Developing Future Services as Competitive Asset –
Outlining Scenarios for a Communication Agency of 2020s

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The purpose of this thesis study is to develop future service offering for a communication agency and discover the changing client needs for organisational communication services in rapidly changing communicating environment. This study examines communications as a service.

The four key literature areas of this work are Future of Communications covering the concept of Antifragile Communications and Megatrends in Communication; Communication Consultancy as Profession covering the professional role and competencies of a communication consult; Service Development covering service business, customer-centricity, service strategy and Service Design and; and Future forecasting and analysing covering Future Studies and Foresight.

In this study a proposal of future vision for a service strategy is suggested for a communication consulting company adapting the theory of Antifragile Communication and Communication Megatrends by developing three scenarios for a future Communication Environment of the Clients of the Communication Agency and their Service needs in 2025. Three semi-structured interviews helped to create scenarios.

The findings show that communication of organisations is impacted by the rapidly changing communication environment and unexpectedly emerging issues. The megatrends are driving the change and the concept of Antifragile Communications is setting the objectives for successful organisational communications that is thriving in unstable environments. Communication consultant's role in the organisation's communication is tri-partite: Consultants act as an Intermediator, Interpreter and Creator.

The scenarios titled as "Super-Agile", "Setback" and "Best of both Worlds", paint a very different future of the operating environment of organisational communication and its professionals' working context. The most anticipated futures are realistic by its content and agile in its working methods, ideal working environments for the professionals and more collaborative and interactive by its stakeholder relations.

In the communication consultancy business, the competence and suitability of consultant must be placed on top when formulating the service strategy of the agency.

Key words
Communication Agency, Communication Consultant, Change, Future Foresight, Antifragile Communication, Service Development, Service Strategy and Scenario work

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1   Introduction

Change is the only constant in life, and there is nothing unchangeable except change it-self. The mythic internet meme of a quote of an ancient Greek philosopher may be banal but seemed to stay fashionable throughout the history. The continuous change has been in the headlines of any business media during the last years. Companies train themselves for the constantly changing environments, business strategies are meant to be modified, workers are encouraged to continuous learning and even schools prepare kids to adapt themselves for the uncertain future.

Some fields of society change even more rapidly than others. Technological development has been rapid throughout the 1900's and 2000's. Technological change has fuelled the disruption of all business sectors. In the era of digital technology media has been one of the most disrupted (Grossman, 2016) industry. Technological change in media has had huge impact on the ways people communicate with each other, and that has impacted both the profession of communications and organization's ways of communicating with their stakeholders.

According to Luoma-aho the development of communications is in relation to its environ-ment and society, and our current environment has made organizations uncovered for analysis of various stakeholders because of direct influencing channels of social media and people's new expectations of transparency (Luoma-aho, 2014). These recent changes in organizational communications had led to changing premises and business environment of communication consultants as well.

This thesis is about developing a future service offering for a communication agency.

The aim of the project is to develop the professional services of a communication and marketing consultancy. The focus of the research and development project is to discover the changing needs for organisational communication services in order to success in mod-ern, rapidly changing professional and business environment.

1.1   About the target company

The target company of this development project and the sponsor of the thesis study is a Finnish communication and marketing agency. The company is offering communication and marketing consultancy services for other organizations, and is therefore operating in professional services sector. The company is small to mid-size, ten employees, and the

same number of freelancers working in projects as self-employed workers or micro-entre-preneurs. The company is operating in Finland, and focusing mainly in one industry sector, built environment, meaning real-estate, construction and building materials industry. The company is founded in 1985 and operating in entrepreneurial basis with two partners working on the operational and on the board level. The company has so far specialised in two broader operational or expertise areas: the built environment sector, and sustainable business and corporate responsibility.

1.2 Purpose of the thesis

This development project is needed to help the "middle-aged" consultant company to review and improve its strategy to prepare to the future. The outcomes of this study are expected to benefit the company's decision making by showing what kind of services and professionals the company should invest in and to further develop. The expected value contribution for the company is greater awareness and knowledge about the ways it can add value to its client's operations.

The outcomes are also expected to benefit communication consultancies and the agency industry more widely, as the constant development of communication environment and revolution of work shall continue in the western countries.

1.3 About the reporter

The researcher is working in the target company, being in charge of client service and projects, as well as sales and new business. The researcher has been part of the organisation more than 10 years in several different roles.

The researchers' own history with communication and media studies started in 1994 in elementary school. Since then, in less than thirty years, she has adopted various communication technologies from traditional analogue media such as pen and paper, photocopied magazines, magnetic audio tapes and analogue radio broadcasting, cinematographic films, several different video formats and new media formats, digital storage and finally the internet and the social media. Despite of her rather short career as a professional communicator she has witnessed – and used – at least ten different generations of media and communication technology. According to some experts, we are now living in the Third Revolution of Industry – or even in the turning point of a Fourth Industrial Revolution (Aittokoski, 2018; World Economic Forum, 2016). Developments in previously disjointed fields, such as artificial intelligence and machine learning, robotics, nanotechnology, 3D

printing and genetics are all building on and amplifying one another (World Economic Forum, 2016, 5-8).

The history of the human civilization has seen gradual improvements in the speed and scope of communications technology (Cullen, 2013) and Moore's Law estimates the computing power of ICT equipment to double every year (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019). The transformation has been ongoing as long as humans have communicated with each other. To researcher as a professional communicator, the change of technology has been more of a gradual development than a single radical change. But looking from the perspective of a business or a company the change can look different: Focusing one's business on one single medium or technology would be rigid and dangerous. Refining the skills and knowledge on certain area of communication process could make organisation vulnerable when the usage of that particular technology changes. And if the tendency continues, the next change will come probably sooner than later.

1.4 About the Thesis and development work

This thesis report consists of in total of five main chapters. First chapter, Introduction, opens up the context where the study is made and the writer's own engagement with the topic and the target organisation. Second chapter presents the background of the topic, grounding the selection of the issues concerned and presenting the whole body of knowledge base and theoretical concepts. Third chapter describes the objectives and research questions, and fourth the methodology of the study as well as methodological choices and methods used to answering the research questions. Fifth chapter compose and presents the findings and outcomes as well as conclusions. And last, sixth chapter concludes the work assessing the value the work has produced to the sponsor organisation and to the researcher herself.

2   *Background and main concepts*

In this chapter one of the biggest underlying themes of the study – change and how it has influenced to the work and choice of subject – will be introduced

2.1   Change is new normal

In the change leadership course assignment in Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences in the late 2018, I analysed the strategic changes made in the target company during the last decade. The scope of the course study was organisational change. Few years ago, the target company executed an internal development project related to agile strategy and change ability. Even if change has been much talked about, it had been somewhat unclear to the researcher before that assignment, what actually had changed in our company. One thing was sure: it was not clear whether the change in the organisation has ended or not. Therefore, the researcher was inclined to think that change in our organisation is actually constant.

Change has been a powerful buzzword in our industry within the last decade – meaning the professional career of the researcher. One cannot avoid hearing about change in business media, seminars or other professional forums. Change is said to be continuous, rapid and unforeseen. (Kotter & Rathgeber, 2016; Reeves, Levin & Ueda, 2016; Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1998).

Besides continuity change is a universal experience: We live in a world where nothing is never the same twice. Organisations are filled with human beings, living organisms, an integral part of whose life is to transform. Just like all living systems organisations are complex, diversified, flexible and made up of networks of individual creatures interacting with each other. When organisation changes it recreates itself. Freedom of creativity is the foundation of all life: There's a definition of 'life' in biology – something is alive if it is capable of producing and re-organising itself, capable to do 'auto-poiesis'. The word has same root as poetry, and that can be seen as every living creature being author of its own existence. (Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1998, 5-11).

The words often related to change, unpredictability and surprise, are fundamental aspects of the world around us. In organisations uncertainty and unexpected surprises have previously tried to be avoided by management, hierarchies and control over systems. Nevertheless, not all surprises are threats to organisations if right kind of open minded and posi-

tive attitude and approach is used towards them. Organisations can be seen as self-or-ganising systems that are constantly shaped by the interaction of its agents. (McDaniel & Driebe, 2005). Therefore, organisations are like experiments in progress: it needs to be found out case by case what works out and what not. Complexity is a result of the interactions between the components of a system. Complex Adaptative Systems are called CAS. Typical examples of CAS's are birds flocking and fish schooling, where the pattern of organisation develops from local interactions among the agents following simple rules. Complex Adaptative Systems are made of diverse agents interacting with each other and the system can undergo spontaneous self-organisation. These agents can process information and react to changes all by themselves. Agents are able to exchange information among themselves and with their environment to adjust their own behavior by the information they process. (McDaniel & Driebe, 2005, 3-10).

The observations of Complex Adaptative Systems are especially important for professional organisations whose operations and everyday life are typically self-organising.

Organisations operate in an increasingly complex world: Business environments are more diverse, dynamic, and interconnected than ever – and far less predictable. Many companies still pursue classic approaches to strategy that were designed for more-stable times, emphasizing analysis and planning focused on maximizing short-term performance rather than long-term robustness (Reeves, Levin & Ueda, 2016). Researchers Martin Reeves, Simon Levin and Daichi Ueda believe that companies are dying younger because they are failing to adapt to the growing complexity of their environment. They believe many have been misreading the environment, selecting the wrong approach to strategy, or failing to support a viable approach with the right behaviours and capabilities. (Reeves et al., 2016).

In the profession of communication and marketing the most changes are related to digitalisation, but other megatrends do matter as well. The problems organisations have to face can be sudden, come from surprising directions and there could appear several of them at the same time. Therefore, in successful organizations the change processes have to be non-stop. (Kotter & Rathgeber, 2016).

During the course assignment mentioned in the beginning of this chapter it turned out that lots of things had changed during the last decade in the target company. The change had started early 2000's but been more visibly from 2008 to this day. Part of the change looked like normal developments of a company and its people but there had also been changes in strategy and market position, ownership structure and administration structure,

client needs, client structure and profitability, core services and company culture. The company had, in other words, overgone a strategic change – it had recreated itself "from doers to thinkers". The most important reasons for the change had been technological development (digitalisation of communications), market competition and changes in the market environment (such as the rise of citizen-journalism and 'amateur professionals' competing with agencies), competition within professionals between communication, advertising and digital agencies (also known as 'sectorial convergence' (von Platen, 2016)), generation shift in ownership, and economic recession. The strategy change was needed for the company to be able to climb up within the value network, offering more valuable work, to be able to change faster than surrounding market and business environment and to have better profitability.

2.2   Literature review and conceptual framework

In this chapter the most important sources of information and relevant theories will be presented, that will help answering the research questions. In the literature scan a variety of books, articles and online sources has been browsed and mapped out resulting the adjusted literature body used in this study. Theory will act as guideline and helping the writer in classification tool. Theory provides concepts, guides the search for information, and also serves as a mirroring surface for the observations made (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006, according to Pihlaja 2001, 45).

The themes for consultation of information have been the following: Communication studies in overall, including organisation communication, marketing communication and future communication trends. Communications as a profession, communications consultancy as a business and communication agencies. Consultancy as a business model and as a profession as well as developing consultancy business. Service business in general, service development and service design, client-centric approach and service strategy. Future forecasting and analysing as a method (foresight), using future studies in business development. And finally, client / customer experience and customer relationship management.

Full list of literature references utilised is attached in the end of this study. References are processed using web-based bibliography and database managing tool RefWorks. Harvard is used as a citation style.

2.3   Relevant theories

When developing communication as service three important theory areas can be applied as referencing background, making the context clearer and getting wider insights over the topic. The fourth knowledge base area will be theory of the research and study methodology. The main abstractions are presented in a map in Figure 1.
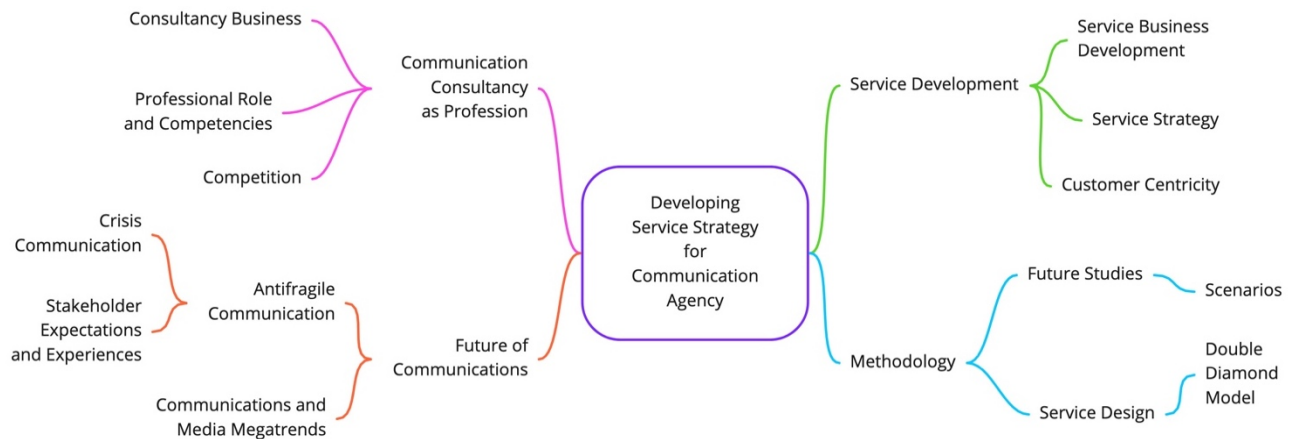
Figure 1: Relevant theories, concepts and knowledge base of the study

First theory area is named as Future of Communications, and consist of a concept of Antifragile Communications established by Luoma-aho (Luoma-aho, 2014, 2013) as well as Megatrends in Communication and Media sector. Second area is named as Communication Consultancy as Profession, that covers issues such as the professional role and competencies of a communication consult as well as competition for communication consulting in new media landscape (von Platen, 2016). Third theory area is named as Service Development, consisting literature about service business development and service strategy. The fourth area, methodology, is consisting of Future Studies (Foresight) and Service Design literature.

These four theory areas have been selected in order to respond to research questions and support the research strategy. Before focusing to these selected concepts, there had been other important literature and information basis regarding to concepts of organisational change (Cawsey, Deszca & Ingols, 2016), changing agility and complex adaptive systems CAS (McDaniel & Driebe, 2005) as well as changing business environment and its impacts on organisations (Reeves, Levin & Ueda, 2016). This thematical area has been discussed in introduction, chapter 2.1. under the title 'Change is the new normal'. These theory areas did not end up into the final study but effected to the scope and focus

of the study and directed deeper into the subject and thus helped forming a broader comprehension about the relevant theory of antifragile communication.

In addition to these information databases writers own course assignment done in Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences is used as a source of information about the target company. The source includes an interview with former CEO and present chair of the company.

This literature review forms framework within which the study will be constructed and the business problem observed. In the next sections the three main theoretical background areas and knowledge base will be presented in detail. The fourth knowledge base concerning methodologies will be presented in the chapter 4.

2.4   Future of Communications

Generally, communications have been studied a lot throughout the decades. Communication divides into several areas and fields of academic research. In the target company of this thesis study (and it might be generalised into communication agencies in large) most of the assignments (client jobs) are related to some kind of an organisational context or are fulfilling the intentions of some kind of an organisation, weather be it marketing, stakeholder dialog, internal information or broader awareness, branding, media relations or societal acceptance. In order to get as broad angle as possible, organisational communication was chosen for the focus area within the communication field of study.

In order to look at the future of communications, some point of reference from the history and the present must be looked into.

2.4.1   Communication in organisational context

One of the most complicated tasks for the writer was to define the conceptual scheme of 'communication' this study is moving around. Apart from being such an everyday phenomenon that is cumbersome to define, communication is the core job of the writer and the sponsor company, and the writer in looking it too close at micro level being able to see the big picture clearly.

Figure 2 presents the most suitable definitions of communication found in the literature. The communication of organisations in general is addressed in a number of academic and professional fields or disciplines. Here are outlined fields of organisational communication, business communication, corporate communication, public relations and marketing communication in addition to 'communications' in general.
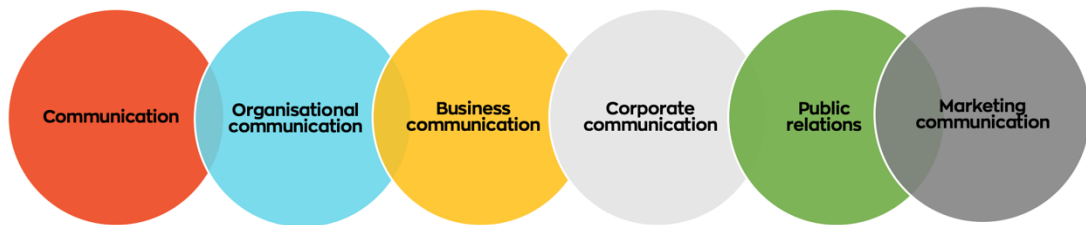
Figure 2: The conceptual scheme of 'communication' disciplines

The fragmentation of disciplinaries is visible in practice as well. According to Barker and Angelopulo, where organisational communication is generally considered to be part of the discipline of communication, marketing communication is more commonly seen as part of marketing, and management communication as a business management. (Barker, Angelopulo, 2005). Although the disciplinaries may overlap, they may address similar aspects of communication from the perspectives of different disciplines. This can be confusing, and is therefore important to understand the scope and perspective of the field and its relationship to the other fields. (Barker, Angelopulo, 2005, 11-12).

West and Turner affirm this difficulty of definition, and cite Trenholm illustrating **communication** as a 'portmanteau word' that is like a luggage overstuffed – too full of ideas and meanings, resulting a conceptual suitcase too heavy for anyone to carry (West, Turner, 2014, 4-5). Even so, West and Turner are defining the concept of communication as '*a social process in which individuals employ symbols to establish and interpret meaning in their environment*' (West, Turner, 2014, 5). By '*social'* meaning that it involves people and interaction, whether face-to-face or online. By '*process'* meaning that it is ongoing and unending, and moreover communication is dynamic, complex, and continually changing, and therefore it has no definable beginning or ending. And by '*environment'* meaning the situation or context in which communication occurs. The environment includes a number of elements, including time, place, historical period, relationship, and speaker's and listener's cultural backgrounds. The environment can also be mediated, meaning that communication can take place with technological assistance. Mediated environments influence the communication between people, e.g. in electronic relationships people are usually not able to observe each other's gestures or vocal characteristics. (West, Turner, 2014, 8)

Organisational communication is a wide-ranging field of study that spreads across academic disciplines e.g. psychology, education, sociology, linguistics, anthropology, organisation studies, and professional specialisms e.g. marketing, public relations, human resources management, information systems, strategic management, and makes use of many contrasting theoretical and methodological approaches. (Blundel, Ippolito & Donnarumma, 2013, 2-22). Multi-disciplinarity is emphasised in several sources. Barker and Angelopulo cite Scott Poole et al. stating that organisational communication is characterised by interdisciplinary approaches towards research and theoretical development, and it borrows freely from management, sociology, psychology, information science and other fields. (Barker & Angelopulo, 2005, 14).

Competing views and various perspectives have informed academic debate in organisation theory and management studies over recent years, which has also had an impact on everyday communication practices. (Blundel et al., 2013, 2-22).

Organisational communication has evolved in parallel with the understanding of human communications and as a response to development of human organisations. According to Blundel, Ippolito and Donnarumma people have since forever been speculating on the basic mysterious of human existence; our origins, the purpose of our lives and how we can gain a better understanding of ourselves and other people. Over the years, philosophers, theologians and artists have done their best to answer these questions, but it is only in the last few centuries that the process of communication in humans has been studied in a systematic way. (Blundel et al., 2013, 2-22).

Organisational communication has its roots in speech communication and communication studies. It became a distinct academic field after the World War 2. In the 1960's organisational communication shifted its primary focus from the applied aspects of communication, such as writing, to the broader role of communication in the organisations, such as areas of behaviour and organisational theory. (Barker & Angelopulo, 2005, 14).

The definition and meaning of organisational communication can be depicted for example by the nature of if or the value it brings for the organisation. Barker and Angelopulo argues that, although organisational communication entails the communication of organisations in a holistic sense, there is some disagreement on the definition of the field. The most common division in the definition lies along the functional – interpretive divide. Organisational communication is often seen, on the one hand, as the *diffusion of meaning and information throughout the organisation and its environment*. On the other hand, it may be de-

scribed as the *process of interaction through which the meaning and experience of the organisation is constructed, maintained, transacted and adapted.* (Barker & Angelopulo, 2005, 14).

The reason of the divergence of the definitions of organisational communication lies, according to Barker and Angelopulo, in varying disciplinary backgrounds of communication scholars.(Barker & Angelopulo, 2005, 14).

Blundel et al. argue, that wide-ranging research literature has also created challenges: many sub-specialisms have been created, each concerned with particular types of communication, and there are several competing perspectives on communication, with their own research agendas and methodologies. This rich mixture of ideas is though valuable because it reflects the real complexity of organisational communication in the 21st-century. (Blundel et al., 2013, 1-4).

As the holistic nature suggests, also the advantages of organisational communication are fundamental, as Blundel et al. explains. Human beings are social animals, and in a complex technological society, our quality of life, and even basic survival, depends on countless successful interactions with other people, mediated through markets, networks and various kinds of organisation. Without these intricate and largely unseen webs of communication, our economic prosperity, social welfare and cultural life would be undermined. (Blundel et al., 2013, 2).

Against this backdrop, organisational communication can help to achieve goals, such as, satisfied repeat customers rather than unhappy ex-customers; well-motivated employees rather than expensive industrial disputes; a positive reputation in the wider community rather than an international boycott of products, and innovative and creative strategies rather than inefficiency, indecision and resistance to change. (Blundel et al., 2013, 2).

Contemporary state of organisational communication is under the influence of both internal and external development of organisations. As West and Turner mention, companies and organisations continue to undergo significant changes in the 21st-century. These changes are a result of corporate scandals, the need to work together in more culturally diverse work environments, the increased accountability needed in business and industry, and the fact that very few jobs these days can be accomplished at work without the help of others. (West, Turner, 2014, 237).

Traditionally, organisational communication has dealt with communication as it exists within a formal, hierarchical, public and private organisations, and between these organisations and their environments. In the last two decades, however many organisations have taken on different forms that are more effectively characterised by outsourcing and decentralisation, or as partnerships and joint ventures. (Barker & Angelopulo, 2005, 14).

At the same time, technology has become increasingly important in the definition and operation of the organisations. Consequently, organisational communication has extended its span to embrace alternative forms of organisation and, increasingly, the technologies that have become central to the functioning of organisations. (Barker & Angelopulo, 2005, 14).

Business communication can be traced back to the earliest times of commercial activity. Barker & Angelopulo point out notion of Reinsch that business communication may be defined as communication that is used to attain a business objective. Such communication tends to be seen as conscious and intentional and as a tool which can help a business achieve its goals, when used appropriately. Business communication tends to be viewed as a business subject. (Barker & Angelopulo, 2005, 12).

Corporate communication is a management function that offers a framework for the effective coordination of all internal and external communication with the overall purpose of establishing and maintaining favourable reputation with stakeholder groups upon which the organisation is dependent. (Cornelissen, 2017, 4-5).

Maybe the best way to understand the definition of corporate communication is to look at the way in which the function has developed in companies. According to Cornelissen, until the 1970s, practitioners have used the term 'public relations' to describe communication with stakeholders. This 'public relations' function, which was tactical in most companies, largely consisted of communication with the press. When other stakeholders, internal and external to the company, started to demand more information from the company, practitioners subsequently started to look at communications as being more than just 'public relations', and the roots of the new corporate communication function started to take hold. This new function came to incorporate a whole range of specialized disciplines, including corporate design, corporate advertising, internal communication to employees, issues and crisis management, media relations, investor relations, change communication and public affairs. (Cornelissen, 2017, 4-5).

Corporate communication is also being lighten up by its etymology. According to Cornelissen, 'corporate' originally stems from the Latin word for a body (corpus) and for forming

into a body (corporare) which emphasize a unified way of looking at internal and external communication disciplines. Instead of looking at specialized disciplines or stakeholder groups separately, the corporate communication function starts from the perspective of the organization as a single embodied entity when communicating with internal and external stakeholders. (Cornelissen, 2017, 4-5).

According to Cornelissen, Van Riels defines corporate communication as 'an instrument of management by means of which all consciously used forms of internal and external communication are harmonised as effectively and effectively as possible', with the overall objective of creating 'a favourable basis for relationships with groups upon which the company is dependent'. (Cornelissen, 2017, 4-5).

Corporate communication, in other words, can be characterised as a management function that is responsible for overseeing and coordinating the work done by communication practitioners in different specialist disciplines such as media relations, public affairs and internal communication. (Cornelissen, 2017, 4-5).

Defined in this way, corporate communication obviously involves a whole range of 'managerial' activities such as planning coordinating and counselling the CEO and senior managers in the organisation, as this as well as the 'tactical' skills involved in producing and disseminating content and messages to relevant stakeholder groups. (Cornelissen, 2017, 4-5).

As in line with what was discovered before in organisational communication, one consequence of these characteristics of corporate communication is that, according to Cornelissen, it is likely to be *complex in nature*. Corporate communication demands an integrated approach to managing communications. Unlike a specialist frame of reference, corporate communication transcends the specialities of individual communication practitioners (e.g. branding, media relations, investor relations, public affairs, employee communication) and crosses these specialist boundaries to harness the strategic interest of the organisation at large. (Cornelissen, 2017, 4-5).

The value of corporate communication describes the reason of its very existence and aligned with that the core objectives of practioners. According to Cornelissen, contemporary management world believes that in today's society the future of any company critically depends on how it is viewed by key stakeholders such as shareholders and investors, customers and consumers, employees and members of the community in which the company operates. (Cornelissen, 2017, 3).

In the times of globalisation, corporate crisis and the recent financial crisis this belief has strengthened even further. According to Cornelissen, CEOs and senior executives of many organisations nowadays consider protecting their company's reputation to be critical and as one of their most important strategic objectives. This objective of *building, maintaining and protecting the company's reputation is the core task of corporate communication practitioners*. (Cornelissen, 2017, 3).

Today corporate communication has so called 'strategic role' within organisations, as highlighted by Richard Edelman, CEO of a large PR agency: "We used to be the tail on the dog, but now communication is the organising principle behind many business decisions. The general idea is that the sustainability and success of a company depends on how it is viewed by key stakeholders, and communication is a critical part of building, maintaining and protecting such reputation." (Cornelissen, 2017, 5).

Within the academic disciplines, corporate communication is most commonly offered as an academic subject within faculties of business, marketing or management, and less so in departments of communication. It can be presented as a sub-topic within courses of organisational communication, public relations or communication management. Corporate communication has developed in parallel with a number of other academic fields, most specifically with public relations. (Barker & Angelopulo, 2005, 15).

Public relations is related to corporate communications, as we learnt before. It can be defined by distinguishing the features between public relations and corporate communication, although Barker and Angelopulo acknowledge the difficulty to distinguish between the two fields. Each focuses on the *management and implementation of organisations' communication*, and in most instances, each *addresses exactly the same issues, uses the same techniques, and relies on the same theory*. The distinction lies more in the origins and emphasis of the two disciplines than it on content and practice. Public relations originated in journalism, publicity and communication studies, while corporate communications originated in business. While those fields address management and communication issues, the approach of public relations is more closely aligned with communication, while corporate communications approach is more closely aligned with business. (Barker & Angelopulo, 2005, 17).

Public relations can also be defined on account of the role or skillset of corporate communicator. Durutta states that one of the most critical success factors of organisations is often how its *public profile* is perceived, regarded, and valued by the outside world (Gillis & Durutta, 2011, 23). Durutta continues, that an unfavourable public image can destroy an organization regardless of the actual quality and integrity of its products or service. In the

role of public relation, a communicator works closely with the entities that most influence the perception of the organization (and its products and services) among potential clients or customers. These can include the media, community groups, and other key audiences (publics). The communicator must build a *relationship* of responsiveness and trust with these *publics*, so that the information received is considered accurate and honest. (Gillis, Durutta, 2011, 23).

Marketing communication can be perceived as communication that is part of marketing; it is communication that supports the sales of products and services and customer relationship management. Marketing communication create, maintain and strengthen customer relationships and influence the awareness, desirability and, ultimately, the sale of products and services. It keeps in touch not only with potential and current customers, but also with the distribution channels and other influencers. Marketing communication is designed to address the need for information regarding assets and purchasing decisions, and thus focus on products and services, their price, quality and other characteristics, and place of purchase, unlike corporate communications, that supports the entire business. (Isohookana, 2007, 16-17).

The evolution of marketing communication has run parallel with the evolution of marketing. Fundamentally, marketing communication can be thought of as the communication element that is embedded in the marketing process. (Barker & Angelopulo, 2005, 17).

There has been a shift in market power towards the customer and away from manufacturers, resulting in a change in the approach to marketing communication. What was seen as a relatively rigid marketing communication mix of advertising, sales promotion, publicity and personal selling – with advertising invariably dominating this mix – has now altered. Today marketing communication is seen as the communication variable that exists in every aspect of the relationship between customer and business, and less as discrete set of separate techniques. (Barker, Angelopulo, 2005, 18).

Marketing communication has evolved closer to public relations. According to Cornelissen both marketing and public relations emerged as separate external communication disciplines in the 20th century when organisations realised that in order to prosper, they needed to concern themselves with issues of public concern (i.e. public relations) as well as with ways of effectively bringing products to market (i.e. marketing). (Cornelissen, 2017, 4-5). According to Cornelissen, since those days, both the marketing and public relations disciplines have gone through considerable professional development mostly separately. (Cornelissen, 2017, 18-23).

Since the 1980's organisations have increasingly started to bring these two disciplines together again under the umbrella of a new management function that we now know as a corporate communication (Cornelissen, 2017). This trend towards 'integrating' with marketing and public relations made, according to Cornelissen Philip Kotler has recognised a 'genuine need to develop a new paradigm in which these two sub-cultures, marketing and public relations, work most effectively in the best interest of the organisation and the publics it serves'. (Cornelissen, 2017, 18-23).

According to Cornelissen Kotler has highlighted the different ways or models of looking at the relationship between marketing and public relations. (Cornelissen, 2017). Until the 1980's, marketing and public relations were considered as rather distinct in their objectives and activities, that Kotler is articulating as a traditional position. Over time cracks appeared in this view of marketing and public relations as two disciplines that are completely distinct in their objectives and tactics. Rather than seeing them as separate, it was recognised that marketing and public relations actually shared common ground. In the 1980's concern over the rising costs and decreasing impact of mass media advertising encouraged many companies to examine different means of promoting customer loyalty and of building brand awareness to increase sales. Companies started to make greater use of 'marketing and public relations' (MPR) – the publishing of news and events related to the launch and promotion of products and services. MPR involves the use of public relations techniques for marketing purposes which was found to be a cost-effective tool for generating awareness and brand favourability and to include communication about the organisation's brands with credibility. In the 2010s the emergence of 'branded content' drove a further wedge between marketing and public relations. The generation of 'content' for a corporation or a brand in the form of a press release, and opinion article, a keynote or a video has always been a part of public relations. 'Marketing public relations' (MPR) and 'branded content' use public relations techniques but are directly or indirectly focused on the marketing of a company's products and services. (Cornelissen, 2017, 18-23).

Next model of the relationship, 'integrated marketing communications' (IMC), then again is defined as a concept of marketing communication planning that recognise the 'added value' of a comprehensive plan that evaluates the strategic role of a variety of disciplines (such as advertising, direct marketing, sales promotion and public relations) and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact. (Cornelissen, 2017, 18-23). (The final model of looking at these two disciplines favours a view of marketing and public relations as merged into one and the same 'external communication' function. (Cornelissen, 2017, 22).

Marketing communications can also be defined by its activities and techniques. Marketing and public relations activities overlap and they have shared tools and techniques. According to Cornelissen, marketing communications involves *corporate advertising* (advertising by a firm where the company, rather than its products or services, is emphasised) and *mass media advertising* (advertising aimed at increasing awareness, favour or sales of a company's products or services), *direct marketing* (direct communication via post, telephone, online or e-mail to customers and prospects) *and sales promotion* (tactics to engage the customer including discounting, coupons, guarantees, free gifts, competitions, vouchers, demonstrations and bonus commission), and *'marketing' public relations and 'branded content'* (the use of what are traditionally seen as public relations tools for marketing purposes, including techniques e.g. editorials, features and informational videos) *including product publicity and sponsorship*. Of these activities – corporate advertising and marketing public relations & branded content – overlap with public relations. (Cornelissen, 2017, 21).

2.4.2 Megatrends in Communications and Media

The change of communication domain is "*disruptive and unpredictable*", is stated in the proposed set of principles of corporate communications made by the Finnish Association of Communications Professionals ProCom (ProCom ry, 2019). In the vision a group consisting of communication academicians and scholars as well as working professionals has been mapping out the megatrends influencing the communication domain within the forthcoming decade. Eight megatrends, Climate Change, Globalisation, Security, New Governance, Technology, Demographic Change, Science and Education and New Ways of Working, are described in the original picture in figure 3.

The paper also defines the new functions of corporate communication in the 2020's – 2030's that the emerging megatrends require from communication functions and professionals: Sensemaking and awareness, strengthening a sense of community and cultivating culture, purpose driven and dialogic strategy, monitoring, interpreting and reacting, and finally communication content, structure and networks.

MEGATRENDS INFLUENCING COMMUNICATION

Communication is shaped by the following megatrends in the coming years:

Figure 3: Megatrends in communication 2030 (ProCom ry, 2019)

2.4.3 Antifragile Communications

As the societal and media environment has changed, it seems apparent that the organisations have encountered challenges in their communication: both in processes and in outcomes or impacts. In the landscape of fragmented channels and multiplied messages throwing around every second it is hard to get the attention of a right group of people. In the landscape of technology enabled empowerment of people and the diminished powers of professional mass communicators as the gate keepers of what used to be called the 'publicity', the space and transparency of organisations communication is much greater now than it twenty years ago. The growth of social media platforms has, among other internet related communication channels, impacted organisations communication practises. As discussed earlier in this chapter, change seems to be central phenomenon in contemporary societies, and as illustrated above the change of communication is disruptive and unpredictable.

Creating successful communication and success for the organisation with the help of communication has been discussed in various literature sources throughout the modern communication history. In the context of this thesis, constant change and adapting communi-

cation into the future landscapes, an organisation needs to re-examine their communication purposes and practises. One conceptual idea that is offering answers to this situation is called Antifragile Communication, that can be seen as an ideal archit ype of a 21st century's organisation communication. Antifragile Communication is a sub theory for organisation communication and public relations, and it is created by Vilma Luoma-aho. In this theory Luoma-aho explains an agile model for organisational communication in rapidly changing media and publicity environment with disruptions and unexpectedly emerging events, 'black swans'. (Luoma-aho, 2013, 2014).

Antifragile communication is communication that thrives in an unpredictable environment where shocks and turmoil are the norm. It is built around a strong core identity and organisational values that can stand storms. It is media-independent, flexible, fast and un-bureaucratic. (Luoma-aho, 2013).

Antifragile communication is robust. It is beyond resilient, it thrives in volatility, and based on intangibles such as organizational reputation, identity and values, instead of a crafted image. Antifragile communication is tested in real time, as organizations face unpredictable challenges, and its stakeholders interact on different issue arenas discussing the organization and its contributions to society. Antifragility requires transparency of organizational actions, but also communications. Its' goals are realistic and maintainable, as unrealistically high goals provide pose a real risk. Antifragile communication results in trust that is realistic: too high expectations and blind faith in organizations could prove problematic in times of crises. Its target is achieving a neutral reputation: creating a high maintenance excellent reputation is simply too risky in this shaky environment. Moreover, antifragile organizational communication is not marketed by the organization itself: instead, it is the organizations' loyal stakeholders or faith-holders with frequent interaction and personal experience with the organization that ensure its success. (Luoma-aho, 2013).

Organisations can test the level of antifragileness by asking their employers, clients and end-customers about their experiences about the organisation. (Luoma-aho, 2014).

The principles of Antifragile Communication are listed in the table in Figure 4 as parallel to old way of communicating. Content of the table is marginally adapted by the original concept of Luoma-aho (Luoma-aho, 2014, 13) and translated by the researcher herself.

	Fragile communication (old world)	Antifragile communication
TARGET	Communicate your own messages to stakeholders	Understand the needs of stakeholders
FRAMEWORK	The internal structures and division of labour of the organization are decisive	The key point is the stakeholder / customer experience
PROCESS	Linear continuum of processes, from department to department	Continuous development, everyone has access to the latest information
RELATIONS	Stakeholder management and manipulating	Stakeholder empowerment and engagement
INTERACTION	Armored and defensive, avoiding criticism	Listening and creating realistic expectations, receiving criticism
LOGIC	Individual strategies and policies to be monitored	The goal is to create a strong internal culture that guides action
CONTROL	Control	Self-direction
OPTIMIZING	Organisation-optimized communication	Stakeholder optimized communication
PERSONNEL	Controllable by rules	Motivated by well-being
REPUTATION	Builds by communicating better	Built on good experiences and credit crunch recommendations

Figure 4: The principles of Antifragile Communication, adapted from Luoma-aho (Luoma-aho, 2014)

2.5 Communication Consultancy as Profession

In this chapter few basic questions about communication consultancy as a profession is to be answered: Is communication consulting a profession? Who is communication consult and what does a communication consult do?

Creating a successful organisation with the help of communication through utilising the services of an external communication consultant is less popular topic in academic communication research. There were not many hits about communication consultancy in the online library databases, but, by contrast, whole bunch of literature on management consultancy.

As we learnt in the earlier chapter 2.4. about communication in organisational contexts, communication has common interfaces with management both in academic and practical world: Communication is said to be a study that spreads also across disciplines such as

management studies and professional fields such as strategic management. It is said to help organisations and businesses to achieve their goals and characterised both as a tool and management function. (Blundel et al., 2013; Cornelissen, 2017). It appears relevant to set practising organisational communications against this framework of management.

Von Platen defines, citing Frandsen et al, communication consult as an important *body of communication professionals*, who *provide private and public organizations with input when they need to use communication to reach their organizational goals* (von Platen, 2015, 150-166).

To define in more detail the meaning and reason to exist and to make a clear-cut definition for communication consulting, some help can be attained from the definition of the broader topic, consulting. There are approaches emphasizing consultants as helpers or enablers and others viewing consulting as a special professional service (Kubr, 2002, 3-4). According to Kubr management consulting can be viewed either as a professional service, or as a method of providing practical advice and help.

According to the Management Consultancies Association (MCA) management consultancy can be summarised as "*The creation of value for organisations, through the application of knowledge, techniques and assets, to improve business performance*. This is achieved through the rendering of objective advice and/or the implementation of business solutions." (O'Mahoney, 2010, 14).

Taking into account what has been outlined earlier in this chapter about business, organisational and corporate communication, corporate communication is known to be a management function involving managerial activities, and therefore a consultant who is working towards organisations' goals (e.g. (Blundel et al., 2013) within the activities of diffusing the meaning and information of the organisation and its environment as well as processes of interaction through which the meaning and experience of the organisation is constructed, maintained, transacted and adapted (Barker & Angelopulo, 2005) can presumably be considered equal with management consultant working in the field of management consultancy defined above by O'Mahoney.

As a conclusion of this, the writers' own interpretation is that, communication consultancy is the *creation of value for private and public organisations, through the application of knowledge, techniques and assets of diffusing the meaning and information of the organisation and its environment as well as processes of interaction through which the meaning and experience of the organisation is constructed, maintained, transacted and adapted, in order to improve the performance of organisation and help it reach its goals. This is*

achieved through the rendering of objective advice and/or the implementation of business solutions.

Von Platen has researched communication consultancy, the functions and tasks of communication consultants, and found it is a neglected area in communication research. (von Platen, 2015, 150). Nevertheless, communication consulting is clearly a profession practiced by specialised professionals, and the business employing communication consultants most typically, internationally called the PR or PR agency industry, was globally worth more than 12 billion dollars in 2018 (Sudhaman, 2019) and employed more than 75,000 people in 2013 (von Platen, 2015, 151).

The international interest group of communication consultancies is The International Communications Consultancy Organisation ICCO that declares itself as the voice of public relations consultancies around the world. (ICCOPR, 2020).

The public relations, or most often shortened, PR industry has been growing both in size and in scope. The work of a communication professional has become more complex and challenging. (USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations, 2016). Technology has dramatically transformed the communication profession. (USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations, 2019). In 2018 a survey of 1000 American communication professionals revealed that the two most industry change driving factors were changing media landscape (87 % of respondents) and technological innovations (82 %). Within the next five years strategic planning, leadership and written communication skills will be most necessary for their organization's success. (USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations, 2018).

In 2014 European Communication Monitor (EMC) surveyed challenges for European professional communicators within the digital age and discovered that technology is significantly influencing how we professionals do our work in communication industries. (Zerfass et al., 2014). The EMC report refers to a global study of leadership in communication by Berger & Meng, 2014, that has identified 'dealing with the speed and volume of information flow' as key challenge for practitioners globally. (Zerfass et al., 2014).

The survey shows that the way communication professionals work has been changed by the digital age and that the demands from stakeholders are rising. Respondents report about an increasing pressure in their jobs. At the same time, technology creates more opportunities. Part of this change is an increase in information flow. Younger professionals tend to feel that the digital age is not negative but rather provides job enrichment and also makes work easier for them. (Zerfass et al., 2014).

Also, communication consultants struggle to reconstruct their professional role in the digital media landscape. (von Platen, 2016, 353).

2.5.1   Professional role and competencies of communication consultant

In this section the role and competencies of communication consultant are being explored further. Understanding the role of communication consultant demands information about why communication consults do exist and for what purposes they are needed in client organisations.

Von Platen cites a great number of authors, for example Czarniawska, Mazza, Fombrun and Schein among others, listing acknowledged functions for organizational consultants as change agents, advisers, helpers, diffusers of fashionable ideals, fulfilment of managerial social psychological needs as identity work and sensemaking. (von Platen, 2015, 151).

According to Platen, consultants' work is often portrayed in the management consultancy literature by four broad functions or roles of the consultant: knowledge actor, corporate performer, fashion setter and social psychologist. In addition to that consultants are often viewed as disseminators of e.g. advice, ideals, fashions and knowledge. (von Platen, 2015, 152).

These functions are not sufficient to explain the tasks of communication consultants working in today's modern communication processes with infinite flow of new ideals, fragmented stakeholders and complex settings, and where skills of translating knowledge, information and ideas between different contexts are needed (von Platen, 2015,151), and therefore Von Platen has defined three comprehensive roles of communication consultant acting as an organisational translator in different contexts:

> **1. Neutral transcoder**, who transmits and moves knowledge and information with a slight but unavoidable change of content.
>
> **2. Re-interpreting sense-maker,** who transforms and recontextualises knowledge in different languages and cultures, and
>
> **3. Creative sense-giver,** who re-defines and actively interprets knowledge and information to others.

(von Platen, 2015, 154-155).

All the functions consultants act in, share the common characteristic of being engaged in translating between different groups and individuals. (von Platen, 2015, 155).

Von Platen refers translator as metaphor for linguistics; whereas a skilled translator must have knowledge about the topic and cultural contexts of the text being translated, in an organisational setting the translator must know about practices in other organizations, as well as history and norms of the organisational context. The translator must choose the right language and to introduce new expressions in an appropriate way, since words and concepts have different meanings in different settings. The translator must also be creative and relocate and edit ideals imaginatively by copying or modification, and possess strength, legitimacy and credibility, since reforms are are to be criticized just like literary translations. (von Platen, 2015,154).

The communication consultants' translation is about imitation achieved by creativity, adaptation, editing and framing (von Platen, 2015,154).

Consultants rarely perform only one of these functions within an assignment, and the roles are not clearly separated from each other (von Platen, 2015, 155).

Just as literal translation can be seen between 'constrained copying' and 'creative freedom', von Platen suggests that communication consultant accomplishes various translator functions on a scale of interpretive freedom that ranges from a rather neutral transmitter to an inventive sense-giver. (von Platen, 2015,154)

Tested in empirical interviews with organisational communication managers, five contexts where the communication consultants carry out translation tasks was revealed: 1. between organization and society, 2. from ideal to practice, 3. from communication manager to senior management group, 4. from managers to employees and 5. from employees to managers. (von Platen, 2015, 155-156).

Combining these translator tasks and roles of communication consultant with some of organisations' translation context, the model of communication consultant's translator functions was drawn. (von Platen, 2015, 155).

2.5.2 Consultancy Business

In this chapter the other dimension of communication consultancy is being approached by exploring the side that has less to do with the communication processes of their clients; the business operation of a consultancy agency.

Consulting business is a business model adopted in some, if not all, communications agencies in Finland.

There has been also criticism against consultancy business. Kuusela and Ylönen have concerned the rapid growth of the consulting business in Finland (Holvas, 2013). Total turnover of consulting was 2,4 billion euros in 2011 (Holvas, 2013) and according to one estimate 3,2 billion euros in 2016 (LKJ, 2017).

Fifty years ago, professional services, such as businesses as accountancy, law, architecture, engineering, consulting, and advertising, were provided by small, local partnerships of professionals. Today, professional services firms (sometimes shortened PSFs) have become 'global behemoths providing a wide range of services in almost every corner of the globe'. (Houlder & Williamson, 2013).

Digitalisation has impacted also on the deploying and organising the work in communication consultancies operating in the Knowledge Intensive Business Services sector KIBS. Järvi explains the concept of KIBS originally adopted by Miles et al. (1995) and is referring to consultancy and design services that expert companies provide to other companies and organisations. (Järvi, 2016, 14). Järvi cites Amara et al., 2009 and Strambach, 2001 that typical KIBS are IT services, R&D services, technical consultancy, legal, financial and management consultancy, and marketing communications services. Järvi cites Miles, 2005; Consoli & Elche-Hortelano, 2010 that characteristics of KIBS companies are a high share of expert labour and a central role in the knowledge formation of clients. (Järvi, 2016, 14).

When looking at the future of work in Finland, digitalisation has a significant role on the overall change of it. According to Hautamäki, Leppänen, Mokka and Neuvonen the biggest reason for the change of work is matured new technological solutions and globalisation (Hautamäki, Leppänen, Mokka & Neuvonen 2017). This results in cheaper prices and cheaper or even free services. The expansion of digital communication has also created new co-operation between people outside the markets. For example, if there used to be a need for a photograph for illustration purposes in near past, it had to be bought, whereas now it is possible to get it free of charge using the Creative Commons licence. Wikipedia

has largely destroyed the commercial market of encyclopaedias. (Hautamäki et al., 2017, 10-11).

For businesses, digitalisation enables the dismantling of hierarchies and the moving to networked production methods. In the digital age, production is horizontal and based on co-operation, which does not require large amounts of capital in the beginning. Instead of large hierarchical companies, platform operators take the role of coordinators. (Hautamäki et al., 2017, 14).

All routine and predictable tasks will be automated. (Hautamäki et al., 2017, 15). It was long thought that knowledge work would continue to be necessary and hold its value. However, as computers become capable of processing large amounts of data and learn from the data, machines will become more and more intelligent and capable of doing the work of the advisers. IBM's Watson, a system that uses artificial intelligence, is already able to make better analyses than a human being when diagnosing illnesses or complex financial data. Artificial intelligence systems are a serious competitor in advisory work in the field of economics, law, administration, teaching, media and healthcare. It has been estimated that half of all current work tasks will be automated within the next twenty years or so. (Hautamäki et al., 2017, 15).

2.6   Service Business Development

This chapter the characteristics of service business are discussed. In this part examined the third identified knowledge area named as 'Service Development', and it is consisting of literature concerning customer centricity, service business development and service strategy. This part of knowledge consists of phenomenon visible within in the service business and developing services and it is of significance, because thinking about developing successful services offered by a company, one must be aware of concepts for developing service business as well.

What is service?

Service seems to be as common everyday subject that it is not obvious how to defined it. Grönroos displays it as a complicated phenomenon that has many meanings, ranging from personal service to service as a product or offering. (Grönroos, 2007, 51). Developed over decades and simultaneously with industrial and post-industrial revolutions, one attempted definition of service is:

A service is a process consisting of a series of more or less intangible activities that normally, but not necessarily always, take place in interactions between the customer and the service employees and/or physical resources or goods and/or systems of the service provider, which are provided as solutions to customer problems. (Grönroos, 2007, 52).

According to Grönroos (Grönroos, 2007, 53), there are three basic characteristics that can be associated with services in general:

1. Services are processes consisting of *activities* or a *series of activities*.

2. Services are at least to some extent *produced and consumed simultaneously*.

3. The *customer participates* as a *co-producer* in the service production process at least to some extent.

What is service business?

An old definition for service sector is, according to Grönroos, based on the industrial era when the creation of wealth was conditional to capability to produce manufactured goods in factories, and services were considered merely add-ons. From the tradition of that time the so-called 'service sector' includes e.g. financial services, transportation, hospitality, professional services and services provided by the public sector. (Grönroos, 2007,1).

In other words, one way of defining service business is that is provided by a certain type of organisation. Although, Grönroos argues, that this way is misleading because it views services as a sector of the economy, not as a business logic and a perspective on how to create a competitive advantage. (Grönroos, 2007, 2).

What is service as a business?

Another perspective to view service business is customer perspective. In this point of view, Grönroos argues that, customers do not buy goods or services, they buy the benefits goods and services provide them with (Grönroos, 2007, 4). Customers buy *offerings* consisting of goods, services, information, personal attention and other components, that they perceive as services. This *customer-perceived service* of an *offering* creates value for them (Grönroos, 2007, 4). Grönroos argues, that in fact, the value of goods and services to customers is not produced in factories or back offices of service firms, but the *value is created in customers' value-generating processes*, when she or he makes use of the solution just purchased. (Grönroos, 2007, 4). According to Grönroos, a firm should provide customers with solutions consisting of all the components required to function in

value-creating way in customers everyday activities, because customers do not look for goods or services per se, but they look for solutions that serve their value-generating processes. (Grönroos, 2007, 4).

Looking at this way, from the customer perspective, every business is a service business, when the solution to customer problems are seen as a total service offering and thus becoming a service. (Grönroos, 2007, 32).

Service offering is a selection of services meaning all service products and services of a service provider. Service options may be presented to the customer with the help of a service offering. (TSK Sanastokeskus, 2009).

The customer relationship perspective goes beyond a single transaction of goods or services. The product or service itself as it is, involving all kind of side equipment becomes just one element in the total, ongoing *service offering*. (Grönroos, 2007, 31). For a service firm the core element of the service offering is 'a core service', because it is a prerequisite for a successful offering. But in today's competitive situation this 'core' is rarely enough to produce successful results and a lasting position in the marketplace. In other words, competing with the core product is not enough double, competing with the total offering, where the core product is only one element, or around the one service, of the total service offering is what counts. (Grönroos, 2007,31).

How the services are developed?

Grönroos finds product-oriented management approach, where the back-office is considered the key to a firms' success in the marketplace, old-fashioned and not reflecting the competitive situation of today. That means, interactions in the service process are considered less important to the customer than what is produced in the back office. (Grönroos, 2007,31-32).

Instead, creating a successful, customer orientated service system is asking for relationship marketing that demands that the firm defines its business as a service business, and understands how to create and manage a total service offering. The organisations' processes have to be designed to make it possible to serve customers, and produce and deliver a total service offering. This is referred as practising 'service management'. (Grönroos, 2007, 34).

Another mind-set of developing services is productization, that offers strategic framework for developing services. The starting point of service development of a company is business strategy – an insight on how to best connect a company's expertise and resources

with the opportunities of industry to deliver growth and profitability – and one of the targets of the development project can be developing the service offering. (Jaakkola, Orava & Varjonen, 2009, 1-4).

The main purpose of the service development work is to create the conditions for services that the customer thinks will produce attractive added value. Strategic choices should at least provide information on customer needs, industry conditions and trends, and competitors. (Jaakkola et al., 2009, 1-4).

Successful service business requires know-how in terms of service, customers and industry. The key questions that determine a company's operations are (1) what kind of customers and customer relationships are sought, (2) what products and services are produced and how they are produced, and (3) what is the degree of specialization and product development. (Jaakkola et al., 2009, 1-4).

Service development projects are based on defining a company's service offering: what services are actually offering and what services should be provided to achieve the overall goals. Service offering means the entire set of services provided by a company. By describing and evaluating the entire offering, a clear comprehension can be formulated of what kind of services the business consists of. A targeted service offering can be defined to guide the development work, to which the company aims at within next years. By comparing the current situation with the company's strategy and objectives, it can be discovered how the business should be reformed and developed. (Jaakkola et al., 2009, 7).

According to Grönroos, any attempt to conceptualise the service offering has to be based on a customer perspective. Too often understanding customers' point-of-view is limited in the development process. (Grönroos, 2007, 184).

2.6.1 Customer Centricity

As discovered above, service development requires customer-centricity.

Market research company's Forrester's report is stating that the world has entered the Age of Customer (Koivisto, Säynäjäkangas & Forsberg, 2019). It means that empowered customers are disrupting every industry and the only sustainable competitive advantage that can survive in the technology-fuelled disruption is understanding and engagement with customers (Bernoff, 2011, 1-4).

Customer centricity could be described as a wider set of "isms" (theories and ideas) focusing on the customers side of all kind of business relations, for example on customers experience or the value customer is gaining from the operations of the provider. Customer centricity in not a new idea, quite opposite Finland was already in the late 1990's by definition a service society: generating 55 % of its GDP via services already in 1997 (Grönroos, 2002).

According to Grönroos, the service society had already been described in the early 1970's by Daniel Bell as a "mutual game of people", and that characterises well the essence of post-industrial era as compared with the "game against cultivated nature" of period of industrialisation. During this era of mutual game of people, that we are still living in, focus is on managing relationships between the people, whether they are the employees and customers of a service company or the staff alone. (Grönroos, 2002).

Also, the need to success in these times of customer orientation, new ideas such as customer satisfaction management had come into language of business development and marketing after 1980's and 1990's (Rope & Pöllänen, 1994), and the whole idea of relationship marketing has born and been refined as comprehensive concept customer relationship management CRM (Peelen & Beltman, 2013).

From the marketing point of view, customer thinking started as a solution of growing the overall customer orientation within the western economies: The mass production of industrialisation era had led to the need of marketing systems and brought extensive distribution channels that had distanced the producer from the customer. (Storbacka & Lehtinen, 1997). In the late 1990 the business community wanted to reform the mind-set of people to think from the customers point of view. Storbacka and Lehtinen illustrate this with saying: 'Lets rather find products for the customers than customers for the products. (Storbacka & Lehtinen, 1997).

Historically, in classical marketing and sales the emphasis had been on customer acquisition and transactions, not on customer loyalty and building relationships. Customer service had long been considered only as a after sales activity – not a part of the core of commercial process. Over the past three decades retaining customers and building relationships with them has gained attention and with that attention the roles of marketing, sales and service have changed. (Peelen & Beltman, 2013).

A common phrase in the everyday business environment the writer has been under influence, is *centralising on customers*. According to that, customer centricity is the strategic choice that defines the organization as a whole.

Being customer centric has consequences for the whole organisation: it has implications for leadership, culture, employees, internal communication, processes and control (Peelen & Beltman, 2013).

The customer centricity has also clear linkage to organisations' communication processes and thus impacting in addition this way into developing of communication services as core business.

When technology empowered customers are disrupting every industry, engagement with customers will be the only sustainable competitive advantage (Bernoff, 2011, 1-4). Bernoff states that customers want things faster, better, cheaper, and with a higher degree of service, and social technology makes getting what they want possible. In this age, Bernoff call Age of Customer, customer matters more than any other strategic imperative and that is beyond customer customer-centric thinking (Bernoff, 2011, 1-4).

2.6.2 Service Strategy

The concrete aim of the thesis process is to compose a suggestion for a service strategy of a communication consultancy company. One potential reference for strategic development of services is IT industry, that has been an example of developing the target company previously as well. Distinct similarities between the two sectors include for example service dominant business models, rapidly changing environments and close relationship with different technologies and independency from certain systems or technics.

A quote from Harvard Business School professor emeritus Theodore Levitt makes the need for future anticipating service strategy concrete: "*People do not want quarter-inch drills. They want quarter-inch holes*." (Cannon, Wheeldon, Lacy & Hanna, 2011, 35). When the needs and requirements of client organisations change, there will be also competing ways of fulfilling these needs. These unknown future players on the market can be something else than traditionally similar companies offering same kind of expertise. The business environments of communication and marketing agencies is already being disrupted by phenomenon such as, individual professionals, technologically equipped amateurs, multinational and global social networking services and radical transformation of media industry, to name a few. This unstable future and fuzzy front end of service developing process needs to be taken into account when deciding new directions for services of a company.

According to ITIL Service Strategy principles (Cannon et al., 2011, 37) the goal of a service strategy can be summed up as *superior performance versus competing alternatives*.

"A high-performance service strategy, is one that enables a service provider to consistently outperform competing alternatives over time, across business cycles, industry disruptions and changes in leadership. It comprises both the ability to succeed today and positioning for the future." (Cannon et al., 2011, 38).

In short, a strategy is a plan that outlines how an organization will meet a designed set of objectives. More detailed, a strategy is a complex set of planning activities in which an organisation seeks to move from one situation to another in response to a number of internal and external variables. A service strategy specifically defines *how a service provider will use services to achieve the business outcomes of its customers*, thereby *enabling the service provider to meet its objectives*. (Cannon et al., 2011, 35).

A service strategy should also consider the opposing dynamics of developing services as business: Navigating in rapid changes even daily basis, not losing the operational effectiveness and holding on to clients also in long perspective.

Business change is quickening and opportunities arise while others disappear. Today's good plan may be a weakness tomorrow. Therefore, a service strategy resolves big issues so that employers can get on with the small details, for example how best to provide services rather than debating what services to offer. (Cannon et al., 2011, 37).

Operational effectiveness is often not enough to remain competitiveness and it needs to be put against improvements increasing competitive advantage of company's services. Constant focus on improving operational effectiveness is often not able to improve competitive advantage. That's why a service strategy must explain how a service provider will do it better not only compared to itself but against competing alternatives. (Cannon et al., 2011, 37).

New services may be launched to create value through distinctiveness, but it may not be able to keep it for a long since there is a little time before competitors access the same capability. Service innovations are costly, so the strategy needs to find a balance between maintain a value capture capability of current innovation and looking for the next opportunity. (Cannon et al., 2011, 38).

Accomplishing a beneficial suggestion for a service strategy requires embracing the strategic level.

According to the Mintzbergs Four P's of Strategy there are four forms or stages that should be covered when defining a strategy: Perspectives, Positions, Plans and Patterns

(Cannon et al., 2011). These stages can be approached from any direction and proceeded in whichever order. For example, a service provider might begin with a perspective: a vision and direction for the organization. It is important to use all the four stages at some point though. (Cannon et al., 2011).

In this development project the first part of the P's, Perspective, is focused on.

Perspective describes the vision and direction of the organization (Cannon et al., 2011, 39). A strategic perspective articulates what the business of the organization is, how it interacts with the customer and how its services or products will be provided. A perspective cements a service provider's distinctiveness in the minds of the employees and customers.

According to ITIL Service Strategy (Cannon et al., 2011, 148) good perspective is to

- clarify the direction of the service provider
- motivate people to take action that moves the organization to make the vision reality
- coordinate the actions of different people or groups
- represent the view of senior management as they direct the organization towards its overall objectives.

3   Objectives

In this chapter I will discuss more profoundly about the objectives and the context of the study as well as introduce the outcomes and research questions.

The purpose of this thesis study is to develop future service offering for a communication agency and discover the changing client needs for organisational communication services in rapidly changing business environment. This study examines communications as a service.

The goal of this research and development project is to produce a scenario to anticipate the future service demand of a communication agency. This thesis study will give ideas and structure for developing the service offering for a communication agency, and therefore help it building better and more successful future for the company. The study will give the company an insight on how to be a successful communication and marketing agency in the 2020's and help it build more structured service strategy. Through that the organisation will be able to further develop itself both as a wanted service provider and an employer / work community.

The objectives of the study are:

− To increase organisations' understanding about the expectations and needs of the clients regarding to its services

− To identify the demand of different communication consultancy services in the near future

− To create recommendations based on the results or a proposal for a service strategy.

3.1   Context

The working environment of communication and advertising agencies and communication professionals has changed in the past decades. The trends change faster than before, people's social awareness is greater, and expectations of transparency for organisations are increased. The modern communication is interconnected and social by technologies (Sedereviciute & Valentini, 2011) and rapidly changing (Luoma-aho & Vos, 2010).

A successful communications consult must understand how the client organisations communicate at the moment, and have an insight on how they will do it in the near future, as well as anticipate what kind of communication services she or he has to offer in order to

succeed. Von Platen cites Alvesson, Fincham & Evans saying that consultancy and other knowledge intensive forms of the work suffer from a constant need to establish and reinforce their legitimacy in the labour market (von Platen, 2016).

The target company of the thesis study has been established over 30 years ago and it has gone through a generation shift and strategic change during the last ten years. Within the communication and marketing agency industry there has been a structural change. In the mid 80's the company was founded as advertising agency, extended with the communications agency in the late 90's, merged into a one holistic marketing communications agency in the 2010's and proceeded with branch-specific expert organization.

Integration between the functions of communications/PR and advertising/marketing has been going on the whole of my professional carrier.

In the survey of global PR professional's, majority of the respondents predicted the coming years will bring ever considerable or drastic change (USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations, 2019). According to the survey, the integration between PR and marketing is one of the important trends as it has been in the past years: 90 % of respondents see the two domains will be a lot more or somewhat more integrated over the next five years. Only 8 % saw they will stay the same and 3 % less integrated. Thereby it looks like the western PR industry professionals seem to have congruent view for what types of agencies the future will host. The integration spurred by competition is forcing PR agencies to adopt new technology being used in the advertising world. The merger of marketing and PR is causing structural changes in agencies, and one result is that PR agencies are hiring more occupational titles from advertising agencies, such as creatives and planners. (USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations, 2019).

PR and advertising are big business. In 2016 a report expected the global PR industry business to approach 20 billion dollars by 2020 (USC Annenberg Center for Public Relations, 2016), and agency leaders predicted over 30 % industry revenue growth. By 2019 the growth has been slower than expected, but still the global PR Industry was estimated growing steadily wit 5 % rate (Sudhaman, 2019).

Two major industry associations collecting data about PR industry are European EACA (European Association of Communication Agencies) and American ICCO (International Communications Consultancy Organisation), but at least in Finland majority of companies are left outside of these statistics.

In 29 European countries there were 2500 agencies and 130 000 employees organised as the "agency industry" being members of an official industry association in 2019. Some 60 % of the companies described the type of their agency as "advertising", 18 % of "media", 9 % of "digital / Interactive", 6 % of "public relations", 4 % of "design and 6 % other. In Finland there were 70 agencies as member of national association (Finnish Association of Marketing, Technology and Creativity MTL) representing approximately 1600 professional employees. (EACA, 2019). The actual amount of communication and marketing agencies in Finland is nevertheless far higher: There were 4 029 companies operating in public relations and communications or advertising and market research industry in 2018 (Statistics Finland, 2019). Together they were employing only 10 655 people, which means Finnish marketing and communication consultancy companies are very small, with approximately personnel of 2,6. The communications consultancy market in Finland is thereby very scattered and diverged. The vast majority of Finnish professionals seems to be working in the companies outside of the traditional corporate associations. This can be one explanation why the Finnish "marcom" companies have very little common arrangements and conventions and why the industry is such competitive.

It is somewhat unclear whether the global, with strong emphasis on US and UK, figures will hold true in Finland but at least it will give us hints from the forthcoming trends.

Like many other agencies, the target company has evolved from advertising producer or manufacturer to a consult agency, offering wide-ranging and often complex professional services demanding deep expertise and versatile skills on certain areas of communication and marketing – be it strategic thinking, written, oral or visual communication, technological or business development know-how.

Strategic position of the target company is to be a communication and marketing "one-stop-shop" in the chosen industry sector. The skills needed are very specific and the work is usually learnt over long period of time. It is often not easy to requite new people from the outside the company or from another business sector. In order to grow and increase sells, the company needs to decrease dependency on personifying to some key individuals. Its operations must be more scalable. In order to do that, service development must be accomplished. In my experience, it is quite easy to discover new ideas for potential service concepts within the daily work with clients. Developing ideas into viable service concepts is however time-consuming and therefore expensive at least in small business scale (SME). Instead of using considerably time and money on developing some specific

repeatable marketing or communication service component, that could change rapidly as was discussed earlier, company must decide what broader themes and service areas it should focus on – and perhaps develop further to concepts. More detail service concepts are needed to get the skills and expertise of different people into the use of good quality operations.

3.2 Outcomes

The main outcome of this research and development project is a set of scenarios, and based on those a proposal for a service strategy for a communication agency. The scenarios will be compiled on the bases of literature analysis and deepened in the interviews with real-life agency clients and communication professionals. Based on the scenarios and the interviews the service strategy will be constructed.

One concrete outcome of the thesis is simplifying the decision making of a small company (SME) regarding the new services and resources allocation of the development activities.

The other, and more long run outcomes will be the company's deepened understanding about the client needs and advanced knowledge of the writer herself.

For different stakeholders the expected results will give various advantages: The scenarios will help both the company administration (directors) and the communication professionals (consults) to anticipate for the coming needs of competence and know-how. The proposed service strategy will help the owners and the shareholders to anticipate the future position of the company and expectations for the value of their interests.

The research and development project of this thesis is conducted according to following process exhibited in the Figure 5: First the relevant development challenge and theories were discovered, then, the scope of development was defined, solution was developed and finally an outcome was delivered.

Knowledge base, theories

Megatrends of 2020's and 2030's

Design drivers

Scenarios of future

Interviews

Ideation of future needs

Service description of the future

DISCOVER DEFINE DEVELOP DELIVER
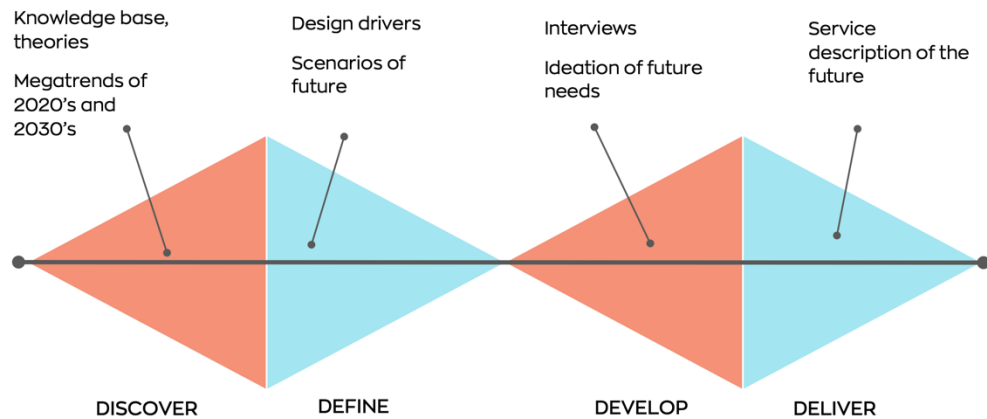
The process of the Research and development project of this thesis adapting the Double Diamond model of Service Design.

Figure 5: Process of this research and development project adopting the Double Diamond model of Service Design.

3.3 Research questions

The main problem of the study and the business problem of the target company is that it is impossible to know beforehand, what should a successful communication agency be like in the near future and what kind of services it has to have in order to be a successful communication agency? This problematic lack of knowledge about the future makes the vision of agency blurred and obscure and development of the agency difficult.

The writer's own assumption is that success of a consultant company is created through offering services that meet the needs of clients, a company strategy that is agile enough and fits the current business environment, creating customer relationships that last, and developing an organisation culture that cultivates succession and professional talent.

In communication consultancy business the discipline of communication is utilized within services and service business. Because the writer studies in Communication Management Degree Program, this study will focus on the services of communication consultancy agency rather than overall business operations of the company.

Service development requires customer-centricity. Market research company's Forrester's report is stating that the world has entered the Age of Customer (Koivisto, Säynäjäkangas

& Forsberg, 2019). It means that empowered customers are disrupting every industry and the only sustainable competitive advantage that can survive in the technology-fuelled disruption is understanding and engagement with customers (Bernoff, 2011, 1-4). This observation has been driving the selection of research methodology of this study.

Service development requires having insight from the future as well. Wanting to get a grasp of best possible insights for what services and competencies an agency should invest in for the future success, some future orientated questions must be answered.

Developing communication consultancy's services also examines problems of communication as profession. In order to solve these problems, some questions related to communication consults role and competence must be answered. In the short summary of previous the objectives, outcomes and research questions of this study are the following.

The objectives are
- To increase organisations' understanding about the expectations and needs of the clients regarding to its services
- To identify the demand of different communication consultancy services in the near future
- To create recommendations based on the results or a proposal for a service strategy.

The outcomes are
- set of scenarios
- service strategy suggestion for a communication agency.

The main question of the study is what is a successful communications agency alike in 2020's.

The actual research questions will shed light on the following topics: Success in future communicating landscape; Changing use of Communication Services; Services of Success and Competences of Communication agency. The focus of the research is on communication agencies, but themes will be examined through the needs of their client organisations. The clients are referred here as "organisations" as distinct from "agencies".

The research questions (RQ) of the study are formulated with the following train of thought.

3.3.1 RQ 1

The first question is the examined within the framework of success of client organisations of the agency in the future communication landscape. This is, how will the 2020's communication environment be like? How will communicating change in the near future? What are the megatrends that are driving the change? And on the other hand, how should a successful organisation communicate? What kind of a communication makes an organisation to succeed?

RQ1 is "What will successful organisational communication of agency's clients be like in the 2020s communication environment?"

3.3.2 RQ 2

The second question will touch the theme of changing use of services of client organisation of the agency. Meaning how will the trends discussed within the previous research question (RQ1) impact on the needs of the clients of the agency? How will the need of professional communication services change? What are the required and desired communication services for an 'antifragile organisation'? And what communication or marketing related professional services organisations will need in order to success in constantly and rapidly changing environment?

RQ2 is "What kind of future needs of communication services will the agency's client organisations have?"

3.4 Scope

As discussed earlier, developing viable service concepts can be costly and time-consuming for small companies. In order to decide what ideas to develop further services, the target company must know what are the most promising service areas that support most the future success of the company.

The scope of this thesis is to gather strategy supporting insights and suggest a framework or principles against which to choose what service concepts to develop and what not. The aim of the thesis is therefore to help the company in making decisions regarding developing new services and to offer a systematic structure for considerations in allocating time and human resources for the development activities.

Strategic implementation is the usual phase where success or failure is decided within professional services firms in modern business environment. (Prince, 2015). According to

Prince, "a large percentage of professional services firms would likely be much better off focusing on implementation that is directly tied to success than on perfecting their strategy which, considering the dramatic, fast moving changes impacting the world of professional services, will always need to be adjusted." (Prince, 2015).

The wider phenomenon discussed in the thesis is communication as service, that is offered through communication agency and produced by the consultants. The more focused area of the development project is the future services of communication agency. The actual development work is the suggestion for the service strategy of a small communication agency.

The concrete result is a suggestion for the service strategy. The entire strategy work process will be limited outside of the scope of the study. Instead creating insight for the future service development and proposals for future service strategy belong to the project. Creating an entire service strategy for the target company does not belong to this thesis work because it would be hard to measure the success of the strategy within the time limits of the study. An appropriate strategy work should also take into account other perspectives of service offering, such as competition and economics. This study focuses on the fundamental elements of services – the client and environment needs – and comments on the required competences to some extent.

4   Methodology and methods

In this chapter the research approach of this study is explained, covering research and development methodology as well as data collection and analysing methods.

The methodological approach of the work is applied research and development. According to Ojasalo et. al (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti, 2015, 19) applied research and development can originate from various perspectives, such as an organisation's development or need to change. Applied R&D work usually involves solving practical problems and producing new ideas, practices, products or services. Its purpose is typically to draft, develop, and implement solutions that and takes things forward in practice.

One applied R&D work often has features from several approaches. (Ojasalo et al, 2015, 51).

4.1   Methodology

The approach of the work is explained in this chapter and the methodological background is being explained and the justification being argued.

Main methodological approach guiding the research of this development project is *Future Foresight (*OR *Foresight).* The methodological approach of *Service Design* has been informing and influencing this thesis as well, but because of the chosen focus it has merely impacted the choosing the approach and development methods with its client-centred perspective.

This research and development work is about future services of a communication consultancy agency, and therefore future oriented research and development methods are being exploited. Moreover, this work is about the prosperity of an agency and its services, and therefore it concerns the feasibility of the services offered to the markets. The before-mentioned perspective makes the viewpoint of a user and a buyer of the services important.

This methodological approach is chosen in order to study challenges happening in the future and by the clients of an organisation. This challenge of unknown behaviour of people and organisations is being settled with by choosing these two methodologies to guide the study and taking advantages of the research and development methods of each.

Research design of this study is Applied Research. By Applied research is meant research undertaken with the intention of applying the results to a specific problem (SAGE Publishing, 2020b). Applied research is an umbrella term that includes various kinds of

systematic, empirical research that aims to solve particular problems (Frey, 2018). Applied research is trying to improve circumstances through collecting and analysing data that directly inform organisational decision making. Applied research differs from basic research so that the problem to be investigated in an applied research project could be selected by the researchers themselves or by nonresearcher stakeholders or clients. (Frey, 2018).

Also, the underlaying philosophical attitude or stimulus of this study and writer herself needs to be explained in detail because of the transparency of the choices made and explained further in the next chapter within the title of research strategy. The term 'research philosophy' refers to a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016, 124). The researcher needs to be aware of the relationship between her own philosophical position and how one undertakes her research (Saunders et al., 2016, 125) in order to explain and justify one's methodological choice, research strategy and data collection procedures and analyses techniques. (Saunders et al., 2016, 125).

When business and management emerged as an academic discipline in the 20th century, it drew its theoretical base from a mixture of disciplines in the social sciences, natural sciences, applied sciences, arts and humanities and the domain of organisational practice. This history is resulting in the coexistence of multiple research philosophy is, paradigms and approaches as well as methodologies to be used within the business and management research. (Saunders et al., 2016, 126). This diversity of attitudes can be seen helpful and enriching the 'ways of seeing' the different organisational realities (Saunders et al., 2016, 126).

There are two opposing extremes of research philosophy in business and management research: objectivists and subjectivist. *Objectivism* incorporates the assumptions of the natural sciences, seeing the researched social reality as external, embracing realism, considering social entities to be like physical entities of natural world and seeking to discover the truth about the social world with measurable facts and law-like generalisations. Because of realism and externalism this seeks to keep the research free of values of the researcher biasing the findings (Saunders et al., 2016, 128). As opposite to this, *subjectivism* incorporates assumptions of the arts and humanities, asserting that social reality is made from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors (people) (Saunders et al., 2016, 130). Subjectivism may consider for example that the order and structures of social phenomena studied are created by the researchers themselves and by other social actors through use of language, conceptual categories, perceptions and consequent actions. Because each person experiences and perceives the reality differently, it makes

sense to talk about *multiple realities* instead of a single reality that is the same for everyone. In social constructionist version of subjectivism reality is seen as constructed through social interaction in which social actors create partially shared meanings and realities. As social interactions are a continual process, social phenomena are in a constant state of flux and revision. Because subjectivist researcher sees no universal laws governing social behaviour, she or he is interested in *different opinions* and *narratives* that can explain different social realities of different actors. They also believe that as an active user of the data, the researcher cannot detach herself from her own values, and therefore openly acknowledge this and actively incorporate reflections within the research. (Saunders et al., 2016, 130).

For example, in a subjectivist research on customer motives and behaviours the customers are just like other social actors and may interpret the situations in which they find themselves differently as a consequence of their own view of the world, and the different interpretations are likely to affect their actions. (Saunders et al., 2016, 130-131).

The *subjectivist researcher's role* is to seek to understand the different realities of the customers in order to be able to make sense of and understand their motives, actions and intentions in a way that is meaningful. The subjectivist view suggests that, 'customer service is produced through the social interactions between service providers and customers and is continually being revised as a result of this' (Saunders et al., 2016, 131).

The background of the writer herself lies within the arts and humanities and media studies. Given the prior studies informing the writer the philosophical background of this study is leaning more on the subjective approach. With regards to the background of the researcher and the functional role of the research as a development work for an existing organisation in practice, the major philosophical tradition most relevant to this study seems to be *pragmatism*, which argues that concepts are relevant only when they support action. (Saunders et al., 2016, 143). **Pragmatism** reconciles between both objectivism and subjectivism, facts and values, accurate and rigorous knowledge and different contextualised experiences. It does this by considering theories, concepts, ideas, hypothesis and research findings not in an abstract form, but in terms of the roles they play as instrument of thought and action. (Saunders et al., 2016). Reality matters to pragmatists as practical effects of ideas, and knowledge is valued for enabling actions to be carried out successfully (Saunders et al., 2016, 143). For a pragmatist, research starts with a problem, and aims to contribute to practical solutions that inform future practice (Saunders et al., 2016). As pragmatists are more interested in practical outcomes than abstract distinctions, there may be considerable variation in terms of how 'objectivists' or 'subjectivist' the research is.

(Saunders et al., 2016). The most important determinant for the research design and strategy, in pragmatist philosophy, is the research problem and question. In the pragmatist view it is possible to work with different types of knowledge and multiple methods within one study (Saunders et al., 2016). Since pragmatists recognise that there are many different ways of interpreting the world and undertaking research, no single point of view can ever give the entire picture and that there are maybe multiple realities. (Saunders et al., 2016)

A *research strategy* can be defined as a plan of how a researcher carry out answering her research question. Research strategy is the methodological link between the chosen philosophy and subsequent choice of methods to collect and analyse data. (Denzin and Lincoln in (Saunders et al., 2016, 177).

Given the earlier choices of approaches and traditions explained above, the research strategy in this study is Constructive Research. The constructive approach means problem solving through the construction of models, diagrams, plans, and organizations (Kasanen, 1993, 1).

The process of a constructive approach may be characterized by dividing the research process into phases (Kasanen, 1993, 3).

1. Find a practically relevant problem which also has research potential.

2. Obtain a general and comprehensive understanding of the topic.

3. Innovate, i.e., construct a solution idea.

4. Demonstrate that the solution works.

5. Show the theoretical connections and the research contribution of the solution concept.

6. Examine the scope of applicability of the solution.

The following picture in figure 4 presents the constructive research process as linear phases. (Kasanen, Lukka & Siitonen, 1991 in Ojasalo et al., 2015, 67).
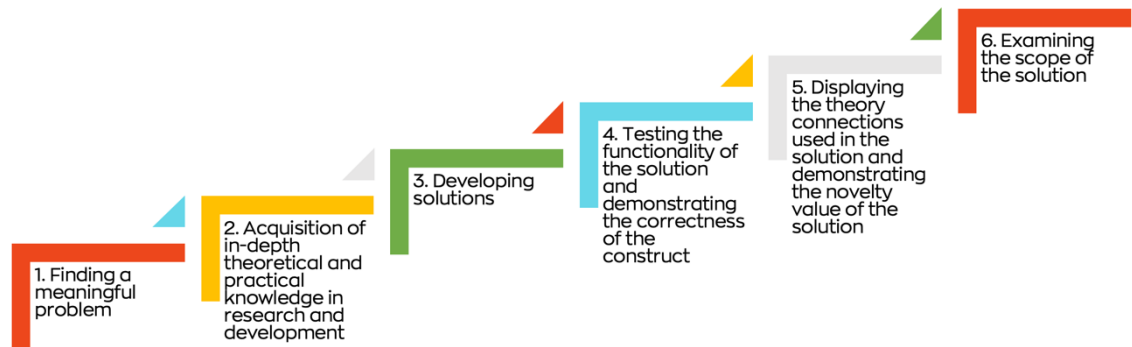
Figure 4: Construcive research project adapted from Kasanen, Lukka & Siitonen, 1991 in Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti, 2015, 67

The study aims to develop solutions for a challenge identified in a particular organisation by the writer herself. Although the questions are examined through one organisation, the results would be generalised in larger community of communication consultants. Because of this generalisation, the study does not meet the criteria for Case study.

The type of applied research closest to this study is Action Research. Action Research is "designed to find the most effective way to bring about a desired social change or to solve a practical problem, usually in collaboration with those being researched" (SAGE Publishing, 2020a). "Action research is a term used to describe a family of related approaches that integrate theory and action with a goal of addressing important organizational, community, and social issues together with those who experience them." (Coghlan, Brydon-Miller, 2014).

In order to answer to the research question of the future needs of communication services of the client organisations exploratory or inquiring methods are being used. (O'Mahoney, 2010). The research methodology used in organisational communication up to the early 1980's where predominantly positivist and quantitative. Within the next two decades qualitative, interpretative, cultural and critical approaches became commonplace. (Barker & Angelopulo, 2005), 15).

The research approach chosen in this study is viewing communication as a social, interactive phenomenon.

Closer view on the strategic alignment of this thesis study is obtained by investigating three contrasting academic perspectives that have informed debate in organisation theory and management studies and their implications for studying communication; *modern, interpretive, and postmodern perspectives*. (Blundel et al., 2013). Blundel et al. use terminology adapted from Deetz, and it is likely to face similar range of perspectives elsewhere in organisation theory, management studies and other areas of social science. (Blundel et al., 2013). Blundel et al. argument that, by 'becoming more aware of the different perspectives used to study communication, we are also better positioned to question the tendency of writers to offer the so-called pre-packaged solutions that takes insufficient account of local circumstances.

In **modern perspectives** Modernism is associated with the rise of scientific enquiry in the Renaissance and Enlightenment eras; it remains a dominant way of thinking about the world. Citing Thompson, Pugh and Hickson, Blundel et al. state, that modernism's science-based framework emphasises objective measurement, decision-making based on rational calculations, and progress towards an improved and more general understanding of real-world phenomena. Research in this perspective tends to treat organisational communication practices as being readily accessible to researchers, revealing some predictable features that make them open to a degree of managerial intervention and control. Research programmes have often followed the natural science model, seeking law-like generalisations through theory building and empirical testing, frequently making use of quantitative survey data as the basis for detailed statistical analyses of organisations. (Blundel et al., 2013, 12). Also, Systems theory tended to treat organisations as rather more complex phenomena that cannot be fully understood using the tools of natural science, and paid greater attention to the subjective perceptions of people in organisations. (Blundel et al., 2013).

In **interpretive perspectives**, Interpretive research in contemporary organisations owes much to the ethnographic tradition in anthropology aiming to reveal the complexity and richness of organisational communication. Ethnographic studies often involve research is spending long periods in the field, using qualitative research methods such as participant observation to record conversations, stories, rituals and other routine events. Citing Pentland, Blundel et al. argues that the results are often presented in the form of detailed narratives, accompanied by varying amounts of analyses, in contrast to natural science,

where researchers can make direct interpretations of objects and processes (e.g. chemical compounds or whether systems), social science researchers are often required to interpret other people's interpretations of the world. Studies attempt to conduct research in ways that do not impose the researchers' interpretations of a situation onto the people they are observing. (Blundel et al., 2013).

In **postmodern perspectives**, Postmodernism is often presented as a challenge to the assumptions of modernisms. According to Blundel et al. postmodernist theorists have questioned whether it is possible for researchers to take a detached view of the research subjects, and whether there is a possibility of establishing general laws relating to real-world phenomena, such as organisations. At the core of post-modernism is the view that there is no neutral access to the world, unlike modernist researchers assume. Our knowledge is always shaped by language, which is itself a product of society and open to a variety of meanings, depending on the context in which it is used. In the field of organisational communication, post-modernists have argued that contemporary trends, such as globalisation and the rise of the Internet, have left people with multiple and 'fragmented identities', in the face of many competing discourses. This means that it is not possible to make any objective, generalised or unified statements about organisational communication. Instead, research tends to be directed at the deconstruction of particular communication practices. (Blundel et al., 2013).

These views are competing against each-others. Blundel et al. state that postmodernists have criticised interpretivist's for representing cultures as unified wholes, rather than reflecting inherent tensions, while modernists have attacked both the interpretive and postmodern perspectives for the absence of coherent theoretical frameworks or sufficiently rigorous research methods. (Blundel et al., 2013).

In this study's research strategy, modern perspective is clearly not followed. The chosen methodologies in data collection and analysis, fictional scenarios and qualitative interviews, are apparently not going to produce "natural science law-like generalisations" and "objective measurement" or "decision-making based on rational calculations" nor overall "progress towards more general understanding of real-world phenomena". Just like in Systems theory, greater attention to the subjective perceptions of people in organisations have to be paid.

Instead, elements of interpretive research perspectives and postmodern perspectives are to be applied in this study. Interpretivisms 'ethnographic tradition in anthropology revealing the complexity and richness of organisational communication' is applied in discussion-like,

qualitative interviews over the scenarios. Also studying the researchers own working environment is parallel to 'spending long periods in the field'. Also using 'qualitative research methods such as participant observation to record conversations, stories, rituals and other routine events' is natural to interpretive research strategies.

4.2   Development methods

The development methods are *Future studies, Foresigh*t and *Scenario working*.

Because the case company has been constantly evolving over the last ten years and the change has been identified as a continuous state, it is necessary to anticipate the future by identifying future services to be developed, and therefore this work should focus on the *development of the whole service offering* rather than improving a single existing service or expanding an existing service in the current target market. Service offering seems to be matching the needs of the sponsor company, the main problem and research question having being "*what should a successful communication agency be like in the near future, what kind of services makes a successful communication agency*"?

Future Foresight as a methodological approach is justified because the questions this study tries to correspond are not able to be answered by looking at the history or current data of the company or its clients. It therefore needs, to some extent, to look ahead, to do scenario working and to have several possible futures identified and to anticipate towards the ones that are wanted.

Some features of the methodological approach of *Service Design* is implemented in this thesis as well. Service Design is concrete approach that brings deep client understanding into the business and therefore helps to implement service-dominant logic into the everyday of companies. Service Design can help to bring real client value as a starting point of the development work. This is thought to be most successful when Service Design process and methods are being combined to Foresight methods. (Ojasalo et al., 2015, 73).

4.2.1   Future studies

In this section the definitions and terminology of future studies is presented.

The future is a set of plausible outcomes rather than one future to be discovered.

Future studies aim to work out what will be possible, plausible, desirable or avoidable, presumable in the future. Future studies are a multi-disciplinary field that aim to settle what kind of different futures could be. Future studies research phenomena of today (and history) in the framework of the evaluation of the futures. (Ritalahti, 2018b).

Future research, on the other hand, describes, explains and understands broad societal phenomena and processes of change and development in different walks of life related to them. In futures research, a multidisciplinary approach combines the discipline's own methods and theoretical approach. Future research looks at trends affecting society from the perspective of knowing the future. In addition, it looks at what is possible and looks for alternative futures, the probability or desirability of which can be estimated by various methods. (Rubin, 2004).

Future oriented thinking is vital for any forward and strategic planning or policy activity to be able to meet future challenges proactively. (European Foresight Platform, 2012).

There is certain importance of the meaning of words describing the studying and re-searching the future.

The verb 'to *foresee'* is the most unprofessional of the three expressions presented here, meaning the 'crystal ball' type of prophecy, that is not always based on science-like data, but more gut-feeling, based on experience or guessing. Verb 'to *forecast'* has more scientific meaning, based on data, like common weather forecasts. Finally, the verb 'to *antici-pate'* meaning preparing for the future, choosing some of the forecasts and helping it to become true. (Ritalahti, 2018a).

In this study, as a sort of a combination of the terms above, the expression '*foresight'* is preferred.

4.2.2 Foresight

Foresight is a systematic, participatory, future-intelligence-gathering and medium-to-long-term vision-building process aimed at enabling present-day decisions and mobilizing joint actions (European Foresight Platform, 2012) . Word 'foresight' is not meaning making prophecy or predictions. "It does not aim to predict the future but to help to build it. It invites to consider the future as something that can be created or shaped, rather than as something already decided." (European Foresight Platform, 2012).

Foresight enhances future oriented thinking by gathering anticipatory intelligence from a wide range of knowledge sources in a systematic way and linking it to today's decision

making. Foresight can be envisaged as a triangle combining "Thinking the Future", "Debating the Future" and "Shaping the Future". (European Foresight Platform, 2012).

Foresight is action-oriented: is not only about analysing or contemplating future developments but supporting actors to actively shape the future. Foresight is open to alternative futures: it assumes that the future is not pre-determined, but can evolve in different directions, which can be shaped to some extent by the actions of various players and the decisions taken today. There is a certain degree of freedom to choose among the alternative, feasible futures, and increase the chance of arriving at the preferred (selected) future state. (European Foresight Platform, 2012).

Foresight is participatory: it is not done by a small group of experts but involves a number of different groups of actors concerned with the issues at stake. The results of the Foresight exercise are disseminated among a large audience from which feedback is actively sought. (European Foresight Platform, 2012).

Foresight is multidisciplinary: it is based on the principle that the problems faced cannot be correctly understood if reduced to one dimension and to fit into the perspective of the different academic disciplines. Foresight provides an approach that captures realities in their totality with all the variables influencing them, regardless of the type (quantitative and qualitative). (European Foresight Platform, 2012).

The difference between the terms is that, purely analytical studies of possible futures (i.e. "futures studies") without connection to possible actions are not considered as Foresight. Foresight activities should only be undertaken when it is actually possible to shape the future. (European Foresight Platform, 2012).

In this study, outlining the strategic plan over the future services allows the company and its people to anticipate the feasible and preferred future to become true by implementing the strategy or elements of it. Therefore, the development project can be regarded as foresight activity.

In this study, methodologies of futures research and future studies are being utilised.

4.2.3   Service Design

In this study the Service Design was used to plan the development work process.

Service Design means the application of design processes and methods to service development. It doesn't just mean decorating details, it can be applied to service development

at all levels: company strategy, business models, processes, service environment (physical and virtual), and customer contacts (Ojasalo et al., 2015, 71).

The goal of service design is to create easy-to-use, useful and desirable service experiences for the user and service concepts that are effective, efficient, profitable and distinctive from the perspective of the service organization (Ojasalo et al., 2015, 71).

The most essential characteristic of Service Design is user-centricity (Ojasalo et al., 2015, 72). On the strategy level company can with Service Design create new competitive advantage or find new business opportunities or even new position on the markets. (Ojasalo et al., 2015, 73).

Service design is a concrete approach that brings in-depth customer understanding to the business and thus helps bring service-oriented business logic into the daily lives of companies. Service design can be utilized both for the development of existing business and for the creation of a completely new service innovation. In other words, service design is suitable for the development of a company throughout its life cycle.

Service design helps here by bringing genuine customer value as a starting point for development work.

Linking foresight to the service design process is important simply because the service is always planned for future situations and future customers (Ojasalo et al., 2015).

An in-depth understanding of how a company can support a customer's daily life and what benefits the customer perceives as valuable creates an important foundation for finding their own position and competitive advantage. This is best accomplished if the Service Design process and methods are combined with anticipation methods. (Ojasalo et al., 2015).

In this study the 'Doube Diamond Proccess' model of Service Design was used to plan and execute the development work process that is being presented in figure 5.
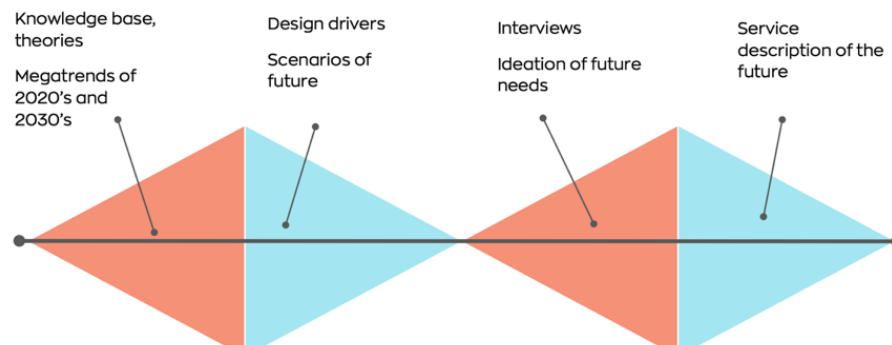
Figure 5: The Process of thesis guided by Double Diamond Process of Service Design.

According Ojasalo, Moilanen, Ritalahti (Ojasalo et al., 2015, 72-73) the process of service design differs from more straightforward problem-solving processes because its steps are usually repeated several times and quickly.

At the beginning of the service design process, the emphasis is always on gaining an in-depth understanding of the customer and operating environment. (Ojasalo et al., 2015)

4.2.4 Scenarios

Scenarios are used as concrete method to create different possible prospects of future.

Scenario can be defined as a script for the future or a description of possible chain of events that may occur in the future. The scenarios are not about forecasting, but about outlining possible developments. Scenarios are a tool to look at alternative futures. (Vuorinen, 2017).

Scenario is a series of possible future images that are sequential in time, logically advancing, and justifiable. It is a story presented with the help of visions, and it can be understood as a functional script for the future, which contains the conditions for achieving the goals. The scenario includes a description of its actors, activities and a description of chain of events of decision-making and consequences. This chain of events leads from the present to the vision chosen for the scenario. This can be a core vision, a strategic goal, or an opportunistic goal. (Rubin, 2004).

The term scenario comes from the film and theatre world and refers to the director's functional script. The scenario first appeared in leadership literature in 1962 in the book *Thinking About the Unthinkabl*e by Herman Khan (Vuorinen, 2017, 109).

According to Vuorinen, scenarios became more widely involved in the strategic management of companies following the 1973 oil crisis, as business leaders were disappointed with traditional strategic planning tools. The scenarios provided a new way of looking at uncertainty and surprising events in the context of strategy work. The meaning of scenario work has become more important as environmental change accelerates and uncertainty increases. (Vuorinen, 2017, 109).

Scenarios can help to challenge the organisation's established beliefs and practices. The purpose of future outlooks is to assist the organisation in its strategic choices and decision-making. Scenario work is intended to increase strategic flexibility and allow for simultaneous preparation for many different futures. Scenario work does not answer the question of *what will happen*, but it can provide a valid answer to the question of *what we do, if this happens*. (Vuorinen, 2017, 109-118)

The scenario always includes the following basic elements: Description of current status; Description of the state of the future; A description of the process that connects these two. (Vuorinen, 2017, 109-118)

Scenario work can be divided into two different approaches. Investigative scenario (explorative) look at the past and the present trends and continue them into the future. Targeting scenarios (normative) are based on visions of the desired future situation. The target scenario is built from the picture of the future to the present. (Vuorinen, 2017, 109-118)

As the target company does not yet have a vision of its future services and the identification of future client needs is a key issue answering the research questions, an exploratory scenario is chosen as the approach of this thesis scenario work.

In this approach, the most probable development paths are sought by varying basic assumptions (Vuorinen, 2017, 109-118). These assumptions include trends and megatrends identified in the literature that influence communication and the work of a communications consultant.

According to Vuorinen (Vuorinen, 2017, 109-118) three to five scenarios are recommended for concurrent review. Scenario work can proceed, for example, according to a five-step process:

1.) Delimit the frame of reference and timeline

2.) Evaluate the current situation and look for drivers for change

3.) Select change drivers and create alternative futures

4.) Work on the best 3-5 scenarios for storytelling

5.) Evaluate the impact on the strategy, make an action plan.

Whereas more academically according to Rubin, (Rubin, 2015) scenario work can be divided into six stages:

1.) Analysis of background information: Mapping the current status of the object, resources and possible external factors influencing the development process.

2.) Construction of future images: On the basis of the above, using a suitable method the drafts of future images are constructed on which the scenarios will be based.

3.) Scenarios: At least three scenarios will be built.

4.) Creating a vision: Based on the scenarios, a vision (a description of the state of mind for the future) of the organisation is created.

5.) Strategy building: The vision and scenario tools are used to develop a mission, which is a draft of the path leading to the vision, i.e. the measures and decisions that will make the vision achievable. As well as the definition of milestones as part of strategic planning.

6.) Correcting and updating scenarios according to the requirements of changed circumstances.

4.3   Data collection and analysis methods

This study has two research questions to answer: (RQ1) **What will successful organisational communication of agency's clients be like in the 2020s communication environment and** (RQ2) **what kind of future needs of communication services will the agency's client organisations have.**

Data collection and analysis methods are the following:

The first research question (RQ1) is answered through collecting information from different sources about *how the communication environment of organisations seems to be changing* **in the future** and through enquiry about the weak signals of emerging service needs creating understanding about the change in organisational context.

- ⇨ Applying information from literature: Principles of Corporate Communication in the 2020's and Megatrends, Antifragile Communications and Consultant Roles
- ⇨ Applying foresight methods, the weak signals will be collected in an online enquiry / interview
  - o In accordance with the principles of Antifragile Communications, how those phenomena are appeared / witnessed in today's organisational communications' practical situations?

The second research question (RQ2) will be answered through enquiry about the weak signals of emerging service needs and through scenarios, and thus creating understanding of (drivers and demands for change) ***what communication services the agency's client organisations need.***

- ⇨ Applying foresight methods, weak signals will be collected in xxx
- ⇨ What out of the roles of communication consultant are needed in anti-fragile communications world?

  Neutral transcoder, who as transmits and moves knowledge and information with a slight but unavoidable change of content.

  Re-interpreting sense-maker, who transforms and recontextualises knowledge in different languages and cultures, and

  Creative sense-giver, who re-defines and actively interprets knowledge and information to others.

- ⇨ The information gathered during answering the RQ1 will be summarised and from the findings and insights three scenarios are written.

- ⇨ Based on the scenarios, a proposal for a preliminary service strategy for a communication agency is written; insight for the future service development and a suggestion for a vision of future service development of the organisation is to be outlined.

5   Findings and outcomes

This chapter explains how the research and development work was carried out in practice and presents the results achieved with the methods used and presented in previous chapter.

The process followed in the functional part of this research and development work and creating scenarios is presented in picture 7 adapted accordingly as presented earlier in chapter 4.2.4 with some modifications. Originally the scenario process planned to be explorative turned out to have features of targeting scenarios (normative), that are typically based on visions of the intended future situation. (Vuorinen, 2017, 109-118).
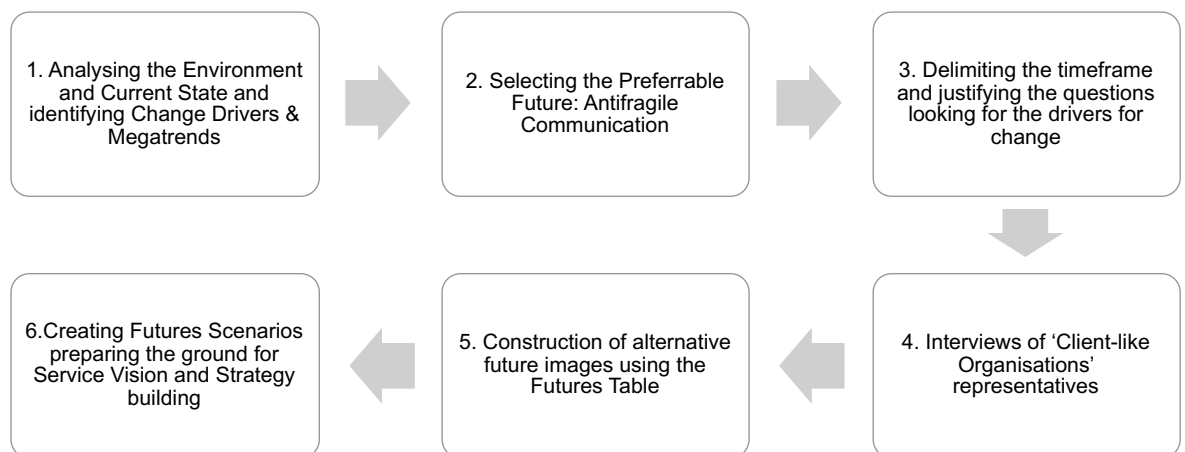
Figure 6: Process of creating Scenarios

5.1   Summary of literature

According to the literature knowledge base introduced in chapter 2 the communication of organisations is currently impacted by the rapidly changing media and publicity environment and as well as disruptions and unexpectedly emerging 'black swans' of their operational environments. The megatrends are driving the change of organisational communications within the next decade. The theoretical concept of 'Antifragile Communications' is setting the objectives for successful organisational communications thriving in modern kind of unstable environments. Communication consultant's role in the organisation's communication is tri-partite: Consultants act as an Intermediator, Interpreter and Creator.

This body of literature significantly affect to the aim of answering the research question of 'What kind of services a successful communication agency will need in the era of 'Antifragile Communications'.

The literature also brought up the verbal concept of communication environment of organisations which proved useful in the practical part of this development work: Adapting West and Turner (West, Turner, 2014, 8) in the context of communication, word '*environment*' means here the situation or context in which communication occurs. The environment includes a number of elements, such as time, place, historical period, relationship, and speaker's and listener's cultural backgrounds – and it can also be mediated, meaning that communication can take place with technological assistance.

The summary of literature is presented in the Figure 8.

Figure 7: Summary of literature

5.2   Interviews

In order to enrich the literary material analysed in previous stages of the process, set of interviews were selected as a secondary data collecting method. Three semi-structured interviews helped to create scenarios of Communication agency's client's communication environment, i.e. operating environment of communications, and service needs in 2025.

The main purpose of interviews was to gather insight and test the plausibility of chosen future vision of communication environment (Antifragile Communications and Antifragile Organisations) as well as identify weak signals from the topic.

According to Ojasalo, Moilanen and Ritalahti (Ojasalo et al., 2015, 106) through an interview it is possible to gather material that opens up new perspectives, if the subject of development has been little researched. The purpose of the interviews can be, for example, to clarify or deepen the issues.

Semi-structured interview method was chosen to support the free imagination and new perspectives. According to Ojasalo, Moilanen and Ritalahti (Ojasalo et al., 2015) a semi-structured interview is useful when the purpose of the study is to examine the significance of a phenomenon for participants.

> In a semi-structured interview, the questions are prepared in advance, but the interviewer may vary their order according to the course of the interview. The exact wording of the questions may also vary. Questions prepared in advance but not appropriate to the situation may be omitted and, accordingly, questions that come to mind during the interview may be asked.

(Ojasalo et al., 2015, 108)

A variety of pre-prepared stimuli can also be used in interviews to concretize and brainstorm various issues (Ojasalo et al., 2015,106). As stimulus a summary of communication megatrends was shown. Among stimulus material a table presented in figure 9 comparing the principles of Antifragile and Fragile Communication was exhibited to the interviewees.

	Fragile communication (old world)	Antifragile communication
TARGET	Communicate your own messages to stakeholders	Understand the needs of stakeholders
FRAMEWORK	The internal structures and division of labour of the organization are decisive	The key point is the stakeholder / customer experience
PROCESS	Linear continuum of processes, from department to department	Continuous development, everyone has access to the latest information
RELATIONS	Stakeholder management and manipulating	Stakeholder empowerment and engagement
INTERACTION	Armored and defensive, avoiding criticism	Listening and creating realistic expectations, receiving criticism
LOGIC	Individual strategies and policies to be monitored	The goal is to create a strong internal culture that guides action
CONTROL	Control	Self-direction
OPTIMIZING	Organisation-optimized communication	Stakeholder optimized communication
PERSONNEL	Controllable by rules	Motivated by well-being
REPUTATION	Builds by communicating better	Built on good experiences and credit crunch recommendations

Figure 8: Table comparing the principles of Antifragile and Fragile Communication, adapted by the original concept of Luoma-aho (Luoma-aho, 2014,13) and translated by the researcher was used as stimulus material in the interviews.

The interviewed persons were chosen based on their occupational position and profession in order to correspond company's present client base. All the interviewees represented Finnish large organisations that operate at least partly in B2B sector. All the interviewees

were working with the communication processes of their organisations, either in communication department or equivalent or otherwise working with similar issues.

Interviews were conducted in Finnish, and written stimulus material was used to fuel the imagination of the interviewees and to build a joint comprehension about the topic examined. Interviews conducted within a week in May 2020 using virtual meeting tools. Each interview took an hour and was recorded, and transcribed with the help of technical application automatically transcribing audio into draft text using speech recognition.

The questions and themes for the discussion were:

1a. What thoughts do the megatrends of communication and the concept of Antifragile Communication evoke in you?

1b. How do they feel about when thinking of your organisation?

2. How do you see your organisation's communication and communicating is changing in five years (2020-2025)? What is the communication environment of your organisation then?

A. What is your most ideal communications operating environment in 2025?

B. What is your most undesirable communication environment in 2025?

C. What kind of communication environment in 2025 do you think is most likely?

A summary of the interviews

Each of three interviewees recognized the Megatrends of communication and the concept of Antifragile Communication in practice. In theoretical level though, the concept name was not familiar to all, but everyone acknowledged the elements of communication environment described by it.

Based on this observation the drafts of alternative futures images were constructed around more detailed question '*what are the possible directions, speed and pace and meanings of the change*' rather than *'what are the possible changes'*.

The interviewees considered five years as quite a short time for relatively big, structural changes. For the interviewees, the ideal future was just a 'slightly improved version' of today. The most undesirable future was perceived to be the disappearance of the current state.

Based on this observation the researcher had to consider the plausibility of the future versus effectiveness of the results. The imaginable future was not making a very clear distinction to what is already known about the communication environment of organisations. Although in all probability it is realistic vision for the future, an essential question was whether it was capable to bring new information for the target company, help it develop its' prospective services or improve its' success in the future. The results could not bring so much new information, but to reinforce pre-existing assumptions. It could help the company to develop its services, though, through strengthening an already known orientation. But the capabilities to influence improving the futureproof success were not to be full materialized if no new ideas of preform services were not detected.

Mannermaa (Mannermaa, 2004, 41) points out that

> social and economic development is becoming more complex and involves upheavals and surprises. Instead of old trends, companies should focus on new phenomena, weak signals that can offer significant new opportunities. The Good Weak Signal is recognized by the fact that it is strange, vague, and undeveloped, many do not know about it, and most reject it.

This kind of 'vague and undeveloped' issues were brought up by the interviewees. One of these was the organisations' relations to stakeholders and way of interacting with them.

> I believe that both internal and external stakeholder engagement is a lot of opportunities. Sure, this is being done pretty much everywhere even now, but it could be done even stronger from the stakeholders-oriented perspective. Sometimes it feels that involvement already has some starting point, and it wants to drive a certain thing. But starting entirely from the stakeholder, there might be opportunities in that. (Interviewee)

This afterthought brought up in one interview could be an example of a weak signal. A weak future signal is the first symptom of change, and typically becomes strong by merging with other signals (Mannermaa, 2004,116). The interviewee's afterthought about stakeholder engagement has a clear linkage with other trends presented in Antifragile Communications concept, such as the main target of organisations communication and the whole framework of communication. Therefore, this notion about level of engagement could be considered as valuable enough information to be included in a prominent way into the more detailed description of scenarios.

5.3 Futures Table

In order to process and analyse the qualitative data produced by the literature analyses and the interviews, Futures Table was used as a structured way to organise information.

The Futures Table is a tabular collection of future statuses by sector, usually representing one perspective and a predetermined year. The purpose of the analysis of the future table

is to identify the key variables (phenomena, factors) for the problem area under consideration and their possible implementation options in the future. (Rubin, 2004)

In this work, Futures Table was originally drawn based on the literature analysis and the interview questions and improved after the interviews. Futures Table was used as sort of a of frame or skeleton of the scenario around which the more detailed content was ideated.

Using the futures pictures created with Futures Table, the story line of scenario narratives was written.

According to Rubin (Rubin, 2004) Futures picture or the picture of future is

> 1. A vision of the state of the future, a structure of the mind built on an understanding of the present and the past, knowledge and interpretations, perceptions, beliefs, expectations, values and hopes, and fears.

> 2. A description of the future realisation of an issue or phenomenon under consideration in the Futures Table variables.

The Futures Table was written in Finnish, that was the original language of the interviews. The summary of drivers is presented for the main part in table 1. The problem area examined in the Futures Table was the future services of a communication agency, and their desirability and demand in year 2025. After filling each cell of the table, descriptive names were given to each column.

Table 1: Summary of Futures Table built upon the information gathered in the scenario process.

Phenomena, drivers & factors	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3
The recognisable elements of Coms Environment	Agile, resilience, unbreakable Ability to react and act quickly	Management over engagement. Communication controlled and in the hands of a few people	Up with the times and old-fashioned activities in the organisation at the same time. Aiming to be in the world of Antifragile communication
The direction and pace of change	Linearly forward at fast speed. Quantum leap taken place, about 90% of customers follow an	Direction has turned 180 degrees backwards. Client's focus on securing	Change has continued in small, uncertain steps. The majority of the clients have characteristics

	Antifragile principles in their communications.	current operations and survival.	of both worlds within the same organization.
Objective and framework of communication	Realistic communication that understands the needs of stakeholders and strives for a good experience.	Get messages out to stakeholders as effectively as possible, through a precise division of labour, clear guidelines and monitoring the implementation of plans.	Achieve communication that produces the desired effects in the target groups. The style and tone of communication is authentic and people-oriented.
Stakeholder relations	Genuine collaborative interaction with the relevants. Engagement is done in a stakeholder-driven way and they have the power to define the topics of conversation	Stakeholders are sought to be managed and guided by means of communication.	A lot of co-operation with different groups. Goal is interaction. Targeted engagement is done promoting the acceptability of issues. Questioning is a powerful means of communication.
Services used	Anticipation, awareness, large-scale outsourcing of expertise, communication is done from strategic thinking to tactical doing	Information / publishing & releases, planning communication and marketing campaigns, making e-mails, writing website articles	Rapid response services for various situations. communication is done from strategic thinking to tactical doing
Service value to the client	Helps to react quickly and with a continuous supply to future situations and to anticipate and eliminate risks in advance.	The service helps to implement various communication measures quickly and cheaply / cost-effectively.	The service helps to continuously develop at both the strategic and tactical levels.
Acquisition method of Services	A long-term partnership based on know-how and expertise on the substance matter	Purchased on project-specific order	Ordered on a project-by-project basis. Pioneers commit good partners, to whom there is no need to explain the task.

5.4   Scenarios

Based on the Futures Pictures drawn from the Futures Table, three scenarios were named. As has been pointed out before earlier in chapters 5.2 and 5.3., the Scenarios were designed to answer the more detailed question of '*what are the possible directions, speed and pace and meanings of the change*' of future services of a communication agency, and their desirability and demand in year 2025.

The scenarios were titled as (1.) "Super-Agile", (2.) "Setback" and (3.) "Best of both Worlds". The first and the last (1. Super-Agile and 3. Best of both Worlds) ended up containing more or less similar attitude towards the ideals and principles of communications. The difference between these two is ultimately in the level of ambition and the comprehensive coverage in all the major clients of an Agency.

The scenarios can be enlivened with everyday observations made in the interviews. The 2025 world of these two far-end scenarios (1. and 3.) is realistic by its content and agile in its working methods:

> The organisation's increased communication needs can be met agilely, quickly and with ethical considerations in mind. (Interviewee)

> We are not trying to make glossy communication but being more realistic; people get closer and the real world becomes stronger. (Int.)

They also are ideal working environments for the professionals by their processes and logic:

> Communication is valued in the organization and its work is understood as a whole. (Int.)

> When the world and situations are unpredictable, communication has the knowledge and ability to quickly understand cause-and-effect relationships and the ability to act immediately as the situation requires. (Int.)

The stakeholder relations of the organisations seem to become even more collaborative and interactive. There's a lot of co-operation with different groups. Engagement is envisaged to be done in a stakeholder-driven way so that the interaction is either targeted engagement to promote acceptability of some issues or even done so that the stakeholders have the power to define the topics of conversation from the beginning.

> Partnerships, even atypical ones, arise naturally. (Int.)

> Within the organization, a lot of new innate communicators emerge who work in different forums and arenas and take the message forward unnoticed. (Int.)

> Communication is less written and more done through people, doing and acting. (Int.)

> Ideally, communication department would not be an intermediary between a company or its management and its stakeholder or media or the general public. (Int.)

There is also a possible future of stakeholder co-operation going to the extremes and embracing the new stakeholder-centered engagement in an extensive way as has been visualised in the scenario of Super-Agile (1.) Engagement is already an ideal:

> The ideal would be for us to get to know our stakeholders better and learn to understand expectations from there as well. And that learning would accumulate over the years. (Int.)

According to Bernoff, in this age of empowered customers understanding and engagement with customers is the only sustainable competitive advantage (Bernoff, 2011, 1-4). In the wake of Age of Customer (Bernoff, 2011), organisations may in the future take the path of going beyond stakeholder-centric thinking and start to empower other stakeholder groups as well and adapt even more profound way of 'stakeholder capitalism' (Cheng, Araujo & Hayhoe, 2020). A possible vision of future could be, that one day the communication functions of organisations become the enablers of 'stakeholder democracy' and fill the gaps of democratic participation that is deteriorating elsewhere in society.

For the Communication agency the two first mentioned scenarios pose a parallel development challenge but over a different time span. The situation imagined in the scenario 1 (Super-Agile) would mean that agency is already in a hurry to develop its services to meet the challenges of the new world. In the scenario 2 (Best of both Worlds) will give the Agency slightly more relaxed time-schedule but still the goal is the same: to gear up to be as agile as the Antifragile Comms environment requires, and yet the challenge is to be forced to serve several different purposes and needs at a time, that means preparing more than one approach to its services and the resources they require.

The Setback-scenario (2.) is the opposite regarding to the attitude towards the ideals and principles of communications. The world of Setback can be anything going away from the well-structured and well-functioning operations of organisations communication:

> The amount of information is growing and cannot be managed in a reasonable way. The audience is fragmented and new channels are introduced recklessly. And the number of communication needs is growing tremendously, but communication does not have enough resources to meet all of them. (Int.)

Although going to the far end, the lack of resources doesn't matter if the stakeholder's needs are not met anyway:

> Communication and O-suite work in their own bubble and the bubble just condenses. The world and its cause-and-effect relationships are not seen outside of it. Content that is listening and creating realistic ideas, receptive to criticism, or inclusive is no longer valued. (Int.)

Opposite to agile and resilient, communication and its operations could be rigid and these practices lead to difficulties:

> All communication is reactionary, hasty and bad, running after things and being unprepared. Crisis communication is needed when there is incredible mischief and loss of both trust and face. (Int.)

For the Agency and its services, Setback (2) is definitely not a future wanted, and it would be hard to see any positive opportunities the situation described in Setback-scenario would bring to professionally produced and developed communication services.

The short summary of Scenarios of Communication Environment of the Clients of the Agency and their Service needs in 2025 are presented in figure 9.
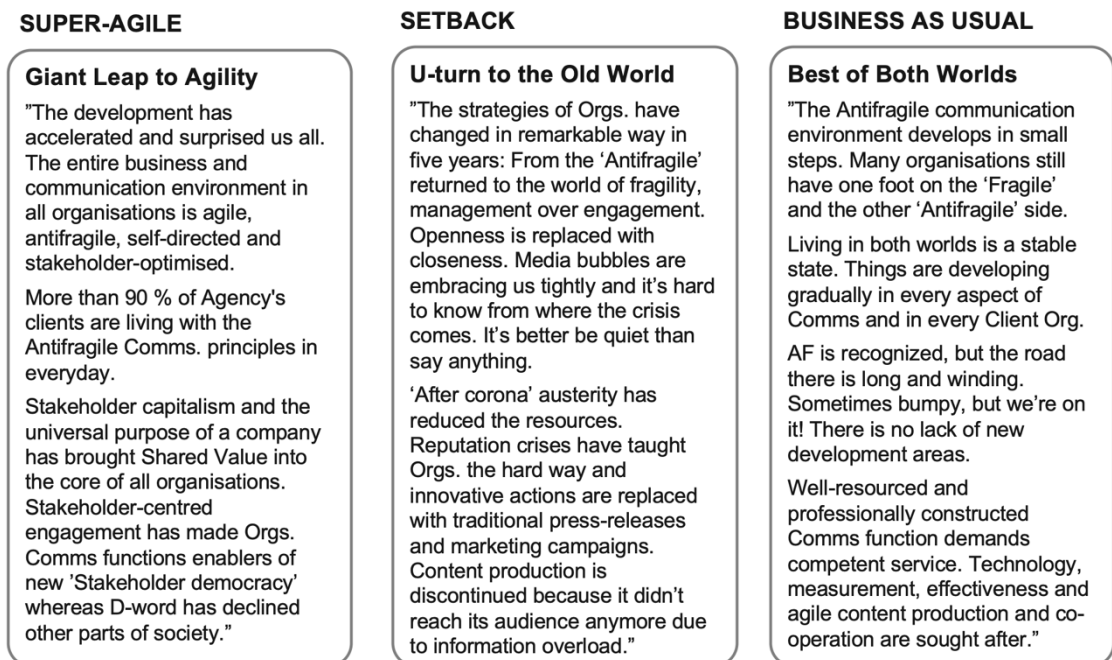
SUPER-AGILE

Giant Leap to Agility

"The development has accelerated and surprised us all. The entire business and communication environment in all organisations is agile, antifragile, self-directed and stakeholder-optimised.

More than 90 % of Agency's clients are living with the Antifragile Comms. principles in everyday.

Stakeholder capitalism and the universal purpose of a company has brought Shared Value into the core of all organisations. Stakeholder-centred engagement has made Orgs. Comms functions enablers of new 'Stakeholder democracy' whereas D-word has declined other parts of society."

SETBACK

U-turn to the Old World

"The strategies of Orgs. have changed in remarkable way in five years: From the 'Antifragile' returned to the world of fragility, management over engagement. Openness is replaced with closeness. Media bubbles are embracing us tightly and it's hard to know from where the crisis comes. It's better be quiet than say anything.

'After corona' austerity has reduced the resources. Reputation crises have taught Orgs. the hard way and innovative actions are replaced with traditional press-releases and marketing campaigns. Content production is discontinued because it didn't reach its audience anymore due to information overload."

BUSINESS AS USUAL

Best of Both Worlds

"The Antifragile communication environment develops in small steps. Many organisations still have one foot on the 'Fragile' and the other 'Antifragile' side.

Living in both worlds is a stable state. Things are developing gradually in every aspect of Comms and in every Client Org.

AF is recognized, but the road there is long and winding. Sometimes bumpy, but we're on it! There is no lack of new development areas.

Well-resourced and professionally constructed Comms function demands competent service. Technology, measurement, effectiveness and agile content production and co-operation are sought after."

Figure 9: The three Scenarios of Communication Environment of the Clients of the Agency and their Service needs in 2025.

5.5 Implementation

The three scenarios paint a very different picture of the operating environment of organisational communication and its professionals working context after five years. Instead of selecting just one desired future, the researcher would recommend to take both the scenarios 1. and 3. into more detailed review and to take them as the starting point of Agency's future anticipation operations.

Both the scenarios 1. and 3. support the current direction of development as well as the ideals of Antifragile Communication. Taken that the concept of Antifragile Communications is in line with the megatrends in communications identified by the group of experts, it is also realistic to believe that these would be most probable direction of future out of the altogether three paths presented.

The changing needs of the clients of communication agencies meaning an agency must consider its service offering and therefore the resources and competencies established in or acquired by the agency.

How does the consultant's role fit into their client's future horizon? What is the relationship of client and consultant in the age of Antifragile Communication? The scenarios presented some possibilities for this.

In a communication or marketing agency, where the projects are usually relatively small and often employing only a few people at the same time within one project, the perceived quality of service is quite largely, if not even completely, dependent on the characteristics and skills of the people working in the expert roles of these client projects. They can be called consultants or some other professional title, but the common feature is direct cooperation with the client representatives. One can even argue, that because of the emphasising role of personal competences, the biggest individual decisions affecting the quality of a communication or marketing agency services are made in recruitments.

McDaniel & Driebe refer to organisations as Complex Adaptative Systems (CAS), that are made of diverse agents interacting with each other and the system can undergo spontaneous self-organisation. (McDaniel & Driebe, 2005, 4-5). According to this comprehension of McDaniel & Driebe, these CAS agents can process information and react to changes all by themselves. Like flocking of birds, agents capable of self-organisation, are able to exchange information among themselves and with their environment to adjust their own behavior by the information they process. (McDaniel & Driebe, 2005, 5).

The environment of the clients is already very dynamic:

> Never in my career has so much happened to me as in recent years. Something happens all the time. There have been walkouts, natural disasters, pandemic, crashes of IT systems… If everything is pulled together, then most of the situations have been completely unexpected. So, agility and the speed that is required to communicate in these situations is the red thread of them. (Int.)

In the scenario 'Best of Both Worlds' (Scenario 3) portray the possible service value to the client as helping them to continuously develop at both the strategic and tactical levels at the same time. As client's communication functions are thought to be well-resourced and

professionally constructed, they are anticipated to demand as competent service from their service provider as their own expertise is.

Combined with the fact, that the events and incidents occur ever faster, this means every single consultant of the service provider agency must be able to exercise spontaneous self-organisation and adjust their behavior by the information they collect from the situation and the needs of the client, that are constantly renewing.

According to Antifragile Communication environment scenarios selected for anticipation and presented in the chapter 5.4. *multi-talent* and *resilient/agile* are competencies that seems to be essence for a communication agency's service in the 2025's in order to succeed:

> The need to think about the roles of communication has been highlighted because the boundaries of competence have long since fallen. Modern communicators are generalists: The communicator must be proficient in social media, internal communication, all publishing systems, be able to describe, video, edit ... everything possible. Because resources are not limitless, a person who knows only one thing cannot be included in the team, but everyone must be an expert in at least five things. Multi-competence also makes an organization resilient and agile: if one team is absent, the others must be able to perform tasks at least at some level. (Int.)

The Communication consultant roles can be closer examined and compared with the possible futures situations described by the scenarios in order to analyse what kind of competences and skills an agency could possibly use if different paths would come true.

As presented earlier in chapter 2.5. there can be identified three comprehensive roles of communication consultant working in and with the client organisations. The roles can also be understood as skills and competencies of the personnel working in client projects within the communication agency, and therefore being primarily responsible for the quality of service experienced by the client representative.

In the most conservative scenario (3.) the environment seems to be changing very little and new competences are not necessarily needed to review and holistically. But a partial assessment is still needed. In contrast, in scenarios 1. and 2. the review of competencies would be important.

In the table 2 is presented a draft analysis about the researchers own understanding about competences of communication consultants of the agency emphasizing in different scenarios. Highest emphasis is marked with three points whereas low emphasis with one point. The table is built on adapting the von Platen's (von Platen, 2015, 155) model of translation functions of communication consultants' tasks and roles and it shows that scenario 3, titled Best of both Worlds, requires the most diverse resources and therefore

could challenge centralization of expertise and make it difficult to achieve agility and resilience within the Agency. Whereas scenarios 1 and 2 both show for their part a clear direction for the development of the future service strategy, role of consultant and through it the competence of the people.

Table 2: Analysis of competences of communication consultants of an agency emphasized in different scenarios.

Role Scenario	1. SUPER-AGILE	2. SETBACK	3. BofW
Neutral transcoder transmits information with a slight but unavoidable change of content	*	***	***
Re-interpreting sense-maker re-contextualises knowledge between cultures	***	–	***
Creative sense-giver actively interprets and translates	***	*	***

Proposal for service strategy

A scenario is an image of the future based on assumptions, which outlines the company's future operating environment and describes the development path from the present to the future (Meristo, 2017, 172). The scenarios created within this development work have the features of themed scenario (Meristo, 2017): They answer to question '*what are the possible worlds*'. The perspective of the scenarios is limited to outside world of the company; observing the changes in its operating environment that could be influencing the needs of their services.

The next step for the target company would be to expand the development work and examine more the inside of the company; creating mission scenarios answering the question '*who and where the company is*'. (Meristo, 2017,173).

As presented in chapter 2, there are four stages that should be covered when defining a service strategy, and in this development project the first part, Perspective, is focused on.

> The perspective of an organization expresses how it sees itself in terms of its context. It describes what the organization is, what it does, who it does it for and how it works. It defines the overall direction, values and purpose of the organization and how it intends to achieve these as a service provider. (Cannon et al., 2011, 39)

According to Cannon (Cannon et al., 2011) the most common forms of *perspective state-ments* are vision and mission statements: Vision articulating desired state the service pro-vider aims to achieve at some time in the future, and mission articulating the basic pur-pose and values of the organization and its operation, making its vision a reality. (Cannon et al., 2011, 148).

Looking at the scenarios resulting from this research and development work, it seems clear that the scenarios as an outcome are not sufficient enough for building a strategy for the future, but it is nevertheless a starting point for more thorough development of service strategy of the target company. In an industry where personal competencies matter a lot, they must be taken very seriously into account when developing services. We are living in the Age of Customer (Bernoff, 2011) where customers are most significant strategic im-perative and where understanding and engaging them is probably the only sustainable competitive advantage. And as we know, customers do not buy the services itself, but the benefits they provide them with (Grönroos, 2007, 4).

In the communication consultancy business, the competence and suitability of consultant must be placed on top when formulating the service strategy of the target company.

As a summary from the previous the draft of the vision of a successful service of a com-munication agency in 2025 is

- Aiming for agile communication and supporting the resilience communications of the of client organisation.

- Capable of moving from strategy level to implementation quickly.

- Based on self-directed consultants who are possessing high competence, diverse skills and extensive experience and who are capable of spontaneous self-organi-sation, exchange information with their clients' environment and adjust ones' be-havior by the unpredictable needs of them.

- Communication professionals' skills are related to, for example, content, ethics, or-ganization, technology, networking and presentation skills.

- Based on long-term partnerships and quiet information.

- Aiming to develop its client's communications, stakeholder engagement, improve anticipation and awareness.

6   Discussion

This chapter focuses on assessing the outcomes of the development work and assumptions about the value the work has produced to the sponsor organisation.

The main problem of the study and the business problem of the target company was the impossibility to know beforehand, what should a successful communication agency be like in the near future and what kind of services it has to have in order to be a successful communication agency.

This problematic lack of knowledge about the future makes the vision of agency obscure and development of the services difficult. Foresight could be one method of developing future services.

The main problem the study is solving is what kind of services a communication agency has to be able offer in the future in order to succeed. Some literature and theories suggest that these services must help the client organisations success in rapidly changing communication and operating environment.

6.1   Answering the Research questions

This study had two research questions: what will the successful 'communication environment' of B2B organisations look like in the future of 2020's (RQ1) and what kind of future service needs do the client organisations of the communication agency have then (RQ2).

RQ 1 was answered through collecting information from different literature sources.

It seems that successful organisational communication of communication agency's clients in the 2020s communication environment will be in accordance with the concept of Antifragile Communications: built on stakeholder expectations and maintainable, realistic reputation enabling the formation of trust, built around a strong core identity, values and internal culture, it is media-independent, flexible, fast and un-bureaucratic, not marketed by the organisation itself but by its loyal stakeholders and their experiences. Its goal is unbreakable (antifragile) organisation and its not done in silos but creating a seamless stakeholder experience. (Luoma-aho, 2014, 2013).

RQ2 was answered through scenarios and interviewing professionals representing potential client organisations of the target company.

It seems, that agency's client-organisations needs for communication services in the 2020's are diverse, requiring in-depth knowledge extensively on different communication areas of expertise and they need to be acquired with little effort from the client, fast and flexibly. The communication consult and her competences also have a significant role in fulfilling the needs of their clients.

6.2   Assessment of the method

Foresight scenarios are one way of anticipating the future. They will give the target company one possible insight on the services that a communication agency in the 2020's has to offer in order to succeed in constantly changing market. Although it has to bearded in mind that the scenarios only show one possible option for the path of the future and not the whole truth.

As taken from Rubin (Rubin, 2004) future research looks at trends affecting society from the perspective of knowing the future, looking for what is possible and for alternative futures. In order to answer to the research question of the future needs of communication services of the client organisations some exploratory or inquiring methods needed to be used.

As a foresight method a set of scenarios helped very well to achieve the goals and find answers to the research questions. The explorative nature of the scenarios was not realised as profoundly as the researcher expected. This was mainly because the researcher tied it to the literature and existing theories and concepts which restricted the perspective and results. The scenarios also became to be quite similar in content. Greater variation could potentially have highlighted the difference in the company's service needs better. Perhaps more interviews could have brought more variation to the scenarios, but at the same time required more time resources and may not be possible within the timeframe of thesis.

The researchers original aim to practice Service Design didn't' fit easily with the company business objectives and needs. Although Service Design can be used on the strategy level as well, to create new competitive advantage or find new business opportunities or even new position on the markets (Ojasalo et al., 2015), in practice more time should have been set aside for it in order to find examples suitable for beginners on how to use it.

Having Service Design as a starting point was nevertheless a useful mindset as, SD and Foresight support each other in a very rewarding way. Alternativeness of foresight linked with the user-centricity of SD was an important factor because the service is always

planned for future situations and future customers, as Ojasalo et al. suggests (Ojasalo et al., 2015.).

Assessment of the business value could be determined for example through the objectives presented in chapter 3: To increase organisations' understanding about the expectations and needs of the clients regarding to its services, to identify the demand of different communication consultancy services in the near future and to create recommendations based on the results or a proposal for a service strategy.

To these, very broad goals although, the R & D work succeeded to answer at least in some level.

In general, the purpose of this development work was to help the "middle-aged" consultant company to review and improve its strategy to prepare to the future. Regarding that aim, this R&D work is still this in the beginning of the journey. The outcomes were expected to benefit the company's decision making by showing what kind of services and professionals the company should invest in and to further develop, and this R&D work surely produced some material to start with. The expected value contribution for the company was to create awareness and knowledge about the ways it can add value to its client's operations, and through the interviews used in building scenarios the outcomes did contributed this aim.

6.3   Reflections on learning

The fundamental function of this thesis was to deepen the learning of the writer, improve skills in practice with chosen development methods and increase one's professional competence. Initially Service Design was chosen as primary development method from the personal interest of the writer herself. As the work progressed and joint goals were negotiated with the sponsor company's' interest in mind, it came clear that the object of development must be targeted to the strategical level in order to achieve the desired effectiveness. Developing internal processed was not considered to have enough business impacts, nor developing of old and existing services. The industry of communications and marketing consultancies is living on novelties and innovations. New products and services are regularly expected by the clients and regeneration as well as new ideas are at the heart of the industry. Therefore, developing new services was natural choice of focus for this thesis.

There is regular discussion within the company which service preforms should be invested more time and other inputs on. In order to answer that question and inventing new services, the emerging needs of clients must be identified. There is a legitimate question whether we didn't just ask the clients what services do they want and need – why are all the investments on research justified?

It is because asking simply don't show the whole picture. Koivisto, Säynäjäkangas and Forsberg explain it with an iceberg metaphor (Koivisto et al., 2019, 45). The customer insight gathering methods used in Service Design can be divided into groups according to how and what kind of information they potentially can bring to the researcher: On the visible top of the iceberg there are methods bringing forth explicit information that people are able and willing to express in words. With these methods it is possible to achieve an incremental improvement to an existing solution.

But below the waterline there are methods that should call out in addition to the before-mentioned some latent information: Contextual and perceptual information that provides a deeper understanding about behaviour of people and implicit information that is not expressed in words; what a person feels or experiences and what he dreams of and what they can express by projecting. With these contextual and exploratory methods, it is possible to identify latent needs that may enable the emergence of more revolutionary innovations. (Koivisto et al., 2019).

It is not realistic to expect easy answers to complex questions such as what kind of services and competences should a company invest in today, in order to succeed in the forthcoming decade. This work has been completed in the spring of 2020, when the Covid 19 virus hit the world as a worst pandemic for decades and gave us all a reminder of the unpredictability of issues and the existence of previously unknown 'black swans'.

This learning path has taught the writer at least one sure thing in this everchanging world full of unexpected events: It is not impossible to see beforehand, how could a future look like if choosing one alternative path over the other. Preparation comes from anticipation, and with careful exploration of options the company really can see in advance, what kind of services it should offer in the next 10 of 15 years to come.

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