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LEADERSHIP IN AGILE CONTENT MANAGAMENT
Promoting clarity and focus with QBR process

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Tämän opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli ymmärtää sisällön johtamisen haasteita ja arvioida QBR (Quarterly Business Review) prosessin vaikutusta ja tehokkuutta osana sisällön johtamista. Sisällön johtaminen koostuu tavoitteiden asettamisesta, priorisoinnista ja oikeisiin asioihin keskittymisestä. Tavoitteena oli tarjota näkemyksiä ja kehitysehdotuksia sisällön johtamisen ja QBR-prosessin parantamiseksi kohdeyrityksessä.

Tutkimus toteutettiin laadullisella tapaustutkimusmenetelmällä faktapohjaisesta näkökulmasta nojaten substanssiteorioihin. Tarvittava aineisto kerättiin teemahaastatteluilla kohdeyrityksen ylimmältä johdolta. Tärkeimmät parannuskohteet löydöksistä sisälsivät strategisen kuilun ylimmän johdon ja operatiivisen tason välillä, haasteet priorisoinnissa ja organisaatiorajat ylittävässä johtamisessa.

Tutkimus osoitti, että onnistunut sisällön johtaminen priorisoi strategisia painopisteitä, toimintaympäristöä ja perustoimintoja yhdenvertaisesti. Tämä tulisi huomioida pitkän ja lyhyen aikavälin tavoitteissa. Tavoitteet tulisi asettaa yhteistyössä siten, että ne heijastavat arvon luomista, eivätkä määrittele yksittäisen organisaation vastuulla olevaa työtä. QBR-prosessia tulisi käyttää yhtenäisellä tavalla läpi organisaatioiden, jotta tavoitteet pysyvät johdonmukaisina ja tiedonkulku sekä oppiminen mahdollistuisi. Tämän opinnäytetyön esittelemät onnistuneen sisällön johtamisen parhaat käytännöt ovat sovellettavissa tavoitteilla johdettaviin organisaatioihin.

Avainsanat: sisällön johtaminen, priorisointi, tavoiteasetanta, yritystasoinen ketterä, itseohjautuvuus

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aimed to understand the challenges of content management and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the QBR process (Quarterly Business Review) as a part of the overall content management. Content management consists of goal setting, prioritisation and focusing on the right matters at the time. The goal was to provide insights and development proposals for improving the overall content management and the QBR process in the case company.

The research was conducted through a qualitative case study approach, with a factual perspective and reliance on substantive theories. Required data was collected through theme interviews with the top management in the case company. The most important improvement areas from the findings included the strategical gap between the top and operational levels, challenges in prioritisation and leading cross-organisational work.

The study showed that successful content management prioritises strategic focus points, operating environment, and basic functions equally. This should be reflected in the long-term and short-term goals. Goals are to set collaboratively in a manner that reflects value creation, not defining organisation specific work. The QBR process should be used in a unified manner to promote clarity, horizontal and vertical alignment, and coherent feedback loop. General best practices of successful content management introduced in this thesis can be applied in objective led organisations.

Keywords: content management, prioritisation, goal setting, enterprise agile, autonomous way of working

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

BAU Business as usual
CoE Center of Excellence
MBO Management by Objectives
OKR Objective and Key Results
QBR Quarterly Business Review
ROI Return on Investment
WIP Work in Progress

1 INTRODUCTION

The case company of this study is a large financial company that has operated in Finland from the early 20th century. The case company's business is divided into different business area segments that offer services to personal and small business customers as well as corporate and institutional customers. Even though the case company operates mainly in Finland, it needs to succeed in the global competition as well. Competitors are not only national finance companies anymore, but through digitalisation they are in increasing numbers international finance or even tech companies. The case company must be able to react to this changing competitive environment. This means securing success in Finland, as global companies try to conquer the market.

The case company transformed to an agile way of working in early 2019. The method was adopted gradually in different segments and organisations and was in use in the whole company in 2021. Reasons for the transformation came from within the company. Responses of the personnel survey responses revealed that the employees wished to put the focus back on the customers and improve cooperation across the different organisations, reduce bureaucracy and clarify decision-making and responsibilities within the company. Other reasons were tightening regulation, more global competition, faster changing customer needs, operating environment, and reducing the costs. With the agile transformation, the case company aimed to improve their operations by concentrating on three areas:

1. Employee experience
2. Customer experience
3. Operational efficiency

The case company has written an agile way of working document which describes the way of working and leadership within the case company. Leadership has an essential role in an autonomous and agile organisation built around multiskilled teams of various specialists. Leadership must adapt and support the autonomous way of working. Principles of good leadership

are the basis for the aimed approach to leadership in the case company. The four principles of good leadership (Case company 2019.) are:

- Leader shows the way
- Leader enables success
- Leader encourages learning
- Leader ensures results

In the case company, the agile leadership is done in close collaboration among multiple roles. Daily management is the responsibility of the autonomous teams. To enable the autonomous way of working in the case company, leadership responsibilities are divided between leadership areas:

1) Goal setting and prioritisation (content management)
2) Competence management
3) Supervisor duties (HR matters)
4) Day-to-day management of teams

This research focuses on the first area of management, content management. Content management refers to the management of all the tasks that employees spend their time on. Therefore, for example, HR technical issues are excluded from this research.

Content management in the case company consists of goal setting, making decisions by prioritisation and focusing on the most important matters at the time. Goal setting involves defining specific, measurable, and achievable short-term and long-term goals that align with the organisation's overall strategy. Goals should be set in collaboration and communicated clearly to all stakeholders; and progress should be tracked regularly to ensure that they are being achieved. Prioritisation involves identifying the most important matters that stem from the operating environment or customer needs that need to be completed and allocating resources accordingly. Prioritisation helps to ensure that the most critical matters are completed first and that the organisation is making progress towards its goals. Focusing on the most important matters involves identifying the activities that will have the greatest impact on achieving the goals and allocating resources to those activities. Focus can

lead to eliminating or reducing the activities that are not aligned with the set goals. The content-producing part of the content management happens in the autonomous teams. The teams define, plan and execute the necessary work based on goal setting and customer experience to meet the customer needs.

Leadership from different perspectives has been studied multiple times over the years in the case company. However, there is a lack of study focusing specifically on content management and the challenges in that area. There are findings from other studies conducted within the case company regarding challenges in goal setting, prioritisation and managing shared goals. These studies conducted internally cannot be showcased in this thesis, but those findings are used as a basis for the research problem in this research.

1.1 Objective of the thesis

The aim of this thesis is to gain an understanding of what is the focus of the content management in the case company, as well as the leadership challenges from the perspective of top management. This research specifically evaluates the impact and effectiveness of the QBR process (Quarterly Business Review) as a part of the overall content management. QBR process is used in the case company for strategic operational management. In the QBR process, the shared annual goals are clarified and split into quarterly objectives.

The goal is also to gain an understanding of the challenges of goal setting, prioritisation and managing shared objectives and reflect these challenges against relevant theory. Based on the results of the research, conclusions and development proposals are made on how the overall content management could be improved and how the QBR process should be developed to enhance the content management in the case company.

1.2 Research questions

The research problem of this thesis stems from the challenges in the content management within the case company. Shared goals are used to support the autonomous way of working, but from various research conducted within the case company, there are findings that shared goals are not considered to

guide the work. These challenges tend to occur especially in relation to the QBR process.

As the shared goals may not truly guide the work, prioritisation can be challenging, and the focus of the content management is not clear. This has been noticed to cause dependency issues and create unnecessary complexity in the entity. This thesis aims to answer one main research question with two sub-research questions.

RQ 1.: How can the overall content management be done successfully in the case company?

This research strives to gain an understanding of the overall focus of content management at the moment. The aim is to discover where the focus of leadership is from the top management point of view, and what challenges do they see in the overall content management. For this research question, the aim is to find general best practices of how the overall content management can be done successfully in the case company.

RQ 1.1.: Where should the focus of improving the content management in the case company be?

To improve the overall content management, it should be clear where the most important improvement areas are. This research strives to gain information of the critical areas of content management from the perspective of the top management. For this research question, the aim is to discover the main challenges of content management at the moment and how to specifically improve these areas in the case company.

RQ 1.2.: How could the overall content management be improved with better utilisation of the QBR process?

Even though the QBR process is the key strategic operational management tool in the case company, it may be seen as a separate aspect of management and its purpose may not be fully grasped. This can lead to direct management of organisational activities instead of through the goal setting

and the QBR process. For this research question, the aim is to examine the significance and utilisation of the QBR process at the moment, and how it could be improved to support the overall content management better in the case company.

1.3 Methodology

This thesis is case study research conducted in the case company. A qualitative approach for this research is appropriate as the phenomenon, meaning in this case the overall content management and the factors affecting it, is yet very little studied in the case company.

Case study explores the phenomenon under study in real-life context and it is led by evidence. The goal is to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic in order to create knowledge or provide input for the development of the topic under study. (Simons 2009, 21.)

Merriam & Tisdell (2015) suggests that if the subject that is studied lacks inherent limitations, it cannot be considered as a case. One method to determine the limits of the topic is to evaluate the extent of data collection, meaning considering whether there is a limit for individuals who could be interviewed or a limited timeline for observations. If there is no definitive end to the number of individuals who could be interviewed or observations that could be made either in practice or in theory, then the phenomenon is not sufficiently constrained to qualify as a case. (Merriam & Tisdell 2015, 39.)

In this case, there is a limited group of informants that can be interviewed to gain the needed information, and there is a set time frame to conduct the study regarding the yearly and quarterly objectives in the case company. As it is, this case qualifies as a case study.

1.4 Research framework and limitations

Existing theories regarding the research topic create the theoretical framework for this thesis. This theory is examined against the findings from the data collected for this research to conduct validated conclusions. The data for this study is collected through a theme interviews, which may be subject to

response bias. How ever, the interview questions are conducted so that they do not lead the interviewee to answer in a specific way.

The existing theory of the study subject is not standardised as there are various and relatively new methodologies regarding the study subject. Theories regarding agile leadership and the ways of working are commonly accepted norms or best practices in the industry. As this is a case study, this research does not aim to make broad generalisations. However, the general best practices regarding content management can be applied to other organisations.

1.4.1 Research in relation to theory

Theories are utilised to provide explanations for why specific events and patterns of events occur as they do. Therefore, they are constructed by humans and are subject to improvement, refinement, and sometimes rejection, meaning they are tentative in nature. (Wellington & Szczerbinski 2007, 34.)

The function of theory in social research is to aid in comprehending events and to view them in a new or different manner. A theory can be a metaphor, model, or framework for understanding or making sense of social events. (Wellington & Szczerbinski 2007, 35.)

Depending on the nature of the research and the area being investigated, theories can be generated from the data, or they can be imposed upon it. In some fields, there are ample theories that are sufficiently well-developed, and it would be incorrect not to use them in shaping research design and data collection. In other fields, there may be a shortage of suitable theory, or it may be extremely tentative, implying a different approach. (Wellington & Szczerbinski 2007, 37.)

In this research, the data is examined through existing theory that is presented in the coming chapters of this thesis. This research does not aim to create new theory, but the method used for the analysis promotes the generation of novel theories, so based on the findings, it is not excluded altogether.

1.4.2 Theoretical perspective

Paradigms are used in research to create a framework through which the data is being examined. They can be considered as the perspective with a set of assumptions that are used as guidance when conducting the research. There are various paradigms that guide social research and different researchers use varying ways of grouping and naming paradigms, which has led to some degree of inconsistency in the literature with terms. (Leavy 2022, 12.) The theoretical perspective in this research is a factual perspective. Depending on the source, this perspective can also be referred to as positivist, realist, or functional paradigm (Tracy 2013, 65).

As the data is collected through interviews, the interviewee is understood as an informant who possesses information on the subject being studied. Questions are therefore as non-leading as possible to encourage the interviewee to speak honestly about the subject. Similar questions about the same topic can be asked in slightly different ways to obtain the most truthful picture of the interviewee's perception.

As this research is done from factual perspective, various substantive theories that explain the phenomenon are relied upon. In this thesis, the phenomena related to the content management in the case company are described and explained, and the argumentation style emphasises evidence-based reasoning.

2 LEADERSHIP IN AGILE AND AUTONOMOUS WAY OF WORKING

This chapter introduces the relevant theory and existing research about the research topic. This research revolves around leadership methods and the autonomous way of working that is at the core in agile methods adopted by the case company. As the subject includes various theories that are not all standardised, theories presented are commonly accepted norms or best practices in the industry. Relevant theories are presented in general and from the perspective of the case company to form the theoretical framework to the research.

The methods and practices of leadership and the way of working in the case company is presented through the target state where the case company aims. The ideal state is described in an agile way of working document within the case company. The author of this thesis works in the case company, so the introduction of the ways of working and the operating model in the case company are largely based on the author's own knowledge.

The general theory of agile leadership and the autonomous way of working is presented in a way that creates understanding of the overall topic, as well as common challenges and best practices in the industry. This thesis does not aim to create novel theories, but to offer best practices for the case company to improve the overall content management.

2.1 Agile Framework

The agile way of working is contradictory to the traditional waterfall model. Dr. Winston Royce wrote a paper on “Managing the Development of Large Software Systems” in 1970, and it is considered to outline the waterfall approach as it is known today. In this waterfall approach, a large and complex software project is divided into sequential phases to manage the entity. Dr. Royce himself noticed weaknesses in the approach even then. One of the crucial problems with the waterfall approach that Dr. Royce noticed was that the whole process was sequential, and an error or mistake made in the early phases may be discovered only in the end that would generate loads of re-doing of the work. And because of this finding, more iterative practices started to evolve that include incremental development practices. (Cobb 2015, 18.)

Agile is considered to have been found in 2001, when a set of principles and values was compiled by 17 people who were at the time implementing their own different methodologies (Mundra 2018, 20). These 17 people came together with the aim of finding better ways to develop software. Even though with different background and practices, they had common work ethics that they formed into four values in their Agile Manifesto. (Beck et al. 2001.) The values of the Agile Manifesto (Beck et al. 2001.) are:

- People and interactions are valued over processes and tools.

- Functioning software is valued over extensive documentation.
- Customer engagement is valued over contract agreement.
- Reacting to change is valued over executing a plan. (Beck et al. 2001.)

There is value in the latter matters too, but the matters mentioned first are considered to bring more value. In addition, twelve principles were specified in the Agile Manisfesto. (Beck et al. 2001.) They are:

1. The customer's satisfaction through early and continuous delivery of valuable software is the top priority.
2. Change is harnessed for the customer's competitive advantage through agile processes, even if requirements are changed late in development.
3. Working software is delivered frequently, with a preference for the shorter timescale of a couple of weeks to a couple of months.
4. Daily collaboration between businesspeople and developers is required throughout the project.
5. Projects are built around motivated individuals who are given the environment and support they need to get the job done and are trusted to do so.
6. Face-to-face conversation is the most efficient and effective method of exchanging information to and within a development team.
7. The primary measure of progress is working software.
8. Sustainable development is promoted by agile processes, allowing sponsors, developers, and users to maintain a constant pace inevitably.
9. Agility is enhanced by continuous attention to technical excellence and good design.
10. Simplicity, which maximises the amount of work not done, is essential.
11. Autonomous teams are responsible for the best architecture, requirements, and designs.
12. The team reflects regularly on how to become more effective and adjusts its ways of working accordingly. (Beck et al. 2001.)

Even though these values and principles originate from the software industry, they started to spread to other industries as well. The different agile methods currently used in the companies originate from this agile mindset, values, and principles. (Project Management Institute 2017, 10.)

One of most important benefits of an agile way of working to a company is that it brings the business and IT department closer to each other. By achieving this, speed to market is increased which contributes to a higher ROI (Return on Investment), costs of changes get lower, and risks reduce because of faster feedback loops. (Mundra 2018, 21.)

2.1.1 The Spotify model

The Spotify model, described in the document by Kniberg and Ivarsson (2012), is a widely used organisational structure that companies adapt when transforming into an agile model. The fundamental building block of development at Spotify is called a squad. Ideally, each squad operates independently with open communication with their stakeholders and no hindrances from other squads. Essentially, each squad functions as a small startup, as a self-organising team that defines their own methods and has a long-term objective. (Kniberg & Ivarsson 2012, 2.)

A group of squads working in related fields is called a tribe. The tribe functions as an "incubator" for the squad startups and has a reasonable level of independence and autonomy. Each tribe is led by a tribe lead who is responsible for creating an optimal environment for the squads within the tribe. (Kniberg & Ivarsson 2012, 5.)

With full autonomy there might occur some loss of economies. For this reason, there are chapters and guilds in the Spotify model, which create economies without mitigating the autonomy. The chapter is a group of people with similar skills and working within the same general competence area. The chapter is responsible for the competence development of the group. A guild is a wider community of similar interests, where a group of people share their knowledge and good practices. Chapters are always within a tribe, whereas to a guild can belong team members across the organisations. This structure creates both vertical and horizontal dimensions to the organisational structure (Kniberg & Ivarsson 2012, 9-10.)

Figure 1 illustrates the vertical and horizontal dimensions in the Spotify organisation structure. The squads represent the vertical dimension in the matrix where people are physically grouped, and where they spend most of their time. The chapters and guilds represent the horizontal dimension where they share knowledge. (Kniberg & Ivarsson 2012, 9-11.)

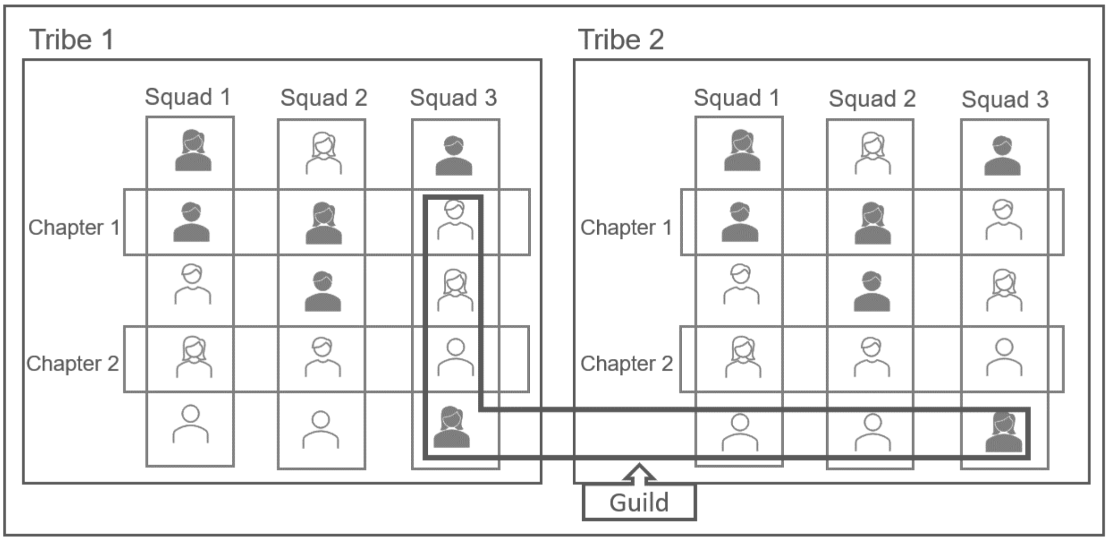

Figure 1. Spotify organisational matrix illustrated (based on Kniberg & Ivarsson 2012, 9.)

The organisational structure in the Spotify model is claimed to promote learning and innovation as the squad feels ownership of their processes and around the needed work. Also, squads should be able to get tasks done faster and release changes or new features to production with minimal hassle. (Kniberg & Ivarsson 2012, 2.)

2.1.2 Enterprise Agile and autonomous way of working

Frederick Winslow Taylor invented a scientific management model which he described in his monograph called “Principles of scientific management” that was published in 1911. In the monograph it is suggested that if jobs were better optimised and simplified, productivity would increase. This model of scientific management expedited industrial development at the time making great prosperity possible. This management style is still widely in use today. It is based on improving the efficiency of a worker by a management that is supervising the work and its results. Based on the results whether they are good or bad, the worker is either rewarded or punished. (Ries 2011, 13.)

David Marquet addressed this scientific management model, when he wrote about his experiences and learnings as a leader in the US navy in his book “Turn the ship around”. He described the leadership model used in the navy and in the organisations today as “leader-follower” model. Leadership in the navy as well as in many companies is about controlling people. This divides the employees in the company as leaders and followers. This management style has been successful in the past, and that is the reason why it is hard to give up. But this management style was invented in the era where labor was mostly psychical, whereas the work conducted today in many organisations is more cognitive, so this kind of management style created for the physical work is not optimal today. (Marquet 2015, 21-22.)

Even though the scientific management model is still commonly used, companies have noticed the potential of agile methods and started to implement them on a broader scale. Usually, the term agile transformation is used when adopting the agile on an enterprise-wide level. (Mundra 2018, 22.) Nowadays, companies are aware they are in an environment where there are rapid technological advancements and customers expect faster delivery of value. By implementing agile methods, companies can manage disruptive technologies. (Project Management Institute 2017, 3.)

Organisational structures require change from control to creating space, when building an autonomous agile organisation. There is still a need for leadership, as an autonomous way of working requires alignment. Agile management requires also arranging the governance so that the organisation’s strategy and vision is formed into objectives for the teams, enabling autonomy but showing direction. (Hoogveld 2017, 99 - 101.)

David Pink addresses the benefits of the autonomous way of working in his book Drive (2018), where a human behavior model called Type 1 is introduced and supported by several studies. In Type 1 behavior model, the motivation for acting is more intrinsic than external. This behavior model concerns little with external rewards, but with the rewards that the activity brings itself. The studies regarding this behavior model show that people have an inner need to be self-directed, to learn and create something new and to do better by

themselves. (Pink 2018, 10.) This behavior model consists of three elements: autonomy, mastery and purpose (Pink 2018, 90-133).

Social scientists have found that autonomy is something that people pursue and is considered to improve their lives. Autonomy does not mean the same as independence, it means acting by choice. The feeling of autonomy has been proven in studies to enhance a person's performance and attitude. Autonomy promotes better conceptual understanding and higher productivity. (Pink 2018, 90-91.) Autonomy does not exclude accountability. The belief behind the traditional management system is that an employee would avoid responsibilities when given freedom. But in autonomous way of working, it is assumed that people want to be accountable, as it means they have control over their work. But, transitioning to the autonomous way of working in the organisation will not often happen over a short period of time. There usually is a struggle when moving away from the controlled environment, and organisations should provide support in the transition process. (Pink 2018, 106-107.)

Another element of the inner motivated behavior model, mastery, is a need to get better at something that matters. Flow is essential to mastery, but it does not guarantee it. (Pink 2018, 111-120.) Mastering something often requires working a lot with little improvement, with few flow moments along the way. This involves making little progress, and then getting a little better and keeping on learning. But that is the essence of mastering, as effort gives meaning. (Pink 2018, 125.)

The third element of the inner motivated behavior model is purpose. Purpose provides context to autonomy and mastery. Autonomous people working towards something meaningful are extremely motivated and productive. (Pink 2018, 133.)

Among agile methods, there are many other organisational philosophies and strategies used by businesses to be competitive and profitable in their markets. Among these methods, there is the concept of lean that has its origins in industrial manufacturing, often related to Japanese automobile company Toyota. Lean is widely recognised and implemented, and often

accompanied with agile methods. The goal of lean is to perfect processes by minimising and ultimately eliminating waste which causes variation throughout the value stream. The focus of lean is on the customer who determines the value and how much they are willing to pay for the product or service. (Motwani et al. 2012,15.) In lean manufacturing the aim is to recognise the efforts that are creating value and those that are creating waste. Agile methods that were created for software development have their origins in lean thinking as agile was also designed to eliminate waste. (Ries 2011, 47-58.)

The concept of reducing waste has much to do with keeping inventory. From an industrial manufacturing perspective this is easy to understand. A large inventory will more likely guarantee to have the right product for the customers they are in need of. But large inventory is expensive due to the costs of transportation, storage, and tracking. Lean production solves this problem with the pull factor. The target is to implement small batch production that eventually leads to a single-piece flow throughout the entire supply chain. Each step in the production line pulls the parts it needs from the previous step, which shrinks the excess inventory. In the field of information technology, the work that is in progress (WIP) can also be thought of as an inventory, it is just invisible. Work that is in progress is waste until it is ready and in production creating value. (Ries 2011, 199-200.)

Little's law is a queueing theory that is usually associated with WIP when trying to optimise it in operations management. Little's law states that with steady conditions, average number of items (L) in the queuing system equals the average arrival rate (λ) multiplied by the average spending time (W) of an item in the system, so algebraically the Little's law is $L= \lambda W$. (Little & Graves 2008, 82.) When managing operations, the concern usually is with the time it takes for items to go through the production process (development time) rather than the arrival rate, so, the queue length is WIP, and the wait time is cycle time. It means; when managing operational tasks, the Little's law is WIP = development time x cycle time. (Little & Graves 2008, 96.)

In addition to reducing waste, decreasing the inventory with smaller batch sizes enables faster learning, which is in the core of agile methods. Getting the product ready for the market starts the process of learning. Learning

enables continuous improvement of the product leading to better responding to the customers' needs. (Ries 2011, 201.)

Eliminating waste and creating a faster feedback loop requires also prioritisation. As companies have limited resources, important matters need to be prioritised. When bringing strategic plans to execution, management must be able to put priorities in order and decide on what should be focused at the moment when setting objectives to priorities. (Plenert & Cluley 2012, 147.) At the operational level, the tasks need to be prioritised and decided which task to execute, and in which order to achieve the objectives. Some tasks may have greater influence in achieving the objective while some tasks may have a smaller influence. (Plenert & Cluley 2012, 154-155.)

Prioritisation is essential also due to people's cognitive limitations. Studies have shown that individuals have a limit to the number of tasks they can effectively perform and the amount of information they can absorb at the same time before their overall performance suffers. The degree of disruption of the context switch increases when there is higher workload. In other words, the more there is simultaneous work, the more inefficiency it creates. (Adler & Benbunan-Fich 2012, 164-165.)

Even if the context switch is done without external enforcement, it does not have any better effect. In a study of multitasking in a workplace conducted by Czerwinski et al. (2004) it was noticed that context switching that employees experience is mostly initiated by themselves. Mark et al. (2005) noticed that self-interrupted working between tasks can reduce productivity even more than external interruption as the deferred task is less likely to be continued after the break. (Adler et al. 2015, 5460-5461.)

As the performance decreases in context switch, the level of accuracy decreases as well. It appears that accuracy steadily decreases as context switching increases. As both productivity as well as the quality of the work suffers from having too much work in progress, it makes sense to work more in a consecutive way than simultaneously. (Adler & Benbunan-Fich 2012, 164-165.)

2.1.3 Agile and autonomous way of working in the case company

The agile way of working in the case company is adapted from the Spotify model. The case company's agile way of working documentation describes the principles and practices to enable the organisation to achieve common goals. The documentation should not be considered as a set of rules or a detailed manual on what to do in different situations. It provides a framework and policies for adapting agile mindset and culture across the company. The agile way of working is continuously refined according to the needs of operations and employees. The key principles for the agile ways of working in the case company (Case company 2019.) are:

- The value generated for the customer is at the core of all activities. The operational organisations are built around value generation for the end customer. Customer value is expressed in the goals. Each operational organisation is supported by a separate line organisation, which provides expertise and efficient practices across operational organisations.
- Autonomous, multi-skilled teams take responsibility in creating customer value in a very self-directive manner, while also applying shared practices.
- Competencies are constantly developed, and the ways of working are continuously improved in order for the organisation to react quickly to changing situations.
- Work should be transparent and that requires an open discussion culture. Obstacles should be pointed out and actively removed and goals and work are reassessed and prioritised when necessary. (Case company 2019.)

In the case company, squads are called teams. The agile approach revolves around these multi-skilled teams that work autonomously, have decision-making power, and clear responsibilities. The focus is on meeting the needs of the customers, with management, target-setting, and day-to-day tasks all geared towards this goal by using iterative processes and faster feedback loop. Teams are meant to work independently and make faster decisions by the streamlined decision-making process and reduced need for permission-

seeking or rigid structures. Each business segment within the case company should apply the agile methodology's shared principles and practices that are best suited for their activity. (Case company 2019.)

The teams' autonomy in the case company is structurally ensured by separating line organisations from operational organisations. Line organisations develop competencies and provide tribes with the experts they need, while the day-to-day work is done in the operational organisations, meaning tribes and teams. Operational organisations are based on target-oriented and multi-skilled teams grouped into tribes.

Figure 2 is sketched by the author of this thesis to illustrate the operational and line organisations within the case company. Each tribe belongs to a specific business segment that is responsible for a dedicated business area. To support the work in the tribes, there are different competence centers. Multi-skilled teams within the tribes are formed by experts from different competence areas. The line organisation's centers of excellence (CoE) have experts whose expertise in tribes is not continuously needed and the experts serve several teams. Unlike competence areas, CoE members do not belong directly to teams or tribes but work closely with them.

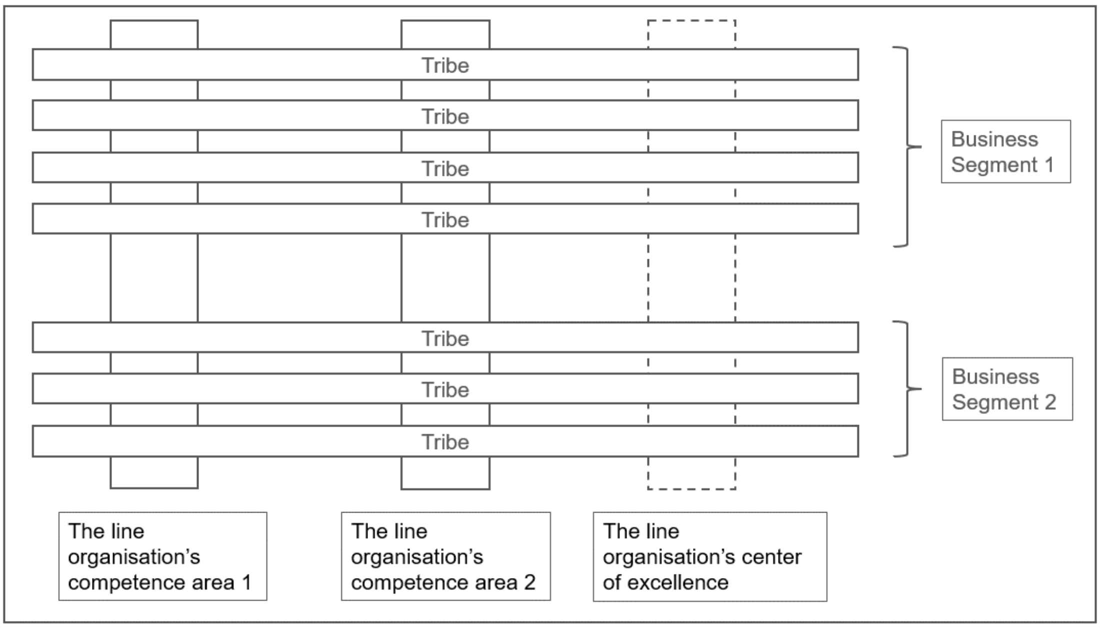

Figure 2. Operational and line organisations within the case company illustrated

A tribe is an operational organisation consisting of multi-skilled teams, with as simple a structure as possible and a flat decision-making hierarchy. A tribe has a strategic purpose and business goals which are fulfilled by the teams. Competencies from different line organisations are brought together in tribes to achieve set goals. This enables tribes to create customer value with minimum dependency on the activities of other tribes.

2.2 Management by Objectives

Management by Objectives (MBO) is a method invented by Peter Drucker in the 1950s. MBO is a process to transform the organisation's strategic objectives into employee level objectives. The focus is on how everyone in the organisation can participate in reaching strategic level goals. (Islami et al. 2018, 95.) The MBO process commences by defining the issue and establishing objectives. Organisation needs to analyse where it is now and where it wants to be after the method is implemented. (Islami et al. 2018, 98.)

In order to implement the MBO model, significant resources and specific tools are necessary. This is because managers in business organisations are not automatically directed towards a shared target. The business inherently holds three significant aspects of misdirection: the specialised work of most managers, the hierarchical structure of management, and the differences in vision and work that can result in segregation of different levels of management. (Drucker 2011, 105.)

2.2.1 Objectives and Key results -framework

Objectives and Key results -framework (OKR) is based on the MBO method. MBO method inspired Andy Grove to develop the method further into the OKR framework in the 1970s. OKR framework consists of two parts: Objectives, meaning goals that set the direction, and Key Results that indicate whether the progress is going as intended. (Den Haak 2021, 9.) OKRs are used to improve transparency by displaying goals and progress to all stakeholders, from top-level management to individual employees. This is done to personalise the objectives and to create vertical and horizontal alignment. (Mooncamp 2023.)

Even though managing with objectives is not a new concept or method, OKR framework is claimed to bring a new mindset to it. The OKR framework should not be considered as a methodology, but a new culture needs to be adapted for it to succeed in an organisation. Just re-naming old targets and starting to use OKR term does not change the way of working. (Stanforth 2020, 44.)

If a company aims to set ambitious goals with OKR and create a space for creativity and innovation, there must be psychological safety where people are not afraid to share their ideas and start new experiments even though they might fail. It means OKR framework acquires a culture where mistakes are understood as part of the process. But if teams are being punished based on the results of OKR, or OKR is used for employee evaluation or bonuses are attached to the results, people will only define OKRs that they are sure to achieve. (Sörgens 2023, 71.)

The leadership should provide a clear vision and strategy for the long-term, as well as a short-term goal for guidance. The teams can then develop their own means and solutions and decide how and when to implement them. It is important to strike a balance between top-down and bottom-up goal setting. If goals are only set from the top, employees may not feel motivated to achieve them. Conversely, if goals are only set from the bottom, individual teams may prioritise local optimisation over the bigger picture. (Sörgens 2023, 70.)

The annual strategic focus should be a combination of ongoing market observations, analysis, and customer engagement, and outline a hypothesis on how customer needs or problems and market trends could lead to competitive advantages. The annual strategy should be directional and provide focus without specifying exactly what needs to be done, while also excluding what should not be done. This strategic clarity helps the members make autonomous decisions later in the OKR process, reducing the need for micro-management. (Sörgens 2023, 14-15.)

Defining a good objective is a challenging task itself. Objective describes the wanted outcome, what is supposed to be achieved. Objectives should work as a motivation for the team members in the organisation. Defining the objectives from the customer’s point of view can be good practice. (Den Haak 2021, 71-

72.) A short-term objective is a qualitative representation of a desired target state that is derived from the annual goals. Sörgens (2023) also highlights that the objectives should provide orientation and serve as a motivational and aspirational tool for the team members. The objective describes the outcome that delivers added value for a particular target group and can be visibly experienced at the end of an OKR cycle. The end-to-end capable team defines the objective that they autonomously work on in the coming three to four months, depending on the review cycle. (Sörgens 2023, 17.)

There are different versions of the OKR framework, as it is not standardised. Various implementations of the OKR framework have some differences. Although there is variation with the implementation of the OKR framework, as a basic rule, there should be a limited number of objectives. Den Haak (2021) suggests starting with one objective when ramping up the OKR framework. This is due to the reduction of returns that applies to objectives as well as to other matters. When there is a reasonable number of objectives, that is one to three objectives, the organisation will most likely achieve them. If there are four to ten goals, probably one or two goals will be met. (Den Haak 2021, 120.)

When implementing the OKR framework, some organisations tend to define all the work into OKRs. This phenomenon usually occurs when it is pointed out that those who have no or few OKRs are not working on anything important. It should be made clear that Business as Usual (BAU) work, meaning keeping the operations running in the company, is just as important as strategic work. Both types of work are equally necessary, but they require different approaches. Although, many organisations fail to transparently prioritise their operational tasks, which is also needed. (Sörgens 2023, 72-73.)

Also, a common attribute with OKR is that the long-term objectives are divided into short-term objectives that are set quarterly, as learning and proactive decision making is an essential part of OKR framework. It is important to gain new information that can be analysed and turned into knowledge to innovate and to change the strategy if needed. (Niven & Lamorte 2016, 21-22.)

Alignment is important when setting OKRs. Vertical alignment involves setting objectives and key results that trickle down to individual employees. However, it does not mean that the executive team imposes mandatory goals on lower level without considering their relevance or necessity. Vertical alignment aims to establish a clear connection between the team's daily activities with other stakeholders and the company's overall goals. (Niven & Lamorte 2016, 109.)

Horizontal alignment is also crucial. Modern enterprises require diverse teams to collaborate to solve customer issues or create new value. When one unit cannot depend on another, several negative outcomes may occur, such as duplicated efforts, missed opportunities, and escalating conflicts that harm the company's culture. Managers acknowledge the challenge of cross-functional coordination. Creating horizontal alignment involves having detailed conversations with other units throughout the company to identify mutual dependencies. To ensure that all units create OKRs that reflect them, the resulting OKRs may be shared OKRs. (Niven & Lamorte 2016, 133.)

Sörgens (2023) addresses the challenge of alignment too. In OKR implementations, it is a common mistake to directly adopt the organisation chart when creating the OKR structure. This means that each team shown in the organisation chart is expected to create their own set of OKRs. Since most organisational charts do not reflect the value creation, the usual dependencies between teams will still exist in the new OKR process. If teams cannot achieve their OKRs without the help of other teams, it increases the need for coordination and leads to frustration among team members due to the risen need for coordination of the work rather than realising their OKRs, and the promised benefits of effective work are not achieved. (Sörgens 2023, 54.)

2.2.2 QBR process

Quarterly Business Review (QBR) is a tool used in some companies that are led with objectives and implements the OKR framework (Jadoul et al. 2020). There is very little literature or research conducted of the QBR process. There are articles and blog posts from business thinkers and company executives explaining the overall QBR process, what benefit it brings and how it should be implemented through their experience.

The QBR process is a method for companies to evaluate their advancement, recognise obstacles and possibilities, and plan ahead. It assists in guaranteeing that the business remains on course to fulfill its targets and vision. (Shisha-Halevy 2023.)

It is seen important for agile companies to establish a balance between stable and flexible practices. Periodic business reviews, prioritisation of tasks, and alignment among organisational units (commonly referred to as 'tribes') are frequently grouped together in QBR process. QBR process can serve as a vital component in achieving an efficient and effective agile organisation by linking the overall strategic goals to the team-level in the organisational units. (Jadoul et al. 2020.)

QBR process aids organisations to allocate resources between the strategic objectives and operations maintenance through a shorter-term review. Resources are allocated among project and product groups, and the quarterly process aims to create transparency around resource allocation and alignment across business areas. QBR is commonly used in digital and transformation management business units, which deliver continuous value using agile methods. (Hoeft 2023, 342-343.)

2.2.3 Shared goals and leading with objectives in the case company

Goals are the key leadership tool within the case company. In setting the goals, the most important aspect to consider is what should be achieved and whose contribution is needed. Clear communication by segment and tribe leaders is needed to create faster reactions and to change the direction when needed. Shared agreement on goals provides teams with the correct context for planning actions and creating value for the customer. It is important in the autonomous way of working that the goals are commonly agreed targets, not given tasks.

The case company’s mission and values guide the operations and choices. The role of vision is to set the direction. The role of the strategy in the case company is to create a decision-making framework. Strategic priorities for the

next few years are defined in the strategy process. Strategic priorities are brought to strategic roadmaps to predict future needs. Strategic road maps are continuously developed in order to divide the strategy into more manageable parts. This means adding shared annual goals and identifying the elements of value creation.

This process aims to create a clear narrative for the autonomous tribes that work under the management team. Within the tribes, there are autonomous teams that are responsible for strategic management at their respective level. This approach provides purpose to the work and a clear direction from the goals.

2.2.4 QBR process in the case company

The purpose of the QBR process in the case company is to strengthen teams' ability for autonomous way of working by creating clarity on what is aimed to be achieved on a company level. Also, it provides insight for the organisations on each other's actions, and creates a view for leaderships on the implementation of the strategy.

Companywide priorities and focus are updated periodically in the QBR process. All the necessary parties should contribute to the related objective setting and decide what will be in focus for the coming quarter. To be able to focus quarterly, a clear long-term strategy and a roadmap are essential. Both strategy and roadmap evolve based on the work done. Figure 3 is sketched by the author of this thesis to illustrate the feedback loop that should work both from the top down and from the bottom up. The important strategic matters are brought from the top level to the operational level, and the lessons learnt should be brought up to be considered when adjusting the strategy if needed.

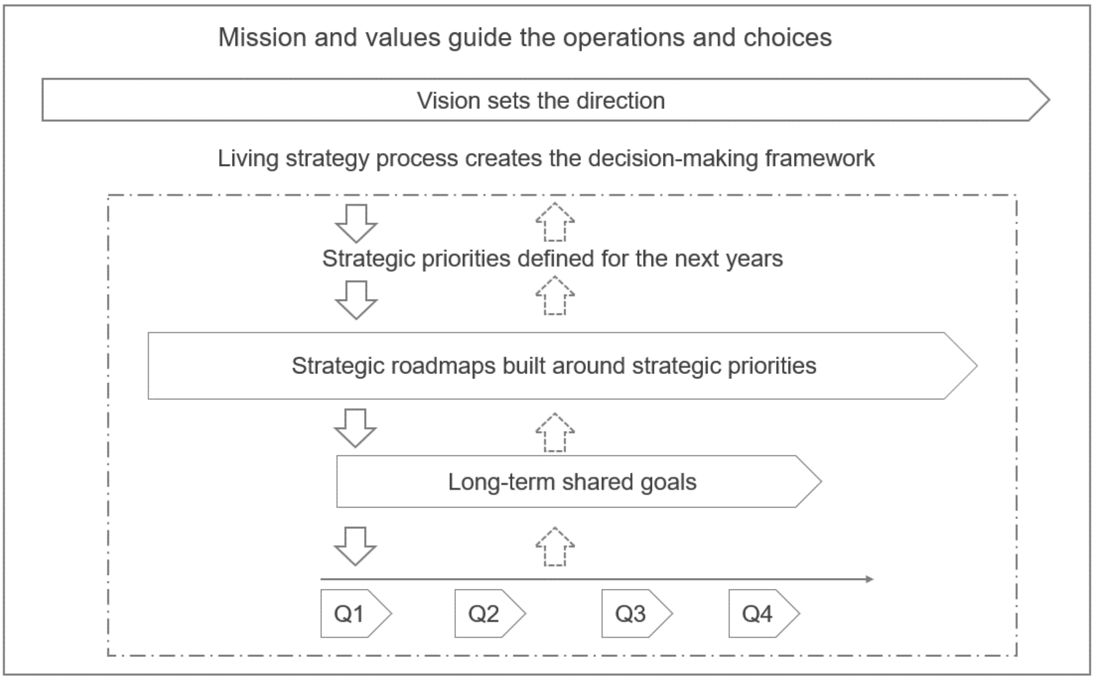

Figure 3. Leading with objectives model in the case company illustrated

QBR process is used in the case company for strategic operational management, meaning long-term monitoring of goals and adjusting based on the lessons learned from completed work. Differing from the OKR framework, business as usual tasks are managed in the QBR process in the case company. As QBR process is used to make all work transparent, matters regarding strategic priorities, operating environment, and maintaining the basic functions are prioritised equally in the QBR process.

QBR process consists of collaboration between segment leaders and tribe leaders. This requires prioritisation if obstacles or conflicts occur. Long-term goals are clarified in the QBR planning process, where the participants should agree on what to aim for next. Each tribe must have a shared, jointly managed QBR target in cases of collaboration across tribes. The teams must participate sufficiently in QBR planning to ensure the smoother fulfilment of goals. The needs of teams and tribes must be identified, and targets prioritised to ensure the fulfillment of key goals.

With QBR planning, the case company aims to improve its overall customer value created by the teams in collaboration. This should be done so that the organisations should not try to always further all fronts, but one task should be completed at a time. Simultaneous work on several tasks leads to waste.

Tribes should define quarterly goals through the QBR planning process with a clear focus and priority. Teams should understand what they are aiming for. Teams should collaborate and, by doing so, be capable of working autonomously during the target period. QBR planning is cyclical by nature as the next quarter is always based and built on the previous one.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter presents the research design of this thesis. The decisions and reasons for the selected methodology are explained, as well as the approach used to investigate the research problem. Also, the different research methods in the field of social sciences are introduced briefly.

The selected data collection method and the overall process of data collection is described in this chapter. Common data analysis methods for qualitative research are introduced briefly, and the reasons for the selected data analysis method for this research. The selected data analysis method and the analysis process is thoroughly explained.

3.1 Research methods

Research can be categorised into different types based on various criteria, such as the purpose of the study, the objectives of the research, and the data collection. Considering the type of data that is collected, research can be categorised into qualitative and quantitative approaches. Combination of these two methods is known as a mixed-method study that includes advantages of both approaches. Qualitative and quantitative approaches differ in terms of the level of understanding and explanation of phenomena being investigated, the researcher's role, and whether the knowledge is constructed or discovered. (Taherdoost 2022, 53-54.)

In social sciences, a distinction is often made between descriptive and explanatory research. Explanatory research aims to answer 'why' questions. It aims to explain why matters are the way they are respecting the phenomenon under investigation. Descriptive research aims to create contextual and detailed descriptions of the subject under study. The purpose is to describe

what kind of phenomenon the research subject is or how common the phenomenon is. (Leavy 2022, 6-7.)

The primary purpose of qualitative research is to comprehend human behavior, which is based on the philosophical principle of hermeneutics. The primary objective of quantitative research is to explain human behavior. Understanding in qualitative research implies having empathy for the human subjects involved. Qualitative research provides personal information within a broader context, allowing for hypotheses to develop gradually based on interpretive observations of recurring patterns. (House 2018, 7.)

In the field of research, quantitative methods may be seen more as proper research compared to qualitative, due to the assumed subjectivity in qualitative research (House 2018, 7). However, when encountering a topic that is very little researched, exploratory research creates new information and knowledge about the topic (Leavy 2022, 5). As qualitative research is considered as an inductive approach, qualitative approach is used to explore new phenomenon in research (Leavy 2022, 9).

3.2 Methodology in this research

This research is based on a theoretical framework which gave the context to the empirical data that was collected through interviews. This thesis aims to understand the decisions regarding the content management within the case company. As the aim of this research is to comprehend the phenomenon, the approach of this research is qualitative.

The process of this thesis started with defining the problem related to content management in the case company. The challenges regarding content management have emerged from various studies and analysis conducted within the case company. However, they have not been studied further yet, and the root causes for the phenomenon are unclear. As the phenomenon is unfamiliar and there is no exact root cause for the challenges identified yet, it was clear this requires an explanatory approach.

3.3 Data collection

The research problem of this study required gathering new information in order to understand the reasoning and factors related to the content management in the case company. Leadership in general is a subject that is studied often in the case company, and from various perspectives. What was noticed to be lacking at the moment was a study focusing on goal setting and decision making.

Information needed for this research was gathered from the top management of the case company, as aspects related to content management have not been studied before from their perspective. Data was collected by theme interviews conducted by the author of this thesis. Interviews were conducted between February and March 2024 within a three-week time frame.

3.3.1 Selection of the informants

The top management in the case company are board members who are leaders of the different business segments and different competence centers and the company’s CEO. The aim was to clarify through different themes how the board members see the focus and mechanisms of the leadership from their perspective.

Two business segment leaders delegated the role of the informant to their deputies, and from one business segment two different informants were interviewed. All the leaders from the competence centers were interviewed except for one area that was excluded from this research. There was a total of nine interviews conducted to collect the data for this research. As the case company wishes to stay anonymous as well as the informants, the different business segment areas, or the areas of the competence centers are not identified further in this thesis. Later in the chapters of this thesis, competence centers and business segments are referred to as departments to ensure the anonymity of each informant and the organisations they are the leader of.

When transcribing the interviews, each informant was given a randomly selected ID to make the collected data anonymous. ID numbers do not reflect

the order in which the interviews were conducted. Table 1 shows the length of the interview, interview location and the ID number for each informant.

Table 1. The informants ID numbers, duration, and the location of the interviews

Informant ID	Duration of the interview	Live / Microsoft Teams
ID1	1h 3min	Microsoft Teams
ID2	52min	Live
ID3	54min	Live
ID4	1h 1min	Live
ID5	1h 4min	Live
ID6	1h 1min	Live
ID7	1h	Live
ID8	1h 17min	Microsoft Teams
ID9	50min	Microsoft Teams

As the top management usually have full calendars for several weeks to come, the interviews were booked at the beginning of the year before the interview questions were assembled based on the research questions. When booking the time slots for the interviews, the aim and reason for this study and what is expected from the informants was explained. When the interview questions were ready, they were sent a week or two prior to the actual interview for the informants. This was done so that the informants could familiarise themselves with the questions, gather their thoughts and form a well-founded view of the questions.

3.3.2 Themes of the interviews

Interviews were conducted either via Microsoft Teams or live in the company's office space. All the interviews were recorded with Teams with the permission of the informants. At the beginning of the interview, the aim of the study and the practices of the interview and matters regarding the protection of the data

were explained. After this the interview questions were asked by the informants in the order that was sent to them beforehand.

The interview questions were not changed, or new questions added in the interview, but the author could ask the informants to clarify or elaborate their answers. Also, the informants could share their thoughts related to the topic that was not asked in the interview questions. Time slot booked for the interview was one hour, but some interviews lasted longer while few interviews were finished earlier.

All the informants answered each interview question, but all the questions were not equally relevant for every department leader. This was expected as there are differences between the organisations. Differences can be related to the structure, size, or the purpose of these organisations. Even though every question in each theme of the interview structure was not completely relevant to all the informants, the overall themes were created so that they were relevant at least to most part to everyone.

The themes and the questions for the interview are showcased in Appendix 1. The themes were:

- Focus of leadership to achieve the wanted result
- Mechanisms of leadership
- The role of QBR process in leading department

As was expected, the first theme, focus of the leadership, was equally relevant to everyone and each question in the theme was considered equally relevant in every department. In, the second theme, mechanisms of leadership, there was some variety with individual questions whether they were seen as relevant or not in the context of each department. On the third theme, the role of QBR process, some variety in the questions occurred: whether the different questions were seen relevant or what kind of visibility the leader of each department has in their organisation regarding the topic.

3.4 Data analysis

The interviews were held in Finnish. The author of this thesis made a transcript of every interview based on the recording of the interview. Transcripts were done in Finnish and translated into English for further analysis by the author of this thesis.

The process of transcribing the recorded interviews should be thought of as a preliminary stage of analysis. As there are many different approaches to transcription, the researcher should think early in the process of conducting the research about how the transcript is done. Depending on the topic and the objective of the research, some research requires a more precise level of transcript, whereas for some research rough transcription might be enough. (Brinkmann 2013, 61.)

As the research for this thesis is conducted from a factual perspective, only the subject matter in the interview is relevant. Therefore, the transcript was done in the level of transcribing the spoken words of the informants, but intonation, possible pauses or hesitations were not transcribed. Also, filler words were left out from the final transcripts.

As creating the transcripts is time-consuming, various possible ways are suggested as an alternative, such as outsourcing the transcribing to external transcriptionists. Over the past few years automatic transcription that is based on speech recognition algorithms has become an alternative. (Wollin-Giering et al. 2024, 2.) However, automated transcription should not be used as such as it requires manual review afterwards. Automatic transcription programs can complete sentences in some specific ways or remove filler words, potentially altering the content. (Wollin-Giering et al. 2024, 32-33.)

As the transcription is stated as a useful phase to get acquainted with the data and perhaps aids the process of further analysis, the transcription was not outsourced. Also, the use of transcription programs, such as ChatGPT, requires manual review and therefore would not save time considerably. As the target group for informants was limited and all the informants from that

group were interviewed, the transcripts and getting familiarised with the collected data was done after all the interviews were conducted.

3.4.1 Data analysis methods in qualitative research

There are a variety of common data analysis methods used in qualitative research. Although certain methods are specific to certain methodologies, there are some methods that can be used across a range of methodologies. (Rena 2022,17-18.)

One such method is **constant comparative analysis** that originates from Grounded Theory approach. The method involves coding text data often prior to thematic analysis or categorical analysis. This method is common to use when data is collected through interviews. When the interviews have been transcribed, the next step in analysis is to read each transcript, create preliminary coding, and then compare the codes across transcripts. (Rena 2022,17-18.)

Content analysis is another method that can be used in various methodologies. This method is often used with fieldnotes of observations in an ethnographic study or written survey responses in a generic qualitative study. (Rena 2022,17-18.)

Thematic analysis is perhaps the most commonly used method for analysing qualitative research data, and there are multiple forms of it. Although thematic analysis is a common method, it is sometimes associated with studies that lack detail in the analysis. (Rena 2022,17-18.) Brandau & Rebello (2021) and Ryan-Vig et al. (2019) write that thematic analysis involves identifying, examining, and documenting recurring patterns or "themes." It is commonly used to interpret data from various sources such as interviews, focus groups, surveys, videos, and other visual or textual materials. It is a fundamental technique for identifying and interpreting patterns and meanings in qualitative data, and it can be applied to a wide range of research topics and questions. (Christou 2014, 563.)

Gioia analysis methodology was used for the data analysis in this research. The Gioia method is similar to thematic coding. The Gioia method was selected over the traditional thematic analysis methods due to its systematic data-coding and data-analysis techniques, that provides a higher level of detail via a more methodical research approach.

3.4.2 Gioia methodology

Gioia & Pitre (1990) writes that the Gioia methodology is an approach to inductive research that aims to surface new concepts and to generate persuasive new theories of the collected data (Gioia et al. 2013, 15). The development of Gioia methodology started in the late 1980s when Dennis A. Gioia and Kumar Chittipeddi conducted an ethnographic study. In 2013, Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton published a detailed explanation of the methodology and its philosophical foundations in Organisational Research Methods, which quickly gained wide acceptance. The adoption of this approach has continued to increase since then. (Magnani & Gioia 2023, 1-2.)

In organisational studies, the traditional approach often leads to a focus on developing and defining abstract theoretical concepts known as constructs. Constructs are formulations that describe phenomena of interest in an abstract way, with the aim of being able to measure them as variables. The main purpose of a construct is to identify a set of attributes that can be defined and preferably quantified. Constructs and variables are useful tools for simplifying complex concepts and achieving some level of agreement when studying an organisation. (Gioia et al. 2013, 16.)

In Gioia methodology, the basic assumption is that the organisational world is socially constructed. The next assumption is that the people constructing their organisational realities are ‘knowledgeable agents,’ meaning people in the organisation know what they are trying to do and can explain their thoughts, intentions, and actions. This foregrounds the informants’ interpretations where researcher’s role is to give an adequate account of the informants’ experience. This means that the researcher gives voice to the informants in the early stages of data gathering and analysis and also represents their voices prominently in the reporting of the research, which creates opportunities for

discovery of new concepts rather than only confirming existing concepts. (Gioia et al. 2013, 17.)

Continuum to these assumptions, it is assumed that the researcher is also knowledgeable of the subject and can notice patterns in the data. This enables the surfacing of concepts and relationships that the informants themselves may not be aware of; and those concepts can be formulated in theoretically relevant terms. (Gioia et al. 2013, 17.)

In contrast to unstructured case study designs that lack systematic data-coding and data-analysis techniques, the Gioia approach provides more rigor by utilising a more methodical research approach. This involves a three-stage process. The first step is to create analytic codes and categories that are organised into a data structure consisting of first order (informant-centered) codes and second order (theory-centered) themes and aggregate dimensions. In the second stage, a grounded theoretical model is developed by constantly comparing data over time and across informants. In the third stage, the study's findings are presented through a detailed, data-driven narrative that typically uses second order themes and aggregated dimensions, with frequent reference to first order quotations from the informants. (Magnani & Gioia 2023, 2.)

3.4.3 Data analysis process with Gioia methodology

Gioia (2004) instructed the analysis process with Gioia methodology that starts with transcribed data. During the initial phase of research, a vast array of terms, codes, and categories are generated by the informants. In this primary analysis, the terms used by the informants are accurately reflected without attempting to simplify or reduce the categories. Consequently, the number of categories tends to increase significantly at the beginning of the study. For example, it is not uncommon to have 50 to 100 first order categories emerge from ten interviews. This may appear so that the data lacks cohesion. (Gioia et al. 2013, 20.)

As similarities and differences among the categories are sought as the research progresses, the relevant categories are eventually reduced to a more

manageable number. The categories are then labeled with phrasal descriptors, preferably retaining the terms used by informants. At this point, the researcher must think at multiple levels simultaneously, meaning at the level of the informant terms and codes and at more abstract, second order theoretical level of themes, dimensions, and the larger narrative. (Gioia et al. 2013, 20.)

In this second order analysis, the focus is on the theoretical aspects of the research, exploring whether the emerging themes can provide concepts that may assist in describing and explaining the observed phenomena. The attention is particularly in the novel concepts that lack theoretical references in existing literature or existing concepts that are relevant to a new area. Once a viable set of themes and concepts has been established, it should be examined whether it is possible to condense the emerging second order themes even further into aggregate dimensions. (Gioia et al. 2013, 20.)

When the full set of first order terms and second order themes and aggregate dimensions are available, a data structure, as shown in Figure 4, can be built. The data structure is not only useful in configuring data into a sensible visual form, but also in providing a graphic representation of the progression from raw data to terms and themes in the analysis. (Gioia et al. 2013, 20.)

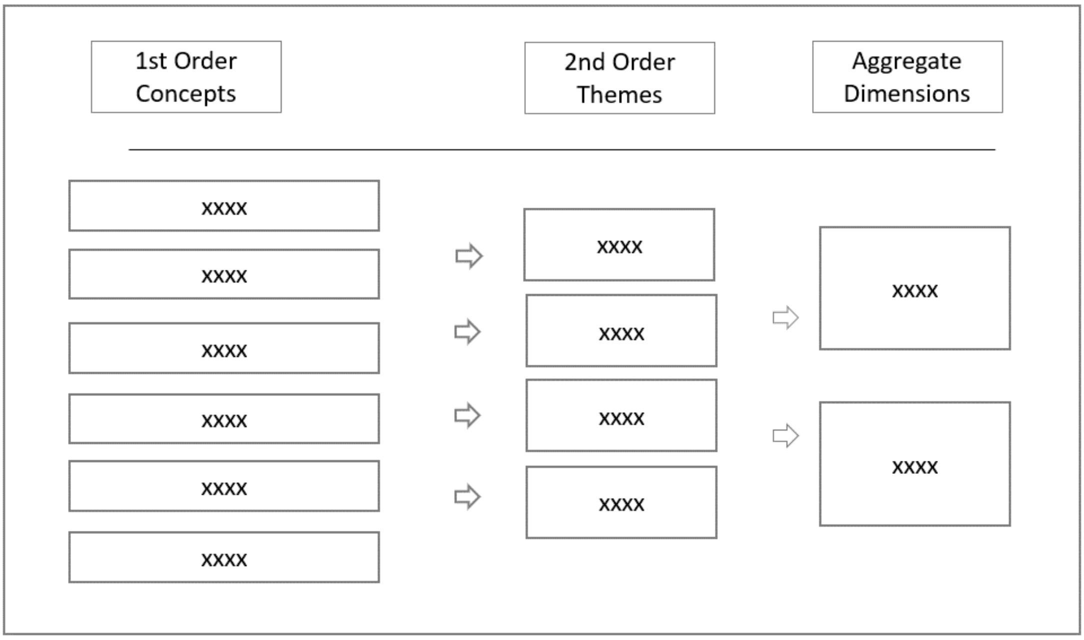

Figure 4. The data structure of Gioia Methodology illustrated (based on Gioia et al. 2013, 21)

Following the stages of analysis requires concurrent examination of the first order concepts, second order themes and the aggregate dimensions as well as the relevant literature. This is done to determine whether there are precedents for the findings and to identify potential new concepts. (Gioia et al. 2013, 21.)

3.5 The analysis process in this research with Gioia methodology

After all the interviews for this research were transcribed, started the process of analysing the data further into first order concepts, then second order themes and finally into aggregate dimensions that would create the data structure that is used as a basis for the findings and conclusions. The whole data structure is presented in Appendix 2.

The analysis process was done by utilising an excel sheet to organise the data. As shown in Figure 5, the answers to every interview question from each informant were written to separate excel cells to compare the answers and find the relevant information in each analysis stage.

G13

	A	B	C	D
1	**Informant ID**	**Interview question 1**	**Interview question 2**	**Interview question 3**
2	8	Answer from raw data	Answer from raw data	Answer from raw data
3	6	Answer from raw data	Answer from raw data	Answer from raw data
4	9	Answer from raw data	Answer from raw data	Answer from raw data
5	5	Answer from raw data	Answer from raw data	Answer from raw data
6	2	Answer from raw data	Answer from raw data	Answer from raw data
7	3	Answer from raw data	Answer from raw data	Answer from raw data
8	1	Answer from raw data	Answer from raw data	Answer from raw data
9	7	Answer from raw data	Answer from raw data	Answer from raw data
10	4	Answer from raw data	Answer from raw data	Answer from raw data

Figure 5. The analysis process illustrated

The author of the thesis considered using some application, for example Nvivo to organise the data, but excel seemed to work well as the data in this research was not overwhelmingly large. Also, the more manual process forces to get deeper into the data which helps to make more genuine discoveries as well as maintains more certainly the integrity in the analysis process.

3.5.1 The first order concepts

When the data was in more accessible form to examine more thoroughly, the aim was to find concepts that are relevant to the phenomenon under study. As the first order concepts are presented in the informants' own words and should not be changed into any other terms, there is a mixture of singular words, terms, and phrases in full sentences.

The number of first order concepts emerging from the data in the first iteration rose above 200. From the second iteration the number reduced below 200, as some concepts were found irrelevant regarding the phenomenon under study. In the third and final iteration, the number of first order concepts stabilised to 141 concepts. In the theory about Gioia methodology is suggested that the average number for the first order concepts from data this size is around 100 concepts, so the number of concepts from this data was large. This was considered not to pose challenges in the later stages of the analysis, if the concepts can be found to have relevance to each other enough that the set of second order themes are manageable.

3.5.2 The second order themes

After the first order concepts were considered to be right in terms of relevance to the research questions stated for this research, the second stage of analysis started where the first order concepts were grouped into themes. Where the first stage of analysis follows the informants' terms and they are not to be changed, the second order themes are generated assimilating the concepts to relevant theory to find conjunctive factors. In this stage, the researcher must also use own expertise in finding similarities from the informants' terms and understand what the informant meant by the used phrases and terms.

To find the second order themes, all the concepts were written in one column to an excel sheet and compared to each other. Figure 6 illustrates the process of recognising similarities in relation to theory from the first order concepts to be grouped into second order themes. In the first iteration, the concepts were gone through one by one and relevant theoretical terms were written down to top row of the excel sheet. From this first iteration emerged 40 different

themes. In the second iteration, all concepts were added to each emerged theme they could be related to. After this cross-check a few duplicate or irrelevant themes were rejected.

D1 Prioritization & Focusing on the right matters

	A	B	C	D
1	1st order concepts	Goal setting	Operating environment	Prioritization & Focusing on the right matte
2	appropriately challenging but achievable within the given timeframe	x		
3	How to set goals that apply to everyone's work	x		
4	Unexpected obstacles along the way that can't be anticipated		x	
5	Prioritizing and focusing on important things			x
6	Shift in culture towards being less cautious and more ambitious when setting targets	x		
7	External factors impacting success		x	
8	Success measured in relation to set goals	x		
9	Prioritization and focus becomes more unclear in the lower levels of organizations			x

Figure 6. Grouping first order concepts into second order themes illustrated

In the third iteration, concepts were divided into themes with most relevance and few themes were rejected again. After this the themes and concepts were cross-checked to confirm their relevance, and the remaining 25 second order themes could be considered correct.

3.5.3 The aggregate dimensions

After the second order themes could be considered relevant in relation to theory and correct in terms of the informants, the recognition of the aggregate dimensions could start. In this stage, the emerging dimensions are again a step more abstract from the informants’ terms. This stage requires more leaning into the relevant theory as well as the expertise of the researcher to create relevant dimensions. This is crucial as the dimensions are the basis of the findings that are used to acquire answers to the research questions.

Before starting the process of grouping the second order themes into aggregate dimensions, it was useful once again to go back to the raw data. This meant going through the interview transcriptions and also reading through the relevant theory that is introduced in the earlier chapters of this

thesis. It is crucial to keep the consistency between the raw data, first order concepts, second order themes and the aggregate dimensions. If the final data structure is not coherent, the findings based on it cannot be reliable. After going through the whole gathered data set from raw data to the second order themes, it was possible to start recognising the aggregate dimensions from it.

From the themes as well as from the informants' terms, there was a clear thread to be found to the elements of what the content management consists of and what affects it. From this scope, it was reasonable to believe that answers to the research questions could be found. In this final stage of building the data structure, the second order themes were grouped further into categories that were relatively self-explaining. The first order concepts and the second order themes were grouped into three dimensions explaining: Leaders' activities in content management, Factors affecting content management that leader has direct impact on, and Factors affecting content management that leader has little or indirect impact on.

4 FINDINGS

In this chapter are presented the findings from the research. Findings are presented through the data structure (Appendix 2) that was built from the first order concepts, second order themes and aggregate dimensions. Findings are supported by the quotes from the informants to validate that the recognised themes and dimensions create a cohesive and rigorous narrative.

Findings regarding each second order theme are presented in their dimensions first. After presenting each dimension and the themes grouped to it, the relation of the three dimensions is explained. Finally, the key findings are summarised and discussed in relation to the theory presented earlier in this thesis.

4.1 Leaders' activities in content management

The first dimension describes the responsibilities and activities of a leader in content management. In an agile and autonomous way of working, the themes representing the activities are often done together with the team members of the organisation. In shared leadership, the responsibility and decision-making

are shared among multiple individuals. There were nine themes recognised from the data revolving around the responsibilities and activities of leadership that are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The first dimension “Leaders’ activities in content management” and themes grouped to the dimension

2nd order themes	Aggregate Dimension
Goal setting	Leaders’ activities in content management
Prioritization & Focusing on the right matters	
Involvement	
Situational awareness	
Ensuring the implementation of the strategy	
Communication	
Continuous improvement	
Getting work done	
Resource allocation and capacity planning	

Goal setting

In the case company’s description of different leadership areas, the essential part of content management is to set goals. This was also emphasised by the informants.

> *“My role is to ensure that people have clear goals. Coach these people continuously regarding the progress of these goals and keep the end goal always clear.* (ID 8)
>
> *“And then the other thing is that I must tell what we need to achieve. We can talk beautifully about leading with goals or showing direction, and that's what it is. But in everyday life, it's mostly about; we need to do this, and it comes either from myself, from the organisation, or from the board.”* (ID 6)

Although the importance of goal setting in leadership was quite unanimously raised among the informants, there were differing views on whether the team members of the organisation should be involved in the goal setting process.

> *"You talk to the selector now. I lead. I'm not really a democracy guy. We don't think together as a group about what's important. Of course, we do think, but you understand that ultimately, I'm the one who makes the decision."* (ID 8)

> *"Understanding our role in implementing the strategy. It's probably the first thing but creating the goal setting by in an involving way, and then communicating it, and also acting as an operational leader, like coaching, leading the goals of your own area and leading people."* (ID 5)

Prioritisation & Focusing on the right matters

Essential areas of content management are prioritisation and making decisions. In an agile and autonomous way of working, the leader is not the only one with decision-making power, as team members must also prioritise and make decisions in their context. The granularity and the level of impact of the decisions are different.

Many of the informants raised the challenges in prioritisation. Prioritising and focusing on the most important matters at the time was seen as an area for improvement. Many informants emphasised the importance of impact when making choices. It is most beneficial to focus on matters that have the greatest possible impact on promoting important strategic goals.

Prioritisation was considered to be a challenge especially when going lower in the organisation to the team level. Prioritising and focus should be improved at all levels, but some felt there has been improvement in management level as the focus is clearer. However, it is not considered to be at an optimal state yet.

> *“My approach is to seek better focus and prioritisation to what we aim for, so that we can achieve things that have significant impacts on both business and company’s objectives and actions. But our departments’ long-term goals and focus on projects, I understand that it is not yet part of everyone's everyday life, and there is still a lot of WIP and other things, so there is still too much to do. But compared to the situation a few years ago, at least the focus and decision-making set by the management are narrower than they were before*.” (ID 9)

> *“We can still improve our prioritisation and decision-making processes and putting things in order of importance. We should do fewer things, more together and things with greater impact. So, we still have a lot of room for improvement in this area.”* (ID 3)

> *“Another issue is that as we go down the organisational hierarchy, it seems to become more unclear how to prioritise things. There should be fewer things to focus on, but there are more. It's like losing sight of what is most essential and where progress needs to be made at this moment."* (ID 2)

Involvement

Involving the team members and utilising everyone’s competence was considered as important. Still, there are challenges in how it should be done and whether there are best practices that are yet to be discovered. This theme of involvement and utilising the expertise of the team members links to the goal setting. There are differences in how much the team members are involved in the QBR planning in the tribes.

> *“I think that there are differences between them just as there are really big differences between tribes in how much the team members are involved in making that QBR plan. I don't know exactly the differences in practices and between the departments, but I have the impression that there are differences.”* (ID 5)

> *“The big challenge in this, in a way, is that all of this starts with our multi-skilled teams, so that their expertise can be utilised. It requires this kind of ability at different levels in organisations to look at those interfaces and implement those things together.”* (ID 2)

> *"And then the original idea of dialogue and involvement, involving team members and teams, in this QBR process is really difficult to implement. It's easier at the level of our department, but at the tribe level, it's more difficult in a way that how do you lead it so that team members know that these are our important goals now, but then there are completely different things at the team level. So, there's a little challenge there, and then involvement requires a lot of time and some good techniques. We've been trying to learn it all the time, and we're certainly not close to an optimal state, but maybe the challenge comes from this.”* (ID 5)

Situational awareness

Transparency and situational awareness enable the autonomous way of working as it is meant to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy by making necessary information available to everyone. Decisions should be based on a common understanding of the overall picture and facts. There were differing views about the usefulness of situational awareness among informants in different departments. Others stated that situational awareness and metrics guide their activities and decisions a lot. Depending on the responsibilities of the department and the nature of the work there affects the use of situational awareness and metrics. There might be a lot of ad hoc work and anomalies, and situational awareness can change quickly during a day, so it is not considered that guiding. In some departments the choices made today may be realised far into the future making the impact cycle very long, so situational awareness is not considered to serve the needs of the departments and their activities.

> *"This is a bit difficult for us because our situational awareness can be dependent on the work, as it can be different this morning than it is this afternoon in a certain way, so we just have to adjust based on the need."* (ID 6)
>
> *"Situational awareness and metrics are really guiding a lot of our activities in our business segment, so we do make changes accordingly*." (ID 5)
>
> *"This (situational awareness and metrics) is our trial, we are really bad at this, we have, I don't really know. If we talk about development, our situation is that the situational awareness and metrics are very lagging-heavy, leading to business results with very long impact cycles, especially in our area of business""* (ID 4)

Ensuring the implementation of the strategy

Strategy and the implementation of the strategic objectives was a topic that was highlighted many times by the informants. QBR process is considered as an essential tool to ensure everyone in the organisation is working towards these important strategic goals. Yet, some informants raised the challenge of taking these strategically important matters to the operational level. Many informants felt there was a gap between the top level and the team level. This links to the theme of involving the team members in content management and

goal setting, as the focus on what is important is considered to be blurred at the team level.

> *"The benefit (with QBR process) we aim for is, of course, to operate as efficiently as possible to implement the strategy, so in a way, QBR is the tool for us to ensure that the pipes are directed in the right direction"* (ID 2)

> *"The challenge then is how to take those QBR goals to the team level. Firstly, when, for example, in our department there are 4-6 goals, not all teams necessarily do things that support those goals. Well, then we have the annual plans at the tribe level, which can then be used to find those goals, but the challenge, in my opinion, is how consistent it is from the top level to the team level."* (ID 5)

> *"We have a gap between strategic priorities, annual goals, and quarterly actions, so there isn't a clear thread throughout. I know and realise that we have a lot of work to do in this area, that these things sometimes run on different tracks and are a bit disconnected from each other."* (ID 3)

Communication

Communication was discussed as one activity that a leader does. This means communication between departments as well as communication within the department. Even though sharing information and transparency was highlighted as important, it was also mentioned to remember that communication is an enabler for the organisations to function properly, it is not the most important matter as such.

> *"So, the idea is that we keep each other up to date efficiently, so that we could fill our days completely by having updates with each other about what we are working on, what you are working on, what we are doing together. It needs to be done, but we should always keep in mind that coordination and information sharing is not our main purpose of existence, but rather to actually do those things."* (ID 1)

Continuous improvement

The mindset and culture of continuous improvement was highlighted by the informants. However, there were differing views whether the culture of constant reviewing and improving of the ways of working and processes is a

strength or weakness. There can be department specific differences as well, but at least one informant highlights that this applies to the departments in general.

> *"Maybe what I have noticed is that retrospectives have generally been neglected in the Central cooperative, except for maybe the system development teams. When we started with agile, we regularly had retrospectives on many things, meaning we tried and asked how things went and worked. As often happens, even with one of the basic everyday practices of agile, when time passes, they tend to be forgotten and we go back to old ways."* (ID 1)

> *“If I speak generally about our leadership in our autonomous model, what I think is our strength is definitely that we have also made continuous improvement a part of our everyday life. So, every quarter, we reflect on what went well and what could have gone better, and this continuous learning is integrated into our operating model. This is related to leadership, so that we can perhaps do things more wisely and learn from things that didn't go quite as planned. I think we have achieved this kind of spirit.”* (ID 3)

Getting work done

Before the work divided into tasks can bring value, the task needs to be finished and taken into production. There was a lot of discussion among the informants about getting tasks done, and many raised the challenges regarding this matter. One challenge is how to ensure that the most important matters will be done. Another challenge is a visibility to those activities that are not progressing well and should be addressed more properly. This theme links to prioritisation and focusing on the most important matters.

> *“Well, they (fulfillment of QBR goals) certainly guide us in the sense that, and also for the following quarter, if we are significantly behind on something, then we have to sort of think about what we can leave out of the preliminary plans for the next quarter to get those important things done.”* (ID 2)

> *"Because we don't need to worry about those things that are progressing and going well. Because they are going well, there is no need. But then, if something requires effort or more investment, how can we see them well enough and then the*

cross-connection to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to accomplish that QBR goal, resource availability, and other things." (ID 6)

"So, aiming to ensure that we don't take on more tasks than we can realistically accomplish, which should lead to faster completion of tasks. That's one goal." (ID 4)

Resource allocation and capacity planning

Adapting capacity and allocating resources was addressed to some degree by many informants. This was seen as an important task of a leader. Resource allocation and capacity planning was discussed to have an effect on implementing strategically important priorities, as there needs to be sufficient competence, technical capability as well as enough people to work towards the important goals. In addition to allocating the resources effectively, the matter of adapting and changing the capacity according to priorities to improve the flow efficiency was considered as an aspect that is missing from the process of setting priorities. Another matter addressed was avoiding silos in terms of combining resources where needed, and also to be able to move responsibilities across organisations if needed.

“Another critical task for management is resource allocation. If we agree that data and the cloud are essential, we need to be able to invest in them both financially and in terms of expertise and other choices. Management has the tools to set goals and achieve them, but if nothing is changed in daily operations, it won't work.” (ID 9)

“But what is missing (from company level priorities) is the resourse, not just allocation, but also the increase or decrease of capacity according to the decided priorities. That is a mechanism that is lacking in our company.” (ID4)

"So, one fundamental question is how we could always allocate the resources correctly in each situation. So that we don't end up operating in a siloed manner, because when we have assigned this task to that team in the QBR process, it may turn out that from

the Company's perspective, it would be better for those people to spend their time and energy on these tasks for the next two months instead" (ID 2)

4.2 Factors affecting content management that leader has direct impact on

The second dimension describes the factors that affect the content management but are not the leaders' responsibilities as such; but the leader can affect the factors directly by their own actions. There were twelve themes recognised from the data concerning the factors on content management that the leader can affect by their own actions, which is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Second dimension "Factors affecting content management that leader has direct impact on" and the themes grouped to this dimension

2nd order themes	Aggregate Dimension
Autonomous way of working	Factors affecting content management that leader has direct impact on
Strategy process	
Leadership competence	
Optimising the company's best interest	
Dependency management	
Shared goals	
Understanding the impact and cause-and-effect relationship when making choices	
Alignment	
Commitment and meaningfulness	
Trust	
Work in progress	
Leading cross-organisational work and avoiding silos	

Autonomous way of working

Among the informants, an autonomous way of working was considered as an essential aspect of the way that the organisation operates. There is still room for improvement in the way the autonomous way of working is understood and is supported at the team level. Teams should be able to work autonomously and make decisions by themselves in their daily work. It still needs to be considered that the decision cannot be made by a single team in the event the matter in question has an impact on the company level. There were also concerns about the challenges that stem from the autonomous way of working itself, as it is seen as a contributor to the dependency management problems.

> *"I see in all of our operational processes in this autonomous way of working, that there is an enormous amount of dependency management problem. Someone builds something small in the middle of the process and doesn't think about what happened before or after it and optimises their own small area, and this is kind of the central challenge for me in our leadership and our QBR."* (ID 8)

> *“Bigger decisions require input (from management), and they cannot be made autonomously in small teams. If they have an impact at the company level, then the management also needs to be willing to take a stance. On the other hand, it is not worth getting involved in small details.”* (ID 9)

> *“And then the autonomy in tribes is bit misunderstood, as it doesn't mean that the tribes are their own kingdoms. Instead, the tribes should be these living amoebas, with the skills and resources to implement the prioritised tasks at any given time. This is not happening in the best possible way. And there are differences in different organisations.”* (ID 2)

Strategy process

The strategy process and how it affects the content management was discussed among the informants. As the strategy is incremental in the case company, it affects the planning and therefore actions in the organisations. One informant raised a concern whether the feedback loop is coherent not only from the top-down but back again: from the team level to the top management. If at the operational level some fundamental hindrance occurs,

it should be addressed higher in the organisation as it might affect the strategy and its implementation.

> *"We have this continuous strategy process, so I would somehow link (to QBR process) an annual sanity check for the longer-term. At some point, we need to stop and look further ahead. At the same time, we need to consider how the surrounding world affects our work, the work of that team or tribe, and how to take that into account. And this would be fruitful not only for the tribe (also for the upper management), as information would flow up and down, and if something is seen to have a significant impact, plans should not be forced on how management thinks it should be done, if the tribe has noticed that it has a significant impact and we should not do it this way and we need to change direction. So, we need to have a better grip on what we get from continuous investments and what comes out of it, and in my opinion, it should start to rise up to management level better from there (from the QBR process)."* (ID 7)

Leadership competence

One factor affecting leadership and the content management is the specific skills of a leader. Different kinds of environments and situations were raised to require certain skills, for example, leading transformations. Most informants talked about the leadership principles within the case company, and they were considered generally useful. Some felt that they are a generic description of what a leader should do when leading an agile organisation; not so much describing what kind of a leader one is and if one has the required competence to lead an agile and autonomous organisation.

> *"A transformational change requires different leadership skills than leading existing business operations and continuous improvement. Running and changing the business are part of the current business operations that enable us to make changes. However, these two aspects require different leadership skills."* (ID 7)

> *"The leadership principles are a generic description of a leader's job, what a leader's tasks are, but they don't answer how we want leaders to act within the company. They don't answer how we want leaders to create the culture here and describe what kind of leader you are."* (ID 4)

Optimising the company's best interest

Many informants discussed the actions taken by a leader that has an effect on the business at the company level. A leader should always prioritise the company's benefit when facing a situation where a decision must be made whether to seek own or own organisation's advantage or the company's advantage. As these situations vary and occur in different contexts, there cannot be any formalised process for this. Therefore, the responsibility lies with the leader to recognise such situations and requires ability to understand the entity and the consequences that follow. This theme is linked to leadership competence.

> *"So then, if the processes are not quite clear, then it really depends on the person, whether I am willing to work with you and sacrifice my own short-term apparent benefit for the benefit of the company. Do I see the bigger picture, and this is a qualitative question, whether the leader puts the interest of the company or the company ahead of their own immediate interest."* (ID 4)

> *"That perspective is just the big picture, and what bothers if I see sub-optimisation somewhere in the organisation, meaning optimisation of that unit's thing only, and not realising that this option would be better for the overall situation than the short-term view from that unit."* (ID 2)

Dependency management

The matter of dependencies and how to manage them was raised by several informants. All the informants recognised the dependencies between the departments and other organisations, but the level of challenges it poses was seen somewhat differently. Interdependencies were seen inevitable in the agile and autonomous way of working, and there were differing views on how they can be managed or reduced. Also, the company structure was seen as a factor that can reduce or add dependencies. Some departments were seen more independent than others, due to the organisational structure.

> *"When we sometimes criticise working in silos, the original idea of Agile was that these entities and tribes were built in such a way that end-to-end is taken care of and tribes are very independent. That they are so extensive the entities that everything is taken care of within the tribe. And as I said, we know today that it was a*

thought and a vision that was far from everyday reality, and of course, we are dependent in countless different ways (ID 1)

Shared goals

Challenges regarding shared goals and leading the shared goals are seen as an important matter to address and to improve. The issue of the large number of department specific strategic roadmaps was raised. As resources are limited, it would be beneficial to allocate resources and effort more into the shared goals that are progressed together in order to achieve the strategically important matters.

Another topic discussed related to shared goals was defining goals and the consistency of the goals between the organisations. Conflicting goals can occur, whether that is seen as a problem varies. Having shared goals were seen necessary, but there were differing views whether shared goals can solely lead to progressing strategically important matters together. Shared goals might not be that guiding if there are organisation specific goals and priorities that are seen more important than the company's common priorities.

> *"So, we could have fewer of those individual activities, as I just said, we have 37 strategic roadmaps in this company right now. So, I think there could be a lot fewer of them, and we could have a lot more shared goals that we progress together."* (ID 3)

> *"What we all must do here, is often a successful coordination of conflicting goals and actions. There probably isn't a moment in any organisation where there aren't conflicting goals and pressures, and that needs to be accepted, and people need to be able to promote conflicting goals together as a successful, balanced whole."* (ID 1)

> *"For example, the company's common priorities, does each leader have to go through the thought process of comparing their priorities to others'. So, try to define a goal that models this high complexity, not possible. With shared goals, it must be ensured that there are no conflicting goals, but that is different than shared goals. And I am not opposing shared goals, but I'm just claiming that it's possible that focusing solely on that won't fix the issue."* (ID 4)

Understanding the impact and cause-and-effect relationship when making choices

Impact based decision-making and focusing on matters that create greater impact was discussed to some degree. The wanted outcome should be the basis when making decisions, and not just planning the work itself. The work itself and how it is conducted should be decided in the teams. Goals should explain what should be achieved, but how the goal is achieved should be the decision of the autonomous and multiskilled teams.

Considering the consequences of one's own actions and how they impact the end result was raised as an important aspect of leadership. This links to the theme of situational awareness, optimising the company’s best interest and leadership competence.

> *“In my opinion, it's important that we make things happen that we believe to have a significant impact, in this case on the company’s long-term competitiveness and ability to serve the customer. The leadership should be done in such a way that the desired things or directions happen. And certainly, ultimate impact is measured by whether we see the impact of those decisions, that they take us in the direction we wanted to see.”* (ID 9)

> *“Focus of leadership should be on understanding causal relationships, modeling, and understanding the impact of choices. Common goals are nice, but what's more important is whether you understand, if there's a point in your everyday life where you see the consequences of your own actions and your ability to influence them.”* (ID 4)

Alignment

There were differing views of the level of alignment that is necessary, but all the informants agreed that alignment is needed in the autonomous way of working. Alignment creates the frame for the autonomous teams where they can work and make decisions in their context. Shared processes and tools create unified ways of working that promote easier collaboration. Many discussed that QBR process should promote better synchronicity for the planning of work. It also raised concerns whether one format dictates too much how the work is done and if the format becomes more important than

the actual work. Alignment with the QBR objectives was considered important, as at the moment they are not seen that synchronised.

> *“My only concern is that the format should never override the substance. However, structures are still needed to keep this institution together.”* (ID 6)
>
> *“Everyone needs to commit when it comes to QBR, but I sometimes wonder if all teams have the right size matters in the QBR. I used to browse through them a lot when they were all available on the intranet and thought that the activities of these organisations do not really pair up.” (ID 6)*
>
> *"If this work planning cycle is not the same, but something completely different, it is very difficult to synchronise those plans. I see this as a productivity challenge for us. We spend a lot of time thinking about how we could work together on these tasks, instead of if we all had the same mindset, we could just come together and start working together.”* (ID 3)
>
> *“Initially, it is assumed that all teams do this (QBR process) in the same way, and it is probably a fair assumption that it is more or less the same, at the tribe level perhaps more or less the same. But then it becomes possible friction, if different departments either A: don't do it or B: do it differently. So, it does have some impact, because it is something that the teams should be able to rely on in a tight spot.”* (ID 4)

Commitment and meaningfulness

The team members' motivation has an effect on the outcome of the work. This was raised in different angles by the informants. It should always be clear why something is being done or some framework is being used, and the benefits for the teams should be clear. QBR process was used as an example, that its benefits should be better brought up. When the goals are split to more manageable sizes, it makes the everyday work easier rather than adding additional bureaucracy level. It was also emphasised that everyone should understand the effect of their work on the wanted outcome. Doing work just for the sake of work feels meaningless.

> *"How we could develop this thinking so that we could help people realise why we have this QBR process, it is to make the work*

> *easier in everyday life, the team's work in this everyday life."* (ID 2)

> *"Everyone should understand why something is being done, that is, something is being done in order to achieve some end result. Not just doing something for the sake of doing something."* (ID 6)

Trust

An open and safe environment to work in is crucial in order for the team members to speak up about the problems they are facing. If failure is accepted and not being punished for, team members dare to set more reaching targets and it also creates atmosphere for innovation. Employee experience was being discussed and creating an environment where teams' expertise is being used was considered essential.

This links also to the themes of strategy process and implementing the strategy where the feedback loop was seen somewhat intermittent. It was suggested that matters are not necessarily being raised from the team level to the top level, and there is a gap with the strategic goals between the top level and the operational level.

> *"Of course, it's about creating an atmosphere, how you can create an open atmosphere and a climate of trust within the organisation, so that issues can be discussed openly, and mistakes can be made without fear, so that you can truly be wrong."* (ID 7)

> *"We need to focus on creating the best possible conditions for people to work in and get the most out of these multi-skilled teams. We need to spend a lot of time building these conditions and learning more about it every day."* (ID 3)

Work in progress

Doing work simultaneously instead of in a consecutive way and having constantly too much work going on was seen as a challenge that is somewhat difficult to get a grasp on. When getting tasks done, it brings a feeling of achievement and that matters are progressing, which creates positive flow for the work. This links to the theme of getting work done. In some departments there is an agreement that when planning the work, there is some room left for unexpected matters so that the workload would not increase too much.

> *"Yeah, this prioritisation challenge is a bit of a sin for us. And then I noticed that in the organisation, I don't know where it comes from, we try to cram too many tasks into the backlog to be done. That is when we should think differently that these tasks are appropriately challenging, but we have the opportunity to do them. Because this also brings a positive spirit to the work when we achieve those things."* (ID 2)

> *"Quite often, we still have this over-optimism when it comes to planning, always thinking that we can achieve more than what is realistically possible... there will be bumps along the way that we can't anticipate. Now we have agreed to leave some slack, so to speak, but then ambitious people still can't leave something out it and everyone is so conscientious."* (ID 3)

Leading cross-organisational work and avoiding silos

The challenges of leading the work across the organisations and where the challenges stem from were discussed from many perspectives. Even though the autonomous way of working is ensured by differing the line organisations and operational organisations, it should not create hinderance to the work conducted towards the common goals. The QBR process was seen as a useful tool to create better collaboration, but it would still need to be developed further to function at a higher level in the organisations to promote the planning of cross-organisational work.

> *"How could we achieve a system-level QBR process where these cross-organisational issues could be planned, discussed, and executed smoothly together, so that they don't end up in organisational silos... At this system level, I don't think it's working, and to me, that would be our next lesson, that despite these organisational boundaries, we could work together on important strategic issues and plan and implement them in this QBR cycle, but it wouldn't be tied to these line organisations where we happen to be members."* (ID 3)

4.3 Factors affecting content management that leader has little or indirect impact on

The third dimension describes the factors that affect the content management, but the leader cannot affect the factors either at all or only to some degree by their own actions. There were four themes recognised from the data

concerning the factors on content management that the leader cannot affect at all or only a little by their own actions, which is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Third dimension “Factors affecting content management that leader has little or indirect impact on” and the themes grouped to this dimension

2nd order themes	Aggregate Dimension
Operating environment	Factors affecting content management that leader has little or indirect impact on
The ability to react fast	
Agile maturity	
Organisational structure	

Operating environment

External factors and operating environment affect the planning and whether the set goals are achieved. Many of the informants raised the challenge of unexpected matters rising during a quarter that changes the priorities. These factors can emerge from an external regulator, market situation or from the operations when error occurs in production. These factors cannot be anticipated, and leaders cannot affect these matters from emerging. This theme is linked to the ability to react, which creates resilience to encounter these external matters.

> *“We have a continuous strategy process. With this continuous strategy process, we benefit from being constantly aware of how our operating environment, competition, and global situation, and the factors affecting them, are changing. We adapt, change our strategic choices or their emphasis, or refine them based on these changes.”* (ID 7)

> *It's already a bit difficult to grasp even a year. We don't know what crises or regulator set requirements, or what openings from competitors or production problems we suddenly encounter, which can completely change the last quarter of the year. It's difficult to be sensitive enough in annual planning for such things.* (ID 1)

The ability to react fast

Many informants discussed the importance of being able to react fast, which was one of the reasons for the agile transformation in the case company. The QBR process was seen as a tool to create better responsiveness. When annual goals are split to quarters, it is easier to track the progress and change the course if needed as learning from the work is faster. This has seen something that has improved over time, but there is still room for adjustment and the validation of the directions is not that systematic yet.

A leader cannot directly affect the company's responsiveness when something occurs that requires reaction, as the ability to react fast is built into the processes and operating model. When some external matter that requires responsiveness emerges, the ability to react is either built in or lacking at that moment. But the leader has an indirect effect on the company's long-term responsiveness that is built over time by the choices they are making.

> *"And this is the task of management, to recognise that collaboration between these tribes is critical and that this should be fixed even if it's not in anyone's QBR process, which means that we should have the ability (to react), much like we think about strategy, that if something radically changes in the operating environment, we need to re-examine how we've prioritised our time for this quarter, rather than wait after the quarter to see if it fits."* (ID 2)

> *"Well, we seek with it (QBR process) more agile management than with traditional annual planning, better responsiveness. It's a good tool for management to say that no, this is not an exhaustive list, we will do other things as well, but now it's important that these particular things succeed and progress."* (ID 1)

> *"For example, now days with agile way of working, we can react more quickly to external changes and navigate them. So, this (QBR) process supports that, but how systematic the input gathering, and direction validation is, it certainly happens, but how transparent and systematic it is, that's another matter."* (ID 9)

Agile maturity

Company level agile maturity was seen as something that needs to be developed further. The informants recognised at least two factors where the

lower level of agile maturity may stem from. One is external factors posed by an external regulator. In the financial sector, there are numerous regulations that the case company needs to implement in their operations. The matter of monitoring and supervision regarding these regulations was raised as a factor creating conflict to the agile and autonomous way of working. Other factors were the level of implementation of the agile ways of working and the level of understanding of the agile. In agile, the focus should be on the value that is created for the customers which is the starting point. After this, it is decided how and where in the organisation the work needed is done. Although, there is still a traditional organisational culture where the responsibilities of an organisation dictate what should be done.

Although there are also external matters affecting the agile ways of working, the leader's choices have an effect on the company level agile maturity. This theme links to the theme of optimising the company's best interest and leaderships skills.

> *"Despite our agile model, we still have to balance to some extent between traditional line management, which is required by a regulator in some matters, and this more flexible approach, such as teams' autonomy and managing that autonomy." (ID 5)*
>
> *"We don't operate like a traditional organisation, where there are organisational units and work and tasks revolve around those organisational units, meaning that those organisational units are permanent and then we look at whose responsibility it is to handle this or that matter. Instead, an agile approach starts with the fact that there are different things we need to do, different development projects etc. And then we would look at where in the organisation we can combine skills and resources to implement this matter, this project, or something else. And we still haven't succeeded in this matter in the best possible way" (ID 2)*

Organisational structure

Organisational structures and their impact on the management were discussed among the informants. Organisational structures were mentioned to have an effect on the overall processes and the ability to see the entity and to be able to improve them. It was also seen to have an effect on the responsibilities which may not always be clear. Avoiding unnecessary

organisational complexity within a department level was seen important. This enables clearer responsibilities and knowing what kind of mandate one has to oversee and run the process one is responsible for.

> *"Well, I have a very simple answer to that, someone is responsible for the entire process, all its stages, every single one, and puts it in order. Now it is fragmented, and no one really knows who ultimately is responsible for it. It's not going very badly, but it could go much better. The problem is not with those people's knowledge, skills, goodness, or willingness, but the structure has created this situation and surprisingly it's still going well."* (ID 8)

> *"We have organised ourselves differently like everyone else. We make sure that it is clear which organisation in our own organisation is responsible for what and who is responsible for what. So, we have clarity that when someone is responsible for something, they know roughly what kind of power and responsibility they have to run it. And that the expectations are such that you know how to develop it yourself. We try to avoid complex organisational structures, just linear organisational structures, so that they are quite clear, and people get clear support."* (ID 6)

4.4 Relation between the aggregate dimensions of content management

Dimensions describing the **activities of a leader** in content management and the factors affecting the content management to which a **leader has a direct** or **indirect effect on** are in many ways interrelated. As everything is connected, the activities or decisions made regarding the direct or indirect factors influence all the other factors. The interrelation illustrated in Figure 7 means that these dimensions are interconnected as the leader's actions and choices in different scenarios can have either a positive or a negative effect on the progression of the factors that a leader has little or no impact on when emerging. For example, the ability to react fast is built over time with decisions made regarding the ways of working. Company level agile maturity depends on all the actions and decisions made in the organisations to either support the agile and autonomous way of working or diminishing it.

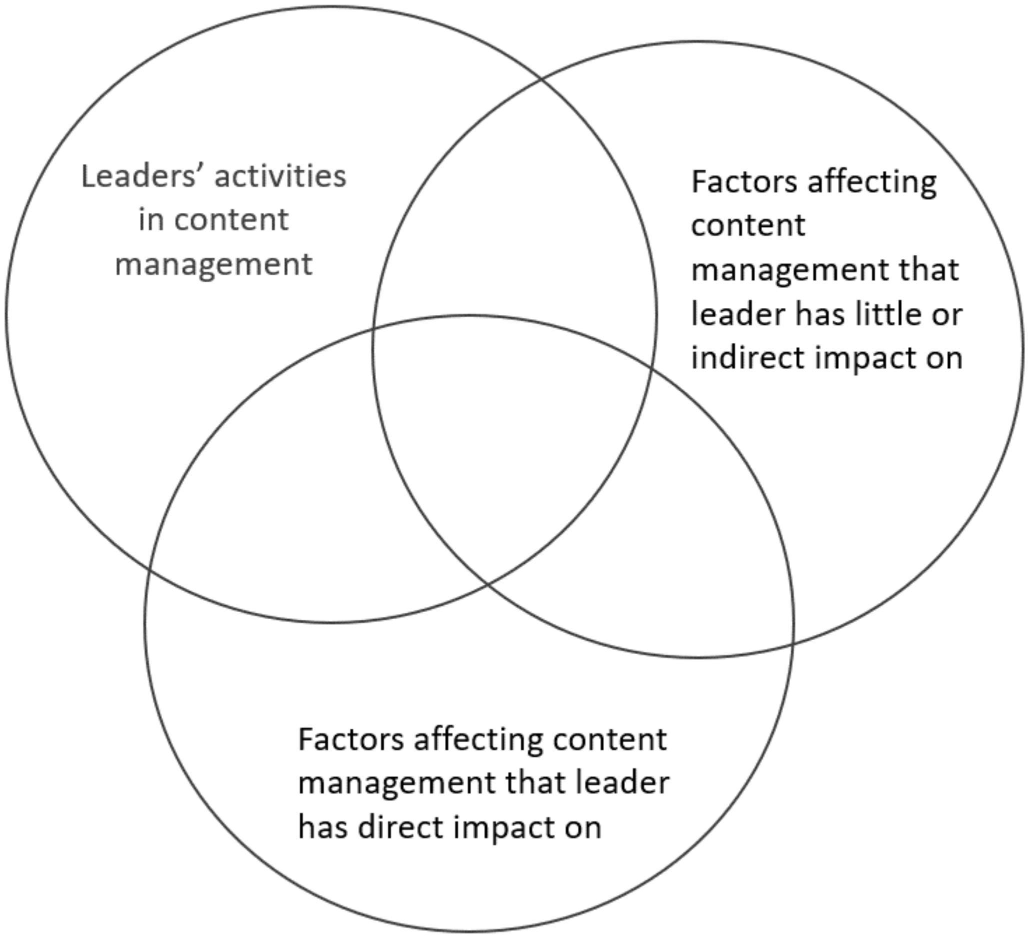

Figure 7. The interrelation of the aggregate dimensions of content management illustrated

The leader's activities described in the first dimension are not usually done only by the leader alone, as the activities can be also the activities of the team members in the organisation or done in collaboration. The leader of the organisation usually decides themselves how much the team members are involved in the content management. The level of shared leadership, meaning how collaboratively the content management is done in the organisation, has direct effects on employee experience, that consists of themes such as trust, commitment, and meaningfulness. In this sense the factors affecting the content management could be leaders' activities as well, for example, creating trust within the organisation. Dimensions "Factors affecting content management that leader has direct impact on" and "Factors affecting content management that leader has little or indirect impact on" are context related many times, meaning whether the leader can affect the matter greatly or none at all. It can depend on the organisation, situation and internal or external capabilities whether it is possible to influence a single factor related to content management.

4.5 Summary of the key findings

In this chapter, the key findings are summarised and discussed in relation to the theory presented earlier in this thesis. Also, the key findings and their correlation to each other are presented in this chapter.

Most important improvement areas raised by the informants are the gap between the top level and the operational level, the challenges in prioritisation and focusing on most important matters, and challenges in leading cross-organisational work.

Resource allocation was discussed to some degree in the manner that resources should be considered better when planning, and that resources should be always allocated correctly from the company's perspective. Adjusting the capacity was raised by one informant as an important issue and something that is lacking from the planning when setting priorities at the moment. This relates to prioritisation and would require better understanding of the current challenges.

Organisational structures were raised by a few informants as something that poses challenges in certain areas but was not considered as a major issue. Continuous improvement was discussed to some degree, and there were differing views whether the culture of continuous improvement is well established. However, it was not seen as something that poses major challenges.

The company's ability to react fast was raised by many informants and it is considered a critical element. It is seen as something that still needs to be improved but was not considered to be in a poor state as it is. Leadership competence was discussed also from various aspects but was not seen as something that needs to be improved in general.

Matters regarding communication and trust within the organisation were discussed quite a lot and are considered as important enablers for a well-functioning organisation. Openness and trust within the company was considered to be of a good level at the moment.

Next the key findings in relation to theory are presented. Key findings evolved from the data structure and from the most important improvement areas raised by the informants. From these key findings three main entities related to each other were created. They are introduced and examined closely through the theory presented earlier in this thesis. The entities are **Leading with objectives**, **Prioritisation and focusing on the right matters** and **Leading cross-organisational work and shared goals**.

4.5.1 Leading with objectives

Goals are the key leadership tool within the case company. As Hoogveld (2017) suggests, leading with objectives that are aligned with the organisation's overall strategy enable autonomous way of working by providing a clear direction, and purpose for the team members within the organisation. (Hoogveld 2017, 99 - 101.) When objectives are clearly defined and communicated, individuals and teams can understand what is expected of them and can make autonomous decisions on how to achieve those objectives. This approach allows individuals and teams to have more ownership over their work creating commitment and fosters creativeness in finding solutions to achieve the objectives. Sörgens (2023) suggests that leading with objectives also reduces the need for micro-management, as individuals and teams are able to work autonomously towards achieving their objectives (Sörgens 2023, 14-15). Niven & Lamorte (2016) emphasise the importance of learning from the cyclical process of leading with objectives. Information should flow top-down as well as bottom-up in the strategy process, where strategic priorities are defined into the annual and short-term goals. As learning and proactive decision making is an essential part of leading with objectives, it is important to gain new information that can be analysed and turned into knowledge to innovate and to change the strategy if needed. (Niven & Lamorte 2016, 21-22.)

In the case company, **the strategy process** serves as input for the **goal setting**. In the strategy process strategic priorities are defined that are brought to the strategic roadmaps and annual planning, from where they are split to quarters in QBR planning. Informants raised the challenges in **ensuring the**

implementation of the strategy, as there seems to be a gap between the top level and the team level. The focus of what is important is considered to be blurred at the team level. There were also concerns whether the feedback loop is coherent not only from the top-down but back again from the team level to the top management. If some fundamental hindrance occurs on the operational level, it should be addressed higher in the organisation as it might affect the strategy and its implementation. Regarding the learnings from QBR process, the level of visibility is weak in many departments to the fulfillment of QBR goals. As was stated by the interviewees, especially in top management, there is no need to address the operational work and how it is done in the teams. This is due to the fact that the top management leads through strategy and the day-to-day work should be the team’s responsibility. However, it would be beneficial to have better visibility of the lessons learned from the QBR process. In one interview, it was stated that there is a need for a better grip on how the continuous investments are actualised and what comes out of them, and these matters would be useful to rise from the QBR process to the management level.

One factor contributing to this gap between the strategical and operational level can be varying practices with QBR process, that was mentioned by the interviewees. Varying practices with QBR can lead to lack of transparency with incomplete situational awareness. In the interviews, the issue of discordant QBR goals was raised, as the granularity of the goals can vary. This can make comparison difficult or impossible.

Among the informants, there were different views on the level of **alignment** that is necessary, but all the informants agreed that alignment is needed in autonomous way of working and specifically with QBR process. Shared processes and tools create unified ways for working that promote easier collaboration. In the interviews, a concern was raised whether a too strict format dictates the way the work is done, leading to making the following of the format more important than the actual work. Niven & Lamorte (2016) raises the importance of not only vertical alignment of objectives, but horizontal alignment. Many times, different teams are required to collaborate to solve customer issues, and if a team cannot depend on another, there may occur conflicts that harm the company's culture. (Niven & Lamorte 2016, 109.)

Creating horizontal alignment requires collaboration and common practices and tools, and in the team level goal setting, QBR process creates the environment for the collaboration. The interviewees discussed that the QBR process should promote better synchronicity for the planning of work. The planning cycle and the ways to utilise QBR process was considered to vary, and this was seen as a productivity challenge. Without proper alignment, time is consumed figuring out the common ways of working, instead of working together with already agreed methods. In this sense, lack of common practices leads to hindering the actual work as time is wasted on creating common ways to work. Already agreed practices enable the teams to focus on the actual work when in need of collaboration.

In the research, it was found that there are varying practices whether team members are **involved** in the goal setting process in the case company. There was variation especially in how team members are involved in the QBR planning in the tribes. One informant raised a challenge in finding best practices to involve team members in the planning. Facilitating the QBR planning sessions can be difficult to achieve in such a way that a large number of people would participate actively. Having together the whole or at least a large part of the organisation may feel too big of an investment too. In agile, information sharing is crucial, even though it may feel inefficient at times. But in order to make fact-based decisions in each team member's context, everyone needs to have all the relevant information to do so.

Sörgens (2023) suggests that goals only set from top-down creates poor motivation and team members may not feel **committed** to the goals. If the goals and wanted outcome it not clear, it is difficult to prioritise and focus on the most important matters, as there is not enough knowledge of what is supposed to be achieved. (Sörgens 2023, 70.) Better involvement in the goal setting would clarify the end goal and what are the most important matters to achieve at the moment. In general, better dialogue and involvement lowers the threshold to discuss openly with the management when in need of help with deciding on what should be progressed right now. The best practice would be to involve team members in the process, which would create better clarity to what needs to be achieved.

This enhanced process of leading with objectives covers the second order themes of strategy process, involving team members, goal setting, commitment and meaningfulness, ensuring the implementation of strategy and alignment. This whole process of leading with objectives is illustrated in Figure 8.

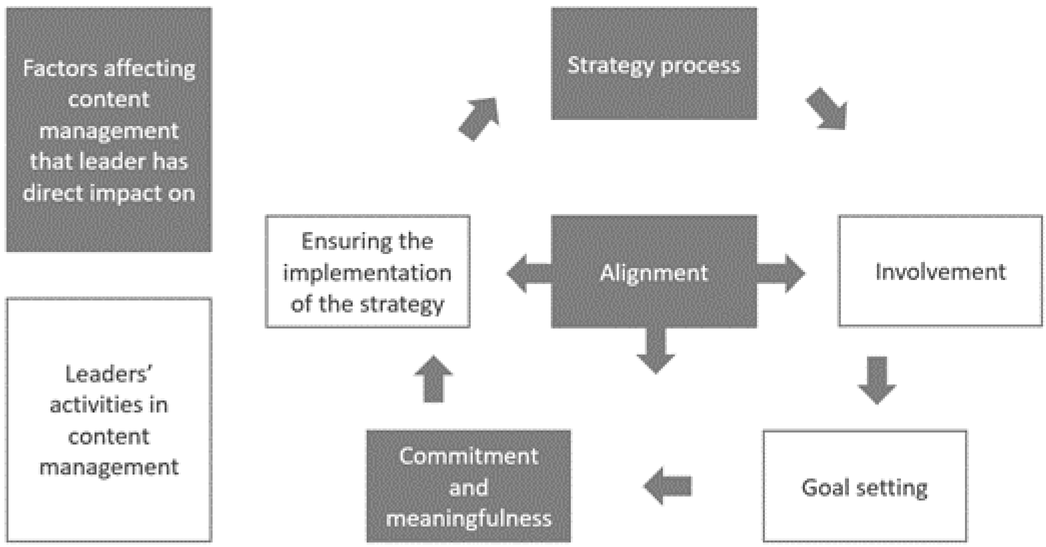

Figure 8. Leading with objectives illustrated

The goals should be set by involving team members in the process, as it would create better understanding of the wanted outcome, which would lead to a feeling of meaning and committing to the set goals. This would ensure the implementation of the strategy while also enabling learning and coherent feedback loop from top-down and bottom-up. Alignment promotes collaboration and enables one to focus on the actual work instead of the way of working.

4.5.2 Prioritisation and focusing on the right matters

Prioritisation and focusing on the most important matters are at the core of content management in the case company. While the main method of directing the case company is through target-setting including strategy and the long-term and short-term goals, they also need to be prioritised alongside other needs such as changed regulation or competitive situation. As stated by Plenert & Cluley (2012), prioritisation is important due to the limited resourses. As everything that is important cannot be done, management must decide where the most effort should be put in order for the teams to focus on the right

matters and get tasks done. (Plenert & Cluley 2012, 147.) In an agile and autonomous way of working, team members must also prioritise and make decisions in their context. In the top level of the organisations, prioritisation regards the wanted outcome; at the operational level, team members decide and prioritise the needed tasks to achieve the set goals.

Prioritisation in the top level of the case company is deciding what are the most important strategical priorities now. Key strategic priorities for the next years are defined based on the strategy process. Leaders should also evaluate whether the current prioritisation is providing the best possible guidance to the teams. In the operational level, prioritisation is more capacity based, meaning considering what can be achieved within the available working hours and with the available competences. In the case company, factors guiding the prioritisation in the teams should be QBR priorities, the team's basic function and available capacity. As suggested by Plenert & Cluley (2012), the impact should be considered when making decisions, as it is most beneficial to focus on the tasks that have the greatest possible impact to promote the most important strategic goals. Some tasks may have greater influence in achieving the objective while some tasks may have a smaller influence. (Plenert & Cluley 2012, 154-155.)

It was stated by the interviewees that **prioritising and focus** should be improved at all levels, but prioritising was considered a challenge especially when going lower in the organisation to the team level. The challenges in prioritisation in the operational level were discussed by the interviewees to link to the high level of **work in progress**, which can be seen from the metrics in the case company. Having too much work in progress was discussed by the interviewees as a challenge in the everyday work of the teams.

In the case company, work in progress is measured along with other development metrics by the data received from the task management tool that is used by the teams. This metric is illustrated in Figure 9 that is sketched by the author of this thesis. WIP metric measures the amount of work that is "in progress" state and compares it to the calculated optimum. The orange bar in Figure 9 indicates the average amount of open tasks daily and the grey line

illustrates the optimal level. Theoretical optimum is calculated using Little's Law. This describes the team’s potential to complete the unfinished work.

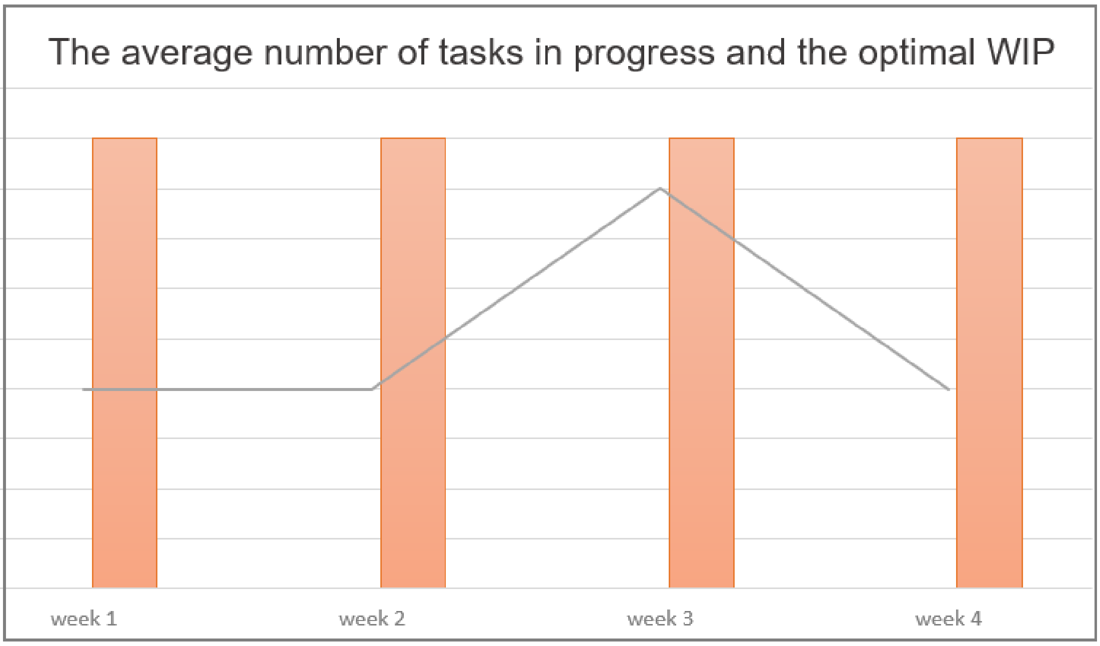

Figure 9. WIP-dashboard illustrated.

In the case company, achieving the optimal level is not realistic, but the aim is to reduce the gap between optimal and current level. The goal state is to have enough work so that unfinished work does not pile up as inventory, and there is no waiting time due to work running out.

When the goal is clear, meaning where the most effort should be put in, it is more effective to conduct the work in a consecutive way than progressing many tasks simultaneously. It may seem intuitively more effective and more efficient use of resources to progress all the work at the same time, but it is shown to be more ineffective. Context switching alone makes the work progress more slowly than when focusing on one matter at the time. (Adler et al. 2015, 5460-5461.) Also, as stated by the interviewees, getting work done brings positive spirit and flow to the work which also speeds up the work.

The challenges in prioritisation at team level can evolve from the unclear focus or having too many focus areas that are set from the higher levels of the organisations. Sörgens (2023) states that leadership should provide a clear vision and strategy for the long-term, as well as a short-term goal for guidance. The annual strategy should be directional and provide focus without

specifying exactly what needs to be done. (Sörgens 2023 14-15.) This strategic clarity helps the teams to make autonomous decisions and reduces the need for micro-management. If the guidance from the priorities set at the top level is not clear, operational level prioritisation can lose its focus as everything seems as important. These leads having too much work that is progressed simultaneously and tasks are challenging to organise in order of importance or urgency. The QBR process could be better utilised for prioritising work. The basis for the task creation in the teams should be the goals that are prioritised in the QBR process. When new work occurs, it should be prioritised in the QBR process and evaluated whether it is important either from the company's, department's, or teams' perspective and then decided whether it should be carried out. Teams should avoid creating tasks at detailed level for the future. Defining detailed tasks far in the future leads to holding on to the tasks even if noticed later that they are unnecessary, which impairs the company's ability to respond to customer needs on time. Plans should be refined according to the QBR cycle schedule, meaning when a new quarter begins, the team knows what is expected of them and has an idea of how to implement the set goals.

The interviewees discussed the significance of **situational awareness**, as in some departments it is not considered that useful. In an autonomous and objective led way of working, the wanted outcome should remain clear in the organisational hierarchy from the top level to the operational level. This enables decision making and prioritising the right tasks in each situation in the multi-skilled teams. Transparency of the needed information and common understanding should be the basis for the decision making at every level. Transparency and situational awareness are enablers for the autonomous way of working as it reduces unnecessary bureaucracy in the organisation. When team members have the needed information and facts about the work that is being done toward an end result, the need for escalating matters to management level reduces which leads to a more hassle-free environment.

Getting work done was one of the themes discussed by the interviewees that relates to the theme of having too much ongoing work. As described by Ries (2011), while tasks are in progress, they are not creating value. An item that is ready and taken to production, is creating value. Having too many different

items in progress simultaneously piles up as inventory that is creating waste. (Ries 2011, 199-200.) The higher the amount of work in progress is, the more it slows the process of getting them done (Adler & Benbunan-Fich 2012, 164-165). Also, when the tasks are being done, the learning from the work can start. This is an important input for the continuous improvement, as the feedback indicates whether something should be done differently.

Prioritisation and focusing on the right matters cover the second order themes of situational awareness, prioritising and focusing on the right matters, work in progress and getting work done. This more focused way of working is illustrated in Figure 10.

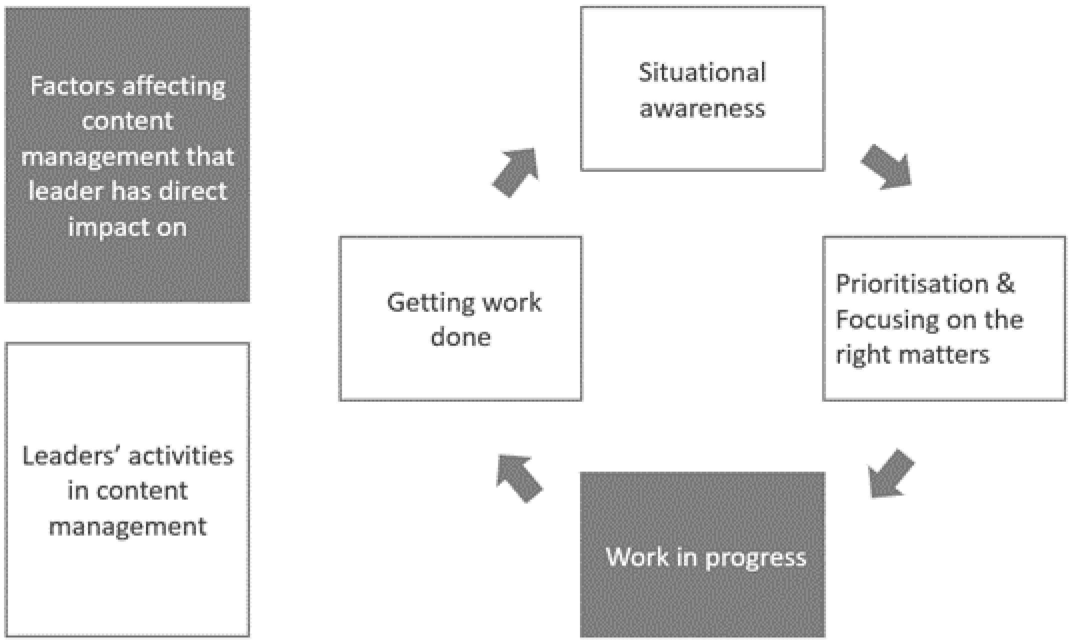

Figure 10. Prioritisation and focusing on the right matters illustrated

Situational awareness at all organisational levels enables successful prioritisation and focus on the right matters, as everyone shares the same information. This leads to a better focus as it is clear what should be achieved and what is not as important at the moment. This leads to lowering the amount of work in progress and tasks can be done consecutively, leading to getting work done and enabling value creation and learning.

4.5.3 Leading cross-organisational work and shared goals

Shared goals support the agile and autonomous way of working. The aim of shared goals is to align the efforts of different organisations towards a common objective. As resources are limited, it is beneficial to combine and allocate resources into the shared goals that are progressed together in order to achieve strategically important matters. Niven & Lamorte (2016) emphasised the importance of horizontal alignment with objectives, as the work usually requires collaboration between different business units. In order to recognise and manage these dependencies, good practice is to create shared objectives. (Niven & Lamorte 2016, 133.)

The challenges regarding **leading and planning cross-organisational work** and where the challenges may stem from were discussed by the interviewees. As one challenge was raised the issue of traditional line-organisational thinking that is based on the idea that the line organisation owns their responsibilities and work and builds the roadmaps for it. However, there are many matters and priorities that do not belong to a single line-organisation but are shared within the company. An example of such priorities is important development programs, where the different organisations contribute to these shared priorities and goals. QBR process was seen as a tool to support the leading and planning of cross-organisational work, but it does not serve that function fully yet. The idea of a higher-level QBR process was raised by the interviewees to better support the leading of cross-organisational work.

The issue of the large number of department specific strategic roadmaps was raised also by the interviewees, and that the planning is still attached much to the line-organisations. As Sörgens (2023) suggests, it is a common mistake to use the line-organisation structure when creating the objective structure, meaning each team in the organisation is expected to create their own set of objectives and not creating shared goals that would reflect the value creation. (Sörgens 2023, 54.) Strengthening the common priority setting and goals set in collaboration would ensure strategic development. Better guidance of shared goals would steer the company and its organisations to work in the same direction and specify the value that is aimed at being created. Shared

goals and priorities should be set for value creation entities, not to organisation specific work.

The topic of **dependencies** and the need to manage them were discussed by the interviewees. Challenges posed by dependencies can stem from the organisation specific goals. Goals set to entities cause less dependencies as then there are clear common priorities for the value creating entities instead of organisation specific work. Sörgens (2023) states that when setting targets according to organisational structures, it increases the need for coordination and leads to frustration among team members due to the risen need for coordination of the work rather than working towards achieving the goals. (Sörgens 2023, 54.) There are defined good practices for the dependency management in the case company. The goal of dependency management practices is to enhance teams' autonomous ability to create customer value. In addition to shared goals set to value creating entities, dependencies should be managed and reduced by visibility to the goals and work being done towards them. Visibility can be created by common tools and practices that should be in use in all organisations.

As mentioned earlier, the planning cycle and the ways to utilise QBR process were considered to vary in the case company. With better alignment in the QBR process across the organisations, the need for excess coordination of the work and the ways of working would be reduced. This would also clarify the common priorities and strengthen the **autonomous way of working** in teams, as teams would be more capable of making decisions independently, which creates efficiency.

Company level **agile maturity** was seen as something that needs to be developed further. The reasoning behind the level of agile maturity was discussed by the interviewees. The level of implementation of the agile ways of working and the level of understanding of the agile was considered to be a work in progress. One of the respondents mentioned the original idea of the level of autonomy and independence that the agile would create in the case company. Collaboration and cross-organisational work were not considered in the original idea of agile, as each tribe was thought to have clear overall entities in their own responsibility. These entities and tribes were thought to be

built in a way that end-to-end is taken care of and tribes are very independent, so working in silos was not considered as something to avoid. This was also stated to not to be the reality today as organisations are dependent on each other. This original idea of strong independence within the organisations may be one factor that poses challenges regarding the level of agile maturity and how the organisations should operate towards the shared priorities and goals.

The interviewees mentioned that **understanding causal relationships and the impact of one's own choices** are important tasks and responsibilities of a leader. One informant felt that this was more important than just having shared goals. Shared goals may not guide actions if a leader does not understand the impact of different choices and if such a shared discussion does not take place among management. Leaders should have to weigh their priorities against all other important issues and go through a thought process of seeing the priority from the company's perspective. Such a mechanism was felt to be missing in everyday work at the moment.

Optimising the company's best interest instead of sub-optimising one's own area was discussed to some degree as well. A leader should always prioritise the company's benefit when facing a situation where a decision must be made whether to seek own organisations advantage or the company's advantage. The company's strategy should always guide the prioritisation, which is the framework for decision making at all organisational levels. Creating a mechanism that would support the understanding of the entity and the optimisation from the company's perspective was discussed by the interviewees. This was considered to lead to a state where shared goals would be the primary guiding factor of the work being done in different organisations.

Leading cross-organisational work and shared goals cover the second order themes of shared goals, dependency management, autonomous way of working, leading cross-organisational work and avoiding silos, understanding the cause-and-effect relationship when making decisions and optimising the company's best interest. This more effective way of working towards the common goals is illustrated in Figure 11.

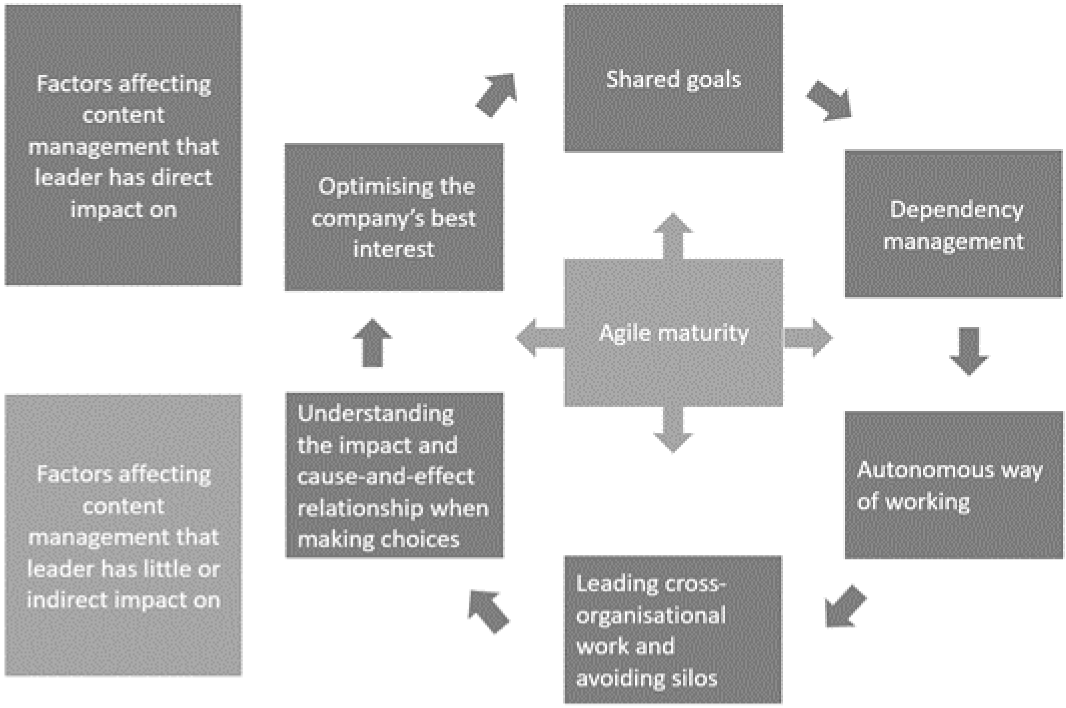

Figure 11. Leading cross-organisational work and shared goals illustrated

Shared goals set to entities would reduce the challenges posed by the dependencies and strengthen the autonomous way of working. This would ensure better value creation, as the cross-organisational shared priorities would guide the work and choices in order to optimise the company's long-term competitiveness. A higher level of agile maturity would promote more efficient operations and synchronicity in the way the organisations are working towards the common goal.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The objective of the research was to comprehend the most important elements of content management and the factors affecting it, and how it can be done successfully. Also, in this research, the impact and effectiveness of the QBR process was evaluated as part of overall content management.

Conclusions were drawn based on the findings from the data that was validated against relevant theory. These conclusions offer plausible answers to the research questions. Next, the conclusions and answers to the research questions are presented.

RQ 1.: How can the overall content management be done successfully in the case company?

Matters regarding strategic priorities, operating environment, and maintaining the basic functions are prioritised equally in successful content management. This focus should be reflected in the long-term and short-term goals. Goals should be set in collaboration with relevant experts across the organisation, aiming to impact value creation and avoiding goals that define the organisation specific work. These shared goals and priorities set to value creation entities are divided into smaller parts when going lower in the organisations.

Leading with objectives should be cyclical and the lessons learnt should always guide the prioritisation at all levels. A coherent feedback loop is required to ensure the information flow from the lessons learnt from top-down as well as bottom-up. To ensure clear direction and sufficient competence and capacity, teams should be involved in the goal setting through QBR process. The objectives describe only the wanted outcome, not the needed work. The teams should be able to define the tasks needed, and with whom they should collaborate, to achieve the wanted outcome.

RQ 1.1.: Where should the focus of improving the content management in the case company be?

Decreasing the gap between the strategical and the operational level is an enabler for improving the overall content management. The wanted outcome should remain clear in the organisational hierarchy from the top level to the operational level. Clarity could be achieved with adequate choices made at each organisational level, meaning dividing the wanted outcome into smaller parts in a manner where everyone knows which part is their responsibility and whose contribution is needed in order to achieve the end-to-end responsibility. The prioritisation at each level guides the next level with fulfillment being monitored. These priorities and situational awareness should be reviewed throughout the organisation and choices should be made accordingly.

Enhanced situational awareness would help to narrow the focus to fewer matters at a time and reduce the excess WIP in order to get tasks done. Clearer focus would lead to allocating the resources towards the most important matters. The allocation of resources is made visible in the QBR process, which serves as input for updating the strategic road maps in order to understand the required capacity of critical competencies for longer term.

There should be more precise decision making regarding the most important focus point now, including clearly stating what is not progressed at the moment. In prioritisation, the strategic priorities, operating environment, and maintaining the basic functions should be considered. These areas should be equally prioritised in order to decide where the most effort should be put at the moment.

RQ 1.2.: How could the overall content management be improved with better utilisation of the QBR process?

QBR process is a cyclical process where the coming quarter is always based on the learnings from the previous one. These learnings should be reflected on the evolution of business in target markets in order to create better focus for the coming quarter. Companywide priorities and focus should be reviewed and updated accordingly in the QBR process. Team members should be involved in the QBR planning to keep the companywide priorities and focus clear in the organisational hierarchy. The QBR process should be utilised to promote this clarity as the wanted outcome is split into smaller parts and responsibilities and collaboration are agreed upon and the fulfillment of the objectives are being monitored.

The feedback loop in the QBR process should be enhanced to improve the vertical alignment. Information should flow top-down as well as bottom-up in the process, as learning is an essential part of the QBR process. The information gained should be analysed in order to innovate and to adjust the strategy if needed. When new work emerges regarding either the strategic priorities, operating environment, or basic functions, it should be equally prioritised and evaluated against the current companywide focus in the QBR process, before deciding whether the work should be conducted.

Better alignment of QBR process across the organisations would promote the synchronicity of the planning. More unified practices with QBR process would enhance transparency and more complete situational awareness enabling more independent decision-making in the teams. The need for micromanagement would reduce enabling leadership to concentrate on examining the market situation and customer needs to make sustainable business decisions.

5.1 The reliability of this research

The reliability of the findings is indicated by a thorough data-driven presentation. The presented theory is based on books and articles written by experts in the field of the topic of this research as well as scientific studies. Therefore, conclusions drawn based on the findings and relevant theory can be considered reliable.

As the research topic, content management, is a wide concept covering various aspects, the perspective of the examination had to be narrowed. This research examined the overall function of content management and how it can be done successfully. As this is a case study, broad generalisations of the challenges and how to improve them cannot be made as such. However, general best practices regarding successful content management can be applied in other objective led organisations as well.

5.2 Future research

There are aspects of goal setting, prioritisation and focusing on the right matters that were not addressed in this research due to the chosen focus and the limitations of the research. These aspects would still require further research in order to gain deeper information on how it is affecting the overall content management. Two different perspectives on prioritisation emerged during this research, which should be studied further in the future.

Considering the adjusting of capacity in prioritisation should be studied further. It can be stated that within a quarter there is no means to affect the capacity, meaning it cannot be adjusted according to the needs due to the organisational structures. Strategic roadmaps could better serve this purpose

of planning and anticipating the future needs of capacity in critical competencies. There should be better understanding of the current state and challenges, and how it could be improved based on this understanding.

Another topic for future research could be assessing more thoroughly the impacts of prioritisation. This study could examine how the understanding of situational awareness could be improved to the level where it is possible to prioritise not only on valid grounds, but the matters that need to be prioritised. This should be done in a manner that would not hinderance but strengthen the autonomous way of working and systemic thinking, meaning optimisation of the overall system.

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Appendix 1/1

THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Topic 1: Focus of leadership to achieve the wanted result

- When can you say that your department has been successful in your opinion?
- What has been your role as a leader in this success?
- Is your department’s success somehow dependent on the success of other departments?
- What should be the focus of leadership to achieve the necessary results?
- What are the challenges and strengths of managing your department’s content compared to other departments?

Topic 2: Mechanisms of leadership

- What are the different ways of content management and what is the purpose of each method?
- What kind of impact is aimed to achieve through different leadership methods?
- How do different leadership methods affect collaboration between different departments?
- What kind of situational awareness and metrics are you following in your department and why are you following these situational awareness and metrics?
- How is situational awareness affecting your operations?
- What kind of conclusions and decisions are made based on the situational awareness, and how often do they result in new decisions or changes?
- How are leadership decisions communicated to the necessary parties?
- How do your practices differ from other departments and what strengths or challenges do you see in your approach?
- Do you discuss leadership structures among board members and share good practices?

Topic 3: The role of QBR process in leading department

Appendix 1/2

- How do you see the significance of the QBR process in content management?
- What are the benefits that are aimed to be achieved with the QBR process and are they currently being achieved?
- What challenges do you currently see in the QBR process?
- How good is your transparency in terms of QBR goal progress and the lessons learned from the process?
- How does the current quarter's fulfillment guide the planning of the next quarter?
- How often is it noticed that quarter goals should be changed in practice?
- Do you see any differences in the implementation of the QBR process between different departments?
- Does this difference affect the collaboration between different departments?
- Does this difference affect your department?
- How would you develop the QBR process?

Appendix 2/1

THE DATA STRUCTURE

1st order concepts	2nd order themes	Aggregate Dimensions
Ensuring that tasks are appropriately challenging but achievable within the given timeframe How to set goals that apply to everyone's work Shift in culture towards being less cautious and more ambitious when setting targets Short-term and long-term goals Success measured in relation to set goals The importance of having clear goals The need to set realistic yet challenging milestones	Goal setting	Leaders' activities in content management
Prioritisation and focus becomes more unclear in the lower levels of organisations Challenges of balancing time allocation between management colleagues vs own organisation Creating a system for prioritisation Focusing on the most essential things to do and understanding where the most effort should be put in Important milestones are kept in the planning schedule and not changed, considering what can we do differently to reach this milestone Prioritising and focusing on important things	Prioritisation & Focusing on the right matters	
Challenges in communicating relevant decisions to people in different types of roles Involving team members to goal setting Differences between tribes in how much people are involved in making the QBR plan Involvement of team members and teams in the QBR process Involving experts in decision-making Utilising the expertise of our multiskilled teams	Involvement	
Visibility to QBR process learnings and fulfillment weak as they are not addressed in segments management level At the moment lacking transparency and visibility to the QBR process Customer, Internal, and Results health Improved communication and monitoring as ways to improve the QBR process and make it more meaningful Result-oriented organisation Soft and hard measures of success Transparency of the QBR process could be increased if there were clear metrics for the key things that need to be done	Situational awareness	

Appendix 2/2

A gap between strategic priorities and annual goals and quarterly activities Challenges of conveying and implementing a company's strategy throughout the organisation Challenging to lead and communicate the goals and priorities from the business segment level to the tribe and team levels Coherence between upper-level strategy and operational level Consistency between top level and team level Ensuring that there is a clear red thread connecting quarterly planning to the overall strategy Taking QBR goals to the team level, where not everyone necessarily understands or supports those goals	Ensuring the implementation of the strategy	
Challenge of ensuring that messages reach everyone in a complex and diverse organisation Challenges of defining and communicating decisions Information sharing important but not the main purpose of existence Hallway and coffee machine conversations and decision-making Regular communication of the big picture and issues relevant to the organisation's objectives Communication and collaboration among different teams and stakeholders Flexibility in determining the frequency and format of meetings and events The role of management in communicating decisions	Communication	
Pragmatic approach of trying to improve operations within the current structures, rather than constantly changing things QBR process could benefit from a more process-oriented approach Retrospectives have generally been neglected in the Central Cooperation over the past couple of years Sharing good practices and learning from what has been done and thought about The importance of the QBR process has grown, and there are hidden resources in it that can be utilised We have made continuous improvement a part of our everyday life Verifying that a good practice actually works before advocating for it	Continuous improvement	
Better focus and visibility to work that is not progressing that well Combining resources to complete tasks Fulfillment of the previous quarter affects the planning of the next quarter if something important is not completed QBR process aims to achieve realistic task completion When significantly behind on something, team needs to think about what they can leave out of the preliminary plans for the next quarter to get those important things done	Getting work done	

Appendix 2/3

Directing the organisation's resources in the right direction Fundamental challenge to avoid acting in silos enabling better allocation of resourses Resource allocation and capacity taken into account in the QBR process The challenges of balancing resources across multiple segments Resource allocation and investing in expertise and technology Capacity planning	Resource allocation and capacity planning	
Dependency management challenges in autonomous way of working Earning the license for self-management Autonomy in organisations is bit misunderstood	Autonomous way of working	Factors affecting content management that leader has direct impact on
Continuous strategy process Incremental strategy and continuous development	Strategy process	
The focus on removing obstacles in leadership Different leadership skills for running the business, changing the business, and transforming the business The leadership principles of showing direction, removing obstacles, encouraging learning, and ensuring results Creating the best possible conditions for people to work in and get the most out of multi-skilled teams The need to manage emotions in change management and make people receptive to change	Leadership competence	
Long-term competitiveness Putting the company's best interest above own short term benefit Should avoid partial optimising and putting own organisations needs above the company's benefit The benefits of having a holistic approach and thinking about the companys ability to face the future	Optimising the company's best interest	
Better end results and improved dependency management Interdependence between different business functions or operations QBR process brings limited usefulness of dependency management at higher levels	Dependency management	
Ensuring that as many people as possible are doing the same things at the same time to achieve a common goal Ensuring that resources are allocated to the right areas and that everyone is working towards the same goals Less business area specific strategic roadmaps and more common goals that are progressed together There should not be conflicting shared goals A successful coordination of conflicting goals and actions	Shared goals	

Appendix 2/4

Focusing on the wanted impact on business and achieving long-term goals Impact-based approach Key things verified to be achieved beyond just done or not done Understanding causal relationships and consequences of your own actions and your ability to influence them Importance of understanding the order and dependencies of different tasks and mechanisms The challenges of managing complex processes and systems Long impact cycles and delayed results Struggling to plan for long-term transformations and realise their benefits	Understanding the impact and cause-and-effect relationship when making choices	
Causes friction if segments do not implement QBR process or do it differently, as teams should be able to rely on in a tight spot Considering whether the current format of the QBR process is the most effective, and whether there are other formats that could better serve the organisation's need Developing unified practices for everyone, while still allowing some flexibility Differences in the implementation of QBR process is unclear how much it depends on the Agile Coach and the tribe leaders Differences in the QBR process makes it difficult to sync plans and there are productivity challenges because of this Limitations to the usefulness of the QBR process for some teams More formal directions for the Cooperative banks for QBR process adapted from the Central Cooperation, to ensure that everyone is working towards the same goals Unclear whether differences in QBR process has direct impact on cooperation	Alignment	
Making sure everyone understands the reasoning for doing thing Addressing the resistance to change and feel of bureaucracy towards QBR and emphasising the positive impact of achieving goals Individuals should understand their role in the process and how their work relates to the bigger picture Not doing QBR process just for the sake of having a QBR process Recognising that change and developing QBR process may be difficult and may require a shift in mindset and approach Shift in perspective to help individuals understand why the QBR process is important and how it can make their work easier Systematic commitment to QBR goals	Commitment and meaningfulness	

Leadership pole distance Teams need to practice speaking up if they think something won't work out Top-down leadership and trust in responsible adults to take messages forward Trusting that the organisation functions properly Creating an atmosphere of openness and collaboration	Trust	
Challenge of managing routine tasks and managing unexpected tasks Improving productivity and learn how much work can be done in a certain period of time Managing operational work out of QBR process Managing unexpected tasks and changes in everyday life that can affect the QBR process QBR process makes less responsive to something else that should also be done Time pressure and busy nature of organisational life, which can make it difficult to prioritise strategic work or explore new ideas WIP limit exceeds constantly and too much ongoing work	Work in progress	
Breaking down organisational silos and ensuring that important strategic issues are planned and implemented in the QBR cycle, regardless of which line organisation they belong to Collaboration between tribes to get something critical done, even if it's not on anyone's QBR Developing a system-level QBR process that allows smooth planning and discussion of cross-tribal issues Leadership practices related to managing cross-organisational matters The challenges of shared priorities across multiple segments and achieving alignment The challenges of choosing strategically important things and getting colleagues on board	Leading cross-organisational work and avoiding silos	
Agility and flexibility in response to changing situations and environments External factors impacting success Supporting an agile operating model that allows for faster reactions to external changes Systematically monitoring insights and benefits in certain areas, such as generative AI Unexpected obstacles along the way that can't be anticipated	Operating environment	Factors affecting content management that leader has little or indirect impact on
Challenges in bringing unexpected matters to the QBR process Difficulty of planning for unexpected events Planning forward with adequate accuracy and being able to react QBR process is partially successful in achieving flexibility and agility to react, but there is still room for improvement Reacting quickly to unexpected issues The QBR process is seen as a way to quickly react to changes	The ability to react fast	

Appendix 2/6

Balancing traditional line management with flexible leadership approach Agile not fully understood or implemented in all organisations yet Agile WoW starts with matters that need to be done, then combine the skills and resources from organisations to implement the matter External regulator requires supervision from management which creates conflict to our agile way of working	Agile maturity	
Challenges posed by the company's structure Leadership structure of cooperative banks The importance of avoiding complex organisational structures and promoting clarity The importance of clear responsibilities and structure within an organisation	Organisational structure	