

Sensemaking in Transition:

How newcomers construct organizational culture

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Abstract. Organizational socialization and onboarding have received considerable scholarly attention, with effective onboarding programs linked to several individual and organizational outcomes. Despite the extensive research within the field, how newcomers make sense of their new organizational environment remains insufficiently understood. This study investigates how newcomers make sense of organizational culture during organizational socialization through a qualitative case study approach based on in-depth interviews, participant observations, and documentary analysis. Drawing on a theoretical framework of normative control, individual sensemaking, and organizational forms of sensemaking, the study examines how organizational cues and cultural frameworks are interpreted and internalized by newcomers. The findings suggest that organizational culture is not uniformly understood but interpreted differently depending on local interactional conditions and organizational contexts. In particular, the proximity between cultural articulation and everyday work practice substantially influences newcomer understanding and enactment of organizational culture. Furthermore, managerial and leadership involvement shapes the perceived relevance and legitimacy of cultural frameworks. The study contributes to research on organizational socialization by emphasizing the interpretive and socially situated nature of newcomer sensemaking.

Keywords: Sensemaking, Organizational socialization, Socialization, Organizational culture, Onboarding, New employee, Newcomer, Normative control

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Definitions

<i>Term</i>	<i>Definition for this study</i>
Organizational Socialization	The process through which newcomers transition from organizational outsiders to integrated insiders.
Onboarding	The formal and informal organizational activities and practices intended to facilitate newcomer adjustment, learning, and integration into the organization.
Organizational Culture	A system of shared meanings, values, assumptions, and practices that shape how organizational members interpret situations and act within the organization.
Sensemaking	The process through which individuals interpret, construct, and negotiate meaning in situations characterized by ambiguity, novelty, or uncertainty.
Normative control	A form of organizational control through which organizational values, beliefs, and cultural expectations shape how members understand appropriate behavior, identity, and work practices.

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1. Introduction – Entering the Transition

We have a really good culture, but it takes too long for new employees to take it to heart (Manager 14).

Newcomer integration is a fundamental organizational challenge. Recruitment represents a significant cost, onboarding and socialization are critical for cost-effectiveness and long-term functioning. Employees are increasingly mobile and exhibit lower organizational commitment and loyalty than in the previous century (Bauer, Erdogan, Ellis, Truxillo, Brady, & McCarthy, 2025). Consequently, organizations are under pressure to rapidly integrate newcomers into their work tasks and the organization.

Organizational socialization constitutes a central human resource (HR) process influencing newcomer assimilation, contribution, and career development (Saks & Gruman, 2014). Effective onboarding and socialization can determine whether a newcomer becomes a long-time employee or a new recruitment process is needed.

Understanding newcomer integration requires examining how they make sense of their surroundings. This entails identifying the processes, cues, and actions enacted by an organization and its members, and which are critical for newcomers in learning organizational culture.

This study explores how newcomers make sense of their environment and organizational culture during the early stages of employment. Through a qualitative case study approach based on in-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analysis, the study examines organizational culture and newcomer sensemaking, providing initial insights into these dynamics.

Centrally, newcomers were interviewed to understand their perspectives and experiences. In addition, managers were interviewed to gain insight into how aspects of culture, processes, and values are communicated during onboarding and subsequently integrated into work practices. Corporate managers and cultural ambassadors responsible for organizational culture and values were interviewed to understand how the organization operates and represents itself. Through

this three-pronged approach (newcomer, managerial, and corporate perspectives), the study contributes to a deeper understanding of newcomers' sensemaking process during organizational entry.

This paper is structured into seven sections. First, it reviews prior research on organizational culture, onboarding, socialization, and sensemaking. Second, the research gap motivating the study is identified. Third, the theoretical framework is developed, drawing on sensemaking, organizational forms of sensemaking, and normative control. Fourth, the methodology is presented, following a qualitative case study design. Fifth, the empirical analysis is presented. Sixth, the discussion outlines the contributions, implications, and limitations of the study, and directions for future research. Finally, the paper concludes.

1.1 Research Question

The following research question guided the study, focusing on the intricate processes of newcomer sensemaking during their organizational entry:

How do newcomers make sense of an organizational culture transmitted by organizational actors during organizational socialization?

1.2 Intended Contribution

The raison d'être of this study is to explore and generate a nuanced understanding of the sensemaking process of newcomers during their organizational entry. Emphasizing the interplay between newcomers and organizational incumbents, this study explores how onboarding and organizational socialization processes influence newcomers' sensemaking. The aim is to contribute to knowledge of how organizational culture is transmitted to new generations of organizational members.

1.3 Delimitations

Situated in a large Swedish manufacturing organization with a global presence, this study focuses on a Swedish, albeit multi-cultural, context. Consequently, other geographical settings are not considered. Furthermore, the existing organizational culture at the case company is treated as exogenous. As the aim is to examine sensemaking processes during organizational socialization, the study does not evaluate the organization's culture, practices, or frameworks.

Additionally, the case organization employs both white- and blue-collar workers, this study focuses on the experiences of white-collar workers. Thus, blue-collar workers are excluded from the scope. This delimitation is made due to significant differences in how organizational culture is communicated and enacted within the organization. White-collar work involves a high degree of cognitive labor, with an emphasis on problem-solving, whereas blue-collar work tends to be more standardized, shaping work processes and practices. Accordingly, this facilitates a deeper understanding of white-collar socialization and integration.

2. Literature Review

This section provides an overview of prior research on (1) organizational culture, (2) onboarding and organizational socialization, and (3) sensemaking.

2.1 Organizational Culture

Organizational culture refers to the shared learnings of a group, developed through solving problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and taught to new members as the appropriate way to think and behave within the group (Schein & Schein, 2017). Widely regarded as a seminal contributor to the study of organizational culture, Schein's (1985) framework has served as the foundation for much subsequent research (Bogale & Debela, 2024; Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016).

Schein and Schein (2017) conceptualize organizational culture at three levels: basic assumptions and beliefs, espoused norms and values, and cultural artifacts. Basic assumptions represent the deepest level of organizational culture and consist of taken-for-granted beliefs that evolve over time as groups repeatedly succeed in solving organizational problems. These assumptions gradually become the lens through which members interpret organizational life and appropriate behavior. Closer to the surface are espoused values, which are conscious articulations and normative guidelines for how members should think and act. Finally, artifacts are visible manifestations of culture, including physical environments, language, stories, rituals, and formal structures (Schein & Schein, 2017).

Building on this framework, organizational culture is commonly conceptualized as a system of shared values and norms that guide behavior among organizational members (Denison et al., 2014; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996; Smircich, 1983). It has also been described as a social control system, operating more extensively than formal control systems and contributing to organizational performance through enhanced motivation, strategic alignment, and coordination among employees (O'Reilly, 1989; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996).

Much of the interest in organizational culture as a field of study stem from its association with performance outcomes (O'Reilly et al., 2024). For instance, organizational culture has been linked to firm growth and profitability (Denison & Mishra, 1995; O'Reilly et al., 2024),

organizational effectiveness (Zheng et al., 2010), and organizational change (Kaur Bagga et al., 2023), as well as innovation (Hogan & Coote, 2014; Loch et al., 2025). Moreover, it has also been associated with employee-related outcomes such as organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Chung & Ahn, 2019; Huey Yiing & Zaman Bin Ahmad, 2009; Sabuhari et al., 2020), along with turnover intentions (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005).

Although the links between organizational culture and performance outcomes have been widely explored, the existing body of literature has been criticized for being fragmented, particularly due to inconsistencies in definitions and measurements of organizational culture (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016). For example, Giorgi et al. (2015) identify five dominant approaches to culture, namely values, frames, stories, categories, and toolkits. Nevertheless, most authors align with Schein and Schein's (2017) three-level framework, although measurements are not always applied in ways congruent with this definition (Chatman & O'Reilly, 2016).

Schein and Schein's (2017) definition additionally emphasizes the teaching and integration of newcomers, referred to as organizational socialization, as a mechanism of cultural continuity and survival. According to this perspective, newcomers gradually learn organizational norms and assumptions through interaction with existing members and participation in organizational life. As such, learning culture becomes an interpretative process in which newcomers, over time, seek to decode cultural meanings by testing behaviors and observing how these are reinforced or discouraged by organizational insiders. This learning process is characterized as continuous, implicit, and unsystematic.

2.2 Onboarding and Organizational Socialization

Onboarding refers to “the structured practice of assisting new employees to integrate into the organization” (Bauer, Erdogan, Ellis, Truxillo, Brady, & McCarthy, 2025, p. 1651). Other definitions extend the concept to include both formal and informal practices enacted by the organization or its agents to facilitate newcomer adjustment (Klein et al., 2015). There is ongoing debate regarding the distinction between onboarding and organizational socialization, with some authors equating the two terms (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011), while others, such as Klein et al. (2015), conceptualize them as distinct constructs with important differences. In this view, “socialization is something that occurs within the individual, whereas onboarding refers to efforts by the organization to facilitate socialization” (Klein et al., 2015, p. 264). Organizational

socialization can be understood as the process of adapting a newcomer from an outsider to an effective, integrated insider (Bauer et al., 2007). It occurs both when individuals cross organizational boundaries or moves sideways within the organization (Harris et al., 2020).

Organizational socialization represents a transition period for newcomers, characterized by learning, adaptation, and adjustment (Bauer, Erdogan, Ellis, Truxillo, Brady, & Bodner, 2025), during which individuals acquire knowledge about their roles, responsibilities, and the organizational culture (Harris et al., 2020). An individual's adaptation to an organization occurs as they transition from a newcomer to insider, for example when they are given broad responsibilities and autonomy, or are included in informal networks (Louis, 1980).

A common finding in the literature is that effective socialization and onboarding processes have a substantial impact on both individual and organizational outcomes. Newcomer adjustment is associated with positive individual outcomes, including increased job satisfaction, role clarity, self-efficacy, social acceptance, and well-being (see Figure 1 for an overview; Bauer, Erdogan, Ellis, Truxillo, Brady, & Bodner, 2025; Bauer et al., 2007; Klein et al., 2015). At the organizational level, these processes are linked to outcomes such as improved performance, stronger organizational commitment, more positive job attitudes, and reduced turnover intentions and behavior (i.e., increased retention; Bauer, Erdogan, Ellis, Truxillo, Brady, & McCarthy, 2025; Bauer et al., 2007).

Earlier research on organizational socialization was dominated by uncertainty reduction theories but has since expanded to incorporate perspectives such as resource-based theories and interactionist perspectives (Bauer, Erdogan, Ellis, Truxillo, Brady, & Bodner, 2025; Saks & Gruman, 2018). Uncertainty during the socialization process is reduced as newcomers learn organizational norms and become aligned with them (Harris et al., 2020).

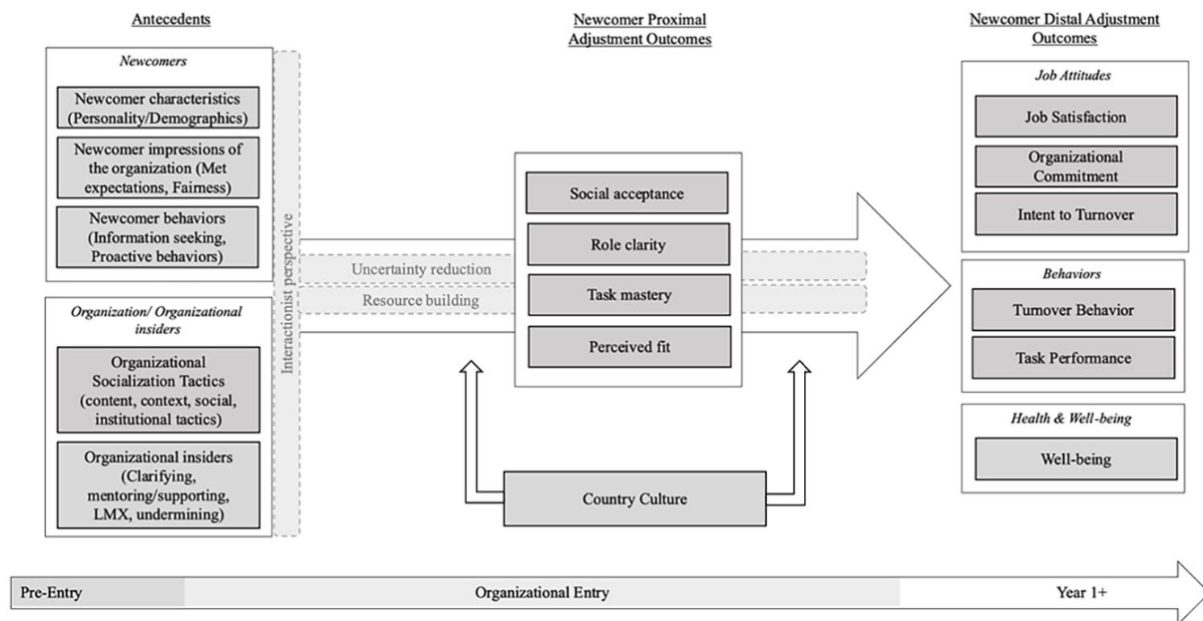


Figure 1: Summary Model of Newcomer Organizational Socialization Constructs (Bauer, Erdogan, Ellis, Truxillo, Brady, & Bodner, 2025).

Cesário and Chambel (2019) develop and provide evidence for a three-component perspective on onboarding, in which corporate, managerial, and coworker welcome positively affects employees' work engagement and affective commitment. At the corporate level three types of layers are identified: the macro layer (e.g., group sessions providing information about company history), the functional integration layer (where newcomers are grouped by operational areas and functional managers deliver information on work areas), and the micro layer (e.g. receiving role-specific information). At the managerial level, senior managers' commitment to onboarding practices is essential for clarifying task goals and facilitating social network integration. Finally, at the coworker level, relationships play a key role in socializing newcomers and fostering a sense of welcome, thereby supporting commitment and satisfaction. Overall, this underscores the importance of comprehensive onboarding practices (Cesário & Chambel, 2019).

2.2.1 Organizational Tactics

Van Maanen and Schein (1979) identified six dimensions of organizational socialization tactics: collective versus individual (the context of newcomer learning, whether in group settings or through individual experiences); formal versus informal (whether learning occurs in segregated settings or on the job); sequential versus random (whether there is a specified sequence of

learning stages); fixed versus variable (whether there is a clear timetable for progression); serial versus disjunctive (whether experienced members guide newcomers or whether newcomers must develop their own role definitions); and investiture versus divestiture (whether newcomers' existing identities are affirmed or stripped away; Jones, 1986; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

Building on this framework, Jones (1986) classified these tactics into two broader categories: institutionalized and individualized socialization. Institutionalized tactics (collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial, and investiture) tend to produce custodial role orientations, reinforcing existing practices and encouraging conformity to prescribed roles. Conversely, individualized tactics (individual, informal, random, variable, disjunctive, and divestiture) are associated with more innovative role orientations, challenging the status quo and redefining role expectations. Furthermore, institutionalized tactics have been found to be negatively related to role ambiguity, role conflict, and turnover intentions, and positively related to perceptions of fit, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job performance (Jones, 1986; Saks et al., 2007).

2.2.2 Newcomer Behavior

Another stream of research has focused on newcomer behavior; particularly how proactive behaviors influence socialization and integration outcomes. Proactive behaviors have been shown to affect both proximal (e.g., role clarity and self-efficacy) and distal outcomes (e.g., job performance and organizational commitment). Different types of proactive behaviors are associated with distinct socialization outcomes, although findings vary across studies. For instance, Zhao et al. (2023) find that relationship-building behaviors are strongly related to social integration, while information- and feedback-seeking behaviors contribute to task mastery and role clarity.

Bauer, Erdogan, Ellis, Truxillo, Brady, and Bodner (2025) report similar findings but extend this line of research by identifying negative effects associated with certain traits, such as neuroticism, on outcomes including social acceptance, role clarity, and task mastery. Additionally, proactive behavior not only facilitates learning but is also associated with role innovation, as proactive newcomers may challenge existing norms, particularly before becoming fully acclimatized. At the same time, certain organizational tactics may have adverse effects, such as fostering feelings of abandonment (Ashforth et al., 2007).

2.2.3 Managers' Role in Socialization and Onboarding

Supervisors are highly influential in newcomer outcomes and adjustment, affecting task mastery, role clarification, acquisition of organizational knowledge, and realization of social identification, and social integration (Lee, 2024).

Korte et al. (2015) examine differences between newcomer and managerial expectations in organizational socialization. Their study on graduates' transition into working life identifies three main areas of mismatch: (1) the structure of newcomer learning, (2) the amount of managerial guidance, and (3) the level of newcomer initiative. Their study also highlights the influence of coworkers in the socialization process, with local mentors guiding the newcomer both professionally and socially within the group. Furthermore, the findings indicate that managers expect proactive newcomer learning, whereas newcomers tend to emphasize responsible learning.

Managers can take specific actions to facilitate newcomer socialization. To enhance task mastery, managers should assign appropriate tasks, encourage workgroup collaboration, provide learning materials and opportunities, and assign mentors. To facilitate acculturation managers should provide learning materials and opportunities, assign mentors, and communicate regularly with newcomers. For role clarification, managers should communicate regularly and facilitate coworker interaction. Finally, to support newcomers' social integration, managers should allow for natural integration, review behaviors, and encourage social events (Dong et al., 2022).

2.2.4 Digital Onboarding

Digital tools and e-socialization have become an integral part of onboarding and organizational socialization (Gruman & Saks, 2018). In recent years, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, scholarly interest in digital onboarding has increased (Scott et al., 2022). This growing body of research examines how digital and remote onboarding practices influence newcomer socialization and integration into organizations. Digital onboarding practices can create confusion for newcomers and therefore requires a detailed and systematic approach, with clear communication and personal one-on-one interaction (Yarbrough & Ramos Salazar, 2023).

2.3 Sensemaking

Sensemaking has been defined as “the making of sense” (Weick, 1995, p. 4). When frameworks of stimuli are disrupted, opportunities for sensemaking emerge (Weick, 1995), suggesting that “sensemaking is partially under the control of expectations” (p. 5). Maitlis and Christianson (2014) defines sensemaking as “the process through which people work to understand issues or events that are novel, ambiguous, confusing, or in some other way violate expectations” (p. 57). Similarly, Weick et al. (2005) describe sensemaking as “the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing” (p. 409).

Broadly, “sensemaking is about placing items and experiences in frameworks, comprehending, redressing surprise, constructing meaning, interacting in pursuit of mutual understanding, and patterning” (Weick, 1995, p. 6). In response to disruptions or breaches in expected continuity, individuals seek explanations and enact responses that allow them to maintain ongoing activity, often drawing on frameworks such as plans, expectations, or justifications (Weick et al., 2005). Across these perspectives, sensemaking can be understood as the construction of cognitive schemata that help explain the world at both the individual and group level (Weick, 1995).

Ambiguity and uncertainty are two common sensemaking occasions in organizational life (Weick, 1995). Under conditions of ambiguity, sensemaking is driven by confusion due to equivocality, where multiple interpretations are available. Contrarily, under conditions of uncertainty, sensemaking is driven by a lack of interpretations, where there is insufficient information to guide understanding. Ambiguity is common in organizational contexts, as these are oftentimes complex and paradoxical, where two or more explanations are simultaneously plausible. Conversely, uncertainty is characterized as “[t]he shock attendant to uncertainty is one of ignorance” (Weick, 1995, p. 95). Sensemaking in uncertainty is driven by various loci, including *state uncertainty* (a lack of understanding of how components or the environment is changing), *effect uncertainty* (uncertainty regarding the impact of environmental changes on the organization), or *response uncertainty* (uncertainty regarding available courses of action). Additional information, such as news and present information, may reduce uncertainty. However, under conditions of ambiguity, additional information may increase equivocality by introducing competing interpretations.

2.3.1 Sensemaking During Onboarding and Organizational Socialization

Research on sensemaking in the context of organizational socialization emphasizes how individuals interpret and respond to novel and ambiguous experiences. Louis (1980) highlights that surprise is a key trigger of sensemaking, noting that “one kind of event that provokes cognition is surprise and that surprise seems to be an inevitable part of the experience of entering [...] an unfamiliar organizational setting” (p. 241). Her research presents a model of sensemaking during organizational entry (see Figure 2). Disruptions, such as surprise, contrasts, and unmet anticipation (i.e., when expectation differ from actual experience), are central triggers of sensemaking. Entry experiences are characterized by change, contrast, and surprise. Change is inherent in new settings, such as entering a new organization or role. Contrast is personal and refers to the noticing and selection of features. Surprise, defined as situations where anticipation and expectation differ from actual experience, may be both positive and negative, depending on whether expectations are under- or overmet.

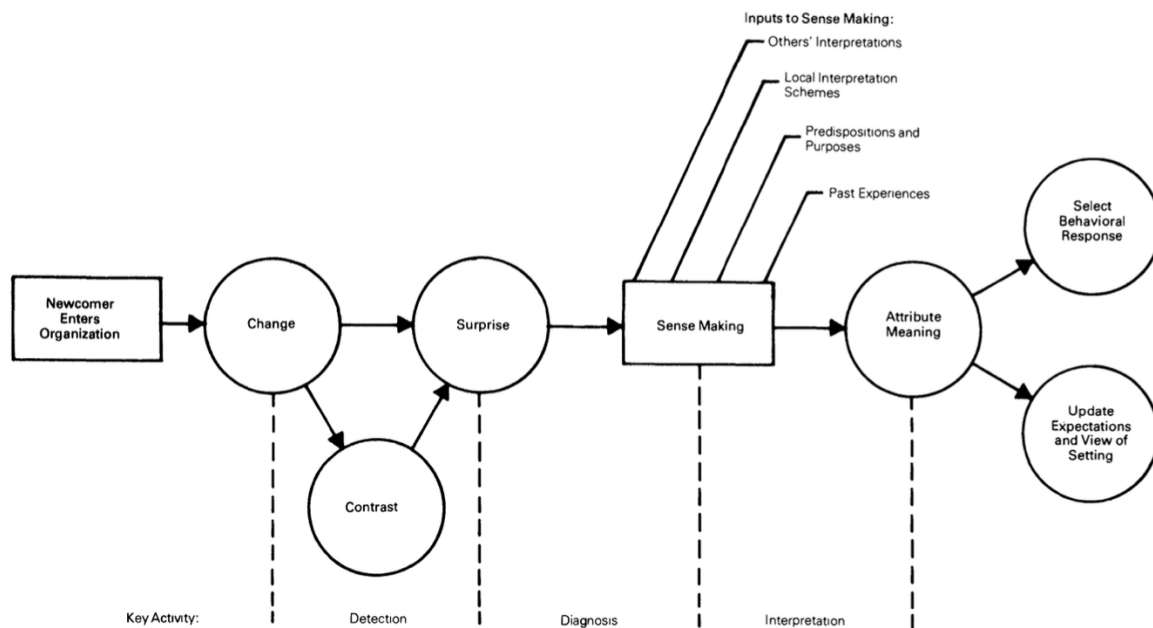


Figure 2: Sensemaking in organizational entry (Louis, 1980)

Sensemaking during organizational entry is influenced by others' interpretations, local interpretations, predispositions and purposes, and past experiences. Compared to organizational insiders, newcomers are at a disadvantage. Two of the inputs may be problematic, namely local interpretations and others' interpretations. Louis (1980) argues that newcomers have not yet developed sufficient local interpretations and therefore rely on prior experiences that may not

be applicable to the new organizational context. Furthermore, newcomers are not yet fully integrated and have not formed relationships with insiders, limiting their ability to test and refine their interpretations through social interaction.

Drawing on Nicholson's (1984) model of work role transition, Harris et al. (2020) examine newcomer sensemaking in relation to replication and determination practices, and how individualized and institutionalized tactics produce these practices. These practices are characterized by low levels of personal development, while differing in the degree of role development. Replication practices involve low levels of both personal and role development, whereby newcomers reproduce existing ways of working and established role definitions. In contrast, determination practices are characterized by low levels of personal development and high levels of role development, meaning that newcomers actively shape and redefine their roles to align with their personal identity and skills (Harris et al., 2020; Nicholson, 1984).

In replication practices, typically associated with institutionalized tactics, sensemaking is driven by newcomers leveraging prior experiences and access to organizational insiders through questions and observation. Sensegiving is driven by insiders preferring status quo and demonstrating current practices. Sensetesting is driven by newcomers checking their understanding of practice, and adjusting, through feedback loops from sensetesting (Harris et al., 2020).

By contrast, determination practices, associated with individualized tactics, are characterized by a lack of organizational insiders from which to draw sensemaking from. In these contexts, sensemaking is driven by newcomers independently interpreting situations and drawing on prior experience to enact the environment and adjusting organizational practices. Sensegiving is limited due to the scarcity of information and could either be deliberate (hands-off approach with experienced newcomers because of their prior knowledge) or unintentionally due to negligence of insiders, lacking care or attention. Consequently, sensetesting is also constrained, as limited interaction with insiders restricts opportunities for feedback, thereby increasing uncertainty regarding role boundaries and the acceptance of newly enacted practices (Harris et al., 2020).

3. Research Gap – A Need to Focus on Individuals

There is an extensive body of research on individual and organizational outcomes. Prior studies have predominantly focused on either (1) the characteristics and behaviors of newcomers or (2) the actions undertaken by organizations and their members to facilitate adjustment (Bauer, Erdogan, Ellis, Truxillo, Brady, & McCarthy, 2025).

Louis' (1980) research on sensemaking during organizational socialization examines the foundational processes through which newcomers navigate unfamiliar settings and provides a strong basis for further exploration. However, organizational life has changed significantly since its publication, highlighting the need for renewed empirical investigation.

Contemporary studies engage only marginally with sensemaking, often treating it as a variable affecting onboarding outcomes. Sensemaking is frequently operationalized as observable behaviors, such as information- and feedback-seeking (Harris et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2023). Sensemaking has been described as “a cycle of events that arise over the duration of time” (Lee, 2024, p. 528) and more narrowly as “cognitive processes involving information- and feedback-seeking” (Lee, 2024, p. 528). Defining sensemaking as information- and feedback-seeking behaviors risks overlooking newcomers' active role in constructing meaning. Sensemaking is more accurately understood as a process involving identity construction, social interaction, and cue extraction in interaction with the environment and organizational actors (Weick, 1995).

Most onboarding and socialization studies adopt a quantitative, positivist approach, less suited to capture lived experiences and sensemaking. Challenging the field's paradigmatic assumptions (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011) enables deeper understanding of newcomer socialization. An interpretative perspective enables closer insight into individual sensemaking and interpretations of organizational culture.

This study addresses the gap by examining newcomers' sensemaking during organizational socialization through an interpretative qualitative approach, focused on meaning construction in interaction with organizational actors and practices.

4. Theoretical Framework – Construction of Culture

This section outlines the theoretical framework that underpins the analysis. The framework draws on Kunda's (2006) notion of normative control, Weick's (1995) concept of sensemaking, and Maitlis' (2005) four forms of organizational sensemaking.

4.1 Normative Control

Kunda's (2006) ethnographic study of a high-tech corporation examines how organizational culture generates control and commitment. His study provides insight into how culture can function as a form of normative control, shaping employees' identities and commitment, defined as "the attempt to elicit and direct the required efforts of members by controlling the underlying experiences, thought, and feelings that guide their actions" (Kunda, 2006, p. 11). Through normative control, organizational members are driven by "internal commitment, strong identification with company goals, intrinsic satisfaction from work" (Kunda, 2006, p. 11). Figure 3 displays the adapted framework used in this study. In this context, normative control can be understood as shaping the conditions under which sensemaking occurs, influencing which interpretations, identities, and meanings are perceived as legitimate within the organization.

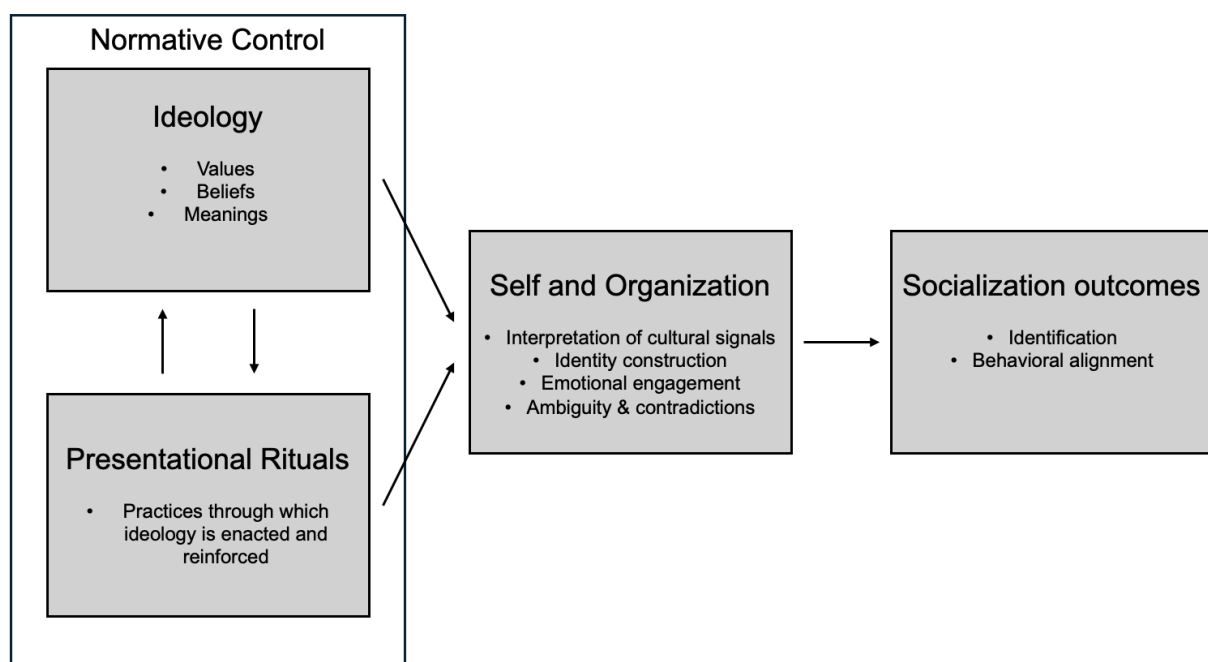


Figure 3: Normative control framework, adapted from Kunda (2006)

4.1.1 Ideology

At the core of normative control lies the ideology. Kunda (2006) conceptualizes ideology as a system of meaning through which organizations define and communicate a particular version of reality. To illustrate this, he formulates the following guiding questions:

What is the 'company perspective' on ... culture? What forms does it take? Who are its spokespersons? What kinds of authority do they claim? What versions of social reality do they offer? What kinds of member roles do they depict? What normative demands do they embody? How are the various ideological forms related? What general matrix of meaning do they combine to create? (Kunda, 2006, p. 52).

The concept of ideology presented in these questions illustrates how an organization articulates their core values, beliefs, and assumptions about work, employees, and appropriate conduct. Ideology thus provides a framework through which members understand what constitutes appropriate behavior, legitimate ways of thinking, and desirable modes of action. By promoting a shared language and common understanding, organizations shape how employees perceive both their roles and organizational reality. Rather than relying on formal rules or direct supervision, ideology operates by encouraging employees to internalize organizational values and align their identities and actions accordingly. In this way, control is exercised indirectly, as employees regulate themselves in accordance with the meanings and expectations embedded in the organizational ideology (Kunda, 2006).

4.1.2 Presentational Rituals

Rituals are “a rule-governed activity of a symbolic character which draws the attention of participants to objects of thought and feeling which they hold to be of special significance” (Lukes, 1975, as cited in Kunda, 2006, p. 92). It is through presentational rituals that organizational ideology is transmitted, functioning as a key mechanism for normative control. Rituals include training sessions, meetings, and other structured interactions in which ideology is enacted through experiential practices. Through rituals, organizations can influence how social reality is perceived, interpreted, and understood (Kunda, 2006).

4.1.3 Self and Organization

Ideology and presentational rituals introduce and enact the organization's culture and values, shaping how members come to understand both the organization and their place within it. They present "member roles" that define what it means to be an appropriate organizational participant. Members must position themselves in relation to these roles and the meanings they embody. The social-construction of the "organizational self" whereby individuals develop a sense of self within the framework of organizational ideology, is closely linked to how members construct their identities within the organization (Kunda, 2006).

Through self-definition, an ongoing process of positioning oneself in relation to organizational expectations, and one's own identities and experiences, members' responses are formed. Responses might include distancing from the organizational ideology, internalizing its values, or identifying with the prescribed member role. Notably, these processes can coexist, and members can display commitment and skepticism simultaneously (Kunda, 2006).

4.2 Seven Properties of Sensemaking

At the core of the theoretical framework guiding this study is the concept of sensemaking, as introduced in the literature review. Weick (1995) defines seven properties of sensemaking: *grounded in identity construction; retrospective; enactive of sensible environments; social; ongoing; focused on and by extracted cues; and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy*. Table 1 provides a summary of these properties, their underlying mechanisms, and their core characteristics.

<i>Property</i>	<i>Core Idea</i>	<i>Key Mechanism</i>
Grounded in Identity Construction	Sensemaking is grounded in the self, where individuals interpret situations based on who they believe they are and how they are perceived by others (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Identity is continuously shaped and reshaped through interaction, especially when it is threatened or destabilized (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014).	Self-concept guides interpretation and is maintained through interaction.
Retrospective	Sensemaking is inherently retrospective, as individuals interpret present situations by looking back at past experiences and noticing patterns (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). This process helps reduce equivocality by linking current events to prior knowledge and interpretations (Weick, 1995).	Reconstruction of past experiences to interpret present situations.
Enactive of Sensible Environments	Individuals actively create their environments while simultaneously being shaped by those environments (Weick, 1995). Sensemaking thus involves a dynamic interplay between action and cognition, where people both influence and are influenced by their surroundings (Weick, 1995).	Mutual constitution of action and environment.
Social	Sensemaking is fundamentally social, as meanings are constructed through interaction with others (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Through these interactions, individuals negotiate shared understandings and construct accounts that enable coordinated action (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Maitlis, 2005).	Meaning constructed and negotiated through interaction.
Ongoing	Sensemaking is a continuous process without a clear beginning or end, unfolding in an ongoing flow of experience (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Interruptions or unexpected events trigger heightened attention and reflection, prompting individuals to make sense of situations (Weick, 1993).	Continuous flow interrupted by events triggering sensemaking.
Extracted Cues	Sensemaking is focused on and shaped by extracted cues, which are selected signals from the environment that individuals use to construct meaning (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). What is noticed and how it is interpreted is context-dependent and influenced by prior experiences and power dynamics (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005).	Selective attention and bracketing of cues.
Plausibility Rather than Accuracy	Because of equivocality, sensemaking prioritizes plausibility over objective accuracy, as individuals construct coherent and reasonable accounts that allow for action in ambiguous situations (Weick, 1995). These accounts are shaped by available cues and past experiences rather than a need for precise correctness.	Construction of plausible and coherent accounts.

Table 1: Overview of the seven properties of sensemaking

4.3 Maitlis' Four Forms of Organizational Sensemaking

Maitlis (2005) identifies four forms of organizational sensemaking: *guided*, *restricted*, *fragmented*, and *minimal* organizational sensemaking. These forms depend on how meaning is shaped through interaction between leaders and stakeholders, particularly through communication and interpretation of cues. While Maitlis (2005) conceptualizes this process as

sensegiving, the present study interprets it through Weick's (1995) perspective on cues, interaction, and meaning construction.

Maitlis (2005) further identifies process characteristics related to animation and control, which vary across the different forms. Animation refers to stakeholder engagement and active participation in communication and interpretation processes, characterized by high and intense flows of information between stakeholders and leaders. Figure 4 gives an overview of the framework.

Leader Sensegiving	High Sensegiving	<i>Guided Organizational Sensemaking</i> Process Characteristics • High animation • High control Outcomes • Unitary, rich account • Emergent series of consistent actions	<i>Restricted Organizational Sensemaking</i> Process Characteristics • Low animation • High control Outcomes • Unitary, narrow account • One-time action or planned set of consistent actions
	Low Sensegiving	<i>Fragmented Organizational Sensemaking</i> Process Characteristics • High animation • Low control Outcomes • Multiple, narrow accounts • Emergent series of inconsistent actions	<i>Minimal Organizational Sensemaking</i> Process Characteristics • Low animation • Low control Outcomes • Nominal account • One-time, compromise action
		High Sensegiving	Low Sensegiving
Stakeholder Sensegiving			

Figure 4: Four forms of organizational sensemaking (Maitlis, 2005)

4.3.1 Guided Organizational Sensemaking

This form involves high levels of engagement from both leaders and other stakeholders. Both animation and control are high: processes and opportunities for information sharing are structured and controlled by leaders, while allowing for high levels of deliberation and stakeholder involvement in decision-making. The outcomes of guided organizational sensemaking are rich, unitary accounts, leading to an emergent series of actions that is internally consistent (Maitlis, 2005).

4.3.2 Fragmented Organizational Sensemaking

This form involves high levels of stakeholder engagement but low levels of leader involvement. Leaders assume a background role, often refraining from voicing their own perspectives or directing the process. Animation remains high due to extensive stakeholder participation, while control is low. Fragmented forms produce multiple, narrow accounts, in which several interpretations coexist without coalescing (Maitlis, 2005).

4.3.3 Restricted Organizational Sensemaking

This form is characterized by high levels of leader control and low levels of animation and stakeholder engagement. Restricted sensemaking generates distinct, unitary accounts, with a single, dominant interpretation, namely that of the leader. The outcomes of these are one-time responses or planned and consistent actions. Due to the low levels of animation and almost minimal stakeholder involvement, this form of sensemaking produces highly specific foundations for action (Maitlis, 2005).

4.3.4 Minimal Organizational Sensemaking

This form is characterized by low levels of both animation and control, as leader and stakeholder engagement is nominal. Actors wait and observe how others interpret the situation, with limited discussion or active sensegiving. Minimal sensemaking often unfolds over time and produces nominal accounts resulting in one-time compromise actions, producing temporary relief (Maitlis, 2005).

4.4 Synthesis of Theoretical Framework

Taken together, the theoretical framework provides a multi-level perspective on sensemaking in organizational contexts. Normative control (Kunda, 2006) highlights how organizational culture and ideology influence the meanings, identities, and interpretations that are available and considered legitimate. The seven properties of sensemaking conceptualize how individuals construct meaning through ongoing, socially embedded processes (Weick, 1995). Finally, Maitlis' (2005) framework extends this perspective by demonstrating how variations in interaction between leaders and stakeholders shape the emergence of interpretations, determining whether they become shared, fragmented, or constrained. This enables an analysis

of whether interpretations emerge collectively, remain contested, are shaped primarily by leadership, or result in weak and temporary understandings. Figure 5 presents the integrated framework applied in this study. The integrated framework guides the analysis by examining how normative control is mediated by newcomers' sensemaking activities, and how it influences the internalization of organizational ideology and presentational rituals.

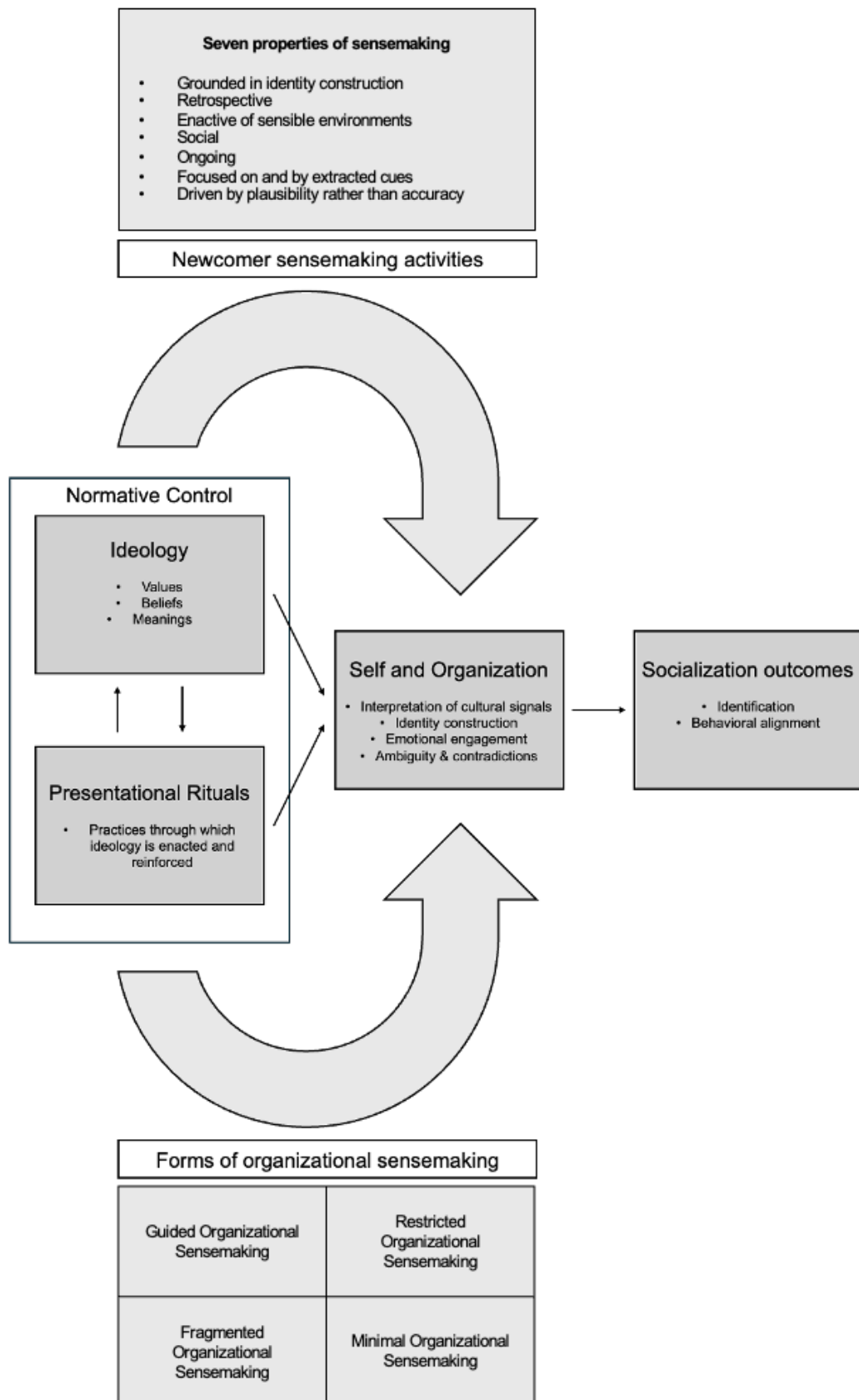


Figure 5: Synthesized Framework of Newcomer Organizational Socialization

5. Methodology

This section presents the adopted research methodology across four subsections: (1) Research Approach, (2) Research Design, (3) Research Method, and (4) Quality Criteria.

5.1 Research Approach

The study adopts an abductive approach to reasoning, characterized by a continuous movement and iterative interplay between empirical observations and theoretical concepts (Bell et al., 2022; Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013; Van Maanen et al., 2007). Abduction can be understood as “an inference to explanation” (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013, p. 72), referring to a cognitive process central to theorizing (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013). This abductive approach enables the study to iteratively refine theoretical insights in relation to newcomers’ sensemaking processes as they emerge from the empirical material.

In line with the intent of the study, it adopts an exploratory purpose and a qualitative approach was employed, enabling the exploration of the social world from the individual’s perspective (Bell et al., 2022). Considering that the research problematizes underlying paradigmatic assumptions, the topic is regarded to be of a nascent nature. Consequently, a qualitative approach is appropriate and the methodological fit is deemed suitable (Edmondson & McManus, 2007).

Given the nature of sensemaking as “grounded in both individual and social activity” (Weick, 1995, p. 6), the ontology underlying this study is rooted in social constructionism, which views the social world as constructed by individual actors and groups (Bell et al., 2022). Furthermore, the epistemological stance is that of interpretivism, attempting to develop understanding and comprehension of subjective meanings (Cuthbertson et al., 2020).

Subsequently, the study is situated within an interpretative paradigm, placing human interactions and experiences at the center and seeking to understand the inner workings of organizational life (Bell et al., 2022; Saunders, 2019). Within this paradigm, research aims to “understand and explain the social world primarily from the point of view of the actors directly involved in the social process” (Burrell & Morgan, 1985, p. 227), and to capture the subjective experiences of individuals (Burrell & Morgan, 1985). This aligns with the objectives of the

present study. The study adopts a phenomenological symbolic interactionist perspective, focusing on the “social context in which interacting individuals employ a variety of practices to create and sustain particular definition of the world” (Burrell & Morgan, 1985, p. 271).

5.2 Research Design

To investigate the complex social phenomena of organizational culture and newcomer socialization, and taking into account the exploratory purpose of the study, a single-case study research design was deemed appropriate (Yin, 2014). A single-case study enables the development of in-depth, context-dependent knowledge, which is particularly valuable for theory development in social sciences (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Case studies are suitable for examining contemporary phenomena within a real-world context, where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not evident (Yin, 2014), which aligns with the aim of the study.

The study’s objective is to provide an in-depth elucidation of the cognitive process of newcomers’ sensemaking processes (Bell et al., 2022). The focal company (hereafter *Industra*), a large Swedish manufacturing organization, was selected due to its ongoing efforts to develop and anchor an organizational culture. Additionally, there was a willingness to engage with the topic of newcomer socialization. Organizational support is essential in case study research (Darke et al., 1998), as close cooperation facilitates access to rich empirical data. Consequently, *Industra* provides both a relevant empirical setting and access to in-depth insights (Dubois & Gadde, 2002).

Important to note is that the researchers were employed and integrated into a central team by the organization during the study. This position provided extensive access to the organization’s internal processes and key stakeholders involved in the phenomenon under investigation. Concurrently, this dual role necessitated continuous reflection on potential biases and its influence on data collection and interpretation.

5.3 Research Method

Consistent with the abductive approach, the study involved a continuous and iterative movement between data collection, analysis, and theoretical development. Figure 6 gives an overview of the research process.

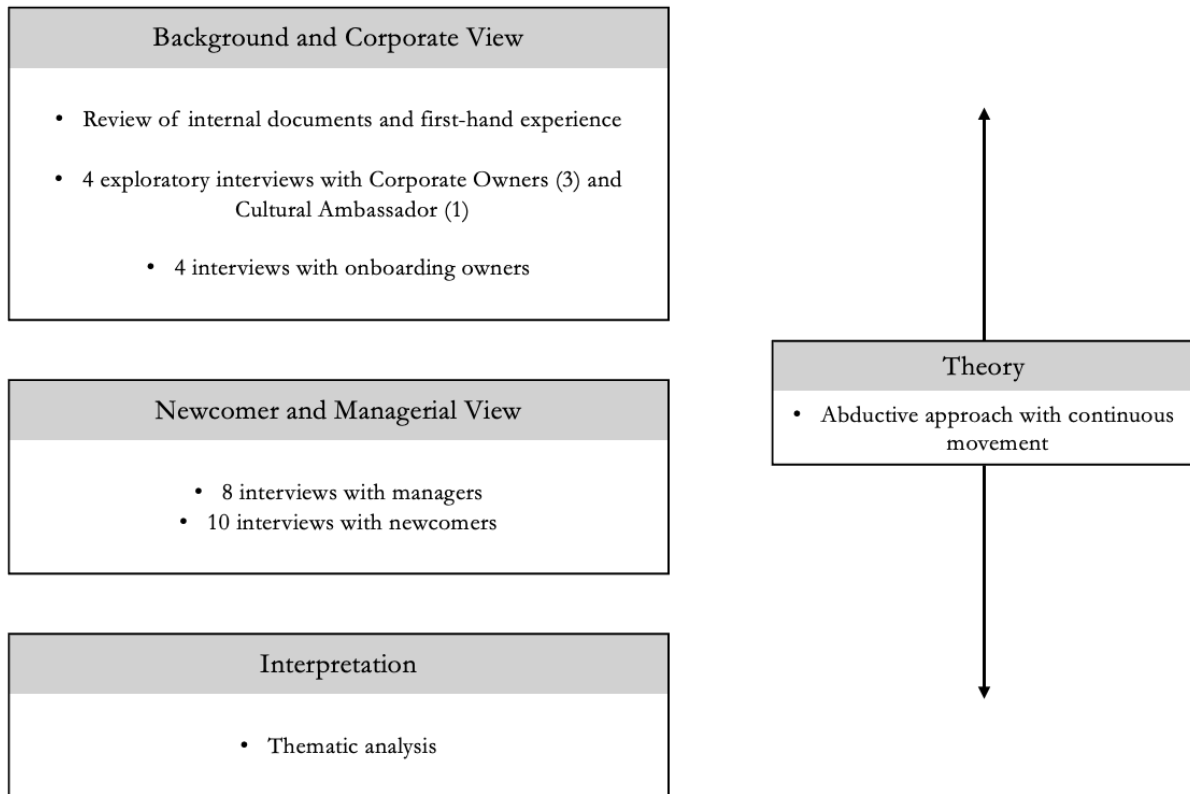


Figure 6: Outline of the research process

5.3.1 Data Collection

Data were collected through a multi-method approach (Saunders, 2019), primarily consisting of in-depth semi-structured interviews. Complementing this, observational data through participant-as-observer and observer-as-participant roles, and documentary data were also collected (Bell et al., 2022; Gold, 1958; Saunders, 2019).

Interviews

Primary data were collected through individual interviews. Interviews are suitable for exploring interpretation, negotiation, and meaning construction, and enabled access to participants' reflections, experiences, and interpretations (Bell et al., 2022).

Interview sample

A purposive sampling strategy was adopted, as participants required experience and insight into onboarding processes, organizational culture, and newcomer integration (Bell et al., 2022). This sampling strategy enabled comparison between Industria's ideology, ritualistic practices across hierarchical levels, and how these are interpreted in practice by different organizational actors (see Table 2 for an overview of interviews). Participants from two departments were interviewed: Department A (representing an engineering context) and Department B (representing a business context).

The first phase of data collection focused on actors with formal responsibility for organizational culture and onboarding processes. This included the corporate culture function, the corporate culture network, and HR professionals working with onboarding. Participants were selected based on their roles in defining, articulating, and translating organizational culture. Together, these perspectives provide insight into the espoused and intended aspects of onboarding and culture, specifically how values, principles, and cultural practices are formally conceptualized and communicated.

The second phase focused on newcomers and hiring managers, examining how onboarding and organizational culture are experienced, enacted, and interpreted in practice. Newcomers were defined as having less than one year of organizational tenure, consistent with previous research on socialization (Bauer, Erdogan, Ellis, Truxillo, Brady, & Bodner, 2025). Hiring managers were identified based on similar criteria, having recruited a newcomer within the past year. Lists of recently hired employees within the two departments were used to identify relevant participants. To the extent possible, newcomers were paired with their respective managers to enable comparison between managerial and newcomer interpretations.

Data collection proceeded iteratively, consistent with the abductive approach, with no predetermined limit on the number of interviews. Interviews continued until recurring patterns and themes relating to onboarding, culture, and sensemaking emerged, indicating thematic saturation; that is, additional interviews yielded only limited new insights (Bell et al., 2022).

Interviewee	Role	Function	Department	Duration	Type	Date
1	Corporate	CO	–	81 min	In-person	2026-02-11
2	Corporate	CO	–	56 min	In-person	2026-02-12
3	Corporate	Onboarding	B	58 min	In-person	2026-02-23
4	Corporate	CA	B	54 min	Digital	2026-02-26
5	Corporate	CO	–	62 min	In-person	2026-03-10
6	Corporate	Onboarding	–	59 min	In-person	2026-03-11
7	Newcomer	–	A	58 min	Digital	2026-03-13
8	Newcomer	–	A	56 min	In-person	2026-03-16
9	Manager	–	A	55 min	In-person	2026-03-16
10	Newcomer	–	A	54 min	In-person	2026-03-17
11	Manager	–	A	50 min	In-person	2026-03-17
12	Newcomer	–	A	56 min	In-person	2026-03-17
13	Newcomer	–	A	59 min	Digital	2026-03-19
14	Manager	–	A	58 min	Digital	2026-03-20
15	Manager	–	A	55 min	Digital	2026-03-24
16	Manager	–	A	55 min	In-person	2026-03-25
17	Manager	–	A	57 min	In-person	2026-03-26
18	Corporate	Onboarding	–	51 min	In-person	2026-03-26
19	Manager	–	A	61 min	In-person	2026-03-27
20	Newcomer	–	B	52 min	Digital	2026-04-01
21	Newcomer	–	B	59 min	Digital	2026-04-01
22	Corporate	Onboarding	–	59 min	Digital	2026-04-02
23	Newcomer	–	B	53 min	In-person	2026-04-09
24	Newcomer	–	B	38 min	Digital	2026-04-10
25	Newcomer	–	B	28 min	Digital	2026-04-10
26	Manager	–	B	38 min	Digital	2026-04-17

Table 2: Overview of interviews. N.B. Cultural Ambassador (CA), Corporate Owner (CO)

Interview Design

The interview design was informed by previous research, particularly literature concerning socialization tactics, newcomer behavior, insider actions, and onboarding processes (e.g., Bauer, Erdogan, Ellis, Truxillo, Brady, & Bodner, 2025; Klein et al., 2015; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Interviews followed a semi-structured approach and when possible conducted face-to-face, to enable interaction and observation of non-verbal cues (Bell et al., 2022). Flexibility was maintained due to participant availability, with 15 interviews conducted in person and 11 via video calls using Microsoft Teams.

Interview guides were adapted to each role and iteratively refined to incorporate emerging themes, tensions, and ambiguities identified in earlier interviews, consistent with an abductive approach (see Appendices A–D for an overview of the guides). This enabled probing within predefined topics while maintaining the flexibility to pursue follow-up questions related to ambiguities, contradictions, and significant experiences (Bell et al., 2022). Questions were designed to capture participants' interpretations and retrospective constructions, consistent with the sensemaking perspective (Weick, 1995).

Interviews followed a similar structure independent of roles, beginning with introductory questions about role, background, and tenure, followed by general questions on onboarding. Questions regarding organizational culture were introduced later in the interviews. This approach intended to allow participants' experiences and interpretations to emerge naturally before explicitly addressing cultural aspects. Further, it aimed to minimize the priming of participants toward culture-focused responses and to explore the extent cultural considerations were spontaneously linked to onboarding and everyday experience. Correspondingly, the study was initially presented as focusing primarily on onboarding rather than organizational culture to newcomers and hiring managers.

Participants were informed of the study's purpose, assured of anonymity, and asked to provide consent for audio recording and data handling in accordance with ethical guidelines (Bell et al., 2022). To support participant comfort and narrative richness interviews were conducted either in Swedish or English, depending on participant preference. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed using Microsoft Teams, then manually reviewed to ensure accuracy.

Alternative Data

Complementary to interviews, ethnographically inspired observational data were collected during four months of immersion, contributing to a deeper understanding of the practical enactment of organizational culture. The participant role provided broad access to physical and digital spaces. These fieldwork-methods enabled access to both articulated understandings and the ways culture is manifested through interactions, language, rituals, artifacts, and everyday organizational practices. The project was sponsored by a senior executive, facilitating legitimacy and access to multiple organizational functions and settings.

Participation level varied depending on context. Within the host department, the role was primarily participant-as-observer, allowing active engagement in everyday organizational activities and interactions. In broader settings (e.g., corporate and local onboarding events, and meetings), an observer-as-participant role was adopted (Gold, 1958).

Observational material included participation in corporate onboarding activities, departmental onboarding events, digital learning activities, and everyday team interactions. The researchers experienced onboarding activities, including digital trainings and integration into a team environment. Additional observations concerned physical cultural artifacts in office spaces, the use of organizational language and symbolic references, and interactions related to the enactment of the Industria Philosophy. Observational data was documented through jotted fieldnotes (Bell et al., 2022), focusing on interactions, language use, symbolic artifacts, and cultural manifestations.

Documentary data were collected (Bell et al., 2022), including onboarding plans and cultural material. This third source of data was included to contextualize how culture is formally communicated and to capture the organization's perspective.

This multi-method approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of how newcomers construct meaning, enabling a richer account of how organizational culture is enacted. The purpose of observational and documentary material was to support, contextualize, and contrast interview-based accounts through methodological triangulation.

5.3.2 Data Analysis

Gathered data were analyzed using a thematic approach, involving the aggregation of data into recurring themes (Bell et al., 2022; Braun & Clarke, 2006), guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process:

1. Familiarization with data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing report

The analysis began with transcript immersion through repeated reading, generating an initial understanding of the material. The transcripts were re-read and open-coded using a data-driven approach grounded in the empirical material. Codes were continuously analyzed in relation to the theoretical framework, enabling iterative refinement toward more theory-informed coding, reflecting the abductive approach with continuous movement between data and theory. Candidate themes and codes were reviewed and refined in accordance with the fourth step of Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach. This stage involved revisiting and recoding the data once the thematic mapping had been established. Subsequently, codes were grouped into relevant sub-themes and overarching themes that aligned with the sensemaking framework (see Appendix E & F for an overview of identified themes and Appendix G for an example of coding).

5.4 Quality Criteria

Given the interpretative and qualitative nature of the study, research quality was evaluated using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) concept of trustworthiness, encompassing credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

5.4.1 Trustworthiness

Credibility concerns the extent to which findings reflect participants' experiences and interpretations of the studied phenomenon (Bell et al., 2022; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility

was strengthened through prolonged engagement within the organization, enabling contextual familiarity with onboarding practices, organizational language, and cultural enactment. Additionally, data triangulation was employed through interviews with multiple stakeholder groups, including newcomers, managers, HR professionals, and corporate culture actors. This allowed interpretations to be compared across organizational levels and perspectives. Methodological triangulation was further supported through the use of interviews, observations, and organizational documents (Bell et al., 2022).

Transferability refers to the extent to which findings can be applied to other contexts (Bell et al., 2022; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Given the case study design, the aim is not generalizability, but rather analytical and contextual understanding. To support transferability, detailed descriptions of the organizational context, along with culture and onboarding practices within the case company have been provided, enabling readers to assess the applicability of findings to other organizational contexts (Bell et al., 2022).

Dependability refers to the consistency and traceability of the research process (Bell et al., 2022; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To strengthen dependability, detailed records were maintained throughout all stages of the study in a structured and accessible manner (Bell et al., 2022). These records span data collection and analysis, including interview development, coding procedures, analytical discussions, and iterative revisions of themes and interpretations. Supporting material has been included in the appendix to enhance transparency and allow external scrutiny of the research process.

Confirmability concerns the extent to which the findings are grounded in empirical material rather than shaped by researcher bias or theoretical preconceptions (Bell et al., 2022; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The embedded role within the organization made reflexivity an important consideration. Interpretations and emerging themes were continuously discussed between the authors, with company supervisors, and the academic supervisor at the Stockholm School of Economics. This helped challenge assumptions, compare interpretations, and ensure that conclusions remained grounded in the empirical material rather than organizational familiarity or preconceptions.

5.4.2 Ethics

Ethical considerations were addressed throughout the study. The main objective was to preserve the anonymity of interview participants and informants. Accordingly, identifiers such as roles, organizational tenure, and departments were masked. All participants were informed of their rights in accordance with data protection laws (Bell et al., 2022). One ethical consideration occurred during the onboarding events where an observer-as-participant role was taken. In these occasions, no personal data was collected, and the focus was instead on the lecture content. The presenters were aware of being observed and consented to participate in the study.

6. Empirical Analysis – Cultural Dissemination

This section presents the empirical analysis of the study. Drawing on Kunda's (2006) framework of normative control, it first examines how organizational ideology and presentational rituals at Industra articulate and disseminate organizational culture. Thereafter, Maitlis' (2005) organizational forms of sensemaking are used to analyze the environments these rituals create in relation to leader control and stakeholder animation. Finally, Weick's (1995) perspective on sensemaking guides the analysis of how newcomers interpret and construct understandings of organizational culture based on the cues, interactions, and conditions available to them.

6.1 Ideology – The Context and Organizational Beliefs

The ideology at Industra is grounded in the Industra Philosophy, consisting of the House, the Thinking Model, and the Leadership Model. Articulated primarily through executive and corporate perspectives, the ideology provides a framework through which newcomers are expected to interpret organizational values, behaviors, and membership within the organization.

6.1.1 Executive Perspective

CEO Talk

Through a video, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) presents the Industra Philosophy as mandatory for all organizational members, while acknowledging that enactment varies across local contexts and functions. Departments are not viewed as isolated silos, but as interconnected parts of a larger organizational flow, where the ideology facilitates cross-functional interaction at inter-departmental touchpoints.

First of all, there is no option. Everyone has to. I would not allow a CEO to say, okay, you can choose whether or not to work with this. You have to. But then the work we do as individuals is very different in different parts of the company. But that said, we're all part of the flow... And there we have to and can work according to the basic thoughts of the House.

Employees are expected to understand their role in value creation and continuously identify improvements through systematic work practices. External and internal factors are in a state of

flux, creating ambiguity and uncertainty, necessitating a structured approach to problem solving, experimentation, and employee initiatives. Simultaneously, problem reduction and continuous improvements are not fast-paced activities, accentuating the need for grit, determination, and openly acknowledging deviations. Leaders are crucial in disseminating the ideology throughout the organization by acting as proponents and transferring it to followers.

Ideological Symbolic Artifacts

The presence of physical artifacts conveying the organizational ideology varies across departments and offices. While the perceived presence of ideology through artifacts among organizational members is generally high, this is not consistent across all settings. Walking through three office buildings at Department A, the absence of such artifacts in certain areas becomes readily apparent. Isolated instances of posters, sculptures, and other displays can be found. In several cases, the materials reflected outdated versions of the models or were placed in low visibility places. In contrast, Department B displayed a high concentration of ideological artifacts. Posters promoting slogans and core values, as well as prominent representations of the Industra house and other physical artifacts constantly reminding employees of the ideology.

6.1.2 Corporate Perspective

The corporate function is responsible for reinterpreting and updating the ideology as the environment and organization evolves. It transmits this throughout the organization through three main avenues, publications, corporate talk, and cultural ambassadors in a network of experts.

Publications

The primary means of articulating the organizational ideology is through publications that delineate various cultural representations, including key models and components. The primary publication is a booklet describing in detail the elements of the Industra Philosophy. The culture is linked to core values and stakeholders, emphasizing a collaborative and value creating ideology. The Industra House is substantiated by three levels, the foundation is made up of the core values, above which the leadership model is situated, and in the uppermost part the guiding principles. The different parts of the House and its concepts are explained in the booklet (see Figure 7).

Principles				
Normal Situation	Demand Driven	Right From Me	Continuous Improvement	
<i>[E]stablishes how things are done ... A well-defined normal situation describes all important aspects of our processes and their interdependences. To ensure consistent output, the methods that are used must be described in enough detail...</i>	<i>Our demand starts with the end customer and is traced back to all Industra's functional areas... The most important flows are those that add value to the customer... you are always a receiver as well as a sender in these flows.</i>	<i>We do not accept deviations from another process, we do not hand over a deviation to our customer, and most importantly, we ensure that our own process does not cause deviations...</i>	<i>Continuous improvement is a mindset deeply embedded in our company culture. Symbolically placed on the top of the Industra House, it is the ultimate purpose of the Industra Philosophy.</i>	

Leadership		
Own Today, Shape Tomorrow	Dare to Try, Manage the Risk	Start with Trust, Build Together
<i>Leaders are held accountable and responsible for the day-to-day results ... every leader is responsible for striking a balance between short-term and long-term perspectives."</i>	<i>"As leaders, we are responsible for striking a balance between innovation and consequences... If we stand still, we become irrelevant. If we change blindly, we lose our way.</i>	<i>Trust is the foundation of any efficient team and is formed between individuals and between teams... To build together, we need to have mutual trust and a shared sense of achievement...</i>

Core Values				
Customer First	Respect	Team Spirit	Responsibility	Elimination of Waste
<i>We are only successful when our customers are successful... If we are uncertain of what the customer values, we adopt an exploratory approach until we have certainty.</i>	<i>We listen and understand. From [consumers] to all our employees, the individual stands at the center of all that we do... Differences in knowledge, perspective, and experience are essential for every aspect of the Industra Philosophy.</i>	<i>[A]ll the way from our local team up to our entire group. A shared sense of direction brings collective strength and purpose.</i>	<i>We recognize that we have a responsibility towards society and the environment and always strive to do the right things in the right way... We always keep our promises and are accountable for what we do.</i>	<i>With... continuous improvements throughout our entire organisation, we ensure safe and high-quality output in all areas. Deviations from targets and standards help us to identify and eliminate waste...</i>

Figure 7: Presentation of cultural aspects in the House from the booklet published by the corporate office

Corporate Talk

The corporate office argues for what they see as a federalistic ideology with methods and results being locally adapted and adopted. Through this, the corporate office wants to convey a culture of bottom-up thinking, where the knowledge and experience of lower hierarchical levels influence methods and ways of working.

There are really two main ways to apply such a system... it can be a centralistic or federalistic, and we have chosen to be federalistic... we try to find balance between keeping together a central idea about this is our way of working, while at the same time enough freedom to be able to adapt to the local context (Cultural Owner 1).

Corporate functions portray a culture of shared responsibility, where everyone, from the CEO, down to middle managers and employees are responsible for improvements. Ideology acts as a common language, bridging differences.

In an organization, organizational subcultures also emerge, based on the nature of one's assignment and what is considered right and self-evident within that assignment... And this is where the Industria Philosophy comes in. We must have a common language, but we must allow for dialects depending on the context (Cultural Owner 1).

Through a common language, top-down control can still be influenced, as a system of operating, dictating appropriate behavior, “we call it culture less and less, we used to call it that, but now we call it operational strategy or operations management models” (Corporate Owner 2). Culture, or management models, are utilized to exert control top-down, influencing decision making and steering how employees should act. Through the ideology, top management creates an internalization of disciplinary control systems, creating a system of normative control.

Cultural Ambassador Network as Experts

Cultural ambassadors located throughout organizational departments function as experts responsible for adapting and implementing the ideology to local contexts, and teaching managers and employees. Their role is described by HR as a supporting role to both the corporate office, as an extension and operational arm, and managers to “spread tools, develop tools, inspire, participate and help practically” (Onboarding 3).

Bottom-up influence is seen as something that can generate positive outcomes for Industria, and the uniqueness of the culture is dependent on the people in the organization. Bottom-up influence is challenged by goal setting and targets that are set top-down, hampering organic improvements. This duality increases equivocality of the cultural message, a balance between an overarching cultural framework into a system of control and operation. Portraying the culture as a control system highlights the underlying mechanisms of normative control (Kunda, 2006).

We don't really know which leg to stand on. Because we want to be performance driven and have goals. But goals are rarely like... the challenge we have is that we need to have that at the same time as we have the Industria Philosophy and the desire that the company constantly remain strong and improve organically from the bottom up (Cultural Ambassador 4).

6.2 Presentational Rituals – Making Culture Explicit

Presentational rituals are one of the primary mechanisms through which ideology becomes visible and interpretable to newcomers. Industria's presentational rituals are intended to facilitate newcomers' understanding of both organizational culture and the Industria Philosophy, providing a framework through which they can interpret their work, role, and broader context, in line with Kunda (2006). Across interviews, organizational actors describe the Industria Philosophy as a guiding framework, or cultural map intended to support newcomer orientation and integration into the organization. As one corporate respondent explains, "It [Industria Philosophy] should be an introduction for new colleagues so they can quickly get into how we work and how we think" (Cultural Office 1).

While the Industria Philosophy is presented as a coherent organizational framework, the rituals through which it is communicated vary considerably across organizational levels and contexts. Culture is presented to newcomers across a variety of organizational touchpoints. These include centrally controlled onboarding activities, local onboarding practices, and team interactions. Together these touchpoints constitute a layered sensemaking environment through which newcomers encounter, interpret, and enact the Industria Philosophy. The differences in presentations have implications on the extent to which they allow newcomers to collectively interpret, negotiate and connect the ideology to everyday work practices.

6.2.1 Centralized Explicit Messaging

Centrally, culture is communicated through structured and explicit forms of messaging. These touchpoints are intended to introduce newcomers to the Industra Philosophy and generally include high levels of leadership control, but low levels of animation (Maitlis, 2005), positioning newcomers primarily as receivers rather than co-constructors of meaning.

Pre-boarding and Digital Trainings

The introduction to the Industra Philosophy begins before newcomers formally enter the organization, receiving pre-boarding materials upon signing their contracts.

We have material that all new hires receive even before they have started...you are introduced to the basic concepts, and you get the symbols, the house, thinking model and leadership principles, so you're at least familiar (Cultural Office 1).

Through pre-boarding, the organization attempts to establish an early familiarity with the core principles of the Industra Philosophy. The material is framed as a central mechanism through which newcomers learn how employees are expected to think and contribute. Pre-boarding provides newcomers with coherent and explicit cues intended to reduce ambiguity prior to organizational entry (Weick, 1995). This material reinforces the significance of the ideology. In a video message, the CEO links it to the organization's adaptability and long-term success, "[W]e have always been very good at handling change. And I think one reason for that is our fundament with values and principles that guide us in the way we're thinking" (CEO).

Simultaneously, the ritual remains largely symbolic and abstract. Pre-boarding introduces newcomers to the cultural vocabulary and ideological framing, but opportunities for interaction and connection to everyday work practices are limited. Upon organizational entry, digital training modules on the Industra Philosophy become available, consisting of a one-hour introduction course of videos, written material, and quizzes. The ritual further reinforces knowledge and applicability of the Industra Philosophy. "The Industra Philosophy – valid for all parts of the company, with no exceptions. We share the same fundamental mindset and principles" (Excerpt from digital training).

Collectively, pre-boarding and digital materials reinforce the coherent and standardized ideological presentation of the Industra Philosophy. However, while sensemaking is a

fundamentally social process (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005), these rituals occur in a social vacuum where only the newcomer exists. This isolated and non-interactive nature constrains stakeholder involvement and limits opportunities to collectively interpret or enact the ideology in relation to situated work practices. From Maitlis' (2005) perspective, these rituals therefore resemble more restricted forms of organizational sensemaking, where ideological control is high, but socially embedded meaning construction remains limited.

Onboarding Day

The formal onboarding day constitutes one of Industra's most explicit presentational rituals in which its values, principles, and priorities are introduced to newcomers across the whole organization. The ritual follows a structured itinerary consisting of presentations and visits to the Industra museum and factory. The Industra Philosophy occupies a central position in the agenda, with an 80-minute formal presentation by representatives from the culture office and network.

Although the onboarding day includes interactive elements such as breakout discussions, participation during the observed session was limited and generally characterized by pauses, hesitancy, and limited engagement. Notably, the presenter described the session as comparatively active relative to typical sessions. The ritual therefore appears to combine high levels of leader control with relatively low newcomer animation, where attendees are mainly receivers rather than actively participating in the enactment of meaning (Maitlis, 2005). Thus, despite producing coherent, explicit and ideologically grounded cultural messages, the onboarding day appeared relatively abstract and detached from localized work practices.

It was pretty theoretical. Particularly the onboarding day. But there was discussion, they put forth some arguments for it, and one could ask questions, or counter arguments (Newcomer 24).

The emerging sensemaking process thus appears restricted, resulting in a narrow account of the Industra Philosophy. The onboarding day produces a coherent and unitary symbolic recognition of the ideology but does not necessarily equip newcomers with the ability to convert theoretical knowledge into situated work practices. A restricted sensemaking process limits newcomers'

ability to engage in improvisation or extension of their Industra Philosophy understanding (Maitlis, 2005).

6.2.2 Local Translation and Adaptation

Local Training

Due to Industra's federalist system, local business units are afforded considerable autonomy in how onboarding and cultural introduction are enacted. Consequently, the visibility, explicitness, and practical translation of the Industra Philosophy begin to vary substantially across organizational contexts. Department B has an additional onboarding day designed to provide further information about the specific setting, including a two-hour segment with the purpose of contextualizing, translating the central message, and putting the Industra Philosophy into practice.

I give a number of organizational or common process problems and have them explain them with the Industra House. And surprisingly quickly, they start to think with the help of the Industra House (Cultural Ambassador 4).

Instead of presenting the Industra Philosophy in theoretical terms, the ritual actively situates values, principles, and priorities within practical work-related situations. By collaboratively working through and interpreting organizational issues, newcomers are encouraged to translate ideological concepts into concrete organizational understandings and behaviors, thereby increasing the practical visibility and interpretability of cultural cues. Through this approach, newcomers are able to enact the ideology in a safe environment (Weick, 1995). Furthermore, this allows the ritual leader to build upon the theoretical accounts produced in the centralized messaging, effectively extending newcomers' understanding of the Industra Philosophy. The approach, which facilitates interaction, also increases animation among newcomers, and as a result, a rich and unitary practice-related understanding of the Industra Philosophy is more likely to emerge (Maitlis, 2005).

At Department A, a similar event takes place, introducing the context and the Industra Philosophy. The time afforded the ideology is constrained, at 8 minutes, and the intent is different, "[y]ou get to know that the Industra Philosophy exists, but the message is, if your manager doesn't cover this, ask for it, or come to me" (Cultural Ambassador holding the

presentation). This sensemaking opportunity does not extend the theoretical account produced in centralized messaging, instead approaching the Industria Philosophy from a higher level of abstraction. Leader control remains high while the opportunity for animation is limited. Thus, newcomers are left with sparse and underdeveloped cues, reproducing a restricted sensemaking process which does not resolve the ambiguities of the corporate account (Maitlis, 2005). Thus, the ideologically coherent account is reinforced, but newcomers receive limited opportunities to interpret or enact its practical relevance within the local work context.

6.2.3 Everyday Enactment

The Industria Philosophy is ultimately shaped in everyday interactions with organizational actors. At this stage, explicit rituals around the Industria Philosophy often diminish, with many managers only addressing the Industria Philosophy briefly or omitting it entirely from onboarding activities.

I try to talk about it in some way, but it's difficult to really dedicate that time to one-on-one, because this is something you should really talk about in a group, that's when you benefit from it (Manager 19).

Instead of being systematically and explicitly introduced through formal onboarding, the Industria Philosophy is expected to emerge through participation in everyday organizational life. In this sense, the team context becomes the primary environment for encountering and making sense of organizational culture. Enactment ranges from continuously articulated and explicit to tacit. Newcomers encounter varying sensemaking conditions depending on how the Industria Philosophy is articulated within their teams, ranging from guided, fragmented and minimal forms (Maitlis, 2005).

Yes, but every single day, every week... in different forums, in how we work, in our methods, but also how we set our principles, because we want to do things, how we want to create behavior towards each other, how we create clarity (Manager 26).

In these contexts, the Industria Philosophy becomes actively and explicitly embedded within meetings, collaborations, and discussions concerning everyday work. Leaders structure recurring discussion and collective reflection. Newcomers are both involved in, and exposed to, visible and explicit cultural cues that support the translation of the Industria Philosophy from

theory to practice through social interaction and enactment (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). As such, a more guided sensemaking process emerges under these conditions (Maitlis, 2005).

Often rituals are tacit. They are enacted in practice, though not articulated through language or formal reflection, “in some way I think we do it, we just don't use the house and maybe that's the problem... Because we are doing the house, we're just not using the picture of the house” (Manager 9). Such accounts suggest that the Industra Philosophy often remains embedded within organizational practices, despite not becoming explicitly articulated in onboarding and everyday organizational language. As a result, the ideology remains visible to organizational insiders through practice, while becoming less interpretively accessible to newcomers. Consequently, newcomers are expected to learn the Industra Philosophy through observation, participation, and interaction rather than explicit and collective negotiation of meaning (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Without leader involvement, the sensemaking process becomes fragmented or minimal, depending on the involvement of other organizational actors around the newcomer (Maitlis, 2005). With lower visibility and clarity of cues, this places a larger emphasis on newcomers' ability to effectively make sense of such tacit environments.

Sporadic workshops, offsites, or reflections explicate the Industra Philosophy in contexts of tacit enactment; however, these are not intended as a mechanism for newcomer socialization, “we don't really take that time when we onboard... but we do our yearly cycle and talk about it once a year... I don't think we take the time because we take it for granted” (Manager 16). Episodic rituals function as moments where tacit cultural knowledge is temporarily made explicit through collective reflection and symbolic reinforcement. In such settings, sensemaking temporarily takes the form of guided interactions, increasing the animation and clarity of ideological cues (Maitlis, 2005; Weick, 1995).

6.3 Self and Organization – Culture and the Individual

Managers' and newcomers' self-identification with the company culture varies depending on departmental practices and contexts. As newcomers encounter and enact the Industra Philosophy under different organizational sensemaking conditions, they construct differing understandings of what the culture means in practice and how they position themselves in relation to it. The forms of organizational sensemaking have a large impact on cultural internalization and identification.

6.3.1 Manager Perspective

Managers take on different roles in cultural onboarding, which results in significant variation in how culture is conveyed and enacted within everyday organizational life.

Organizational Identity and Culture

Across interviews, managers consistently describe the Industra Philosophy not only as a driver of success, but also as a shared framework of coordination and alignment. “Industra Philosophy... really is something which will be a key factor in our long-term success. It is a key factor that has made us successful historically” (Manager 26). The Industra Philosophy is closely related to managers’ sense of organizational identity (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005), often exhibited in the form of pride. Managers view the Industra Philosophy as essential for helping newcomers navigate and interpret the organization effectively. It is frequently described as a common language through which employees learn how to collaborate, what behaviors are appropriate, and what organizational expectations exist.

Because sometimes you don't really... know if you bring in someone external from Industra, it can be such an uphill battle when you don't know the jargon [fikonspråket] or the organization (Manager 16).

Such accounts suggest that familiarity with the Industra Philosophy is not only viewed as cultural knowledge, but also as a prerequisite for effectively navigating organizational interactions and becoming an organizational insider.

Manager Role

There is broad agreement that cultural teaching is a crucial aspect of onboarding and a central managerial responsibility, “It is my responsibility... If there is anything that needs to come from me, that we should work with and be representatives for the Industra Philosophy” (Manager 14). Some managers reinterpret this responsibility by framing culture as something collectively maintained within the team context, rather than explicitly managed by individual actors, “of course, it's not only the manager, but should be part of everybody’s culture and the back of everybody” (Manager 17). Despite its perceived importance and espoused responsibility, the teaching of the Industra Philosophy becomes fragmented and less clearly articulated within the team context. Additionally, although managers retain formal

responsibility, much of the day-to-day activity is delegated to mentors, which frequently extends to the transmission of culture itself.

I think it's there's more on the mentor, because the mentor has this kind of checklist that has all the checkpoints of the Industra Philosophy in it, so they ... are kind of responsible (Manager 9).

In practice, this shift in enacted responsibility removes managers from the sensemaking context, decreasing leader control and reducing opportunities for animation (Maitlis, 2005). Additionally, reviewing onboarding checklists reveals frequent referencing to digital ideological training modules, but do not articulate explicit cultural expectations for mentors. This lack of clear cultural responsibility structures contributes to rituals becoming largely tacit. As a result, minimal or fragmented sensemaking conditions arise. Thus, newcomers receive less explicit guidance in how the Industra Philosophy should be interpreted or enacted within everyday work practices (Maitlis, 2005).

Why Culture is Not Systematically Taught

When reasoning as to why managerial engagement remains limited in practice despite the espoused importance, managers point to several organizational conditions that constrain active engagement with the Industra Philosophy in onboarding and everyday work. “No, you understand that it's important, but we can take it later, because I also need to deliver here [competing task] because I'm behind. So, what's most important?” (Manager 16). This stands in contrast to the ideological emphasis from top management. Managers perceive a lack of demand and follow-up in teaching the Industra Philosophy, “if that's what is requested, then you do it. Like if [the CEO] requested trainings in the Industra Philosophy and followed up [it would be] totally different” (Manager 14). While there is espoused importance, the lack of control systems plausibly suggest that this is less important than other deliveries (Weick, 1995). Consequently, while the Industra Philosophy remains clearly articulated at the ideological level, explicit managerial articulation and enactment of meaning is rarely operationalized in practice. From the perspective of Maitlis (2005), this creates a disconnect in the vertical flow of sensemaking processes. Managerial enactment and engagement with cultural topics remain minimal and inconsistent across onboarding and everyday practice, although corporate and executive leaders explicitly articulate and champion the Industra Philosophy.

Finally, changes in the work environment further complicate cultural teaching. Reduced physical presence limits opportunities for interactions and informal learning, especially for newcomers, “[w]e go to office twice a week. But what [is] the new employee is going to do in the other three days in the week?” (Manager 15). In contexts of fragmented or minimal sensemaking conditions, reduced physical co-location decreases newcomers’ opportunities to observe and make sense of implicit and tacit cultural cues. Therefore, digital work environments do not necessarily weaken organizational sensemaking directly but rather amplify the consequences of already tacit and weakly articulated cultural cues. Guided sensemaking through explicit reflection sessions and formal onboarding rituals remain comparatively resilient to digitalization (Maitlis, 2005). However, tacit cultural learning through observation, participation and everyday interaction becomes increasingly difficult to sustain.

Change in Culture Over Time

Cultural patterns are not perceived as static over time, with managers retrospectively describing a shift in the articulation of the Industra Philosophy (Weick, 1995). In Department B, a manager highlights that Industra Philosophy engagement has become more pronounced, facilitated by recurring articulation and engagement.

My experience is that we talk a lot more about it. But, there was also a time, I would say, about five or six years ago, and when I joined, where people were like, many people talked about how we needed something different, something new... And I think that was why it was hard to understand... the Industra Philosophy (Manager 26).

Managers who entered the organization under minimal or fragmented sensemaking conditions describe the process of learning as prolonged, often many years. This is consistent with the findings of Maitlis (2005), where such environments give rise to either multiple or nominal accounts of the ideology and its relevance. In contrast, many managers in Department A entered under conditions of active articulation of the Industra Philosophy, where explicit engagement positively influenced their cultural understanding.

Then you had to have all these pieces that were Industra Philosophy in order and prove to your management team that we had control of our processes ... So, I guess I've learned that and we don't really do that today (Manager 16).

With the organization actively engaged and leaders creating forums for collective and explicit sensemaking, practical understanding of the Industra Philosophy increased, resulting in richer and more unitary accounts (Maitlis, 2005). Today, however, managers in Department A describe a reduction in both articulation and visible enactment in daily practice.

Because for these more senior employees, they mentioned that maybe 15 years ago, it was really part of a weekly or monthly, they were talking about the Industra House. And now it's not happening. It's not just my group, but it's everywhere (Manager 17).

In line with Schein and Schein's (2017) emphasis that culture becomes increasingly tacit over time, the Industra Philosophy in Department A receded from formal agendas and discourse, yet continued to be maintained through tacit enactment. This shift from explicit articulation to tacit cultural cues introduces a change in the sensemaking environment. Managers with long tenure attribute their learning and understanding of the Industra Philosophy to its prominence during their organizational entry. By contrast, newcomers entering Department A today encounter more ambiguous cultural cues, largely due to their tacit nature. This suggests that the interpretability of the same organizational culture is influenced by organizational sensemaking conditions during entry.

6.3.2 Newcomer Perspective

Newcomers interpreted the ideology through multiple touchpoints, where formal teachings, everyday interactions, and identity construction shaped how the Industra Philosophy was understood and internalized. While most newcomers aligned with the cultural framework, the depth and practical relevance of that understanding varied substantially across organizational contexts. These differences depended largely on how explicitly the philosophy was enacted and reinforced in everyday work practices, influencing newcomers' opportunities to interpret and apply the ideology to their local organizational context.

Understanding Formal Teachings About Culture – Cue Extraction and Plausibility Construction in Formalized Settings

Corporate onboarding events act as one of the primary touchpoints and often constitutes the first in-depth exposure to the ideology and its associated frameworks. These events create a perception of importance, as the time allocated to cultural topics signals that cultural alignment

is essential for both intra- and cross-functional collaboration. Newcomers notice and bracket the cues transmitted by the organization through these events and label organizational frames of reference. Corporate experiences creates common references between newcomer roles and departments (Weick et al., 2005).

In line with Weick (1995), newcomers' sensemaking in formalized settings primarily construct plausible understandings of the organizational culture through the extraction of cultural cues. The full value system of the Industra Philosophy is not internalized, instead focusing on common frames of references and the ideology as a common language. As newcomers do not internalize the culture as a fully articulated system but instead construct a workable understanding based on the availability of cues and the narrow accounts from this setting, this strengthens the view that these events produce a restricted form of sensemaking (Maitlis, 2005). This process reflects Weick's (1995) notion of plausibility over accuracy, as newcomers prioritize interpretations that are coherent and actionable in their daily work over those that are exhaustive or fully articulated.

[I]n those onboarding days, we spend half a day on the Industra Philosophy. And if you imagine that every single employee gets these onboarding days and gets to spend half a day on the values and the Industra Philosophy, that shows that is important. That is the language that we speak. That is something that you have to buy into and if those values are something that one wouldn't identify with themselves with, then this is maybe not the right company for someone. That's just how it is (Newcomer 25)

Local events may play a larger role in understanding local adaptations, as emphasis and practices between corporate and local events diverge. The relative distance to everyday enactment of formal teachings influences how newcomers incorporate messages and cues into interpretations of the culture. The newcomer's identity construct, and ongoing negotiation with the environment play a vital role in creating newcomer sensemaking (Weick, 1995). In Department B, repeated interaction with, and trainings in, the culture at the local level increases understanding of specific local requirements, indicating that newcomers' social construction is consistent with Weick's (1995) emphasis on sensemaking as ongoing. When newcomers are able to actively engage with the ideology under leader guidance, the process becomes highly animated, and creates a common understanding amongst newcomers throughout the department (Maitlis, 2005). In the local events, newcomers have the capacity to relate the ideology to their

individual organizational identity and enact it in a relevant context. This suggests that the effectiveness of formal teachings is contingent upon their proximity to newcomers' everyday experiences.

Yes, exactly, that it really is so interactive... if I had heard it once, then I would have been like 'oh I don't really remember what this was' kind of thing. But now, as I said, I have heard about it... [at] The kick-off here, and then we had the summit, then I had the onboarding day with Industra, and then I had an onboarding day at [Department B], I went to a training in January that also was about the Industra Philosophy... I have been sitting and working with it for like five half-days, at least. Then, of course, hopefully it sticks, otherwise it would have been other problems, kind of. But if I had it half a day the first week, no, then I probably wouldn't have remembered it (Newcomer 23).

Actively creating the culture through enactment is paramount, as it is through action that the ideology is translated into practice and newcomers learn how to respond in accordance with it (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Leader behavior and newcomer involvement during the interactive sessions impact the processes, accounts, and actions (Maitlis, 2005). Leaders' active engagement and control of the session facilitate newcomer involvement, and increases richness and animation, enabling an increased internalization and positive sensemaking outcomes.

But it was also because it was smaller... you were much more like [involved], the other was in a large auditorium. So, the format also affects, because it is difficult to feel as engaged when you are sitting in a room with 200 people and you're not talking. Whereas [cultural ambassador] was like 'what do you think?'. So, you had to listen, had to answer, you had to interact (Newcomer 23).

Physical artifacts function as salient reference points and cues (Weick, 1995) that signal what is considered important for Industra. In the office of Department B with an abundance of cultural artifacts, newcomers are constantly reminded of core values, principles, and other concepts, making culture an obvious part of everyday organizational life. The presence of these artifacts is vital for the ongoing interpretation and in making sense of the ideology. In contrast, Department A exhibits a lack of physical artifacts, possibly explained by culture having been taken for granted, and thus artifacts have dissipated and gone unnoticed over time (Schein & Schein, 2017), reducing the ongoing cue signaling for newcomers.

[T]he house is placed visually here and there so that you see it whether you want to or not. And it's good that you see it when you move around in, like, Industra territories, so that you are, at least I think, constantly reminded of it (Newcomer 24).

Few newcomers reported written material as a major learning touchpoint. When readings are a channel for learning it is seen as an individual responsibility during organizational entry to gain knowledge about the inner workings of Industra and technical aspects related to the products and production. The minimal impact of written material, such as the booklet, can be attributed to low levels of managerial and corporate focus during the socialization period (Maitlis, 2005).

Cultural Understanding Through Interaction – Social Enactment and the Ongoing Negotiation of Meaning

Social and cultural interaction is fundamental for newcomers' sensemaking, highlighting that cultural understanding is socially mediated and the inherent social-construction of the ideology (Kunda, 2006). Sensemaking is not performed in a social vacuum, but is contingent on others (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). Newcomers' interpretation is continuously shaped, negotiated, and reinforced through experiencing the culture in interactions with others, and relating this to their own understanding. Interaction may occur both at the individual level and within team settings, such as meetings. The nature of cultural interaction in these settings vary between departments and teams, and therefore, newcomers experience the culture and value its importance differently. Mentors and coworkers play a vital role in how newcomers relate and understand the culture. As the main touchpoint responsible for teaching newcomers' day-to-day operations, tasks, and role responsibilities, these stakeholders' usage of culture influences and transfers tacit knowledge.

They were, and they are still helping. But at least I know that until my senior is retired, I will have enough knowledge to work it all by myself. So, it's also an example of how the structure and the processes are because I've been employed almost one year before this planned retirement, so it's enough time for a person to start handling their own work (Newcomer 12).

Managerial interaction is for most newcomers concentrated during the initial organizational entry, focused on administrative tasks. In Klein et al.'s (2015) view, managers contribute less to newcomer socialization, and are mainly concerned with onboarding activities. The social

nature of sensemaking is apparent in situations of inconsistencies between the ideology and everyday enactment. When organizational actors signal the importance of culture but fail to explicitly enact it in practice, equivocality increases, causing ambiguity and complicating newcomers' interpretative processes. Newcomers then prioritize socially enacted cues from actors closest in proximity over formal messages. As a result, the local team context becomes increasingly influential in shaping how newcomers interpret the practical meaning and relevance of the Industria Philosophy. This showcases the ongoing nature (Weick, 1995) of sensemaking, as newcomers reinterpret cues and revise their cognitive view of the culture and what behaviors are appropriate.

Yeah, first two or three days my manager was there with me, like, where she went through like... general rules... yeah, the basic things that she did, and we try like, more like, from the working point of view then she also then we introduced with that my buddy [mentor], and she took from there (Newcomer 10).

How the culture is enacted throughout daily work, and how it is articulated in the language impacts newcomers' perception of the culture. Instances of low cultural adoption in language influence how well newcomers relate their daily tasks and how it impacts their decisions. Usage of cultural language is dependent on the manager and team in how explicit and concrete experiences are linked to aspects of the Industria Philosophy. Language usage is intimately tied to how newcomers enact and create the culture in the environment (Weick, 1995). How language is constructed in Industria varies. Teams in Department B actively incorporating a common language resonate with the ideology on a deeper level. This explicit enactment, through managerial initiative and employee engagement creates conditions for a guided form of sensemaking, where the high animation contributes to rich accounts and understanding of the culture (Maitlis, 2005).

[T]hen you talk about how you apply it in practice quite simply. Or if there was a specific difficult situation, something has gone wrong. Then often retroactively then you can take it up and discuss if and how we use Industria Philosophy. Are there any better ways we can use it to prevent similar situations. A bit like that (Newcomer 24).

In Department A, language usage is not related explicitly to the culture, indicating a minimal form of sensemaking (Maitlis, 2005). In such instances, there is a feeling that the Industria Philosophy is more suitable and adapted for production, and not for highly cognitive white-

collar-work with more fluctuation and lack of standardization. Teams in these instances focus on certain aspects of the Industria Philosophy but have difficulty making it explicit.

It's a way of working that we have and it's much more, it's more applicable in things like production and so on, where we have a little more concrete things to work with. In [department] where I work a lot, we've talked a lot about the normal situation. I would say that at [department] in general, it's difficult to have, or in our processes, it's difficult to have a normal situation (Newcomer 13).

Identity and Culture – Identity Construction and Retrospective Sensemaking

Newcomer buy-in and distancing to the ideology differ, with some newcomers being more aligned with the culture. Newcomers' sensemaking is grounded in their identity construction, shaping how Industria Philosophy is interpreted, evaluated, and internalized. Sensemaking is intimately tied to the sensemaker (Weick, 1995), and how newcomers perceive their organizational role shapes their enactment (Weick et al., 2005). Some newcomers express differing levels of abstraction regarding culture, some seeing it as a common corporate culture shared across organizations, where working life displays similarities with previous experience. Others view the culture as common sense, as an inherent way of operating within a group and work setting.

But generally speaking, well, it's pretty, it's pretty straight forward actually. It's about quality and it's about safety and it's about having respect for people and it's about having good processes... So, it's, it's really kind of common sense. It's not like it's something that's... completely new or completely like, 'oh I've never thought of this before.' If I'm going to be completely blunt. It's just like a good foundation, like a cornerstone for how to work. And it's presented in a structured way that you can, you can remind yourself of it continuously, that's really what it's about (Newcomer 24).

Newcomers utilize their organizational position and role to construct and adapt the ideology to their specific environment (Weick et al., 2005). Newcomers primarily construct their organizational identity at the local level, with roles, departmental belonging, and the work context provides acts as the primary reference points. The localized identity impacts what content of the Industria Philosophy is deemed important and enacted in daily work. Viewing one's own and departmental roles and tasks as separate from others creates distinct priorities and interpretations of what is important, and how to follow organizational norms.

I would say that here we generally, this, what is it called, 'dare to try, manage the risk'. It's kind of the whole basic principle of [department] ... So here it is very, at least that part is very suited here. Whereas maybe, if you look at it from the [contrasting department], it becomes clearer with 'right from me'. That like many there care about sustainability... (Newcomer 8).

6.4 Research Question Revisited – How Newcomers Understand Culture

The study set out to understand how newcomers make sense of organizational culture during socialization. The empirical analysis suggests that newcomers make sense of the Industria Philosophy through a combination of symbolic exposure, local translation, and ongoing enactment across multiple organizational settings. How newcomers come to understand and internalize the ideology depends largely on the organizational sensemaking conditions under which cultural cues are articulated, enacted, and reinforced.

Under restricted forms of organizational sensemaking (Maitlis, 2005), cues and narratives are controlled by leaders, leading primarily to symbolic recognition and a higher degree of ideological distancing. Newcomers view culture in the periphery and do not incorporate it into daily practice. Individual sensemaking is hampered by the low levels of animation, as newcomers' ability to adapt and enact the culture in their specific context is limited.

Closer to practice, leaders have greater influence over animation among newcomers. However, the degree to which leaders actively articulate, contextualize, and reinforce the ideology varies substantially. As such, sensemaking conditions ranging from minimal or fragmented to guided arise. The analysis suggests that contexts where the Industria Philosophy is not actively articulated result in minimal or fragmented sensemaking. Individual sensemaking in such contexts is impaired by a combination of low animation and control, or high animation and low control. As such, nominal or multiple narrow accounts emerge (Maitlis, 2005). Finally, guided forms of sensemaking (Maitlis, 2005) have positive effects on internalization and reduced the ideological distancing of newcomers. Leader and stakeholder involvement, and active engagement in making culture explicit increase understanding and enactment in organizational life. Individual sensemaking under these conditions is fostered by an ongoing focus on and

interaction with the ideology, and the proximity to daily practice. The findings therefore suggest that organizational culture becomes meaningful to newcomers not through exposure alone, but through repeated opportunities to interact, interpret, enact and relate ideological cues to situated organizational practice.

7. Discussion

This section discusses the study's theoretical contribution, practical implications, limitations, and future research directions.

7.1 Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes to existing research by challenging paradigmatic assumptions within organizational socialization and onboarding research. Through an interpretivist stance, it extends understanding of how organizational actors shape the social construction of culture and the sensemaking environment where newcomer learning happens. Prior research on onboarding and socialization assumes formal onboarding leads to shared cultural understanding and integration. However, the findings indicate that cultural interpretability and enactment depend largely on local sensemaking conditions.

The study suggests that centralized onboarding rituals primarily generate symbolic recognition of organizational ideology, while practical understanding and internalization of culture depend on repeated opportunities for interaction, enactment and contextual translation. In line with Weick's (1995) emphasis on plausibility over accuracy, newcomers do not necessarily internalize culture as a coherent organizational system, but instead construct locally plausible understandings based on cues, interactions and enactment opportunities available to them. Thus, self-reported evaluations may overestimate proficiency or integration relative to organizational assessments.

The study further indicates that newcomer socialization is conditioned by local events, with cultural internalization and ideological distancing depending on the relative proximity between learning and everyday enactment. By connecting Kunda's (2006) framework of normative control with Maitlis' (2005) organizational sensemaking environments, the study expands understanding of how ideology, rituals, and organizational actors shape newcomers' interpretative accessibility to organizational culture. Furthermore, the findings suggest that tacit enactment may preserve organizational culture for established organizational members, while simultaneously weakening newcomers' opportunities to interpret and enact the ideology meaningfully.

7.2 Practical Implications

The study suggests organizations must continuously articulate culture to build coherent understanding of the ideology. Managers play a key role in translating the organizational culture from theory to practice. Active engagement and reflection in local and team contexts is essential for effective interpretation and enactment. Second, the study indicates that departments where culture is weakly articulated can improve by making culture explicit in language and daily work. In contrast, the analysis indicated that as cues became implicit and knowledge tacit, cultural understanding diverged and decreased over time, emphasizing the importance of continuous cultural articulation. Finally, the study carries implications for how onboarding and evaluations should be structured. Their effectiveness depends on the distance between teaching settings and daily work. A well-structured approach to cultural onboarding, with articulation at several hierarchical levels facilitates a culture that is both cross-functionally coherent, and locally adaptable.

7.3 Limitations

The study and its findings are subject to limitations. First, the sampling of interview participants in relation to organizational culture may be affected by survivor bias. When contacting potential interviewees, those who consider the topic important may be more likely to respond, potentially skewing the findings. Second, sensemaking is a cognitive process, and the subjective experience is difficult to capture. The methodological approach and extensive data collection sought to minimize researcher bias while remaining grounded in the empirical material. However, we acknowledge that such influence is inescapable within social constructionist research. One such limitation is the translation of interview transcripts from Swedish into English, which is subject to researcher bias. Third, newcomers' self-reported level of integration during interviews may reflect the Hawthorne effect, whereby participants may modify their responses to present a higher degree of integration. Finally, the limited timeframe of the study constrained the ability to conduct a longitudinal design, resulting in empirical data being collected from interview participants at a single point in time. The study seeks to mitigate this limitation through extensive data collection from multiple sources; however, the individual participant remains at the center of analysis.

7.4 Future Research

The contribution and limitation of this study open avenues for future research within the topic of newcomer sensemaking during socialization periods. One such possible approach could be to conduct a longitudinal ethnographic study with continuous interaction with participants. Such future research could be better able to uncover changes in newcomer perceptions and social constructions throughout their socialization period. As sensemaking is an ongoing process, revisiting participants to identify changes in their cognitive processes could yield richer data and uncover more nuanced experiences. Second, the case-company in the current study has a formalized cultural framework, with resources dedicated to its development and implementation. Studying an organization with a less developed approach could generate novel understanding of how culture is built in a nascent setting. Such research could utilize the framework developed in this study to uncover how organizational actors make sense of their position within an organizational environment. Third, an experimental study design can be utilized to further explore the translation effect between theory and practice. For example, introducing new guidelines for team level onboarding and exploring how this impact newcomer sensemaking processes. Finally, to build on the contribution of this study, and in conjunction with prior research, testing the framework developed in this study in other organizational contexts would be appropriate. This could for instance be through cross-organizational sampling, to expand generalizability and transferability, increasing the impact for practitioners.

8. Conclusion

This paper has argued that there is a need to challenge the underlying assumptions in the fields of newcomer socialization and onboarding. It has shown that integrating newcomers into an organizational culture is a socially embedded activity and that the setting in which it is transmitted shapes newcomer sensemaking, internalization, and ideological distancing. The two departments studied within the case organization illustrate contrasting sensemaking conditions: Department A where the culture has become largely tacit and unspoken, reducing newcomer understanding and internalization and Department B where continuous and explicit interaction has strengthened internalization and enactment in daily work practices. Through leader and newcomer engagement, richer cultural accounts become possible, creating a shared system of meaning and common language through which organizational work is interpreted and understood. The analysis suggests that organizational culture is made sense of through social interaction, enactment, and localized sensemaking conditions.

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10. Appendices

10.1 Appendix A – Interview Guide (Newcomer)

1. Briefly tell us about yourself, your role, and how long you have been at Industra and in this role.
 - a. What expectations did you have before you started?
 - b. How did you view your role before you started compared to how you see it today?
2. How have you experienced your first time here? What's it like working at Industra?
 - a. Can you describe a situation from your first weeks that influenced how you saw Industra or your role?
 - b. What did you find particularly good or challenging, and why?
 - c. When did you feel that you started to understand how things work here?
3. When did your onboarding begin? Have you had any onboarding?
 - a. What do you remember as important parts of the process?
 - b. What do you feel has helped you settle into Industra and your role?
 - c. Are there any parts you are not very satisfied with?
4. Potential follow-ups on onboarding
 - a. What formal and informal activities were included?
 - b. What helped you most in understanding what was expected of you in your role?
 - c. How did you understand what was important in the organization?
 - d. Was there anything that felt unclear or missing? How did you handle it?
 - e. Who was particularly helpful in the beginning, and how did that influence your understanding of the role or the organization?
5. What is your experience with digital learning and onboarding processes?
 - a. Are they helpful, or is it too much?
 - b. How would you prefer to learn?
6. How would you describe the culture at Industra?
 - a. Can you give a concrete example that illustrates the culture in practice?
 - b. When did you realize "how things are done here"?
 - c. Has your view of the culture changed over time?
7. People often talk about The Industra Philosophy – how would you describe it?
 - a. When did you first hear about The Industra Philosophy?

- b. What did you think it meant at that time?
 - c. What impact does The Industra Philosophy have on you in your work? Do you use it?
 - d. How would you describe your understanding of The Industra Philosophy today?
- 8. How did you learn about The Industra Philosophy?
 - a. In what way was it presented to you (e.g., training, manager, colleagues)?
 - b. What made it feel concrete or abstract?
 - c. How do you experience The Industra Philosophy being applied in everyday work?
 - d. Have you experienced any situation where what is said and what is done did not quite align?
- 9. What role did your manager/colleagues play in your understanding of the culture at Industra?

10.2 Appendix B – Interview Guide (Manager)

1. Please briefly tell me about yourself, your role, and how long you have been a manager at Industra.
2. Can you describe what the onboarding process looks like at [Unit], from the signed contract until the new employee is considered fully integrated?
 - a. Which parts are you personally responsible for?
 - b. At what point do you feel the new employee begins to understand “*how we do things here*”?
3. How do you prepare for a new employee before their first day?
 - a. What practical or social preparations are made in the team?
 - b. Who is typically involved in preparing the onboarding?
4. What expectations do you usually have of new employees when they start?
 - a. What do you expect them to understand during the first weeks or months?
 - b. How do you communicate these expectations?
5. What do you consider to be crucial for successful onboarding?
 - a. Can you give an example of something that is particularly important in the onboarding process?
 - b. Can you give an example of when onboarding worked particularly well – what did you do then?
 - c. Where do the most common challenges arise in the onboarding process?
 - d. If you could change one aspect of onboarding, what would it be and why?
6. What role do the team and colleagues play in onboarding a new employee?
 - a. Are there specific people involved (for example a buddy or mentor)?
 - b. How do colleagues contribute to helping the new employee understand the culture and way of working?
7. What is your view on digital tools in onboarding?
 - a. How is the balance between digital and in-person?
 - b. What are digital tools good for?
 - c. What are digital tool less good for?
8. How do you follow up on a new employee’s onboarding?
 - a. Are there specific checkpoints or conversations during the first months?
 - b. How do you know when someone is fully integrated into the team?

9. How do you view The Industra Philosophy and the culture at Industra?
 - a. How do you see your role in introducing the culture and The Industra Philosophy?
 - b. How do you communicate the meaning of The Industra Philosophy to new employees?
 - c. What concrete situations do you use to illustrate the culture?
 - d. What do you think works well in embedding the culture? Are there any challenges?
 - e. Do you see any gap between The Industra Philosophy as an ideal and how the culture is actually practiced in everyday work? If so, how do you handle that in relation to new employees?
10. Have you experienced situations where onboarding did not work as expected?
 - a. What made the situation challenging?
 - b. How did you handle it?
11. Looking back, what do you think could strengthen onboarding for new employees at Industra?
 - a. Are there aspects of the current process that could be improved?
 - b. Is there something managers need more support with when onboarding new employees?

10.3 Appendix C – Interview Guide (Corporate Owner)

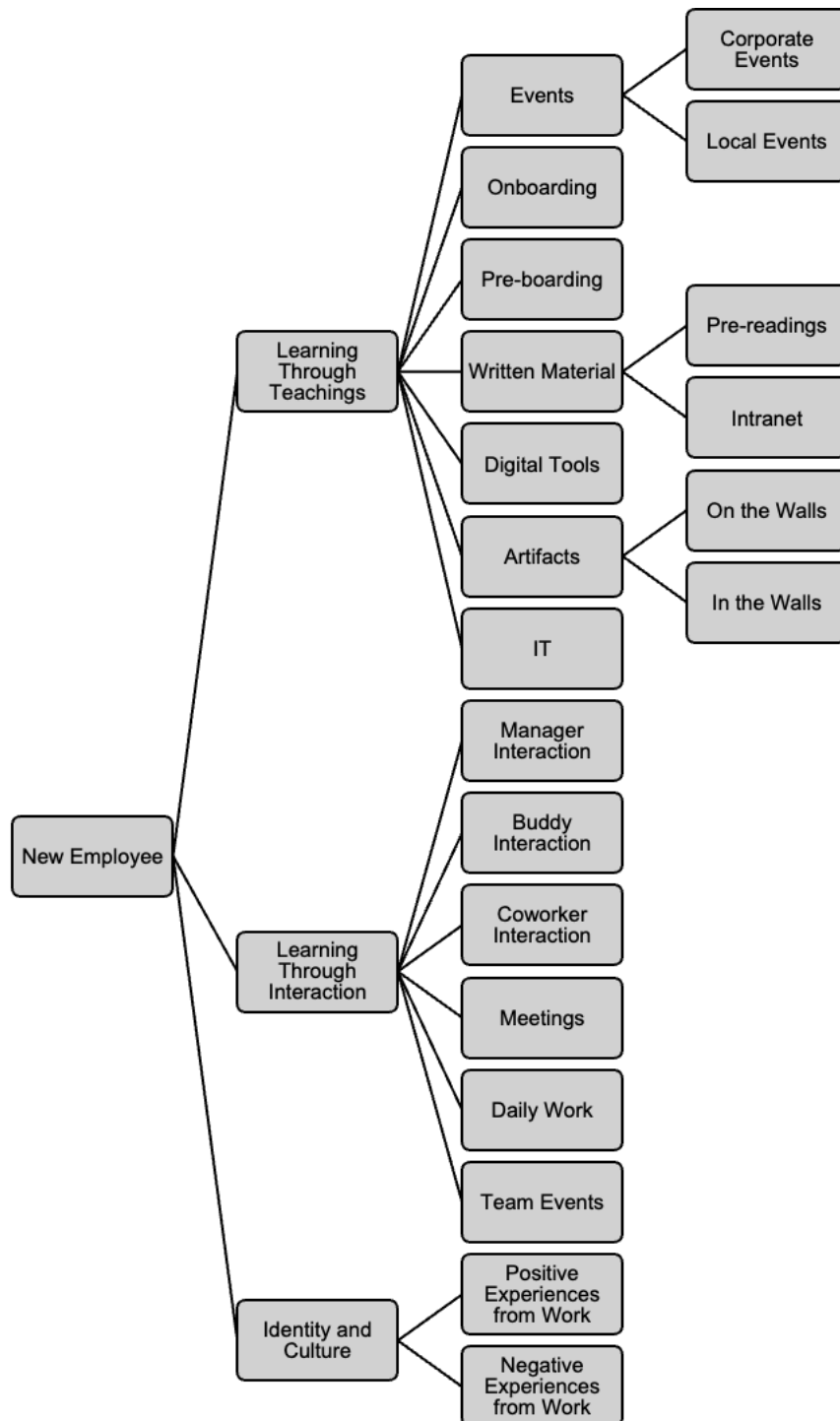
1. Briefly tell us about yourself, your role, and how long you have been at Industra and in this role?
2. What is Industra Philosophy Corporate, and how is their work concretely reflected in the organization?
3. What is the Industra Philosophy Network and their role within the organization?
 - a. How does their role differ from Industra Philosophy Corporate in practice?
4. Why do you work with Industra Philosophy?
 - a. Which aspects are most important?
 - b. Why are they important specifically for Industra?
5. How do you view Industra Philosophy and the culture at Industra?
 - a. What works well? Are there any challenges?
 - b. Is there a gap between Industra Philosophy as an ideal and how the culture is actually experienced in everyday work?
6. How do you / your team / Industra Philosophy Corporate work with cultural change and reinforcement?
 - a. Is the work more formal (processes, training) or informal (leadership, role models)?
 - b. Is it reactive or proactive?
 - c. How do you measure whether it is working?
7. How do you think the culture has changed in recent years?
 - a. Is it strongly anchored in the organization / among employees?
 - b. Does it differ across parts of the organization?
 - c. What do you think drives those differences?
8. What role does Industra Philosophy Corporate play in the introduction and socialization of new employees, and where does your responsibility end?

- a. Are there differences between functions?
 - b. What is most critical during the first 6–12 months?
 - c. Do you think Industria Philosophy Corporate has a balanced role in onboarding, or should you have more / less responsibility?
9. How does the work differ between senior management, middle managers, and employees?
10. What do you think is important for us in our work?

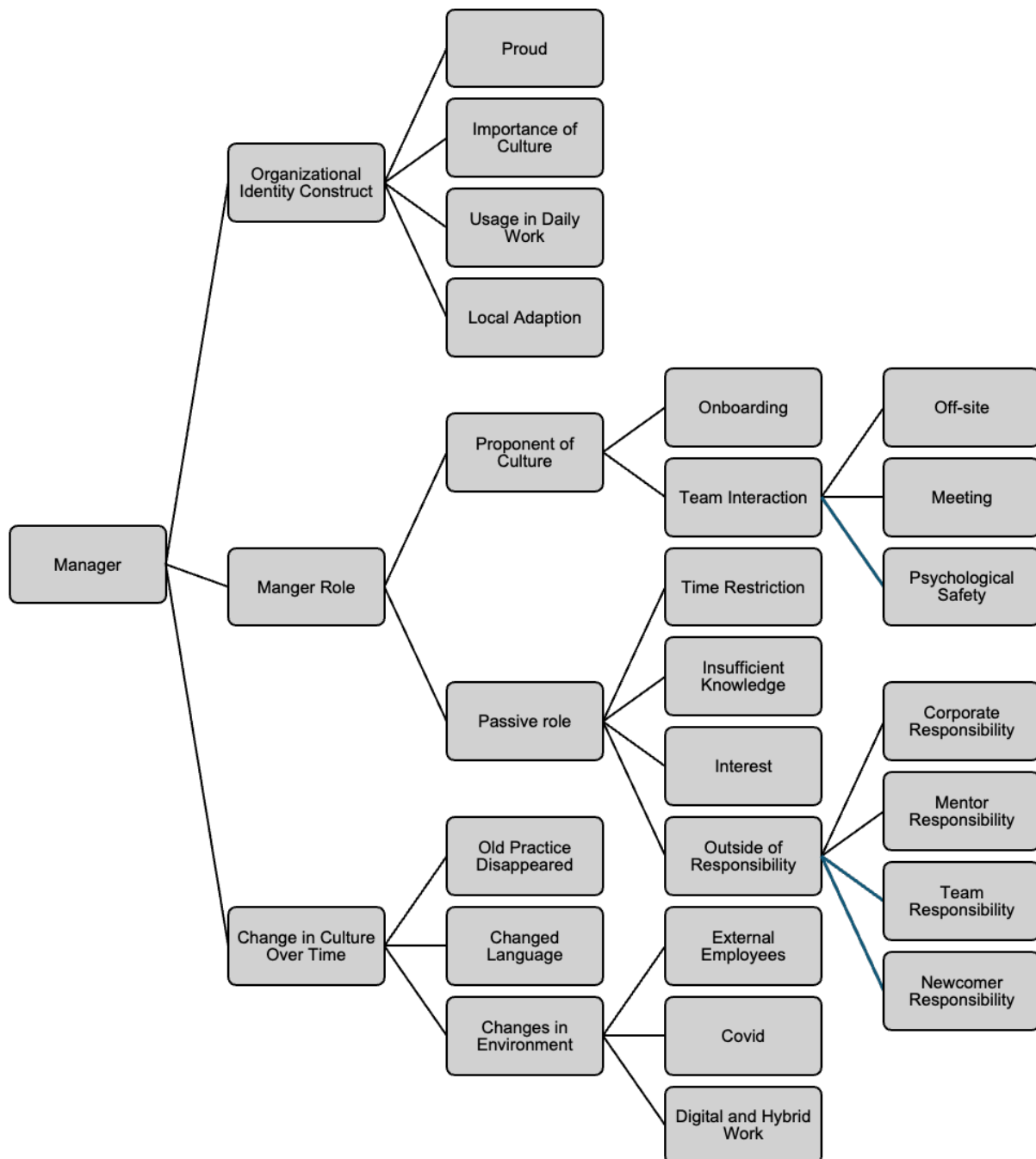
10.4 Appendix D – Interview Guide (Cultural Ambassadors)

1. Briefly tell us about yourself, your role, and how long you have been at Industra and in this role?
2. What is the Industra Philosophy Network and their role within the organization?
3. Why do you work with Industra Philosophy?
 - a. Which aspects are most important?
 - b. Why are they important specifically for Industra?
4. How do you view Industra Philosophy and the culture at Industra?
 - a. What works well? Are there any challenges?
 - b. Is there a gap between Industra Philosophy as an ideal and how the culture is actually experienced in everyday work?
5. Can you describe what the onboarding process looks like at [Unit], from signed contract until the new employee is considered fully integrated?
6. What role do you have, as part of the Industra Philosophy Network, in the introduction and onboarding of new employees, and where does your responsibility end?
 - a. Do you experience differences between functions?
 - b. What is most critical during the first 6–12 months?
 - c. Do you think Industra Philosophy Network has a balanced role in onboarding, or should you have more / less responsibility?
 - d. What is the role of managers when it comes to onboarding and teaching the Industra Philosophy?
7. What do you consider crucial for successful onboarding?
 - a. Can you give examples of when onboarding has worked particularly well?
 - b. Where do the most common challenges in the onboarding process arise?
 - c. If you could change one aspect of onboarding, what would it be and why?
8. What do you think is important for us in our work?

10.5 Appendix E – New Employee Codes and Themes



10.6 Appendix F – Manager Codes and Themes



10.7 Appendix G – Example of Coding

So that it is... Yes, it's one, one, one part that push in our culture that I think is very good and that's what I think I'm pushing in my initial conversations. But then also this that we would like to have room for discussions in our teams and that you are responsible for your own, just like you are responsible for your own deliveries. And there are like no, I would like there to be no stupid questions, you should always be able to come to me and ask questions or return and...

And I'll try to make time, create time to be able to answer and look at these questions. Be helpful and like help out.

Codes:

Manager Role / Proponent of Culture / Onboarding

Manager Role / Proponent of Culture / Team Interaction / Psychological Safety

10.8 Appendix H – AI Usage Report

Throughout the research process AI has been used to a limited degree as a supporting tool in accordance with the AI guidelines at the Stockholm School of Economics. The main AI tool utilized has been ChatGPT. AI has been used to improve language clarity and structure, to improve grammar and wording. To limit the negative impacts of AI hallucination and to ensure academic integrity, AI has not been used to generate content. Suggestions generated by AI was critically reviewed, in relation to the original author generated content, to ensure that the underlying meaning and knowledge generation was not altered. Below example prompts are provided to illustrate how AI has been used:

Please review the following text and give suggestion for improvement, looking at grammar and wordings (synonyms) to have an academic tone suited for a master's thesis. I want to keep the meaning and content so do not generate new insights.

Additionally, AI has been used to help understand core concepts and principles of theory and methodology, in connection to literature, explaining differences between competing frameworks. This was done to help with author understanding before deciding on research methodology:

What is the difference between ethnomethodology and phenomenological symbolic interactionism

Through this restrictive usage of AI, as a language and clarification tool, the production of the thesis has remained strictly on the authors, as AI has not been used to generate content or take decisions. AI has been used similarly to that of a search engine in explaining core concepts and ideas, supporting and not replacing thorough reading of literature.