

FRAMING ACCOUNTING

**COMMUNICATING WITH ACCOUNTING NUMBERS DURING
COVID-19**

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Framing Accounting: Communicating with accounting numbers during COVID-19

Abstract:

This research paper intends to expand on current accounting and crisis communication literature by investigating the use of accounting numbers to frame external communication. The research draws on published financial reports from listed Swedish real estate companies from three time periods during COVID-19. We contribute to the accounting and crisis communication domain by finding that accounting numbers that are used to increase persuasiveness are often used to highlight results through a spinning framing technique. On the other hand, accounting numbers that need contextualization are more commonly used for standardized results together with contrasting as a framing technique. We also found that there are shifts in framing techniques, especially in the time horizon communicated. The early stages of COVID-19 saw a shorter time horizon, while as the pandemic became more protracted, the long-term effects became more prominent in the communication.

Keywords:

Framing, Crisis Communication, Accounting numbers, COVID-19, External communication

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1. INTRODUCTION

Financial reports are one of the main tools for communication with the public. For investors, the documents provide crucial information for decision-making purposes. (Kloptchenko et al. (2004). Although requirements heavily regulate how financial performances are presented and disclosed, annual and quarterly reports leave plenty of room to communicate with investors. Given its importance, communication in times of crisis has been a neglected theme in accounting research (Andon and Free, 2012, 2014; Holland, 2010). Communicating effectively throughout the crisis is especially important due to the increasing volatility. According to previous literature, communication should minimize damage (Coombs, 2018) and align all stakeholders by shaping a collective interpretation ('t Hart, 1993; De Vries, 2004). If the crisis communication is vague and opens up for individual interpretations, the effects can be so severe that the business operations will be threatened. (Liff et al., 2018).

One highly relevant crisis today is the COVID-19 pandemic. Researchers have been quick to investigate how organizations act and communicate to the public during the pandemic. They concluded that managers often use corporate reporting in a crisis for impression management rather than to actually inform the investor. The emphasis has been to create the impression that the company is doing well by disguising unfavorable information using weasel words and mixed messages (Brennan et al., 2021).

Furthermore, organizations tend to frame their communication in a certain manner to improve stakeholders' confidence in annual reports (Wong, Ou and Wilson, 2021).

While there is significant research on impression management and framing, a lot of emphasis is put on the qualitative aspect of framing, e.g. using linguistics. On the other hand, research about the role of accounting numbers and communication has been limited, especially the role of numbers in external communication to stakeholders.

Numbers can play an interesting role in communication because their purpose can be contradictive. On one hand, research have concluded that the use of accounting numbers in arguments can increase the persuasiveness and reliability (Kadous, Koonce, & Towry, 2005). On the other hand, accounting numbers are often weak or incomplete, and need repair (Row, Shields and Birnberg, 2012).

Therefore, the interesting interplay and communication with these will be investigated, which brings us to the following research question:

What role do accounting numbers play in framing external communication during COVID-19?

We take an inductive approach to study how accounting communication is used during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have chosen the Swedish real estate market as a case industry to explore the mentioned subject. The real estate industry correlates highly with macroeconomic factors (McCue and Kling, 1994) and is thus assumed to be a good proxy for the general market. Our observations are based on published financial reports of 27 listed real estate companies in Sweden during three different time periods during the COVID-19 crisis. The three different time periods are intended to reflect multiple stages of the pandemic and allow us to find differences between the time periods.

This research paper introduces three main contributions to the domain. Firstly, we observe that strong accounting numbers (numbers used to increase reliability) frequently framed in a positive or negative light using spinning. On the other hand, weak accounting numbers (numbers in need of contextualization) are commonly used with contrasting to communicate standardized results. However, combining several framing techniques is one of the most frequent tools in external communication.

Secondly, even though numbers can increase persuasiveness, omitting accounting numbers can be a helpful tactic when the discussed subject is not directly related to financial performance. One such framing technique is catchphrases, which frequently is used to communicate corporate values and strategies.

Finally, we observe shifts in how framing is used across the various time periods. Most prominently, there is a shift in the time horizon where companies focus more on the short-term during the initial phase of the crisis, but they have a longer time horizon during the later stages of the crisis. We also observe some shifts in other framing techniques such as accountability and catchphrases.

The rest of the research paper is structured as follows: We begin by presenting existing literature and use it to develop a theoretical framework. This is followed by explaining our research methodology. In the following section, our empirical observations are presented and analyzed. These findings are then discussed in relation to previous literature. Finally, we summarize our findings and contributions to the accounting research and outline the limitations of the study before suggesting topics for future research.

2. THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

The theoretical development is divided into two parts, 2.1 and 2.2. The first section introduces the existing research domain through a literature review. The review focuses on the crisis communication literature. Further in section 2.1, impression management and framing are introduced, essentially laying the foundation for our method theory. The section is concluded with a paragraph highlighting the theoretical gap identified. Thereafter, in section 2.2, we introduce our theoretical framework that has been used when analyzing empirics.

2.1. The accounting and crisis communication literature

Crises can be defined as a situation faced by an individual, group, or organization in which they are not able to cope by applying the use of normal routine procedures (Booth, 1993).

Previous research has identified two types of crises, internal and external. The internal crisis and crisis management relate to the technical and structural aspects, and the external crisis focuses on managing the stakeholders (Alifanova, 2019). Hopwood (2009) analyzed the external aspect and concluded that the financial crisis back in 2008 had “significant implications for accounting.” Substantial flaws in financial accounting, auditing and the regulatory institutions that supervise accounting practices were identified, highlighting the need for further relevant accounting research. In contrast to Hopwood’s (2009) research, Ezzamel et al. (1990) investigated the internal aspect of a crisis by looking at an organization experiencing financial difficulties.

What both internal and external crisis have in common is the communication, whether it is to employees internally or to external stakeholders. Communication in times of crisis has proven to be a relatively neglected theme in accounting research (Andon and Free, 2012, 2014; Holland, 2010). According to Coombs (2018), organizations tend to communicate in ways to minimize damage. The literature on crisis communication has concluded that crises tend to create different stakeholder interpretations of events, causes, and responsibilities (Alink et al., 2001; Boin et al., 2009; Hall, 1997/2003; De Vries, 2004). The purpose of crisis communication is to demonstrate management control over crises, align stakeholder interests by shaping a collective interpretation of crises, and to minimize the gravity of crises (‘t Hart, 1993; De Vries, 2004).

The role of crisis communication can play a critical role during challenging times for companies. Liff et al. (2018) concluded this when researching the Northern Rock Bank in the UK, which, although granted enough funding from government agencies,

experienced a depositor's bank run in 2007. Despite receiving financing from financial institutions, enough to control the situation, the *real* crisis was initiated at this stage. According to the authors, a plausible reason behind the failure of Northern Rock Bank can be linked to the failed crisis communication from their top management. They elaborated by stating that a successful crisis communication requires that sensegivers provide information to match the frame of the sensemakers. According to Andon and Free (2012), successful crisis communication occurs when sensegivers (leaders who communicate in a way to shape their followers about how they understand themselves) are consistent in their crisis communication to sensemakers. Sensegivers need to be prepared to adjust their information to match the frames of the sensemakers. By doing this, consistency will be achieved, restoring the faith and trust among sensemakers.

Brennan et al. (2021) expanded on Liff et al.'s (2018) findings by investigating how organizations act and communicate during a crisis, with a focus on the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors explored how organizations either retreat to silence when investors need guidance or provide poor-quality disclosure with ambiguous language. The research was conducted by assessing profit warnings (large negative earnings surprises) during COVID-19. Their research resulted in two main findings. Firstly, they provide evidence of more frequent disclosure during COVID-19. Secondly, they found that disclosure quality is poor. This resonates with Abdelrehim et al. 's (2015) conclusion that managers use corporate reporting in a crisis for impression management purposes rather than to inform investors. Many profit warnings include weasel words (intentionally ambiguous or misleading) or mixed messages. Companies create an impression that everything is fine and make it look as if the document is not a profit warning by disguising the bad news.

To further expand on impression management, one of the most recent papers by Wong, Ou, and Wilson (2021) investigates the effect of the COVID-19 on financial communication in the hotel industry. The study found that the communication of the management at hotel companies changed the tone of their communication from previously dwelling on past achievements. Additionally, the changes in communication only occurred when the pandemic outbreak affected the operations of the hotels directly, rather than immediately when the outbreak became a threat. The authors explained this phenomenon on poor crisis management, procrastination by management as well as framing communication in a certain manner to improve stakeholders' confidence in the annual report announcement season.

The study used a computer-aided approach to assess large collections of texts and was able to highlight commonly used words during the various stages of the pandemic. Despite changing the tone of communication, certain words were more frequently used to highlight their responsibility for health and precautionary measures such as "cleaning", "safety" and "hygiene". Additionally, CEOs were found to be more likely to

use “me” and “my” before the pandemic and more likely to use “we”, “human” and “working [together]” as the crisis grew. Hotels that were unable to remain open often described themselves as “temporarily closed”, with optimism to reopen when possible. To determine definitions of reality that allow people to make sense of objects and events is known as framing. People use a primary framework to interpret their observations from reality, and Goffman (1974) further divided this into natural and social frameworks. Natural frameworks observe certain events as natural occurrences without letting social intermission cause the events. On the other hand, social frameworks see events as socially driven. Since Goffman published his work, there have been several developments in which additional tools and frameworks have been presented. Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) expanded on this theory by proposing five different framing techniques that are commonly used: Metaphors, jargon and catchphrases, contrast, spin, and stories.

Existing research on impression management and framing puts a lot of emphasis on the qualitative aspect of framing, e.g., using linguistics. However, research about the role of accounting numbers and communication has not been as emphasized, especially the role of numbers in external communication to stakeholders. Previous research has concluded that the use of accounting numbers to support arguments can increase persuasiveness and reliability (Kadous, Koonce, & Towry, 2005). This is related to their nature of objectivity (Porter, 1995). On the other hand, existing research has found that accounting numbers are often weak or incomplete and need repair (Row, Shields, and Birnberg, 2012). In order for the number to become a trusted source, it needs to undergo “major interpretive and organizational work”. Due to this reason, managers tend to complement accounting information with other sources of information since accounting by itself cannot provide a full understanding of the organization (Chapman, 1998; Preston, 1986; Mouritsen et al., 2009).

While previous research can explain the underlying reason why accounting numbers are used in decisions (objectiveness which helps to support arguments), it does not explain why one accounting number might be used over another in different scenarios. Goretzki et al. (2018) have examined this topic to further understand what drives the use of specific accounting numbers when applied to performance. The researchers contributed to this field by having investigated the correlation between the use of numbers and the setting where the key actors stand in a hierarchical relationship to each other.

Their findings shed light on two important aspects. Firstly, persuasiveness can be seen as a matter of legitimacy and salience. Secondly and most importantly, they concluded that organizations are using accounting numbers for different purposes within performance evaluation processes. Furthermore, how numbers are later mobilized also depends on the purpose that is foregrounded in a given situation. By drawing upon Benford and Snow’s (2000) distinction between diagnostic, prognostic, and

motivational framing, Goretzki et al. (2018) suggest that managers use accounting numbers in evaluation processes to:

- Construct performance issues (diagnostic framing) Suggest
- particular actions to be taken (prognostic framing)
- Provide others with a motive to commit themselves to certain actions (motivational framing)

To summarize, there is significant research on impression management and more specifically, framing in crisis communication. However, emphasis has been put on the qualitative aspect of framing, e.g. using linguistics. On the other hand, research about the role of accounting numbers for framing crisis communication has been limited, especially in external communication to stakeholders. While Goretzki et al. (2018) have investigated the role of accounting numbers and framing, they have looked at the internal perspective in the organization and not how accounting numbers can be used for framing in external communication to stakeholders. This is yet to be investigated in the accounting literature. Therefore, this thesis will contribute to the domain theory by analyzing the role of accounting numbers for framing external communication during the COVID-19 crisis.

2.2. Theoretical framework

In order to be able to answer the research question, a theoretical framework has been developed. The foundation of the framework will consist of the five framing techniques introduced by Fairhurst and Sarr (1996): Metaphors, jargon and catchphrases, contrast, spin, and stories. These techniques are well known as broad tools that can be used to frame in a variety of settings and are expected to provide interesting findings from our empirical dataset. Furthermore, the framing techniques introduced by Fairhurst and Sarr were developed from a general context, and we expand on their framework by combining existing literature about the framing techniques in combination with public communication and, if possible, crisis communication. This will enable us to shift closer to our domain theory.

By applying the framing techniques developed by Fairhurst and Sarr, as well as complementing research, we are equipped with the necessary tools to identify and analyze the most prominent framing techniques. This is further developed in our research methodology.

Metaphors: Used to show a subject's likeness with something else. Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) discuss examples such as “great mound of a side”, “caverns of pale pink throat” to highlight that a subject stays in our minds because of the images they evoke. Through the comparisons they draw, metaphors help us think in new ways, and often with more

clarity. In terms of public communication, metaphors can be an important tool of public communication (Nelkin, 2001). In terms of annual reports, researchers such as Ewen and Ewen (1992) concluded that metaphors could be used to construct positive attitudes about company activities.

Jargon and catchphrases: Primarily used to frame a subject in familiar terms. The underlying reason for using this framing technique is to enhance meaning by applying familiar references. According to Fairhurst and Sarr (1996), jargon and catchphrases can help communicate a vision of “god” and “devil” terms. Previous literature does not recommend using jargon when communicating to the public (Shulman & Sweitzer, 2018a, 2018b; Tolochko et al., 2019). The use of complex language and/or jargon leads to a more disfluent processing experience and leads to higher skepticism and lower credibility. However, recent research such as Shulman et al. (2020) concluded that the use of jargon does, in fact, not lead to disfluent processing in a “high urgency crisis” such as COVID-19 since the motivation to process information is higher during high urgency crises. On the other hand, catchphrases are a good tool to make the communication more memorable to the reader.

Contrast: It is a recurring issue that the information and concepts provided are often vague and difficult to understand. As a tool, contrasting can be very useful to help define the subject rather than having to state what it is. This is achieved by describing a subject in relation to its opposite. There is limited research on the use of contrast within public communication. However, research conducted by Englund et al. (2015) has investigated what they refer to as “number-to-number mobilization tactics”, providing insight on the role of numbers and how they are put in relation to each other. According to Englund et al. (2015), in order to make existing research meaningful, an alternative can be to not only relate it to operational knowledge but also to other performance numbers such as target values, those of social referents, etc.

Spin: Spinning is a term that has gained a lot of traction recently and is a common tool used in everyday business language. Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) identify two different types of spin; *positive spin*, where the emphasis is put on highlighting the positive aspects of the message, and *negative spin*, where a subject is seen in terms of its weakness. Spin has emerged to become an interesting framing technique for public communication as organizations have been more pressured to increase disclosure on their sustainability activities through sustainability reporting. This has led to the term “greenwashing” or “*green spin*” when organizations convey a false impression or provide misleading information by positively framing themselves as doing more for the environment than they really are (Alves, 2009).

Stories: One tool to create meaning through language is with the help of storytelling. Stories help to catch people's attention due to them often reflecting on experiences

people can relate to. More recent research has agreed with previous literature and recognized that storytelling is an effective sensemaking device that helps to communicate cross-culturally (Barker et al., 2010). Even though the framing technique has been recognized as an excellent business tool, research has mostly emphasized the use of storytelling for internal communication. For instance, researchers have recognized that storytelling can be used to make employees more aware of organizational values (Barker, Rimler, Moreno, & Kaplan, 2004; Smith & Keyton, 2001; Stutts & Barker, 1999).

Table 1: Overview of the five framing techniques

	Contrasting	Spinning	Jargon and catchphrases	Metaphors	Stories
Function	It describes a subject in terms of its opposite.	It puts a subject in a positive or negative light.	They frame a subject in familiar terms.	They show a subject's likeness with something else.	They frame a subject by example.
Use it because	It is sometimes easier to define what your subject is not than state what it is.	It can reveal your subject's strengths or weaknesses.	Familiar references can enhance meaning. Jargon and catchphrases help communicate a vision's "god" and "devil" terms.	You want a subject to take on new meaning.	Stories attract attention and can build rapport.
Existing research about public communication use	Limited research. Englund (2015) touches upon contrasting by introducing "number-to- number" mobilization tactics.	Limited research. Alves (2009) introduced the term "green spin" to address how organizations use positive spinning to frame their sustainability efforts.	Most researchers recommends being jargon-free (Shulman & Sweitzer, 2018a, 2018b; Tolochko et al., 2019). However, catchphrases are effective when communicating organizational values.	Can be an important tool. Used in annual reports to generate positive reactions (Ewen & Ewen, 1992)	Frequent, when the topic is non-financial. Can also be related to highlight own responsibilities.
Examples	"Our residential properties has never been used as much as during the last month when our tenants have stayed at home to avoid infection - as opposed to hotels, stores, offices, shopping centres, schools and restaurants which to a large extent have been empty."	"I am very proud that we have once again been able to report very positive results. We continue to grow, and rental income increased 9 percent to SEK 781 million for the quarter. The operating surplus rose 11 percent to SEK 555 million, corresponding to a healthy surplus ratio of 71 percent."	"This, combined with Pandox's past crisis experience, has made it possible to quickly organise and address important issues in this unique and challenging time. Pandox is currently focusing on three main areas: Respond, Restart and Reinvent."	"We are beginning to see the light in the end of the tunnel."	"For several months, I have been struggling with a malfunctioning broadband connection at home. After spending hours trying to attract the interest of my supplier, I terminated the contract and found a new and better solution. A small, but telling, example of how poor service leads to the loss of a customer."

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section intends to explain the research methodology used for this paper. The section starts with motivating the chosen research design, followed by an explanation of the process of data collection, and finally elaborates on the approach used to analyze the data.

3.1. Research design

The research must be tailored to best address the research question at hand; *What role do accounting numbers play in framing external communication during COVID-19?* Edmondson and McManus (2007) classify management research theory as either mature, nascent, or intermediate. We position our research paper within the nascent theory, as the research is studied through investigating and identifying patterns, as well as having an open-ended inquiry as a research question. A nascent management research theory requires detailed and high-qualitative data to best study and identify patterns.

For these purposes, the main source of data was published financial reports. The financial reports are an important tool of communication between the management of the company towards investors and other stakeholders, and the contents of the reports can play a major role in how the company's historical and future performance is perceived by investors and the public market (Kloptchenko et al., 2004).

As we use our empirics and observations from reality and attempt to find and highlight generalizations, an inductive approach is taken to this research. Although all research methodologies have their own advantages and disadvantages, we believe it is one that fits our study the best. Time will tell whether findings from an inductive approach will be applicable to the future, as the inductive approach assumes that the sequences of events in the future will occur as it has in the past.

3.2. Research setting

3.2.1. Choosing a case industry

We chose to focus on the real estate sector, as it is known to correlate highly with macroeconomic trends. According to McCue and Kling (1994), approximately 60 % of real estate prices could be explained by macroeconomic trends. Due to the high correlation, the real estate market is viewed as a good proxy for the general market sentiment.

The real estate market is then further limited to Swedish, listed real estate companies. Companies that are listed on the public stock exchange have considerably higher demands on their financial reporting than privately-owned companies do, and therefore

expect a higher quality of the published reporting is expected. Additionally, companies on the public market have a significantly higher need to communicate externally with the public market as financial reports are one of the most important channels of communication for listed companies. The investor stakeholder perspective is important to include as the research investigates external communication. The focus on the Swedish real estate market is practical as the reports are published in Swedish, which is the native language of the authors of this research paper. All empirics are gathered and analyzed in Swedish and are translated to English in our empirical section. Working with empirical data in our native language enables us to analyze and interpret the reports as well as possible. All financial reports were retrieved from the companies' websites. In total, a dataset of 27 listed Swedish real estate companies was gathered and used as empirics.

3.2.2. Choosing a time period

As the relevant time period for the research is during the COVID-19 crisis, the empirics are restricted to data from March 2020 and onwards. The empirical dataset does not include the time period before the crisis, as the research focuses on how communication during the crisis.

To investigate how communication changed during the COVID-19 crisis, the empirical dataset was divided into three chronological "snapshots", intended to represent three different stages of the crisis. For practical reasons, our empirical material is divided into these three stages. The first stage represents the beginning of the crisis; the second represents a period where there were low infection rates, and the final stage represents a period where there were high infection rates. Details on the three different stages are provided below as background information:

- 1) *The beginning of the crisis:* The first stage represents the initial development of the COVID-19 pandemic in Sweden, and it is reflected by our use of quarterly financial reports that represent the period January-March 2020. This is a crucial time period as March 2020 represented one of the most critical developments of COVID-19, and during this month alone, COVID-19 cases in Sweden went from 14 to 5320. As the reports are published with a time lag, there was little doubt about the seriousness of the situation at the time of publishing, and the crisis was considered as the main concern during this quarterly report.
- 2) *After the first wave:* Sweden experienced a considerably lower number of COVID-19 cases during the summer of 2020. Our second snapshot reflects the time period July-September 2020, after a period of low infection rates. We intend to investigate whether this is reflected in their financial communication. Due to the time lag of publishing the financial reports, infection rates increased significantly before publishing, which may have affected the financial communication.

- 3) *Ongoing vaccinations*: The third snapshot represents the period January-March 2021, a period with high rates of infections but with certain optimism due to developed vaccinations. By the end of March 2021, over 10% of the population had at least one vaccination dose. By the time of publishing, over one-third of the population had at least one vaccination dose.

Due to our methodology, where we use three snapshots, our dataset shrank to 25 companies as two of the companies only publishes half-year reports, and their reporting did not correspond to the time periods we investigate in our snapshots.

3.3. Data analysis

The data was collected by reading quarterly reports. The focus is on texts where text and numbers interplay with each other, such as company presentations and the texts by the CEO, rather than the financial statements as it provides more opportunities for active framing. A lens of various framing techniques is then applied to our empirical material, primarily based on the five framing techniques developed by Fairhurst and Sarr (1996). The relevant texts were extracted into working documents for deeper scrutiny. Each report would often be re-read several times with a different framing technique as a primary lens. The examples were categorized into one or several categories based on our analysis. As some findings were difficult to classify within the existing framework and were decided to be highly relevant across all reports, we decided to categorize them into two additional categories. Furthermore, each quote was analyzed in regard to whether we considered the accounting number to be strong, weak, both, or missing.

After gathering the data into working sheets, the most relevant parts for our research were highlighted, and framing techniques that did not play a vital role in the research question were downsized.

The nature of our research subject allows for a wide variety of interpretations for all the framing techniques. We have decided to investigate the main communicative tools for companies and found that although some findings arguably could be interpreted as metaphors or stories, very few of those findings were dominating factors in how companies communicate. After careful consideration, it was decided that our research would benefit from the exclusion of these techniques to increase clarity and focus on the main drivers of communication in combination with accounting numbers. This led to the emergence of a revised theoretical framework, consisting of contrasting, spinning, jargon and catchphrases as well as complimentary framing techniques. The revised framework was used to analyze the empirics with a theoretical lens.

3.4. Research quality

Traditionally, research quality has been evaluated based on validity and reliability, but recent papers question the appropriateness of using it for qualitative studies (Dubois 2014). Instead, it may be more appropriate to evaluate the quality based on authenticity and plausibility (Lukka and Modell 2010).

Authenticity is concerning how accurately the research portrays the studied material. One typical way of increasing authenticity is the use of quotes to reduce the perception of alteration from biased researchers. The frequent use of direct quotations and accurate referencing is our most important tool for increasing authenticity in this research.

Providing crucial background information both in terms of the crisis and the real estate industry is intended to contextualize information for the reader and also increase the authenticity of our research.

Plausibility refers to how well the reader can understand, interpret and “make sense” of the provided research, according to Lukka and Modell (2010). Therefore, careful use of language, rhetorics, and framing in this paper plays a major role. Although the research method requires us to interpret text subjectively for further analysis and discussion, we intend to provide carefully explained interpretations of our selected direct quotations for the reader to follow to increase the plausibility. Working with a structured methodology also increases our plausibility as it leaves less room for biases by us, the researchers.

4 EMPIRICS

To investigate how communication in accounting has been used during COVID-19, this study investigates empirics from the Swedish real estate market. The section begins with a brief overview of the Swedish real estate market during the three stages. It is followed up by presenting and analyzing findings based on the various framing techniques, and finally, a few complementary techniques based on our own findings are presented.

4.1. A bird's eye view of the real estate market and COVID-19

A brief overview of the real estate market during the COVID-19 crisis and the chosen snapshot periods is provided below. The information is based on regular updates from the global real estate company Cushman & Wakefield (2021).

The beginning of the crisis

As COVID-19 spread to Sweden during especially March 2020, the real estate market was one of the many industries across the market that were affected. Due to the increasing volatility and a struggling market, investors expected a risk premium. Most retail stores and restaurants were still open but with very few customers. This led to suffering tenants and bankruptcies for the companies with limited liquidity. During the end of the period, the Swedish government provided landlords who gave rental reductions a reimbursement of 50 %. However, rebates caused tensions between landlords and tenants due to the uncertainty of which situations were eligible for rebates and not.

After the first wave

The transaction market remained liquid for residential and public properties, although investors are cautious about offices and logistics deals. During the early summer of 2020, COVID-19 cases decreased, and some restrictions lightened. This correlated highly with the real estate market as we witnessed high transaction volumes after the previous hiatus. Retail stores and restaurants largely returned to normal opening hours. Many workers returned to offices, but the reversing trend was halted at the end of the period as the number of COVID-19 cases increased.

The autumn of 2020 came with a long-term focus from many tenants and real estate companies. Several companies were surprised with the productivity during the work-from-home period before the summer and contemplated new long-term office strategies, also in terms of cost-optimization. This naturally resulted in some real estate companies learning from the challenges of the spring to find long-term new business ideas.

Although the office real estate market remained luke-warm in terms of transactions, the residential real estate market performed well.

Ongoing vaccinations

The end of 2020 and early 2021 saw high levels of COVID-19 infection rates but with definite optimism due to initiated vaccination programs. Transactions within the real estate market remained active, albeit temporary laws were passed that enabled the government to close shopping centers and gyms where restrictions weren't upheld.

Retail spaces and restaurants struggled to return to pre-COVID-19 results, but a large increase in company registrations might lead to positive long-term effects in the office market. Like in the first stage, the government provided additional rental support, which yet again caused tensions between landlords and tenants. The end of the period continued to see a high number of infections and increasing restrictions, but with increased optimism as vaccination rates increased quickly. "The bonus question of whether an office vacancy is considered an opportunity or a risk divided the investors into two nearly identical sized groups." (Cushman & Wakefield, 2021)

4.2. Case findings

This chapter intends to disclose relevant findings from our empirics. The material is first and foremost structured according to the framework techniques originally presented by Fairhurst and Sarr. Findings that were not applicable to Fairhurst and Sarr's framing techniques or required closer investigation are presented in the separate section Complimentary framing techniques.

4.2.1. Contrasting - comparing to what it is not

Contrast as a framing technique is to describe a subject in terms of what it is not, according to Fairhurst and Sarr (1996). This framing technique allows the company to present a subject through a suitable comparison. Two important factors are shown to play a major role in using contrasting as a framing technique. First of all, *companies must choose an appropriate metric*. In many situations, it would be best to choose the metric which makes the company compare as well as possible. It must also be relevant to what the company wants to communicate. Choosing metrics that can be perceived as irrelevant may damage the reliability of the company. Secondly, *companies must choose the right comparing units*. This goes hand in hand with choosing the appropriate metric. The company may choose to compare against a comparing unit that provides the best comparison for them and the message they want to convey.

Although some types of contrasting are more obvious than others, smaller subtleties such as contrasting a metric by the metric during the last period or claiming that something has grown, increased, or decreased. Therefore, contrasting is one of the broadest tools available for framing both with and without accounting numbers.

We start by examining those observations where it is used together with strong accounting numbers. This is highlighted by the quote below by Fastighets AB Balder.

“Approximately **60 %** of the property portfolio consists of residential properties. Of the total property portfolio, approximately 8 % consists of hotels, **a sector which is experiencing difficulties.**”

(Fastighets AB Balder, Q1 2020)

To facilitate the analysis, one may have to look at the two parts of the quote. The first part would be the first sentence where Fastighets AB Balder highlights that 60% of their real estate portfolio consists of residential properties. In this sentence, we interpret 60 % as the strong accounting number because it provides a sense of objectivity and does not require any contextualization. Furthermore, although not explicitly stated, it is assumed that residential properties have performed well during the pandemics as people have stayed at home.

In the second part of the quote, the 8% acts as a weak accounting number as it needs contextualization, and it is complemented with further information, which in this case relates to the negative impact on the sector.

The role of framing using contrasting can only be identified when analyzing the whole quote. By stating that 60 % of the portfolio is residential properties (which had performed well during the pandemic), it may serve as a conscious contextualization for the 8 % that have been heavily impacted by the pandemic. This tool may attempt to diminish the effects of the struggling hotel portfolio by comparing the negatively impacted 8 % in comparison to the 60 %. This creates an impression that Balder only seems to have been marginally impacted by the pandemic.

This type of framing using contrasting and accounting numbers was observed multiple times where in most scenarios, a strong accounting number often existed to accompany a weak number in need of contrasting.

However, with weak accounting numbers, this was not always the case. One example that highlights this is a quote by Samhällsbyggnadsbolaget i Norden AB (SBB), who, instead of contrasting strong and weak accounting numbers with each other, contrasts a weak number with linguistics.

“During the second and third quarters, we received **99.8 percent** of our rental income, which is probably the **highest of all listed property companies in Europe.**”

(Samhällsbyggnadsbolaget i Norden AB, Q3 2020)

In this quote, the 99,8% lacks contextualization since we do not know if 99,8 % is an impressive achievement or not without comparing it to something relatable. This is an effective way of showcasing exceptionally strong results and drawing attention to those results by stating strong claims about having the highest collection rate in Europe. This is a contrasting situation in which SBB can be viewed as the superior party and they have a strong motivation for including accounting numbers to strengthen the reliability of their claim.

Heimstaden Fastigheter i Sverige AB uses contrasting in a variety of ways to frame their results during the pandemic. Instead of contrasting externally, as in the previous example, the company applies contrasting internally:

“In our “rescue efforts” for those commercial tenants who, on the other hand, are impacted by the crisis, we anticipate a decline of about **SEK 15-17 million** in the Group as a whole for the second quarter. This corresponds to about 1 percent of the total rental income for the quarter.”

(Heimstaden Fastigheter i Sverige AB, Q1 2020)

Management forecasts a declining result of SEK 15-17 million, which as a weak accounting number. Not only can decline be interpreted as a type of contrasting, but the last sentence also provides a context in a similar way to Fastighets AB Balder’s quote above. The 1 percent acts as a strong accounting number as it provides contextualization to the SEK 15-17 million previously mentioned.

Relating back to our previous quote from SBB, we observe a different example where contrasting is used, and competitors are comparing units. However, this time, they are not using accounting numbers in their use of contrasting.

"Our residential properties has never been used as much as during the last month when our tenants have stayed at home to avoid infection - as opposed to hotels, stores, offices, shopping centers, schools and restaurants which to a large extent have been empty."

(Akeliuss Fastigheter AB, Q3 2020)

Despite being the superior party in contrasting, Akelius Fastigheter AB manages to increase persuasiveness without the use of accounting numbers. This can be related to the two vital factors mentioned earlier. The chosen metric, in this case, is how used their assets are, rather than using cash flows, earnings, or other financial metrics that might be of more direct interest for investors. This metric is chosen carefully, as it should be perceived as the most beneficial for Akelius Fastigheter AB in comparison. However, it can be difficult to quantify, especially for their competitors, as it is not publicly known information, unlike certain financial metrics. Second, the comparison unit, in this case, is not a single competing organization, but six different types of real estate objects are mentioned. Contrasting against a larger number of entities likely increases the perceived strength of the claim, but it could also make it more difficult to quantify the comparison in a coherent way. In that sense, increasing the number of comparing units could be a method to compensate for the lack of numbers.

It is also notable that contrasting has been used extensively as a predictive tool, albeit rarely with the use of accounting numbers.

“The recovery for **hotel markets which are further ahead in development** provides good support for Pandox's view that the underlying drivers for, and the potential within, a recovery for the **hotel market is relevant to Europe**. In addition, a successful vaccination program and decreasing regulations in the U.S. has led to a sharp increase in demand for the hotel industry.”

(Pandox AB, Q1 2021)

Pandox AB contrasts its prospects with a current situation in a different geographical setting, claiming that the comparing object is an adequate proxy for the potential development. In times of pandemic, this can be a useful tool as the pandemic spreads across different geographical regions at various rates and points in time.

For this type of contrasting to work effectively, Pandox AB must persuasively argue that the U.S. is ahead of Europe in the development of the COVID-19. This claim can be supported further with numbers and statistics, although accounting numbers may not be the most relevant.

Fabege AB applies contrasting with a historical lens (as opposed to a current lens which Pandox AB uses).

“I, like many others amongst us, experienced the crises in the late 1980s, the property crisis in the early 1990s, the Russia crisis, the IT bubble and the financial crisis just over ten years ago. The list is long. All the crises have been different, but nothing has been as dramatic as this one.”

(Fabege AB, Q1 2020)

Even though he quickly comes to the conclusion that they are not comparable, the technique itself is noteworthy. Both Fabege AB and Pandox AB exclude the use of accounting numbers.

It is also interesting to note that the CEO phrased it “*I, like many others amongst us*”, as one tool to possibly persuade the reader that the management is highly experienced and adequately skilled to lead the company through the crisis. This is similar to the motivation behind accountability (see section 5.2.4.2), but with foreseeing eventual problems rather than explaining and defending problems.

To sum up, some of our observations within contrasting is not an easy task due to its versatility, but in short, contrasting is frequently used with three different strategies.

The company is generally the “inferior” or the “superior” party in each contrasting. In this context, *inferior* is related to providing a comparison where the own company is performing worse than the comparing unit, and *superior* is related to performing better than the comparing unit. It is observed that when the company is inferior, there is little motivation for providing a strong accounting number to support the claim. However, it is frequently combined with accountability to provide an explanation and possibly shift responsibility for weak performances. However, if the comparing unit is superior, there is a motivation for applying accounting numbers to support the underlying claim. Thus, it is even more important to choose the appropriate metric to contrast as highlighted accounting numbers are subject to closer scrutiny.

As displayed in the empirics, contrasting is one of the most frequent and useful tools for framing communication. There are empirical examples of using contrasting together with accounting numbers and without them. It can also be observed that it is such a flexible tool that it can, and frequently is, combined with other framing techniques. We observe that strong accounting numbers most commonly exist together and support weak accounting numbers. On the other hand, weak accounting numbers are generally supported by either accounting numbers or linguistics, or both. There are also examples where contrasting is not combined with accounting numbers, which can depend on how relevant the topic is to financial performance.

4.2.2. Spinning - to give a concept a positive or negative connotation

To spin, as a framing technique, is to talk about a concept so as to give it a positive or a negative connotation.

In general, data gathered from the case companies supports that spin is a popular framing technique, both with and without accounting numbers. One example with a strong accounting number is seen from Fastpartner AB:

”Besides the **great human suffering**, Covid-19 has had a **profound effect** on the global economy, with hotels, restaurants and supermarkets taking a **particularly hard hit**. Fastpartner’s exposure to this category of tenants is **relatively limited** and accounts for less than 5 per cent of the company’s total rental income.”

(Fastpartner AB, Q1 2020)

In this situation, Fastpartner AB begins by using a form of negative spinning, where they emphasize the effects of COVID-19 to a large extent before introducing the undesirable impact on their rental income. Fastpartner AB then applies a different type of spinning by mentioning “relatively limited”. With this technique, the claim of having a relatively limited exposure is supported with an accounting number, and the audience may perceive the “less than 5%” to be good given the “extreme” conditions that Fastpartner AB has operated in. Furthermore, readers may perceive that their performance is and will be better than many of their competitors due to low exposure to affected real estate segments.

Another example of using strong accounting numbers and spinning can be shown by the quote below from Wihlborgs Fastigheter AB:

“I am **very proud** that we have once again been able to report **very positive** results. **We continue to grow**, and rental income increased 9 percent to SEK 781 million for the quarter. The operating surplus rose 11 percent to SEK 555 million, corresponding to a **healthy surplus** ratio of 71 percent.”

(Wihlborgs Fastigheter AB, Q1 2020)

This is one of the most frequent uses of spinning as a framing technique. Note the frequent use of words such as “very proud”, “very positive” and “healthy surplus ratio” when discussing increases in rental income and surplus ratio. These words help Wihlborgs Fastigheter AB to ensure that the increases are interpreted as something very positive for the company. While the words themselves do not provide any valuable information, they contribute to the perception of the financial metrics discussed. The

numbers are strong as they are used to increase the persuasiveness of the general message that Wihlborgs Fastigheter AB is trying to convey.

Although most commonly used with strong accounting numbers, spinning can also be combined with *weak accounting numbers*. This can be illustrated with an example by Diös Fastigheter AB from their quarterly report Q3 2020:

” This is a result that we are proud of and that points to strength – among our tenants, in our market and in our business. For the fourth quarter we have so far received 95 per cent of our expected rental payments, which is normal. Our costs are lower, and it is satisfying to note that our efforts to improve energy efficiency are having an impact on our bottom line. The surplus ratio for the period improved, to 68 per cent.”

(Diös Fastigheter AB, Q3 2020)

Here, Diös are using words such as “a result we are very proud of”, “showing strength in our tenants, in our market, and in our actions” to frame themselves in a better light. This is similar to how Wihlborgs Fastigheter AB used spinning in our previous example. However, Diös Fastigheter AB introduces an accounting number (95%), which by itself does not say too much as it needs contextualization. This is provided by “which is normal” to provide the reader with an understanding of the quality of the number. Note that “which is normal” is perceived as a positive result due to the context of being amidst a crisis.

Similarly to contrasting, spinning is frequently combined with other framing techniques. As previously mentioned, spinning and contrasting together with accounting numbers is one of the most frequent combinations.

As already discussed, the 95 percent is considered weak as it needs contextualization, which it receives by subtly framing it positively by stating that it’s normal, which is one type of contrasting. On the other hand, the latter accounting number used (a 68 percent excess rate) acts as a strong accounting number as it increases the reliability of the claim that the excess rate is strengthened. For this tool to work, it is once again important to carefully choose the right metric, one that is as persuasive as possible while still being perceived as relevant.

As the example showcased, there are considerable opportunities for spinning and contrasting to interplay with each other, as well as with other framing techniques. One word, such as *strengthening*, can portray both a contrasting technique and a spinning technique simultaneously. This combination of contrasting and spinning is one of the most frequent tools observed in financial reports, but it may not be a surprising

observation. Contrasting compares the chosen metric to something else, and spinning strengthens that comparison by providing a positive or negative valuing linguistics to the observation. Note that accounting numbers can be used by themselves as a contrasting tool, but spinning requires linguistics as support.

As can be seen in the quote above from Wihlborgs Fastigheter AB, the company combines contrasting, spinning, and accounting numbers in an effective way to frame its communication. There are several accounting numbers present, and with contrasting, they are contextualized through comparing it to previous periods. By applying words such as “very proud” and “very good”, the performance is framed positively.

Furthermore, there are multiple examples of spinning without the use of accounting numbers. One clear illustration can be shown with a quote from Castellum AB in their quarterly report Q1 2021.

“As you may have noticed, I have not commented specifically on the effects of the ongoing pandemic. This is because its direct impact on our earnings is **extremely marginal**, since the rents paid in are still as they were during a normal quarter; customer losses and bankruptcies are **almost non-existent**.”

(Castellum AB, Q1 2021)

Prior to this quote, the report briefly discusses the ongoing pandemic and how it has impacted the real estate industry, which may give the reader the impression that Castellum AB will present negative financial results. However, it is then presented that the impact has been “extremely marginal” and losses have been “almost non-existent”, creating the impression that Castellum has been performing really well compared to the industry as a whole. In this situation, it would not have been irrelevant to include accounting numbers as the subject is related to financial performance. On the other hand, by highlighting metrics such as rental income and customer loss rate, it still manages to contribute a certain degree of increased reliability. The actual financials for these two metrics can be found in other parts of the report, and by highlighting the metrics, the company is confident enough in its claim as the metrics, in any case, are subject to closer scrutiny.

To summarize the use of spinning, our data suggest that the role of accounting numbers can have an important role in combination with spinning. In general, many of the case companies took advantage of lexical items such as “heavily impacted”, “growth”, “increase” or “very good results” to express confidence and optimism for their businesses during the crisis.

This was often used to emphasize the effects of COVID-19 on society before introducing their financial results. In detail, empirics suggest that COVID-19 is used to either excuse a negative result or to maximize the effect of a good performance.

4.2.3. Using jargon and catchphrases

It is common for real estate companies to display their core values and beliefs through catchphrases. It is one method for the organization to make projects and values memorable by bringing a very familiar and accepted meaning to the subject with which they are associated. However, the use of accounting numbers (and numbers in general) in combination with jargon and catchphrases is very limited for this framing technique.

Heimstaden Fastigheter AB took advantage of this framing technique when discussing its core value by introducing the catchphrase “CARE-DARE-SHARE” at the beginning of the crisis and stressed that their values are demonstrated through tangible actions when the rest of society is in a state of crisis. Heimstaden Fastigheter AB also combined their use of catchphrases with contrasting:

“Our corporate culture and our values are what **set us apart from many other** private housing companies and are absolutely central aspects of our capacity to maintain or increase the value of our company. **We are there for those who need help.** That makes me both happy and hopeful.”

(Heimstaden Fastigheter i Sverige AB, Q1 2020)

This tool allows Heimstaden Fastigheter AB to frame a memorable message while simultaneously persuading the reader that they are unique compared to their competitors. This observation is interesting as the contrasting is neutrally formulated. Heimstaden Fastigheter AB does not claim to be better or stronger than its competitors. However, given the context of the contrasting, the reader is likely to perceive Heimstaden Fastigheter AB as claiming to be superior due to the context of social responsibility and performing good deeds. Many other companies have been using catchphrases just like Heimstaden Fastigheter AB, such as Pandox AB who also introduced a catchphrase as the crisis erupted.

“This, combined with Pandox’s past crisis experience, has made it possible to quickly organize and address important issues in this unique and challenging time. Pandox is currently focusing on three main areas: **Respond, Restart and Reinvent.**”

(Pandox AB, Q1 2020)

As noted with both examples, companies have used wordplay (for example, rhyming) to make their message more memorable. On the other hand, Diös Fastigheter AB introduced their strategy called “the 15-minute city” when describing that they focus on smaller cities. This is in contrast to previous catchphrases highlighted as it does not use wordplay, but it is memorable as it brings a familiar and accepted meaning to the subject.

As seen in the examples above, catchphrases are often used in the absence of numbers. However, there are a few exceptions highlighting the combinations of catchphrases and accounting numbers. One example is when the CEO of SBB discusses the importance of cash flow during a global pandemic by introducing the well-known catchphrase “Cash is king”.

“**Cash is king**” also applies during a pandemic - Cash flow from operating activities increased by SEK 347m, corresponding to 358 percent.”
(Samhällsbyggnadsbolaget i Norden AB, Q1 2020)

There are a few advantages of using a well-known catchphrase before introducing accounting numbers. Firstly, it might appear as something unexpected in a public report, catching the attention of the reader. Secondly, it can make it easier for the reader to relate to the topic discussed, which can be seen from the example above.

There were few interesting findings regarding jargon as a communicative framing tool. It appears that companies are hesitant about using jargon in external communication during COVID-19, possibly due to the increased risk of misinterpretation.

4.2.4. Complimentary framing techniques

The framing techniques by Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) provide a good foundation for our theoretical model, but our empirics show that there are several interesting framing techniques that may not fit the established categories well, yet they are frequently used. Two framing techniques are hereby presented, although they often appear in combination with other framing techniques.

Predictive framing

An important task for financial reports is to convey predictions on the future of the company, the market, and the crisis at hand. The art of how to frame prediction has to the best of our knowledge, not previously been investigated deeply.

The vast majority of the empirical material provided very careful predictions about the future at the early stages of the pandemic.

“It is **too early to estimate the effects** of the Corona pandemic on real estate valuations. What is clear is that values during the coming quarters will **have higher degrees of uncertainty** than normal, since transaction volumes decreases which in turn decreases the amount of comparable real estate transactions.”

(Akeliuss Fastigheter AB, Q1 2020)

In the quote above, Akeliuss Fastigheter AB recognizes that the crisis introduces a large degree of uncertainty and is careful about giving any type of prognosis other than recognizing the increasing uncertainty itself. Since accounting numbers often are used to increase persuasiveness and reliability by providing an aura of objectivity, it may appear as if accounting numbers should not be used in predicting uncertainty.

Although many companies stay clear of using accounting numbers in this context, a few companies used accounting numbers together with predictive framing successfully. Not to convey the uncertainty itself, but rather to provide increased reliability to the company's situation within the uncertainty. In the following quote, predictive framing is combined with contrasting.

“We know from experience with earlier crises that drawn-out processes such as this one strike property values harder and faster than rental income. It is easy to realize that if property values fall going forward, it means that the net asset value presented in yearend reports are already history. **A hypothetical calculation: At a 50% loan-to-value ratio, a 10% fall in property values would mean a 20% reduction in net assets – with an accompanying upswing in loan-to-value ratio. As far as Castellum is concerned, we can state that even a 20% fall in property values would mean our position continues to be reasonable – a loan-to-value ratio of 53% against 43% by the start of the year.**”

(Castellum AB, Q1 2020)

Contrasting has briefly been mentioned together with predictive framing previously, where it was observed that accounting numbers rarely were used in combination with contrasting. This hypothetical calculation provided here provides an excellent example of how accounting numbers can be integrated with the tool.

Note that the accounting numbers and hypothetical calculations reinforce their own financial stability rather than communicate a market prognosis. Even though companies are able to predict the state and development of the pandemic, it is likely preferable to highlight the financial strength of the company instead (as Castellum did in the quote above).

Even though the predictions may be accurate, the reliability of such predictions is low. With scientists and experts with vast experience researching the pandemic, readers would likely realize that the management of the real estate company in question has significant expertise within their own company but limited expertise within epidemiology. One of the empirical observations highlighted in early 2020 that the spread of pandemics appeared to decrease in large areas. History has shown that the pandemic was far from over by the time of writing, and the section was considerably less highlighted in their upcoming published financial reports.

Some companies highlighted the potential long-term effects of the pandemic:

“Many people are currently predicting the long-term effects of this pandemic. "Will there be any shops left? Will there be any need for offices in the future?" I think it is a good idea to see the bigger picture and look at what is happening in a broader context based on long-term social trends. The strong trend toward urbanisation will probably not be affected by the pandemic. More people have been living in cities than in the countryside since the 2010s. And things are moving quickly. In 2030 it is estimated that 60 per cent of the world's population will live in cities. The figures speak for themselves; the bigger the cities, the greater the productivity.”

(Atrium Ljungberg AB, Q3 2020)

As the quote displays, the real estate sector as a whole was uncertain about the long-term effects on the industry. Atrium Ljungberg uses numbers, although not accounting numbers, to provide increased reliability to their prediction. Accounting numbers would likely be irrelevant as the context itself is not within accounting or even financial performance.

To sum up, accounting numbers are rarely used in the context of predictive framing, but hypothetical calculations can be effective tools to incorporate the two. On the other hand, predictive framing is frequently combined with contrasting to anchor the predictions to something.

Accountability

Another framing device commonly used in times of crisis is accountability. As the market in general suffered, at least in the beginning, companies may hold others accountable for eventual negative results or events. The main reason for such a framing technique is likely to retain the impression that the management of the company is competent and skilled enough to remain in charge of the company.

It was found that many reports explained their negative results and developments as a result of the ongoing pandemic.

“Rent payments for the month of April were 3 percentage units lower than usual, which **likely is an effect by the Corona pandemic.**”

(Akelius Fastigheter AB, Q1 2020)

As mentioned in 5.2.1 above, weak accounting numbers that are in need of contrasting in combination with being an inferior party is a frequent setting for the inclusion of accountability. The example above by Akelius Fastigheter AB highlights a frequent example of such observations. The contrasting is slightly more subtle than commonly observed, but it is present.

The pandemic is undoubtedly a strong factor that has affected many financial metrics, but there is a danger that some negative results are blamed on the pandemic even though the pandemic was not the underlying factor. This is especially true if it is difficult for the reader to examine the underlying calculations closer.

Another example of the use of accountability is the following:

“Modernization of residential properties is no longer possible **due to the new rent regulation in Berlin.** Akelius will reduce staff by 58 employees that have worked with construction related work, such as upgrading of apartments and buildings. This was a very painful decision, which the company postponed as long as possible, **hoping that politicians would come to their senses. They did not.**”

(Akelius Fastigheter AB, Q1 2020)

In the quote above, one could argue that management should be aware and take various political and legal risks for every region in which they operate into account. However, they shift the responsibility onto the politicians.

The tool can be an effective one, but it largely depends on how the reader perceives it. If, for example, the company can be proven to be accountable for the negative events, then it may damage the company's reputation considerably.

On the other hand, even though blaming a different organization may be justified in certain cases, if it is ineffectively framed, investors may perceive the blaming to simply be an attempt to downplay management's own responsibilities. Finally, one must not

forget that holding someone else accountable, regardless of how justified it is, could damage the relationship between the company and the person/organization held accountable.

Table 2: Key takeaways from empirical analysis

	Strong Accounting Numbers	Weak Accounting Numbers	Lack of Accounting Numbers
Contrasting	Frequently used in combination with weak accounting numbers	Very frequent. Especially considering standardized financial metrics.	Common, especially when combining with other framing techniques.
Spinning	Very frequent, especially to highlight strong performances.	Common in combination with contrasting.	Common, especially in non-financial topics of discussion.
Jargon and catchphrases	Rare, possibly due to non-financial topic of discussion.	Rare, possibly due to non-financial topic of discussion.	Very frequent. Accounting numbers not always relevant to communicate values or strategies.
Predictive framing	Rare, possibly due to increasing need of contextualisation to provide reliable prediction.	Sometimes used with hypothetical calculation.	Common, especially if the topic is not directly related to financial performance.
Accountability	Sometimes used, often in combination with contrasting.	Frequent in combination with contrasting to highlight negative performances before shifting responsibility.	Frequent, when the topic is non-financial. Can also be related to highlight own responsibilities.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1. The use of accounting numbers

As previously mentioned, this research paper investigates the role of accounting numbers and framing during the COVID-19 crisis. In detail, this relates to closely examining the use of strong, weak, and the absence of accounting numbers within a framing context.

Observations support that strong accounting numbers, as previously defined to increase persuasiveness and reliability (Kadous, Koonce, & Towry, 2005), play an essential role in framing during the COVID-19 crisis. Our observations suggest that it is most frequently used with highlighting financial data that is expected to generate a positive reaction from the audience. In these situations, the provided information not only matches the frame of sensemakers as mentioned by Liff et al. (2018) but may also exceed the expectations in terms of performance. During COVID-19, it is plausible that the company wants to highlight its strongest performances, especially as investors may expect negative results as a result of the crisis. Since much crisis communication is aimed at aligning investors, using spinning may help to align the perceptions of the company and its performances. Our findings support Abdelrehim et al. 's (2015) finding that managers may use corporate reporting in a crisis for impression management purposes rather than to inform investors.

As mentioned by Row, Shields and Birnberg (2012), accounting numbers also tend to be weak and in need of contextualization to make sense for the reader. Although a single number may still by itself provide a sense of objectivity to the reader, it will not position itself in the mind of the reader without context. Our findings show that weak accounting numbers are most frequently used in combination with results and performances that are more standardized. These include metrics that are included regularly in financial reporting and are expected by investors and the public market.

However, contrasting is one of the widest tools in the framing toolbox, and as observed in the empirics, there are plenty of minor details, such as contrasting a current performance to the performance last period. Englund et al. (2015) number-to-number-tactics is one such tool that per se is defined as contrasting and serves as an effective tool to frame.

Due to the large scope of contrasting techniques and micro-contrasting within financial reports, it is difficult to draw any potential conclusions from the state of COVID-19. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many standardized results were suffering and this, in turn, led to increasing use of accountability in combination with contrasting and weak accounting numbers. Previous literature supports this, like Wong, Ou and Wilson's

(2021) study suggests that management may increase focus and responsibility on a more collective level during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As observed in the empirical material, contrasting and spinning are two framing techniques that often work well together. It appears to be useful to integrate accounting numbers into this combination, and these are examples of situations where accounting numbers can serve as weak and strong simultaneously. As spinning often serves a purpose to deliver and frame the main message to the audience, it can be supported by an accounting number that can increase the persuasiveness of the claim. This number itself can increase in reliability by contrasting it. This three-component solution provides reliability in several steps and appears as a frequently used tool for communication. As accounting numbers are prominently used to disclose or highlight financial performances, it can be seen as a special type of diagnostic framing (Benford & Snow, 2000) where certain areas are problematized and then can be seen as trivialized or downplayed in order to minimize damage which aligns with theory suggested by Coombs (2018).

5.2. Accounting numbers are missing

Thus far, there has been a heavy emphasis on the role of accounting numbers and framing in external communication. However, it is also necessary to discuss why there are situations where accounting numbers, or numbers in general, are not used in framing contexts.

Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) group together jargon and catchphrases as one framing technique. However, we have found that they are used for different purposes in financial reports. Previous research supports that a necessary part when communicating with the public is to keep the information simple and *jargon-free*. In general, using complex language and/or jargon leads to more disfluent processing experience in comparison to using a more common language. Furthermore, it can also lead to higher message skepticism and thus, decrease the reliability. However, recent research by Shulman et al. (2020) suggests that jargon, in fact, does not lead to disfluent processing during a “high urgency crisis” such as COVID-19. When analyzing the empirics using a theoretical lens, one can conclude that very few of the 25 case companies were found to use jargon in their financial reports under the three periods investigated. This could be explained by the fact that jargon, even though it might be a framing technique, is not a preferred one when communicating to external stakeholders. Furthermore, organizations might be hesitant to use jargon during challenging times for organizations, where public communication is more emphasized and the risk of disfluency in communication wants to be minimized.

In contrast to jargon, catchphrases were commonly used in the external reports analyzed. It is also evident that it is generally not used in combination with accounting numbers, despite the previously mentioned advantages of providing increased reliability and a sense of objectivity. To investigate the subject at hand further, the underlying motivations for the use of catchphrases are discussed. The observations from our empirical material indicate that most of the phrases were used to provide an overview of their values, long-term goals, and strategy. One such example is the catchphrase used “CARE-DARE-SHARE” by Heimstaden Fastigheter AB to highlight their core values.

As catchphrases often are used to highlight core values and strategies, they are a useful tool to combine with both contrasting and accountability. From the catchphrase above, Heimstaden Fastigheter AB further expanded on their core values by stressing that their values and social responsibility are what separate them from other real estate companies. This adds another aspect to the use of accountability, which most commonly is used to direct responsibilities away from itself. This technique aligns well with Wong, Ou and Wilson’s (2021) finding of companies highlighting their own responsibility during COVID-19 within the hotel industry.

Furthermore, an interesting link can be drawn to the framework developed by Benford and Snow (2000). Analysis from the empirics suggests that catchphrases tend to showcase proposed actions and solutions rather than display a financial performance. Considering this, catchphrases as a framing technique are more closely related to prognostic and motivational framing rather than being used for diagnostic purposes.

5.3. Time aspects within framing in external reporting during times of crisis

The observations from the empirics showcase that there are several interesting time aspects to consider, and it is a subject that is rarely touched upon in previous literature. Due to the nature of financial reports, time aspects and especially the future plays a considerable role in the perceived financial position and performance of a company. As mentioned in our empirics, we highlight several such findings within the section Predictive Framing.

In the findings within predictive framing, companies try many different strategies to predict and to frame their future, with the intention of framing themselves as positively as possible. However, as this paper investigates three different time periods during the pandemic, we are able to discuss findings across the various time periods.

5.3.1. Shifts in time horizon

One of the findings in our empirics was that there is a shift in the communicated time horizon. In the first time period, when the pandemic can be considered to be in its infancy, there are several observations showing that management communicates with a focus on the short-term. They were also very careful about giving predictions, rarely formulated themselves with certainty, and did not use numbers or statistics to back their predictions. This is closely related to Brennan et al.'s (2021) finding that organizations may regress to silence even though investors seek guidance. However, it was also observed that already during our second time period, many real estate companies were highlighting potential long-term effects.

According to Cushman & Wakefield (2021), investors were split almost equally between believing in major long-term changes in demand and not believing that demands will shift significantly, and this is reflected in our empirics. Some companies communicate their readiness for the new demands after COVID-19, whilst others stress that their asset portfolio is already well-positioned for the future and the COVID-19 will not affect much long-term.

Therefore, the time horizon appears to shift from being relatively short-term in the infancy of the pandemic to long-term during the later stages of the pandemic. This aligns well with previous literature describing companies and organizations that have a more short-term focus during times of crisis. As the COVID-19 crisis is relatively protracted timewise, it has allowed investors and the companies to consider not only the short-term situation but also the long-term. For some of them, the COVID-19 crisis can be viewed as an opportunity and not only a threat to current business. This opportunity lies within being at the forefront of positioning themselves to shifts in the long-term demand.

5.3.2. Shifts in use of framing techniques

Due to the various time periods chosen, it is also possible to investigate whether the use of other framing techniques has shifted throughout the different stages of the pandemic. The shifting use of predictive framing has already been discussed above. Some variations were also found within the context of accountability. As previous literature has mentioned, crises tend to create different stakeholder interpretations of events, causes, and responsibilities (Alink et al., 2001; Boin et al., 2009; Hall, 1997/2003; De Vries, 2004). Despite applying the research to COVID-19, where no organization is to blame, the shifting use of accountability suggests that tensions between events, causes, and responsibilities exist.

Our observations show that accountability was more frequently used as a framing technique during the first stage of our time periods when the pandemic was in its infancy. Not too surprisingly, many events and performances were explained by the pandemic.

The first period represented the most uncertainty and volatility of the three periods in the research setting, and therefore, blaming negative results on COVID-19 may have been done unjustifiably frequently. This was often used in a predictive setting, where companies lowered the expectations of the investors by using accountability and COVID-19. Interestingly, the second period saw less frequent use of accountability as the summer period, in fact, had not been as bad as many expected for the real estate market, and the results were communicated as relatively strong.

We also noticed the increasing use of catchphrases during the early stages of the pandemic. As catchphrases are useful tools to communicate organizational values rather than financial performance, this finding aligns well with the current theory. Highlighting values during times of crisis can be one way to align and connect with various stakeholders. It can also be a method to draw attention away from financial results and focus on other areas. There were also empirical observations of companies developing certain tools and methods and providing those with catchphrases during the pandemic. One such example is “*Respond, Restart and Reinvent*”, which Pandox AB developed as a method to manage during the crisis.

As for spinning and contrasting, these are two very versatile and broad tools that were used frequently during all stages of a pandemic. We have already discussed shifts within accountability and predictive framing, and these are tools that are frequently combined with contrasting and spinning. However, generally speaking about contrasting or spinning, no other significant differences were found throughout the various time periods.

By using contrasting, accounting numbers have the ability to contrast themselves, which they do within financial reports. The scope of our research is limited to those sections where accounting numbers interplay with linguistics, and therefore we do not focus on financial statements. However, due to reporting requirements, important financial statements are, in fact, using contrasting as a technique as it is required to not only present the latest financials but also financials for the previous comparable period.

In our empirics, there are plenty of examples, such as “The unrealized changes in value of properties amounted to SEK 480.0 million (592.2)”, where the 592.2 represent the vacancy rate for the previous period. In this situation, the 480.0 would act as a weak accounting number (in need of contextualization, while the 592.2 acts as a strong accounting number (providing contextualization).

To summarize, empirics imply that companies tend to shift their framing. This is especially prevalent in regard to time horizon and the use of accountability. However, it aligns well with Andon and Free's (2012) claim that sensegivers must be prepared to adjust their information to match the frames of the sensemakers.

6. CONCLUSION

This research paper investigates the role of accounting numbers in framing external communication during COVID-19. Due to the frequency and importance of published financial reports, the increasing number of listed companies, and the recent COVID-19 crisis, further expanding academic theory in this field is expedient. Although previous research has examined crisis communication during COVID-19 (Wong, Ou, Wilson, 2021), little attention has been given to the use of accounting numbers. This paper investigates the subject by examining the Swedish real estate industry and its financial reports during the crisis in order to answer our research question:

“What role do accounting numbers play in framing external communication during COVID-19?”

We contribute to the accounting literature with three findings. The first finding is related to the advantages and disadvantages of incorporating accounting numbers. We find that strong accounting numbers (numbers that can provide a sense of objectivity and increase reliability) are commonly used to highlight results combined with spinning.

However, weak accounting numbers (numbers in need of contextualization) are commonly used with standardized results and disclosures that are expected from the company. They are predominantly used in combination with contrasting. However, as our observations show, combining several framing techniques is one of the most frequent tools in external communication. This finding is supported by previous literature as Englund et al. (2015)

Our second finding is related to the lack of accounting numbers. Despite the advantages of using accounting numbers, we find that catchphrases are commonly used during a crisis. It is likely related to the topic at hand, where catchphrases often focus on non-financials where it would be more relevant to use accounting numbers. Instead, catchphrases are commonly used in displaying corporate values or long-term strategies.

Finally, the use of time periods has allowed us to investigate shifts in framing techniques within the crisis. Our observations suggest that there are shifts, especially within predictive framing techniques. We observed that the initial phase of the pandemic saw a considerably shorter time horizon, but as the pandemic developed, the time horizon lengthened. Other techniques such as accountability and catchphrases were also used predominantly within the initial phase of the crisis.

7. LIMITATIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There are several limitations to our study. This research solely focuses on the COVID-19 crisis, and its applicability to other types of crises may be limited. For example, our finding that the length of time horizon shifts depending on the stage of the crisis is more applicable to protracted crises. On the other hand, the same logic applies in reversed order, as previous literature on crisis communication or accounting in crisis may be of limited use when applied to the COVID-19 crisis. Additionally, the research is based on the Swedish real estate market, and its applicability to other markets can be discussed. We have chosen the real estate market as a proxy for the market due to its high correlation to macroeconomic factors. While our findings may be of great interest to the average firm or industry, they may be less applicable to the industries that exist in the extreme ends of the span (those industries that were affected the worst and the least by the COVID-19 crisis).

The research design based on financial reports has its limitations as well. Callon and Law (2005) outlined three stages of framing where the first stage represents gathering the information, the second stage is related to manipulating the information, and the third and final stage represents the finished product. By using the financial reports for our research, we only work with the final step, and we have no insight into the information gathering and manipulation steps of producing the reports. It would also be possible to conduct similar studies using other frameworks than Fairhurst and Sarr to investigate potential differences.

Finally, the research is limited to an extent by the subjective interpretation of the authors of this research paper. Although previously developed frameworks are used to discuss our findings, a subject such as framing and communication can be open to a wide variety of interpretations and analyses that, to a large extent, will be based on subjective interpretations.

For further research on the subject, one method could be to complement our research by conducting single-case studies. This would enable the researcher to investigate the first two stages of Callon and Law's (2005) framing stages, which we were unable to do in this research. It would also be possible to apply a similar research design to other types of crises to research whether our findings are applicable to the accounting and crisis domain in general.

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9. APPENDIX

Quotes and translations

The following quotes are used in the thesis.

Quote 1 Balder Fastigheter AB – Q1 2020. Page 4. Retrieved: 2021-09-12

Swedish Ungefär 60 % av fastighetsbeståndet består av bostäder. Av det totala fastighetsbeståndet består ungefär 8 % av hotell, en bransch som är hårt drabbad.

English Approximately 60 % of the property portfolio consists of residential properties. Of the total property portfolio, approximately 8 % consists of hotels, a sector which is experiencing difficulties.

Quote 2 Samhällsbyggnadsbolaget i Norden AB – Q3 2020. Page 8. Retrieved: 2021-09-12

Swedish Under det andra och tredje kvartalet har vi fått in 99,8 procent av våra hyresintäkter, vilket troligtvis är högst av alla noterade fastighetsbolag i Europa.

English During the second and third quarters, we received 99.8 percent of our rental income, which is probably the highest of all listed property companies in Europe.

Quote 3 Heimstaden Fastigheter i Sverige AB – Q1 2020. Page 4. Retrieved: 2021-09-12

Swedish	I våra ”räddningsinsatser” för de kommersiella hyresgäster som drabbats av krisen räknar vi med en nedgång på cirka 15-17 miljoner kronor, vilket motsvarar cirka 1 procent av de totala förväntade hyresintäkterna för kvartalet.
English	In our “rescue efforts” for those commercial tenants who, on the other hand, are impacted by the crisis, we anticipate a decline of about SEK 15-17 million in the Group as a whole for the second quarter. This corresponds to about 1 percent of the total rental income for the quarter.

Quote 4 Akelius Fastigheter AB – Q1 2020. Page 2. Retrieved: 2021-09-12

Swedish	Våra lägenheter har aldrig varit så använda som under den senaste månaden när hyresgäster stannat hemma för att undvika smitta – till skillnad från hotell, butiker, kontor, köpcenter, skolor, restauranger som i stor utsträckning stått tomma.
English	Our residential properties has never been used as much as during the last month when our tenants have stayed at home to avoid infection – as opposed to hotels, stores, offices, shopping centers, schools and restaurants which to a large extent have been empty.

Quote 5 Pandox AB – Q1 2021. Page 2. Retrieved: 2021-09-12

Swedish Återhämtningen på hotellmarknader i världen som ligger längre fram i utvecklingen, ger gott stöd för Pandox uppfattning att de underliggande drivkrafterna för, och potentialen i, hotellmarknadens återhämtning efter COVID-19 är relevanta även i Europa. I det första kvartalet har dessutom ett framgångsrikt vaccinationsprogram och minskade restriktioner i USA lett till en kraftig ökning av efterfrågan i hotellmarknaden (...).

English The recovery for hotel markets globally which are further ahead in development provides good support for Pandox's view that the underlying drivers for, and the potential within, a recovery for the hotel market to be relevant in Europe. In addition, a successful vaccination program and decreasing regulations in the U.S. has led to a sharp increase in demand for the hotel industry.

Quote 6 Fabege AB – Q1 2020. Page 2. Retrieved: 2021-09-12

Swedish Jag, och många av oss, har varit med om kriserna i slutet på 1980-talet, fastighetskrisen i början av 90-talet, rysslandskrisen, IT-bubblan, samt finanskrisen för drygt tio år sedan. Listan kan göras lång. Ingen kris har varit den andra lik, men ingen har varit så dramatisk som denna. (...)

English I, like many others amongst us, experienced the crises in the late 1980s, the property crisis in the early 1990s, the Russia crisis, the IT bubble and the financial crisis just over ten years ago. The list is long. All the crises have been different, but nothing has been as dramatic as this one.

Quote 7 Fastpartner AB – Q1 2021. Page 3. Retrieved: 2021-09-12

Swedish	Förutom det stora mänskliga lidande som COVID-19 orsakat så är effekterna på den globala ekonomin väldigt omfattande där framförallt hotell, restauranger och sällanköpsvaror drabbats hårt. Fastpartners exponering mot de denna kategori av hyresgäster är relativt begränsad och utgör mindre än 5 procent av bolagets totala hyresintäkter.
English	Besides the great human suffering, Covid-19 has had a profound effect on the global economy, with hotels, restaurants and supermarkets taking a particularly hard hit. Fastpartner's exposure to this category of tenants is relatively limited and accounts for less than 5 per cent of the company's total rental income.

Quote 8 Wihlborgs Fastigheter AB – Q1 2021. Page 3. Retrieved: 2021-09-12

Swedish	Jag är mycket stolt över att vi än en gång levererar ett mycket bra resultat. Vi fortsätter att växa; hyresintäkterna ökade med 9 procent till 781 Mkr under kvartalet. Driftsöverskottet ökade med 11 procent till 555 Mkr vilket motsvarar en bra överskottsgrad om 71 procent.
English	I am very proud that we have once again been able to report very positive results. We continue to grow, and rental income increased 9 percent to SEK 781 million for the quarter. The operating surplus rose 11 percent to SEK 555 million, corresponding to a healthy surplus ratio of 71 percent

Quote 9 Diös Fastigheter AB – Q3 2020. Page 3. Retrieved: 2021-09-12

Swedish Det är ett resultat vi är mycket stolta över och som visar på styrka hos våra hyresgäster, i vår marknad och i vårt agerande. För fjärde kvartalet har vi hittills erhållit 95 procent av förväntade hyresinbetalningar vilket är normalt. Våra kostnader är lägre och det är glädjande att våra insatser inom energieffektivisering ger avtryck i resultatet. Överskottsgraden för perioden stärks och uppgår till 68 procent.

English This is a result that we are proud of and that points to strength – among our tenants, in our market and in our business. For the fourth quarter we have so far received 95 per cent of our expected rental payments, which is normal. Our costs are lower, and it is satisfying to note that our efforts to improve energy efficiency are having an impact on our bottom line. The surplus ratio for the period improved, to 68 per cent.

Quote 10 Castellum AB – Q1 2021. Page 4. Retrieved: 2021-09-12

Swedish Som ni märker så har jag inte specifikt kommenterat effekterna av den pågående pandemin. Det beror på att dess direkta påverkan på vårt resultat är mycket marginell då de inbetalda hyrorna fortsatt är som under ett normalt kvartal och kundförluster närmast är obefintliga.

English As you may have noticed, I have not commented specifically on the effects of the ongoing pandemic. This is because its direct impact on our earnings is extremely marginal, since the rents paid in are still as they were during a normal quarter; customer losses and bankruptcies are almost non-existent.

Quote 11 Heimstaden Fastigheter i Sverige AB – Q1 2020. Page 4. Retrieved: 2021-09-12

Swedish	Vår företagskultur och våra värderingar är det som skiljer oss från många andra privata bostadsbolag och helt centrala faktorer för att vi ska kunna behålla eller öka värdet på vårt bolag. Vi finns där för den som behöver hjälp. Detta gör mig både glad och hoppfull.
English	Our corporate culture and our values are what set us apart from many other private housing companies and are absolutely central aspects of our capacity to maintain or increase the value of our company. We are there for those who need help. That makes me both happy and hopeful.

Quote 12 Pandox AB – Q1 2020. Page 2. Retrieved: 2021-09-12

Swedish	Det har tillsammans med Pandox tidigare kriserfarenhet gjort det möjligt att snabbt organisera och landa de viktiga frågorna i denna unikt utmanande tid. Pandox arbetar just nu med tre huvudområden: Respond, Restart och Reinvent.
English	This, combined with Pandox's past crisis experience, has made it possible to quickly organize and address important issues in this unique and challenging time. Pandox is currently focusing on three main areas: Respond, Restart and Reinvent.

Quote 13 Samhällsbyggnadsbolaget i Norden AB – Q1 2020. Page 5. Retrieved: 2021-09-12

Swedish "Cash is king" gäller även under en pandemi - Kassaflödet ökade med 347 mkr motsvarande 358 procent

English "Cash is king" also applies during a pandemic - Cash flow from operating activities increased by SEK 347m, corresponding to 358 percent.

Quote 14 Akelius Fastigheter AB – Q1 2020. Page 2. Retrieved: 2021-09-12

Swedish Det är för tidigt att uppskatta effekterna av Coronapandemin på fastighetsvärden. Vad som emellertid är helt klart är att fastighetsvärderingar under de kommande kvartalen kommer vara behäftade med större osäkerhet än normalt, eftersom transaktionsvolymen sjunker, minskar även jämförbara fastighetstransaktioner.

English It is too early to estimate the effects of the Corona pandemic on real estate valuations. What is clear is that values during the coming quarters will have higher degrees of uncertainty than normal since transaction volumes decrease which in turn decreases the amount of comparable real estate transactions.

Quote 15 Castellum AB – Q1 2020. Page 2. Retrieved: 2021-09-12

Swedish Vi vet av erfarenhet från tidigare kriser att utdragna processer som denna slår snabbare och hårdare på fastighetsvärdena än på hyresintäkterna. Det är lätt att inse att om fastighetsvärdena sjunker framöver, innebär det att substansvärdena vid årsskiftet redan är historia. Ett hypotetiskt räkneexempel: Vid 50 % belåningsgrad innebär en 10 % nedgång i fastighetsvärdena en minskning av substansen med 20 % - med åtföljande uppgång av belåningsgraden. För Castellums del kan vi konstatera att även 20 % nedgång i fastighetsvärdena innebär en fortsatt rimlig position - en belåningsgrad på 53 % mot 43% vid årsskiftet.

English We know from experience with earlier crises that drawn-out processes such as this one strike property values harder and faster than rental income. It is easy to realize that if property values fall going forward, it means that the net asset value presented in yearend reports are already history. A hypothetical calculation: At a 50% loan-to-value ratio, a 10% fall in property values would mean a 20% reduction in net assets – with an accompanying upswing in loan-to-value ratio. As far as Castellum is concerned, we can state that even a 20% fall in property values would mean our position continues to be reasonable – a loan-to-value ratio of 53% against 43% by the start of the year

Swedish

Just nu är det många som siar om de långsiktiga effekterna av pandemin. "Kommer det att finnas några butiker kvar? Kommer det att behövas kontor i framtiden?" Jag tycker att det finns anledning att lyfta blicken nu och se det som händer i ett större perspektiv, utifrån långsiktiga samhällstrender. Vi har en stark urbaniseringstrend som sannolikt inte kommer att påverkas av pandemin. Sedan 2010-talet bor fler människor i städer än på landsbygd. Och utvecklingen går fort. 2030 bedöms 60 procent av världens befolkning bo i städer. Siffrorna talar sitt tydliga språk; ju större städer desto högre produktivitet.

English

Many people are currently predicting the long-term effects of this pandemic. "Will there be any shops left? Will there be any need for offices in the future?" I think it is a good idea to see the bigger picture and look at what is happening in a broader context based on long-term social trends. The strong trend toward urbanisation will probably not be affected by the pandemic. More people have been living in cities than in the countryside since the 2010s. And things are moving quickly. In 2030 it is estimated that 60 per cent of the world's population will live in cities. The figures speak for themselves; the bigger the cities, the greater the productivity.

Quote 17 Akelius Fastigheter AB – Q1 2020. Page 2. Retrieved: 2021-09-12

Swedish Hyresinbetalningar för aprilhyran var 3 procentenheter lägre än normalt, vilket är en trolig effekt av Coronapandemin.

English Rent payments for the month of April were 3 percentage units lower than usual, which likely is an effect by the Corona pandemic.

Quote 18 Akelius Fastigheter AB – Q1 2020. Page 2. Retrieved: 2021-09-12

Swedish Renovering av hyresbostäder är inte längre möjlig i Berlin till följd av den nya hyresregleringen. Akelius säger därför upp 58 anställda som arbetslett renoveringar av bland annat hissar, balkonger och lägenheter. Ett väldigt smärtsamt beslut, som vi sköt på in i det sista med förhoppningen att politiker skulle ta sitt förnuft till fånga. Det gjorde de inte.

English Modernization of residential properties is no longer possible due to the new rent regulation in Berlin. Akelius will reduce staff by 58 employees that have worked with construction related work, such as upgrading of apartments and buildings. This was a very painful decision, which the company postponed as long as possible, hoping that politicians would come to their senses. They did not.

Empirical Dataset

Company name	Publishing Dates		
	Q1 2020	Q3 2020	Q1 2021
Fastighets AB Balder	2020-05-08	2020-11-05	2021-05-12
Vasakronan AB	2020-05-04	2020-11-04	2021-04-28
Pandox AB	2020-04-29	2020-10-23	2021-04-27
Castellum AB	2020-04-24	2020-10-15	2021-04-21
Akelius Fastigheter AB	2020-04-28	2020-10-26	2021-05-03
Corem Property Group AB	2020-04-24	2020-10-20	2021-04-29
AB Sagax	2020-05-06	2020-10-27	2021-05-05
Fabege AB	2020-04-21	2020-10-20	2021-04-26
Kungsleden AB	2020-04-23	2020-10-21	2021-04-22
Atrium Ljungberg AB	2020-04-16	2020-10-15	2021-04-16
Samhällsbyggnadsbolaget i Norden AB	2020-04-27	2020-11-03	2021-05-05
Hufvudstaden AB	2020-05-07	2020-11-05	2021-05-06
Wallenstam AB	2020-04-28	2020-10-22	2021-04-27
Heimstaden Fastigheter i Sverige AB	2020-04-30	2020-10-28	2021-04-30
Wihlborgs Fastigheter AB	2020-04-28	2020-10-23	2021-04-27
Platzer Fastigheter AB	2020-04-16	2020-10-23	2021-04-21
Nyfosa AB	2020-04-23	2020-10-22	2021-04-21
Diös Fastigheter AB	2020-04-23	2020-10-23	2021-04-23
Catena AB	2020-04-29	2020-10-28	2021-04-29
ALM Equity AB	2020-05-27	2020-11-25	2021-05-26
Fastpartner AB	2020-04-23	2020-10-21	2021-04-22
Bonäsudden Holding AB	N/A	N/A	N/A
Sydsvenska Hem AB	2020-05-25	2020-11-30	2021-05-24
Logistri Fastighets AB	2020-05-19	2020-11-26	2021-05-20
Link Prop Investment AB	N/A	N/A	N/A
Halmslätten Fastighets AB	2020-05-27	2020-11-25	2021-05-25
Tingsvalvet Fastighets AB	2020-05-20	2020-11-19	2021-05-20