

STRATEGIC RENEWAL AND POLITICAL VALUE CREATION

**A CASE STUDY OF THE MODERATES' TRANSFORMATION,
2002-2006**

MICHAEL HESSEN

ANDREAS OTTOSSON

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Strategic Renewal and Value Creation: A Case Study of the Moderates' Transformation, 2002-2006

Abstract:

Following the catastrophic electoral defeat of 2002 and the historic victory of 2006, Sweden's Moderate Party underwent a radical transformation to regain political legitimacy. This thesis addresses a gap in political marketing research by specifying how internal organization, strategic narrative, and network relations interact during renewal. Drawing on a qualitative case study comprising nine interviews with key strategists and extensive documentary analysis, we develop and apply an integrated framework of Political Value Creation that combines Political Market Orientation, Strategic Narrative Management, and Networked Political Communication. Empirically, the findings reconstruct the renewal as a three-phase process: (1) a multidimensional crisis that legitimized a centralized leadership core and reoriented the party toward latent voter needs; (2) a phase of outward-oriented experimentation where policy was rebuilt through expert input and relationships within the political network were recalibrated; and (3) the launch of "The New Moderates" as a public brand that consolidated these changes into a disciplined "work line" narrative. The study concludes that successful renewal relies on a coordinated system where internal market intelligence drives external storytelling and utilizes a complex network of actors, while contributing an integrated framework that can be used diagnostically by other political parties and advocacy-oriented organizations facing legitimacy crises.

Keywords:

Political marketing; Party renewal; New Moderates; Political Market Orientation; Networked Political Communication; Strategic Narrative Management; Political Value Creation

Authors:

Michael Hessen (26166)

Andreas Ottosson (25876)

Tutors:

Magnus Söderlund, Professor, Department of Marketing and Strategy

Per Andersson, Professor, Department of Marketing and Strategy

Examiner: Per Andersson, Professor, Department of Marketing and Strategy

Bachelor Thesis in Marketing

Business and Economics Program,

Stockholm School of Economics

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1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the thesis and motivates the case. It briefly situates the Moderate Party's 2002-2006 renewal in Swedish politics and research on party change and political marketing, states the research problem and questions, and outlines the scope and structure of the study.

1.1 Background and Context

Between the electoral defeat of 2002 and the victory in 2006, Sweden's Moderate Party moved from a deep organizational and electoral crisis to its strongest result since 1928. In a party system long dominated by the Social Democratic Party, the Moderates had traditionally occupied a conservative position associated with fiscal conservatism, tax cuts for higher earners, and a pro-business profile, which limited their broader appeal.

The 2002 election, where the Moderates received only 15.3 percent of the votes, was therefore experienced as a multidimensional crisis. After Fredrik Reinfeldt became party leader in 2003, a new leadership circle initiated a comprehensive renewal project. The party was rebranded as "the *New Moderates*", moved its communication closer to social democratic issue frames, and entered the 2006 election as the leading force in the center-right Alliance "Allians för Sverige" alongside the Christian Democrats, the Centre Party, and the People's party (now the Liberals). The 2006 result, the party's best since 1928, makes the 2002-2006 period a compelling case of strategic renewal and Political Value Creation.

1.2 Problem Statement

The 2002 crisis illustrates a broader challenge for parties that operate in a rapidly changing media environment and rely on political marketing. Political marketing borrows tools such as market intelligence, segmentation, targeting, brand positioning, and campaigns from commercial marketing; therefore, much of the thinking on market orientation also applies to parties (Kotler & Levy, 1969; Lees-Marshment, 2014; Newman, 1999). Commercial actors typically sell tangible products or services for profit, whereas parties compete for votes and legitimacy.

In political marketing, the "product" consists of ideologies, promises, and candidate personas that cannot be returned, the "price" is the voter's trust and vote, and the "profit" is electoral victory, legitimacy, and governing power (Newman, 1999). Parties therefore work with

intangible outputs in dense networks of media, rivals, allies, and civil society rather than simple supplier-firm-customer relationships.

Existing studies of The New Moderates typically focus either on ideological repositioning or campaign communication, thereby providing only partial accounts of the 2002-2006 transformation. Party change theories explain how parties adjust their policies, organization, and electoral strategies after crises, while political marketing portrays parties as market-oriented organizations that design offerings based on intelligence about voters and competitors. Yet we still lack an integrated, process-oriented analysis that shows how internal political market orientation (PMO), a party's position in the political communication network, and strategic narrative management interact over time in a renewal episode such as the Moderates' turnaround.

1.3 Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to explain how the Moderate Party transformed itself after the 2002 electoral crisis and rebuilt voter legitimacy ahead of the 2006 election. We address this problem by developing and applying an integrated analytical framework that combines political market orientation, strategic narrative management, and a network perspective on political communication within a broader concept of *Political Value Creation*.

Primary research question (RQ):

- How did Sweden's Moderate Party, from the 2002 crisis to the 2006 election, transform internally and externally to regain political legitimacy?

Adjusting the Research Question to our Theoretical Framework, we get more focused sub-questions:

- RQ1: How did internal Political Market Orientation practices (voter orientation, rival orientation, and interfunctional coordination) change across the renewal phases?
- RQ2: How were problems and solutions framed and communicated through strategic narrative management (agenda-setting and framing) during the renewal?
- RQ3: How were network relations with key actors in the political communication environment (such as media, allies, rivals, and opinion leaders) reconfigured over time?

1.4 Scope and Delimitations

This thesis is a single, in-depth case study of the Swedish Moderate Party. The temporal focus spans the period from the leadership change in 2003 to the 2006 general election, with the 2002 election serving as the starting point. We study the communicative and strategic aspects of the renewal, primarily based on semi-structured interviews and public documents. Other aspects such as detailed finances, opinion polls, or the later governing record fall outside the scope. Although the Alliance contributed to the electoral success, the study focuses on the Moderate Party as the organizational unit where political market orientation, narrative work, and network relations were most tightly coupled.

1.5 Thesis Structure

Chapter 2 reviews previous research and identifies the research gap. Chapter 3 develops the integrated theoretical framework, and Chapter 4 describes the methodology. Chapter 5 presents the results in three phases. Chapter 6 provides the analysis through the theoretical framework. Chapter 7 discusses the theoretical and practical implications. Chapter 8 concludes with contributions and suggestions for future research.

2 Literature Review

This chapter reviews research that provides the theoretical background for the thesis. It first discusses studies on the Moderates' renewal between 2002 and 2006, then situates the case within broader work on party change, political marketing, crisis communication, and media influence. The chapter ends by synthesizing these streams and motivating the integrated framework in Chapter 3, which combines Political Market Orientation, a Network Perspective on political communication, and Strategic Narrative Management.

2.1 Previous Research and Literature on the New Moderates

Academic research on the New Moderates is limited and usually examines only one dimension of the renewal. Existing theses and articles focus mainly on rhetoric, ideology, and discourse and analyze how language, symbols, and ideas were reframed, rather than renewal as an integrated political marketing process that links policy change, network relations, and narrative construction (e.g., Hammarström, 2006; Andersson, 2011; Lundh, 2012; Greek, 2015; Rosengren, 2015).

By contrast, narrative non-fiction such as Anders Pihlblad's "Ett partis fall och uppgång" (2012) reconstructs the "story of The New Moderates" and, together with a large archive of news articles, radio features, and TV interviews from 2002 to 2006, provides important empirical material for our triangulation strategy (see Chapter 4). These journalistic sources are treated as interpretive, non-neutral texts and are always read alongside other material.

Existing literature on the Moderates' transformation highlights Fredrik Reinfeldt's leadership, the rebranding to the New Moderates, inspiration from Tony Blair's New Labour, and a move toward the political center on welfare issues (Pihlblad, 2012; Lindbom, 2008). Lindbom (2008) shows that the party moved from opposing the welfare state to a more accepting and pragmatic position after 2003. However, no study has systematically traced how internal strategic work, policy development, narrative construction, and network relations interacted over time in the renewal episode, which motivates the more processual approach in this thesis.

2.2 Literature on Party Change

The Moderates' transformation is one example of a broader phenomenon in political science, namely, how parties renew themselves after crises. Downs' (1965) economic theory of democracy models parties as rational vote seekers that move their positions toward the median voter. Kirchheimer's (1966) "catch-all party" highlights how post-war parties weaken ideological profiles, centralize leadership, and seek support from many social groups, while Katz and Mair's (1995, 2009) "cartel party" thesis argues that mainstream parties in Western Europe increasingly use state resources to protect themselves from challengers and become more detached from civil society. Stokes (1963) introduces the concept of valence politics, where voters judge parties on general qualities such as competence and honesty. Budge and Farlie (1983) demonstrate that parties gain advantages when they emphasize issues they already "own". In this thesis, party change, valence politics, and issue ownership are treated as background theories that describe the competitive environment in which parties adapt, but they do not specify the internal market-oriented and communicative processes that our core framework seeks to analyze (see Section 3.1).

2.3 Political Marketing and the Market-Oriented Party

Marketing research suggests that market-oriented firms tend to perform better and are more profitable (Narver & Slater, 1990). Similarly, political marketing extends this logic to parties

by applying marketing principles to electoral competition and internal strategy (Kotler & Levy, 1969). Lees-Marshment's concept of the Market-Oriented Party (MOP) is central: a market-oriented party systematically uses intelligence about voters to shape its political "product" and is understood as an adaptive organization rather than a static ideological actor (Lees-Marshment, 2014). Lees-Marshment also distinguishes between product-oriented, sales-oriented, and market-oriented party strategies, offering a typology for analyzing responsiveness and strategic adaptation. From a political marketing perspective, success is not only winning an election but also building long-term relational capital and legitimacy; yet, existing studies often focus on campaigns and branding, treating them separately from the internal capabilities needed for implementation.

2.4 Communication in Times of Crisis and Renewal

Party renewal is often triggered by a brand crisis, which should be handled by acknowledging the problem, taking corrective action, and presenting a credible vision for the future (Coombs, 2023). In politics, this means demonstrating competence and integrity to rebuild trust, a central form of political capital (Mayer et al., 1995). In this thesis, crisis communication is used as supporting literature to clarify the communicative conditions under which renewal efforts occur and to interpret the communicative aspects of Political Market Orientation, Strategic Narrative Management, and network relations (see Sections 3.1.1 to 3.1.3).

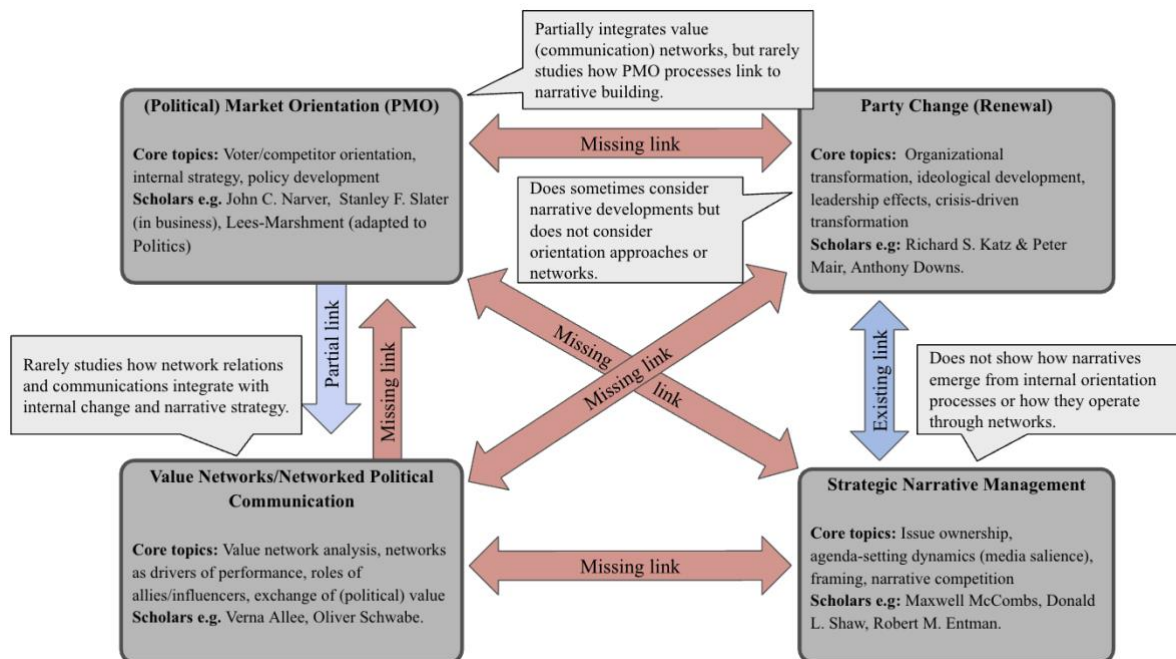
The 2002 crisis unfolded in a context of growing mediatization, where mass and digital media operate according to their own logic and news values, shape political processes, and influence which issues and actors receive visibility, often favoring personalized, conflict-oriented, and simple messages (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Strömbäck, 2008). For established parties, strategic renewal therefore requires learning to operate under media logic. In the case of the New Moderates, success depended on building credible relationships with media actors and constructing narratives that could circulate across multiple, partly fragmented arenas, which links directly to our focus on Strategic Narrative Management and the Network Perspective on political communication.

2.5 Synthesis of Literature Review and Research Gap

Existing literature provides strong but fragmented tools for analyzing party renewal. Studies on the New Moderates and on party change more generally describe ideological

repositioning, branding, and campaign communication, but usually separate external strategies from internal organizational processes. Political marketing and branding theories mainly explain what parties should do, and crisis communication and issue ownership literature explain why trust and the competitive ground must be rebuilt. Much less is known about how internal capabilities and processes actually link strategic work to electoral outcomes, especially in the case of the New Moderates.

Figure 1: Overview of relevant literature and research gap



Previous studies have not developed an integrated framework that combines Political Market Orientation, a Network Perspective on the political ecosystem, and Strategic Narrative Management. This thesis addresses the gap by proposing such a framework and applying it in a process-oriented case study of the Moderates' transformation from 2002 to 2006, tracing how internal work, network configurations, and communicative choices interacted over time.

3 Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents the integrated theoretical framework that addresses the literature gap outlined in Chapter 2. It combines concepts from strategic management, organizational theory, and network analysis to analyze political renewal. Rather than relying on a single political marketing model, we adapt general ideas of market orientation, strategic narratives, and value networks to a political context, allowing for the study of internal processes of orientation, coordination, and value creation within the party. The framework consists of

three components, Political Market Orientation (PMO), Strategic Narrative Management (SNM), and a Network Perspective on political communication, which together guide our study of the Moderates' renewal.

3.1 The Integrated Theoretical Framework

This thesis applies an integrated framework that combines concepts from strategic management, organizational theory, and network analysis, which are often used separately. The aim is practice-oriented, linking abstract concepts to observable phenomena (Gioia et al., 2013). Bringing these perspectives together enables a holistic analysis that connects the party's external strategy and brand with its internal capacity for change and its position in the political environment, in line with the traditions of comprehensive conceptual systems in political science (Easton, 1979).

The framework joins three complementary sub-frameworks. Political Market Orientation is the internal engine that defines what the party offers and how it learns from the market. The Network Perspective examines the external value network and where the party exchanges value. Strategic Narrative Management focuses on communication and meaning creation, explaining how the party constructs and spreads its story to legitimize the offering. Other literatures reviewed in Chapter 2, such as party change and crisis communication, are used as contextual background.

In the empirical chapters, PMO is used to identify how the party generated and shared intelligence about voters and rivals and translated this into internal coordination. The Network Perspective maps key actors and value flows in the political ecosystem. Strategic Narrative Management, finally, examines the agenda-setting and framing moves in public communication and how the party constructed coherent problem-cause-solution chains. This division clarifies when the analysis shifts between lenses in Chapters 5 and 6.

3.1.1 Political Market Orientation

To analyze the underlying engine of party renewal, this sub-framework conceptualizes the party as a market-oriented organization that learns from its environment to create value for voters, rather than as a static, product-oriented actor.

We adopt the foundational behavioral model of market orientation developed by Narver and Slater (1990) and enrich it with Lees-Marshment's (2014) typology of political organizational behavior. This combination distinguishes three approaches to political strategy: product-

oriented, sales-oriented, and market-oriented parties, where the latter systematically use intelligence to design a political “product” that meets voter needs (Lees-Marshment, 2014). Lees-Marshment's typology is used to classify behavior across phases, while her idealized Market-Oriented Party (MOP) process functions as a benchmark (Lees-Marshment, 2014).

In our framework, the PMO is based primarily on Narver and Slater's (1990) original definition of market orientation, which comprises three behavioral components: customer orientation, competitor orientation, and interfunctional coordination (Narver & Slater, 1990). Although this model was developed in a business context, it offers a focused behavioral lens and does not include its own theory of party change or campaign strategy (Narver & Slater, 1990). We translate these components into a political setting and let them define the core of PMO. Lees-Marshment's (2014) broader political marketing work is used in a supporting way, mainly as vocabulary and ideal type benchmarks, while the underlying behavioral logic still comes from Narver and Slater (1990).

3.1.1.1 Customer (Voter) Orientation

Customer orientation, or in a political context, voter orientation, is a thorough understanding of target voters that enables the creation of superior value for them consistently. It goes beyond tracking popularity metrics and implies a sustained commitment to intelligence generation about the electorate. For a political party, this means moving beyond simple polling to understand both expressed needs, such as unemployment, healthcare, and taxes, as well as latent needs, which are unarticulated but often more powerful. The capacity to uncover latent needs differentiates a truly market-oriented party from sales-oriented or product-oriented behavior (Lees-Marshment, 2014).

3.1.1.2 Competitor (Rival Party) Orientation

Competitor, or rival party, orientation means understanding “the short-term strengths and weaknesses and long-term capabilities and strategies” of key current and potential competitors (Narver and Slater, 1990, p. 21-22). It involves systematic analysis of the competitive landscape, identifying where rivals fail to deliver value to voters and anticipating their long-term strategies, including dynamics within coalitions. A strong rival orientation helps the party ensure that its platform is perceived as superior to the alternatives.

3.1.1.3 Interfunctional Coordination

Interfunctional coordination is the “coordinated utilization of company [party] resources” to create superior value for target voters (Narver and Slater, 1990, p. 22). Intelligence from

voter and rival orientations must be systematically shared and acted upon across the organization. In a political party, these functions include policy development, communications and campaigning, grassroots organization, and parliamentary work. When these activities are aligned around shared market intelligence, knowledge about voter needs and rival weaknesses can be translated into a coherent political offering.

Figure 2: Political Market Orientation

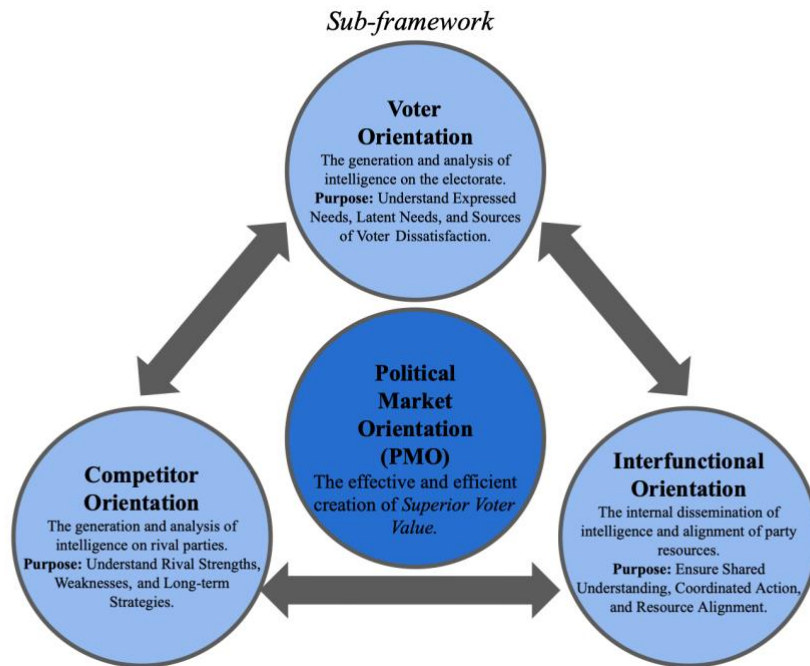


Figure 2 – The diagram is illustrating the Political Market Orientation (PMO) sub framework with three interdependent components: Voter orientation, Competitor Orientation, and Interfunctional Coordination, all converging to achieve Political Market Orientation.

In the empirical analysis, we interpret Political Market Orientation as present when we observe (1) systematic efforts to listen to voters through field feedback, (2) explicit monitoring and discussion of rivals' positions, reputations, and vulnerabilities, and (3) repeated attempts to align policy development, communication, and organizational resources around shared market intelligence. These indicators connect the abstract concept of PMO to the practices outlined in Chapters 5 and 6.

3.1.2 Strategic Narrative Management in Political Renewal

While market orientation (3.1.1) defines what the party offers, the Network Perspective is defined in Section. 3.1.3 describes where this occurs; this sub-framework explains how communication is used to legitimize the new offering and win support. We focus on two connected theories, agenda-setting and framing.

3.1.2.1 Agenda-Setting

Agenda-setting theory, originally formulated by McCombs and Shaw (1972), argues that mass media influence which issues the public sees as important. By highlighting certain topics, media “may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about” (Berelson et al, 1963, cited in McCombs and Shaw, 1972, p. 177). For a party in renewal, this is a key arena. We use agenda-setting to identify which issues the party makes salient and how it tries to influence media and public priorities within the network.

3.1.2.2 Framing

Framing theory addresses how issues are presented once they are on the agenda. Entman (1993, p. 52) defines framing as the process of “select[ing] some aspects of a perceived reality and make[ing] them more salient in a communicating text”. A frame promotes particular problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations, and treatment recommendations.

Figure 3: Two-Step Narrative Analysis Model

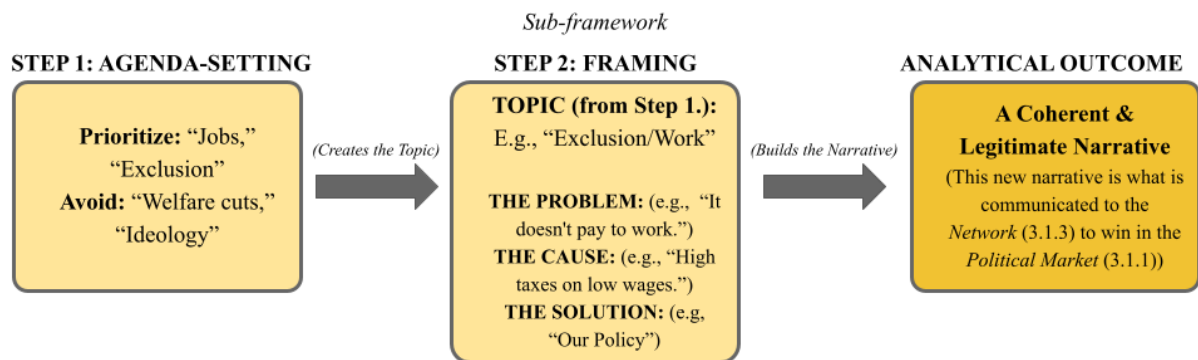


Figure 3 - The Two-Step Narrative sub-framework applied to a political context. The diagram visualizes the process of constructing a coherent and legitimate narrative, moving from agenda-setting to framing.

Framing is the central mechanism for giving the new offering from 3.1.1 meaning and legitimacy. We apply it to examine how the party constructs narratives that link problems, causes, and solutions, for example, by redefining economic issues to fit a market-oriented position. Empirically, we identify Strategic Narrative Management through (1) coherent problem-cause-solution chains in speeches, debate articles, and campaign films, (2) systematic contrasts between the Moderates’ “work line” narrative and alternatives, especially those of the Social Democrats, (3) repeated use of key storylines, symbols, and labels across channels, and (4) deliberate agenda-setting moves where some issues are

prioritized and others downplayed. These indicators let us study narrative management as observable practices.

By analyzing agenda-setting and framing, we can see how the party manages the narrative within the network in 3.1.3, among journalists, opinion leaders, and voters.

3.1.3 Network Perspective on Political Communication

This sub-framework starts from the idea that a party is embedded in a network of interdependent actors, rather than acting alone. Success depends on how it manages relationships and exchanges of value. We adopt Value Network Analysis (VNA), which provides a “human-centric, role-based, network ecosystem perspective into how value is created” (Allee and Schwabe, 2015, p. 17). A value network is a set of roles and interactions that generate an outcome through exchanges of tangible and intangible value. Mapping this political ecosystem enables us to visualize the flows of influence, resources, and support that shape electoral success.

3.1.3.1 *Network Participants*

In a value network, actors are understood through the roles they perform (Allee and Schwabe, 2015, p. 35). In politics, key roles include the Party, which coordinates strategy, resources, and messaging; Voter Segments, which provide votes and legitimacy in exchange for representation; Mainstream Media, which act as gatekeepers and amplifiers; Coalition Partners, which contribute endorsements and policy alignment; and Opinion Leaders, such as academics and commentators, who help frame issues and confer credibility. In the Swedish context, this includes rivals like the Social Democrats, union groups, and partners in the Alliance for Sweden.

3.1.3.2 *Value Flows (Deliverables)*

Interactions between roles are purposeful exchanges of value, or deliverables (Allee and Schwabe, 2015, p. 47). Tangible deliverables are concrete exchanges that support core political functions, especially votes and donations that fund campaigns (Allee and Schwabe, 2015, p. 52). Intangible deliverables are relational elements that maintain the network’s functioning, such as trust, legitimacy, endorsements, and influence, or issue ownership (Petrocik, 1996). Trust reduces uncertainty and stabilizes cooperation. Legitimacy is the perceived right to govern and speak for the interests. Endorsements transfer credibility and

attention, while influence and issue ownership shape how problems and solutions are defined in public debate.

Figure 4: Network Value Analysis in a Political Context

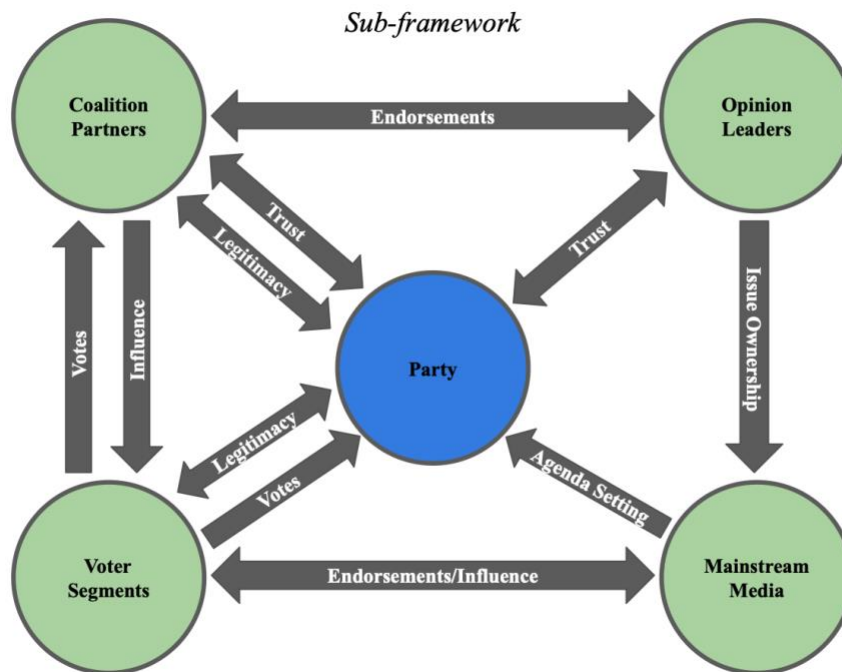


Figure 4 - This diagram illustrates the Network Value Analysis sub-framework applied to a political context, showing key actors like Party and Competitors. It visualizes the exchange of tangible values (Votes, Donations) and intangible values (Trust, Legitimacy) between interconnected nodes.

In our analysis, these deliverables are interpreted in explicitly political terms. Trust, legitimacy, endorsements, and issue ownership become valuable resources that influence a party's ability to position itself effectively in the Swedish multi-party system. The Network Perspective is therefore a core lens for understanding where and with whom the party must build and maintain value exchanges during renewal. We are interested in how relationships shift over time in response to strategic choices.

Empirically, we observe the Network Perspective through (1) changes in access to and tone of relationships with actors such as unions and media, (2) shifts in endorsements and support from opinion leaders, (3) developments in perceived legitimacy, for example whether the Moderates are described as a credible governing alternative, and (4) patterns of issue ownership and agenda influence in media and public debate. These indicators enable the tracing of how the party's network position evolves across the three phases of renewal identified in Chapter 5.

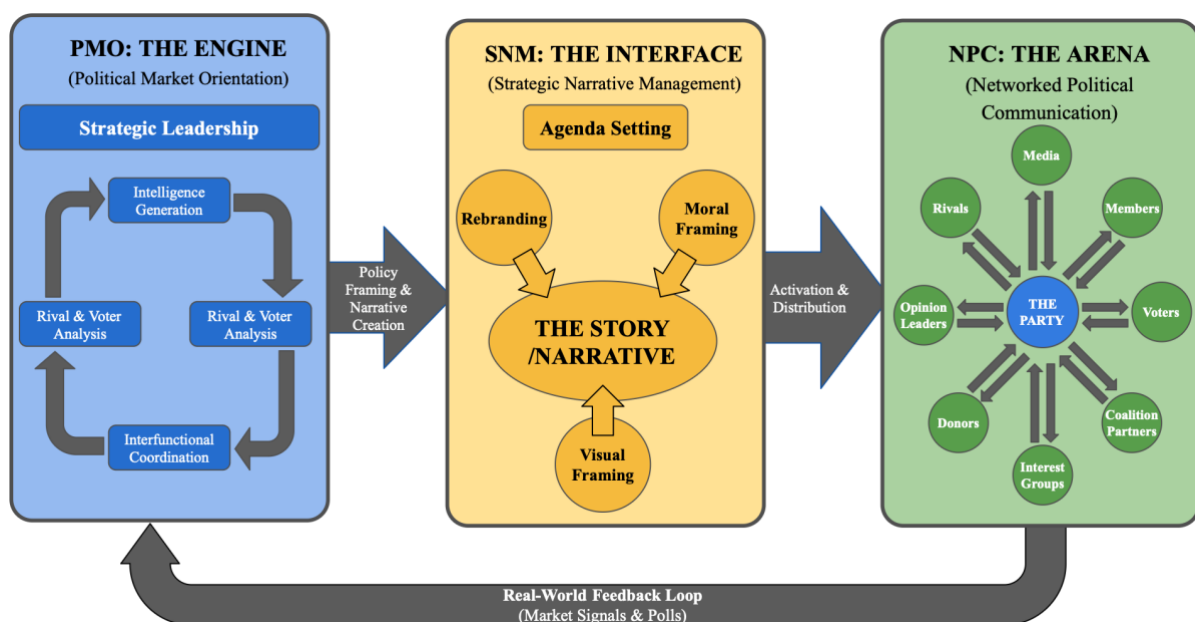
3.1.4 The Integrated Framework

The three sub-frameworks integrate as follows. Political Market Orientation provides the internal foundation for renewal, Strategic Narrative Management operationalizes communication, and the Network Perspective maps the external ecosystem. Applied across the three phases of renewal, the framework traces how changes in internal capabilities, narratives, and network relations reinforce one another.

The integrated framework can be visualized as a dynamic system where PMO functions as the engine, generating a value proposition through intelligence generation, rival and voter analysis, and interfunctional coordination. SNM serves as the interface that transforms this proposition into a coherent narrative through agenda-setting and framing. Networked Political Communication (NPC) is the arena where a party interacts with stakeholders, including media, rivals, voters, opinion leaders, members, donors, interest groups, and coalition partners, exchanging both tangible and intangible value flows. Feedback from polls and other signals is fed back into PMO for refinement.

Our framework does not replace existing political marketing models but recombines established constructs into a processual, network-sensitive lens tailored to party renewal. It is both the main theoretical contribution of the thesis and the organizing device for the empirical analysis of the Moderates' renewal across its three phases in Chapter 5.

Figure 5: The Integrated Theoretical Framework of Political Value Creation



4 Methodology

This chapter explains and justifies the methodological choices of the study, from research philosophy and design to data generation, analysis, ethics, and quality assurance.

4.1 Research Philosophy and Approach

Our research is grounded in an interpretivist epistemology and a constructivist ontology, which view social reality as multiple and continuously constructed rather than fixed. Instead of measuring objective “facts” about the Moderate Party’s renewal, we focus on how key actors interpreted and gave meaning to the New Moderates’ project and its perceived effects (Bell et al., 2019, pp. 27, 31). The renewal is therefore treated as a social process negotiated among strategists, politicians, journalists, and voters, rather than just as a set of policy changes.

Methodologically, we follow a pragmatic abductive logic that moves back and forth between empirical material and existing theory (Bell et al., 2019, p. 24). Insights from data and from our integrated framework were developed in parallel, so theory informed what we looked for, and emerging findings in turn refined how we used the framework. Two implications follow. First, we aim for analytical generalization rather than statistical generalization, evaluating the study based on the credibility and coherence of its interpretation, as well as the potential transferability of its insights to theory and other cases (Bell et al., 2019, p. 177). Second, the research process is explicitly iterative and process-oriented, with theory and empirical material continuously informing each other rather than being handled in separate phases (Bell et al., 2019, p. 23).

4.2 Objectivity and Bias

We approached the material as systematically and critically as possible, while recognizing our own pre-understandings. Both authors have long-standing experience in the Moderate Party and its youth organization, including leadership roles, which gives us proximity to the case. This insider position facilitated access to elite interviewees and provided contextual literacy regarding internal language, culture, and structures, but it also risks shaping what we notice. To reduce bias, we openly reflected on our background, triangulated interview data with documentary sources, and continuously challenged each other’s interpretations during coding and analysis.

4.3 Research Design

Given our research questions and philosophical stance, we employ a qualitative case study design (Bell et al., 2019, p. 63). The 2002-2006 renewal of the Moderate Party is treated as a bounded, complex event where the phenomenon cannot be separated from its context. It constitutes a unique and revelatory instance of strategic transformation in a mature political organization and also a critical “least likely” case for successful, communication-driven, voter-oriented repositioning (Bell et al., 2019, p. 66).

The design is embedded, with several units of analysis derived directly from our theoretical framework. We examine: (1) the internal engine for change, focusing on Political Market Orientation; (2) the external offering and message, focusing on agenda-setting and framing; and (3) the networked environment, focusing on how relations with media, members, and voter segments were managed. These embedded units prevent the case from becoming overly general and structure the results and analysis chapters.

4.4 Data Generation Methods

To build a rich and credible account of the case, we combined semi-structured elite interviews with documentary and media material, enabling data source triangulation (Bell et al., 2019, p. 364).

4.4.1 Semi-Structured Interviews (Primary Data)

The primary data consist of nine semi-structured interviews with actors who shaped, communicated, or closely observed the New Moderates’ strategy. Respondents include former party secretaries, communication strategists, speechwriters, parliamentarians, and local leaders who were active in or around the Moderate Party between 2002 and 2006. This mix allowed us to contrast high-level strategic accounts with experiences from other organizational levels.

We chose semi-structured interviews because they combine focus with flexibility (Bell et al., 2019, p. 436). An interview guide derived from our theoretical framework ensured that core topics were covered, while open questions and follow-ups could be adapted to each respondent’s role (Bell et al., 2019, p. 436). Interviews were conducted in October and November 2025, either in person in Stockholm and Västerås or via video calls, and lasted between 30 and 75 minutes. Appendix 1 summarizes the respondents, their roles, and key interview details, while Appendix 2 outlines how we utilized the interview guide.

4.4.2 Documentary Analysis (Secondary Data)

To complement the interviews, we collected documentary and media material related to the renewal. These unobtrusive documents, produced independently of our research, include op-eds and debate articles from 2002 to 2006, speeches and campaign materials from the 2002 and 2006 elections, and journalistic books and long-form reportage about the renewal (Bell et al., 2019, p. 500). Such sources provide important external points of comparison but are treated as interpretive, non-neutral accounts whose content is always read in conjunction with interviews and contemporary documents.

In addition to public documents, we had access to two internal discussion memos written by Per Schlingmann in 2003 for a small, confidential strategy meeting at Bomans in Trosa. These are not publicly available and are cited as a single source (Schlingmann, 2003). We treat them as sensitive material and use them primarily to triangulate and nuance interview accounts, rather than as objects of detailed textual analysis. This approach limits direct quotations and avoids operational details that exceed what is already publicly known.

4.5 Data Analysis

After data collection, we conducted a qualitative analysis, primarily thematic, supported by elements of qualitative content analysis (Bell et al., 2019, p. 519). All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim in Swedish. We first familiarized ourselves with the material while taking initial notes on striking passages and potential links to our theoretical framework. We then developed a coding schema that combined deductive codes derived from Political Market Orientation, the Network Perspective, and Strategic Narrative Management with inductive codes that captured unexpected aspects such as internal conflicts, personal trust relations, and informal routines (Bell et al., 2019, Chapter 24).

To manage the large volume of text, we utilized generative AI as a technical support tool, applying our predefined codes to the transcripts under strict instructions. The AI output was reviewed line by line and adjusted by the authors. All final coding decisions, code merging, and interpretations were made by us. Related codes were then grouped into broader themes, which were linked to a chronology of key events between 2002 and 2006 and organized into three phases of the renewal. The overall logic of the analysis can thus be summarized as follows: transcripts and documents → codes → themes → three phases → visual representations and narrative explanations.

4.6 Triangulation Strategy

Triangulation was central to our effort to address retrospective and elite bias (Bell et al., 2019, pp. 364-365). We first reconstructed a chronology of the 2002-2006 renewal, primarily based on contemporary documents such as election manifestos, debate articles, media coverage, and internal documents, where available. Interview material and coded segments were then placed on top of this timeline and iteratively compared with public language and observed network interactions.

Given the roughly twenty-year time gap and the central roles of several respondents, we were aware of the potential for recall bias and post-hoc rationalization (Hassan, 2006). Specific claims in interviews were systematically checked against contemporary documents, and we noted where later narratives diverged from earlier material. To reduce elite bias, we included respondents at different organizational levels, probed for tensions and failed initiatives, and compared elite narratives with journalistic and documentary accounts. Triangulated analysis did not remove all bias but supported a more cautious and layered interpretation of the renewal.

4.7 Sampling, Access, and Recruitment

This study used a non-probability, purposive, criterion-based sampling strategy. Participants were selected strategically because they could provide rich information about the renewal rather than because they statistically represented a population (Bell et al., 2019, p. 391). The main criteria were (1) direct involvement in the Moderate Party's strategic or communication work between roughly 2002 and 2006, and (2) a close connection to or impact from the renewal through leading roles in local or youth politics or long-term engagement in the party.

We combined purposive sampling with elements of snowball sampling (Bell et al., 2019, pp. 394-397). An initial set of central actors was identified through public information and existing networks, and interviewees were then asked to suggest additional respondents who met our criteria or could provide complementary perspectives. Before finalizing the sample, we conducted a small pre-study in which we approached Fredrik Reinfeldt for an interview. He declined but explicitly confirmed that the set of actors we had identified, especially Littorin, Schlingmann, Odenberg, and Tamsons, covered much of the strategic and communicative work we wished to study. This provided additional confidence in the relevance of our sampling frame.

Access and topic boundaries were further discussed with experienced politicians such as Elisabeth Unell and Mikael Damsgaard. These conversations highlighted both ethical and strategic sensitivities, supporting our decision to focus on a somewhat historical case rather than the upcoming election cycle, which several actors regarded as too sensitive. We also attended political events and informal gatherings where current and former Moderate politicians and staff were present, discussing our tentative research focus. Altogether, this combination of purposive and snowball sampling, along with pre-study consultations, produced a small but information-rich sample of nine respondents that covered both the core of the renewal and important surrounding perspectives.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

Research with human participants entails important ethical responsibilities. We followed the core ethical principles presented by Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2019, Chapter 6), focusing on informed consent, confidentiality, and the avoidance of harm.

4.8.1 Informed Consent

All interviewees were informed about the study's purpose, main research questions, and what participation would entail. This information was provided verbally before each interview, and explicit consent was obtained prior to recording.

4.8.2 Data Management

Audio files, transcripts, and analysis files were stored on password-protected devices to which only the authors had access. After examination and grading, personally identifiable raw material will be destroyed.

4.8.3 Avoiding Harm and Political Sensitivity

We sought to ensure that participation did not expose respondents to personal or professional risk. Most questions concerned events almost twenty years ago, which reduced the risk of immediate political consequences. Sensitive topics, such as internal conflicts, alliances, and views on individuals, were handled cautiously. When respondents requested extra care, we anonymized passages or used them primarily as background information rather than direct quotes. We did not request or analyze identifiable opinions on specific political issues beyond those already publicly available. The specific temporal and strategic risks associated with time distance and potential secrecy surrounding political strategy are discussed further in

Section 8.2, and they informed our ethical judgment when selecting the case and formulating questions.

4.9 Quality, Rigor, and Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, traditional criteria of reliability and validity are often reformulated as trustworthiness, comprising credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Bell et al., 2019, pp. 363-365). We strengthened credibility primarily through triangulation, by systematically comparing interview accounts with documentary and journalistic evidence and by paying attention to retrospective and elite bias (Sections 4.4.1 and 8.2). Transferability was supported through a thick description of the context, actors, and processes, allowing readers to judge the relevance of our findings for other settings (Bell et al., 2019, p. 365).

Dependability was enhanced by clearly describing the research design, interview procedures, and the stepwise coding and analysis, making the logic of our decisions traceable to the reader. Confirmability was supported through reflexivity about our pre-understandings (Bell et al., 2019, p. 156), the use of multiple data sources, explicit coding rules, AI-assisted but human-controlled coding, and systematic triangulation.

Two methodological limitations are particularly important for trustworthiness. First, the time distance between the events studied (2002-2006) and the interviews (2025) increases the risk of memory loss and rationalization, which we partly mitigated by relying on contemporary documents and conducting careful cross-checks of timing. Second, secrecy and strategic sensitivity may limit what political actors are willing to share, especially when similar logics remain relevant. Focusing on a historical case reduces, but does not remove, this problem; where respondents appeared cautious, we interpreted this as data in itself and did not press for further detail. These limitations and their implications are discussed in more detail in Section 8.2.

4.10 Artificial Intelligence Usage

In line with the AI policy of the Stockholm School of Economics, we used generative AI tools in a transparent and accountable way. AI played a supportive role in language editing and certain aspects of data processing, but it was not used to generate empirical material or conduct the final analysis. We, the authors, remain fully responsible for all interpretations and conclusions.

4.10.1 Linguistic and Stylistic Refinement

To improve linguistic clarity and maintain a consistent academic tone, we utilized large language models, including Google Gemini (versions 2.5 Flash and 2.5 Pro) and OpenAI (GPT-5/5.1 and GPT-5/5.1 thinking), as well as Grammarly, primarily to identify grammatical inconsistencies and suggest alternative phrasings. These tools were limited to surface-level language refinement and did not involve decisions on the thesis structure, generation of research questions, or conduct of theoretical or empirical analysis.

4.10.2 Data Processing and Coding Assistance

We also utilized AI tools in the qualitative data processing, employing a strict human-in-the-loop procedure. AI support helped us apply our predefined coding schema and work systematically with the large body of text, but all interpretive steps, including final coding, theme formation, and phase construction, were carried out and validated by us. A more extensive disclosure of AI use, including prompts and safeguards, is provided in Appendix 5.

5 Results

Drawing on nine semi-structured interviews and documentary material from 2002-2006, we reconstruct the Moderates' renewal as three chronological phases with different main focus areas. The phases are defined not by exact dates, but by recurring themes in how respondents and documents describe crisis, experimentation, and consolidation. We present these themes descriptively before applying the theoretical framework in Chapter 6.

5.1 Phase 1 (2002-2004)

In Phase 1, respondents describe how the 2002 defeat pushed the Moderate Party into a multidimensional crisis that undermined political, financial, and organizational foundations and opened a window for radical renewal. The phase is characterized by internal collapse, leadership change, and the early formation of a small strategic core that began to rethink policy and communication. Earlier routines are portrayed as ideology-driven and detached from voters, while the first cautious attempts to attend more systematically to voters and rival parties appear. Respondents also note that the party's external position towards media, donors, and allies weakened in 2002. At the same time, early narrative signals around work, security, and everyday life gradually surfaced in speeches and debate articles, including Fredrik Reinfeldt's DN Debatt article from 2003.

5.1.1 Contextual Background and Crisis as a Mandate for Change

All respondents identify the September 2002 general election as the starting point for renewal. The result of 15.26 percent is described as a systemic shock. Political Advisor Kristoffer Tamsons recalls a party in “a combination of shock and crisis [...] over a radically bad election result and a crisis in everything from the organization and its finances to how we were seen and perceived” with finances, organization, and public image under pressure. Shortly after the election, Sven Otto Littorin became Party Secretary and described inheriting “chaos” and a party that was essentially bankrupt, lacking 12.5 million SEK in equity. For the 2004 EU election, the national campaign budget was only 3 million SEK, a dramatic reduction that constrained operations. The defeat delegitimized the existing leadership and, according to Littorin, gave the new team an “almost unlimited mandate” to pursue radical change. Åsa Coenraads describes a mood where many members “were just waiting for someone to take charge and present a credible plan”, which made the organization willing to accept far-reaching reforms. In a May 2003 DN Debatt article, Fredrik Reinfeldt argues that the Moderates had focused on “numbers and complicated proposals” instead of values and everyday experiences, so that the voter’s encounter with the party became “technical”, and stresses the need to win voters “shaped by the long-term Social Democratic holding of power” who often only knew a “distorted version” of the Moderates (Reinfeldt, 2003).

5.1.2 Low Interest From Media

Several respondents recall that media interest in the Moderates was low in the years immediately after 2002, with sparsely attended press conferences and a sense that the party was no longer central to the national conversation, which increased the risk of political irrelevance. In this situation, individual high-profile interventions became important. Articles on DN Debatt were seen as rare opportunities to set the agenda and were carefully prepared in small circles before publication. At the same time, interviewees close to economic policy note that interest from specialized reporters and professional economists increased once the party presented more detailed analyses and recalculated proposals, resulting in modest broad media attention while niche interest in the “new” economic line slowly grew.

5.1.3 Economic Crisis and Need for Donations

The financial crisis that followed 2002 forced the party to rethink how its activities were funded. Littorin recounts arriving at “basically no equity left”, with campaign bills still arriving and further redundancy rounds needed before salaries were secure. Staff at the

central organization were reduced, the use of consultants was cut, and traditional campaign activities were scaled down. Respondents describe constant pressure to secure new income, prompting more systematic fundraising toward business actors and long-standing sympathizers. The crisis was used as an argument that the party had learned from its mistakes and would handle money more carefully. Scarce resources also encouraged a more modest and sometimes more creative campaign style, where travel, meetings, and symbolic actions became more central than large-scale advertising, and gradually pushed the organization toward a more professional, long-term approach to fundraising and budgeting.

5.1.4 Establishing a Strategic, Governing Leadership Core

The operationalization of the renewal mandate began largely in secrecy. Respondents highlight a closed strategy meeting at Bomans in Trosa in July 2003, shortly before Fredrik Reinfeldt became party leader, as an incubator for the new direction. The meeting gathered, among others, the core leadership team, often labelled the “Gang of Four” (Reinfeldt, Anders Borg, Sven Otto Littorin, and Per Schlingmann). Schlingmann brought internal memos with analyses and suggested focus areas (Schlingmann, 2003), and interviewees describe discussions that linked policy content to tone, language, and new ways of speaking about society. Since this group operated before Reinfeldt's election at the party congress in October 2003, confidentiality was a central concern. Over time, the small leadership core became a centralized decision-making unit that coordinated policy, communication, and organizational changes and is described as crucial for keeping the renewal coherent and shielding early strategic choices from internal resistance.

5.1.5 Redefining Problem Formulations

Phase 1 also involved a shift in how the leadership defined the core societal problem. Earlier focus on system change and tax cuts for high earners was increasingly viewed as disconnected from most voters' everyday reality, and respondents describe how the new leadership launched an internal inquiry into what the Moderates should “exist to handle”, moving the discussion away from abstract ideology toward concrete social outcomes.

Through internal intelligence work, combining economic data and external experts, the party identified a latent problem of social exclusion and unemployment, with many working-age individuals moving into benefit systems. Internal calculations suggested that high marginal effects made it “completely rational” not to work and that growth in the early 2000s was

“largely jobless”. Interviewees present this redefinition as the foundation for the “work line” (arbetslinjen), with a new emphasis on participation in work life and on low- and middle-income earners. From a strategic perspective, this also required reassessing earlier rhetoric and how the party spoke about Sweden itself.

As former parliamentary party group leader Mikael Odenberg puts it:

“The Moderates had described reality as if everything was miserable in Sweden, Sweden was miserable, and the Social Democrats ruined everything, but the aim of the renewal was to turn this into a positive story that Sweden is a good country, but that the Social Democrats had run themselves into the ground and that it was time for something else.”

The new problem formulation is visible in Reinfeldt's 2003 DN Debatt article, where he argues that the task is to “conquer” voters formed by a Social Democratic one-party state not through a dramatic system shift, but by offering security and opportunities for individuals (Reinfeldt, 2003). When previous budgets were re-examined with the Parliamentary Research Service (Riksdagens utredningstjänst, RUT), it was found that they favored high-income earners. Interviewees stated that the new goal was to construct a “quality-assured” policy package, with low- and middle-income earners as the main beneficiaries. Several respondents link the end of Phase 1 to the 2003 party congress, where Reinfeldt was elected party leader, the closed strategy meeting at Bomans in Trosa, and the decision to publicly correct economic policy through DN Debatt, which together mark the shift from crisis management to a more planned renewal process.

5.2 Phase 2 (2004-2005)

Phase 2 marks the shift from inward crisis management to outward-oriented experimentation with policy and communication. Respondents describe how the leadership publicly acknowledged earlier mistakes, recruited new experts, and organized a listening tour to gather feedback from voters and stakeholders. Voter and rival information was now collected more systematically and fed into policy work, while relations with key external actors began to be rebuilt. At the same time, early elements of strategic narrative work appeared, as debate articles and line speeches sketched a new problem-solution story around work and responsibility.

5.2.1 The “We were wrong”-Realization

The transition to the public stage began with a strategic admission that earlier policy had failed. Internal calculations showed that previous Moderate tax proposals had distributional effects that were “completely off”, making them impossible to defend, especially since alternative budgets had relied on optimistic “dynamic effects” and, in practice, favored high-income groups. This reset was communicated in a pivotal debate article in DN on 4 March 2004, “Vi lägger om vår ekonomiska politik”, where the leadership admitted that earlier proposals “entailed unfair tax cuts and weakened state finances” (Reinfeld et al., 2004). Interviewees consistently describe this article as a turning point: internally, it triggered both relief and anxiety about abandoning long-held principles, and externally, it attracted unusually strong media attention for the Moderates. Together, these reactions signaled that the party was prepared to take responsibility for past mistakes and change course.

5.2.2 The “Start from zero” directive in renewing policy

The public admission was followed by an internal “start from zero” directive that reshaped policy work. Existing staff at the central office were replaced to free up resources for new experts, such as PhD economist Eva Uddén Sonnegård, who was recruited in 2004. She describes how she was asked to approach labor market policy without being bound by earlier Moderate positions:

“Strike a big line over everything the Moderates have said on labor market issues and start from zero with your academic background and applied research.”

She also reflects on why she was chosen, noting that “I don’t think I would have been asked if I had had a background in MUF, for example.” This combination of a clean slate and an outsider profile illustrates how the leadership wanted people without strong youth-wing backgrounds to review policy with fresh eyes and base proposals on research and empirical evidence rather than internal traditions.

5.2.3 Intelligence Generation

Another central development was a shift in behavioral culture from preaching ideology to systematically listening. The leadership travelled extensively around the country to present the new direction and gather feedback from voters and local actors. For the first time, representatives of workers’ unions were invited into internal policy groups, both to signal openness and to generate intelligence. Political Advisor Kristoffer Tamsons describes a

coordinated effort to “visit ordinary people”, with instructions to bypass senior management and sit down with employees to discuss their everyday work.

He summarized the new approach in concrete terms:

“The whole direction with this was [...] we don't want to meet the bosses. We would like to sit with a cup of coffee with [the employees] and talk and reason about how they have it in their everyday life, what they think works well, and what works poorly.”

According to Schlingmann and Tamsons, this listening tour generated “thousands of testimonies” from nurses, steelworkers, and small business owners that could later be cited in debates to demonstrate that policies were grounded in lived experience rather than abstract theory. A memo by Schlingmann, prior to the Trosa meeting, linked these travels to the communication plan, instructing that local and regional media, seen as having an “enormous impact,” should be prioritized, and that news proposals should be released in connection with visits and given a local angle (Schlingmann, 2003).

5.2.4 Internal Discrepancies

The radical shift in policy and culture generated friction with parts of the internal “old guard” (“Bunkermoderater”), who saw the new line on taxes and unions as a betrayal. To contain this resistance, the leadership invested in internal anchoring: Schlingmann spent a year visiting local branches, and line speeches in municipalities were used to explain the changes and answer questions. At the same time, Gunnar Hökmark argues that, at least regarding the work line and tax credits, formal anchoring was limited and relied on the perception that reforms were already broadly accepted among key actors, illustrating the divergent views of respondents on how deep the renewal reached. The 2004 DN Debatt article also functioned as a “test balloon”, and although Tamsons and Odenberg recall “very great nervousness” beforehand, they conclude that it “landed very, very well” in most of the organization, strengthening the leadership’s confidence.

5.2.5 Operational Communication Process

Political Advisor Kristoffer Tamsons described a disciplined five-step “order of operations” for launching new policies developed in Phase 1. The process linked policy work, media agenda-setting, leadership communication, expert backing, and internal implementation.

- 1) The process always began with completed policy development, since “it is not possible to start with the balloons and posters”; politics came first, then communication.
- 2) The reform was launched externally through a high-profile DN Debatt article to set the media agenda.
- 3) A major line speech by the party leader followed, anchoring the message ideologically and emotionally among members.
- 4) Seminars, reports, and press conferences with experts, often non-political, backed up the proposal and made intentions “very well known” before implementation, as Uddén Sonnegård notes.
- 5) The message was then pushed down through the organization via newsletters, internal conferences, and talking points so that local branches could implement it consistently.

A visual representation of this process is found in Appendix 4.

5.2.6 New Relationships With Rivals

Phase 2 also reconfigured relations with traditional allies and rivals. Respondents describe how representatives from LO and other unions were invited into internal working groups, and how Reinfeldt gave rare interviews in LO-tidningen, including “a huge feature in LO-tidningen with Fredrik” on unemployment insurance that reportedly upset leading Social Democrats. In parallel, the party carefully loosened its dependence on employers’ organizations such as Swedish Enterprise; as Tamsons puts it, the Moderates had almost become “the extended political arm of Swedish Enterprise”, and the new strategy instead targeted the “broad working middle class”. Interviewee Elisabeth Unell links this to a softer stance toward labor-market institutions, recalling that the party now “had to love collective agreements”. These changes were both strategic and sincere: they lowered suspicion between unions and the party, opened new channels for information about working-life conditions, and were seen as necessary to make the later “New Worker’s Party” identity credible. Respondents often describe the end of Phase 2 in terms of consolidation: the “start from zero” policy work had taken shape, the 2004 DN Debatt article had been positively received internally, and cooperation with union and employer representatives had deepened, preparing the ground for the formal launch of “The New Moderates” at the 2005 party conference and the more focused election campaign in Phase 3.

5.3 Phase 3 (2005-2006)

Phase 3 centers on the public launch of “The New Moderates” as a brand and on consolidating the new narrative in a tightly managed campaign. It is marked by rebranding, the claim to be “Sweden’s New Worker Party”, and strong message discipline in the 2006 election. Interviews describe this as the moment when earlier policy work and voter listening became a coherent story that challenged the Social Democrats’ ownership of work and welfare.

5.3.1 Launching “the New Moderates”

“Nya Moderaterna” (“the New Moderates”) was officially launched at the party conference on 26 August 2005. Several respondents outside the leadership experienced it as sudden. Schlingmann recalls that the visual execution was improvised, with a team member drawing the logo the night before, but he stresses that the brand was a “promise” grounded in the policy changes adopted at the convention.

To signal renewal, the party adopted a lighter and less formal style. Storåkers links the move from dark to light blue to a message of “openness” and “liberalism”. Unell and other local actors primarily remember the brand as a new messaging platform rather than a radical stylistic break. The launch formalized earlier changes and tied them to the identity “The New Moderates”.

5.3.2 Framing the Party as “Sweden’s New Worker Party”

A core part of the renewal was the narrative repositioning as “Det nya arbetarpartiet” (“Sweden’s New Worker Party”). The slogan was both a provocation toward the Social Democrats and the ideological core of the new value proposition on labor, welfare, and employment.

Election campaign videos translated this claim into everyday working life. Short films with humor and working-class settings ended with text boards such as “everyone might not know that we have changed” and the New Moderates logo (see Appendix 3). The campaign agency argues that the repositioning worked because a visible break with the previous leadership and a “we have been wrong” drama around Reinfeldt coincided with films that presented the party as close to ordinary workers rather than only the wealthy.

5.3.3 Focus and Narrative Discipline

With the product and brand in place, Phase 3 was executed with strong message discipline. Respondents describe how the central political conflict was framed as a choice “between the work line and the benefit line”, and this frame was repeated in debates, interviews, and written material. Tamsons later summarised this sharpening by saying that the line between work and benefits became “knife-sharp and we probably had not had it that clearly earlier”.

Testimonies collected during the Phase 2 listening tour became key tools within this framework, helping spokespersons answer questions while consistently returning to work, incentives, and participation. Schlingmann summarises this conviction by saying that “no matter what the question is about, the answer is always something about work”, and that the leadership was determined to “pull this all the way to the finish line” without broadening the message.

5.3.4 Strategic Ignorance and Baiting

Respondents also describe how the party handled its main rival, the Social Democrats, through a strategy of ignoring their agenda and pushing them onto the Moderates’ own problem definition.

Spokespersons attempted to avoid side issues and repeatedly returned to the contrast between the work line and the benefit line, linking other topics back to work and incentives.

Interviewees also describe “baiting”, for example, when the Moderates challenged the Social Democrats on “real unemployment” with alternative figures. The aim was not to win a technical argument, but to keep the debate focused on exclusion from work.

5.3.5 Reinfeldt vs. Persson

Respondents highlight the contrast between party leader Fredrik Reinfeldt and Prime Minister Göran Persson, who is often described as “tired” and “older”, while Reinfeldt appeared calmer. Hökmark argues that Reinfeldt “radiated calm and a certain warmth on the TV screen” and could keep to his agenda, reinforcing the image of a new party challenging a worn-out government.

Taken together, the three phases show strategic renewal. Phase 1 crisis dismantled old structures and created a mandate for change; Phase 2 translated this into new ways of working; Phase 3 consolidated the developments into a public brand and a coherent campaign

narrative. Across the phases, political market orientation, the political value network, and strategic narrative management become intertwined, and the next chapter interprets them through this integrated framework.

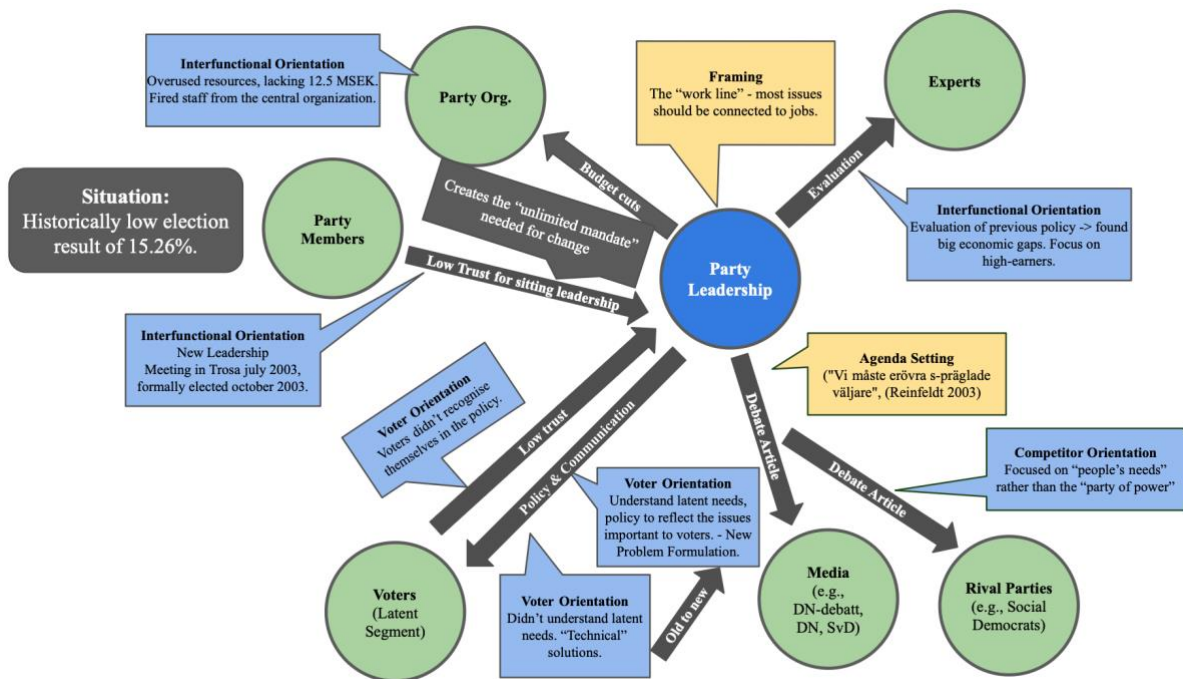
6 Analysis

This chapter connects the empirical results to the Integrated Theoretical Framework of Political Value Creation developed in Chapter 3. We focus on three core mechanisms: (1) crisis → mandate → more centralized Political Market Orientation (PMO), (2) listening plus expert recalculation → a reframed value proposition around the “work line”, and (3) reconfiguration of networks combined with narrative discipline → regained legitimacy. Using PMO, Strategic Narrative Management, and a Network Perspective, and inspired by Easton’s view of politics as an interdependent system of inputs, outputs, and feedback (Easton, 1979), we analyze how these mechanisms together generated political value.

Political Market Orientation captures the internal “engine” of change, that is, how the party generates, shares, and acts on intelligence about voters and rivals, and how different functions are coordinated (Lees-Marshment, 2014; Narver & Slater, 1990). Strategic Narrative Management uses agenda-setting and framing to analyze how the leadership defined problems and public meaning through key communicative acts (Entman, 1993; E. Katz et al., 2017; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The Network Perspective views the party as a single actor within a broader value-creating network, where tangible and intangible resources, such as money, expertise, trust, and legitimacy, circulate among party members, experts, media, rivals, and voters (Allee & Schwabe, 2015).

The analysis follows the three phases identified in the results. Phase 1 (2002-2004) is dominated by crisis, problem diagnosis, and the construction of a new leadership core. Phase 2 (2004-2005) covers the development and rollout of renewed policies and the systematic building of network legitimacy. Phase 3 (2005-2006) centers on the public launch of “The New Moderates” and the consolidation of the new narrative and brand. Figures 6-8 visualize how the leadership re-positioned itself in the value network, and how voter, rival, and interfunctional orientations changed over time.

Figure 6: Phase 1 (2002-2004)



6.1.1 Crisis as Evidence of Failed Voter Orientation

From a Political Market Orientation perspective, the 2002 election result is a brutal market signal. A party that receives 15.26 percent support is clearly not delivering “superior value” to its buyers in the sense of Narver and Slater (1990). What Littorin describes as “chaos” and “bankruptcy” is therefore read not only as organizational drama, but as evidence that the previous product-oriented strategy had lost touch with voter needs. The crisis reveals a structural weakness in voter orientation rather than a temporary campaign failure.

The leadership explicitly interprets the defeat in this way. In the 2003 DN Debatt article, Reinfeldt admits that the party had focused on “numbers and complicated proposals” instead of values, making politics appear “technical” to citizens (Reinfeldt, 2003). In PMO terms, the party still behaves as a product-oriented actor, designing policy based on ideological preferences and fiscal calculations rather than a deep understanding of expressed and latent needs (Lees-Marshment, 2014; Narver & Slater, 1990). Voters are described as a “latent segment” who do not “recognize themselves” in the party’s profile, and the previous “product,” relatively abstract tax cuts and system changes, is seen as misaligned with their everyday experiences of insecurity, unemployment, and exclusion. Phase 1 is therefore less about sophisticated opinion research and more about recognizing that the old way of thinking about voters was incorrect. This introspective process marks a shift towards a more market-

oriented logic, where the leadership asks, “What societal problem should the Moderates exist to handle?” and, through internal analysis, identifies social exclusion and unemployment as core issues. In PMO terms, the party starts to redefine its core customer problem before redesigning its product or communication.

6.1.2 Crisis-generated Mandate and Interfunctional Coordination

The crisis also involved near-bankruptcy, downsizing, and internal conflict. From a PMO perspective, these pressures reshape interfunctional coordination. Scarce resources and low internal trust make old routines difficult to defend, and as the interviews show, create what Littorin calls an “almost unlimited mandate” for the new leadership to reorganize staff and decision-making structures. The severity of the crisis thus becomes a political resource that legitimizes centralization and makes previously contested changes appear necessary.

In Figure 6, this appears as “low trust” from members towards the old leadership, as well as overused resources and dismissals within the central organization. Analytically, Phase 1 marks a shift from a fragmented organization, where different parts worked with their own agendas, to a more tightly coordinated leadership core. The covert Trosa meeting in 2003, with Reinfeldt, Borg, Littorin, Odenberg, and Schlingmann, symbolizes this shift. It functions as a central coordinating unit that integrates voter intelligence, policy development, and communication. Schlingmann’s prepared memos and focus areas indicate that communication was treated as part of the strategic core from the beginning. This illustrates Narver and Slater’s argument that market orientation requires coordinated utilization of organizational resources rather than isolated information gathering (Narver & Slater, 1990). The leadership core starts to align policymaking, communication, and organization around a shared strategic interpretation of the crisis. Phase 1, therefore, does not yet deliver a new political product to voters, but it creates the centralized PMO structure that later allows listening and expertise to be combined into a new value proposition.

6.1.3 Constructing a New Narrative Frame

Strategic Narrative Management clarifies how the leadership in Phase 1 began to craft a new narrative about Swedish society and the party’s role. Narrative work develops in parallel with the centralization of PMO, not as a later packaging stage. From an agenda-setting perspective, the 2003 DN Debatt article is a crucial move. By stating that the Moderates had focused too much on numbers and too little on people’s real lives, Reinfeldt both apologizes

and tries to shift the focus of debate (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Reinfeldt, 2003). Instead of discussing individual tax cuts, he invites media and voters to discuss how to reach citizens shaped by a “one-party state” who only know a “distorted version” of the party. This echoes Petrocik’s (1996) description of attempts to challenge existing issue ownership: the Social Democrats are associated with welfare and work, but the Moderates now claim that they can better address exclusion and unemployment by focusing on incentives and participation (Christensen et al., 2015).

At the framing level, internal analysis defines the main societal problem as social exclusion and unemployment driven by high marginal effects that make it rational not to work. This is translated into the “work line” (*arbetslinjen*), placed at the center of Figure 6 as the emerging master frame: most issues should be linked to jobs. Following Entman (1993), unemployment is framed not primarily as market failure but as a problem of incentives and structures that keep people outside the labor market. This opens for a policy mix that combines lower taxes for low- and middle-income earners with stricter benefit rules, presented as tools for inclusion rather than cuts, and allows the party to speak about security and opportunity in a less ideological tone. Respondents highlight this as crucial for winning Social Democratic-leaning voters. Importantly, this narrative work begins in Phase 1, before the full policy package and campaign of later phases. Through internal memos, expert evaluations, and selective media interventions, the leadership tests and stabilizes a new story: Sweden has a problem of exclusion; the old Moderate politics was too technical; the “new” Moderates will focus on work, responsibility, and everyday needs. Phase 1 thus already links centralized PMO to a first version of the “work line” narrative, even if listening and detailed policy design remain limited.

6.1.4 Re-mapping The Political Value Network

Through the Network Perspective, the crisis appears as a disruption of the party’s value network, marking the beginning of a conscious attempt to redesign it (Allee & Schwabe, 2015). In Figure 6, the party leadership is placed at the center, surrounded by party members, the central organization, experts, media, rival parties, and voters. Many of the value flows at the beginning of Phase 1 are weak or negative: trust from members is low, media interest is limited, and earlier policy is evaluated as flawed. The party is short not only of money but also of intangible resources such as legitimacy, confidence, and attractive narratives (Allee & Schwabe, 2015).

The leadership reacts by strengthening specific ties. First, it increases the importance of experts. Economists inside and around the party, and the Parliamentary Research Service (RUT), review earlier budget proposals and point to “big economic gaps” and an excessive focus on high-income earners. This generates technical knowledge and analytical legitimacy that can later be mobilized if a new policy is criticized, captured in Figure 6 as an “evaluation” flow from experts to leadership. This is the first step in the listening-plus expertise mechanism, even though listening is still mostly indirect. Second, the relationship with the media is slowly reframed. While journalists initially show weak interest, the leadership soon uses arenas such as DN Debatt to present its own interpretation of what went wrong and what needs to change (Reinfeldt, 2003). In network terms, they attempt to re-activate a central gateway node by utilizing mainstream media as an amplifier that can disseminate internal analysis to a wider public (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

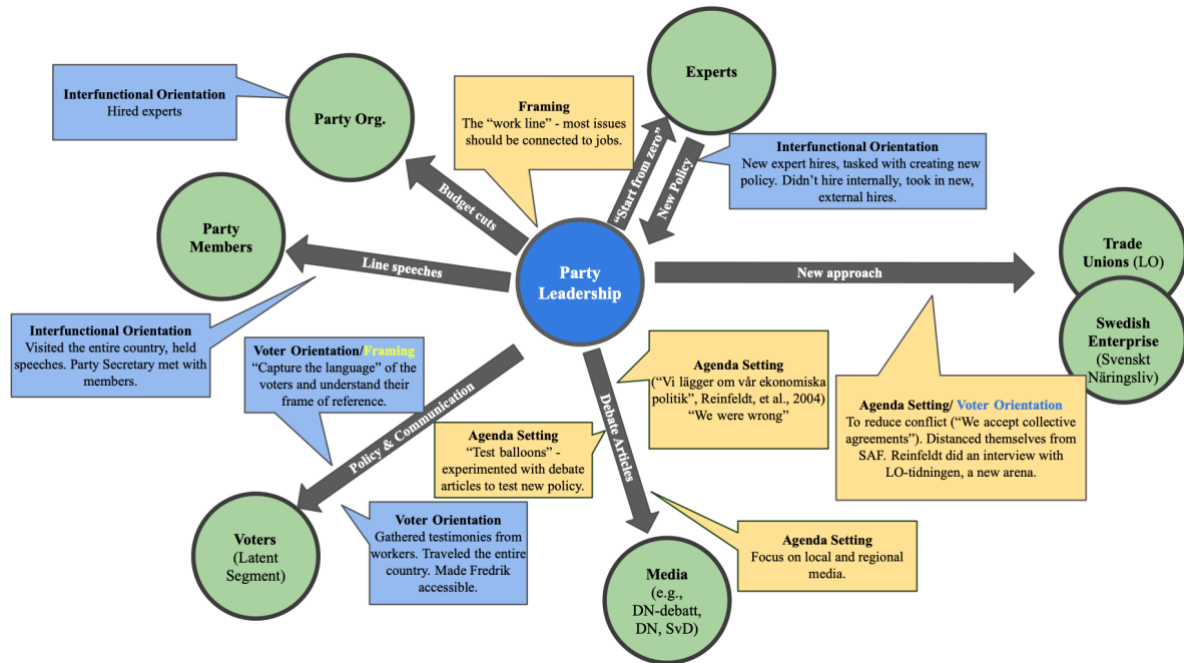
Third, the leadership develops a more explicit rival orientation. It pays special attention to Social Democratic “ownership” of certain issues and to long-term Social Democratic dominance that has shaped voter perceptions (Christensen et al., 2015). In Figure 6 this is summarized as a “competitor orientation” that portrays the Social Democrats as a “party of power” rather than a party focused on “people’s needs”. Rivals are understood as both constraints and reference points for the Moderates’ new value proposition. Overall, Phase 1 involves a re-mapping of who matters in the environment and what kind of value they can provide: experts supply credible evaluations, media provide access to the agenda, rival parties provide contrast, and party members provide an internal mandate. Voters are kept at a distance, but they increasingly appear in the leadership’s mental model as the ultimate source of legitimacy around which the network must be oriented. The crisis → mandate → centralized PMO mechanism already interacts with the first steps of network reconfiguration, preparing the ground for the more outward-oriented experimentation in Phase 2.

6.2 Phase 2 (2004-2005): From Inward to Outward

Phase 2, summarized in Figure 7, marks the move from inward crisis management to outward-oriented experimentation. Internal diagnosis now informs new policy work, organized intelligence generation, and more formal communication routines. At the same time, the party begins to reposition itself within the political value network, particularly

towards trade unions, employers' organizations, and regional media, making the listening-plus-expertise mechanism and early network reconfigurations more visible.

Figure 7: Phase 2 (2004-2005)



6.2.1 Deepening Voter Orientation

In Political Market Orientation terms, Phase 2 mainly concerns voter orientation becoming concrete behavior (Lees-Marshment, 2014; Narver & Slater, 1990). The leadership organizes nationwide listening trips where leading figures, according to Tamsons, "visit ordinary people", bypass formal management layers, and speak directly with employees about everyday life. These tours generate "thousands of testimonies" that feed into policy work and serve as rhetorical proof that the party is "grounded in reality", which in Figure 7 appears as the voter-orientation box where the party "gathered testimonies from workers" and made Reinfeldt accessible.

The ambition to "capture the language" of voters, highlighted by Schlingmann, links voter orientation to symbolic fit and to later framing (Entman, 1993). Instead of imposing technocratic terms, the party mirrors everyday expressions in speeches and campaign material, refining the "work line" narrative. Yet, voters are still treated as a "latent segment" in Figure 7, as the interpretation of testimonies remains centralized in the leadership and expert group, so the process remains top-down, even if it rests on a thicker layer of qualitative data.

6.2.2 Rebuilding the Policy Engine with External Expertise

Phase 2 strengthens interfunctional coordination by discarding the old economic policy in the “We are redesigning our economic policy” article and issuing a “start from zero” directive to newly recruited external experts who are “tasked with creating new policy” (Reinfeldt et al., 2004). The crisis thus legitimizes cutting old staff and building an expert-driven policy group, captured by Uddén Sonnégård’s call to “strike a big line over everything the Moderates have said on labor market issues and start from zero”.

These experts are expected to combine research knowledge with testimonies from the listening tour and to calculate policies that mainly benefit low- and middle-income earners. Phase 2 therefore tightens the link between voter intelligence, expert analysis, and leadership decisions. Policy, organization, and communication become synchronized around the “work line” frame at the center of Figure 7, so that qualitative stories are translated into an expert-verified value proposition and the party moves towards a more professionalized, catch-all structure associated with cartel party development (E. Katz et al., 2017; Kirchheimer, 1966; Pihlblad, 2012).

6.2.3 Re-Balancing the Value Network

The Network Perspective clarifies how Phase 2 repositions the party among key external actors (Allee & Schwabe, 2015). Ties to experts, unions, employers, members, voters, and media are selectively strengthened or weakened to support the new value proposition.

A central move is to invite union representatives into internal policy groups and to let Reinfeldt give interviews in the trade union newspaper LO-tidningen, an unusual step for a Swedish conservative party that signals an attempt to rewire the value network. Instead of relating primarily to employers’ organizations, the Moderates now build ties to workers’ organizations and seek new intangible deliverables such as trust, legitimacy, and endorsements from actors who traditionally belonged to the rival’s sphere, while simultaneously distancing themselves from Swedish Enterprise on symbolic points such as collective agreements to reduce conflict with LO and avoid being framed as anti-worker (Allee & Schwabe, 2015). In line with issue-ownership perspectives, this is meant to show credibility within the social partner system, not only among employers (Christensen et al., 2015; Petrocik, 1996).

The media and member networks are adjusted in a similar spirit. Schlingmann's memo states that travel should be combined with communication and that local and regional media, which have an "enormous impact", should be prioritized (Schlingmann, 2003). This aligns with research on mediatization, where regional media serve as key intermediaries in fragmented media systems (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Strömbäck, 2008). By giving local journalists access to Reinfeldt and to workplace visits, and by letting the party secretary and party leader hold "line speeches" for members, the leadership turns dispersed media and party nodes into carriers of "work line" stories while stabilizing internal trust and alignment ahead of the disciplined campaign in Phase 3.

6.2.4 Agenda-Setting and Framing as Controlled Experimentation

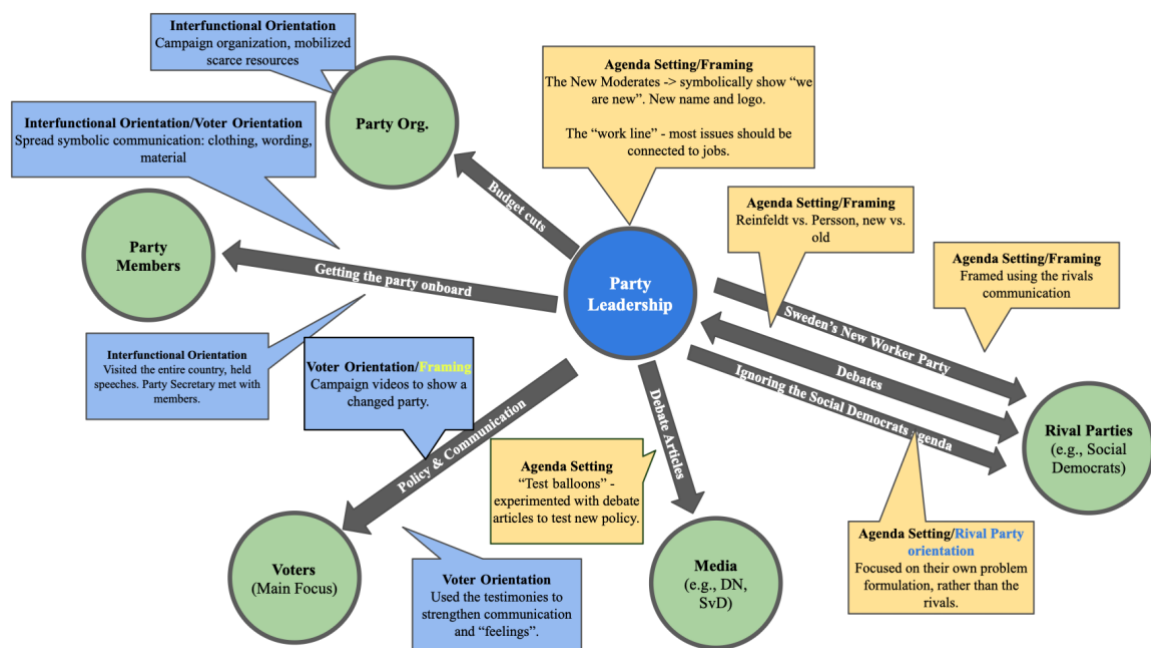
Strategic Narrative Management becomes visible in Phase 2 through the "We were wrong" article in DN Debatt in March 2004 (Reinfeld et al., 2004). By admitting that earlier proposals had "unfair tax cuts and weakened state finances," the leadership attempts to recast the party as responsible and self-correcting, rather than stubborn and ideological, in line with framing perspectives (Entman, 1993; Lindbom, 2008). At the same time, the article continues the "work line" frame by promising that the new policy will make work pay for low- and middle-income earners, combining valence politics with an attempt to challenge Social Democratic ownership of labor and welfare (Christensen et al., 2015; Petrocik, 1996; Stokes, 1963).

Debate articles in outlets such as DN Debatt are also used as "test balloons" to experiment with formulations and to gauge reactions from members, media, and voters. As Figure 7 indicates, the agenda-setting process runs from party leadership to the media and back to party members and voters, allowing the leadership to influence which issues and interpretations become salient in public debate (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

The five-step communication process described by Tamsons means that this experimentation is highly structured, moving from policy to debate, article, and line speech, to expert seminars, and finally internal implementation. Substantive policy based on expert work and voter intelligence is the "product", but it only enters the market through this sequence, which is completed by a focus on local and regional media that complements the national strategy with local stories and workplace testimonies in different public spheres (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Strömbäck, 2008).

6.3 Phase 3 (2005-2006): Brand launch, valence, and narrative discipline

Figure 8: Phase 3 (2005-2006)



Phase 3, illustrated in Figure 8, is where earlier market-oriented and network-building work is translated into a public brand and a tightly managed campaign narrative. After crisis and redefinition in Phase 1 and outward-oriented experimentation in Phase 2, this phase secures the new position and makes it emotionally and visually salient to voters. Reconfigured networks and the disciplined “work line” narrative now convert the renewed value proposition into broad legitimacy and electoral support.

6.3.1 From Internal Project to Public Brand: “The New Moderates”

Through the lens of Political Market Orientation, the launch of “Nya Moderaterna” in August 2005 marks a shift from internal adaptation to explicit market repositioning (Lees-Marshment, 2014). The new name, logo, and lighter color palette signal that the party’s “product” has changed, compressing work line reforms into a promise that this is not the old Moderate Party. From a network perspective, the “new” label is an intangible deliverable of legitimacy and issue redefinition, making the network receptive to media and opinion leaders to treat the party as renewed (Allee & Schwabe, 2015). The secrecy surrounding the launch creates a narrative break that forces journalists, members, and rivals to react to a new category. Meanwhile, Figure 8 shows that leadership must “get the party onboard” so that campaign workers can enact the brand across the network (Lees-Marshment, 2014; Narver & Slater, 1990).

6.3.2 “Sweden’s New Worker Party”

The second pillar of Phase 3 is the repositioning to “Sveriges nya arbetarparti”, “Sweden’s New Worker Party”, which links competitor orientation and issue ownership by challenging the Social Democrats’ long-standing control of labor and welfare issues and presenting the Moderates as better representatives of workers (Christensen et al., 2015; Petrocik, 1996). Campaign videos translate this into working-class scenes in break rooms and everyday workplaces. From a Network Perspective, these films build identification, trust, and emotional closeness with previously distant voter segments (Allee & Schwabe, 2015). Repeated lines like “Everyone might not know that we have changed” tie back to earlier reforms and aim to reduce the perception gap between the renewed product and the old brand image (Lees-Marshment, 2014). The worker-party frame also speaks to valence politics by portraying the party as closer to ordinary life and thus more competent and trustworthy than the Social Democrats (Lindbom, 2008; Pihlblad, 2012; Stokes, 1963).

6.3.3 Narrative Discipline and the “Work Line vs Benefit Line” Conflict

Phase 3 is also marked by strict message discipline. The campaign defines the conflict as a choice between the “work line” and the “benefit line” and repeats this frame across debates, interviews, and campaign material, as shown in Figure 8. From a Strategic Narrative Management viewpoint, this is agenda-setting and framing intensified: by returning to one core issue, the party tries to make journalists, opponents, and voters view the election through this lens (Entman, 1993; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The instruction that “no matter what the question is about, the answer is always something about work” shows a deliberate effort to steer discussions back to this problem definition. This discipline also expresses a fully activated PMO, where earlier analysis of latent voter needs and recalculated policies guide implementation toward the target market (Narver & Slater, 1990). Testimonies from nurses and small business owners, when reused, support the two-step narrative logic by transforming ordinary workers into opinion leaders who validate the party’s interpretation of reality (Allee & Schwabe, 2015).

6.3.4 Strategic Ignorance, Baiting, and Rival Orientation

Phase 3 is also defined by how the party handles its main rival. The results describe a strategy of largely ignoring the Social Democrats’ agenda and instead forcing them to debate on the Moderates’ problem definition, sometimes using “baiting”. From a rival-orientation and valence perspective, the Moderates answer mainly when it reinforces the work line versus

benefit line conflict; challenges about employment figures are used to make the Social Democrats defend their own line while the Moderates appear calm and focused on their own diagnosis of societal problems, projecting greater competence (Christensen et al., 2015; Lindbom, 2008; Petrocik, 1996; Stokes, 1963). Interviews contrast Reinfeldt, described as modern and “fresh”, with Persson, portrayed as “tired”. In our network model, media coverage of these leadership styles becomes an intangible deliverable that feeds back into voter perceptions, helping the party claim ownership of “work” and “modern leadership” (Aylott & Bolin, 2007; Pihlblad, 2012).

6.3.5 Internal Mobilization and Symbolic Alignment

Finally, Phase 3 has a strong internal dimension, seen in Figure 8 through references to campaign organization, symbolic communication, and travelling to meet members. The leadership that previously challenged the “old guard” now depends on the whole organization to embody the new brand. From the PMO perspective, this is the final step in interfunctional coordination, ensuring that local branches, members, and candidates deliver a unified, market-oriented message and style (Lees-Marshment, 2014; Narver & Slater, 1990). Clothing, wording, and campaign material are standardized, and scarce resources are concentrated in a professionalized campaign machine (R. S. Katz & Mair, 1995; Kirchheimer, 1966). In value-network terms, internal mobilization secures flows of trust and alignment needed for the external narrative to be credible (Allee & Schwabe, 2015). Investing in internal speeches, visual tools, and clear talking points transforms the party into a distribution network for the new story and strengthens its capacity to sustain the “work line” conflict within the wider network.

7 Concluding Discussion

This chapter synthesizes the findings to answer the research question and show how the integrated framework of Political Value Creation can be used analytically and in practice. We first present an integrated answer to the research question, then outline the main theoretical contributions of the framework. We then discuss practical implications for political parties and other advocacy-oriented organizations, and finally summarize the main limitations and avenues for further research.

7.1 Answer to the Research Question

The study aimed to understand how the Moderate Party managed the renewal process that culminated in its 2006 electoral success, asking how Sweden's Moderate Party, from the 2002 crisis to the 2006 election, transformed internally and externally to regain political legitimacy.

Drawing on interviews and documentary material, we reconstructed the renewal as three partly overlapping phases: asking how Sweden's Moderate Party, from the 2002 crisis to the 2006 election, transformed internally and externally to regain political legitimacy. Across these phases, the party moved from a narrow, internally driven approach to a more systematic orientation towards voters, rivals, and internal coordination. In parallel, the leadership repositioned the party within the political value network and constructed a new narrative centered on work, inclusion, and responsibility, communicated consistently internally and externally.

Overall, we find that the Moderate Party rebuilt political legitimacy by translating the post-2002 crisis into a new political value proposition centered on the work line. In Phase 1, the crisis created a mandate for change and enabled a new leadership core. In Phase 2, outward-oriented experimentation rebuilt voter orientation, policy work, and key relationships. In Phase 3, the New Moderates were launched as a coherent brand that connected earlier internal work to a new external offering.

Regarding internal Political Market Orientation (RQ1), the party shifted from a primarily product- and sales-oriented approach to a more systematic market-oriented behavior (Lees-Marshment, 2014). Crisis experiences forced the leadership to reassess earlier policies and recognize that important voter segments had been misunderstood. Listening tours, renewed policy work, and reorganized headquarters practices institutionalized voter, rival, and interfunctional orientations (Narver & Slater, 1990), which were then embedded in the campaign and brand architecture, for example, by defining workers with low and middle incomes as priority segments.

Regarding Strategic Narrative Management (RQ2), the party stepwise transformed complex policy packages into a simple and morally charged narrative using agenda setting and framing (Entman, 1993; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Economic and social problems were progressively reframed around exclusion from work and responsibility and condensed into the work line versus benefit line contrast. The narrative was introduced through high-profile

debate articles, anchored in line speeches, validated by experts, and implemented internally through guidelines and campaign material.

Regarding network relations in the political communication environment (RQ3), the party selectively built, repaired, and redefined relationships with voters, unions, business actors, media, and opinion leaders, thereby reconfiguring its value network (Allee & Schwabe, 2015). It opened new channels, for instance by participating in LO-tidningen and by accepting collective agreements, while moderating the image of being a pure business party. These reconfigured relationships generated tangible and intangible deliverables such as endorsements, media access, and perceived governing credibility, which amplified the effects of the new narrative and helped consolidate issue ownership around work and employment.

Taken together, the three lenses show the renewal as an iterative process rather than a linear rollout. Feedback from polls, media reactions, and network actors was continuously incorporated into internal market orientation and narrative development. The integrated framework of Political Value Creation therefore explains the Moderates' transformation as a coordinated system linking internal capabilities, narrative construction, and network activation over time.

7.2 Contributions of the Integrated Framework of Political Value Creation

A central ambition of this thesis was to integrate Political Market Orientation, a Network Perspective on political communication, and Strategic Narrative Management into one analytical lens for understanding party renewal. The case of the New Moderates suggests that this integrated framework helps explain how an established mass party can rebuild legitimacy after a crisis and is potentially relevant for other advocacy-oriented organizations, such as interest groups, large NGOs, or lobby organizations that face similar problems of brand decay and loss of trust.

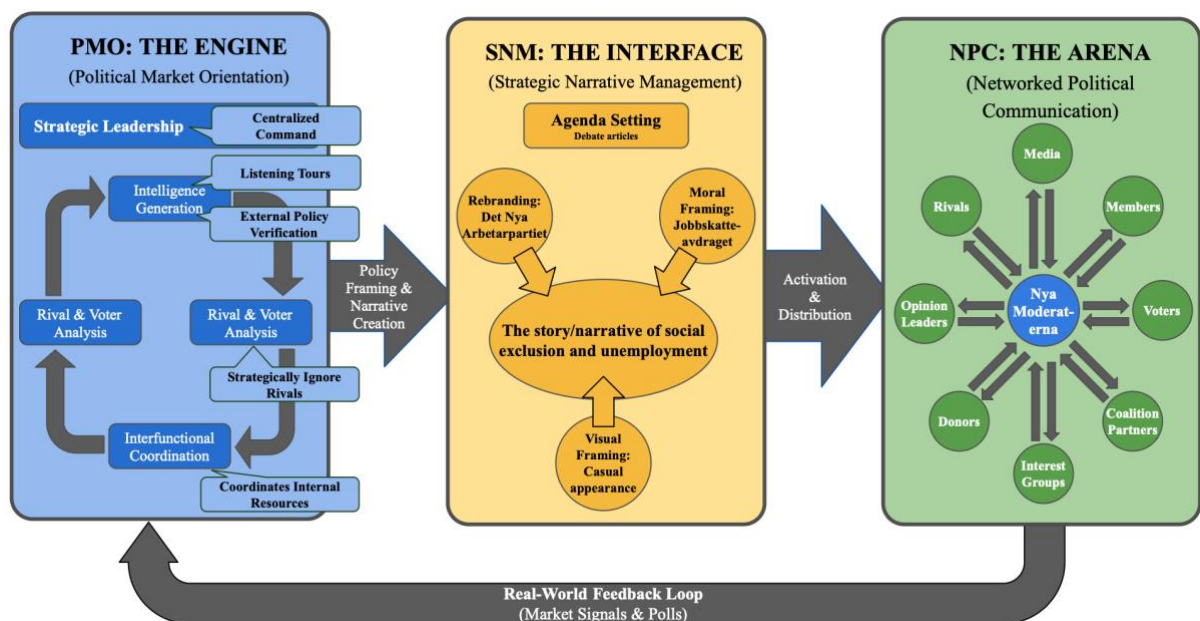
First, we extend Political Market Orientation in a party context by demonstrating how voter orientation, competitor orientation, and interfunctional coordination evolve across distinct phases of renewal and are shaped by intra-party power relations and ideological debates. In our case, PMO appears not as a simple managerial decision, but as a cumulative and sometimes conflict-ridden process that gradually builds a new engine for value creation inside the party.

Second, we link Strategic Narrative Management to both PMO and the network perspective through the Operational Communications Process. By specifying the sequence from internal policy development through agenda setting and framing to expert validation and internal implementation, we demonstrate how complex policy packages were transformed into a coherent narrative that could travel through the political value network. This adds a process dimension to research that often treats narrative, campaign technique, and internal strategy as separate phenomena.

Third, we connect network value analysis to political marketing by demonstrating how changes in the party's value network condition the effect of market-oriented strategies. Electoral renewal depended not only on adjusting the policy product but also on reconfiguring flows of trust, legitimacy, and endorsements between the party, media, opinion leaders, unions, and business actors. In this way, the framework links internal strategic work to the party's changing position within the broader political landscape.

Taken together, the framework allows us to summarize the renewal process in terms of how value was created over time. In Phase 1, starting from a position close to zero, the party moved in a relatively linear way from crisis diagnosis and intelligence generation, through agenda setting around unemployment and the work line, to distributing this narrative into the network. In Phases 2 and 3, the same elements operated more dynamically: the party used feedback from polls and media reactions, adjusted the message through test balloons and controlled experiments, and redistributed refined narratives through different channels.

Figure 9: Integrated framework of Value Creation applied to the renewal of the Moderates



The three-phase specific figures, based on the framework, can also be viewed as a practical diagnostic tool. They help practitioners and researchers visualize where a party is currently strong or weak, for example, when it has a clear narrative but limited network support, or rich voter insight but poor internal coordination. In this sense, the integrated framework is not only a theoretical contribution but also an operational device for assessing the balance between internal market orientation, external network position, and narrative coherence in political renewal.

The integrated framework highlights its limits by primarily focusing on PMO, narrative work, and network relations, which capture formal strategies and public communication but miss key aspects of party life. Elements like internal democracy, ideological identity, and informal relationships are only indirectly addressed. Tensions between central control and local autonomy, as well as market adaptation versus ideological commitments, manifest as weak signals rather than fully developed variables. While the framework helps explain how crisis management and network strategies contributed to the Moderates' renewal, it falls short in accounting for the role of internal power dynamics and informal politics in shaping legitimate strategic options.

7.3 Practical Implications

The findings offer implications for political parties and organizations operating in contested environments.

First, crises can be used as learning moments rather than handled mainly with defensive communication. The Moderates' "start from zero" instruction and listening tours demonstrate how acknowledging past mistakes and engaging with previously neglected groups can yield new insights into voter preferences. Parties, companies, and NGOs should design listening processes that feed needs from dissatisfied groups into policy or strategy work.

Second, internal organization must support external repositioning. Decisions about resources, roles, and routines, combined with coordination between policy, communication, and leadership, enabled the Moderates to translate voter and competitor intelligence into concrete proposals. Similar organizations require cross-functional processes that integrate strategy, communication, and operations from the outset, ensuring a unified approach to problem formulation before launching a renewed positioning.

Third, rebuilding legitimacy requires deliberate engagement with key actors in the surrounding ecosystem. Opening channels to trade unions, experts, and parts of the media demonstrates that trust is established through repeated and concrete actions, such as accepting collective agreements. Parties and organizations should map the current distribution of trust and legitimacy within their networks and develop engagement strategies that extend beyond traditional allies to skeptical or previously distant actors.

Balancing narrative coherence with internal pluralism is crucial. A clear problem-cause-solution narrative enhances consistency, supported by

structured communication and a limited set of core storylines alongside reinforcing slogans and symbols. However, this discipline can stifle internal debate and alternative viewpoints. Organizations like parties, firms, and NGOs face the challenge of maintaining a coherent external narrative while allowing for internal reflection and criticism through governance that permits disagreement yet enables a unified external voice.

7.4 Alternative Explanations

Our framework highlights the Moderates' internal strategic renewal, but the 2006 election outcome also depended on external forces. Favorable macroeconomic conditions, voter fatigue after long Social Democratic rule, and the creation of the Alliance for Sweden together formed an opportunity structure that benefited the center-right.

These exogenous factors created conditions that made a change of government more likely, but they do not, by themselves, explain why the Moderates were able to capitalize on them. Earlier opposition constellations faced similar openings but struggled with fragmentation and unclear narratives. In our interpretation, the internal renewal process, particularly the centralized PMO and narrative discipline around the "work line", served as a mechanism that enabled the party to utilize the favorable context in a systematic manner.

Rather than competing with structural or behavioral explanations, our analysis should therefore be read as complementary to them. The framework illustrates how organizational change, narrative work, and network relations contributed to transforming a potential opportunity into electoral gains. We do not claim to offer a complete causal map of the 2006 election, and the broader methodological limits of our explanation are discussed more fully in the following chapter on limitations and avenues for future research.

8 Limitations and Further Research

This study has limitations that affect how its conclusions are interpreted and indicate directions for further research. Based on a single case, the renewal of the Moderate Party in Sweden during the early 2000s, its findings are not easily generalizable. Future research could apply this framework to different parties, countries, or time periods. The goal is theoretical refinement and contextual transferability rather than statistical prediction, as we cannot isolate the impact of the renewal strategy from broader macroeconomic trends or other contextual factors.

The data also creates built-in biases. Because the interviews were conducted almost twenty years after the events and primarily with national-level actors, the material is vulnerable to retrospective- and elite bias. As discussed in Sections 4.6 and 4.9, we partially addressed this issue through triangulation and the inclusion of some local actors; however, internal conflicts, failed initiatives, and outsider perspectives (e.g., ordinary members, opponents, journalists) are likely underrepresented in our reconstruction of the renewal.

Additionally, we, as student researchers, constructed the integrated framework and analysis of empirical material, meaning our theoretical choices and interpretations are not neutral; others may prioritize different concepts. While our framework emphasizes communication, networks, and market-oriented thinking, it overlooks important aspects like internal party democracy and ideological identity. Future studies should clarify their focal dimensions and consider incorporating perspectives that address intra-party democracy and ideological contestation.

Based on these limitations, several approaches for future research appear. Comparative studies could examine whether similar patterns of renewal can be found in other center-right parties in Europe or in parties of other ideological families. Quantitative content analysis of media coverage, campaign materials, or social media could complement our qualitative findings and illustrate how narratives evolve and change over time. Future research could also refine the network dimension through formal social network analysis that maps not only perceived relationships but also concrete interactions and resource flows. Finally, more work is needed on the tensions between market-oriented strategies and internal party democracy: how parties balance responsiveness to voters with the preferences of members and activists remains an important and underexplored question.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Overview of Respondents

Name	Position during renewal (and later relevant roles)	Date (2025) & time	Mode	Length
Eva Uddén Sonnegård	Economist in the party (from 2005); later State Secretary at the Ministry of Employment	21 Oct, 10:00–11:10	In person, Ratio	70 min
Per Schlingmann	Communications chief from 2004; later Party Secretary (from Sept 2006)	13 Nov, 09:00–09:50	Digital	50 min
Sven-Otto Littorin	Party Secretary 2003–2006; responsible for organization, staff, and finances; later Minister for Employment	11 Nov, 11:00–12:15	Digital	75 min
Kristoffer Tamsons	Speechwriter and political advisor for Fredrik Reinfeldt; member of inner core around the renewal	3 Nov, 10:00–11:00	Digital	60 min
Åsa Coenraads	Member of MUF national board during the period; locally active in Västmanland regional politics	28 Oct, 16:00–17:00	Digital	60 min
Elisabeth Unell	Opposition leader in Västerås (2002–Now); Mayor (KSO) 2006–2010	30 Oct, 09:30–10:30	In person, Västerås City Hall	60 min
Gunnar Hökmark	Party Secretary 1991–2000; later Member of the European Parliament 2004–2019	29 Oct, 11:10–11:40	In-person, Cadierbaren	30 min
Michael Odenberg	Group leader of the Moderate parliamentary group and economic spokesperson 2003–2006; later Minister for Defence	5 Nov, 12:00–13:00	In person, Paraden	60 min
Michael Storåkers	External communication consultant responsible for launching <i>Nya moderaterna</i> through his PR-agency Storåkers AB	20 Nov, 10:00–11:00	In person, CFHill	60 min

Appendix 2 – Overview of Interview Guide

This appendix contains an overview the semi-structured interview guides used in the study.

The guides varied between respondents, but they all followed the same basic structure and were built around broad, open questions. Our intention was to let respondents describe the renewal of the Moderate Party in their own words, while still covering key aspects of the process that are relevant for our research question.

The guides were prepared with our integrated theoretical framework in mind, but we deliberately avoided using theoretical concepts or “exam language” in the interviews. Instead, we translated our interests in voter focus, networks and narratives into everyday, non-leading questions. The framework was therefore more visible in how we designed themes and later analyzed the material, than in the explicit wording of the questions.

1. General structure of the interview guides

Across all interviews, the guide was organized into four broad blocks. Within each block we used open questions and follow-up probes rather than fixed items. The exact formulation and order depended on the respondent and on how the conversation developed.

(1) Background and role

Typical opening questions were:

- “Could you start by telling us a bit about your background and how you became involved in the Moderate Party?”
- “What was your role in the party during the period 2002–2006?”

Follow-ups were used to clarify formal positions, informal responsibilities and how close the respondent was to the central renewal work.

(2) Experiences of the 2002 election and the need for change

To understand how the crisis was experienced, we asked questions such as:

- “How did you experience the 2002 election and the period immediately afterwards?”

- “From your perspective, what were the biggest problems or challenges for the party at that time?”
- “When did you first get the feeling that something more fundamental had to change?”

These questions were kept broad to allow respondents to choose which problems (organization, message, leadership, voter relations, etc.) they wanted to emphasize.

(3) Working methods and internal renewal

This block focused on how the party’s way of working changed over time:

- “If you think about your daily work before and after 2002, what changed?”
- “How did you and your colleagues talk about voters and different voter groups in your work?”
- “Can you describe how ideas for new policies or campaign themes were developed and tested?”
- “Were there any tensions or conflicts inside the party about the direction of the renewal?”

Here we used follow-up probes such as “can you give an example?”, “who was involved in that?”, or “how did others react?” to get concrete episodes rather than abstract statements.

(4) External relations, communication and outcomes

To capture the broader environment and the perceived effects of the renewal, we asked open questions like:

- “Outside the party organization, which actors or arenas felt most important for the renewal work?”
- “How did you experience the relationship with media, other parties and organizations during this period?”
- “Looking back, what moments or decisions do you see as turning points?”
- “Are there aspects of the renewal that you are particularly proud of, or that you are more critical of today?”

Again, the focus was on the respondent's own interpretations. We avoided mentioning our theories or preferred concepts in the questions.

2. Adaptation to different respondent groups

Because the interviews were semi-structured, we adapted both the wording and the emphasis to each respondent:

- For **central strategists and party leaders**, we asked more follow-up questions about coordination between policy and communication, internal decision-making and the design of central campaign ideas.
- For **policy experts**, we focused more on how specific reforms were developed, how input from research and external actors was used, and how disagreements around policy change were handled.
- For **local politicians and observers**, we asked more about how the renewal was perceived and implemented in practice outside the national leadership, and how they interpreted campaign material and media coverage.

Not all questions were asked in every interview, and new probes were added when respondents opened up new, relevant themes.

3. Relation to the theoretical framework

The interview guides were thus **informed by** rather than **structured around** our theoretical framework. When designing the guides, we used the framework to make sure that the conversations could touch on:

- how the party related to voters and rivals,
- how it worked with different networks and arenas, and
- how it framed problems, responsibilities and solutions over time.

However, the concepts of Political Market Orientation, strategic narratives and networks were not mentioned to respondents. This was a conscious choice to avoid leading questions and to keep space for respondents' own categories, which later could be interpreted and related to the framework during the coding and analysis stages.

Appendix 3 – Campaign Films

This appendix briefly describes the main campaign films from the 2006 election that we analyzed in detail. All films were part of the New Moderates' national TV and cinema campaign and were used as empirical material in both the results and the analysis chapters.

“Festivalflört” (Music festival)



The film is set at a summer music festival. A group of young people with “alternative” festival styling sit on the ground among tents and talk about music, authenticity and whether a band has “sold out”. One girl suddenly says: “I am going to vote for the Moderates.” The others fall completely silent and look at her with surprise and discomfort.

The closing text says: “Alla vet kanske inte att vi har förändrats” (“Not everyone may know that we have changed”), followed by the New Moderates' logo. The narrative plays on the social stigma of voting for the Moderate Party in a youth segment that is normally distant from the party and introduces the core message that the party has fundamentally changed.

“Mahogany-Mats” (Construction workers)



In this film, three construction workers sit in a break room. One of them tells a mocking story about his neighbour “Mahogany-Mats”, who has bought very expensive, pre-oiled mahogany wood to build a simple football goal for his son. The others laugh at this extravagance. A fourth man, probably their foreman, enters wearing a t-shirt with Fredrik Reinfeldt’s face. When he hears that they are talking about his neighbour, the storyteller becomes visibly embarrassed.

The image then freezes and the same closing text appears: “Alla vet kanske inte att vi har förändrats” with the New Moderates logo. The film uses a working-class setting to criticise elitism and wastefulness and then breaks the stereotype by placing Reinfeldt on the t-shirt of a respected colleague, signalling that the “new” party belongs on the workers’ side.

“Söndagsmiddag” (Sunday dinner)



This film takes place at a bourgeois/intellectual dinner party. The host proudly says that he is proud that the family has “högt i tak” (is very tolerant). A young father with a small child on his lap quietly says that he will vote for the Moderates. An uncomfortable silence follows; the other guests look shocked and no one responds.

Again, a text board appears over the dinner scene: “Alla vet kanske inte att vi har förändrats”, followed by the New Moderates logo. The narrative plays with the idea of “tolerance” among cultural elites and highlights the latent social stigma around right-wing voting even in milieus that describe themselves as open.

“Första maj” (First of May)



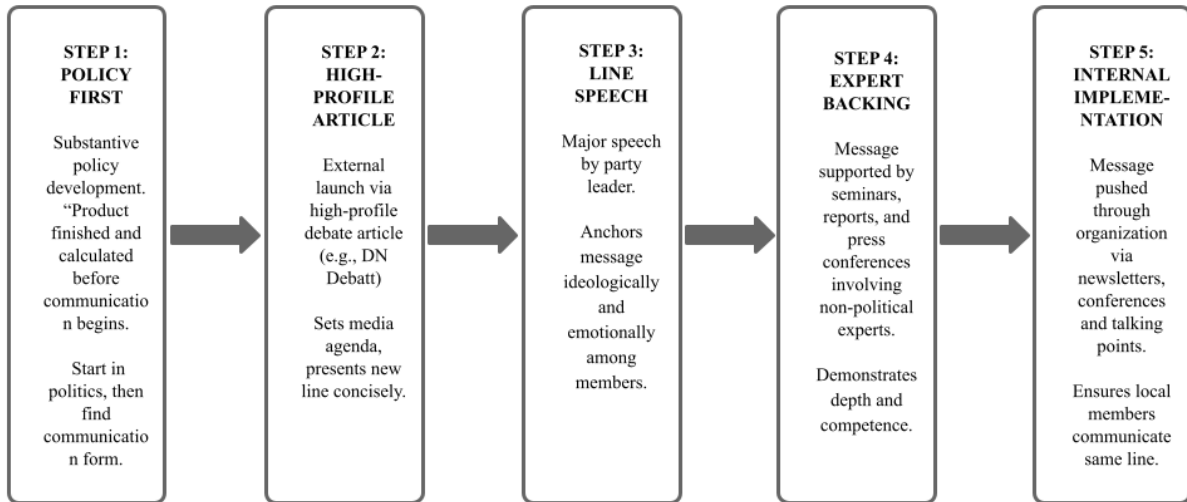
The “First of May” film uses historical footage of the Swedish labour movement. It starts with black-and-white images from early 20th-century demonstrations with men in caps and hats, brass bands and red banners. Color footage from later decades follows, still showing large left-wing demonstrations. One banner with the text “Trygga jobben” (“Secure jobs”) is clearly visible.

Towards the end, text appears over the red flags: “Efter 116 år av demonstrationer är det dags att någon lyssnar” (“After 116 years of demonstrations it is time that someone listens”), followed by the New Moderates logo. The film symbolically appropriates the history of the labor movement and reframes the party as “the listening party” that takes job security seriously, in contrast to a rival that has marched and spoken but not listened.

Use in the analysis

In the analysis, we treated these films as condensed expressions of the New Moderates’ strategic narrative and market orientation. We coded them using the same codebook as for the interviews (for example, voter orientation, latent needs, framing of problems and solutions, and narrative rebranding) and compared the visual and textual messages in the films with how respondents described the campaign strategy in the interviews.

Appendix 4 – Operational Communication Process for the New Moderates



Appendix 5 – Disclosure of AI-tools use

In accordance with the AI guidelines of the Stockholm School of Economics, this appendix outlines the use of AI tools in the thesis. We answer four questions:

- 1) What AI tools have been used and how?
- 2) In what ways have these tools contributed to increasing the quality of the thesis?
- 3) What potential risks were identified, and how were they reduced?
- 4) What insights were gained from using AI tools in the thesis writing process?

Throughout the work, AI tools were used only as supportive instruments. They did not generate empirical material, theoretical arguments, or complete sections of the thesis. All analyses, interpretations, and final formulations are our own.

- 1) What AI tools have been used and how?

We used four categories of AI-related tools.

(a) Transcription of interviews

We utilized AI-based speech-to-text software (KB-Whisper and Microsoft Word) to generate the first drafts of the recorded Swedish interviews. These drafts were then carefully checked and corrected by us while listening to the audio. Only the manually verified transcripts were used in the coding and analysis.

(b) Support in developing the coding framework

We first developed the coding schema manually, based on our theoretical framework.

To improve clarity and identify gaps, we then used *OpenAI ChatGPT (GPT-5 and GPT-5 “Thinking” mode)* as a methodological assistant. We asked the model to comment on our draft definitions and give examples of how a code might appear in an interview, without changing the basic meaning of our codes.

A typical prompt was:

“You are an experienced qualitative methodological assistant. Here is our draft codebook for a study of party renewal. Please suggest improvements to the wording of each code definition and give a few examples of how the code could be recognized in interview data.”

The AI-generated coding suggestions were exported and checked line by line against the original transcripts. We corrected misinterpretations, merged or split codes, and occasionally added new inductive codes that the AI had not picked up. We treated all suggestions as input only and revised the final codebook in our own words.

(c) Support in handling the coded material

When the codebook was stable, we used *Google Gemini 2.5 Pro* to obtain preliminary coding suggestions for the interview transcripts. The model received our fixed codebook and segments of the Swedish transcripts and was asked to propose 0-3 relevant codes for each segment. The prompt used was:

“You are a methodologically aware research assistant with a qualitative coding task. Below is our codebook for a study of political party renewal. For each text segment (1–3 sentences in Swedish), assign 0–3 codes from the list that fit best. If no code fits, write ‘NONE’. Respond in a simple JSON format with `segment_id`, `suggested_codes`, and a short comment. Do not invent new codes and do not change our definitions.”

The model’s suggestions were used as a first pass. We then went through the material manually, segment by segment, corrected or removed codes where we disagreed, added missing codes, and wrote our own analytic memos. All final coding decisions and all higher-level categories used in the results and analysis come from our own reading of the material.

No AI tool was used to generate themes, phases or interpretations.

(d) Language and style support

For language and style we used:

- OpenAI ChatGPT (GPT-5, later GPT 5.1, as well as GPT-5 Thinking, later GPT-5.1 Thinking)
- Grammarly

These tools were used to detect grammatical errors, suggest smoother formulations and point out unclear sentences. We used generic prompts that asked for comments and alternatives, not for full rewrites. For example:

“Please read the paragraph below from a bachelor’s thesis. Identify grammatical errors and unclear sentences and suggest small changes to improve clarity and academic tone. Do not add new arguments or change the meaning.”

“Act as a language editor. Give short suggestions for how we could make this section flow better (for example, shorter sentences or clearer connectors), do not rewrite the content.”

Any suggestions were adapted and rewritten by us before inclusion. We did not paste long AI outputs directly into the thesis.

2) In what ways have these tools contributed to increasing the quality of the thesis?

We see three main contributions to quality:

1. More efficient handling of text material

AI-assisted transcription and preliminary coding suggestions made it possible to work through long interviews simultaneously in a structured and efficient way. This freed time for deeper manual reading, comparison between interviews, and triangulation with documents.

2. Clearer and more documented analytical choices

Using AI as a “sparring partner” when refining the codebook forced us to clarify definitions and boundaries between codes. This strengthened the documentation of our analytical process and made our coding logic more transparent.

3. Improved linguistic clarity

As non-native English writers, we benefited from language tools and Grammarly to reduce grammatical mistakes and awkward phrasing. This helped us reach a more consistent academic tone without changing the underlying arguments or structure.

3) What potential risks were identified and how were they reduced?

We were aware of several risks and tried to handle them actively:

- **Misinterpretation in coding**

Large language models can misunderstand context or over-interpret ironic or ambiguous statements. To reduce this, we treated all AI coding as suggestions only and checked the coded material manually, segment by segment, against the original transcripts.

- **Over-reliance on AI in writing**

There was a risk that AI-generated wording could shape our text in ways we did not fully control. We therefore limited AI to local suggestions, avoided prompts that asked for full sections, and rewrote all suggested formulations in our own words.

- **Loss of author voice and academic integrity**

To safeguard academic integrity, we kept full control over structure, argumentation, and examples. All sections were drafted and finalized by us, and AI tools were used only as supportive aids.

- **Privacy and data security**

Because the interviews contained sensitive political information, we were cautious about what we uploaded to external services. We limited the amount of raw material shared and avoided including direct identifiers when using external models.

4) What insights were gained from using AI tools?

From our experience, we draw four main lessons:

1. **AI is most useful when it forces precision**

To obtain meaningful support, we had to formulate clear instructions and definitions. This improved our own thinking about codes, categories, and structure.

2. **Human judgement remains central**

The crucial analytical work, interpreting the renewal of the Moderate Party, building the three phases, and connecting them to theory, depended on our contextual knowledge and close reading. AI could not replace this.

3. **AI works best as a complement, not as a shortcut**

The tools were most valuable when they helped with routine tasks (transcription, small language edits, first coding suggestions) and gave us material to react to, rather than when they tried to “do the work”.

4. **Critical distance is necessary**

Working with AI throughout the process made us more aware of its limitations and possible biases. This reinforced the importance of manual control before, during, and after any AI-supported step.

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