Secondly, the goal of leaving the manual and striving for automation is addressed. In relation to computers, human interference can constitute a bottleneck. Realizing this, Qasa strives for the platform to be, to the largest extent possible, self-managing and automated. It is self-managing in the sense that the platform owners keep their meddling to a minimum in the matching process, as well as in the relation that ensues. Achieving this means that the bottleneck of human interference

is diminished. In turn, that allows for scalability, a key factor for increasing the number of matchings without having to grow the organization in relation. Succeeding in controlling for these two, the platform is given good conditions for becoming self-managing.

6.1.4 Centralized power, decentralized control - Not control in the traditional way

It was empirically concluded that the theoretical concept of protocol was present in our case companies. Our findings in the case companies point towards that platform organizations function through keeping the power centralized while having the control decentralized, and in fact done by the very users of the service. One way that platform organizations, for example seen in Qasa, are exercising their centralized power is basically through deciding who stays on the platform, or at least who is presented to other users. It boils down to the requirements that they put on their users. Much of the control process in our case companies is “outsourced” to the value creation process, which goes in line with the theoretical framework used for the study.

6.1.5 Transparency as a control dimension

During the interviews, transparency emerged as an aspect that should be taken into consideration. The way that all of the companies pointed to transparency as something that separated them from competitors and incumbents in their respective markets is a clear sign of the weight they put into the word. Transparency is a central part in the business model and is used to attract, retain and, paradoxically, selectively show and selectively cover up. This covering up and selective transparency is shown in how secretive they are in how the matching, i.e. their offer and prime value driver, functions. These three sub effects combine into the value driving effect that transparency has on platform companies and better explains why they need to control for it.

6.2 Suggestions for Future Research

What could be mentioned first of all is that this research field is nascent, and that it for that reason in general is room for academic exploration of it. With that said, there are a few specific questions that arose in our analysis, that we deem could be further investigated in future research.

The first suggestion for future research concerns the matching process, mostly relevant for our main case company Qasa. We raised the question regarding if it is the case that in order to reach a sophisticated matching process, of for example two users on a platform, one can benefit from information that goes beyond predetermined ratings of good or bad. This is however not something that we at the moment can answer with the empirics at hand. We concluded that one would need more insight into the matching logic, the algorithm or whatever kind of process it may be, in order to draw these kinds of conclusions. Accordingly, to further investigate this process is a suggestion for future research, which we deem would benefit the research field of management control in platform organizations.

The possible occurrence of a self-reinforcing feedback loop from amassing a surplus of data and through this enabling generativity, in turn spurring an increase of data, was addressed with a theoretical mindset and would benefit from a study of more longitudinal character.

Kornberger et al. (2017) found that given the new accounting regime that surrounds platform organizations, where much of the traditional accounting is “outsourced” to the value creation process, accountants actually become de-skilled. This was however not something that we could see in our analysis. What seems logical though is that given the new type of accounting and analysis that platform organizations demand, it could actually be the case that the accountants shift focuses in their profession. The accountants become more skilled in the new type of accounting and analysis that platform organizations demand. These questions were not in focus in our study, so we cannot empirically comment on it with any certainty. However, it is something that could be further investigated in future research.

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8 Appendix 1

Interview log

#	Date	Form	Duration	Company	Title
1	2017-09-08	Telephone	25 min	Qasa	CEO
2	2017-09-08	Office visit	40 min	Qasa	Company
3	2017-09-20	Meeting	60 min	Heetch	CM*
4	2017-09-20	Meeting	45 min	Workaround	BD**
5	2017-09-20	Meeting	40 min	Workaround	Co-founder
6	2017-09-22	Meeting	60 min	Qasa	CEO
7	2017-09-28	Meeting	85 min	Qasa	MD***
8	2017-10-20	Meeting	50 min	Qasa	CEO
9	2017-10-20	Meeting	40 min	Qasa	CEO
10	2017-10-23	Telephone	30 min	Workaround	BD
11	2017-10-24	Meeting	70 min	Heetch	CM
12	2017-10-26	Meeting	80 min	Qasa	MD
13	2017-11-03	Telephone	27 min	Qasa	CEO
14	2017-11-09	Telephone	30 min	Heetch	CM
15	2017-11-09	Telephone	30 min	Qasa	MD
16	2017-12-01	Meeting	70 min	Qasa	CSM****
17	2017-12-04	Telephone	25 min	Qasa	CSM

* CM = Country Manager

** BD = Business Development

*** MD = Marketing Director

**** CSM = Customer Satisfaction Manager