



Uio • University of Oslo

Making sense of digitalization in the field of humanitarian work

*A qualitative study of an NGOs understanding of
digitalization due to COVID-19 and the conversion
to home office*

Tomas Berglund

Master's thesis in Organization, Management and Work

Department of Sociology and Human Geography

Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Oslo

Spring 2022

Abstract

This thesis explores how Plan International Norway as a non-governmental organization (NGO) makes sense of increased digitalization due to the forced conversion to home office during COVID-19, and how digitalization alters the assumptions, roles and work of the organization. Research shows that modern digitalization is profound and complex, and pervasially changes organizations (Hanelt et al., 2021). An organization's ability to understand contextual changes have shown to impact its ability to successfully adapt to digital transformation (Verhoef et al., 2021; El sawy et al., 2016) – a phenomenon that nevertheless has been sparsely studied through the sensemaking perspective (Takkunen, 2021, p. 24). Sensemaking theory assumes that humans retrospectively interpret their actions and makes situations comprehensible (Weick et al., 2005). It has been widely used to understand how organizations make sense during periods of great change, characterized by contingencies (Weick, 1993; Schildt et al., 2020). Thus, with COVID-19 as a starting point, the overall research question of this master's thesis is: *How do the employees of an NGO make sense of digital work life due to COVID-19, and how does this affect the organization's perception of its future role within humanitarian work?* The thesis is divided in the following two analytical research questions (RQ):

RQ1: What are the characteristics of change and digitalization that has taken place within Plan?

RQ2: How does clashing institutional pressures affect Plan as a humanitarian organization within a digital age?

Drawing on sensemaking theory, I will describe how sensemaking processes have been triggered and evolved as a result of organizational changes, turbulence in work routines and adapting to digitalization. Additionally, neoinstitutional theory is further used to illustrate how different institutional pressures affect Plan as it adapts to digital transformation while simultaneously preserving its organizational identity. Finally, using prospective sensemaking theory, the employees' predictions of Plan's future role and work within the humanitarian field are illustrated – predictions based on new understandings of the role of digitalization within Plan and humanitarian work.

The data used in this thesis was collected during a previous student project, in which five fellow students and I interviewed employees at the humanitarian organization Plan International Norway. The interviews include the employees' discussions about possibilities and challenges of increased digitalization due to COVID-19 and the forced conversion to home office. Six of these in-depth qualitative interviews were used and inductively analyzed in this thesis. The choice of reusing this data was to further investigate how the employees make sense of digitalization and how this in turn affects their perception of the organization's role.

My findings portray how the conversion to home office and the increased digitalization resulted in an episodic change of Plan's daily practices and communication patterns, which the employees strived to make sense of by improvising and searching for ways to utilize digital technologies in ways to support their humanitarian work. However, as the dynamic patterns of social interactions were disrupted, shifting from face-to-face interactions at the office to digital channels, so too were the arenas in which sensemaking usually thrives. This resulted in individual discrepancies in their understandings of how Plan and digitalization can merge and how Plan can benefit from digitalization in the future. In line with previous research (e.g., Warner & Wäger, 2019; Takkunen, 2021), my study indicates that sensemaking of digitalization is vital in order to align understandings of digital transformation with existing conceptualizations of organizational identity practices.

From a macro perspective, my findings suggest how digital transformation leads to radical institutional change (Hinings et al., 2018), which implies new ways of organizing that changes collaborations and communication patterns within the field of humanitarian work. Consequently, digitalization disrupts Plan's routine processes and role as an intermediary between donors and receivers. Canceled visits due to COVID-19 restrictions have resulted in less direct monitoring and "controlling" of the implementation of humanitarian projects, which in turn may lead to the transferring of power and increased agency to the employees of Plan's local subsidiaries in developing countries. My study illustrates that Plan's challenge in adapting to digitalization is to identify ways in which digitalization can be aligned with its organizational purpose, attributes and processes. This must be done in a way that ensures legitimacy in an era of digitalization, while simultaneously maintaining its NGO identity in line with humanitarian goals and visions.

Acknowledgements

I am writing the final words of this master's thesis with somewhat mixed emotions. It surely feels good to know that this will be the last examination – that there will be no more barely-understandable articles to read or late evenings spent writing at the university. At the same time, I am certain that it will not take long before I might actually miss the university, the routines of being a student and the feelings of mastery that follows after passing an exam.

I have plenty of people I would like to thank who made this thesis possible to write. I wish to thank the informants at the program department at Plan International Norway who took the time to be interviewed. I also wish to thank my supervisor, Beatrice Johannessen, for an excellent job of guiding me in the right directions during moments of uncertainty and giving constructive and encouraging feedback on my messy drafts. I wish to thank my fellow OLA-students – thank you for all the shared times of frustration, procrastination, worries, discussions, reflections and laughter!

To Miriam – thank you for all your support and encouragement. Thank you for making me laugh every single day and being the best partner one could ask for. Without you, this thesis would probably never have been written. You're the best – I love you.

To my parents – thank you for all your unconditional love and support. No matter what I've done so far, you have always cheered me on – whether it has been from the side of a football field, in the audience during a concert or giving me feedback on university assignments. Thank you for all the travels around the world, for all our late discussions at the dinner table and for encouraging me to try different things in life. For all this, I love you and will be forever grateful.

Table of contents

1. Introduction and background.....	1
1.1 Roadmap	2
1.2. Previous research: Digitalization – a game changer	3
2. Theoretical framework.....	6
2.1 Making sense of organizations.....	6
<i>2.1.1 Prospective sensemaking: looking ahead.....</i>	8
2.2 Digital transformation – to digitize or to digitalize.....	9
2.3 Organizational change: restructuring towards digitalization	11
<i>2.3.1 Changing organizational design</i>	12
2.4 Gaining legitimacy and maintaining organizational identity in a time of digital transformation	13
2.5 Bridging institutional theory and the sensemaking perspective.....	15
3. Method	17
3.1 Qualitative research	17
<i>3.1.1 Limitations</i>	18
3.2 Data Collection	19
3.3 Informant selection.....	19
<i>3.3.1 Limitations</i>	21
3.4 The interviews.....	22
3.5 Data analysis.....	23
3.6 Ethics.....	26
3.7 Reliability, validity and generalizability	27
4. Findings and analysis.....	29
4.1 Change, digitalization and canceled visits.....	29
<i>4.1.1 Organizational change: working in a digital context.....</i>	30

4.1.2 <i>The cessation of traveling</i>	32
4.1.3 <i>Making sense of change and digitalization</i>	35
4.1.4 <i>Making sense of Plan without traveling</i>	39
4.2 Clashing institutional pressures in a digital age	41
4.2.1 <i>Experiencing clashing institutional pressures</i>	42
4.2.2 <i>Predicting the future role and work of Plan</i>	45
5. Discussion	50
5.1 Structural changes towards digitalization.....	51
5.1.1 <i>Is traveling necessary?</i>	52
5.2 Making sense of home office and digitalization	54
5.2.1 <i>Predicting future digitalization</i>	56
5.3 The tug of war between institutional legitimacy and organizational identity	57
5.3.1 <i>Raising a critical voice</i>	59
5.4 Transferring agency and power to employees abroad.....	60
6. Conclusion	62
6.1 Limitations and future research	64
Attachment 1	73
Attachment 2	78
Attachment 3	82

1. Introduction and background

My interest in the topic of this thesis originated with the outbreak of COVID-19, when companies all over the world were forced to adopt home office practices and became increasingly digital. In a former student project, taking place during COVID-19 and lockdown, five fellow students and I collaborated with the Oslo based program department at Plan International Norway (hereafter referred to as Plan) – a non-governmental organization (NGO) focusing on children’s rights and equality for girls. Our task was to investigate how the pandemic had changed Plan and what challenges and opportunities the situation had created in terms of communication and interaction. What I found interesting was how the informants reflected rather differently regarding their experience of working increasingly digitally during lockdown and home office. Depending on their personal conceptualization of the situation, they gave different tellings about how they handled the turbulent situation and adapted to an increased digital work life. It seemed as if the conversion to home office led to differentiation in how they perceived and conceptualized Plan within the humanitarian field, their roles in it, and how they imagined work life could be after the pandemic. The way in which the informants made sense of digitalization when working in an NGO was something I wanted to investigate further and soon became the main focus for this master’s thesis.

NGOs are “self-governing, private, not-for-profit organizations that are geared to improve the quality of life for disadvantaged people” (Vakil, 1997: 2060). Digitalization changes the context and forms of humanitarian work (Casswell & Hamilton, 2019), for instance, in the introduction and usage of communication apps, social media and digital transferring of money (Lunt, 2019; Kaspersen & Lindsey-Curtet, 2016). NGOs like Plan are especially interesting to investigate in relation to digitalization, since their legacy routines occasionally clash with today’s modern digital transformation. In order for NGOs to survive in a digital context, digital adaptation is inevitable – but the question is to what extent digitalization can merge with already established organizational practices and routines, and if digitalization will make aspects of traditional attributes of NGOs redundant?

Despite the pressure to adapt towards digital transformation and reduce administrative costs, (Burkart et al., 2018), NGOs often struggle to implement and invest in digitalization because of budget constraints (Merkel et al., 2007). Additionally, the deployment of digital technologies might cause obstacles when facing the many aspects permeating humanitarian

work, such as cultures and living conditions in developing countries, and social and material inequalities (Akhmatova & Akhmatova, 2020). The obstacles, choices and possibilities of digitalization are many, and digital transformation changes organizations profoundly and continuously (Hanelt et al., 2021). What becomes interesting in the understanding of digital transformation in relation to humanitarian work is how NGOs like Plan can identify what parts of digitalization are useful in regards to the overall purposes of the organization? My aim in this master's thesis is therefore to explore how employees at an NGO make sense of increased digitalization of work life due to massive, abrupt changes within their working environment. With COVID-19 as a starting point for increased digitalization, the overall research question of this master's thesis is: *How do the employees of an NGO make sense of digital work life due to COVID-19, and how does this affect the organization's future perception of its future role within humanitarian work?* I wish to address my research question by dividing it into two analytical research questions (RQs):

***RQ1:** What are the characteristics of change and digitalization that has taken place within Plan?*

***RQ2:** How does clashing institutional pressures affect Plan as a humanitarian organization within a digital age?*

The scope of this thesis stretches over several levels of analysis. From a micro-perspective, it focuses on the employees' adaptations and understandings of increased digitalization. From a macro-perspective, it focuses on the different institutional pressures that affect Plan when adapting in a digital age. However, my thesis does not include implementations of specific digital technologies. The empirical data is also limited to the informants' telling's about their experiences of digital work life.

1.1 Roadmap

After introducing the concept of digitalization in the following section and setting the scene for this thesis, chapter 2 then presents the overall theoretical framework. In chapter 3, qualitative research and my chosen methodological approach are presented and discussed – highlighting its strengths and suitability to this thesis, as well as its weaknesses. I will also describe the process of how the data was gathered during a former student project.

In chapter 4, I will present my thesis findings. Part 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 focuses on RQ1, and describes the changes and processes of digitalization that have occurred within Plan, which are analyzed through organizational change theory and theory on digital transformation. RQ1 is directly linked to the first part of my overall thesis: *How do the employees of an NGO make sense of digital work life due to COVID-19*, which will be drafted and analyzed through the sensemaking perspective in part 4.1.3 and 4.1.4.

In chapter 4.2.1, I will focus on RQ2, and describe how clashing institutional pressures affects Plan in a digital age. Here, neoinstitutional theory is used to illustrate how Plan becomes affected by different institutional pressures, and in what ways organizational identity attributes might function as an equipoise in the rapid adaptation towards digitalization. From here, RQ2 is linked to part 4.2.2 and the second part of my overall thesis: *... and how does this affect the organization's perception of its future role within humanitarian work?* Here, prospective sensemaking theory is used to shed light on how the employees predict digitalization to affect Plan's future work and role within the field of humanitarian work.

In chapter 5, my findings are discussed in relation to previous research and theories. Certain implications are brought up, such as shifting power structures within the humanitarian field as a result of decreased traveling, as well as critical arguments against digitalization. Finally, in chapter 6, based on the findings and analysis in chapter 4, I will present a conclusion to this thesis' overall research question. The thesis' limitations will be discussed and further research will be suggested.

In the following section, I will set the scene by presenting research on digitalization and place my thesis within the field of today's digital transformation.

1.2. Previous research: Digitalization – a game changer

Although organizations already employed digital solutions regularly before the pandemic, COVID-19 clearly accelerated organizations' use and implementation of digital technologies and the adaptation to digital business ecosystems (Amankwah-Amoah et al. 2021). COVID-19 has been a push for the adaptation and increasing use of digital work, which have presented new possibilities, challenges, learning and resistance within organizations (Amankwah-Amoah et al. 2021). This institutional change towards digital transformation implies an alteration of organizational structure, work patterns and strategies (Hinings et al., 2018).

However, looking back on the last decades, digitalization has profoundly changed organizational processes and assumptions, whereby traditional structures, strategies and business models have been disrupted (Verhoef et al., 2021; Jacobides et al., 2018). This has entailed new opportunities in the acceleration of digital innovations (Yoo et al., 2010) as well as challenges within more traditional sectors (Parvinen, 2020). Consequently, it enables fast-growing digital entrants to challenge and conquer grounds held by established ones (Verhoef et al., 2021). For instance, within the consumer goods industry, the retailer has functioned as the intermediary between companies and customers – a logic which have been disrupted by digitalization to the extent that it is no longer obvious what business model to adapt and how it is managed (Leone et al., 2006, p. 136). Companies like Alibaba and Amazon have outdated many of their incumbent competitors, and the platform company Spotify has completely disrupted the traditional music industry (Verhoef et al., 2021, p. 889; Wlömert & Papies, 2016). Within humanitarian work, pressure is put on NGOs to become increasingly digital (Burkart et al., 2018), and digitalization offers possibilities of reducing administrative costs (Kotarba, 2017). In that way, digitalization might offer great advantages for NGOs as it makes operations and communication more effective. However, NGOs often lack the budget held by other for-profit organizations, which problematizes their abilities to invest and adapt towards digital transformation (Merkel et al., 2007).

Research shows that modern digitalization is profound and complex, and pervasially changes organizations (Hanelt et al., 2021). At the same time, digital tools have become increasingly user-friendly and enable faster innovation and possibilities of collaborations. Adapting to digitalization means changing legacy routines and structures, which can be a challenging transformation since the organization's identity and competence often is linked to its heritage, habits, values, emotions, routines and politics (Warner & Wäger, 2019, p. 331). Studies have shown that the ability to make sense of the contextual changes has an impact on how organizations can successfully adapt to digital transformation (Verhoef et al., 2021; El sawy et al., 2016). Thus, organizations become more efficient in the drive for digital transformation the more they align their conceptual organizational understanding with current digitalization and its potential for the overall business model (Warner & Wäger, 2019). To NGOs, the pressures of digitalization might interrupt established procedures of humanitarian work. As such, budgets and resources might shift towards processes of becoming digital, at the cost of the organization's humanitarian purposes.

In order for organizations to successfully restructure towards digital transformation, it is crucial to establish a common conceptualization on how organizational identity attributes

(such as legacy routines and established processes) can merge with new processes of digital transformation (Takkunen, 2021). Otherwise, digital transformation might slow down or fail completely. Understanding how organizations make sense of digitalization improves our knowledge of how digital opportunities are sensed, seized, conceptualized and utilized within different organizational fields (Björkdahl, 2020; Warner & Wäger, 2019). However, as noted by Takkunen (2021), organization's abilities to make sense of digitalization, and aligning it with their current state of practices, have been sparsely studied through the sensemaking perspective (Takkunen, 2021, p. 24).

In this thesis, I aim to address how Plan as an NGO makes sense of its role and practices in relation to increased digitalization, and how sensemaking is reflected in the employees' tellings of their experiences of the home office context. I attempt to understand their ability to make sense of digitalization, and how they perceive what digitalization means to Plan and humanitarian work.

In the following chapter, this thesis' theoretical framework is introduced and described.

2. Theoretical framework

I have chosen sensemaking theory and neoinstitutional theory as the main theoretical frameworks in order to understand my empirical material and provide an answer to my thesis: *How do the employees of an NGO make sense of digital work life due to COVID-19, and how does this affect the organization's perception of its future role within humanitarian work?* My aim is to describe how an understanding of Plan and digital work have undergone during home office, how digitalization can be aligned to already established conceptualizations of Plan's processes and role, and illustrate how sensemaking processes have been triggered and evolved during a period of turbulence, adaptation and modification of work routines.

I will describe sensemaking theory, its assumptions and how it is applicable in my case. Therefrom, I will present theories about digitalization and illustrate how it has disrupted and problematized common theoretical assumptions about organizational change, strategy and culture. I wish to present the concepts of *digitization* and *digitalization* as different conceptualizations of organizational adaptation towards digital transformation. Thereafter, organizational change theories are used to differentiate between episodic and continuous change perspectives, and neoinstitutional theory is used to interpret how different institutional pressures affect Plan when adapting to digital transformation while holding on to its organizational identity. Finally, the micro-perspective focusing sensemaking theory and macro-perspective focusing neoinstitutional theory are combined in order to illustrate individual adaptation and understanding within an institutional context of increasing digitalization. Theories and assumptions will be problematized and discussed.

2.1 Making sense of organizations

Why do people mostly perceive the world as cohesive, stable and predictable? We follow familiar patterns in our daily lives that make sense and provide meaning. This sort of "knowing" the world has its benefits – it helps us to tackle everyday activities without needing to halt and evaluate all possible options. Instead, we recognize certain cues and know how to act on them based on previous experiences. This type of scenario – giving meaning to our actions – is what the sensemaking perspective is all about (Weick, 1995). As we make sense of our actions during sequences of contingencies, we rationalize our decisions and make confusing circumstances comprehensible. The sensemaking perspective assumes that humans

are meaning-making organisms, and “knowledge” about life as we know it is socially constructed when we make sense of our activities and lived experiences (Weick, 1995).

Sensemaking is particularly useful when trying to understand organizational life (Weick et al., 2005) and has been widely used by researchers to understand how organizations make sense during periods of great change, characterized by contingencies (Weick, 1993; Schildt et al., 2020). Originally, the sensemaking perspective emphasized the cognitive nature of organizing as a phenomenon happening when enough people share the same “cause maps”, referring to the above-mentioned individual rationalization and sensemaking of enacted actions (Weick, 1979). In the process of sustained interaction, people connect their conceptualizations and actions over time and reach consensus regarding *what is going on here? Who is doing what? How should we do it?*

The routines and patterns of life that organizations (and individuals) follow each day are not deterministic, but instead made real through our actions. Only when we perform certain acts do we make them real – and as we do, we constantly look back at our actions and interpret them in ways that makes them sensible and rationalized (Weick et al. 2005). The process of sensemaking gives meaning to *organizing* when people collectively are able to define organizational life and put it into words, or chunks of salient categories that can be conceptualized, discussed and intellectually shared (Gioia et al., 1994). During sequences of turbulence, characterized by shifting challenges and dynamics, individuals try to understand the flux of activities that surrounds them. Therefore, sensemaking is especially triggered during contexts of constant change and uncertainties (Weick, 1993) and it functions as the process of interpreting, constructing and puzzling together plausible images that are made rationale (Weick et al. 2005). As sensemaking unfolds, it makes collective action – or in other words – *organizing* possible.

Since digitalization increasingly penetrates organizational fields of all sorts, it is vital to understand not only how digital technologies enter organizations and change them, but also how employees make sense of them. That is, how do humans incorporate digital technologies into already fine-tuned perceptions of social reality and organizing. In this study, sensemaking theory is used to understand how sense is made during turbulent sequences of changing conditions during COVID-19, that implies stripped physical interactions and increased digitalization. When the informants were interviewed, they had been working in home office settings for about 11 months, and could retrospectively assess their experiences and put them into words – and thereby *making sense* of the abrupt changes of work arrangements and an increased digital work context. Studying digitalization from a sensemaking perspective thus

offers insights about the informant's understanding of digitalization, as well as changes within the dynamics of social interaction. These sorts of understandings can contribute to the overall process of digitalizing modern work life in a way that makes sense to the people mainly exposed to them – namely, the employees.

In the following section, prospective sensemaking is added to show how “classic”, retrospective sensemaking processes also function as basic structures for future predictions.

2.1.1 Prospective sensemaking: looking ahead

Originally, the sensemaking perspective was retrospective in its nature (Weick et al., 2005), assuming that people can only know what they have done after they have done them (Weick, 1995, p. 18). However, in this study, I wish to add the often-discussed aspect of *prospective* sensemaking, which assumes that conceptualizations of the past also can serve as “perceptual lenses for interpreting current issues and making future strategies” (Gioia & Thomas, 1996, p. 372). Prospective sensemaking have become an ever accepted adding to the sensemaking perspective in recent years (Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012; Ganzin, et al., 2020) and especially used in studies of strategic change and technological innovation (Gioia et al., 1994; Kaplan & Orlikowski, 2013). The idea of prospective sensemaking – “the conscious and intentional consideration of the probable future impact of certain actions, and especially nonactions, on the meaning construction processes of themselves and others” (Gioia et al. 1994: 378) – is about interpreting actions that have been made, making them understandable, and therefrom to predict the future. An organization is filled with interpretations of responses from perceived periods of uncertainties that collectively build a plausible image of *what has happened, what is happening now, and what might happen in the near future*.

The reason for adding prospective sensemaking in this study is because the context in which the informants were making sense of (home office), due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, was perceived as temporary. Most informants believed COVID-19 and home office would eventually come to an end. In a predictable manner, the informants were able to “resee” the past (Strauss 1969, p. 67), and to realign it with their understandings of changing present concerns or newly imagined futures (Kaplan & Orlikowski, 2013, p. 967). Once the past and present are starting to make sense, thoughts of the future emerge: *Where do we go from here? How can we benefit from our newly learned digital skills in the future? What about creating arenas of informal social interactions?* The last question is especially interesting, since sensemaking is a social course of events – driven by collective action and conversation (Weick et al., 2005).

Sensemaking is the main theoretical framework used in this thesis in order to understand how sense is made of digitalization. This calls for a more thorough introduction of what digitalization is and how it affects organizational life. In the following section, I therefore wish to present useful theoretical constructs of digitalization.

2.2 Digital transformation – to digitize or to digitalize

Digital technologies change the way we live, communicate and organize. To organizational life, digitalization offers ubiquitous data, unlimited connectivity and massive processing powers which have entailed new modes and understandings of organizations (Ross et al., 2019, p. 20). The development of digital innovations are fundamentally disrupting and altering ways of organizing, which in turn challenges established theoretical constructs about organizations and organizational change (Hanelt et al., 2021). The interplay between organizational change and digital transformation have become an increasing topic within various research fields which have resulted in several conceptualizations of the phenomenon, such as *digitization*, *digitalization*, and *digital strategy*. As a result, a clear academic definition is lacking (Verhoef et al. 2021). With inspiration from Tilson et al. (2010, p. 749) and Koch & Windsperger (2017, p. 5), Takkunen (2021) have merged their understanding of *digitalization* as:

A sociotechnical process in which digitizing techniques are applied to broader social and institutional contexts. Digitalization enables individuals, groups and organizations to create services, applications and content together. Subsequently, radical new business models and completely new industries emerge (Takkunen, 2021; Tilson et al. 2010, p. 749; Koch & Windsperger, 2017, p.5).

In my thesis, focusing on the sociotechnical aspects of digital transformation and organizational change, the use of this definition is beneficial as it includes different levels of analysis to conceptualize the impact of digitalization – individual, group, organizational and institutional. Other definitions of digitalizations focus more on the technological aspects of digitalization (e.g., Yoo et al, 2010; Yoo et al., 2012; Tilson et al., 2010) or the implementation of information technologies (e.g., Orlikowski, 2000).

As digital innovations increasingly merge with the foundational structures of organizations, digital strategies are gradually becoming incorporated into organization's overall strategy. The separation of IT strategy and business strategy are therefore being merged into *digital business strategy* (Bharadawaj et al. 2013). Digital business strategy is needed to maneuver the organization's ability to handle digital challenges and responses within the organizational *turbulence* that follows from digital transformation (El Sawy & Pereira, 2013).

This turbulence implies unpredictable conditions, with expanding technologies and changing requirements that need to be met in order to stay relevant and competitive. In order to organize in a state of turbulence, organizations need to rethink strategy, structure and management. El Sawy et al. (2010) states that organizations' adaptations towards digital transformation leads to *digital business ecosystems*, in which organizations become more adaptable to change and innovation (El Sawy et al., 2010). As digital innovations facilitate collaboration across organizational and border boundaries, organizations become increasingly interdependent. *Digital business ecosystems* are realized by the spreading, adaptation, implementation and modification of digital technologies, which in turn facilitates new forms of organizing (El Sawy et al. 2010).

In the light of digital transformation, NGOs and other incumbents are facing the challenge of “dual transformation” (Ross et al., 2019, p. 14), which refers to the enabling of organizational ambidexterity (Park et al., 2020). This means that organizations need to do two things at the same time – to maintain operational efficiency and utilize established skills and processes, while simultaneously transforming structural patterns in order to create new offerings and processes based on digital technologies. Changes towards becoming digital can be characterized by new possibilities and “flows” of creativity, but it can also be perceived as disturbing and counteractive to the organization's routinized processes (Parviainen et al., 2017).

Ross et al. (2019) distinguishes between two types of organizational processes towards digital transformation – *digitizing* and *digitalizing*. To become *digitized* implies transforming former analog processes into digital in order to make operational sequences more efficient. This transformation might make some operations more efficient, but it is not the same as transforming the organization to become adaptable towards new digital technologies, or readymade to utilize ubiquitous data, unlimited connectivity, and massive processing power (Ross et al., 2019). Instead, this is the process of becoming *digitalized* – to implement a digital business design and fully become a digital organization (Ross et al., 2019). This process implies an overall change of structures and processes that facilitates creativity, innovation and new forms of offerings and services based on digital technologies. To use the words of Parviainen et al. (2017), “digitalization is not about turning existing processes into digital versions, but rethinking current operations from new perspectives enabled by digital technology” (Parviainen et al., 2017, p. 74).

The overall “take-away message” is that becoming digitized is not enough in order to stay competitive and relevant in an increasingly digital world (Ross et al., 2019; Leonardi &

Treem, 2020). Instead, it is essential to restructure the organization into becoming adaptable to rapidly utilize new digital innovations, a necessary process that is both demanding and often slow, which is why so few organizations have initiated their digital journey (Ross et al. 2019). Conclusively, NGOs like Plan and other incumbents, do not become digital in the mere process of a moving from regular office to home office. However, some would argue that such a transition, within the context of rapidly adapting to home office as a consequence of COVID-19, is in fact organizing enabled by digital processes, structures and values suitable in a given, increasingly digital context (Hinings et al., 2018, p. 54; Bauer & Gegenhuber, 2015).

In order to adapt towards digital transformation – by digitizing or digitalizing – organizational change in some form is inevitable. Whether it is planned change to deliberately restructure the organization, or if it is maintained during smaller, continuous adaptations and modifications that slowly alters former processes of the organization. In the next section, I will therefore present organizational change theory, that helps illustrate how organizations change in accordance with digital transformation.

2.3 Organizational change: restructuring towards digitalization

In this next section, I will present different conceptualizations of organizational change, and specifically in what ways NGOs and other incumbents can get inspired by holacratic organizational structures when adapting to digital work life.

A common theoretical understanding of organizational change is presented by Weick and Quinn (1999), that differentiates the *episodic* and *continuous* change perspective. The episodic perspective conceptualizes organizational change as happening during bursts of fundamental change episodes, caused by long periods of routine, stability and inertia (Romanelli & Tushman, 1994; Weick & Quinn, 1999). Episodic change takes a macro perspective, and emphasizes comprehensive, planned and sometimes revolutionary change. In regards to digital transformation, the episodic perspective is useful when analyzing how digital innovation completely penetrates institutional fields that leads to overwhelming organizational changes triggered by managerial decision of strategic change and restructuring, organizational inertia or environmental factors (Weick & Quinn, 1999; Huber & Glick, 1993). In reference to my study, COVID-19 can be understood as a direct trigger of *episodic* organizational change that overwhelmingly disrupts Plan's stability and routines.

The *continuous* perspective assumes change to be ongoing, evolving and cumulative (Weick & Quinn, 1999, p. 375). Change is conceptualized as constant and driven by improvisation and adaptation amongst the employees, who are the key to understanding how digital innovations are understood, accepted/rejected and modified within organizations. Continuous change assumes a micro perspective where minor continuous adjustments gradually lead to greater organizational change (Weick & Quinn, 1999). In relation to the outburst of COVID-19 and the following period of contingencies due to increasingly digital work, the continuous perspective is helpful when analyzing micro level adjustments, adaptations and learning of digital technologies. For instance, how new digital communication tools are learned and increasingly used – not only in pure technical terms, but also in ways that alter patterns of overall communication and dynamics of social interaction between colleagues.

Since both perspectives describe changes from different levels of analysis (micro vs macro), neither fully captures all aspects of organizational change. Accordingly, the two perspectives are related with different understandings of the organization, assumptions and roles (Poole, 2004).

2.3.1 Changing organizational design

Organizational design is about how an organization is arranged, how work tasks are distributed and what systems and processes that constitutes the organization (Nadler & Tuschman, 1997). The design of the organization concerns the overall structural adaptation of what the organization does and how it should do it (Mintzberg, 1981). In the early 2000s, many upcoming IT and software organizations implemented *holacratic* organizational structures (Schwer & Hitz, 2018). Organizational holacracy emphasizes decentralized management instead of hierarchy, roles instead of titles and job descriptions, and gives more responsibilities and agency to the employees (Schwer & Hitz, 2018, p. 5). The idea of holacracy is to make the organization increasingly transparent and agile in accordance to external opportunities, threats and shifting institutional requirements. As such, holacracy comprise attributes in total opposite of the standardized and often inert features common in bureaucratic organizational designs (Schwer & Hitz, 2018).

As digitalization is spreading and permeates further institutional fields, holacratic structures are starting to spread outside the realm of the IT-industry. Consequently, digital transformation drives organizations to form malleable structures that enable continuous adaptation (Hanelt et al. 2021, p. 1168). One way for Plan and other NGOs to succeed in today's digital transformation is indeed to be inspired by the dynamics and flexibility in

holacratic organizational structures. For instance, by facilitating more interdependencies between colleagues working collaboratively across borders. Giving increasing influence to interdependent teams makes the organization more malleable and ready to changing requirements, threats and opportunities in an age of digital transformation (Schwer & Hitz, 2018)

Another obstacle of becoming digital regards the fact that organizational change disrupts images of organizational identity, symbols, traditions and norms – aspects which in the neoinstitutional perspective are what gives meaning to organizing (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995). In the next section, I will therefore discuss aspects of digital transformation through the perspective of neoinstitutional theory and give examples of why organizations need to understand the necessity of searching for legitimacy in a digital world, while simultaneously maintaining organizational identity (Pedersen & Dobbin, 2006).

2.4 Gaining legitimacy and maintaining organizational identity in a time of digital transformation

How can organizations maintain their organizational identity – their *culture* – while simultaneously adapting structures, strategies and processes that follow from the institutional pressure of digital transformation? Neoinstitutional theory tells us that organizations strive for legitimacy, and in the process of isomorphism imitate each other because of normative, mimetic and coercive pressures (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Accordingly, institutional context gives templates for “accurate” organizing in certain institutional fields. Within today’s digital transformation, organizations strive for legitimacy by implementing digital innovations and adapting to an overall increasingly digital work life. Through the lens of neoinstitutional theory, digital transformation is “the combined effects of several digital innovations bringing about novel actors (and actor constellations), structures, practices, values, and beliefs that change, threaten, replace or complement existing rules of the game within organizations and fields” (Hinings et al., 2018, p. 53). As digital technologies spread within and between institutional fields, organizations adhere to the innovations that reflect current contextual norms, values, symbols and traditions (Hinings et al., 2018; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Digital innovation alters the shape of organizations and institutional infrastructures in such a dramatic and radical way that routine patterns of practices, structures and values fundamentally change. Hence, as argued by Hinings et al. (2018) *digital*

transformation is in fact *institutional change* which leads to the emergence of new conceptualizations of legitimate forms of organizing (Hinings et al., 2018, p. 55).

What then are the driving factors that pushes towards digitalization, and what holds the organization together in circumstances of turbulent digital transformation? In the hype of digitalization, wherein radical institutional change puts pressure on organizations to adopt digital technologies, organizations might be at risk of “losing” their identity. In periods of turbulent change, Hanelt et al. (2021) assert that *culture* is what holds the organization together, and that it might “serve as a connective tissue holding the dynamics of malleable organizational designs and turbulent digital business ecosystems together” (Hanelt et al., 2021, p. 1184). In line with Kotter & Heskett (1992), culture is what facilitates and legitimizes adaptation, psychological safety and a trial-and-error mentality that is vital during sequences of uncertainty (Kotter & Heskett, 1992). Others argues that neoinstitutional pressures and organizational culture are two sides of the same coin – organizations strive for legitimacy by adopting certain templates for organizing (such as “hyped” digital innovations) while simultaneously standing their ground in the process of clarifying their uniqueness (Pedersen & Dobbin, 2006). Both neoinstitutional theory and organizational culture theory assumes that meaning is socially constructed (Pedersen & Dobbin, 2006, p. 897) – the first asserting it is constructed *among* organizations in the process of shared practises and process of isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 1995), while the other say meaning is created *within* organizations in the process of unique practices and identity attributions (Smircich, 1983). When analyzing Plan’s situation, the two perspectives are useful when trying to understand the processes of adapting to digital transformation while simultaneously having to maintain a perception of collective identity during an era of increased digitalization.

In the next section, I wish to converge neoinstitutional theory and sensemaking theory in order to give a more detailed description of how employees make sense of the conversion to home office and an increasingly digital work life. Because, although the sensemaking perspective primarily assumes a micro perspective and focuses on how humans continuously create their own actions and realities, the assumptions regarding how humans make sense of contingencies in order to stabilize and give meaning to social life are to some extent shared with neoinstitutional theory (Scott, 2013). Thus, sensemaking always occurs within, and is inevitably affected by, an institutional context and its requirements. At the same time, sensemaking processes continuously create new institutions and consolidate their legitimization (Weber & Glynn, 2006).

2.5 Bridging institutional theory and the sensemaking perspective

What is the interplay between sensemaking processes and institutional contexts? Does one antecede the other or are they created interdependently? It is an often-assumed premise that institutions impose cognitive constraints on the actors who do the sensemaking – i.e., institutions are setting the stage for and narrowing down how and what sense can be made (Weber & Glynn, 2006, p. 1640). Hence, most theoretical attention has been assuming that sensemaking is the “feedstock for institutionalization” (Weick, 1995, p. 35) and emphasizes that the emergence of new institutions are built bottom-up from collective sensemaking processes (Scott, 2001, p. 96). However, others point to the contrary and argue that institutions do more to sensemaking than “making some things unthinkable and un-sensible” (Weber & Glynn, 2006, p. 1643). Instead, institutions are both antecedents to, and the results of, sensemaking processes, which makes the interplay between institutions and sensemaking circular rather than sequential (Weber & Glynn, 2006).

Institutions affect sensemaking in the processes of *priming*, *editing* and *triggering* (Weber & Glynn, 2006). Priming is about providing certain social cues in specific situations; editing is when institutions give feedback on previous actions and retrospective sensemaking that enables prospective sensemaking; finally, institutions trigger sensemaking due to periods of shifting expectations and pressures that are characterized by uncertainties (Weber & Glynn, 2006). The triggering institutionalized expectations can be contradictory, ambiguous or inadequate, and results in a transformation process of experienced loss of meaning (Weber & Glynn, 2006, p. 1654). Consequently, sensemaking is activated because of the wish to restore meaning.

To account for institutional context in the otherwise micro-focusing, agency-emphasizing sensemaking perspective adds an important dimension when understanding sensemaking processes in organizational life – namely that it does not occur in an empty space, free from contextual frames (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). As in the process of understanding institutional change in the form of digital transformation (Hinings et al. 2018), which functions as the initial contextual framework and cognitive building blocks for sensemaking. Institutional pressures further edits and paves way for advanced action (Weber & Glynn, 2006). Finally, as sensemaking unfolds, institutions are ultimately enacted and realized.

In relation to Plan, and other incumbents that have been through the process of sudden shift to home office and an increased digitalization, the above descriptions of clashing institutional pressures provides a vivid image of the challenges put at the organizations. Plan

and other NGOs are facing somewhat contradictory institutional templates and pressures on what legitimizes a modern digital organization and what legitimizes a humanitarian organization, with its legacy norms and traditions. As will be clear, the situation triggers an overall need to make sense of the situation which in turn entails individual interpretations and actions depending on how that sensemaking unfolds.

Both sensemaking and neoinstitutional theory assume the link between meaning and action (Weber & Glynn, 2006). Criticisms made against either perspective can be interpreted as the others' advantage. For instance, sensemaking are often criticized of excluding the contextual factors (social, historical, institutional) since its focus primarily have been on subjective micro-processes, while neo institutional theory has been focusing on macro-level structures on expense of overlooking individual agency, for which it has been heavily criticized (Weber & Glynn, 2006). To conclude, sensemaking processes are occurring within institutional environments that are shaped by cognitive, normative and regulatory pressures, which means that organizations cannot be understood apart from its wider and cultural context (Scott, 1995, p. 151). To this study, this means that the circumstances (COVID-19) and changing institutional pressures (digital transformation) that is causing sensemaking processes to be primed, edited and triggered, cannot be excluded when analyzing how digitalization is made sense of and how it affects Plan's future role and work within the humanitarian field.

This chapter has presented and described the theoretical frameworks used in this thesis. Next, I will present the methodological approach and data collection used to gather and interpret the data.

3. Method

In this chapter, I will describe my thesis' methodological approach and why the chosen analysis is suitable for understanding qualitative research. Thereafter, I will present the origins and characteristics of my data, the informant selection and the interviews. Additionally, I will highlight the thesis methodological limitations as well as ethical aspects.

3.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative methods allow for a broad and explorative approach towards the empirical material. Compared to quantitative research, suitable within a positivistic approach and deductive reasoning, qualitative methods empower the researcher to go “underneath” the salient aspects of the subject of research as one tries to understand its underlying factors (Tjora, 2017). For instance, when investigating cultural changes within an organization, the employees might not state changes of theoretical concepts literally. Instead, a researcher must aim to “read between the lines” and interpret the holistic underlying movements of cultural change. As such, qualitative research is about asking “how” and “why” – i.e., understanding the in-depth aspects of a phenomenon of interest (Silverman, 2005). Therefore, in order to investigate and understand how the employees at an NGO make sense of digitalization due to COVID-19, and how this affect the organization's perception of its future role within humanitarian work – in addition to the data I had access to – I concluded that a qualitative method would be the suitable approach.

The analysis used was inspired by the systematic inductive approach developed by Gioia et al. (2013), that emphasizes the importance of grounded theory and the creation of new concepts. The goal of this method is to assume a holistic approach when developing new knowledge within the organizational field, while simultaneously meeting the required scientific research standards. This form of inductive reasoning can be made through in-depth qualitative interviews, assuming the informants to be “knowledgeable agents” with the capacity and ability to continuously create and make sense of their activities and context (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 17). The researchers' task is to interpret and “lift” their tellings to an abstract theoretical level that describes and defines new ways of social and organizational movements (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 19–20). Instead of searching for measurable attributes and confirming real life occurrences of theoretical constructs and assumptions (more commonly the practice within deductive

reasoning), the advantages of using Gioia's methodological approach is how it lets the researcher interpret the respondents' story more openly. The researchers' challenge is therefore to interpret the informant's story, and to highlight what parts that can be explained by established constructs and organizational theories, and what parts that cannot, which allows knowledge to grow and advance.

3.1.1 Limitations

An inductive analysis of the informants' tellings implies that they are abstracted into *sensitizing concepts*, which in contrast to definite prescriptions and definitions "merely suggests directions along which to look" (Blumer, 1954, p. 7). Sensitizing concepts lack clear references, but rather provide reference points when facing empirical data (Blumer, 1954). As the informants' words are made abstract and processed into the theoretical realm of social sciences, concepts like *institutions* and *sensemaking* help shed light on the phenomenon we wish to understand, as in this case how employees make sense of the conversion to home office and an increasing digitalization due to COVID-19.

However, the fact that my interpretations of the informants' tellings into theoretical concepts is the source of findings and results in this thesis, does entail some problematic aspects. For example, my interpretation can never be uncolored by my own experiences and understanding of the world. There is always a risk that my interpretation does not fully represent the ideas and tellings intended by the informants. At the same time, I might also come too close to the informants' story and their understanding of social reality (Gioia et al. 2013). To fully adopt the informants' view might hinder the possibility of a more abstract perspective that includes theorizing concepts. Also, it might become more difficult to stay critical and objective in regards to the informants' tellings. Thus, assuming the qualitative approach by Gioia et al. (2013) is in a way a balancing act between the informants' story on one side, and the theoretical realm of abstract constructs on the other. Initially, the researcher should allow the respondents' concepts to be used, only to then theoretically grasp the totality of the collected data and understand the patterns of thoughts, meanings and movements (Gioia et al., 2013).

In the following section, I will describe the origins of my data collection in this thesis and why I have decided to reuse data collected during a former student project.

3.2 Data Collection

The data used in this thesis was gathered by five fellow students and I during a former student project called Prosjektforum (project forum), which is a mandatory course in our masters' program – Organization, Management and Work at the University of Oslo. The data consists of semi-structured in-depth interviews with employees at the program department at Plan International Norway, a Norwegian humanitarian organization (in this thesis referred to as Plan). Besides collaborating internally in Oslo, the employees at the program department maintain collaborations with colleagues stationed locally in developing countries (e.g., Mali, Tanzania, Nepal etc.). Their job tasks therefore imply traveling and establishing relationships and communication patterns with colleagues in different parts of the world. The interview contains reflections and discussions about the conversion to home office and increased use of digital work tools due to COVID-19.

Because of the limited time and scope of research during Prosjektforum, we could only investigate a fraction of the materials' potential. Therefore, I decided to “dig deeper” into the material, especially since it matched with my interest in the crosspoint of humans, technology and organizations. For instance, how can organizations handle institutional expectations when becoming digitalized? Or, how the conversion to home office affects organizational culture. Early in the process of writing this thesis, I knew that I wanted to investigate further about how the digitalization process had changed Plan, its role within the field of humanitarian work and the employees' understanding of the sudden increase of digital work.

To me, the sensemaking perspective was an unexploited theme during Prosjektforum that I realized could be further used in a master thesis. Nevertheless, we did use sensemaking theory during Prosjektforum, but more as a supporting theory that could shed light on our main findings and topics of research, such as organizational learnings, possibilities, challenges and trust. In this thesis, I want to further combine the micro-perspective assumed in sensemaking theory with the macro-perspective of neoinstitutional theory.

Next, I will describe the process of how we gathered our data during Prosjektforum, what challenges we faced, how we contacted our informants and the structure of the interviews.

3.3 Informant selection

During Prosjektforum, the mandate from Plan was to investigate how COVID-19 had changed the way Plan Norway performs its task and what challenges and opportunities this situation

had created in terms of communication and interaction (Berglund et al., 2021). The openness of this mandate allowed us to initiate an explorative way of gathering the data. Semi-structured interviews are advantageous when trying to obtain information about the informant's own worldview and socially constructed reality (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Accordingly, we decided to implement semi-structured interviews with everyone at the program department in order to fully capture all the nuances of the employees' experiences regarding the overall organizational change.

All informants worked at the program department in Plan and we received their contact information via their department manager, who also was our group's contact person. Some of the informants were newly employed and couldn't elaborate fully on all of our questions to the same extent as the "veterans". Nonetheless, many of them compared to previous work experiences in the field of humanitarian work. The employees who at the time worked at the program department got our invitation and information about the project and all of them accepted to be interviewed. We also interviewed employees at Plan International country offices (COs) in Tanzania, Mali and Nepal that were in regular contact with our informants at the program department in Oslo. These interviews gave us a more in-depth understanding of the global cooperation that is Plan International, instead of exclusively incorporating the Norwegian perspective.

From the advice of our professors and other graduate students, we discussed the possibilities of saving our material in order to potentially use it in a future master's thesis. Therefore, when we assembled our consent request to the informants (see attachment 1), we included the following two alternatives:

To consent to participate in the project please respond to the same email you received this letter. You can consent by simply replying «I consent to participate in an interview relating to this project.» OR you can choose to voice your consent at the start of the interview.

If you consent to us storing your information for a potential master thesis, simply consent by replying «I consent to have my information handled until the end of the master thesis» OR voice your consent at the start of the interview.

Despite our wish to receive a specific consent that clarified our possibilities to use the material in a potential master's thesis, most of the participants merely gave a general consent. In most cases, we did however receive a specific consent after explaining our wish in the beginning of the interview. We discussed possible reasons why the participants did not follow our instructions more accurately, and we suspected that many of the participants had not read the

consent carefully enough, or had not understood the purpose of our Prosjektforum project. These misunderstandings were sorted out during the first minutes of the interviews, where we could explain the purpose of our project and why we wanted to gather a consent for a potential master's thesis. After hearing this, a majority of the informants orally gave their consent. The option to voice the consent was approved by NSD.

In this thesis, I chose to select a sample of six transcribed interviews from informants who had specifically given a written consent to a master's thesis. These transcripts were re-coded and analyzed in reference to this thesis' research question. The data gathered from a sample of six interviews gave plenty of empirical material in order to investigate, elaborate and answer my thesis. In addition, the sample size of six interviews follows recommendations on sample sizes in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 50). I decided to focus on the Norwegian informants, instead of including employees at the COs (Tanzania, Mali and Nepal) since I wanted to focus my thesis on the conversion to home office, digital work life and the organization's perception of its future role within the humanitarian field from a Norwegian context. However, I am aware that the exclusion of CO interviewees might affect perspectives and insights regarding the border-crossing aspects and an increased global workspace that digital innovations and tools enables. Nonetheless, because of the limitations within this thesis, I wished to narrow my study towards a concentration on the Norwegian context.

3.3.1 Limitations

Since I was one of the interviewers, my understanding of this case might be biased by the fact that I recognize the material and are familiar with the outcomes of the interviews. Hence, my interpretation and participation of the material might influence the results. My aim was therefore to interpret the material as "flat" as I possibly could, emphasizing the informants' concepts and words instead of my own, and to seek for possible connections within theories and the literature that could shed light on the results and help improve the understanding of organizational activities.

In the following, I will describe the interview process that took place between February–March 2021 and the implications of performing interviews digitally.

3.4 The interviews

Despite having an interview guide to follow (see attachment 2), we strived to enable an open discussion on how the informants had perceived the changes to home office and increased digital work life. We aimed at following the informants' reflections to where it led us, establishing a situation similar to a conversation. This sort of less strict interview format is one of the advices of qualitative semi-structured interviews put forward by Kvale & Brinkmann (2015).

Because of the prevailing COVID-19 restrictions during the time of Prosjektforum (January 2021–June 2021), we performed the interviews on the digital video communication tool Zoom. All interviews were conducted by two members of the project group and one interviewee. Each of us sat by our own computer. Since we had varying experiences of qualitative interviews, one of us acted as host and drove the interview forward while the other took notes and complemented with follow-up questions that made sure no questions were left unanswered. Additionally, one could proceed interviewing if the other fell out because of deficient internet connection or other disruptions.

The digital format of conducting the interviews gave us flexibility when it came to scheduling interviews and traveling to interview locations. However, occasional deficient internet connection led to some disruptions. At times, the camera had to be turned off in order to maintain a functioning connection and we had to repeat questions because of poor sound quality, which could lead to misunderstandings. This disrupted the flow of some interviews in which lagging made discussions harder to sustain, and interviews at times had to be paused and resumed later. Consequently, some words were inaudible on the recordings and left out of the transcription. However, these disruptions did not prevent us from performing any interview in a way that disintegrated our investigation, and in most cases the disturbances were far from threatening to the overall interview experience. The issues of communicating via digital communication tools were, after all, familiar to all attending, since the COVID-19 restrictions had forced us to get accustomed to digital meetings – which in addition was a part of our mandate to investigate and reflect on. The informants could refer to everyday communication issues as something happening during our interviews, which contributed to a setting of common experiences and mutual understanding of the potential downsides and advantages of using digital communication tools. These sorts of interruptions could be reflected on with the informants since it resembled their experiences of everyday digital communication within Plan.

In general, digital video communication might complicate the possibilities of establishing a connection to the interviewees, which can affect the overall atmosphere of the interview. Previous qualitative research often concludes that online methods lead to difficulties and challenges when managing meaningful communication (Abidin & De Seta, 2020) and since it solely includes the upper body, it implies troublesomeness in interpreting body language and tone (Cater, 2011). Thus, a previous conclusion was that face-to-face interviews remain as the golden standard of when doing qualitative interviews (Oltmann, 2016; Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). However, recent research increasingly emphasizes the benefits of digital qualitative interviews (Archibald et al., 2019), implying it to be a trustworthy, cost-efficient alternative (Saarijärvi & Bratt, 2021), and even asserting it to generate richer insights in certain topics of research (Jenner & Myers, 2019). In a study on the feasibility and acceptability of using Zoom as a digital communication tool when gathering qualitative data, findings pointed to the overall viability of using Zoom and showed that the overall interviewees' experience was highly satisfactory, and generally rated Zoom as a better option than face-to-face alternative, despite some technological difficulties (Archibald et al., 2019).

Conclusively, qualitative interviews held via digital communication tools have increased because of COVID-19, and as internet connections gets faster and more reliable and communication tools gets more user-friendly and stable, digital interviews are assumed to work just as well as face-to-face interviews (Howlett, 2021; Lo Iacono et al., 2016), and even suggesting it to be advantageous for discussing deeply personal or sensitive topics (Jenner & Myers, 2019, p. 176). These aspects of digital interviews were discussed during Prosjektforum. We nevertheless tried to create a situation where the informants could talk freely about their experiences. Following the advice from Holstein & Gubrium (2003), we aimed at establishing an online climate of mutual disclosure by, for instance, starting all interviews with informal talk, where the informants could present themselves.

Next, I will describe the process of how the interviews were transcribed and analyzed, and thereafter reflect on my experiences of reusing previously used data and its consequences.

3.5 Data analysis

From the advice of our supervisor during Prosjektforum, we transcribed the same interviews that we had hosted, since this implied that the ones with the most understanding of the interview could add the most context to the quotes and explanations to external sounds. The transcriptions

were made in the Microsoft transcription application *f4transcript*. In order to capture as much information as possible without changing the meaning of the empirical content, we transcribed the interviews verbatim (i.e., quoted in exactly the same words as were used originally by the informants). However, the quotes picked out in the following analysis chapter, have been translated from Norwegian to English in a way that best captures the content and intention of the overall message rather than verbatim. Consequently, these translations are my personal interpretation and understanding of the informants' words, which inevitably leads to an imminent risk of misinterpretations and mistranslations regarding the informants' intended message. Additionally, as I am originally from Sweden, Norwegian is not my mother tongue. Although I have been living in Norway for some time and understand Norwegian very well, it could imply that I might have misunderstood certain aspects of sentences, wordplays or underlying meanings of certain quotes.

During Prosjektforum, the transcripts were coded according to the above-mentioned systematic analysis by Gioia et al. (2013). I used the same method again during this masters' thesis, except I tried to go even deeper with regards to my current research question: *How does employees at an NGO make sense of digital work life due to COVID-19, and how does this affect the organization's perception of its role within humanitarian work?* However, since my prior knowledge and experience of the completed Prosjektforum lay as the foundation of ideas for my upcoming master's thesis, my methodological approach of the gathered data does to some extent resemble the process of *abductive* reasoning rather than *inductive*. Abductive reasoning sets off in the empirical material (similar to induction) but does not reject theoretical assumptions (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2017, p. 4). Hence, abductive reasoning assumes that preconceptions and theoretical perspectives affect the process of interpreting the empirical material (Tjora, 2017). Gioia et al. (2013) also asserts how a systematic approach might turn into an abductive approach the more one turns to literature (Gioia et al., 2013, p.21), and admits that data and theory can become converged in the research process (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007). Since I had already worked with and knew about the empirical material, I had a foundational understanding of how it could be used and interpreted. Admitting that my objectivity of the material in that sense were "invalid", and that my preconceptions had paved way for further possibilities within the empirical material, I nevertheless concluded that the systematic approach from Gioia et al. (2013) could inspire my methodological approach in this thesis since the material had several unexplored themes. To my best ability, I tried to "step out" of my "knowing" of the material, to abandon some of my theoretical stance, and look for further aspects within the material. For instance, an unexplored theme was the institutional pressures

that affects the organization to adapt to digital innovations and transformation, while simultaneously maintaining its organizational identity as a humanitarian organization with legacy traditions and processes.

The process of re-using data struck me as far more learning and challenging than I initially thought. What I suspected could be a process of repetition of old conclusions, turned out to be the opposite as I discovered plenty of unexplored findings that had laid hidden until investigated with “fresh” eyes and a new research question as a starting point. Conclusively, the process of re-using material was an eye-opener to me, in the way that the same empirical material included far more interesting aspects than what was shown at first analysis.

Initially in the analyzing process, a 1st order analysis was made, where I tried to “adhere faithfully to the informants’ terms” (Gioia et al. 2013, p. 20), and thereby avoid distilling the different emerging categories into higher-level theoretical constructs. In this phase, the quotes and conceptualizations of the informants were amplified, rather than made abstract. Further, during a 2nd order analysis, the categories were being searched for instances of similarities and differences which distilled the initial large number of categories into a more manageable amount. In line with Gioia et al. (2013), I tried to ask myself – *does this material contain a deeper structure?* (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 20) and I tried to look for emerging concepts that explained processes relatable to my thesis. Further, as I distilled the 2nd order categories into *aggregate dimensions*, it enabled me to reflect on the informants’ quotes in more theoretical terms. Figure 1 shows an example of the coding process of moving from 1st order analysis to aggregate dimension.

My aim in this thesis was to be more open towards what could show up in the empirical material, rather than trying to find evidence that would answer a given mandate and research question (which were the case during Prosjektforum). Soon, I realized that many of the informants took the opportunity to talk extensively about their experiences and understandings since the outburst of COVID-19. These stories included an emotional dimension, which, to me, almost resembled a therapeutic situation, where the informants occasionally struggled to make sense of a period of overwhelming changes, new routines and adaptations. Thus, the theme of *making sense of changes*, digitalization and institutional pressures therefore became my main interest in this thesis.

Figure 1. example of this thesis' systematic analysis

1st order	2nd order	Aggregate dimension
<p><i>"We can be very good as professionals when it comes to collaboration, but I think that the social aspect of collaboration, and like having network is just super important"</i></p> <p>Emphasizes the importance of visiting abroad, to have discussions about projects and what can be improved. The conceptualization of digitalization, collaboration and organizational goals occurs during face-to-face interactions</p> <p>Requirements change rapidly, which is why frequent communication with colleagues is important. COVID have i entailed increased mandate to colleagues abroad</p>	<p>The importance of social interaction in collaboration</p> <p>The conceptualization of Plan are created during formal and informal interactions</p> <p>changing contextual requirements pressures Plan, and changes the organization's structure and assumptions</p>	<p>Sensemaking</p> <p>Neoinstitutional theory/isomorphism</p>

Compared to the coding processes during Prosjektforum, I noticed how I got more meticulous when doing it by myself – carefully analyzing the material in a way that would facilitate the possibility to understand what could hide “under the surface” of the already familiar material. The fact that I recognized the tellings made me search for “deeper” structural patterns of organizational movements, both within the micro-perspective, such as individual adaptations to digital work life, but also from a macro-perspective when identifying institutional pressures that were to be drawn from the informants’ tellings on how the changes had affected the organization’s role in regard to digital transformation and in the field of humanitarian work.

In the following, the ethical aspects regarding my thesis methodological approach will be discussed.

3.6 Ethics

The data collection for this masters’ thesis was done in accordance with guidelines and laws from the Norwegian Centre of Research Data (NSD). The data gathering of Prosjektforum was approved by NSD prior to the initiation of the study in January 2021, and the re-use of that data

collection for this thesis was approved on January 19th 2022 (see attachment 3 for NSD approval).

In general, anonymization within research projects is made to prevent the informants from being recognized (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 95-96). Hence, we switched all names and personal information into informant codes to avoid any words or sentences from being traceable to any single individual. During the storage of the data, names and other personal information were anonymized and stored separately from the interview transcripts, which helped secure the identity of our informants in case someone would get access to the data (Fangen, 2010). The interview recordings were stored on a shared cloud service called *Lagringshotell* (storage hotel) provided by the University of Oslo and was accessible only to the members of our student group. As mentioned, all informants were informed of the purpose of Prosjektforum, as well as our wish to be able to use the transcripts in a potential future master's thesis. The participants were also informed on how their data would be handled and stored, and what their rights and overall participation would entail. We emphasized that their participation in the project was voluntary and that they, whenever they wanted, could retrieve their consent without any specific reason. This included a potential master's thesis as well. As noted, all participants gave their general consent written and/or orally. The participants in this thesis gave specific consent for their data to be used in a possible master's thesis. Further, I have kept the informants' codes and transcribed interviews separated during the whole process of writing this thesis. All information will be deleted after any potential master's thesis has been written, and the final date for the possibility to use the material before it is deleted is June 30th 2023.

Following is a reflection of the choices made in regard to reliability, validity and generalizability.

3.7 Reliability, validity and generalizability

Reliability in research is about presenting and describing the method and analysis process in a way that makes a coherent understanding that can be reproduced (Johannessen, Christofersen, Tufte, 2010, p. 230). In order to gain reliable findings in this thesis, I have strived to be transparent in relation to my results, and further throughout the process present my choice of methods and interpretations, and its benefits and disadvantages. Additionally, my relation to the material inevitably entails preconceptions that affect the interpretations (Tjora, 2017).

Considering that this is my second time working with this material, it might bias my results. However, throughout the process, my aim has been to assume an explorative research perspective, and to investigate more openly how the informants put their experiences and conceptualizations into words. I have nonetheless been aware of how my preconceptions in this case might problematize the reliability, described in the discussion above on abductive and inductive reasonings, and I have to my best ability tried to confront the material with an ever-increasing caution, meticulousness and openness.

Validity concerns to what extent the findings reflect the purpose of the research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). As in this case, if the methodological choices and results reflect the overall purpose of my thesis, which is to understand how employees at an NGO make sense of digital work life due to COVID-19 and how it affects the organization's perception of its future role within humanitarian work. The link between the empirical data and purpose of my research have been close to mind since the start of the project, especially since my preconceptions of the material could lead me away from this thesis, closer to the previous project's conclusions. Therefore, I had a constant awareness about the material and in what ways the informants' reflected on the aspects concerning this thesis' purpose.

Although the findings from this study have potential regarding generalizability, which is to what extent my findings can be transferable to other organizations, contexts and situations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 289), its main focus has been to investigate employees at an NGO, characterized by certain institutional pressures and role conceptualizations. Specifically, since the work of my informants concerns collaboration with colleagues in Africa and Asia, those aspects of my findings cannot be generalizable in the same extent as the ones that mainly concern the overall consequences of converting to home office in Oslo.

This chapter has described my chosen methodological approach as well as the thesis empirical material. In the following chapter, I will present and describe the findings and analysis of my thesis.

4. Findings and analysis

In this chapter, I will present and analyze the findings of my thesis. These are divided into categories that ultimately aim to answer my thesis: *How do the employees of an NGO make sense of digital work life due to COVID-19, and how does this affect the organization's perception of its future role within humanitarian work?* The following sections are based on my thesis two research questions:

RQ1: What are the characteristics of change and digitalization that has taken place within Plan?

RQ2: How does clashing institutional pressures affect Plan as a humanitarian organization within a digital age?

RQ1 and the first part of my overall thesis is answered in chapter 4.1. Here, I will describe the changes caused by COVID-19 and digitalization, as well as interpreting the informants' tellings of how they have made sense of these changes. RQ2 and the second part of my overall thesis, is answered in chapter 4.2. Here, I will describe the institutional pressures affecting Plan as it strives to gain digital legitimacy, while simultaneously having to hold on to organizational identity attributes. Prospective sensemaking theory are used to interpret the informants' predictions of Plan's future role and work.

4.1 Change, digitalization and canceled visits

The first category of findings, presented in part 4.1.1 and 4.1.2, concerns RQ1: *What are the characteristics of change and digitalization that has taken place within Plan Norway?* I will describe the organizational changes due to COVID-19 and digital transformation, which will be interpreted through organizational change theory and newer theory on digital transformation. Home office understood as a digital context and the problematic factors that occurred when travels had to be canceled will be analyzed more specifically. From here, RQ1 will lay the foundation in order to answer the first part of my overall thesis: *How do the employees of an NGO make sense of digital work life due to COVID-19?* In part 4.1.3 and 4.1.4, I will describe how the employees make sense of the situation by trying to align digitalization with established conceptualizations of Plan as an organization. I will also illustrate how the

home office context resulted in fewer arenas where sensemaking processes could thrive, leading to individual differentiation in the understanding of digitalization in relation to Plan.

4.1.1 Organizational change: working in a digital context

In order to comply with the COVID-19 restrictions, Plan had to convert all forms of work to home office, whereby all work practices and communication channels had to become digital. This affected the informants' everyday life, such as an increasing flexibility of working hours, which to many made everyday "life puzzles" easier to plan. Some emphasized the non-disturbance environment at home which let them concentrate better on certain tasks. Overall, COVID-19 has been the "great accelerator" that pushes the priorities of digital technologies forward in line, implementing new digital solutions, as well as increasing the use of already existing ones (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021). The use of Plan's digital solutions have been forced to intensify during COVID-19 in order to maintain communication and work, as described by the following informant:

[...] all these digital platforms and resources that we've had internally in Plan, which have existed a long time, but which might have not utilized that good, until we didn't have a choice.

The increasing competence and use of digital communication tools on shared platforms across the organization can be interpreted as a continuous change and adaptation process towards digitalization as a result of a major, episodic change (Weick & Quinn, 1999; Romanelli & Tushman, 1994). Thus, Plan is becoming increasingly digital as a result of COVID-19 – at least in the form of *digitizing*, i.e., turning analog practices into digital (Ross et al. 2019). The following quote illustrates how the employees improved their competence of digital communication tools:

It has been a digital revolution, internally within the organization [...] we have all gone from being like idiots, scratching our heads because of Skype, to going from one Teams meeting to another. In that way there has been a lot of learning.

This learning has occurred as a result of the continuous adaptation towards digital work life (Weick & Quinn, 1999). The process of adapting to digital communication has also implied

some “failed” initiatives. For instance, adaptations were made in the attempts of establishing rules or routines when communicating digitally, but were eventually abandoned:

We established a couple of routines for how to use Teams, sort of rules [...] but now no one uses them actively anymore [...] But it was to set the culture in the start, which I think can be smart, to kind of have some guidelines.

These were mainly debating rules in order to prevent people from talking simultaneously. The abandoning of these can be interpreted as a form of adjustment in the process of establishing new norms and routines. As such, the informants make sense of their actions within a new setting, which can be either maintained, modified or replaced (Weick et al., 2005). Additionally, the above informant emphasizes the importance of establishing a culture in order to maintain stability in the flux of new digital tools. In reference to Kotter & Heskett (1992), organizational culture is what facilitates and justifies the right to improvise, fail and continuously modify processes of communication and action, which is especially important during periods of uncertainty and turbulence (Kotter & Heskett, 1992).

The conversion to home office meant that face-to-face interactions with colleagues were excluded from an ordinary workday. This change of social dynamic interactions was by many perceived as *the* major change due to the pandemic, rather than work itself. One informant explained it as:

[Converting to home office] hasn't completely changed how we work [...] It has changed in that you don't get to see your colleagues and that interaction. So, of course, that changes the dynamics in the long run.

This suggests that the rapid conversion to home office implied an increasing adaptation in the form of *digitizing*. This can be understood in contrast to the more consistent adaptation form of *digitalizing*, which is to rethink organizational operations from new perspectives enabled by digital technology (Parviainen et al., 2017, p. 74; Ross et al., 2019).

However, when face-to-face interaction decreased, digital communication intensified, and many informants expressed the benefits of the “lighter” type of communication because of its efficiency during simple, information-exchanging communication. Beneficially, more people could digitally attend webinars and meetings with institutional donors, whereby information could be shared seamlessly between actors of humanitarian work. These

adaptations can be understood as processes of restructuring the organization towards becoming fully *digitalized*, in the sense of restructuring towards digital transformation, and fully taking advantage of what it can offer (Ross et al., 2019). As such, the digital work context changes the organization's conditions and enables new types of collaborations, both within Plan and with other stakeholders.

Many of the informants' work tasks require collaboration, discussions and brainstorming-type of interactions, but the digital context complicates daily routines of social interactions and inhibits possibilities of collective critical thinking (and talking). Fewer random conversations, during which experiences are shared, results in fewer moments of potential learning. Consequently, the possibility to "stumble" into new knowledge just by initiating a conversation has diminished. The following quote vividly illustrates how smaller interactions always have the potential to escalate further:

Well, during normal times, when you grab a cup of coffee together and some stuff is brought up, or you just walk over to someone's desk and ask about something – that is gone [...] You kind of have to set up a Teams-meeting to talk about things – and you don't if you've just got a short question [...] And then you never know what some initial questions lead to, maybe it would lead to a discussion where other exciting things would've come up.

A result of disrupted daily social interactions is that minor work decisions are to a greater extent taken individually. Starting a chat or video meeting does require some form of social commitment. Hence, the informants are at risk of becoming somewhat socially isolated from each other when adapting to, and making sense of, increased digital work (which will be further analyzed in 4.1.3). Especially, since many of the minor problems are sometimes not considered "serious" enough to initiate digital contact.

In the following section, the more global aspects of Plan as an NGO are added, as the cessation of visits and traveling are described and analyzed.

4.1.2 The cessation of traveling

A distinguishing feature of Plan is yearly visits to ongoing projects abroad. The cessation of traveling due to COVID-19 restrictions was seen as a major, challenging change of organizational practices. During these visits, the informants usually establish relationships with colleagues abroad, who have the most contextual, political and cultural understandings

regarding the challenges, obstacles and opportunities when implementing humanitarian projects. The exclusions of visits meant that the exchange of these understandings came to a halt and collaboration became harder. One informant explained the following:

That we cannot visit them and see the projects, that is probably the biggest change [...] And if you've never met each other and been visiting, seeing the projects together and creating that chemistry that you need to be able to tackle the tougher questions, then it gets harder to collaborate.

The visits give the employees a more detailed understanding of Plan's overall processes. As the following quote describes, during visits, informal types of relationships are established between colleagues that enables further (digital) communication to be more open and honest:

During those visits, I create the foundation to get to know people, which leads to a more frequent type of communication. Also, those visits give a complete other dimension of working in-depth – with the understanding of what we are wishing for, and what types of challenges they face – all of which we lose completely now. So that is a rather major challenge.

This illustrates the difficulties of communication, collaboration and establishing relationships with colleagues abroad when traveling was excluded. And, as illustrated in the following quote, the loss of “regular” interaction during visits forces Plan to transfer *all* communication to digital channels:

[...] perhaps I spent three hours on that report in a Skype-meeting to explain how they should answer our requirements in the report. And when I get it back, it isn't even close to what we wished for. Usually, this three hour meeting – that would rather have been a weekly long visit [...] and that is a major problem, because then I miss the understanding of the situation and the kind of in-depth explanation of what we want them to report.

This quote interestingly suggests digital communication does not meet the standards to maintain relationships and collaborations across borders, which have resulted in an increase of

long video meetings – perhaps to compensate for the loss of understanding usually gained during regular visits. This in turn, leads to further misunderstandings and frustration.

The problems following the cessation of visits are not one sided. The employees stationed abroad need to repeatedly describe and explain what is going on in an endless correspondence of emails and chats.

They [employees abroad] have gotten new program advisors that don't know the country's projects. So they have had to spend a lot of time explaining... Explaining, explaining, explaining – by email and Teams.

What becomes clear is that regular face-to-face visits fill a purpose that makes collaboration and implementation of humanitarian projects possible. The increasing digital communication implies an endless amount of emails sent back and forth. The above quotes glimpse some of the frustration that “lurks under the surface” when communication and collaboration is held solely digital.

Nonetheless, the implementation of humanitarian projects has not come to a halt, mainly because the local employees have needed to take more responsibility. One informant reflected on this in the following way:

Plan is even much more localized, which I think has been a very important adaptation [...] you have people who will stay and deliver in the field. And you don't need to make very many adjustments on this organizational level.

Plan's humanitarian projects *are* being implemented, mainly because responsibilities and agency are transferred towards locally stationed employees of Plan – a restructuring resembling some of the characteristics within holacratic structures, that emphasizes increasing responsibilities and agency to employees. (Schwer & Hits, 2018). Hence, the *increased* digitalization and *decreased* traveling changes the dynamics, roles and assumptions within the organization – changes that potentially enables Plan to become increasingly malleable towards future digital transformation and continuous change (Hanelt et al., 2021).

To conclude part 4.1.1 and 4.1.2, and providing an answer to RQ1: *What are the characteristics of change and digitalization that has taken place within Plan Norway?* Through the theoretical perspective of episodic and continuous change (Weick & Quinn, 1999) the changes of Plan due to COVID-19 and increased digitalization can be considered both episodic

as well as continuous. The pandemic was indeed a major external factor that led to abrupt overwhelming changes within the organization (Huber & Glick, 1993). Episodic as these changes may have been (Weick & Quinn, 1999), Plan has adapted continuously towards digital work life by *digitizing*, i.e., transforming analog practices into digital (Ross et al., 2019). When reflected on by the informants, the changes mainly affected the dynamic social interactions among colleagues in Oslo, rather than professional work. In the context of home office, the employees are becoming physically isolated from each other, and social interactions, which usually “flows” daily at the regular office floor, are not yet fully compensated for by digital technologies.

The cessation of traveling has implied major challenges within Plan, as the lack of visits disrupted traveling routines and possibilities to establish relationships between colleagues from different countries. Frequent dialogue and sharing of knowledge are essential organizational prerequisites for staying flexible when it comes to how money should be spent and what kinds of humanitarian projects should be initiated. Digital technologies have facilitated frequent communication between employees in Norway and abroad, and the habits of turning to digital solutions are gradually increasing. In accordance with organizational change theory (Weick & Quinn, 1999) and newer theories of digital transformation (Hanelt et al. 2021), Plan is in a current process of adapting strategies (Bharadawaj et al., 2013) and structures (Schwer & Hitz, 2018) in accordance with the possibilities of today’s digital transformation.

The disturbing of communication patterns and lack of informal social interactions, lead me into the following chapter, where I will use sensemaking theory to analyze how the informants make sense of the above presented changes and adaptations towards digital work life, which will help answer the first part of my overall thesis: *How do the employees of an NGO make sense of digital work life due to COVID-19?*

4.1.3 Making sense of change and digitalization

The retrospective nature of sensemaking theory assumes that humans retrospectively interpret experiences into a coherent story that makes flux of contingencies comprehensible, which ultimately makes organizing possible (Weick et al. 2005). The employees in Plan strived to make sense of home office by increasing the use of digital technologies, and by improvising and modifying ways of working digitally in ways beneficial to their daily tasks. There were periods of adaptation, especially in the first three to four months, when the informants primarily perceived home office as unfamiliar and confusing, until new digital skills were learned, new routines had formed and digital practices had become a part of daily routines. Some eventually

perceived these changes as more beneficial to their humanitarian work compared to regular office, as illustrated by the the following quote:

When working from home – I actually think I have more contact now with our colleagues abroad, and this just keeps getting better now that I have these digital solutions in my home office, which are way better suited to my tasks in Plan.

Through the sensemaking perspective, this shows how the informants were able to make sense of digitalization in ways beneficial to Plan's humanitarian work (Weick et al., 2005). Digitization was then understood as providing new possibilities – realizations that were developed in retrospect when the employees observed their enacted behaviors and experiences of working solely from a computer. However, depending on work tasks, home office was perceived differently. The informants usually working in collaborative settings in Oslo quickly identified what digitalization could not yet compensate for, as illustrated by the following:

[getting in contact] is much easier just by writing in the Teams-chat and asking: "Have you got five minutes?" and then most do, because you're not getting distracted by other things. But as soon as you're supposed to collaborate it gets harder to solve things. More innovative discussions on how to work – that's harder.

This indicates how sensemaking processes unfolded somewhat differently in regards to understanding how digitalization can align with Plan's humanitarian work. Many struggled to maintain the discussions and frequent sharing of knowledge usually occurring at the regular office, which made the overall work of Plan hard to conceptualize.

The informants emphasized that formal work nevertheless was possible to perform solely on digital channels. Rather, it was the informal interactions that had been missed, as indicated by the following informant:

[...] we can always fix the formal aspects of work, calling in to a meeting or sending emails. But all those things, where we usually would've simply turned to a colleague and have a small chat about – it's important to have channels for that type of interaction.

Social interaction did not occur as naturally from home as at the regular office. Instead, social interactions did in some sense become a choice to make – it was up to the individual to make daily contact by calling, emailing or starting a chat. Informal encounters, such as interactions by the coffee machine or between meetings, ultimately function as arenas of sensemaking, where groups of colleagues collectively define work activities during a turbulent time of increased digitalization (Weick et al., 2005). The importance of constant formal *and* informal dialogue within Plan did to some degree appear as an insight when the latter was disrupted and can therefore be interpreted as a collective insight due to the consequences of home office (Weick et al., 2005).

It further becomes evident that the merging of *home* and *office* into *home office* is a blurring of boundaries between work and time off. Thus, to many, the first step of adapting to home office occurred when defining boundaries between work and home. There seemed to be a risk of not “leaving” work since the usual displacement of entering and leaving the office building did not occur. Additionally, sufficient equipment and stable internet connection were soon perceived as vital prerequisites in the setup of a functioning home office. Through the lens of sensemaking theory, the positive and negative aspects of home office became clearer as the informants continuously observed their actions in retrospect and made sense of them (Weick, 1995).

A similar realization due to home office adaptation concerned the increasingly important weekly updates from management, during which Plan’s overall visions and goals are shared. One informant reflected on the increasing necessity of management guidance:

[...] they introduced a Monday-meeting, which is a kind of status-meeting where all departments must report what they’re up to [...] in the situation we are in now, this is important because it is basically the only way for us to get an overview of what is happening in the organization. This is much more important now than it was before.

These meetings became more crucial as they guided Plan through a digital, turbulent landscape in a period permeated by confusion and uncertainties. These conditions lead to an increasing need to make sense of the organizational flux in a changing context (Weick et al. 1993). As such, sensemaking processes were facilitated by the constant updates from management, which defined and evaluated processes in retrospect, as well as pointing out new directions to go.

However, the interviews also revealed that the informants’ sensemaking of home office and digital work at time differed. For instance, in their conclusions regarding the benefits of

digitalization, and if it could be aligned with already established processes and routines in Plan. As noted by the following informant, arguing of the benefits of home office and wished to maintain it after the pandemic:

When we get back to normal, I hope they [management] are kind of engaging and flexible, and kind of see the possibilities, and let home office be something we can continue with to a fairly large extent.

Other informants longed for more traditional ways of working:

I have my overdose of Teams meetings – really tired of those. Often you sit there all day going from one meeting to another [...] and at once there is one of those webinars – I'm really falling out. I think that at this point I'm kind of hungry for non-digital ways of working.

Naturally, working from home suits some better than others, but the differentiation of how digitalization can be understood in relation to already established processes of Plan, can be interpreted as differentiation in individual sensemaking processes (Weick et al., 2005). In other words, the informants look back at their experiences of home office and reach different conclusions on whether this is beneficial to Plan or not, and because there are fewer arenas of social interactions, wherein collective processes of sensemaking occur, the differentiation of individual conceptualizations seem to increase.

Conclusively, the increased digitalization resulted in continuous processes of adaptations within Plan as the employees increased the use of digital tools, improvised, and learned new digital ways of working. These constant modifications of work routines were continuously understood through sensemaking processes (Weick et al., 2005) – i.e., as the informants mentally connect attributes of digitalization with the characteristics of Plan's practices. However, the conversion to digital context led to a detachment between formal and informal arenas of sensemaking possibilities. As the informants became isolated, informal interactions decreased, collective sensemaking processes deteriorated and individual understandings of the organization consequently differed. Many soon understood how digitalization could align with their humanitarian work, while others struggled to see the same possibilities. My findings indicate that making sense of home office does not occur overnight, but is maintained stepwise as when learning new digital tools, establishing boundaries between

work and home, or in the changing of dynamic patterns of social interactions among colleagues.

In the following section, sensemaking theory is further used to understand how the informants made sense of the global collaboration projects when all visits got canceled due to traveling restrictions.

4.1.4 Making sense of Plan without traveling

In a time when traveling was omitted and digital communication was supposed to compensate for actual visits, the informants struggled to make sense of the global collaboration projects that characterizes much of Plan's daily work. Usually, Plan's reason for traveling is, as mentioned, to establish relationships with colleagues and develop common understandings about the ongoing projects. When visits became restricted, it became clear that digital technology could not fully replace the kind of knowledge and understanding acquired during actual visits. The following quote vividly illustrates the consequences of canceled visits and what qualitative aspects of collaboration got lost:

[...] it's the sort of information you get when you have coffee breaks in a meeting, or sitting in a car with someone while the director isn't there – we miss out on those sorts of things [...] But there is something like, establishing trust – it doesn't happen all by itself on a screen [...] and you have to be aware that you're working across many cultures here, and you can manage such things when you spend time together, eating together...

The consequences of sitting in Oslo, while implementing projects in Africa or Asia, is a lack of understanding of the contextual and cultural conditions that affect the success of humanitarian work projects. As the above informant argues – *something* happens when people get together physically that has a huge impact on collaboration. As such, making sense of canceled visits, as a part of the overall *digitalizing* of Plan, does *not* align well with the informants' established understandings regarding the importance of regular visits and face-to-face interactions. The following information reflects on how canceled visits have affected communication to control the implementation of projects:

So now we need to reinforce the kind of hands-on monitoring of what is happening, and maybe be a bit more mindful of this kind of day to day follow-up so that we can understand how the projects are implemented even if we cannot go and see how they

actually function.

The increased digital communication, in order to monitor and “control”, can be interpreted as an attempt of trying to grasp the totality of the situation and make sense of Plan during a time of increased uncertainties (Weick et al., 2005). Additionally, the lack of actual visits and insufficient communication, also led to suspiciousness towards colleagues, which is described in the following quote:

The lack of understanding leads to a kind of frustration [...] You can easily feel that they [colleagues abroad] don't deliver what's required – that the quality isn't sufficient. But then perhaps it's mainly about trusting that they can do a good job, which you get when you travel and meet people, spend time near them for a week – then you get a different understanding of it.

These findings indicate that, as a dimension of social interaction is lost within the organization, so is also a dimension of organizational conceptualization. Even though the informants in Oslo received information digitally, in the form of emails, reports and video meetings, they repeatedly mentioned a frustration of not getting “the full picture” of what was going on:

In all types of project follow-up it's, well, “bumps on the road” – there are misunderstandings [...] But often it's the face-to-face discussions, plus everything that's being said after a meeting is done, where you get the kind of information that's like “ahh, now I understand why this is happening”.

The uncertainties occurring because of canceled visits can be interpreted as triggering of sensemaking processes (Weber & Glynn, 2006). As the possibilities to physically see the global projects of the organization were excluded, the collective conceptualization of Plan as an organization diminished. These findings go in line with sensemaking theory, assuming that sensemaking processes are especially activated during sequences of change and uncertainties (Weick, 1993).

To further summarize part 4.1.3 and 4.1.4, and provide an answer to the first part of my thesis: *How do the employees of an NGO make sense of digital work life due to COVID-19?* The above presented quotes can be interpreted with the help of the retrospective nature of the sensemaking perspective (Weick et al., 2005). In periods of turbulence, sensemaking processes

are activated to make sense of organizational flux (Weick et al., 1993) and meaning out of performed actions (Schildt et al., 2020). The employees of Plan strived to make sense of digitalization by increasing the use of digital technologies, and by improvising and searching for ways to utilize them in ways beneficial to humanitarian work. Home offices and digital work were understood as bringing many advantages, and digital solutions often met the formal requirements of professional work. However, digital communication technologies did not satisfy the needs of frequent social interactions, wherein organizational ideas, decisions and challenges can be shared and made sense of. This indicates how the employees make sense of digitalization through continuous sensemaking processes by merging and combining attributes of digitalization with attributes of Plan and humanitarian work. As such, my findings suggest that sensemaking of digitalization is vital in order to align understandings of digital transformation with existing organizational identity practices.

The lack of traveling was perceived as a major challenge, and the retrospective understanding of the regular visits was realized as an essential part of Plan, even in an age of digital transformation. Because the frequent communication between colleagues in Oslo decreased, sensemaking unfolded differently among individuals and resulted in different understandings of how digitalization could align with Plan's routine practices. This process may eventually lead to different groups among the employees who perceive Plan in a digital environment differently – some emphasizing the benefits of digitization, while others struggle to make home office and digital work understandable in terms of what Plan is and does.

So far, I have provided an answer to RQ1 and the first part of my overall thesis. In the following chapter, I will continue with RQ2 and use neoinstitutional theory to understand how different institutional pressures affect Plan as an organization. Thereafter, prospective sensemaking theory is used to answer the second part of my overall thesis: ... *and how does this affect the organization's perception of its future role within humanitarian work?*

4.2 Clashing institutional pressures in a digital age

The second category of chapter 4 concerns RQ2: *How does clashing institutional pressures affect Plan as a humanitarian organization within a digital age?* Plan's established role is as an intermediary between donors and developing countries. The purpose is to ensure the distribution of money in ways that optimizes humanitarian work. In 4.2.1, I will describe how Plan, as a result of digital transformation accelerated by COVID-19 and the conversion to home

office, has to take several institutional requirements into consideration when navigating through the turbulent transformative digital ecosystem (El Sawy & Pereira, 2013; El Sawy et al., 2010). From here, RQ2 lay as a foundation in order to answer the second part of my overall thesis: *... and how does this affect the organization's perception of its future role within humanitarian work?* I will in part 4.2.2, through prospective sensemaking theory, go more in depth on how these institutional pressures are shown and understood through the tellings of the informants' as they predict the future work and role of Plan.

4.2.1 Experiencing clashing institutional pressures

Neoinstitutional theory assumes that organizations strive for, and gain legitimacy, by imitating templates of organizing (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). From this perspective, Plan's current challenge is to gain legitimacy in a turbulent digital ecosystem (El Sawy & Pereira, 2013). Equally important is nonetheless to maintain its organizational identity and already established role as a humanitarian organization (Pedersen & Dobber, 2006). The conversion to home office and increased digital work leads to changing dynamics between donors, institutions, NGOs and developing countries. The following informant describes how the humanitarian field is changing as a result of digitalization, and how Plan adapts to it:

[...] in a broader context, the humanitarian and development environment here in Norway is quite vibrant. It is much easier now to access multiple webinars [...] the exchange of ideas has also faded away a bit, because there are no physical meetings and no possibility to network that easily. But this can also be beneficial for how we perceive our work and how we adjust our modes of working based on what other organizations are doing.

Interestingly, the adaptation towards other organizations indicates a process of normative isomorphism – i.e., imitating other's digital implementations in order to gain legitimacy in an institutional digital transformation (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 1995). This can also be interpreted as forms of regulative and normative institutional pressures taken into consideration (Scott, 1995), as the informants become aware of the different types of institutional pressures that affect Plan. Although most informants described the use of digital tools as sufficient, the un-utilized potential of digital innovations were discussed and looked positively on, and the potential of digital innovations might not be realized unless taken into practice. As such, digital adaptation seemed to occur, for instance, in the following of other organization's paths of

digitalization. These adjustments may result in new forms of collaborations in line with the overall purposes of Plan, as described by the following:

We have big, great projects linked to digital skills and online safety for children and young people in these countries. And, in addition, we have the ambition to somehow expand our portfolio, so we're having discussions with plenty of business partners about running new projects regarding digitalization and digital skills for future work.

Overall, this implies how COVID-19 has been a trigger for digital transformation and organizational change in the field of humanitarian work, as it facilitates new forms of collaborations and communication channels between NGOs, donors, and other business partners. Digital transformation brings about novel actor constellations as NGOs become more interdependent and malleable, that ultimately changes existing rules of the game within organizational life (Hanelt et al., 2021; Hinings et al., 2018, p. 53).

However, becoming further digital in Norway might complicate collaboration projects in developing countries. For instance, internet connections are often worse in countries with poor digital infrastructure. As the planning and communication takes place digitally, while the implementation mostly occurs within a *real life physical* context, problems might occur when contextual and cultural challenges are not understood by all parties. This decoupling of contexts within the organization occasionally leads to divergences and discrepancies of the collective conceptualization of Plan's capacities. For instance, what is visualized and planned in Oslo, might not be possible to fulfill in the real context of developing countries – a dilemma illustrated by the following quote:

[...] things can seem very simple on a piece of paper, and it can look great on an excel sheet on how we can measure progression on this and that... but out on a local community, at some school or similar, there are a lot more complex conditions, and you kind of have to lower your expectations a bit and think – OK, we had fantastic plans, and we managed to do some of it, and that is quite good.

This indicates how institutional requirements, originating from the field of humanitarian work and digital transformation, puts pressure on Plan to work in certain ways. Occasionally, these pressures do not match the contextual organizational assumptions in the developing countries, where humanitarian projects are implemented. Unless the process of becoming increasingly

digital does not ultimately emphasize the whole global dimension of Plan, it may result in larger gaps of understanding between different parts of the global organization.

This scenario points to the many risks of digitalizing Plan because of its vast spreading of projects over the world. The collective understanding of Plan as a global, multifaceted organization, stretching across different cultural and political contexts, are usually facilitated by the continuous dialogue between employees stationed across the world. As the quality of communication decreases because of the disruption of traveling, so does the understanding that keeps the global organization together, as the following quote illustrates:

[Plan] must somehow have high ambitions that we should have a fairly high quality of what we deliver, both because our donors expect it, and because we should have high ambitions ourselves[...] But it is a risk if that link and collaboration and communication with colleagues abroad doesn't become really strong and very close [...] We expect things which they [colleagues abroad] just shake their heads at and think "this isn't possible". Then you're in trouble.

Before the pandemic, regular visits and continuous dialogue facilitated the organization to handle different institutional pressures and change accordingly (Weber & Glynn, 2006). As visits became canceled, the consequences were discrepancies in the understanding of the projects between Plan and the collaborating developing countries, which in practice could lead to situations where the goals and planning did not match the reality.

As no current technology could compensate for actual visits, the advisors at Plan struggled to deliver accurate status reports regarding cultural aspects and local obstructs that might hinder certain projects. As a result of canceled visits and a decreasing understanding of what was happening "out there", some informants worried that Plan eventually might lose its organizational status towards donors:

We become less relevant partners for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs when we can't deliver information straight from the field [...] we can of course forward reports from our abroad projects, but we can't go in and say that we've been in this and this country, and you should know about these things.

Hence, digitalization seems to erode Plan's current position, as it fundamentally alters its organizational assumptions and roles, In the search for legitimacy and organizational identity

(Pedersen & Dobbin, 2006), Plan has, since its founding, adapted to the institutional pressures from the field of humanitarian work, and become a legitimate humanitarian organization. Now, as digital transformation enters humanitarian work, digital institutional requirements pressures Plan in different directions, as it simultaneously has to adapt to an increasingly digitalized society, while maintaining its legitimate role as an NGO. The results might be, as described above, being perceived as a less relevant partner by institutional donors.

To summarize and provide an answer to RQ2: *How does clashing institutional pressures affect Plan as a humanitarian organization within a digital age?* Digitalization has proven to create new types of organizing within the field of humanitarian work that enables interdependent collaboration and operational efficiency (Hanelt et al., 2021). As argued by Hinings et al. (2018), digital transformation is equal to radical institutional change (Hinings et al., 2018, p. 55), and the conversion to home office and an increased digital context leads to changing dynamics in the field of humanitarian work. This facilitates new forms of collaborations and communication channels between NGOs and donors, which can be expressed and enforced in the process of institutional (digital) isomorphism, (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Digitalization thus seems to erode Plan's organizational role, as it fundamentally alters organizational assumptions, requirements and practices. Digitalization might also complicate collaboration projects within Plan in developing countries, especially if the adaptation towards digitalization merely implies certain affiliates, instead of the global dimension of the organization. The question of digital transformation becomes: *What is the way to do digitalization in Plan?* – a dilemma based on following the hype of digitalization (gaining digital legitimacy), while simultaneously maintaining an organizational identity in line with goals and visions (Pedersen & Dobbin, 2006).

So far, this chapter has shown how Plan, in the search for legitimacy, is being pulled in different directions by clashing institutional pressures. Next, using prospective sensemaking theory, my aim is to reflect on how the informants predict the future role and work of the organization, based on the understandings of how digitalization has changed contexts, routines, canceled visits and dynamics of communication.

4.2.2 Predicting the future role and work of Plan

The prevalent (digital) institutional change has entailed priming and triggering of sensemaking processes (Weber & Glynn, 2006), as the informants strived to make sense of their roles, responsibilities and tasks in relation to their overall conceptual understanding of Plan's situation. Prospective sensemaking theory assumes that these conceptualizations of the past

serve as “perceptual lenses” when understanding current issues and predicting future strategies (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). From this perspective, Plan is filled with interpretations of responses from a period of uncertainties due to digitalization and home office, that collectively build a plausible image of what Plan has been in the past, is today, and could be tomorrow. Accordingly, prospective sensemaking is a beneficial theoretical tool to understand the informants’ predictions of the future, based on retrospective sensemaking of the past (Gioia et al., 1994).

To this point, my thesis’ empirical data indicate COVID-19 as an episodic trigger of change regarding communication, collaboration and an increasing digital work. A continuous adaptation process followed from it, facilitated by active sensemaking processes and improvisation that ultimately led to new predictions of what digitalization might bring to the organization in the future, as argued by the following:

To some degree, this could be the new normal [without regular visits], but then we need to be aware of what we’re missing, when we’re not traveling to the projects. And then the whole of Plan as a major network of organizations... you kind of have to reorganize the whole system.

As the quote indicates, digitalization, and the structural consequences of it, plays a role in the informants’ predictions of Plan’s future role and work. For instance, there were other ongoing initiatives of expanding Plan’s digital portfolio and commencing new types of collaborations with business partners. This can be interpreted as a form of adaptation to institutional digital transformation, where Plan restructures in order to be increasingly flexible towards future digital expansion (Hanelt et al., 2021; Ross et al., 2019). Many informants realized the future role of digitalization, as illustrated by the following:

[...] if we’d look really far ahead in the future, I guess you could imagine going on digital field visits, but that requires more innovative ways of thinking. You know, to be able to see some school or whatever, that is actually possible to do if someone there carries a GoPro camera.

This quote interestingly indicates the informants’ predictions of how digitalization will change and give value to Plan, even if this requires new ways to conceptualize humanitarian work and NGOs. This indicates that the sensemaking of digital transformation is an ongoing process

(Weick et al., 2005), the more the informants are exposed to digitalization and taking digital innovations into practice, the more advantages are revealed. It is a constant modification of organizational and digital assumptions that facilitates an understanding of the past and enables predictions of the future (Gioia et al., 1994).

These realizations might not have occurred without the changes due to COVID-19 and the forced increased use of digital solutions. For instance, a majority of the informants wished to maintain a hybrid office solution in the future, after realizing its benefits:

[...] we also understood that there is maybe a need for greater flexibility at work at times. And that people can actually be efficient working not from the office but from home. And I think as well that the kind of tools that we are using right now can also be very helpful in the future.

This shows the potential of imagining work processes in the future due to newly learned digital experiences. Despite this, other informants wanted to return to regular office, which might indicate differentiation of retrospective sensemaking conclusions on whether home office is functional to Plan or not, which in turn seem to affect future predictions.

In relation to the implementation of humanitarian projects, digital transformation disrupts established assumptions and roles, and some informants wished to investigate further how digitalization might change old patterns of work (such as traveling) and what sort of opportunities it can bring:

[...] we've got this responsibility to kind of make sure resources are used in the best way, and that you're supposed to participate in that monitoring process [...] But I still think that a lot of that type of work doesn't have to be done by traveling and visiting. So perhaps one could reduce some of that traveling after the pandemic.

This shows how sensemaking processes are restricted by institutional pressures to maintain legacy attributes and practices of an NGO. But at the same time, the more digitalization is made sense of, it gradually shapes new institutionalized patterns, such as changing patterns of monitoring, communicating and traveling (Weber & Glynn, 2006). Through the lens of prospective sensemaking (Gioia & Thomas, 1996), this can be interpreted as a process of understanding the future potential advantages of digital solutions when monitoring projects abroad, based on the sensemaking processes that have revealed the benefits of adapting to

digital work life. However, visiting projects in developing countries will keep being a necessity in order to understand the global aspects of the organization, until new innovations might find a way to fill that need:

[...] and I still think we have to travel anyway, unless a technology develops in a way that lets you, almost like in Star Wars, kind of “zoom-zapping” into a room and sit down and join in a meeting. Because what’s missing is that people need to meet each other – there’s something happening then. I think it is, I don’t know, chemistry or something.

Despite the informants’ understanding that digitalization will inevitably lead to new modes of working, there seemed to be an awareness that digital tools and solutions occasionally are not necessary when performing the humanitarian work of Plan. One informant reflected on digitalization and humanitarian work in the following way:

So I think that in a way there are good elements coming from it [digitalization] – increased use of teams, increased sharing through digital tools, maybe increased capacity among the country offices – because they also need to get used to it. But at the same time, I’m not really sure if digitalization is the aspect that would be the most helpful for the future, it’s not necessarily crucial for the programmes in West Africa in my opinion.

As such, many informants seemed to understand that certain digital implementations within other organizations might not work well in Plan. This awareness can prevent Plan from blindly imitating others, in processes of isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell), when implementing new digital solutions. Instead, attempts were made to make sense of: *What does increasing digitalization mean to Plan? To what extent should Plan implement digital solutions in the context of humanitarian work?*, which points to predictions based on retrospective understandings of the past (Gioia & Thomas, 1996).

Conclusively, providing an answer to the second part of my thesis: *... and how does this affect the organization’s perception of its future role within humanitarian work?* To Plan, the consequence of COVID-19 and the conversion to home office is an ongoing disturbance of organizational identity and collective sensemaking processes, as institutional requirements pressure the organization in somewhat different directions. As digital turbulence occurs within

the field of humanitarian work (El Sawy & Pereira, 2013), Plan tries to stabilize and maneuver in a digital context, and sensemaking will eventually lead to new institutionalized patterns of work (Weber & Glynn, 2006). As such, the retrospective sensemaking processes – mainly establishing an understanding of digitalization as an inevitable force that successively permeates the field of humanitarian work – set the agenda for future predictions of how digitization will prevail in Plan. For instance, maintaining home office solutions and digital communication tools, but also knowing the importance of continuous traveling and visits to developing countries. To adapt and implement further towards digitalization means that NGO legacy routines might become redundant, which ultimately changes the characteristics of Plan's organizational identity. Further, Plan's role as an intermediary between donors and developing countries seems to deteriorate, as digitalization disrupts patterns of communication, traveling and monitoring of humanitarian projects. This leads to changes of roles, routines and responsibilities. For instance, challenging Plan's current status in the eyes of donors, as well as giving more responsibilities to individual employees, both within Norway, as well as to colleagues stationed abroad. Consequently, new conceptualizations will emerge regarding the potential future role and work of Plan.

This chapter has presented and analyzed the findings in this thesis. In the following chapter, I intend to discuss the implications of my findings and interpretations, describe the thesis' limitations and give suggestions on future research.

5. Discussion

The above chapter has described and provided answers to my thesis: *How do the employees of an NGO make sense of digital work life due to COVID-19, and how does this affect the organization's perception of its future role within humanitarian work?* My findings point to similar results as Takkunen (2021) and suggest that sensemaking of digitalization is vital in order to align understandings of digital transformation with existing organizational identity practices. Sensemaking processes have occurred as the employees have improvised and adapted ways to handle digitalization in ways beneficial to Plan's humanitarian work by increasing their use of digital technologies. However, since patterns of social interactions have been disrupted, so too has arenas where sensemaking usually thrives, which have resulted in individual discrepancies in the aligning of digitalization to Plan's practices. In light of neoinstitutional theory, rapid increasing digital transformation has put pressure on Plan to become further digitized, which disrupts its organizational identity attributes and legacy routines, such as frequent visits to developing countries and changing status in the eyes of donors. Sensemaking processes continue to be triggered and edited the more digital Plan becomes, which ultimately will lead to new predictions of Plan's future role. Consequently, these prospective sensemaking processes will lead to new (digitalized) institutionalized patterns within the field of humanitarian work.

In this chapter, I aim to discuss my findings in light of previous research and theories. First, I will discuss the implications of the structural changes due to the conversion to home office. The informants' ability to make sense of digitalization are reflected on, highlighting the importance of aligning digitalization with established conceptualizations of the organization. Further, institutional pressures in the form of digital transformation are discussed in relation to processes of organizational identity, implying the importance of maintaining dual transformation. Here, I will also raise a critical voice against the pressure to digitalize. Lastly, implications regarding shifting power structures are reflected on, suggesting that increased digitization can lead to a transfer of power and agency towards Plan's local subsidiaries in developing countries.

5.1 Structural changes towards digitalization

To Plan, and overall organizational life, COVID-19 has been a trigger for increased – and in many ways – forced digitalization (Amankwah-Amoah et al. 2021). Plan’s adapting to current digital transformation implies establishing new norms, habits, strategies, structures and patterns of communication (Hanelt et al, 2021; Leonardi & Treem, 2020). This process can be confusing, prolonged, resource demanding and followed by resistance and frustration (Ross et al, 2019). It is also a process characterized by moments of learning, changing roles and responsibilities that can enable employees a higher degree of interdependence and agency (Schwer & Hitz, 2018). The sudden conversion to home office and disruptions of work processes can be conceptualized as an episodic change, later followed by continuous change through adaptations, improvisation and modifications in the form of *digitizing*, i.e., transforming analog practices into digital (Ross et al., 2019; Weck & Quinn, 1999). The use of Plan’s digital tools has increased and led to an understanding of the potential of utilizing digital innovations more, whereby sensemaking processes and learning have been triggered. Consequently, new patterns of work and communication have emerged and changed Plan.

Interestingly, the conversion to home office mainly interrupted patterns of communication, rather than “strict” professional work. Either this indicates that Plan’s work can easily be transferred to digital channels, or it may show that no strategic changes had yet been implemented to adapt to digitalization in the way urged by Ross et al., (2019). Becoming digital is about re-thinking design, strategy and practices in order to align the organization with the possibilities of digital innovations (Ross et al. 2019). To work in a digital context *without* adapting to a digital transformation is therefore a misfitted combo (Hanelt et al., 2021; Ross et al., 2019). The informants indicate that technology surely will keep affecting Plan in positive ways. Yet, many seemed tired of home office and digital meetings, and wished to return to regular office. The future will ultimately tell if what was learned during COVID-19 will change Plan towards further digital transformation, for instance, in the increasing implementation of hybrid office solutions, or if a majority of processes will return “back to normal” with regular office and traveling. The results in this study points to a combination of both – that home office will be kept to some degree in Oslo, while traveling to developing countries will resume as long as no digital solutions fill the same needs acquired during regular visits.

However, one could ask if Plan can have the goods of these two work contexts? Can an organization keep social interactions that usually occur in an office – which are of importance for the collective sensemaking processes (Weick et al. 2005) – while simultaneously re-

implementing home office routines? Surely, the option of home office is a flexibility that appeals most but might lead to groupings among employees – those at the office and those at home – which would increase the differentiation of sensemaking processes in Plan that have started to show during lockdown.

The enabling of social interactions, discussions, critical thinking and collaborations among colleagues (in which sensemaking occurs) becomes a necessity when navigating through institutional digital transformation while maintaining operational efficiency. How can Plan facilitate these kinds of communication channels when restructuring further to digitalization? An advice from the literature is to enable holacratic structures in order to make the organization malleable and adaptable towards continuous digital change (Schwer & Hitz, 2018; Hanelt et al., 2021). Holacratic structures emphasize self-responsibilities, decentralized management and roles instead of titles and job descriptions (Schwer & Hitz, 2018). This calls for a further need to establish a culture where employees are encouraged to feel self-confident and competent to perform work without the same guidance from management they might have gotten previously. Ultimately, it makes Plan better prepared to utilize opportunities and threats within the turbulence that characterizes digital business ecosystems (El Sawy et al., 2010). Perhaps, Plan's future challenge might be to find "the sweet spot" between regular office and home office, and thereby combining the benefits of the two contexts.

On the other side – to what degree should NGOs get inspired by digital companies? In comparison to today's software companies, that paves the way for digital transformation (Hanelt et al., 2021), the process of developing an application or software is quite different from doing humanitarian work in a developing country, wherein cultural and contextual problems need to be taken into consideration. Probably, NGOs have more to gain from investigating possibilities of digital technologies (Godefroid, 2021), but investing in further digitized products might be difficult, since the budgets of NGOs often are limited (Merkel, 2007) and money mainly are meant to be spent on humanitarian projects rather ensuring NGOs to be at the forefront of digital transformation. Nevertheless, Plan needs to continue the journey of digitalization and draw benefits of its potential use, perhaps at the expense of distributing a majority of its resources into the process of digital transformation, which are often long-lasting, expensive and demanding (Ross et al., 2019).

5.1.1 Is traveling necessary?

The answer that emerges to that question is "yes". The way work is structured today, the insights acquired during visits are essential to Plan. Several informants stress the necessity to

re-implement and maintain regular visits to developing countries – at least until a digital alternative can meet the same needs. Without traveling there is a sort of decoupling between the understanding of the real-life context abroad and the digital organization in Oslo. The problem of combining physical and digital contexts is when contextual and cultural challenges are not presented accurately enough to all relevant stakeholders. When implementing humanitarian projects, it mostly happens within a *physical* context, even though the planning and correspondence of communication happens *digitally*. When traveling and having deeper discussions, it is easier to establish a common understanding of tasks and who should do what. Now, the advisors working in Norway seem to strive to comprehend how the two contexts can be aligned into a single conceptualization of the organization. The consequences of maintaining collaborations solely digital are miscommunication, long email correspondence and video meetings that nonetheless do not meet the needs of actual visits.

Assuming Plan's continued organizational role to be an intermediary in the field of humanitarian work entails doing two things simultaneously – implementing humanitarian projects abroad while delivering required reports of certain quality to donors. To maintain this role and processes with less traveling, Plan might either have to teach employees stationed abroad how to deliver qualified reports in line with institutional requirements, which would imply transferring responsibilities to the locally stationed employees. Or, institutional donors have to become more adaptable in regards to what kind of reports they can expect. In such, the changes caused by digitalization will not merely affect NGOs like Plan, but also the assumptions and processes held by other actors in humanitarian work, such as donors and receivers. Hence, it is yet unsure if digital solutions will eventually compensate for actual traveling and face-to-face interaction, since visits still are such a vital and characterizing feature of humanitarian work.

However, what is remarkable in the conversion to home office is that physical distance between colleagues becomes somewhat insignificant. Colleagues in Oslo, Mali or Nepal have in some sense been put at the same distance – a *digital distance*. Perhaps, this is why interactions with colleagues abroad have increased, while interactions with Norwegian colleagues have decreased, since digital contact is easier to maintain, no matter the distance. Maintaining work from a digital distance can be considered an *enabler*, as it lets more people connect and participate in digital webinars or gatherings. This widens the possibilities of sharing knowledge across the global organization. For this to work however, a majority of Plan's affiliates must adapt to a digital work environment which entails a change of habits, culture and processes.

5.2 Making sense of home office and digitalization

An organization's ability to make sense of digitalization and contextual changes has proven to influence its ability to adapt towards digital transformation (Verhoef et al., 2021; El Sawy et al., 2016). Assuming that "sensemaking is homologous to organizing: the latter is achieved to the extent that the former is accomplished" (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015, p. 8), implicates that Plan's understanding of the conversion to home office and an increased digitalization of work, is what constitutes the organization as a whole in a changing context that moves towards digital transformation. In that sense, digitalization implies a change of scenery in which sense is being made out of organizational processes (Weick et al., 2005).

Through the informants' tellings, it becomes clear that the understanding of Plan takes place in situations where an idea or question leads to further discussions, in which further insights and knowledge are shared. It occurs in the organization's culture, the jokes and "jargon", which results in a collective understanding of the organizational identity, its goals and purpose. In line with previous research on sensemaking and digitalization (Warner & Wäger, 2019; Takkunen, 2021), this study suggests that a successful alignment of established organizational processes and digital transformation are facilitated by the understanding of the benefits and possibilities of merging digitalization to the organization's business model. At the individual level, this occurs when trying out and learning new digital technologies. Through improvisation and modifications, digitalization is gradually understood in ways related to Plan's everyday work tasks. This takes place during small adjustments, such as turning oneself to mute or unmute in digital meetings, or finding new ways to work collaboratively in digital documents, or in the setup of essential home office equipment. These findings are generalizable beyond the field of humanitarian work since the understanding of digitalization is what facilitates a successful dual transformation to all sorts of organization – insights which possibly can be transferred within other sectors as well.

The conversion to home office is in many ways a disruption of social dynamic patterns within the organization. Assuming that a lot of sensemaking processes take place during informal interactions, the employees' engagement and ability to initiate digital informal interactions becomes the basic necessity to understand Plan as an organization. Unless interactions are chosen and performed, in the sense of inviting to a video meeting, phone call or chat, it does not occur – and consequently might leave the employees in their own eco-chamber, wherein ideas, conclusions, and problems to a lesser degree are shared and discussed with colleagues. These communication problems were soon realized by the informants as they

emphasized the importance of enabling interactions to flow more easily and regularly, and encouraged their colleagues to stay in touch using digital tools. However, initiating digital communication does not seem to occur with the same ease as regular face-to-face interaction. Hence, the first organizational structures and practices that seem to fall when converting to home office and becoming increasingly digital are not already established routines of professional work, but rather the communication that holds it all together. As a result, it becomes harder to get an overview of *what is going on* for the individuals. In light of sensemaking theory (Weick et al., 2005), the employees' realization of the necessity to establish a digital culture of communication patterns occur in retrospect, as they comprehend aspects of digitalization that do not meet their needs of easygoing interactions.

Evidently, an essential aspect of becoming digital is to enable new arenas of social interactions. The interesting question to ask here is what it means for sensemaking processes if organizations keep digitizing without facilitating easygoing social interactions? If sensemaking is homologous to organizing, as argued by Sandberg & Tsoukas (2015, p. 8) – how can organizations fully adapt to digitalization and rethink organizational strategies without losing the social interactions that keeps the organization together? Perhaps organizations like Plan will keep struggling to maintain social interactions the way they used to, unless future sensemaking processes ultimately makes *digital* social interaction comprehensible. In other words, digital social interactions become the new normal if they one day are understood as *the* way to maintain social interactions. Consequently, this would perhaps force organizations to structure work according to the “amount” of sensemaking processes continuously maintained by digital social interactions.

One initial step for organizations to adapt to digitalization might be to identify aspects of digital work that are hard to make sense of – i.e., to align with an established understanding of the organization's daily work. Thus, organizations like Plan could possibly optimize the digital adaptation process by asking – *in what ways can we facilitate sensemaking processes among our employees? Does some department or group of individuals seem to make sense of digitalization better than others, and if so, how can we enable sharing of digital knowledge and experiences?* This sort of digital adaptation would require re-thinking strategies in line with digital transformation (Ross et al., 2019), lead to a better transition in a digital age and a more seamless connection within Plan as a global organization. Possibly, Plan will become more flexible in the future in regards to home office, if understanding of digitalization becomes an inherent part of the organization's knowledge, culture and everyday assumptions. This indicates how digital institutional pressures limit and shape the behaviors and actions of

individuals. For instance, as Plan's colleagues increasingly take digital communication tools into practice. Sensemaking processes are thereby continuously primed, edited and triggered, which eventually lead to new ways of performing humanitarian work and new digitalized institutional patterns (Weber & Glynn, 2006). This changing process occurs already as the informants predict how future digitalization will eventually change the structures and assumptions of Plan and set new rules for organizing in the field of humanitarian work. Hence, the more digital technologies enter the field of humanitarian work, digital technologies will increasingly become a necessity to implement and maintain in order to be perceived as an legitimate NGO (Hinings et al., 2018). These learnings and continuous adaptations result in new predictions of the future role and work of Plan, on which I will reflect further on in the following section.

5.2.1 Predicting future digitalization

In terms of digital transformation, Plan is in many ways yet an immature organization. There are uncertainties regarding the collective use of digital tools, behaviors, communication and norms. Meanwhile, there are ongoing sensemaking processes that help identify the future potential of digitalization, which can make the Plan more malleable in a digital business ecosystem (El Sawy et al., 2010). During the interviews, a clear line of narrative often took place, where the informants naturally reflected on the past, present and future as if it were one coherent understanding. As argued by Sandberg & Tsoukas (2015), the focus on the prospective is a healthy challenging advancement of the sensemaking perspective, crucial for the understanding the predictable stance that individuals make in their practices (Gioia et al. 1994).

The interviews revealed some discrepancies in the employees' predictions of Plan's future work and role. It seemed as if those informants that successfully had conceptualized and aligned digital work with their individual understanding of Plan, could predict the benefits of further digitalization within Plan better than the informants who struggled to make sense of digital work and mainly wished Plan to re-establish former processes. Some informants wished to return to regular office routines, which others meant was a waste of newly learned digital skills. Perhaps, this is the result of different individual conceptualizations (e.g., differences in sensemaking of flux in regards to digital transformation) of benefits and disadvantages of digital work and home office. Assuming the discrepancies were because of different sensemaking of digitalization in relation to Plan's work, one could ask – *Why does this occur? Why do some see the benefits of digital work and wish to keep it post-covid, while others wish*

to return to “normal”? An important aspect of future implication might depend on the way the employees understand the possibilities of digitalization as well as identifies its disadvantages. As such, organizations need to enable employees to collectively share their conceptualizations of digitalization during informal and formal settings. Unless the pros and cons of digitalization are not discussed and collectively made sense of, the discrepancies of individual understanding of digitalization will probably keep growing, which could split groups within the organization further apart.

Conclusively, the adaptation towards home office and digital transformation is facilitated by the understanding – the *sensemaking of* – digital turbulence within the humanitarian field. As continuous change unfolds, the employees comprehend positive as well as negative aspects of home office. They realize that there is more potential in digital solutions, but also the importance of having social interactions with colleagues, laughing together, thinking together, and to be there as a team in rough times. To organizations like Plan, a crucial part of adapting towards digitalization might be to identify and facilitate successful sensemaking processes among its employees.

In the following, I will discuss the clashing institutional pressures affecting Plan in a digital age.

5.3 The tug of war between institutional legitimacy and organizational identity

In their systematic review of the interplay between digital transformation and organizational change, Hanelt et al. (2021) interestingly asks if “industrial-age incumbents might become more Silicon Valley-like the more they build upon the pervasive digital technology created by tech giants?” (Hanelt et al., 2021, p. 1184). They refer to the phenomenon when established, originally non-digital organizations imitate structural designs most common within the software industry. In accordance with neoinstitutional theory, assuming that organizations strive for legitimacy by imitating templates for accurate organizing in a certain context (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977), processes of isomorphism might help Plan align with other actors in the humanitarian field work that pursue further digital transformation, and thereby continuously maintain its legitimacy while simultaneously defining its uniqueness. Certainly, Plan shares many resembling attributes with organizations further down the road of digitalization, as well as within the field of humanitarian work. To

adapt further may require a stepwise process, where new digital technologies are identified, tested and evaluated. As argued by Ross et al (2019), the process of adapting towards digital transformation is facilitated by dual transformation – i.e., the organization’s ability to hold on to established routines and practices that “keep the organizing going”, while simultaneously enabling an overall restructuring towards digitalization (Ross et al., 2019).

When asked about digital tools, the informants argued to already have the sufficient digital technologies needed, which were mainly Microsoft Teams for digital video meetings and Outlook for emailing. These tools filled the need of exchanging information and straightforward communications messages, which enabled Plan to maintain already established processes and routines. However, there were also tendencies of wanting to become further digital, replicate digital solutions used by other organizations, and increase the organization’s digital skills. For instance, learning PowerPoint better and implementing new digital solutions. In light of current digital transformation theory, digital business ecosystems are characterized by turbulence and changing demands (El Sawy et al., 2010; El Sawy & Pereira, 2013), in which organizations need to be more malleable and adaptable (Hanelt et al., 2021). Perhaps then, there are unexplored digital solutions beneficial to Plan, but will not show until Plan fully reorganizes to become a *digital* organization, in the sense of implementing a digital business design – readymade to utilize ubiquitous data, unlimited connectivity, and massive processing power (Ross et al., 2019).

One way to picture the situation of today’s NGOs in a period of digital transformation is like the game tug of war. On one side, there is a tension and expectation of adapting further towards digitalization – a force caused by digital institutional pressures that draws Plan into processes of isomorphism when implementing the market’s hyped digital solutions. Pulling from the other side are Plan’s organizational identity – its culture, attributes, habits and norms – preventing the organization not to lose its uniqueness. Plan is placed in the center of the rope, constantly under pressure from both sides. The forces of increased digitalization might come from donors, urging increased operational efficiency through digitalization (Burkart et al., 2018). Simultaneously, pulling from the NGO-identity side, there is an overall expectation of NGOs to spend donated money on humanitarian work (rather than digitalization). As increased digitalization occurred due to COVID-19, the tug of war intensified. Now, more than ever, Plan has to adapt towards digital ways of working, while still maintaining its original purposes, goal and visions as a humanitarian organization. As long as institutional pressure and organizational identity holds an equally firm grip on each side, the tug of war continues and the organization maintains “active and alive”. This would mean a mix of implementing and adapting to further

digitalization, but not to the extent of overriding humanitarian objectives. However, if the pressures of either side increases, the organization might either fall to institutional pressures that would disintegrate its identity, or maintain legacy routines at the expense of digital legitimacy. Either way, this would mean “game over” to the organization since it has failed to maintain the balance and ambidexterity necessary in the process of dual transformation (Ross et al. 2019).

5.3.1 Raising a critical voice

Despite the many benefits of adapting to, and aligning with, today’s digital transformation, there are reasons to be wary. For instance, can Plan really draw benefits by imitating agile methods and holacratic structures that currently permeates modern software industries (Mergel, 2021; Schwer & Hitz, 2018) or restructure towards becoming a platform company such as Uber, Airbnb, Spotify etc.? Certain digitalized ideas, software, or ways of structuring work might bring benefits to innovative companies, mainly focusing on creating and offering digital offers – but as they spread, they might “stick” to organizations not needing them to the same extent, such as NGOs. Critical voices have previously been raised against digitalization, such as Henningsen & Larsen (2020), portraying how digitalization achieves a status of policy imperative within the culture sector. As such, digitalization becomes perceived as an external force, deterministically dictating the actions to actors within different fields (Henningsen & Larsen, 2020, p. 4). One might forget that *organizing* as a collective sensemaking process (Weick et al., 2005) – whether it is humanitarian work or something else – does not depend on digitalization. As a matter of fact, Plan managed to perform and maintain humanitarian work long before digitalization and current “hyped” digital communication and collaboration tools existed. In that sense, the processes that facilitates organizing – communication, collaboration, maintaining of customer relationships and similar – occurred long before they were transformed into digital innovations and smart-sounding, business-enabling acronyms.

Digital transformation, understood as radical institutional change (Hinings et al., 2018), creates an atmosphere wherein organizations are expected to become digitalized. Altering structures and strategies in alignment with institutional digital transformation, would surely give Plan its legitimacy in a digital society (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 1995). Nevertheless, Plan must hold on to established processes tied to its organizational identity that serves the current purposes of an NGO (Pedersen & Dobbin, 2006). The risk of rapidly aligning with digital transformation is to implement new digital solutions, just because they seem to be “the new thing used on the field”, whereby Plan might be at risk of blindly imitating other

organizations. What needs to be taken under consideration is not whether digitalization should be dismissed or fully implemented, but rather that digital solutions need to be evaluated from the standpoint of humanitarian work, and thereby to define; what is *the* (necessary) way to adapt to digital transformation within Plan?

A risk might be to either stubbornly hold on to identity-marking practices that would rob Plan of its digital legitimacy and eventually pull it out of business, or to blindly follow hyped-up digitalization innovations without bringing value to Plan's humanitarian purpose – which also might would extract Plan's legitimacy as an NGO. In this way, being critical towards digitalization may prevent NGOs like Plan to spend resources on excessive digitalization, instead of humanitarian projects. The best way might be to search for new ways to utilize digital innovations – ways that fit NGOs like Plan. Overall, this situation puts a pressure on the employers as well as leadership to stay positive and curious towards new digital innovations that might be beneficial to the organization, but at the same time stay anchored to its strategic goals and visions in order not to wander away in a digital landscape overflowed with digital innovations.

5.4 Transferring agency and power to employees abroad

During the interviews, some informants interestingly reflected on how the overall changes due to COVID-19 and digitalization seemed to contribute to a change of power structures within the organization. When traveling became restricted due to COVID-19 restrictions, the employees could no longer monitor the implementation of humanitarian projects by simply visiting and observing. Consequently, they had to rely on the locally stationed employees to have the capability to proceed with the ongoing projects, and trust became an even more important aspect in the global collaborations project. Many emphasized the increasing possibility on whether COVID-19 perhaps could be the trigger of transferring further agency and power towards the local employees.

Changing power structures and re-distributing responsibilities can provide new possibilities as well as challenges, as the local employees are given a stronger mandate in relation to the projects. For instance, increasing agency to the local employees “on the field” would strengthen their position and portray them more as knowledgeable agents of humanitarian work. This could facilitate local adaptations and modifications to environmental threats and changes, which surely would make Plan more flexible and adaptive in an ever

rapidly changing environment. However, applying this kind of globally holacratic structure (Schwer & Hitz, 2018), requires new forms of assuming humanitarian work that allows redistribution of power to the locally stationed workers in Tanzania, Mali, Nepal etc. After all, the local employees possess vital contextual and cultural understandings of the environments wherein projects are implemented – understandings that are hard to acquire when sitting in Norway. Transferring power to determine the implementation of humanitarian projects to those with most knowledge of the local conditions could therefore lead to more successful project implementations, since they might spot possibilities or obstacles sooner, and act and adapt accordingly.

However, fully relying on local employees, due to the redistribution of power and agency might entail some risks as well. For instance, resulting in larger differences of the individual's global understanding of Plan. The centralized management in Oslo might possess the function of connecting all the global aspects of Plan together, thereby maintaining a collective sensemaking of Plan as an organization of humanitarian work. Transferring too much agency away might thus lead to several instances of decouplings of the global organization, as each local office proceeds humanitarian work in the way conceptualized by its local employees. What further becomes evident from the interviews, is that the lack of traveling and regular visits leads to excessive digital communications in the form of long video meetings and email correspondence, during which both sides try to compensate for the lack of understanding usually gained during visits. This leads to miscommunications and frustration when reports are not written in accordance with donors' expectations, and when the Oslo employees do not get the full picture of cultural conditions that affect a project.

Nonetheless, COVID-19 and home office have indicated that the local employees are able to take on more responsibility and become increasingly independent. Thus, digitalization has triggered sensemaking processes and changed conceptualizations regarding professional roles, power and agency within Plan. To Plan, the organizational question to internally reflect on, is in what ways transferring of agency, power and responsibilities are understood by the employees, and how they can draw benefits from these changes. Understanding how digitalization might benefit Plan's practices, as in the shifting of roles, responsibilities and power, might improve its organizational ability to adapt towards digitalization (Warner & Wäger, 2019; Takkunen, 2021).

6. Conclusion

The overall purpose of this thesis has been to explore: *How do the employees of an NGO make sense of digital work life due to COVID-19, and how does this affect the organization's perception of its future role within humanitarian work?* In order to approach my thesis, two analytical research questions have been presented and answered:

RQ1: What are the characteristics of change and digitalization that has taken place within Plan?

RQ2: How does clashing institutional pressures affect Plan as a humanitarian organization within a digital age?

I have answered RQ1 in part 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 by drawing on theory on digital transformation and organizational change, and described the nature of episodic and continuous change, as well as adaptations to digitalization. COVID-19 resulted in an episodic change of organizational life from which Plan adapted continuously by improvising and modifying processes of work. However, mainly in the form of *digitizing* – i.e., transforming analog practices into digital (Ross et al., 2019), although some initiatives additionally point to processes of *digitalizing* – i.e., rethinking organizational operations from new perspectives enabled by digital technology (Parviainen et al., 2017, p. 74). The lack of daily social interactions, and the cessation of traveling was perceived as major challenges, even though digital communication has increased as a result of canceled visits.

I have answered RQ2 in part 4.2.1 by drawing on neoinstitutional theory and describing how digital transformation, understood as radical institutional change (Hinings et al., 2018, p. 55), creates new types of organizing in the field of humanitarian work. This occurs, for instance, in the process of isomorphism, as when organizations imitate each other's digital solutions in order to gain digital legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Digitalization changes patterns of communication and collaborations between NGOs and donors and might ultimately erode Plan's current organizational role. The tension between institutional pressures and organizational identity in a time of digital transformation have been illustrated as a tug of war. The tension is understood as necessary in order to keep "the game" (i.e., the organization in a digital age) going.

Further, drawing on "classic", as well as prospective sensemaking theory in order to answer my thesis, I have in part 4.1.3, 4.1.4 and 4.2.2 described how the employees strived to

make sense of digitalization, home office, canceled visits and clashing institutional pressures in relation to their understanding of Plan as a humanitarian organization. In periods of turbulence, as in this case, the conversion to home office, sensemaking processes are activated to make sense of organizational flux (Weick et al., 1993) and meaning out of performed actions (Schildt et al., 2020). By increasing the use of digital technologies, Plan's employees could make sense of digitalization by improvising and modifying ways of working digitally in ways beneficial to their daily work tasks. However, as fewer social interactions took place, sensemaking processes were aggravated, and further led to discrepancies between the individuals' understanding of how digitalization can align with Plan's characteristics and practices, such as providing new opportunities to make operations more efficient as well as restructuring roles, responsibilities, and practices. Many informants realized the potential of digitalization, while some struggled to incorporate it to their conceptualization of what Plan is, and mainly emphasize a critical viewpoint towards further digitalization. In line with previous research (e.g., Warner & Wäger, 2019; Takkunen, 2021), my study shows that sensemaking of digitalization is vital in order to align understandings of digital transformation with existing organizational identity practices.

In many ways, digitalization has been realized as a force that gradually permeates the field of humanitarian work – providing and offering both valuable as well as unnecessary solutions to NGOs. For instance, providing flexibility of work locations, and easy access to colleagues around the world. However, it does not yet fill the need for social interactions and traveling. It has also revealed the importance and value of social interaction among colleagues in Oslo, as well as traveling and developing relationships with colleagues abroad.

The employees understanding of digitalization indicates that sensemaking is indeed the “feedstock for institutionalization” (Weick, 1995, p. 35), but simultaneously shows how digital institutions undoubtedly prime, edit, and trigger sensemaking processes continuously – showing that sensemaking does not occur context free (Weber & Glynn, 2006). Based on retrospective sensemaking processes of digitalization and home office, the informants make predictions about future work life. These understandings of Plan have affected its current and future perception of its role within the humanitarian field. As sensemaking continuously unfolds, new understandings of work, communication and digitalization emerges within Plan and other NGOs, which gradually will lead to radical institutional change within the field of humanitarian work (Weber & Glynn, 2006). Thus, because of increasing digitalization, Plan's original role as an intermediary between donors and receivers might eventually deteriorate and practices become redundant. It may also lead to changing power structures, where agency and

more responsibilities are delegated to local affiliates – a restructuring process resembling implementing organizational holacratic structures (Schwer & Hitz, 2018).

Some might argue that Plan is at a crossroad where they either can decide to fully adapt to digital transformation and become a *digital* company (Leonardi & Treem, 2020), or to maintain routines and practices as they are, letting digital solutions replace analog practices rather than to restructure the organization – in other words, becoming *digitized* (Ross et al., 2019). Probably, Plan must go both ways, and they have to consider in what ways digital solutions can contribute to the actual purpose of the organization. This is a balancing act, since adapting to digital transformations are costly and resource demanding (Ross et al. 2019). In the tug of war between digital institutional legitimacy and organizational identity (Pedersen & Dobbin, 2006), Plan has to maintain a necessary tension that satisfies templates of legitimate digital organizing, while simultaneously maintaining its unique traits in the field of humanitarian work.

6.1 Limitations and future research

My thesis has several limitations. For instance, my interpretations of the informants' conceptualizations of digital work are based on interviews conducted in the midst of COVID-19, when home office still was the main context of work. Possibly, different types of tellings would change my results if the informants would have been interviewed a second time. In that scenario, the informants' extended experience of home office would function as a more stable foundation when retrospectively making sense of increased digitalization (Weick et al., 2005).

This thesis sheds light on the sensemaking process from the tellings of employees in Norway but does not capture the global aspects of how the changes are conceptualized by the employees abroad. In reference to the above section on changing power structure, it would be interesting to investigate how these changes are perceived from the perspectives of the employees stationed abroad. For instance, do they experience increasing agency and power because of less visits from countries like Norway, or does it rather result in uncertainties and perceptions of increasing distance between colleagues? Understanding how to transfer agency and responsibilities abroad (which would also reduce the need for frequent traveling around the world) may provide insights into how to perform humanitarian work more efficiently and sustainably.

Further, my study merely concerns the employees at the program department at Plan Norway. Even though some of my findings are generalizable to other organizations also

striving to adapt to home office, my informants' conceptualization of what digitalization entails for their humanitarian projects might not be transferable to other types of organizations working solely within Norway or Oslo. As such, it would be interesting to see how sensemaking unfolds within other organizational fields in the adaptation towards digital transformation – for instance, within municipalities, who have to relate to often slow, bureaucratic regulations, while simultaneously having to implement rapidly changing digital innovations.

The chosen methodological approach, as well as theoretical standpoint, limits my understanding of the empirical material. For instance, quantitative research, observation studies or longitudinal studies could possibly be beneficial when further investigating how institutional pressures of digitalization affects NGOs. Additionally, when using the approach put forward by Gioia et al., (2013), the overall understanding of *organization* and *organizing* as a process that continuously unfolds, relies on the premise that organizations and institutions are socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In this case, it helps investigate how digitalization is made sense of – how the informants comprehend and rationalize their experiences with their established understandings of the world. Other standpoints and theories might be more useful when, for instance, investigating the structural power changes described above. This would portray Plan's encounter with increasing digitalization from a different point of view.

In this thesis, I have mainly investigated digitalization and humanitarian work from an individual and organizational level. A final suggestion for future research is therefore to investigate digital adaptation within the field of humanitarian work from a group level of analysis. For instance, theories and understandings of *virtual teams* – understood as members of an organization working towards a common goal while being geographically dispersed could be an interesting advancement in the understanding of adaptation towards digitalization and home office (Malhotra et al., 2007; Hartman & Guss, 1996). This literature gives valuable insights on how to assemble virtual teams effectively (e.g., Kilcullen et al., 2021).

7. References

- Abidin, C., & De Seta, G. (2020). Private messages from the field: Confessions on digital ethnography and its discomforts. *Journal of Digital Social Research*, 2(1), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.33621/jdsr.v2i1.35>
- Akhmatova, D. M., & Akhmatova, M. S. (2020). Promoting digital humanitarian action in protecting human rights: hope or hype. *Journal of International Humanitarian Action*, 5(1), 1-7.
- Alvesson, M., & Kärreman, D. (2007). Constructing mystery: Empirical matters in theory development. *Academy of management review*, 32(4), 1265-1281.
- Alvesson, M., & Sköldberg, K. (2017). *Reflexive methodology: New vistas for qualitative research*. Sage.
- Amankwah-Amoah, J., Khan, Z., Wood, G., & Knight, G. (2021). COVID-19 and digitalization: The great acceleration. *Journal of Business Research*, 136, 602-611.
- Archibald, M. M., Ambagtsheer, R. C., Casey, M. G., & Lawless, M. (2019). Using zoom videoconferencing for qualitative data collection: perceptions and experiences of researchers and participants. *International journal of qualitative methods*, 18, 1609406919874596.
- Bauer, R. M., & Gegenhuber, T. (2015). Crowdsourcing: Global search and the twisted roles of consumers and producers. *Organization*, 22(5), 661-681.
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Anchor.
- Berglund, T., Bostad, S., Fjellvang, P. A., Thomassen, E. F., Thorsen, E. A., & Woie, K. L. (2021). *The development of Plan Norway during the COVID-pandemic. An analysis of the changes, opportunities and challenges related to the conversion to virtual work and home office settings*. University of Oslo. <https://www.sv.uio.no/iss/om/samarbeid/prosjektforum/Oppdragsgivers%20erfaringer/2021/plan-norge.pdf>
- Bharadwaj, A., El Sawy, O. A., Pavlou, P. A., & Venkatraman, N. V. (2013). Digital business strategy: toward a next generation of insights. *MIS quarterly*, 471-482.
- Björkdahl, J. (2020). Strategies for Digitalization in Manufacturing Firms. *California Management Review*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0008125620920349>
- Blumer, H. (1954). Sensitizing concepts. *American Sociological Association*.

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners*. SAGE.
- Burkart, C., Wakolbinger, T., & Toyasaki, F. (2018). Funds allocation in NPOs: The role of administrative cost ratios. *Central European journal of operations research*, 26(2), 307-330.
- Casswell, J., & Hamilton, Z. (2019). Navigating the shift to digital humanitarian assistance. *London: GSMA Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation*.
- Cater, J. K. (2011). Skype a cost-effective method for qualitative research. *Rehabilitation Counselors & Educators Journal*, 4(2), 3.
- Deakin, H., & Wakefield, K. (2014). Skype interviewing: Reflections of two PhD researchers. *Qualitative research*, 14(5), 603-616.
- DiMaggio, P.J., & Powell, W.W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 48 No. 2, 147-160.
- El Sawy, O. A., Malhotra, A., Park, Y., & Pavlou, P. A. (2010). Research commentary—seeking the configurations of digital ecodynamics: It takes three to tango. *Information systems research*, 21(4), 835-848.
- El Sawy, O. A., & Pereira, F. (2013). *Business modelling in the dynamic digital space: An ecosystem approach*. Heidelberg: Springer.
- El Sawy, O. A., Kræmmergaard, P., Amsinck, H., & Vinther, A. L. (2016). How LEGO built the foundations and enterprise capabilities for digital leadership. *MIS quarterly executive*, 15(2).
- Fangen, K. (2010). *Deltagende observasjon*. Fagbokforlaget.
- Ganzin, M., Islam, G., & Suddaby, R. (2020). Spirituality and entrepreneurship: The role of magical thinking in future-oriented sensemaking. *Organization Studies*, 41(1), 77-102.
- Gioia, D. A., Thomas, J. B., Clark, S. M., & Chittipeddi, K. (1994). Symbolism and strategic change in academia: The dynamics of sensemaking and influence. *Organization science*, 5(3), 363-383.
- Gioia, D. A., & Thomas, J. B. (1996). Identity, image, and issue interpretation: Sensemaking during strategic change in academia. *Administrative science quarterly*, 370-403.
- Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2013). Seeking Qualitative Rigor in Inductive Research: Notes on the Gioia Methodology. *Organizational Research Methods*, 16(1), 15–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428112452151>

- Godefroid, M. E. (2021). Lightweight IT as a new analytical lens for digitalization of NGOs. *IADIS International Journal on Computer Science & Information Systems*, 16(1).
- Hanelt, A., Bohnsack, R., Marz, D., & Antunes Marante, C. (2021). A systematic review of the literature on digital transformation: Insights and implications for strategy and organizational change. *Journal of Management Studies*, 58(5), 1159-1197.
- Hartman, F., C. Guss. (1996). Virtual teams—Constrained by technology or culture. Proceedings of IEMC 96. Managing Virtual Enterprises: A Convergence of Communications, Computing and Energy Technologies. IEEE, Vancouver, BC, Canada. 645–650.
- Henningsen, E., & Larsen, H. (2020). The Mystification of Digital Technology in Norwegian Policies on Archives, Libraries and Museums: Digitalization as Policy Imperative. *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research*, 12(2).
- Hinings, B., Gegenhuber, T., & Greenwood, R. (2018). Digital innovation and transformation: An institutional perspective. *Information and Organization*, 28(1), 52-61.
- Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. .F. (2003). *Active Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks. Sage Publications.
- Howlett, M. (2021). Looking at the ‘field’ through a Zoom lens: Methodological reflections on conducting online research during a global pandemic. *Qualitative Research*, 1468794120985691.
- Huber, G. P., Glick, W. H., & Glick, W. H. (Eds.). (1993). *Organizational change and redesign: Ideas and insights for improving performance*. Oxford University Press on Demand.
- Jacobides, M. G., Cennamo, C., & Gawer, A. (2018). Towards a theory of ecosystems. *Strategic Management Journal*, 39(8), 2255–2276. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.290>
- Jenner, B. M., & Myers, K. C. (2019). Intimacy, rapport, and exceptional disclosure: a comparison of in-person and mediated interview contexts. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 22(2), 165-177.
- Johannessen, A., Tufte, P. A., & Christoffersen, L. (2010). *Introduksjon til samfunnsvitenskapelig metode* (Vol. 4, pp. 45-232). Oslo: Abstrakt.
- Kaplan, S., & Orlikowski, W. J. (2013). Temporal work in strategy making. *Organization science*, 24(4), 965-995.
- Kaspersen, A., & Lindsey-Curtet, C. (2016). The digital transformation of the humanitarian sector. *Humanitarian Law and Policy Blog*, 5.

- Kilcullen, M., Feitosa, J., & Salas, E. (2021). Insights From the Virtual Team Science: Rapid Deployment During COVID-19. *Human Factors*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0018720821991678>
- Koch, T., & Windsperger, J. (2017). Seeing through the network: Competitive advantage in the digital economy. *Journal of Organization Design*, 6(1), 1-30.
- Kotarba, M. (2017). Measuring digitalization: Key metrics. *Foundations of Management*, 9(1), 123-138.
- Kotter, J. P., & Heskett, J. L. (1992). *Corporate Culture and Performance*. New York: Free Press.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2015). *Det kvalitative forskningsintervju* (3. utg.). Gyldendal akademisk.
- Leonardi, P. M., & Treem, J. W. (2020). Behavioral visibility: A new paradigm for organization studies in the age of digitization, digitalization, and datafication. *Organization Studies*, 41(12), 1601-1625.
- Leone, R. P., Rao, V. R., Keller, K. L., Luo, A. M., McAlister, L., & Srivastava, R. (2006). Linking brand equity to customer equity. *Journal of Service Research*, 9(2), 125–138.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670506293563>
- Lo Iacono, V., Symonds, P., & Brown, D. H. (2016). Skype as a tool for qualitative research interviews. *Sociological research online*, 21(2), 103-117.
- Lunt, A. (2019). Messaging apps: the way forward for humanitarian communication. *ICRC Medium*.
- Malhotra, A., Majchrzak, A., & Rosen, B. (2007). Leading virtual teams. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 21, 60–70. doi.org/10.5465/amp.2007.24286164
- Merkel, C., Farooq, U., Xiao, L., Ganoë, C., Rosson, M. B., & Carroll, J. M. (2007, March). Managing technology use and learning in nonprofit community organizations: Methodological challenges and opportunities. In *Proceedings of the 2007 symposium on Computer human interaction for the management of information technology* (pp. 8-es).
- Meyer, J. W., & Rowan, B. (1977). Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony. *American journal of sociology*, 83(2), 340-363.
- Mintzberg, H. (1981). Organization design: fashion or fit? (pp. 103-116). *Graduate School of Business Administration*, Harvard University.
- Nadler, D., Tushman, M., Tushman, M. L., & Nadler, M. B. (1997). *Competing by design: The power of organizational architecture*. Oxford University Press.

- Oltmann, S. (2016, May). Qualitative interviews: A methodological discussion of the interviewer and respondent contexts. In *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (Vol. 17, No. 2, pp. 1-16). Freie Universität Berlin.
- Orlikowski, W. J. (2000). Using technology and constituting structures: A practice lens for studying technology in organizations. *Organization science*, 11(4), 404-428.
- Park, Y., Pavlou, P. A., & Saraf, N. (2020). Configurations for achieving organizational ambidexterity with digitization. *Information Systems Research*, 31(4), 1376-1397.
- Parviainen, P., Tihinen, M., Kääriäinen, J., & Teppola, S. (2017). Tackling the digitalization challenge: how to benefit from digitalization in practice. *International journal of information systems and project management*, 5(1), 63-77.
- Parvinen, P. (2020). Advancing data monetization and the creation of data-based business models. *Communications of the association for information systems*, 47(1), 2.
- Pedersen, J. S., & Dobbin, F. (2006). In search of identity and legitimation: Bridging organizational culture and neoinstitutionalism. *American behavioral scientist*, 49(7), 897-907.
- Poole, M. S. (2004). Central issues in the study of change and innovation. In Poole, M. S. and Van de Ven, A. H. (Eds.), *Handbook of Organizational Change and Innovation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 3–32.
- Romanelli, E., & Tushman, M. L. (1994). Organizational transformation as punctuated equilibrium: An empirical test. *Academy of Management journal*, 37(5), 1141-1166.
- Ross, J. W., Beath, C. M., & Mocker, M. (2019). *Designed for digital: How to architect your business for sustained success*. Mit Press.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. (1995). *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. London: Sage Publications.
- Sandberg, J., & Tsoukas, H. (2015). Making sense of the sensemaking perspective: Its constituents, limitations, and opportunities for further development. *Journal of organizational behavior*, 36(S1), S6-S32
- Saarijärvi, M., & Bratt, E. L. (2021). When face-to-face interviews are not possible: tips and tricks for video, telephone, online chat, and email interviews in qualitative research. *European Journal of Cardiovascular Nursing*, Volume 20, Issue 4, April 2021, Pages 392–396,
- Schildt, H., Mantere, S., & Cornelissen, J. (2020). Power in Sensemaking Processes. *Organization Studies*, 41(2), 241–265. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840619847718>
- Silverman, D. (2005). *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook*. London: SAGE.

- Smircich, L. (1983). Concepts of culture and organizational analysis. *Administrative science quarterly*, 339-358.
- Stigliani, I., & Ravasi, D. (2012). Organizing thoughts and connecting brains: Material practices and the transition from individual to group-level prospective sensemaking. *Academy of Management journal*, 55(5), 1232-1259.
- Scott, W. R. (1995). *Institutions and organizations (1st edition)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Scott, W. R. (2001). *Institutions and Organizations (2nd edition)*, Thousands Oaks.
- Scott, W. R. (2013). *Institutions and organizations: Ideas, interests, and identities*. Sage publications.
- Schwer, K., & Hitz, C. (2018). Designing organizational structure in the age of digitization. *Journal of Eastern European and Central Asian Research (JEECAR)*, 5(1), 11-11.
- Strauss, A. L. (1969). *Masks and Mirrors: the search for identity*.
- Takkunen, S. (2021). *Understanding Organizational Orientations Towards Digitalization: A Sensemaking Approach* [doctoral dissertation, Aalto university] Aalto University Executive Education. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-64-0476-9>
- Taylor, J. R., & Van Every, E. J. (1999). *The emergent organization: Communication as its site and surface*. Routledge.
- Tilson, D., Lyytinen, K., & Sørensen, C. (2010). Digital infrastructures: The missing IS research agenda. *Information Systems Research*, 21(4), 748–759. <https://doi.org/10.1287/isre.1100.0318>
- Tjora, A. (2017). *Kvalitative forskningsmetoder i praksis. (utg. 3)*. Gyldendal Akademisk
- Vakil, A. C. (1997). Confronting the classification problem: Toward a taxonomy of NGOs. *World development*, 25(12), 2057-2070.
- Verhoef, P. C., Broekhuizen, T., Bart, Y., Bhattacharya, A., Dong, J. Q., Fabian, N., & Haenlein, M. (2021). Digital transformation: A multidisciplinary reflection and research agenda. *Journal of Business Research*, 122, 889-901.
- Warner, K. S. R., & Wäger, M. (2019). Building dynamic capabilities for digital transformation: An ongoing process of strategic renewal. *Long Range Planning*, 52(3), 326–349. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2018.12.001>
- Weber, K., & Glynn, M. A. (2006). Making sense with institutions: Context, thought and action in Karl Weick's theory. *Organization studies*, 27(11), 1639-1660.
- Weick K. E. *The Social Psychology of Organizing*. (1979). 2nd ed. Addison-Wesley. Reading, MA

- Weick, K. E. (1993). The Collapse of Sensemaking in Organizations : The Mann Gulch Disaster Author. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 38(4), 628–652.
- Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the process of sensemaking. *Organization science*, 16(4), 409-421.
- Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations (Vol. 3)*. Sage.
- Weick, K. E., & Quinn, R. E. (1999). Organizational change and development. *Annual review of psychology*, 50(1), 361-386.
- Wlömert, N., & Papies, D. (2016). On-demand streaming services and music industry revenues—Insights from Spotify's market entry. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 33(2), 314-327.
- Yoo, Y., Boland, R. J., Lyytinen, K., & Majchrzak, A. (2012). Organizing for innovation in the digitized world. *Organization Science*, 23(5), 1398–1408. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1120.0771>
- Yoo, Y., Henfridsson, O., & Lyytinen, K. (2010). Research Commentary —The New Organizing Logic of Digital Innovation: An Agenda for Information Systems Research. *Information Systems Research*, 21(4), 724–735. <https://doi.org/10.1287/isre.1100.0322>

Word count: 24 898

Attachment 1

Participation in UiO research project

Prosjektforum - collaboration between UiO and Plan Norge

This is the formal question about your participation in our research project where the purpose is to map out and examine Plan Norge's challenges and opportunities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this form we will provide you with information about the objectives of the project and what participation entails for you.

Purpose

The COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions that followed has made cooperation between Plan Norge and international offices challenging. The purpose with this project is to examine the needs, possibilities and challenges that the pandemic has presented. We will look at the digital tools and routines used by Plan Norge in connection to the international offices of the organization. This includes problems which may have occurred within Plan Norges organization, but also how the cooperation across borders have been affected. The goal of the project is to examine how Plan Norge have handled the situation thus far, how it has affected the work between countries and possibly how other Norwegian organizations have made use of digital solutions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This project is a part of the master's course Organization, leadership and work at the University of Oslo.

There is a possibility that one or several students of this project group will use data collected in this project in a master thesis. It is optional to participate in this and you will have an option to consent or refuse consent by responding by email to this letter. The only information about individuals that will be stored is information needed to conduct follow-up interviews at a later date. Personal information of any sort will not be included in any report. It will be stored securely then deleted.

Who is responsible for the research project?

The institute of sociology and social geography at the University of Oslo is responsible for the project, in cooperation with Plan Norge.

Why are you asked to participate?

We have in cooperation with Plan Norge, chosen to ask you to participate in this project to provide insights and information needed to prepare a report. We will interview approximately 15-20 individuals that work at Plan Norge, representatives from COs and representative(s) from Plan International.

What does participation entail?

- Participation in the project entails a 45-60 minute interview. The interview will contain questions about work methods, how your workday has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Central themes are digitalization, routines and work methods.
- The interview will be recorded and transcribed, where any personal information about you will be anonymized and stored in accordance with laws and guidelines.
- It may be relevant with a follow-up interview at a later date. It is optional to participate in any follow up interview, and you will be contacted with a request if that is the case.

It is optional to participate.

It is optional to participate in the project. If you choose to participate, you can, at any time, withdraw your consent without giving a reason as to why you wish to withdraw. Any information from you will then be deleted. It will not have any negative consequences for you if you do not wish to participate or choose to withdraw at a later date.

Your privacy – how we will store and use information.

We will only use information for the purposes explained in this form. We treat the information with high confidentiality and in accordance with privacy regulations.

- Individuals with access to information given is: students in the project group, our supervisor, and programme coordinator.

- Names and contact information will be replaced with a code key, which is then stored securely in a separate document away from other data.
- The data we collect will be stored on a secure cloud service approved by the University of Oslo.
- Any personal information will be stored securely on a separate cloud service provided by the University of Oslo. This will be done in accordance to rules and regulations.
- Participants in the project will be anonymized and it will not be possible for others to recognize any individuals in the finalized report.
- Any personal information will be deleted at the end of the project. In the case where participants consent to have information stored for a potential masters thesis, the information will be deleted 30.06.2023.

What happens to your personal information when we conclude the research project?

Information gathered will be anonymized. Any personal information needed, like contact information, will be stored securely in accordance with rules and regulations until 30.06.2023 in the event that one of us is using this data for a master thesis. If you do not consent to have your information stored for a potential masters thesis, the information will be deleted after the project deadline 19. May 2021.

Your rights

As long as we store personal information, you have a right to:

- Know which personal information is stored about you and have a copy of the information provided to you.
- Have any personal information about you corrected.
- Have any personal information about you deleted.
- Send a complaint to «Datatilsynet» (Data protection authority) about the handling/processing of your information.

What gives us a right to handle your personal information

We handle your personal information based on your consent in this form.

On behalf of The institute for sociology and social geography at the University of Oslo, NSD – Norwegian center for research data AS – has assessed that the handling of personal information in this project is in accordance with privacy regulations.

Where can I find more information?

If you have any questions about the project, or wish to exercise your rights, please contact:

- The institute of sociology and social geography at The University of Oslo at Lars Erik Kjekshus (l.e.kjekshus@sosgeo.uio.no) or Tomas Berglund (kjberglu@uio.no)
- Our privacy representative: personvernombud@uio.no

If you have any questions regarding NSDs (Norwegian center for research data AS) assessment of the project, please contact:

- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS at email: (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone at: 55 58 21 17.

Kind regards

Arne Bygdås

(Supervisor)

Erik André Thorsen

(Student)

-

To consent to participate in the project please respond to the same email you received this letter. You can consent by simply replying «I consent to participate in an interview relating to this project.» OR you can choose to voice your consent at the start of the interview.

If you consent to us storing your information for a potential master thesis, simply consent by replying «I consent to have my information handled until the end of the master thesis» OR voice your consent at the start of the interview.

Attachment 2

Interview guide

Informant code: (eks. A-U)

- Thank you for your participation. How are you doing today? (Introduction)
- We want, and hope, to assist Plan Norway to map how you changed your ways of work after the outbreak of the pandemic and what opportunities or challenges you may face by working differently.
- We would like to record this interview in order to work with the data sufficiently and analyze it thoroughly. This recording will be stored in a digital "storage hotel". Your contact information will not be stored in the same "storage hotel". Nobody will be able to track the answers to you. Is it okay that we record this interview?

Yes / No - Turn on the recording.

- Okay, the recording is now playing. Can you please confirm again that it's okay for you that we are recording this interview?

YES

- Thank you. We sent you a letter of consent. Did you understand the terms and conditions of the interview and are okay with them? YES
- We would like to emphasize that participation in this interview is voluntary, and your answers will be anonymous. Only the six of us in the project group and our supervisor will have access to your answers. Your managers or colleagues at Plan International will not have access to your replies in this interview, nor be able to track any information back to you. Your answers and your contact information such as your name are stored in two separate storage disks. Nothing in our final report will be trackable back to you as an individual.
- Do you have any questions before we start? Feel free to ask any questions during the interview.
- We estimate that the interview approximately will take 1 hour, and we would like to contact you again if we have any quick follow-up questions afterwards.

INTRO

1. How long have you been working at Plan International Norway?
2. What is your role and main task focus?
3. What education do you have?
4. Why do you work with Plan?
5. Have you worked in another department in Plan International, in Norway or abroad, or perhaps in another aid organization?

Our thesis (for the time being) is:

“In what way has the corona pandemic changed the way Plan International Norway performs its tasks, and what challenges and opportunities has this situation created in terms of interaction and communication?”

6. Do you have any immediate thoughts about the thesis?

Category 1: PROCESS AND LEARNING PERSPECTIVES / CHANGE OF ORGANIZATION

7. In what way has the corona pandemic affected your normal workday?
 - a. Positive and negative examples
8. What changes have you made regarding your work methods since the start of the lockdown in March and until now?
 - a. Do you have a lifehack for dealing with this work situation during this breakout/Is there something you have found useful to do to make the situation easier these days?
9. How has your use of digital tools changed after the pandemic?
 - a. What digital tools do you use? Example of programs you use?
 - b. Do you prefer some programs over others? Why?
10. What changes has Plan made in the way the organization works?
 - a. How has your experience been of implementing these changes?
 - b. (How has the follow-up from the leader been through these changes?)

- c. (Do you have any examples of previous major changes that Plan Norge has done?)
11. Which of these new working methods have worked and which have not worked?
 - a. Examples
 - b. What have you learned from these changes?
 12. Which changes do you hope will be maintained after the pandemic is over?
 - a. Why?

Category 2: TRUST / CONTROL / COOPERATION PROGRAM COUNTRY

13. How has it been to work more digitally, (when it comes to cooperating with the program countries)?
14. In what way has it affected your cooperation with the Program countries?
 - a. Do you have any examples?
15. In what way do you have to work with the Program countries to maintain your mutual trust?
 - a. More frequent meetings digitally?
 - b. Other examples?
16. How do you think your colleagues in the Program countries have experienced the change in your working methods?
17. Do you think that the way you work and collaborate today is the correct solution in the long run? Why / why not?

CLOSING QUESTIONS

18. Do you have any thoughts about how you should work in the future?
 - a. Collaboration with the Program countries
 - b. Economically
 - c. More climate-friendly
 - d. Money
19. Are there any functionalities with digital tools you use that could make a digital working day easier?

20. Would you like to continue working in a more digital way, as today, or would you like to work more like you did before the pandemic?
- a. Why?
 - b. How do you think Plan relates to digitization services after the pandemic?
21. “Monday morning miracle” - Imagine that a miracle takes place. Your dreams for Plan Norway AS A WORKING PLACE comes true overnight. What has changed and how does your work life look like?

Thank you for your time. Have a nice day!

Attachment 3



Vurdering

Referansenummer
756342

Prosjektittel
Masteroppgave

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon
Universitetet i Oslo / Det samfunnsvitenskapelige fakultet / Institutt for sosiologi og samfunnsgeografi

Prosjektansvarlig (vitenskapelig ansatt/veileder eller stipendiat)
Beatrice Johannesen, beatrice.johannessen@sosgeo.uio.no, tlf: 97723732

Type prosjekt
Studentprosjekt, masterstudium

Kontaktinformasjon, student
Tomas Berglund, tomas.berglund1993@gmail.com, tlf: +46768299289

Prosjektperiode
11.01.2021 - 30.06.2022

Vurdering (1)

19.01.2022 - Vurdert

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet med vedlegg den 19.1.2022. Behandlingen kan starte.

DEL PROSJEKTET MED PROSJEKTANSVARLIG

Det er obligatorisk for studenter å dele meldeskjemaet med prosjektansvarlig (veileder). Det gjøres ved å trykke på "Del prosjekt" i meldeskjemaet. Om prosjektansvarlig ikke svarer på invitasjonen innen en uke må han/hun inviteres på nytt.

TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET

Prosjektet vil behandle alminnelige kategorier av personopplysninger frem til 20.6.2022.

LOVLIG GRUNNLAG

Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra de registrerte til behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 og 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake. Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være den registrertes samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a.

PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER

Personverntjenester vurderer at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen om:

lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen

formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke viderebehandles til nye uforenlige formål

dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet

lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet

DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER

Personverntjenester vurderer at informasjonen om behandlingen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13.

Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18) og dataportabilitet (art. 20).

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER

Personverntjenester legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1. f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må dere følge interne retningslinjer og eventuelt rådføre dere med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.

MELD VESENTLIGE ENDRINGER

Dersom det skjer vesentlige endringer i behandlingen av personopplysninger, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til oss ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. Før du melder inn en endring, oppfordrer vi deg til å lese om hvilke type endringer det er nødvendig å melde: <https://www.nsd.no/personverntjenester/fulle-ut-meldeskjema-for-personopplysninger/melde-endringer-i-meldeskjema> Du må vente på svar fra oss før endringen gjennomføres.

OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET

Personverntjenester vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet.

Kontaktperson hos oss: Lisa Lie Bjordal

Lykke til med prosjektet!