

# The Performative Nature of Organizational Visuals

In Strategic Communication and Management



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## **Abstract**

Med en stigende tilstedeværelse af visuelle repræsentationer i organisatoriske sammenhænge er kommunikations- og ledelsesvidenskaben for nyligt begyndt at undersøge, hvordan visualisering kan konstruere og udtrykke mening og skabe forandring. Indtil nu har ledelseslitteraturen primært fokuseret på verbal tekst og sprog, og derfor er visualisering og visuelle repræsentationer et nyt og anbefalet forskningsområde. Ifølge litteraturen kan det visuelle, og oftest i sammenspil med det verbale, forbedre forståelse, læring, arbejdsindsats, beslutningstagen og problemløsning. Med min selvkonstruerede teoretiske model skabt på baggrund af organisations- og ledelsesteori, visuel og retorisk analyse samt diskurs analyse, og en case illustration af virksomheden Rains, undersøger denne afhandling emnet den performative karakter af visualisering i strategisk kommunikation og ledelse. Afhandlingen besvarer på baggrund af min model, dataindsamling og dataanalyse hvordan organisatoriske illustrationer og visuelle repræsentationer kommunikerer, organiserer og performer strategisk. Modellen og casen af Rains forklarer og illustrerer, at en leder med fordel kan anvende visualisering og visuelle repræsentationer til at skabe forandring i form af blandt andet forbedret hukommelse, indlæring, indsats, problemløsning og beslutningstagen samt forståelse af eksempelvis strategisk retning, værdier og målsætninger. Introduceres visuelle repræsentationer meningsfuldt af en leder, som opfattes kompetent af de udvalgte deltagere i kommunikationen, eksempelvis ansatte, påvirkes menneskets hjerne, mentale processer og adfærd positivt, og dermed kan lederen formå at kommunikere mening og skabe de nævnte mål og effekter.

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## **1. Introduction**

With the increasing use of the visual mode and its significant presence in organizational contexts, communication and management science has recently started to pay closer attention to the concept of visualization, meaning how the use of the visual mode constructs and expresses meaning and reality in a specific way. Until now, management science has mainly focused on verbal text and language, the dominant sign system of human society, and therefore, the visual mode of meaning construction is a new and recommended research area in strategic communication and management (Meyer et al., 2013). According to Meyer et al. (2013), visuals are an equally important resource for the social construction of reality. Like words, visuals materialize, organize, communicate, store, and pass on knowledge, and are objectified within social groups and communities in order to enable mutual understanding. The visual mode has become an elementary mode for the construction, maintenance, and transformation of meaning and integrating the mode will contribute to a better understanding of how actors make sense, process information, and organize knowledge in social categories. The topic of this paper is the performative nature of visuals in strategic communication and management, and the aim is to examine the strategic use of visuals in the communicative construction of meaning. The examination looks into the cognitive part of the organization and the organizational language associated with signs and symbols and investigates the effects of management practices introducing visuals. Management frequently uses signs and symbols to manage, communicate, plan for the future, tell stories, and create the foundation in which employees and stakeholders acquire meaning to (Taylor, Fisher & Dufresne, 2002). What is unknown is how management uses the visual mode to shape stories, to what extent they are in control, and how employees and stakeholders receive, interpret and acquire meaning to the visuals they are exposed to. We know how words construct but we know very little about what words construct. From a constructivist point of view, this paper explores the unknown and examines how organizational images and visual artifacts strategically communicate, organize and perform. To answer this research question, the paper draws on literature described in the literature review, established methodology and tools, and builds its own theoretical framework constructed of puzzle pieces from organizational and management theory, visual and rhetoric analysis, and discourse analysis. The theoretical framework is applied as the data analysis method and by answering the research question and illustrating how visuals perform, the paper fills a research gap and provides valuable perspectives for organizational and management theory.



### **1.1. Philosophy of science**

To explore the visual mode of meaning construction, this thesis draws on the philosophy of science, social constructivism. From a constructivist point of view, the research looks into the unknown and investigates the effects of management introducing organizational images and visual artifacts. Since no universal definition of constructivism exists, the philosophical framework of this paper is based on Lev Vygotsky's social constructivism. Vygotsky defines knowledge as a socially constructed process influenced by external factors such as cultural, historical, and social interaction, and since Vygotsky's perspective acknowledges human learning as an active process of constructing meaning, his perspective is meaningful for this research (Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1986; Amineh and Als, 2015). According to Vygotsky (1978), human learning is an active and social process of constructing meaning. It occurs through interaction with others and is influenced by society. To learn and understand, people engage with others and build new knowledge upon the foundation of previous knowledge. Learning is actively constructed, and understanding is actively received. From Vygotsky's perspective the mind is inherently social in nature and therefore speech moves from communicative social to inner egocentric. The process of knowing is affected by other people and is mediated by community and culture. Through interaction with others, people construct artifacts (Vygotsky, 1986; Amineh and Als, 2015, p. 10). Knowledge and learning are constructed from the external to the internal and therefore, it is a relevant perspective for studying how management uses the visual mode to shape stories, to what extent they are in control, and how employees and stakeholders receive, interpret and acquire meaning to the visuals they are exposed to. In this paper, social constructivism focuses on the collaborative, active and social nature of learning. The aim is to explore how knowledge and human learning in an organizational context are actively constructed and how social reality is determined by the experiences of the receiver and learner.

## **2. Literature Review**

Based on a contemporary literature review, the Visual Dimension in Organizing, Organization and Organization Research by Meyer et al. (2013), this section presents literature relevant for studying the strategic use of visuals in the communicative construction of meaning. The purpose of the literature review is to document the current state of art in the chosen area of study. The literature is presented in an organized way to summarize the existing body of agreed knowledge and demonstrate how my research is a valuable starting point for new knowledge, ideas, and practices in strategic communication and management.

### **2.1. The Visual Mode of Meaning Construction**

With the increasing use of the visual mode and its significant presence in organizational contexts, communication and management science has recently started to pay closer attention to the concept of visualization, meaning how the use of visuals, visual representations, objects, symbols, images and artifacts, construct and express meaning and reality in a specific way. Until now, management science has predominantly focused on verbal text and language, the dominant sign system of human society. The visual mode of meaning construction is a new recommended research area (Meyer et al., 2013; Davison, McLean & Warren, 2012, p. 6). According to Meyer et al. (2013):

In particular, visual artifacts are an equally important resource for the social construction of reality: Like words, and often in symbiosis with words, they materialize, organize, communicate, store, and pass on knowledge (Raab, 2008), and are objectified within social groups and communities in order to enable mutual and shared “readings” (Raab, 2008). Such mutual understanding is, however, not guaranteed. Just as verbal language has to be learned in order to be intelligible, images are no mere “windows” through which we observe the world (Mitchell, 2008), but constitute a complex system of symbolic signs (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). In this respect, the two modes - verbal and visual - resemble each other. Societies not only develop verbal language to externalize the categories and classification schemes by means of which they differentiate and “order” people, places, and things (Berger & Luckmann, 1967); they also develop ways of using visual signs to do exactly the same. (pp. 493 and 494).

Until now, literature has shown that the meaning, expression and interpretation of visuals depend on the specific context and are strongly influenced by cultural, political and social factors. Research has demonstrated that classic visuals (e.g., images, pictures, photographs, paintings, drawings, clothing, make-up, hairstyles and body decoration like tattoos) and organizational visuals (e.g., logos, slogans, organizational charts, marketing images, illustrations, statistics and graphs) construct and express a specific meaning and represent visual manifestations of social knowledge and practice (Meyer et al., 2013; Rafaeli & Worline, 1999; Pratt & Rafaeli, 2001; Davison, McLean & Warren, 2012).

### **2.1.1 Visualization**

The current literature about visualization and the visual mode tells us a lot on about data visualization (i.e., transforming data into specific structures, for example geographical structures), software visualization (i.e., visualization of information related to software systems), information visualization (i.e., representing data and information in a visual and meaningful way to enhance understanding, for example tools for analysis, overview and theorizing), and visualization in human cognition (i.e., using visualization as a cognitive strategy and resource in human discovery and invention, for example as a tool for problem-solving, learning and training) (Meyer et al., 2013; Chen, Härdle & Unwin, 2008; Patterson, et al., 2014; Langley & Ravasi, 2019; Rieber, 1995). The concept of visualization is an acknowledged topic in anthropology, sociology, psychology and theology, art history, social semiotics and media studies and within these fields, several theoretical and practical perspectives and methodological designs and tools exist. In a historical review of visualization in human cognition, Rieber (1995) argues, that visualization is a broad term and using it as a tool or an object of study requires context and framework. According to Rieber (1995):

“Visualization is defined as representations of information consisting of spatial, nonarbitrary (i.e., "picture-like" qualities resembling actual objects or events), and continuous (i.e., an "all- in-oneness" quality) characteristics (see Paivio, 1990) ... Visualization includes both internal (e.g., mental imagery) and external representations (e.g., real objects, printed pictures and graphs, video, film, animation) (p. 45)”

Rieber (1995) describes how visualization can extend to all cognitive and affective outcomes and therefore, the status of visuals in research design varies across literature. The role visualization and visual artifacts play depends on the specific object of study and the chosen approach of research (e.g., archeological approach, practical approach, strategic approach, dialogical approach and documenting approach) (Rieber, 1995; Meyer et al. 2013). Throughout the history, visualization has served as an important strategy for people to solve a wide range of complex and everyday problems, improve understanding and learning, and construct helpful tools (Rieber, 1995; Tegarden, 1999). Meyer et al. (2013) explain why the visual mode of meaning construction is relevant for strategic communication and management theory:

“Images and visual artifacts ... have become an elementary mode for the construction, maintenance, and transformation of meaning. It is the specific performativity of visuals and visual discourse - working differently from other modes of communication - that holds ample potential ... Integrating the visual mode will contribute to a better understanding of how actors make sense, process information, and organize knowledge in social categories” (pp. 491 and 492).

Increasing the emphasis on visualization in organizational contexts has the potential to strengthen the mutual understanding we constantly seek. Combining the visual mode with the verbal language strategically, enables new knowledge and helpful management tools. Closer attention to visuals can provide new valuable insights into communication and management theory. According to Rieber (1995), the pervasive nature of visualization in science discovery and invention and the continued value of visualization strategies should not be mistaken. Rieber (1995) argues, even though we may never adequately understand the psychology of visualization, the visual mode of meaning construction serves as one of our most versatile problem-solving tools and cognitive strategies to help people gain knowledge. In his historical review of visualization in human cognition several examples are provided, for example emerging technologies like virtual reality. According to Rieber (1995), visualization must not be ignored neither must words. The value is found in building bridge to and from visual and verbal representations (Rieber, 1995, p. 55).

### **2.1.2 Visualization in Human Cognition**

To study the effects of management introducing and integrating visuals and explore the cognitive part of the organization and the organizational language associated with signs and symbols, human cognition must be acknowledged and considered. Human cognition is the mental processes involved in gaining knowledge and comprehension. These cognitive processes include language, memory, perception, thought, thinking, attention, emotions and decision making, and are all responsible for how individuals perceive the world, interact with the world and make meaning out of the world. In the field of psychology (i.e., the scientific study of the mind and behavior) and social semiotics (i.e., the study of the modes of communication that people use and develop to construct meaning and represent their understanding of the world), visualization has served as an important approach to understand how people constitute meaning, learn, understand and persuade (Hill & Helmers, 2004).

In psychology, the human brain is acknowledged as an effective image processor (Patterson et al., 2014; Marchak et al., 1993; Rieber, 1995; Bezemer & Jewitt, 2009; Pandey et al., 2014; Hill & Helmers, 2004). The effect of visualization depends on how well the specific visual is able to take advantage of the brain's abilities and since various types of visuals exist (e.g., photos, illustrations, icons, symbols, sketches, figures, and concept maps), the cognitive and behavioral effects of visuals depend on the given context and what is being studied. According to literature, a human cognition framework for visualization is best suited research exploring how people learn, think, understand and interpret, and how the processes affect people's behavior and facilitate change. Using images and visual artifacts strategically, have the potential to increase memorability and motivation and improve understanding, problem-solving and decision-making (Rieber, 1995; Meyer et al., 2013; Patterson, et al., 2014).

### **2.1.3 Information Visualization**

To identify how the use of visualization and specific visuals can lead to change, a human cognition framework for information visualization is useful since it emphasizes how cognitive processing enables the induction of insight, reasoning, and understanding, which are key goals of the visual community (Patterson et al., 2014). According to Patterson et al. (2014):

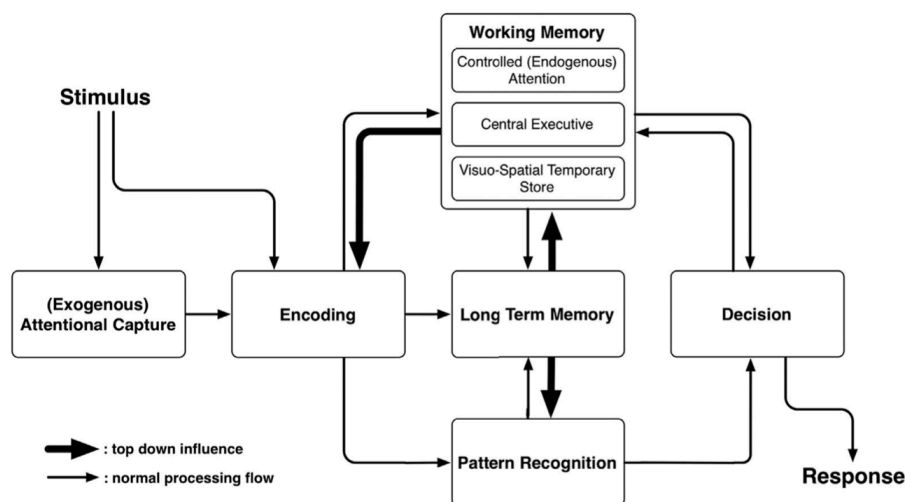
“Information visualization refers to the interdisciplinary field concerned with the visual representation of complex information in ways that enhance understanding. The field draws from such disciplines as computer science, graphics, visual design, psychology, mathematics, and business. The role of information visualization is to leverage the functioning of the human visual system in an effort to provide insight about abstract information, to help humans resolve logical problems, to think and reason, and to provide help in understanding data. High-level cognitive functioning, such as developing insight, reasoning, and understanding, is engaged by visualization techniques because visual perception possesses special properties, is attuned to visual images, and it performs pattern recognition.” (p. 44).

Patterson et al. (2014) support the statements concerning information visualization, yet they identify lack of details and specificity in the linkage between visualizations and the induction of high-level cognitive reasoning and understanding. In the visualization literature, most research rely on the typical pipeline of information visualization design, which focus is on displaying data. The role played by the user's cognition is unspecified. According to Patterson et al. (2014), most research ignores the complex nature of human cognition as the user engages with the visualization. In literature, the connection between visualization and perceptual or cognitive processes is vague and leads to no or few measurable outcomes or guidelines. Patterson et al. (2014) argue:

“Many topics in human factors-based design have not been explored by the visualization community in much depth. Much of the current methodology for designing visualization tools and interfaces is still ad hoc and informal. Only a few visualization designs utilize perceptual and cognitive theories. Tory and Moller suggested that, because many areas of perception and cognition research are likely not utilized to their full potential, further work in this area is promising.” (p. 43)

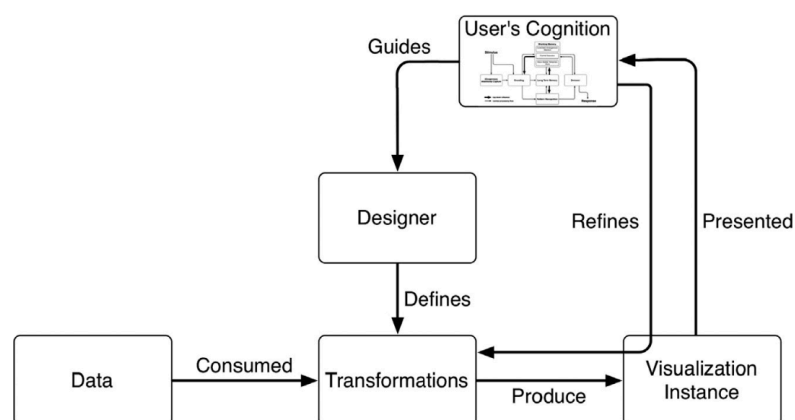
In the spirit of Tory and Moller (2004), Patterson et al., (2014) offer a human cognition framework for information visualization, which engages and promotes high-level cognitive functioning (see picture 1 and 2). The researchers place information visualization within a detailed foundation of cognitive psychology and construct a framework, which makes direct contact with underlying cognitive processes that enable the induction of insight, reasoning, and understanding. Patterson et al., (2014) identify a number of principles for information design display in order to shift the emphasis in much of the display community from entertainment to task-orientated representations of information.

**Picture 1:** Human cognition as a framework for visualization, figure 2 by Patterson et al. (2014).



**Fig. 2.** Overview of human cognition based on a dual-process framework for reasoning and decision making, which forms the backbone of our human cognition framework for information visualization. The flow of information proceeds from left to right, beginning with an impinging stimulus on the left and ending with a decision being made on the right. The components of human cognition shown here, namely encoding, working memory, pattern recognition, long-term memory, and decision making, are discussed in the text.

**Picture 2:** The design process of visualization, figure 6 by Patterson et al. (2014).



**Fig. 6.** Visualization design process. The design process is conceptualized with the user's cognition as being essential to both ends of information visualization: cognition serves in the role of consumer of a given visualization as well as being the primary force driving its design. This is a human cognition-centered design process. Note that this dynamic design process could occur over hours, days, weeks, or months (or more).

#### **2.1.4 A Human Cognition Framework for Information Visualization**

According to Patterson et al. (2014), visual perception should be conceptualized as a complex process, and to influence cognition in powerful ways, the designs must not be limited to the facilitation of visual perception alone. Human cognition arises from the dynamic interplay between bottom-up and top-down processing. Patterson et al. (2014) describe:

“Top-down processing guides the way in which the bottom-up information is processed in order to activate organized knowledge structures represented in long-term memory, which is why we emphasize top-down processing in our framework.” (p. 44).

The framework by Patterson et al. (2014) is based on the cognitive, perceptual and social psychology literature including the dual-systems theory, or dual process theory (i.e., human cognition derives from an interplay between an analytical reasoning system (composed of working memory and long-term declarative memory) and a rapid, autonomous intuitive or implicit system that entails implicit pattern recognition and procedural long-term memory. The dual systems are heavily reliant on both bottom-up and top-down processing) (Patterson et al., 2014, p. 44). Patterson et al. (2014) describe, based on their framework and relevant visualization literature, the characteristics of a well-designed visualization:

“A well-designed visualization attracts attention to important features of the display. This serves to minimize the potential for inattention blindness and the user ignoring important information. Well-designed visualizations also focus endogenous attention on task-relevant goals and minimize distractions that detract attentional resources from the visual analytics processes. A well-designed visualization promotes chunking and shapes encoding by serving as retrieval cues for knowledge representations (e.g., mental models) in long-term memory. Interactions with the visualization enable users to reorganize the relevant details for further encoding or scrutiny. Serving as long-term memory retrieval cues also support reasoning, thinking, and decision making. Well-designed visualizations may present patterns in a training regime, inducing implicit learning and creating the foundation for procedural memory.” (p. 55).



## **2.2. Storytelling and Symbolism**

As indicated above, how well the visual mode will contribute to a better understanding of how actors make sense, process information, and organize knowledge in social categories depends on how well the receiver is able to perceive the story the specific visual, sign or symbol has to tell. In organizational literature, we find a significant amount of research about organizational storytelling and organizational symbolism (Boje, Oswick & Ford, 2004; Boje, 2008; Czarniawska, 1997; Gabriel, 2015; Rafaeli & Worline, 1999; Pratt & Rafaeli, 2001). Management frequently uses signs and symbols to manage, communicate, plan for the future and tell stories and to some extent they are in control. Management creates the foundation in which employees and stakeholders acquire meaning to, and through organizational stories, signs and symbols the foundational understanding of the organization is created (Taylor, Fisher & Dufresne, 2002; Nymark, 1999).

### **2.2.1 Organizational Storytelling**

Organizational storytelling is a concept playing a prominent part in management, communication and organization studies focusing on the meaning-making aspect of stories in organizational life. Czarniawska (1998) conceptualizes, through her narrative approach to organization studies, organizational life as story-making. Stories are considered as a media for understanding the world, and within organizational life used to socially construct meaning (Taylor, Fisher, & Dufresne, 2002). According to Boje (1991b), a story is defined as ‘an oral or written performance involving two or more people interpreting past or anticipated experience’ (Boje, 1991b, p. 111). Boje argues, we live in storytelling worlds and ‘storytelling organizations’ that inform the collective dynamics and processes of movements (Boye, 2019, p. 1). Boje illustrates storytelling as a medium of interpretive exchange over time and describes how storytelling should be understood as performances within organizational context. According to Boje (1995), every event and action that occurs within an organization gives rise to interpretations by organizational members and these interpretations shape subsequent events and actions. Boje argues that the interpretations of events are recorded and transmitted in stories. When organizational members discuss an event, they are telling the story of that event (Boje et al., 1982). The meaning of stories is often ambiguous and changes over time. Stories provide the meaning for specific cultural events and artifacts and as the stories change, the culture changes, and as the culture changes, the stories change. Storytelling is micro behavior within the macro context of culture. It is constrained by the existing culture and it also modifies the culture (Taylor, Fisher, & Dufresne, 2002, p. 318).

According to Nymark (1999), stories are frequently used within the organization to create the image management prefers to communicate to internal and external stakeholders. Through stories management influences organizational culture and communicate strategy, for example with speeches at employee meetings. Stories are emphasized as means for making sense of paradoxical and ambiguous situations, and instead of directing, controlling and confusing employees and stakeholders through formal complex communication, management benefits from storytelling. Organizational stories have the potential to enhance a shared understanding of the organizational direction, values and culture. According to Taylor, Fisher and Dufresne (2002), artful stories are an effective vehicle for managers to contribute to organizational learning. The researchers describe, how well the story is able to make sense for the receiver depends on the quality of the story and therefore, to facilitate learning and construct meaning, organizational stories require a strategic framework.

Czarniawska (1998) describes, a narrative, in its most basic form, requires at least three elements: an original state of affairs, an action or an event, and the consequent state of affairs. To construct meaning the elements must make sense. The elements require some way to bring them into a meaningful whole, for example chronology, which in the mind of the reader easily turns into causality. Several researchers have attempted to reconcile scientific and narrative knowledge in organizational and communication research, and yet it has been claimed that narrative is the main mode of human knowledge and the main mode of communication, most knowledge carried by narratives is not very impressive (Czarniawska, 2011, p. 2-3). According to Nymark (1999), a narrative is defined by narrative probability (i.e., how probable the receiver perceives the story) and narrative fidelity (i.e., how faithful and meaningful the receiver interprets the story). Chronological stories are typically structured as following: (1) introduction of setting and characters, (2) representation of situation and context, (3) the initiating action or event, (4) emotional reaction or declaration of the central character's object, (5) complicated actions or events, (6) result and, (7) implicit or explicit reaction to the result (Nymark, 1999, p. 9; Weick & Browning, 1986). From an aesthetic perspective to storytelling, Taylor, Fisher, & Dufresne (2002) explore how storytelling socially constructs meaning in organizations. Based on aesthetic theory, Mintzberg's taxonomy of the 10 roles of the manager, and storytelling and organizational learning literature, Taylor, Fisher and Dufresne (2002) look into how storytelling can be an important, meaningful and powerful tool for management and why some stories are more effective than others.

According to Taylor, Fisher, & Dufresne (2002), the quality of a story depends on how artful the story is and how well the story lives up to the nature of aesthetic experience. The researchers argue that an artful story tells us something about what it is to be human, provokes the feeling of connectedness, and is characterized by an intense involvement of attention for no other reason than to sustain the interaction.

### **2.2.2 Organizational Symbolism**

According to literature, the concepts and notions of organizational symbolism are closely related to the narrative approach to organization studies, organizational storytelling, and organizational language, learning and behavior. Organizational symbolism is acknowledged as essential to study organizational life. According to Dandridge, Mitroff & Joyce (1980):

“The term “organizational symbolism” refers to those aspects of an organization that its members use to reveal or make comprehensible the unconscious feelings, images, and values that are inherent in that organization. Symbolism expresses the underlying character, ideology, or value system of an organization. In making this character comprehensible, symbols can reinforce it or can expose it to criticism and modification.” (p. 77).

The underlying character is expressive of the deeper layers of meaning that are inherent in all human forms of organization and culture itself. Dandridge, Mitroff & Joyce (1980) provide several examples of how the character is revealed. According to the researchers:

“This character is revealed in such diverse phenomena as: (1) the stories and myths that an organization deliberately concocts, unconsciously invents, or selects as important factual history. These are accumulated to give meaning and structure to critical life events (e.g., the organization's founding, critical incidents, charismatic characters, etc.); (2) the kinds of ceremonies or ritualized events that an organization uses, such as the orientation program, a banquet, or a coffee break; (3) the logo of an organization (i.e., the externalized and concrete visual sign that an organization chooses or designs to convey its distinctive inner character to the outer environment and to itself); and (4) the day-to-day affective and political life of the organization as revealed in the countless anecdotes and jokes that are constantly passed around organizations.” (p. 77).

Dandridge, Mitroff & Joyce (1980), provide a framework of the functions and types of organizational symbolism to describe the fact that organizational symbols are explicitly intentional or functional in character (see table 1). The purpose of the framework is to call attention to the important phenomenon of organizational symbolism and the deep structure of organizations.

**Table 1:** The functions and types of organizational symbolism by Dandridge, Mitroff & Joyce (1980).

		TYPES OF SYMBOLS		
		Verbal myth, legend, stories, slogans, creeds, jokes rumors, name	Actions ritualistic special acts (repeating/nonrepeating) parties, rites of passage, meals, breaks, starting the day	Material status symbols, company products, logos, awards, company badges, pins, flags
FUNCTIONS OF SYMBOLS	<b>Descriptive</b> Providing an experienced expression of the organization			<b>EXAMPLE C</b>
	<b>Energy Controlling</b> 1. Increasing tension inspiring attracting repelling 2. Facilitating re-experience of previous state 3. Decreasing tension cathartic	<b>EXAMPLE E</b>	<b>EXAMPLE D</b>	
	<b>System Maintenance</b> 1. Giving "reason" Providing coherence, order, and stability Differentiating Integrating 2. Providing or guiding acceptable patterns for change— individual or organizational	<b>EXAMPLE A</b>	<b>EXAMPLE B</b>	

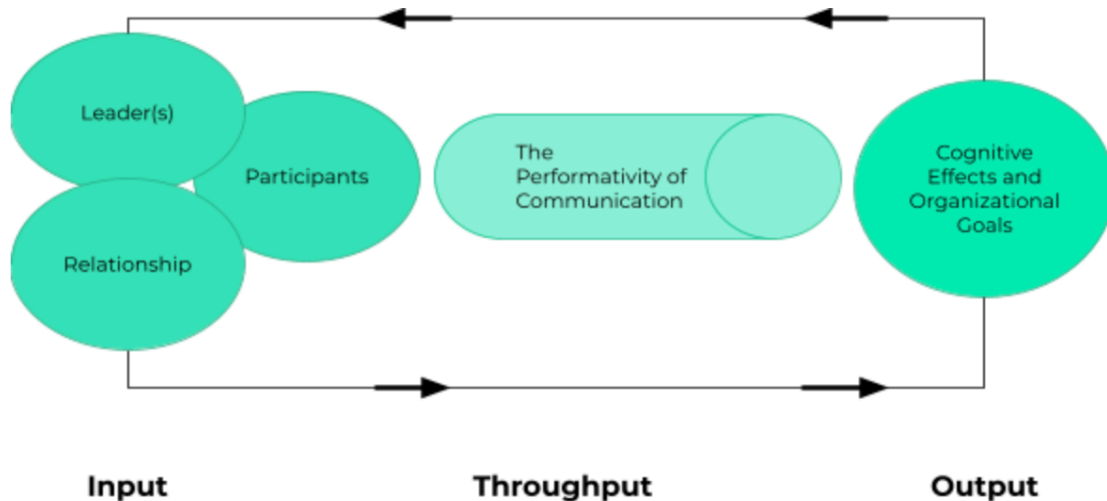
In the framework, the types of organizational symbols are broadly categorized as verbal (e.g., myth, legend, stories, slogans, creeds, jokes, rumors, and name), action (e.g., repeating or nonrepeating ritualistic special acts, parties, rites of passage, meals, breaks, and starting the day), and material (e.g., status symbols, company products, logos, awards, company badges, pins, and flags). The types of organizational symbols are separated into three different functions: descriptive (i.e., providing experienced expression of the organization), energy controlling (i.e., increasing tension, inspiring, attracting and repelling, facilitating re-experience of previous state, and decreasing tension cathartic), and system maintenance (i.e., giving "reason", providing coherence, order, and stability, differentiating, integrating, and providing or guiding acceptable patters for individual or organizational change) (Dandridge, Mitroff & Joyce, 1980, p. 79).

According to Rafaeli & Worline (1999), symbols are integral to organizational life. They convey powerful meanings, and to reveal the shared systems of meaning that construct organizational life and provide its structure and vitality, careful attention to organizational symbols is important. Symbols are essential to understand the cultural system of an organization, the reactions, interpretations, and actions of organizational members, and how those actions, thoughts, and feelings are shaped by the collectivity. Organizational symbols are elements that structure members' active construction of sense, knowledge, and behavior (Rafaeli & Worline, 1999, p. 4). Pratt & Rafaeli (2001) define a symbol as something that stands for something or suggests something else by reason of relationship, association, convention, or accidental resemblance. Symbols can be physical objects or artifacts, individuals or groups behaviors, and verbal expressions. In an organizational context, symbols are something that stand for ideas that compose the organization. According to Meyer et al. (2013) symbols are visuals frequently used in management and communication practices. The researchers define organizational visuals as symbolic devices that exert influence and impact on audiences' perception and evaluation of reality. From this perspective, visuals and symbols are a means of persuasion (Meyer et al., 2013, p. 505). Pratt & Rafaeli (2001) describe that physical symbols and objects are in themselves elements of a language that plays a key role in helping individuals and organizational collectives enact their relationships. From this perspective, symbols are acknowledged as a language or organizational relationships. Symbols construct meaning, which is defined by cultural and social conventions and interactions. They acquire meaning in the organization through recurring experiences and only a connection between symbols and underlying organizational values provides a complete understanding of the symbols. To explore the meaning of organizational symbols, the symbols must be recognized in a specific context. Within the context it is important to acknowledge individual interpretations, and to verify the reliability of the identified interpretations, it is important to explore multiple members interpretations (Rafaeli & Worline, 1999, p. 6).

### 3. Theoretical Framework

As mentioned above, until now, management science has predominantly focused on verbal text and language, the dominant sign system of human society. The visual mode of meaning construction is a new recommended research area in strategic communication and management (Meyer et al., 2013; Davison, McLean & Warren, 2012). To explore the visual mode, I have chosen to construct my own theoretical framework within the organizational context. The framework combines the visual mode with the verbal language strategically, and with the framework and model constructed, my thesis provides a new and unique perspective to the field of management. Within the current literature, nothing similar is found. Connecting communicative relationships, the performativity of visuals, cognitive effects and organizational goals is a new contribution to organization, management, and communication science. Based on the reviewed literature, organization, communication and leadership theory, discourse analysis and visual rhetoric analysis, I will break down the broader ideas into more manageable concepts and construct the framework, which I believe is the best structure for examining how organizational images and visual artifacts strategically communicate, organize and perform. The framework is visualized below, and each part is described underneath.

**Figure 1:** Theoretical framework on how organizational images and visual artifacts strategically communicate, organize and perform. The figure illustrates a communicative process.



Before describing the theoretical framework, I would like to emphasize that this framework is my work and contribution to management and communication science. Figure 1 illustrates a process of communication, which has *not* been seen before.

I acknowledge the current literature, which serves as an important inspiration and provides the broader theories, concepts and perspectives used to explain each element of my framework. What is new is the whole. By putting all elements together, I paint a different and unique picture. The process I have constructed emerges when a leader and selected participants in communication engage in a communicative relationship. In my framework, it is the communicative relationships and performativity of visuals, which constitute the process of communication and enables certain meaningful cognitive effects and organizational goals to be achieved. The effects and goals provide feedback to the inputs and therefore the process is illustrated as a circle. In the current literature, research has looked into each element, but no one has, like I do, connected people and relationships with the performativity of visuals, cognition and outcomes. The following sections describe each part of process including the performativity of communication and the visual mode. Keep in mind when reading the input sections that the inputs are interconnected and impossible to separate. In this framework, it is the engagement, interaction and connectivity between the inputs, which determines the strategic use of visuals and language.

### **3.1. Input**

The first part of the process concerns people, and the way they organize. In my framework, the input of the communicative process is a leader, certain participants in communication, and the leader and participant relationship. The inputs are the beginning of the illustrated communicative process, which emerges when a leader interacts and engages with selected participants in communication with the purpose of facilitating change (e.g., improved understanding, performance, and decision-making). The leader introduces a visual mode, which tells a specific story the participants in communication interpret and acquire meaning to (Taylor, Fisher, & Dufresne, 2002, p. 318; Nymark, 1999; Dandridge, Mitroff & Joyce, 1980). The inputs of the process, which I have constructed are explained with relevant theoretical perspectives from contemporary leadership theory, critical management, and performativity. All concepts emphasize the communicative, collective, and collaborative aspect of organizational life and focus on complex and continuous interactions and interrelationships among leaders and participants (Mathews, 2016). The inputs are explained from a critical perspective to give a more realistic viewpoint on management and relationships. The dependency among the organization and its members, and among the members themselves, is viewed as a dynamic process constituted and influenced by historical, political and social structures, collective understandings, values and motives, and human intentionality.

### 3.1.1 Leader(s)

To explain the leader(s), this paper draws on an ambiguity-centered approach to leadership, concepts from new-genre leadership theory, and a critical perspective to management. In the framework, which I have constructed, leadership is acknowledged as a contradictory context-bound phenomenon, which can be used in many different ways by many different people. Leadership is not wholly desirable and unproblematic and when exploring the management practice introducing the visual mode, the variation, incoherence and complexity of leadership and followership must be recognized (Alvesson & Spicer, 2011; Mathews, 2016). Examining leadership involves listening to and observing people and identifying how leadership is done, interpreted and responded to. According to literature, to understand leadership metaphors are meaningful. Alvesson & Spicer (2011) provide in their book “Metaphors we lead by: Leadership in the real world” six different leadership metaphors: the leader as a saint, gardener, buddy, commander, cyborg and bully. The aim of the metaphors is to provide an imaginative view of the leader and enhance understanding of leadership. In this theoretical framework, leadership is constructed in the complex interaction and interdependencies among agents (e.g., people and ideas), hierarchical divisions, organizations and environments (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Leadership concerns a practice, mindset, and skill focusing on relational dynamics, emotions and cognition, communication and commitment, learning, growth and change. In my framework, leadership is a performance explaining the leader’s ability to engage with selected participants in communication and with established communicative relationships and the performativity of organizational visuals achieve certain relevant and helpful cognitive effects and organizational goals and facilitate meaningful change. In the process, which I have constructed, the leader is defined as an individual who acts in ways that influence the dynamic interactions with and among the selected participants in communication. In my framework, the leader focuses on facilitating growth and improving understanding and performance. The leader is communicative- and process-oriented, proactive and transformative, cognitive- and emotion-focused, and the essential role of the leader is to encourage relationships, solve ambiguity, facilitate change and promote organizational learning and development through an environment, which makes it possible (Mathews, 2016, p. 2; Alvesson & Spicer, 2011). Alvesson & Spicer (2011) explain this leader with the leadership metaphor *leaders as gardeners*, which is about facilitating and growth. The authors explain the metaphor theoretically by applying *authentic leadership theory*, which according to Lydia, Arran & Lester (2010) emphasizes developmental and positive interactions between leaders and followers.



In my framework, authentic leadership involves leadership behavior, which transforms, influences and inspires followers to perform beyond expectations while transcending self-interests for the goal of the organization. Authentic leaders apply in this context optimistic, competent, efficient, and confident behavior, attract followers and inspire people to action through communication, skills, relationships, learning and decision-making. The leader(s) is characterized by self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced information processing, and an ethical and moral perspective, which in turn promotes strong communicative relationships, a positive organizational climate, growth and development (Lydia, Arran & Lester, 2010, p. 439). Authentic leaders are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, uphold their personal moral values, and clearly communicate the rationale and goals behind their actions. The authentic behaviors facilitate a positive organizational environment characterized by integrity, trust, and high ethical standards, which contribute to the development of the participants and their communicative relationships with the leader (Lydia, Arran & Lester, 2010, p. 439). Avolio et al. (2009) describe four primary factors, which constitute the basic structure of authentic leadership: balanced processing (i.e., objective analysis of data before making a decision), internalized moral perspective (i.e., internal moral standards to self-regulate one's behavior) relational transparency (i.e., authentic expression of self through sharing of information and feelings) and self-awareness (i.e., demonstrated understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses). According to Luthans & Avolio (2003), authentic leaders place concern for others before their own self-interest, and with their ability to manage moral and ethical issues, the leaders position themselves at the high end of full-range leadership; meaning that the leaders motivate, inspire, and empower others, build trust, act with integrity, and encourage relationships, learning, growth and development. In literature, this style of leadership and leadership behavior is also found in *transformational leadership*.

As described above, in my framework the main objective of the leader is to engage with selected participants in communication and establish communicative relationships, which are the input that enables valuable cognitive effects and organizational goals to be achieved. The objectives only emerge, are negotiated, contested, implemented, resolved, etc. when the leader and participants engage in a communicative relationship. In this communicative process, it is the complex dynamics between leaders, participants, and context, and the performativity of the visual mode introduced that constitute the communicative process, which I have constructed (Collinson, 2011).

According to Denhardt & Denhardt (2006), to engage and influence potential followers, emotional commitment is needed, and therefore, I have chosen to incorporate cognition in my theoretical framework. To facilitate engagement and establish relationships, the leader must trigger, stimulate or evoke emotional responses. Denhardt & Denhardt (2006) conceptualize this aspect of leadership as *affective leadership*, which involves connectivity on the emotional and mental plane. The task of the leader is to bring emotional connectivity between the leader and the followers and among the followers. This perspective to leadership acknowledges the ability to empower and motivate others through evoking emotions as the key to the art of leadership. The practice engages the leader and followers in an interactive social process, which is characterized as proactive and reactive, inhibiting and facilitative, sensitizing and animating (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2006). To generate the desired effects among the followers, the leader makes space for different emotional responses. According to literature, introducing organizational images and visual artifacts in the dynamic communicative process helps to evoke these cognitive responses. According to Meyer et al. (2013), visuals are symbolic devices, which serve as triggers for individual cognitive processes such as attention, perception, remembrance, and evaluation. When a management practice strategically combines the visual mode with the verbal language, emotional connectivity between the leader and the participants in communication, and among the participants, is encouraged (Meyer et al., 2013; Mathews, 2016, p. 2). In my framework, the leader introduces the visual mode to improve understanding and facilitate a stronger sense of meaning. Through the performativity of the organizational visual introduced transformation is made possible. The transformative characteristic of leadership is viewed from the contemporary perspective to *transformational leadership theory* provided by Avolio et al. (2009), which explain that a transformational leader's behavior transforms and inspires followers to be self-motivated and perform beyond expectations while transcending self-interests for the good of the organization (Mathews, 2016, p. 6). In this framework, the key role of the leader and the practice of leadership is to facilitate growth, promote learning, establish strong communicative relationships, and influence the development of the participants in communication's psychological capital (i.e., the individual's positive psychological states of development based on self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience). The concept of psychological capital is one of the strongest contributions in the evolving field of positive organizational behavior and is used to explain development of positive strength-based human resources, which contribute to improved performance and relationships (Lydia, Arran & Lester, 2010, p. 438).

### 3.1.2 Participants

Further to the explanation of the leader, the participants are explained. In my framework, the participants are people engaging and interacting with a leader in a dynamic communicative process, and therefore, they are defined as the participants in communication. The participants are internal stakeholders (e.g., employees, managers, the board of directors, and investors) and/or external stakeholders (e.g., consumers, regulators, investors, and suppliers). To explain the participants in communication, this paper draws on contemporary *followership theory* and *authentic leadership theory*, which concern processual views, relational interactions and how people come together in a social process to co-create leadership and followership (Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012; DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Lydia, Arran & Lester, 2010). The participants are viewed from a *discursive approach to leadership*, which according to Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien (2012) positions followers as actors engaging, interacting and negotiating with leaders to influence organizational understandings and produce outcomes. Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien (2012) characterize people as engaging in relational interactions, and in these interactions, they are co-producing leadership and followership (e.g., relationships, behaviors and identities). People are defined by how they interact and engage together in social and relational contexts to construct or not construct leadership and followership (Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014; DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Shamir, 2007). In my framework, leadership is acknowledged as a relational process co-created by leaders and followers in context, and to understand the process, behavior and communication is studied. This perspective is also found in *authentic leadership theory*. According to literature, authentic leadership cannot exist without subsequent engagement from and development of the selected participants in communication (Lydia, Arran & Lester, 2010, p. 439). In this framework, the leader is defined by his or her ability to foster engagement and development of psychological capital (i.e., a developmental statelike composite of attitudinal and cognitive resources that have an impact on individual performance). The leader is only able to practice authentic leadership if the participants perceive the leader as being authentic and respond in ways, which facilitate outcomes such as job performance, organizational commitment, engagement and motivation, enhanced understanding, learning and growth, improved decision-making and problem solving (Lydia, Arran & Lester, 2010, p. 439; Alvesson & Spicer, 2011). The participants in communication, and their responses, are central to the communicative process, and to facilitate change with the visual introduced, the leader needs participants willing to engage and interact.

Giving the importance of the participants, their behaviors and the factors influencing their responses must be understood. According to Lydia, Arran & Lester (2010), these are found in the specific mechanisms, which produce the desired cognitive effects and organizational goals. In my framework, the participants are characterized by individual behavior, relationships, and the leader's authentic behavior, which is the factor encouraging the psychological capital of and among participants and potential followers. The psychological capital concerns the positive psychological states, which characterize the individual participant and performance. According to literature these are: confidence (self-efficacy), belief in personal success (optimism), ability to handle setbacks (resiliency) and willingness to commit to accomplish organizational goals (hope). These states characterize together with the authentic behavior the participants in communication. The stronger the positive psychological states and authentic behaviors are, the greater and stronger engagement, relationships and outcomes. When the authentic leader facilitates an environment, which promotes growth, learning and development, the leader encourages the positive psychological states, and influences the participants in communication to become self-motivated and committed to the organizational strategic direction and goals (Lydia, Arran & Lester, 2010, p. 439).

### **3.1.3 Relationship**

The last input is relationship. Relationship concerns how the leader and participants relate to each other and engage and interact in the communicative process. According to *authentic leadership theory and follower theory*, the leader's effect on the participants in communication can only be understood by acknowledging and exploring how leader and participant characteristics interact to influence outcomes (Lydia, Arran & Lester, 2010; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Similar is argued in *leader-member exchange theory*, which focuses on the dyadic relationship between leader(s) and member(s) (Mathews, 2016, p. 7). To explain the relationships between the leader and participants, this paper draws on *relational leadership theory*, which characterizes relationships by leadership effectiveness, follower outcomes, dyadic relationships, connectivity, and context. According to Uhl-Bien (2006), the relational perspective is a relative new term in the leadership literature, and therefore, its meaning is open to interpretation. To explain how the leader and participants relate, I have chosen to use *the leadership process approach* presented and visualized by Uhl-Bien et al. (2014). The leadership process concerns how leaders and followers interact together in context to co-create leadership and its outcomes. The approach assumes that it is how leading and following behavior work together, which constitute leadership and produces outcomes. Relations are created according to how people respond to influences and attempts (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014, pp. 98-99).

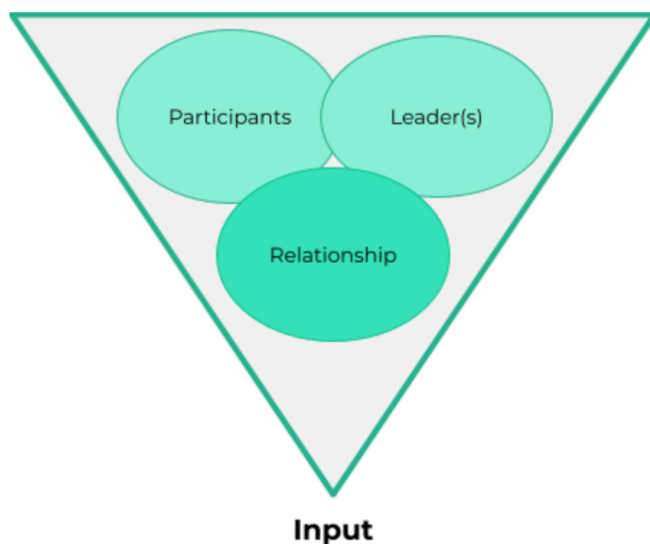
According to Uhl-Bien et al. (2014), focusing on relational interactions allows research to explore leadership, followership and relationships in more meaningful ways. In my framework, the relational approach concerns a social influence process through which change and growth (e.g., new values, attitudes, behaviors, cognitive effects and organizational goals) are encouraged and facilitated. The relationships are socially constructed and constituted in complex dynamics between people, and the specific context and it is evolving patterns of a mutual influence, which define the specific relationship between the leader and participants in communication (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 654; Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Mathews, 2016, p. 11). The participants are considered as selected, active and dynamic agents, which is influenced and encouraged by the leader to engage in a dynamic and interactive communicative process constituted and influenced by the specific context and the visual and verbal mode. The leader's and participants behaviors are a product of the context of constraints, culture, and the leader and participants characteristics explained above (Lord, 2013; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014).

In this framework, which I have constructed to explore the visual mode of meaning construction, to connect and engage the leader and participants in communication, the visual mode is introduced and combined with the verbal language strategically. Connecting the visual and verbal mode, like I do, paint a new picture, which makes my framework a unique contribution to management practice. In my framework, the visual mode serves as a symbolic element activating mental processes able to improve understanding and connectivity. According to *transformational leadership theory*, connectivity is facilitated through intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation. The leader and participants connect where learning and growth are made possible and enjoyable and are encouraged. The relationships between the leader and participants are facilitated, when the leader is able to bring people, minds and skills together in creative ways and develop the collective through inspiring others to perform, develop, grow, learn more, and do more (Watts & Corrie, 2013; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014, p. 86). As a development of transformational theory, Trepanier et al. (2012) propose the theory *self-determination theory of leadership*, which explains the social and motivational factors influencing the transformational behavior applied to facilitate connectivity.

According to Trepanier et al. (2012), the concepts of *autonomous motivation* (i.e., freely engagement in an action for its inherent satisfactory (intrinsic motivation) or engagement in an action because of identification with the actions values and meaning (identified regulation) and *perceived competence* (i.e., the perception of being confident and efficient in one's social interactions and being able to control important outcomes), are key factors explaining performance (effectiveness), commitment, satisfactory, growth and high quality relationships. Relationships, which promote meaningful outcomes are founded on trust, respect, and mutual support, and when both parts are intrinsically motivated, they interact and engage more, and show greater involvement in the communicative process (Trepanier et al., 2012; Mathews, 2016, p. 7).

As illustrated in figure 2, to connect the leader and participants in communication, connectivity and relationships are essential. It is the created and co-created relationships, which constitute, enable and encourage the dynamic process of communication I have constructed. To facilitate meaningful change and achieve the desired cognitive effects and organizational goals, the leader and participants in communication need to understand and emphasize the importance of creating, encouraging and sustaining high quality communicative relationships.

**Figure 2:** The relational connectivity between the leader and participants in communication.



To examine the leader and participant relationship, the discursive approach to leadership and organizational discourse analysis (ODA) is meaningful. ODA is an analytical approach useful for studying how texts are put together in discourses, which are acknowledged as key drivers for organizational dynamics. In my framework, the analysis focuses on how social reality, organizing and organization are talked into or out of existence and how institutionalized forms of talk and text place boundaries on what can exist. The things talked into existence are understood as “small d” discourses and the institutionalized bundles of text are understood as “big D” discourses (Schoeneborn, Kuhn, and Kärreman, 2019, p. 479). The aim of the analysis is to study language in its social context and explore intertextuality (i.e., the interrelationship between organizational text) and how values, beliefs and assumptions are communicated. The perspective from which the inputs are explained is the CCO perspective, which focuses on how organizing arises from the interaction between context and communicative acts, and a critical perspective to management, which pays attention to the role of the broader patterns and structures, which management and organizations function (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000b, 2011; Phillips & Oswick, 2012; Adler, Forbes & Willmott, 2014, p. 127). The focus of my framework is how organizational visuals introduced by management perform and promote change and therefore, the concept of *performativity* is embraced. In general, performativity aims to explain why practices, devices and interactions have certain performative effects whereas *critical performativity* involves the active and subversive intervention into managerial discourses and practices (Huault et al., 2017). According to Spicer, Alvesson & Kärreman (2016), critical performativity explores the practical and sometimes parodic use of discourse including how words describe things in the social world. The concept of performativity is embraced in socially and progressive ways, which enable research to better understand the social world and how to engage with it in progressive ways (Spicer, Alvesson & Kärreman, 2016, p. 538; Huault, Kärreman, Perret & Spicer, 2017). In my framework, performativity involves the idea that social reality can be transformed through the active mobilization of text and visuals. Performativity concerns an ongoing process of performance, and not just a use of words. Knowledge is seen as a collective and transformative process. Discourse is made performative and through the performativity, discourses create space for acting and enacting discourses in different ways. The concept is understood as the reiterative practice by which discourse produces the effects, which it names. Discourse has the ability to be a strategic resource used by different actors in many different ways and constraints of management and therefore context is always acknowledged and considered (Spicer, Alvesson & Kärreman, 2016, p. 544; Adler, Forbes & Willmott, 2014; Gond et al., 2016).

### 3.2. Output

After explaining the input of the interactive process of communication, the output is explained. The output is certain cognitive effects and organizational goals, which are achieved through the performativity of the visual mode introduced. When management combines the visual mode with the verbal language strategically, change can be facilitated. To explain the output, this paper draws on theoretical concepts from visualization literature, human cognition and visual rhetoric analysis. Connecting human cognition and visualization with communication and management is a new way of exploring the visual mode of meaning construction. I acknowledge that the theories, concepts and perspectives in my theoretical framework are found in existing literature. My thesis provides a new perspective to strategic communication and management science because it connects the elements explained in a unique way and paints a picture, which does *not* already exist.

#### 3.2.1 Cognitive Effects and Organizational Goals

According to Patterson (2014), to facilitate the desired cognitive effects and organizational goals, *human cognition* (i.e., the mental processes and actions of acquiring knowledge and understanding) must be considered in both ends of visualization. In this framework, a useful organizational visual is designed with cognition as the primary driving force of the visual design and introduced for selected participants in communication with a very clear purpose. Cognition involves intellectual functions and processes such as attention, comprehension, information processing, meaning and knowledge construction, memory, language, perception, action, emotion, mental imagery, problem solving, and decision making (Patterson, 2014, p. 45). In my framework, the management practice introducing an organizational visual is constructed as a dynamic strategic communicative process directed towards a specific organizational goal. The practice combines the visual mode with the verbal language strategically to achieve the potential outcomes of both modes of communication. According to literature, the visual mode and verbal language each have the potential to elicit emotional and analytical responses. Visual images and descriptive text can activate the same parts of the brain and therefore, how the visual and/or verbal influence the viewer depend on how the visual and/or text are constructed and introduced (Hill & Helmers, 2004). If an organizational visual is designed, presented and evaluated in a meaningful way, it has the ability to facilitate change (e.g., improved understanding, performance, and decision-making) and in some way influence viewers beliefs, attitudes, and opinions (Hill & Helmers, 2004).



To influence, facilitate change and construct meaning the visual mode must make sense to the participants in communication. The visual mode requires some way to bring its elements into a meaningful whole, which in this paper are human cognition as a framework and an organizational visual introduced as a chronological meaningful story (Meyer et al., 2013; Patterson, 2014; Rafaeli & Worline, 1999; Nymark, 1999; Weick & Browning, 1986; Czarniawska; 1998). According to literature, combining the verbal and visual mode in a meaningful way enable more processing capacity to learners. In general, visual representations involve less effort and therefore, the visual mode is meaningful to introduce to improve understanding and learning. In psychology literature, visuals represent a powerful resource for mental and physical well-being, and with the use of cognitive strategies the visual mode has the ability to promote greater self-awareness, reduce negative emotional experiences, and enhance memory processing (Jeung, Chandler & Sweller, 2006; Klinger, Tversky & Hanrahan, 2010; Bolwerk et al., 2014). According to literature, to achieve the desired cognitive effects and organizational goals, the leader needs to communicate clearly why the participants are exposed to the specific organizational visual. When the participants in communication know why, they open their mind to external information. Influential visuals are external information (i.e., stimulus), which catch attention and enter the perceptual and cognitive human processing system via encoding. The encoded information starts human memory (i.e., working memory and long-term memory) and pattern recognition, and lead to decision-making and a final response (Patterson, 2014, p. 44-46).

According to Hill & Helmers (2004), to achieve the desired outcome of visual representations, culture must also be considered. According to the authors, psychological and cultural processes and practices are inextricably linked. They work together in the persuasive process of visuals and therefore, both must be considered. Cognitive processes are recognized as the mechanisms through which the influences of culture operate (Hill & Helmers, 2004, p. 26; Patterson, 2014; Meyer et al., 2013). According to literature, if management introduces a visual representation, which catches attention and tells a meaningful and understandable story, visualization has the potential to enhance understanding and facilitate change. To catch attention the organizational visual must represent something meaningful to the participants in communication. This could for example be a visual representation of organizational strategy, which shows and improves the participants understanding of the desired strategic direction including initiatives and goals.

As described in the input section, the specific outcomes of the process depend on leadership, followership, culture and context. Looking from the perspectives and concepts explained, when the leader introduces the organizational visual for the participants in communication, the leader strengthens, through the visuals performativity, the participants positive psychological states and as a result promotes a positive work climate, which increases engagement, motivation, and interaction and through there improves performance, decision-making, problem-solving and understanding (Lydia, Arran & Lester, 2010; Meyer et al., 2013).

### **3.2.2 Visual Rhetoric**

To examine the output of the communicative process, visual rhetoric analysis is meaningful. The aim of the analysis is to examine the specific outcomes of visuals and visual discourse and ferret out some of the dizzyingly complex relationships between the many factors that help to make up any visual and rhetorical situation (Hill & Helmers, 2004, p. 32). Visual rhetoric analysis helps to explain how visual representations communicate meaning and how the meaning is interpreted and determined by the participants in communication. Visual rhetoric is linked to visual thinking and visual learning and therefore relevant when studying the visual mode of meaning construction. Hill & Helmers (2004) argue, to identify the effects of an organizational visual, it is important to consider what the visual is, what its role in the organization is, and the impact it has had or probably will have on the chosen viewers. The cognitive effects and organizational goals depend on which kind of visual the participants in communication are exposed to. For example, the meaning carried by images is different than the meaning carried by signs and symbols; for an image to make sense it needs its object (i.e., what the image visualizes), a sign or symbol can stand alone because it stands for something else than it visualizes. This means that people respond differently to images and signs and symbols (Hill & Helmers, 2004). When identifying the output of the process, it is also important to consider the group size of the participants in communication. The output may vary depending on communicating to five people or a larger group of people, and since the same visual representation may mean different things to people from different cultures or societies, the specific context must always be considered. Every participant arrives in the process of communication with a repertoire of textual elements (e.g., words, phrases, turns of speech, metaphors, anecdotes) as a result of learning to speak his or her own language. The elements are stored in the individual memory and influenced by personal and collective history of previous interactions and therefore, within the context it is important to acknowledge individual interpretations (Taylor, 1999, p. 27).

The specific cognitive effects and organizational goals achieved depend on the context including the specific organization and its culture, structure, and members. The participants in communication arrive and interpret differently and to identify the output of the interactive communicative process multiple interpretations must be explored (Rafaeli & Worline, 1999, p. 6; Hill & Helmers, 2004).

### **3.3. Throughput**

The middle part of the process is the throughput, which concerns how the visual mode performs and stands in communication. The throughput explains the actual process of communication and how the introduced organizational visual connects the input and output. This part of the process is the centerpiece of my thesis. Management science has until now mainly focused on verbal text and language and therefore, introducing the visual mode of meaning construction in the dynamic communicative process contributes with a new and unique perspective in strategic communication and management. The sections below explain the visuals performativity in communication and how to get to the outcomes (i.e., cognitive effects and organizational goals.)

#### **3.3.1 The Visual Mode of Meaning Construction**

In the illustrated middle part of the process, management introduces a specific organizational visual (i.e., a symbolic device, which exerts influence and impact on audiences' perception and evaluation of reality) to certain participants in communication (Pratt & Rafaeli, 2001). The visual introduced performs in a dynamic and interactive communicative process, which leads to certain cognitive effects and organizational goals. In my framework, the visual mode is composite organizational visuals (e.g., pictures, photographs, images, logos, and text) and abstract organizational visuals (e.g., graphs, charts, illustrations, drawings, signs, and symbols), which stand in communication as *symbolic devices, stories and narratives* (Meyer et al., 2013; Pratt & Rafaeli, 2001; Boye, 1995, 2019). The performativity of communication and the visual mode introduced (i.e., the throughput) is characterized by organizational symbolism and storytelling, and organizational visuals, which structure the participants active construction of sense, knowledge, and behavior, and help individuals and organizational collectives with enacting their relationships. According to literature, management uses the visual mode to shape stories, and to what extent they are in control, and how internal and external stakeholders receive, interpret and acquire meaning to the visuals they are exposed to can be explained by the performativity of communication (Meyer et al., 2013). When Management introduces an organizational visual for the participants in communication, they tell a specific story and express the underlying character, ideology, or value system of the organization.

The visual performs as a language or organizational relationship and constructs meaning, which is defined by cultural and social conventions and interactions (Dandridge, Mitroff & Joyce, 1980; Pratt & Rafaeli, 2001). According to CCO scholarship, stories and narratives are acknowledged as potential powerful mediators of meaning. Stories have the ability to provide the meaning for the organizational visuals introduced (Schoeneborn, Kuhn, and Kärreman, 2019, p. 479). Storytelling, stories and narratives are seen as performances in communication within the organizational context, which inform the collective dynamics and processes of movements (Boye, 2019, p. 1). According to Boje (1995), every event and action that occurs within an organization gives rise to interpretations by organizational members and these interpretations shape subsequent events and actions. The interpretations of events are recorded and transmitted in stories; meaning that when organizational members discuss an event, which in this framework includes a visual representation, they are telling the story of that event (Boje et al., 1982). Combining the visual mode with the verbal language strategically enables management to communicate strategy and tell stories influencing the participants in communication and organizational culture. The stories told through visuals serve as an effective vehicle for managers to facilitate change (e.g., improved understanding, performance, and decision-making) and contribute to organizational learning.

### **3.3.2 The Performativity of Organizational Visuals**

To explain the actual process of communication and how the visual input performs in communication, *the CCO perspective* to communication is applied. In this paper, communication is acknowledged as the fundamental process, which shapes our social reality and constitutes our social world. Communication is a way of explaining organizational reality and how organizations and organizational phenomena come into existence, persist, and are transformed through interconnected communication practices (Taylor, 1999; Koschmann, 2012; Schoeneborn, Kuhn, & Kärreman, 2019 p. 476; Kuhn, 2008, p. 1231; Schoeneborn et al., 2014). According to CCO scholarship, communication is a process of meaning production and negotiation, which tells something about *how* the organization and organizing practices emerge and happen in communication. In this paper, it is through the process of communication the organization is constituted and made recognizable to those who identify with it as its members, or who have to deal with it. Communication is seen as a process of meaning construction and essential for explaining and understanding organizational phenomena (Taylor, 1999, p. 26; Schoeneborn, Kuhn, & Kärreman, 2019, p. 476). Kuhn (2008) describes:

“In constitutive terms, communication is defined as a process in which contextualized actors use symbols and make interpretations to coordinate, and control both their own and others’ activity and knowledge, which are simultaneously mediated by, and productive of, ‘texts’.” (p. 1232).

Communication is the result of an interplay between text and conversation, which unfolds as actors seek to produce coordinated action by co-orienting to both one another and to their common pursuit. The process involves both *interactions*, which are the familiar conversational exchanges that occur between actors in a specific scene and *transactions*, which occur across actors who are aspects of a relationally integrated whole (Schoeneborn, Kuhn, & Kärreman, 2019, p. 483). In the conversation-text dialectic, Kuhn (2008) acknowledges the notion of power in the practices generating organizations to explain that organizations require an array of human or nonhuman agencies brought together to accomplish coordinated action. This array is engineered by what Kuhn calls *authoritative text*, which portrays the relations of authority and criteria of appropriateness that become present in ongoing practice. Text is interpreted broadly as representative of the organization as a whole, because it expresses what the collective is and is not in the sense of establishing an identity, a trajectory, and the practices that the collective can pursue to accomplish its future (Kuhn, 2012, p. 553; Schoeneborn, Kuhn, & Kärreman, 2019, p. 483). Schoeneborn, Kuhn, & Kärreman (2019) describe authoritative texts in relation to the notion of *intertextuality*:

“Similar to the Montreal School, Kuhn argues that authoritative texts can become actors in their own right, guiding and shaping the conversations that comprise the practice of organizing. Authoritative texts, however, pick up “intertextual” influences from other texts, which are found both within and beyond the (artificial) boundaries of organizations. In appropriating the notion of intertextuality, Kuhn suggests that human agency and intentionality cannot be the sole points around which organizational analyses pivot; he instead advocates openness to contingency and indeterminacy in CCO explanations. Intertextuality, therefore, displays that the organizational text never emerges *sui generis*, nor is it ever complete; it is always the ongoing product of practice and it becomes supplemented and saturated through its encounters with other texts (p. 483).

The process of communication is dynamic and involves an agent, a recipient, and thirdness, which means that the agent is always acting somehow in relation to a principal. Communication concerns human beings and all the things that are communicated through what is said, done, and written; ideas, beliefs, values, positions, and emotions and through the latter of these; realities, situations, and facts (Schoeneborn et al., 2014).

All the things communication happens through involve also visual artifacts, which are an equally important resource for the social construction of reality. Like words, and often together with words, visual artifacts materialize, organize, communicate, store and pass on knowledge (Meyer et al., 2013). As mentioned in the literature review, several research design to examine performativity and the visual mode of meaning construction exists. For this paper, a strategic approach is chosen. The strategic approach focuses on the use and impact of visuals in relation to information transmission and processing, understanding and enhancing information, sense-making, memory and recall, decision-making and persuasion and rhetoric. Meyer et al. (2013) describes the aim of the approach:

“The strategic approach focuses on the impact of visuals, both as triggers for individual cognitive processes such as perception, remembrance, and evaluation, and as persuasive rhetorical devices working through culturally established codes and symbols”. From this perspective: “visuals are symbolic devices that exert influence and impact on audiences’ perception and evaluation of reality; they are a means of persuasion” (pp. 504 and 505).

The aim of this thesis is to examine how organizational images and visual artifacts *strategically* communicate, organize and perform, and therefore, the focus is strategic communication, which according to Zerfass et al. (2018) concerns all communication that is meaningful for the success of an entity. In my framework, strategic communication is defined as the purposeful use of communication by an organization or other entity to engage in conversations of strategic significance to its goals (Zerfass et al., 2018, p. 493).

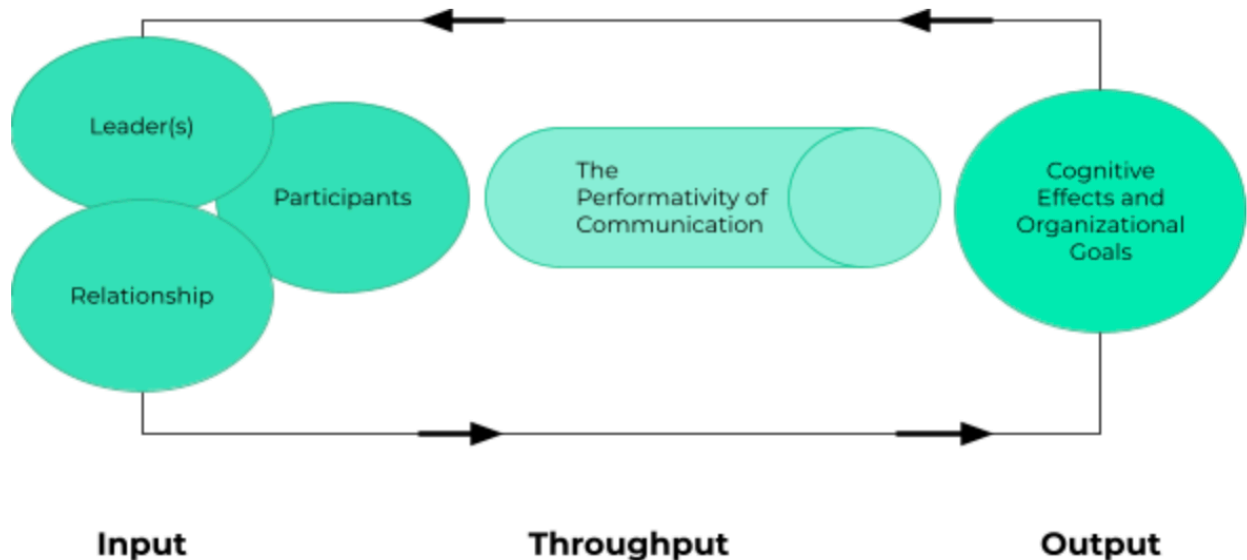
## 4. Methodology

The purpose of this section is to describe the research methodology of the study. The section describes the systematic design process of the research, which are the processes of data collection and data analysis including the self-constructed theoretical framework used to answer the research question and explore the performative nature of organizational visuals in strategic communication and management. Since the object is to examine the strategic use of visuals in the communicative construction of meaning, the chosen research methodology is the qualitative area. The qualitative area implies an emphasis on the socially constructed and constantly changing nature of reality, the intimate and interactive relationship between researcher and the object of study, and the situational constraints, which shape the elements of scientific inquiry (Daymond & Holloway, 2011). Since qualitative research is interested in exploring how reality is socially constructed, it is consistent with the chosen philosophy of science social constructivism. Using the qualitative research methodology enables me to explore human mind and behavior, relationships and experiences, tell a full story, and achieve a profound understanding of the meaning, value and effect of the visual mode in a specific organizational context (Daymond & Holloway, 2011). The conceptual focus of this paper is the effects of management using organizational visuals, signs and symbols, and the aim is to identify how the use of visualization and specific organizational visuals can lead to change, for example improved understanding, performance, learning, growth and decision-making. The chosen type of visuals are *composite organizational visuals* (i.e., pictures, photographs, images, logos, and text) and *abstract organizational visuals* (i.e., graphs, charts, illustrations, signs, and symbols), which stand in communication as *symbolic devices, stories and narratives*. To explore the visual mode of meaning construction, this paper will, besides the strategic approach (i.e., the use and impact of visuals in relation to information transmission and processing, understanding and enhancing information, sense-making, memory and recall, decision-making and persuasion) use the semiotic approach (i.e., the study of signs and symbols) (Meyer et al., 2013). Since qualitative research is concerned with meaning and the process of meaning-making, the data collected do not speak for itself. The qualitative data collected is context specific and open to interpretations. In this paper, it is the researcher, who interprets the data and gives it meaning, and to draw general conclusions additional research exploring the visual mode of meaning construction in the organizational context is needed (Daymond & Holloway, 2011). The aim of this thesis is to provide a useful and helpful theoretical framework illustrated with a specific case to inspire future research and companies to acknowledge and study the strategic use of organizational visuals in the organizational context.

#### 4.1. Data Analysis

As briefly mentioned above, the data analysis method applied to interpret the data collected is the theoretical framework (see figure 1). The theoretical framework is constituted of relevant and helpful theoretical concepts, methods, and perspectives found in the literature review, visual and rhetorical analysis, discourse analysis and organizational, communication and management theory. All theoretical components are found in the current literature, which I acknowledge. What is new is the whole. By connecting the elements, I paint a different picture, which brings a new theoretical framework to strategic communication and management. The framework is my contribution to the organizational context, and I hope it inspires future research and other companies to explore the strategic use of organizational images and visual artifacts. To uncover the research question in the most meaningful and suitable way, the theoretical framework will be illustrated with an empirical case illustration of the global lifestyle brand Rains. The case illustration is based on a case study I did last summer about Rains, collection of organizational images and visual artifacts, seven semi-structured in-depth interviews, and analysis of the visual mode and verbal language.

**Figure 1:** Theoretical framework on how organizational images and visual artifacts strategically communicate, organize and perform. The figure illustrates a communicative process.



To code the seven in-depth interviews, a systematic framework is applied. By doing qualitative systematic coding, visual data mining, I am able to identify and show patterns in a structured way. The codes are found in the theoretical framework and illustrated with different colors (see table 2). I acknowledge, this coding is subjective and since I am doing the research alone, I cannot provide objective coding (i.e., intercode reliability).



**Table 2:** Overview of the codes visualized with different colors.

<i>Input Codes = Pink</i>	<i>Throughput Codes = Purple</i>	<i>Output Codes = Orange</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership practice, mindset and skill</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Performance</li> <li>• Development</li> <li>• Responsibility</li> <li>• Strategic decisions &amp; direction</li> <li>• Facilitating and growth</li> <li>• Individual behavior</li> <li>• Leader(s)</li> <li>• Community</li> <li>• Relationship</li> <li>• Culture</li> <li>• The Journey</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The visual mode</li> <li>• Logo</li> <li>• Visualization of The Light House of Rains</li> <li>• Newsletters</li> <li>• Performativity</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Dynamic, interactive and social process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive Effects</li> <li>• Organizational Goals</li> <li>• Meaning-construction</li> <li>• Improved information, memory, understanding, learning and/or decision-making</li> <li>• Growth &amp; development</li> <li>• Strategic direction &amp; decisions</li> <li>• Market position</li> <li>• Motivation and inspiration</li> <li>• Simplification</li> <li>• Alignment</li> <li>• Equality</li> <li>• Connection</li> <li>• Community</li> <li>• Culture</li> <li>• Open-minded workplace</li> <li>• Transparency</li> <li>• Freedom</li> <li>• Responsibility</li> <li>• Brand image and identity</li> <li>• Professionalism</li> <li>• Storytelling</li> <li>• Employees in no doubt</li> </ul>

All selected concepts, perspectives, theories and methods are used within the organizational context and within this context my thesis constructs its own theoretical gap. By connecting the input (i.e., leader(s), participants in communication, and relationship) and the output (i.e., cognitive effects and organizational goals) with the throughout (i.e., the performativity of communication and the visual mode of meaning construction) my thesis provides a new and meaningful perspective to strategic communication and management. We know *how* words construct, but we know very little about *what* words construct and by uncovering the research question in a meaningful way and illustrating how visuals perform and can lead to valuable and helpful change, this thesis fills a research gap, contributes with meaningful perspectives to organizational and management theory, and provides a helpful management tool. The aim of this research is *not* to generalize, but to inspire future research and other companies to explore the visual mode. I hope other companies learn from my paper and get inspired to explore the performative nature of organizational images and visual artifacts.

## **4.2. Data Collection**

Since I am exploring a process, data from last summer, and this spring is collected and applied. The data collection methods are collection of composite and abstract organizational visuals, which stand in communication as symbolic devices, stories and narratives, and in-depth interviews conducted in June and July 2020 and March 2021. Last summer, I did a case study about Rains, and since the data is relevant and helpful to explore how organizational visuals can lead to change, I have chosen to apply the data for this paper as well. To show the data in a structured way, I have created an overview, which includes descriptions, dates and locations (see table 4 & appendices 4).

### **4.2.1 Interviews and Participants**

The interview method used to collect the data is semi-structured in-depth interviews with specific selected participants. All interviews were directed by an interview guide, with questions and topics to be explored in the course of the interviews (see appendices 3). The purpose of the interview guide was to ensure the same lines of inquiry were pursued in each of the interviews. The interview guide was not strictly followed, since the object was to get an understanding from the participants' perspective and to create this understanding with the participants. I, the interviewer, was free to word questions simultaneously or build a conversation during the interviews if it was meaningful. To ensure a trust-worthy and comfortable environment all interviews were performed individually, and before the conversation about the first subject of study began, all participants allowed me to use the interview with name and information for my thesis. All interviews except one were conducted at the headquarter at Rains, the case illustration company, either in the main meeting room where the visualization of Rains' strategy was on the wall or in a smaller meeting room where the logo was on the wall in front of the participants. The locations were selected by the CEO of Rains, Jan, and only one interview was conducted online on Google Meet since the participant was working from home. Performing the interviews one-to-one gave the participants the possibility to express themselves in the way they wanted, with their own words, and in a way that was meaningful to them, and encouraged a conversation where the participants were elaborating on their answers. The online interview went as trustworthy as the physical interviews because I had interviewed the participant before and met her several times at the headquarter at Rains; meaning that the online interview was not limiting the quality of the data collected.

The individuals taking part in the interviews are the CEO of Rains, Jan, who illustrates the leader in the communicative process, and the Head of International Sales, Jørgen, and the Social Media Responsible, Mai, of Rains, who illustrate the participants in communication and represent the organization. I interviewed all three, last summer, for the case study about Rains, and since I am exploring a process and the data is relevant, all three interviews are used in this paper as well. By comparing the interviews from last summer with the interviews from this spring, I am able to explore a process of communication, which in this case concerns how organizational images and visual artifacts strategically communicate, organize and perform and can lead to valuable change. In all interviews I captured what I needed to capture and therefore, reliable, relevant, and meaningful data was collected. With that being said, I acknowledge the limitations of the interviews. The individual interviews do not provide access to a large number of different perspectives, especially since only two employees were interviewed to represent the organization. I am also well aware that the interviews involved me as a subjective researcher, and the method might have introduced bias causing the validity of the interview results to be questioned.

**Table 4:** Overview, interviews applied to explore the performative nature of organizational visuals.

<i>Summer 2020</i>	<i>Position and Name</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Date</i>
Interview 1 29 minutes	Jan CEO of Rains Employment: 3 years	Rains Headquarter Main meeting room with the Rains' strategy visualization on the wall	July 13, 2020
Interview 2 32 minutes	Jan CEO of Rains, Employment: 3 years	Rains Headquarter Main meeting room with the Rains' strategy visualization on the wall	July 16, 2020
Interview 3 27 minutes	Mai Social Media Responsible, Employment: 5 months	Rains Headquarter Main meeting room with the Rains' strategy visualization on the wall	July 13, 2020
Interview 4 39 minutes	Jørgen Head of International Sales Employment: 2,2 years	Rains Headquarter Main meeting room with the Rains' strategy visualization on the wall	July 21, 2020

<i>Spring 2021</i>	<i>Position and Name</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Date</i>
Interview 5 39 minutes	Jan CEO of Rains Employment: 3,8 years	Rains Headquarter Small meeting room with Rains' logo placed on the wall in front of Jan (not planned beforehand)	March 13, 2021
Interview 6 44 minutes	Jørgen Head of International Sales Employment: 3 years	Rains Headquarter Small meeting room with Rains' logo placed on the wall in front of Jørgen (not planned beforehand)	March 18, 2021
Interview 7 36 min.	Mai Social Media Responsible Employment: 1 year	Online, Google Meet.	March 22, 2021

## 5. Analysis

To illustrate the theoretical framework, which I have constructed to explore how organizational images and visual artifacts strategically communicate, organize and perform, I have chosen to do a case illustration of the global lifestyle brand Rains. The purpose of the case illustration is to show how my theoretical framework is meaningful for companies, management and future research. The analysis begins with a company characteristic of Rains, which includes the historical development of the company, market position, brand image, strategic direction and goals. The following sections are structured as the theoretical framework with input, output and throughput, and to interpret and describe the significance of the findings, the last section provides a discussion. The case illustration of Rains is based on the data collection process described above including the case study project, I did last summer about Rains (see appendices 1,2 & 5). I have the past three and a half years worked as a consultant for the CEO of Rains, and through our collaboration gained a deep understanding of the organization and brand. I have closely followed the journey and development of Rains, and since I am exploring a process, the research from last summer is relevant and meaningful to use. Using the previous research project including interviews and analysis enables me to explore a specific process and illustrate how management practices using organizational visuals can lead to valuable change.

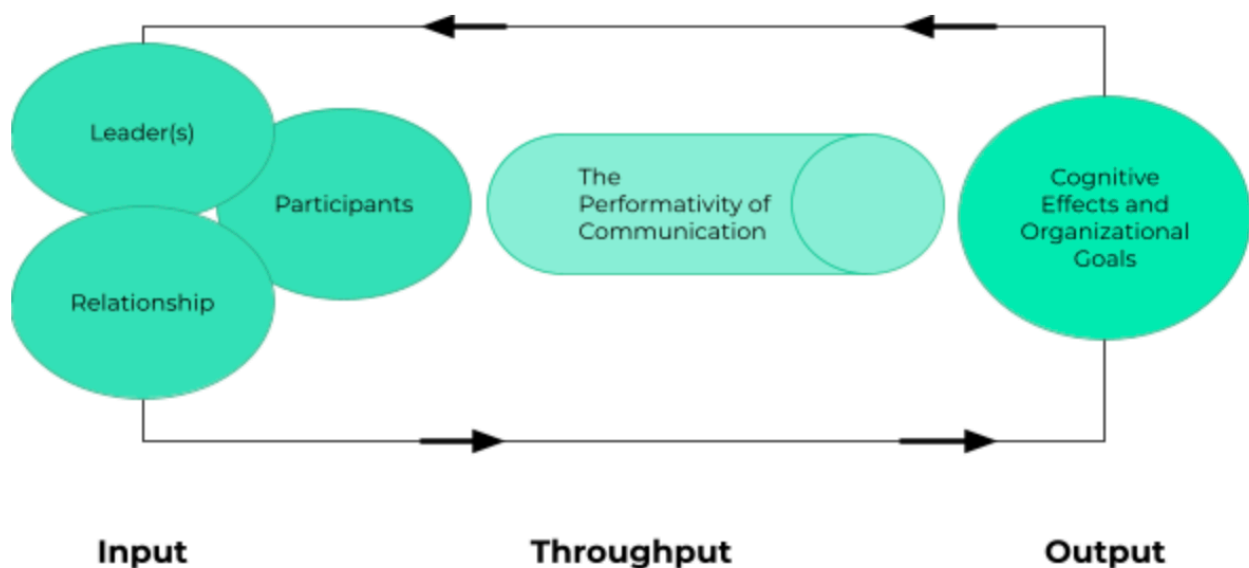
### **5.1. Company Characteristic**

Rains is officially founded in Denmark in 2012 by the entrepreneurs Daniel Brix Hasselager and Philip Lotko (CVR API, 2020). Daniel had previous experience from his own startup company and while he was writing his bachelor, he saw a business opportunity of connecting outdoor and fashion wear (Herning Folkeblad, 2014). Daniel and Philip took the risk and together with the investor Kenneth Davids, they established Rains, which since the startup in 2012 has expanded remarkably (Ringtved, 2019; Mortensen, 2018). In 2017, the owners made the strategic decision to hire the top executive Jan Stig Andersen as CEO to develop Rains into a global lifestyle brand (Finans, 2017). Rains has developed from a small Danish startup to a global expanding lifestyle brand, which is represented in 29 countries across Europe, North America and Asia. Rains is set out to be a high-end lifestyle brand, which rethinks outerwear. The brand originates from a classic minimalistic Scandinavian aesthetic and builds on strong values beyond the foundation of function. The aim of the brand is to provide fashionable outerwear for all seasons. Rains is operating in the lifestyle and fashion industry for outerwear, bags and accessories and is positioned in all markets with a unique selling proposition. The fashionable and contemporary products give Rains a unique position in the marketplace and the recognizable mat rubber surface seen on many products is a key element of the DNA of Rains. The prices are affordable (EUR 27-400), the quality of the product is high, and with a trendy style combining trend, street and performance, Rains is categorized as a luxury, premium and mainstream lifestyle brand. According to Rains, by combining the classic outdoor associations with a young streetwear inspired lifestyle aesthetic, a unique fashion-forward image is created. The core DNA is consistent and easily recognizable but lives in an ever-evolving brand universe of surprising and inspiring stories and environments building a dynamic brand experience (Rains, 2020). The vision for 2022 is to pursue opportunities of market integration (execute plan for quality distribution to secure full control in all key markets), retail scaling (expansion of retail network and upgrade of size, location and geography), North America roll-out (expansion of all sales channels and acceleration of branding and sales), Asia attack (measure strong partners in Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong and build China as first step), regional organizations (build independent organizations in Aarhus, New York, and Shanghai, and brand extension (launch new categories within the Rains brand universe). Rains has since last summer further developed and recently made the strategic decision to change logo. The goal is to become a brand, which covers all seasons. Rains do not want to be a rainwear company; they want to be a well-known high-end lifestyle brand who competes against brands like Prada, Gucci, Moncler and Luis Vuitton (see appendices 1-8).

## 5.2. A Case illustration of the Theoretical Framework

To show how my theoretical framework is relevant and meaningful for future research and other companies, a case illustration is carried out. The aim of the following sections is to illustrate how organizational images and visual artifacts strategically communicate, organize and perform. Before delving into the case illustration, it is important to emphasize that the case of Rains cannot be regarded as necessarily typical for all companies. The case illustration represents the potential value of management introducing organizational visuals strategically in a specific context and provides insights and examples, which hopefully inspire other companies, management and future research. I hope my theoretical framework is perceived as a meaningful management tool and inspires future research to explore the performative nature of organizational visuals in the organizational context.

**Figure 1:** Theoretical framework on how organizational images and visual artifacts strategically communicate, organize and perform. The figure illustrates a communicative process.



### 5.2.1 Input

This section concerns the first part of the process, which is people and the way they organize. The perspective from which the inputs are explained is the CCO perspective, which focuses on how organizing arises from the interaction between context and communicative acts, and a critical perspective to management, which pays attention to the role of the broader patterns and structures, which management and organizations function (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000b, 2011; Phillips & Oswick, 2012; Adler, Forbes & Willmott, 2014, p. 127). The focus in this case illustration is how organizational visuals introduced by management perform and promote change and therefore, the concept of performativity is embraced. In this context, performativity involves the idea that social reality can be transformed through the active mobilization of text and visuals. Performativity concerns an ongoing process of performance, and not just a use of words. Knowledge is seen as a collective and transformative social process, and discourse is made performative and through the performativity, discourses create space for acting and enacting discourses in different ways. The concept is understood as the reiterative practice by which discourse produces the effects, which it names. Discourse has the ability to be a strategic resource used by different actors in many different ways and constraints of management and therefore, context is always acknowledged and considered (Spicer, Alvesson & Kärreman, 2016, p. 544; Adler, Forbes & Willmott, 2014; Gond et al., 2016).

In this case, the inputs are *the leader*, the CEO of Rains, Jan, *the participants in communication*, the Head of International Sales, Jørgen, and the Social Media Responsible, Mai, who represent the organization, and *the leader and participant relationship*, which concerns how people relate to each other in this specific case. The inputs are described one after another in the following sections, but keep in mind, the inputs are interconnected and impossible to separate. As illustrated and explained above, in this process of communication it is the engagement, interaction and connectivity between people, which determines the first part of the process of communication. It is the established and encouraged communicative relationship between the leader and participants in communication, which enables the organizational visuals introduced by management to facilitate meaningful change (e.g., improved understanding, learning, decision-making, performance, and problem-solving).

## Leader(s)

The first input to explore is leader(s). The process of communication emerges when a leader, in this case the CEO of Rains, interacts and engages with selected participants in communication, which in this case are Rains employees, with the purpose of facilitating change. The leader, Jan, introduces strategically the visual mode, for example the visualization of Rains' strategy The Light House, presentation slides or newsletters with visual and verbal elements, brand guidelines or the Rains logo, which is the name of Rains visualized with a specific font and a symbol (see throughout section picture 3-7). The introduced composite and/or abstract organizational visual tells a specific story the participants in communication interpret and acquire meaning to. To explore the meaning and effects of the visual mode introduced by the leader, the practice of leadership including the variation, incoherence and complexity of leadership are recognized and considered. The outcomes of the management practice introducing the visual mode depend on how the leader and the practice of leadership is perceived by the participants who are engaged and interact in the process of communication (Taylor, Fisher, & Dufresne, 2002, Nymark, 1999; Dandridge, Mitroff & Joyce, 1980; Mathews, 2016). According to Alvesson & Spicer (2011), leadership is a contradictory and context-bound phenomenon, and to examine the input leader(s) in the process of communication including the practice of leadership, the researcher must listen to and if possible, observe people involved and engaged. Therefore, all interviews conducted specifically for this case illustration began with a conversation about leadership and the leader role. The leader, Jan, and the participants in communication, Jørgen and Mai, were all asked about how they define and interpret the practice, mindset and skill of leadership.

The CEO of Rains, Jan, explained: *“My job is in reality to create the environment, which enables our company to perform. I am the CEO, and as a CEO the most important thing is that you get the strategy and direction in place, but what is most important is that you create the setting, which makes it possible. If you take a specific example. I have now been at Rains for three and a half years where we have tripled our company and grown from 16 to approximately 80 employees, and the reason is that I as CEO have participated in creating the settings, which enable our organization to perform and ensured enough resources to enable the performance because if you do not have the resources, you are not able to achieve these results. My role is to create the direction and settings, and have the courage to take risk to build a team before you in reality need it”*

(Interview 1, U8)



Jørgen, the Head of International Sales, explained: *“Good leadership, as when we are here and not are bigger, we are quite flat right from our CEO to the rest of us [...] I think that is good leadership on one hand, that there is a good flow in the company. On the other hand, you also need to make sure that your people are following, and that is something I really focus on, and I know Jan and the people sitting next to me, and some of the others, do as well. We care a lot about people being heard and feel responsible. What we do, which I think is good leadership, is to ensure a good structure [...] It also has to be fun or loose in some way. I think that is good leadership, and I can feel, when you want to help out there, it will come back to you, and I think that is cool, that you do not just receive orders, but play both ways. [...] What we have at the office, that is, we are by now many; meaning that it is important to have a good flow, environment and atmosphere, and that is also the case. We also make sure there is a shared lunch, which might sound stupid, but it means a lot, the management team ensure we all eat together as you get to talk to different people. We mix it to make sure you do not only eat with your own team, and it motivates people. They fell like home and appreciated here”* (Interview 2, U15)

In the conversation with the Social Media Responsible, Mai, she described leadership as: *“It means, a person who can create overview, is good at seeing and being objective, has strong opinions [...] For me good leadership is one who can say ‘we go with x and y because of this and that, and that is what we do’. Of course, as a leader you should also be challenged with a lot of different things, but I would say, it is the leader who primarily creates and shows the direction”* (Interview 3, U16)

As described in the theoretical framework, to understand the leader, creating an imaginative view of the practice of leadership is helpful. In my theoretical framework, the leadership metaphor *leaders as gardeners* is used to identify how much the leader focuses on facilitating growth and improving understanding and performance because these characteristics are key to the art of leadership in this paper (see input section 3.1.1).

To achieve an understanding of the leader, in this case the CEO of Rains, Jan, the characteristics of Jan was explored. Jan explained in our interview this spring that: *“I am quite casual, I am quite transparent, I do my absolutely best to involve everyone, I am very communicative, I do a lot of newsletters. I gather the organization; I gather the entire organization at least once per week.*

*I do management meetings and ensure the leaders who are right below me have the premises, which make it possible for them to perform in their team. I am quite bold; meaning that, when we believe in something, we do it 100%. I believe very much in execution. I believe you can have a business plan, which is 90% in detail, but if you believe 100% in it and go 100% after it, you will get more than 100% results. I have seen so many leaders who can create a really cool plan and continue to work on it, but because they are not executing, the plan will just stay on the shelf and not move any further [...] I believe, things need to be communicative, but also simple. It needs to be illustrative. I frequently use metaphors, I frequently use metaphors to compare with because we need something figurative, we can relate to, to understand what we communicate. I believe, people need accountability. I give people a high degree of freedom to perform. The problem is just, if they do not perform, I am not patient. I am really not patient, but I am not patient with anything.” (Interview 1, U10).*

Last summer, Jan also described how he perceive himself as a leader and he explained: *“We have a company that strives after zero politics and police. My leadership is alike, down to earth, relaxed, but also results-orientated. I give a lot of freedom and let people do what they want to do and what they are best at. As long as you perform, you have a high degree of freedom, and if you do not perform, you will in the beginning just get some more follow-up. I am very much walk around and open, deeply honest, very communicative, very communicative in writing also, I visit our markets a lot as well. A lot of CEOs are just sitting at their office and here I am very different. You find me where things happen” (Interview 2, U50)*

Based on the coding and interpretation of all interviews, leadership can be defined according to my theoretical framework as a practice, mindset and skill concerning facilitating and growth, culture, communication, commitment, responsibility, performance, and accountability. In all interviews, the participants explained that the leader’s primary role is to constitute and show the strategic direction and facilitate the settings, which make the direction possible. In all interviews, the participants also expressed that it is the leader’s responsibility to ensure and encourage a culture where people feel well and heard. Jan and Jørgen also expressed the importance of gathering the organization at least once per week and creating an environment where people have freedom and responsibility.

Jan explained when we talked about culture: *“We must have a performance culture, but we also need a culture, depending on how you define culture because it involves many things, that is young, dynamic, innovative, we have the courage, a winner culture. People must feel happy to be here, and even though I do not always like it, that is why we do Friday bars. That was why we did a Roskilde Festival trip, that is why we do festivals trips, do parties, do social events, but also let the young people live in their young world. We give our employees some cool opportunities because they have to think that it is cool to be here, and I believe as a consequence we get some really cool results”*

(Interview 1, U12, see also U14, 16, 18 & 21)

Comparing the interviews, Jan explained last summer: *“We challenge the conventional wisdom and do our best to motivate our colleagues and partners through for example communication and crazy stuff, and we believe, for us, work is a lifestyle you have chosen and somehow we need commitment to our story and journey. That is what we expect from an employee. When we recruit, we look at personality. We look after passion and if it is a person who can be part of our culture and team. Everyone we recruit must have a specific skill set and willingness to learn, and if they do not know how it must at least be someone we can teach. For us, an employment is like an education. At Rains, nothing is too small or too big. You might help with painting one day and the next day you are participating in a big strategic decision about a new expensive location valued four to five million in rent per year [...] It should also be fun to work, and right from the warehouse to all other departments the level is high, and the level of communication is as well. It is important to ensure all employees constantly are motivated and happy. We are a quite flat organization”* (Interview 2, U44 & U50)

Based on the interviews, the leader, the CEO of Rains, Jan, can be explained according to the theoretical framework as an authentic, transparent, illustrative and communicative individual who acts in ways that influence the dynamics, engagement and interactions with and among the selected participants in communication, which in this case are employees. In this case illustration, the leader, Jan, is communicative, process and performance-oriented, proactive and transformative, cognitive and emotion-focused, and his essential role as leader is to encourage relationships, solve ambiguity, facilitate change and growth, and promote organizational learning and development through an environment, which makes it possible (Mathews, 2016; Alvesson & Spicer, 2011).

According to Alvesson & Spicer (2011), this leader can be explained by authentic leadership theory, which involves leadership behavior that transforms, influences, motivates and inspires the selected participants to perform beyond expectations while transcending self-interest for the goals of the organization. According to how Jan characterizes himself as a leader, he can be described according to theory as an authentic leader. Jan applies optimistic, competent, efficient, and confident behavior, attracts followers, inspires and motivates people to action through communication, skills and relationships, learning and decisions making, and shows a great level of self-awareness, relational transparency, and an ethical and moral perspective, which in turn promotes strong communicative relationships, a positive organizational climate, growth and development (Lydia, Arran & Lester, 2010). Jan is well aware of his own strengths and weaknesses, which for example was illustrated when he explained his lack of patience if people do not execute or perform well (Interview 1, U10).

### Participants in Communication

With an understanding of the leader and the practice of leadership achieved, the second input, the participants in communication, is explained. This input is the selected people, the leader engages in the process of communication. The aim of explaining the participants is to understand people representing the organization and individual behaviors, which connect the leader and participants and establish communicative relationship, which are the input enabling the management practice introducing the visual mode to facilitate change. According to the theoretical framework, it is the communicative relationship established when the leader engages the participants in communication, which makes the dynamic and interactive process of communication possible and enables the output, certain cognitive effects and organizational goals, to be achieved (see figure 1). In this case, the participants in communication are the Head of International Sales, Jørgen, and the Social Media Responsible, Mai. The employees represent the participants engaged by the leader, the CEO Jan, in the process of communication, and therefore, they are defined as participants in communication. To explain the participants, the theoretical framework is applied. The theoretical framework draws on followership theory and authentic leadership theory, which concern processual views, relational interactions and how people come together in a social interactive process to co-create leadership and followership, and a discursive approach to leadership, which according to Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien (2012) positions followers as actors engaging, interacting and negotiating with leaders to influence organizational understandings and produces outcomes (Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012; DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Lydia, Arran & Lester, 2010).

Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien (2012) characterize people as engaging in relational interactions, and in these interactions, they are co-producing leadership and followership including relationships, behaviors and identities. People are defined by how they interact and engage together in a social and relational context to construct or not construct leadership and followership and therefore, to make the process of communication possible, the leader facilitating the process needs subsequent engagement from and development of the participants in communication. The leader is only able to practice good leadership if the participants in communication perceive the leader as a good leader and respond in ways, which facilitate outcomes such as job performance, organizational commitment, engagement and motivation, enhanced understanding, learning and growth, improved decision-making and problem solving (Lydia, Arran & Lester, 2010; Alvesson & Spicer, 2011).

Based on the coding process of all interviews, the participants in communication are in this case willing to engage and interact. The employees *and* management of Rains are committed to achieve the goal of the organization, and to understand how they interact in the process of communication, their behaviors is examined. According to Lydia, Arran & Lester (2010), these are found in the specific mechanisms, which produce the cognitive effects and organizational goals. According to my theoretical framework, the participants in communication are characterized by all inputs, which are the leader and participant relationship explained in the next section, individual behavior of the participants, and leader behavior, which is the factor encouraging the psychological capital of and among the participants. The psychological capital concerns the positive psychological states, which characterize the individual participant and performance. According to theory, these are: confidence (self-efficacy), belief in personal success (optimism), ability to handle setbacks (resiliency), and a willingness to commit to accomplish organizational strategy and goals (hope). The psychological states characterize together with authentic behavior the participants in communication. The stronger the positive psychological states and authentic behaviors are, the greater and stronger engagement, relationships and outputs. When the authentic leader, in this case Jan, facilitates an environment, which promotes growth, learning and development, he encourages the positive psychological states, and influences the participants in communication to become self-motivated and committed to the organizational strategic direction and organizational goals (Lydia, Arran & Lester, 2010, p. 439).

In this case, the participants expressed and showed the individual behavior during the interviews. Based on the conversations and observations the participants in communication can be described as confident and independent employees who believe in their own personal success and in teamwork. They are dedicated to the organization, journey and brand of Rains, and their willingness to commit to accomplish organizational goals are significant high. The quotes below illustrate the individual behavior of the participants in communication, and based on the data collected and my insights, Jørgen and Mai illustrate the general behavior, culture and commitment of the participants engaged in the process of communication (Interview 2, U10, 15 & 17).

Jørgen expressed the individual behavior by saying: *“Our strength is that we execute quite fast, and we are really hands-on. Obviously, I am really executing myself, extremely executing. I can do both. I am really structured, but I am also executing. I can do both, which I think is a huge advantage, and it gives some respect further down as we get things done, and it also gives some respect from the ownership because we execute compared to if we just had managers who were only being managers and not executing themselves. That does not work here, and it applies right from our CEO to our ownership, who also are part of the operation [...] Now that I have different roles, I also manage everything with inventory and close out, and all these remains we have to sell out, a wide range of things actually. I am somehow included in everything and therefore, it is important to ensure that everything plays together. You respect the design department when you come upstairs, you do not just know better, you make sure to listen, and make space for other people, and find a balance, but still have some good experience to make a decision”* (Interview 2, U17)

As the quote illustrates, Jørgen expressed commitment, which he also did last summer. In summer 2020 Jørgen explained: *“Yes, it is true, we do not want to play with everyone anymore. We only play with whom we want to play with, those who benefit our growth and internationalization [...] That is exactly what our Light House strategy ensures, that everything is connected, and that we have the opportunity, physically and mentally, to achieve the goals, for example the half billion in the nearest future. We can always keep the speed because everything is close, smart and effectively connecting, and we also constantly execute and follow-up [...] To create a good and beneficial network, that is like everything else, a joint effort, it is something we as an organization make sure as it is our values [...]*

*I think our culture, the culture we have here, is super cool. The culture is really casual, it might sound stupid, but casual, however, also performance-oriented, actually extremely performance-oriented, but in a cool way. You chit-chat with each other, we have fun [...] The young people give a lot, but I also hope we give a lot back. We are a mixed group of people, but everyone is fully committed to everything, for example our Light House Strategy, which creates the framework, and I would argue, the culture is super healthy, a lot of performance, but also a lot of care; you care about people and it is an amazing workplace with a lot of speed, but never a stupid level of speed”* (Interview 4, U151, U155, U157 & U159)

In the conversation with Mai, she expressed the individual behavior by saying: *“Right now, I do not see myself as a leader, but it is something that comes natural to me, also when I think about previous jobs, even in school, taking the leadership role is not something I have thought of or think about. It just comes. I just think, it is how my personality is, and it is not something I am afraid of or fear, and it is also something, I think I will strive after in the future”* (Interview 3, U16).

In relation to this conversation, Mai also expressed responsibility when we talked about her position at Rains. Mai explained: *“That is me. I am not creative, but I give the assignments to our creative colleagues. Therefore, I spend a lot of time on communicating and visualizing in my own way, with the skills I have at this point in time, to make sure that I can tell ‘I want it to look like this’ and then it is my creative colleague’s job to use her skills and ensure it turns out like it should [...] I am not as detailed, and not at all at the level Rains are. I am much more in the helicopter and know how I overall want it to look like”* (Interview 3, U80; Interview 3, U4; Interview 3, U22 & 26).

Last summer Mai expressed: *“I think it is super cool to work for a brand you can identify yourself with and here we have really strong visions about who we are, and you also come a place where there are almost no rules and therefore, it is easier for me to find my own path [...] It is without any doubts our strategy we all work extremely goal-orientated towards that gets Rains to the brand it is today also globally.”* (Interview 3, U90 & U114).

Based on the coding process, the participants in communication illustrate a significant commitment to the organizational strategy of Rains. Their behaviors tell something about how management the past year has been able to sustain the young, dynamic and ambitious culture, and performance.



## Relationship

As explained, to make the process of communication possible, the last input, relationship, is crucial (see figure 2). The leader and participant relationship is essential because it explains how the leader and participants relate to each other and how the participants are engaged and interact in the process of communication. To explain the leader and participants relationship, the theoretical framework is applied. The theoretical framework draws on the discursive approach to leadership, organizational discourse analysis, the leadership process approach by Uhl-Bien et al. (2014), and the relational process approach from relational leadership theory. The leadership process concerns how leaders and followers interact together in context to co-create leadership and its outcomes. The approach assumes that it is how leading and following behavior work together, which constitute leadership and produces outcomes. Relationships are created according to how people respond to influences and attempts, and to understand how people engage, interact and respond in the communicative process with the visual mode, the relational process approach from relational leadership is used. The relational process approach from relational leadership theory aims to explore a social, dynamic and communicative influence process through which change, growth and development (e.g., values, attitudes, behaviors, cognitive effects and organizational goals) are facilitated and encouraged (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014, pp. 98-99). The discursive approach to leadership and organizational discourse analysis is applied according to the theoretical framework, which focuses on how social reality, organizing and organization are talked into or out of existence and how institutionalized forms of talk and text place boundaries on what can exist (Schoeneborn, Kuhn, and Kärreman, 2019, p. 479). The aim is to study language in its social context and explore intertextuality (i.e., the interrelationship between organizational text), and how values, beliefs and assumptions are communicated. To explain the communicative leader and participant relationship, interviews from last summer, *and* this spring are used, and as mentioned above, the participants in summer 2020 *and* spring 2021 interviews are the same. Interviewing the same people, the CEO of Rains, Jan, and the Rains employees, Jørgen and Mai, have enabled me to explore a process, identify patterns and themes, and create a reliable comparison, which provide an understanding of how people in this case illustration relate to each other.



In table 5, codes from 2020 and 2021 interviews are systematically structured and compared. The coding process, from 2020 *and* 2021 interviews provided an understanding of the relationships at Rains, behaviors, values and attitudes, the practice of leadership, strategic decisions and direction, organizational goals, and the brand image and lifestyle of Rains (see table 5). The input sections above (i.e., the leader(s) and participants in communication) explained the behavior of the leader, management and employees, and gave an understanding of how people relate to each other at Rains. To illustrate the relationship, quotes from 2020 *and* 2021 interviews are used.

**Table 5:** Comparison of codes summer 2020 → spring 2021

<i>Codes Summer 2020</i>	<i>Codes Spring 2021 (input)</i>
The Rains brand	Leadership practice, mindset and skill
Communication	Communication
Rains Company	Community
The Rains lifestyle	The Journey
Rains "we"	Responsibility
Committed employees	Individual behavior
Rains confidence	Leader(s)
Collaboration	Relationship
Connection	Culture
Strategy	Strategic decisions and direction
Internationalization	Development
Branding	Facilitating and growth
Competition	Performance

The first quotes illustrate the connectivity between people at Rains. The leader, Jan, explains, rather than using consultants, Rains want to perform on their own. The second quote illustrates culture, and the last illustrates and explains from Mai, Jørgen and Jan's perspective how the visualization of Rains' strategy The Light House of Rains connects and facilitates communicative relationships.

In summer 2020, Jan expressed: *"Look at the episode with ZARA, who tried to copy us, we as a small player won the game against one of the biggest players because we stood by, we are not afraid of fighting back. We believe in ourselves and our team. We rarely use consultants; we believe that what we do is the right thing to do, and we take responsibility for it"* (Interview 2, U44)

In spring 2021, Jan expressed: *“I would argue, rather than drawing on external consultants and get the last 5% statements, I am more executing on gameplans. You can also flip it around and say that I am more focused on content compared to formalities. Content needs to be on point, and when that is what we do, we go 100% after it”* (Interview 1, U10)

In summer 2020, Jan said: *“We really want to have young people, dynamic people who live our culture”*, and in spring 2021 he said: *“We must have a performance culture, but we also need a culture that is young, dynamic, innovative, we have the courage, a winner culture.”* (Interview 1, U28; Interview 1, U12)

To illustrate how people relate to each other, quotes describing the participants perception of Rains’ strategy The Light House of Rains are useful. The following quotes illustrate how the visual mode introduced by the leader, Jan, connects people and facilitates communicative relationships. The strategic visualization made and communicated by the leader, Jan, connects the visual mode with the verbal language, and due to how the visual representation is used in practice, the visualization of Rains’ strategy enables meaningful change to occur.

Last summer the Social Media Responsible of Rains, Mai, explained: *“It is without any doubts our strategy we all work extremely goal-orientated towards, that gets Rains to the brand it is today also globally”* (Interview 3, U114)

Jørgen explained in 2020: *“That is exactly what our Light House strategy ensures, that everything is connected, and that we have the opportunity, physically and mentally, to achieve the goals, for example the half billion in the nearest future. We are a mixed group of people, but everyone is fully committed to everything, for example our Light House strategy, which creates the framework”* (Interview 4, U155 & U159)

Jan also expressed how the visualization of Rains’ strategy connects people. According to Jan, the strategic visualization of The Light House of Rains constitutes a social and dynamic communicative influence process through which change, growth and development (e.g., values, attitudes, behaviors, cognitive effects and organizational goals) are facilitated and encouraged.

The strategy visualized on the wall in the main meeting room at Rains is able to facilitate change because the leader, Jan, clearly introduces and uses the visualization to connect people and encourage communicative relationships. Management practices introducing strategically the organizational visual, the Light House of Rains, constitute a common framework, journey and lifestyle, and how the management practices according to theory enable specific cognitive effects and organizational goals to be achieved is explored in the coming section explaining the output.

Last summer Jan explained: *"On the wall, you see the visualization of our Light House Strategy, which actually is what makes us the unique brand we are. I would argue, it is also our DNA, our strategy is our DNA, and it is the central point for everything we do and the framework for our weekly Monday meetings where the entire organization shows up physically or online to get updates and action plans, and we are 100% transparent to make sure everyone knows what we must do, and everyone knows the strategy. This means, our strategy is our living action plan and loyal follower. The strategy is closely connected to our DNA, which among other things is characterized by transparency. We share everything, and we are open and honest, and do our best to be as effective as possible. In addition, we also run with accountability, we give people freedom, and therefore, they are also accountable for what they do. We say, all assignments must be prioritized, and they have to follow up on their own work, and we also do. We also want speedy execution. We believe, if things go fast, we do not need the strategy to be 100%. A strategy executed 86% without delays is better compared to a 100% less fast executed strategy."* (Interview 2, U2)

To conclude the last input section relationship, the connectivity of people is explored by looking at how the participants in all interviews used 'we' and 'us' instead of 'I' when expressing a belief or opinion. According to the theoretical framework, this illustrates how the leader, Jan, and employees, Jørgen and Mai, explain on behalf of the organization. Together with the explanations above, it illustrates how the leader and participants are connected in a communicative relationship, which according to theory is crucial to make the management practice introducing an organizational visual possible and achieve certain cognitive effects and organizational goals.

Based on the theoretical framework, all interviews conducted the past year illustrate how leadership and followership connect and how the behavior and practices of the leader, the CEO of Rains, Jan, facilitate connectivity. According to transformational leadership theory, connectivity is facilitated through intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation. The leader and participants connect where learning and growth are made possible and enjoyable and are encouraged and communicated by the leader of Rains. The relationships between the leader and participants in communication are facilitated, when the leader, Jan, is able to bring people, minds and skills together in creative ways and develop the collective through inspiring others to perform, develop, grow, contribute, learn more, and do more. This is illustrated by the communicative relationships facilitated by the leader, Jan, through the management practices introducing strategically the organizational visual the Light House of Rains (Watts & Corrie, 2013; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014, p. 86). In the following section, the theoretical framework is applied to explain the cognitive effects and organizational goals achieved when management introduces the visual mode strategically for the participants in communication.

### 5.2.2 Output

This section concerns the output of the process of communication. The outputs are certain cognitive effects and organizational goals, and to explain how the introduced visual can lead to the output the theoretical framework is applied. The output section explains theoretically, based on an information visualization and human cognition framework by Patterson (2014) and visual rhetoric, the potential outputs of the communicative process (see section 3.2 and figure 1). Keep in mind, in this paper the cognitive effects are theoretically explained. The output of management introducing visuals is based on theory and researcher's interpretation. To study mental processes and how the brain works when a specific organizational visual is introduced, a fMRI scanner (i.e., a functional magnetic resonance imaging scan that measures and maps the brain's activity) is required. For the purpose of this paper, scanning is not necessary. The theoretical framework constructed, and data and analysis provide the theory, perspectives and information needed to explore the performative nature of organizational visuals in strategic communication and management and explain how some management practices introducing the visual mode can lead to valuable cognitive effects and organizational goals. The framework by Patterson (2014) is based on human cognition literature and therefore, I am able to explain how the visual mode have the potential to elicit emotional and analytical responses and lead to meaningful change. Moreover, visual rhetoric helps to examine the specific outcomes of visuals and visual discourse.

According to the theoretical framework, the purpose of visual rhetoric analysis is to explain how visual representations communicate meaning and how the meaning is interpreted and determined by the participants in communication. Visual rhetoric is linked to visual thinking and visual learning and therefore relevant when studying the visual mode of meaning construction. Hill & Helmers (2004) recommend, to identify the effects of an organizational visual, the researcher must consider what the visual is, what its role in the organization is, and the impact it has had or probably will have on the chosen viewers. The cognitive effects and organizational goals depend on which kind of visual the participants in communication are exposed to and therefore, the characteristics of each organizational visual introduced by the leader, the CEO of Rains, Jan, are considered (see picture 3-7). According to Patterson (2014), a useful visual is designed with cognition as the primary driving force of the visual design and introduced for selected participants in communication frequently and with specific purpose. Human cognition involves intellectual functions and processes like attention, comprehension, information processing, meaning and knowledge construction, memory, learning, language, perception, action, emotion, mental imagery, problem solving, and decision making (Patterson, 2014). In this case illustration, according to the coding process and interpretation of the data collected, the organizational visuals introduced by the leader, the CEO of Rains, Jan, serve to provide and enhance information, improve understanding, learning and decision-making, facilitate performance and growth, and construct a common framework for the entire organization of Rains.

Jan explained in the beginning of our latest interview that: *“If you are not a good communicator, if you are not really good illustrative, yesterday you did some quite fun visualizations, if you cannot communicate, the process becomes longer and slower”*.

In this interview, Jan also used the original Rains logo on the wall in front of him to explain from. He used the physical logo on the wall in front of him to improve my understanding and learning in the specific context (Interview 1, U16).

Jan explained: *“If you look at the backwall you can see the logo where the feats on the letters are cleaner. It is very simple. You have the lighthouse, which relates to and symbolizes rain, because it is a lighthouse right”* (Interview 1, U17).

In relation, Jan also explained how organizational visuals is meaningful to achieve organizational goals, for example growth and development: *“Our company has developed through line extension, which includes outerwear, footwear is arriving, accessories have arrived, bags have also arrived, and therefore, it is important we move on with some other symbols, but also another manifestation, which is bolder than this logo, and yes, we are in growth right now. In the latest season, we grew 80%, but you still need to keep moving forward and do it in small steps while you still perform. When you first experience plateau, it is too late to do changes like a new logo because in this case, your external environment will think “they change because they are under pressure”. Therefore, as we grow now, we change our manifestation to ensure we keep growing. Brands like ours have normally lifecycles of 5-6-7-8 years before a new lifecycle comes. What we try to do is to build a new lifecycle constantly and as a consequence, we are almost all the time a new brand. We try to add to our collection almost every season [...] we also start to do other things than PU [...] it also means, we begin to take the next step, because we are ready for it [...] We have grown out of the old logo [...] We have removed the lighthouse [...] We will be operating with a new logo separately and a new symbol.”* (Interview 1, U25, U26, U30, U35 & U38)

According to the theoretical framework, if the visual mode is designed, presented and evaluated in a meaningful way by the leader, it has the ability to facilitate change (e.g., improved understanding, performance, and decision-making) and in some way influence viewers beliefs, attitudes, values and opinions (Hill & Helmers, 2004). To influence, facilitate change and construct meaning the visual introduced must make sense to the participants in communication. The visual mode requires some way to bring its elements into a meaningful whole, which in this paper are human cognition as a framework and a specific organizational visual introduced as a chronological meaningful story. In this paper, the visuals introduced by the leader, Jan, stand in communication as *symbolic devices, stories and narratives*, and to achieve certain cognitive effects and organizational goals the visual must make sense to the employees engaged and construct meaning (Meyer et al., 2013; Patterson, 2014; Rafaeli & Worline, 1999; Nymark, 1999; Weick & Browning, 1986; Czarniawska; 1998).

In spring 2021 the participant Jørgen expressed, the aim of the visualization of Rains' strategy is to connect people. Jørgen explained: *"That is what we use the lighthouse for, to build downwards [...] In the lighthouse, it is really important to ensure everybody plays really good together and everyone feels appreciated; meaning that you are ranked equally. Maybe not according to management level, but according to assignments. Marketing is not just a support to sales, they also contribute and are of same importance, or design, they are also of same importance, or e-com, which plays together with wholesales [...] When we have used it at presentations and conferences, we always show that it is flat to ensure everyone feels equally treated and valued, and that is also important regardless of how big every stream is in relation to staff or costs"*.

Jørgen also explained: *"I always use the visual mode"* and elaborated how it improves information, understanding, learning and decision-making, especially in situations where it is not appropriate to go in details with everything. Jørgen explained, the purpose of using the visual mode is to learn and train everyone to say the same, understand better, and communicate the right image and identity.

Jørgen expressed: *"It is called one voice. You use it to bring your brand into existence, and that is why you use the visual mode more and more instead of just talking about numbers or the collection. The visual elements from marketing and our CEO are super important. It is also more professional today. You communicate in another way. It has to be more pro. You do not need different sales people or different types of people communicating differently. You need people who communicate the same [...] That is what I mean; the stronger the visual is, the stronger your history as a brand becomes, and the easier it is to communicate"* (Interview 2, U25, U26, U27, U29, U31, U33 & U).

In the interview with Mai, she also expresses her thoughts about the visual mode. Mai explained the visual expression of Rains with a strong confidence when she argued: *"It is obvious, we want to be a high-end fashion brand, and it is also obvious, we do our best to become one, and if you ask me, we are already on the way"* (Interview 3, U30).

In relation to this conversation, Mai explained how all employees at Rains have received clear and concrete brand guidelines from the owner, Daniel, and CEO, Jan, about how the visual expression of Rains internally and externally must be created and communicated.



Mai explained: *“Rains is in some kind of fixed box in relation to what we can do and not can do. When you want to be this high-end-brand, it creates boundaries for what you can do visually [...] In general, we want to be, I do not know if you can describe it as high-end, because that makes sense to me, but we want to be stringent, clean, simple in our expression, and in a state where all visual decisions are well-considered for a long period of time [...] and that is why it is really important we have some skilled graphics and an art director, who see all the different nuances. It also means, we are not running a lot of trials. We are very much in our own little clean box and use our fond and have all kinds of brand guidelines we have to follow”* (Interview 3, U30).

As the quotes illustrate, the organizational visuals and visual expression created and introduced by the management of Rains, influence and make sense to the participants in communication. The CEO of Rains, Jan, has in collaboration with the founder, Daniel, graphics and the art director created visual representations, which combines the visual mode with the verbal language strategically and tell a specific story the selected participants in communication acquire meaning to. According to the theoretical framework, combining the visual mode with the verbal language in a meaningful way enables more processing capacity to learners. In general, when management practices combine the visual mode with the verbal language strategically, the leader is able to improve understanding, learning, memory and decision-making. According to the framework, visual representations involve less effort and therefore, the visual mode is meaningful to introduce to improve understanding and learning. In general, the visual mode is easier to understand, remember and learn. In psychology literature, visuals represent a powerful resource for mental and physical well-being, and with the use of cognitive strategies the visual mode has the ability to promote greater self-awareness, reduce negative and stressful emotional experiences, and enhance memory processing (Jeung, Chandler & Sweller, 2006; Klinger, Tversky & Hanrahan, 2010; Bolwerk et al., 2014). According to the theoretical framework, to achieve meaningful cognitive effects and organizational goals, the leader, in this case the CEO of Rains, Jan, needs to communicate clearly why the participants are exposed to the specific organizational visual. When the participants in communication know why, they open their mind to external information, and based on the coding and interpretation of the interviews from last summer and this spring, the data collected shows that no one at Rains is in doubt about why they are exposed to the specific visuals and the visual expression they have to create.



This can be explained by exploring the culture of Rains. According to Hill & Helmers (2004), to achieve cognitive effects and organizational goals when introducing the visual mode, organizational culture should be considered. According to the authors, psychological and cultural processes and practices are inextricably linked. They work together in the persuasive process of visuals. Cognitive processes are recognized as the mechanisms through which the influences of culture operate. This means, the culture of Rains tells something about how the participants in communication are influenced when management introduces visuals (Hill & Helmers, 2004; Patterson, 2014; Meyer et al., 2013). According to the theoretical framework, since the culture of Rains is perceived and expressed by the participants as something people relate to, are proud of, and find meaningful (i.e., close connected, transparent, young, fun, dynamic, free, speedy and ambitious, etc.), the culture of Rains illustrates why the participants in communication open their mind to organizational visuals introduced by the leader. The participants representing the organization are included, related, proud and committed and therefore, the visual mode can facilitate cognitive effects and organizational goals. According to literature, when the leader, Jan, introduces a visual, which tells a meaningful and understandable story (e.g., the visualization of Rains' strategy) the visual has the potential to facilitate change. When the visual represents something to the participants and is introduced in a relevant setting, the visual catches the participants attention and influences processes in the brain, which can lead to change such as improved understanding, learning, growth and decision-making. When the leader, Jan, introduces strategically an organizational visual on a frequent basis, which makes sense to the participants in communication, he tells a meaningful story and expresses the underlying character, ideology, or value system of the organization (Meyer et al., 2013).

To illustrate the management practices introducing visuals, the visualization of Rains' strategy the Light House of Rains, Rains' logo, presentation slides, newsletters and brand guidelines is explored. Throughout all interviews, the leader, Jan, and the participants in communication, Jørgen and Mai, expressed the meaning, effects and goals of the organizational visuals introduced.

Mai explained when we talked about the meaning of the visualization the Light House of Rains and how it is introduced by management and influences the culture and performance that: *“For sure! I feel like, when you work at Rains, you really become included in the decisions, and what really surprised me in the beginning was how transparent management in reality is.*

*It also gives a huge connection, and you are never nervous about passing assignments on because I know, everyone at Rains, they get it, and regardless of whether you are positioned in warehouse, customer service or is the head of sales or something else, everyone's role is equally important, and I really feel it is communicated from the top of Rains. It may well be that we have a weekend where we sell ten times more rain jackets, but if our warehouse guys do not show up, the extra sale does not matter. That is the culture I feel is created from your first day at Rains.” (Interview 3, U74).*

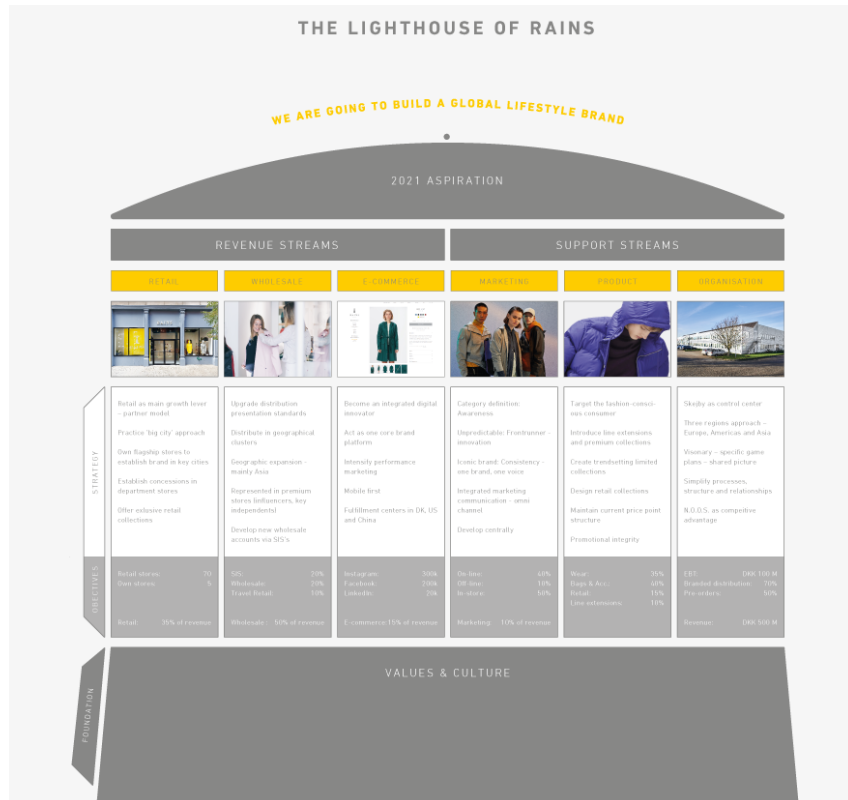
### 5.2.3 Throughput

The last section concerns the throughput in the dynamic communicative process. The throughput section illustrates the centerpiece of my thesis, which concerns the actual process of communication and how the visual mode performs and stands in communication and connects the input and output. Management science has until now primarily focused on verbal text and language and therefore, introducing the visual mode of meaning construction in the communicative process contributes with a new and unique perspective in strategic communication and management (see figure 1). Based on the theoretical framework, this section explains the visuals performativity and how to get to the output, cognitive effects and organizational goals. To provide the most meaningful understanding, examples of visuals introduced by the leader, Jan, are visualized (see picture 3-7). The visuals are specific symbolic devices, which exert influence and impact the participants perception and evaluation of reality. They have the ability to construct meaning, and if the visual is introduced strategically and tells an understandable and meaningful story to the participants in communication, the visual mode becomes valuable for management as it can facilitate meaningful change (Pratt & Rafaeli, 2001). To explain the throughput, the middle part of the dynamic communicative process, and how the visual mode performs and stands in communication, the theoretical framework is applied (see section 3 and figure 1). In this paper, the visuals stand in communication as symbolic devices, stories and narratives, and perform, as illustrated in figure 1, in a dynamic and interactive communicative process, which leads to certain cognitive effects and organizational goals. The performativity of communication is characterized by organizational symbolism and storytelling, and visuals, which structure the participants active construction of sense, knowledge, and behavior, and help individuals and organizational collectives with enacting their relationships. Management uses the visual mode to shape stories, and to what extent they are in control, and how the participants in communication receive, interpret and acquire meaning to the visual mode can be explained by the performativity of communication (Meyer et al., 2013; Pratt & Rafaeli, 2001; Boye, 1995, 2019).

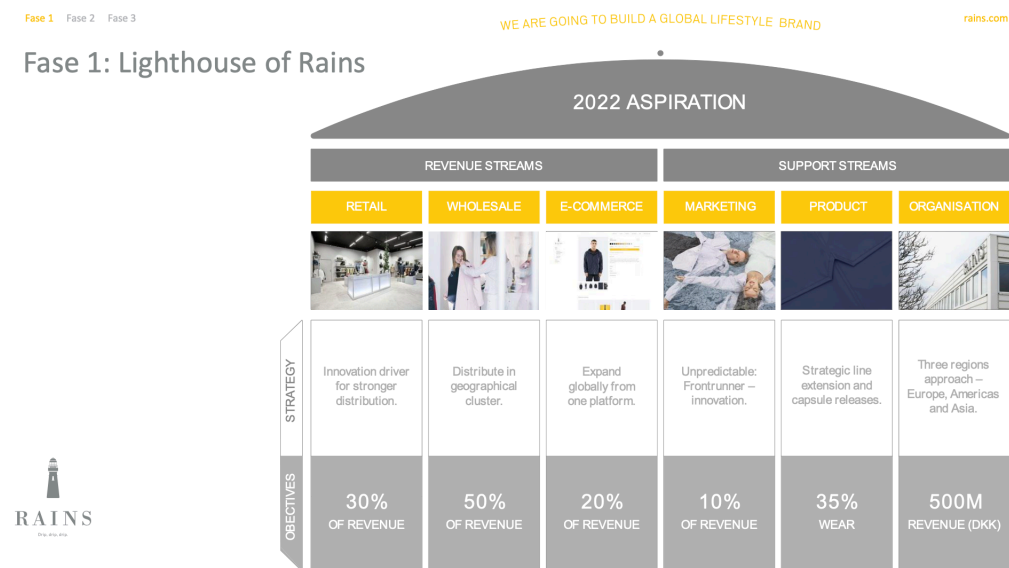
When management, the CEO of Rains, Jan, introduces an organizational visual, which makes sense to the participants in communication, Rains employees, a specific story is told and the underlying character, ideology, or value system of the organization is expressed. The visual mode introduced performs as a language or organizational relationship and constructs meaning, which is defined by cultural and social conventions and interactions (Dandridge, Mitroff & Joyce, 1980; Pratt & Rafaeli, 2001). According to CCO scholarship, stories and narratives are potential powerful mediators of meaning. Stories have the ability to provide the meaning for the visuals (Schoeneborn, Kuhn, and Kärreman, 2019, p. 479). Storytelling, stories and narratives are seen as performances in communication, which inform the collective dynamics and processes of movements (Boye, 2019). According to Boje (1995), every event and action that occurs within the organization, for example visuals introduced by management, gives rise to interpretations by organizational members, and these interpretations shape subsequent events and actions. The interpretations of events are recorded and transmitted in stories; meaning that when organizational members discuss an event, they are telling the story of that specific event. According to the theoretical framework, when management, strategically introduces a visual, for example Rains' logo or the visualization of Rains' strategy the Light House of Rains, the visual becomes a powerful mediator of meaning. The leader, Jan, engages the participants in a dynamic and interactive process of communication with the visual mode, and based on how the participants interpret the visual they are exposed to, subsequent events and actions, which can lead to change, are shaped (Boje et al., 1982). As explained in the output section, since visuals represent a powerful resource for mental and physical well-being, they can promote greater self-awareness, reduce negative and stressful emotional experiences, and enhance memory processing, understanding and learning capacity. Introducing organizational visuals strategically enables management to improve the process of communication and how the participants receive and interpret and is engaged in the process of communication. Based on the theoretical framework and the coding of the data collected, combining the visual mode with the verbal language strategically enables management, in this case at Rains, to communicate strategy, goals, decisions and directions, and tell stories influencing organizational culture and the participants in communication including how they understand, learn, grow, perform and contribute. The stories told through strategically introduced organizational visuals serve as an effective vehicle for leaders to facilitate change (e.g., improved understanding, performance, and decision-making) and contribute to organizational learning, and to explain and illustrate how the visuals perform, the theoretical framework and quotes from the interviews is used.

The theoretical framework explains from the CCO perspective the performativity of communication and the quotes illustrate how the leader and participants in communication interpret, engage and interact with the visuals introduced.

**Picture 3:** The visualization of Rains' strategy The Light House of Rains from a CEO newsletter



**Picture 4:** Internal presentation slide of Rains' strategy The Light House of Rains

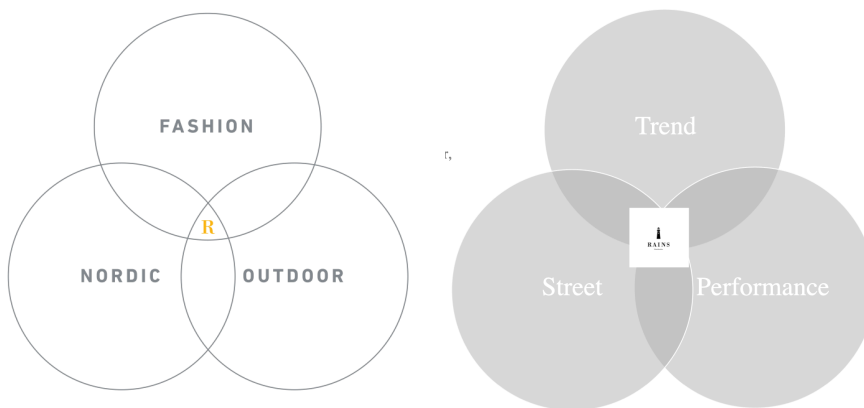


**Picture 5:** The original logo → the coming logo launching June 2021



Note: The symbol and text are used together as visualized here and separately depending on product and place.

**Picture 6:** Visualization of Rains' brand profile made by the CEO of Rains, Jan.



**Picture 7:** Two slides from an external presentation held by the CEO of Rains, Jan.



In the latest interview with the CEO of Rains, Jan explained how he and the management team uses the visual mode to shape stories internally and externally. Together with the founders, Jan has made the strategic decision to change the original logo (see picture 5). The decision is based on growth, and the goal of developing Rains from a rainwear company to a global lifestyle brand.

Jan explained when we talked about the strategic decision to change the original Rains logo: *“As we are a lifestyle brand and not a rainwear company, it is important that our logo does not stay in the rainwear world, and this is something we can see before the customer can. The majority of marketing people you can talk to will think that the identity Rains has right now is not something you should touch, because it is really cool, but it is exactly at this point in time, you should change. The fun thing is, right now it is actually marketing people who characterize our company, because they are involved in creating the framework that makes our growth possible. In two seasons we are already ready for the growth we have facilitated. We already have our logo ready; we have the concept ready, and we are ready to expand and develop once again, and it is obvious, it gives confidence, we are constantly growing and selling really well and therefore, you need to be visually and communicatively a step ahead. Is it risky? Yes, but it is even more risky not doing it”* (Interview 1, U30).

Jan elaborated by describing the new logo: *“It is actually really fun right, we want to do contrasts; meaning that we want to be a contrast to everybody else [...] You can say, it is almost a sun, but it is also a smiley. It also has 12 feets, which symbolize that we are almost ready for all 12 months per year. We have previously only launched two times three months per year where it has rained. Now we are at all 12 [...] We also do, for example, a smiley in the middle of the sun, and you can do it in different colors, because we want to have an “and have a nice day” attitude; meaning that suddenly we are more open and apart from that, we also want to be like Nike with the swoosh; meaning that we grow into having a distinctive mark, which we can add without the name of Rains, because people do not want to have the name on many of our products.”* (Interview 1, U40, U42, U44)

In the interviews with the employees the performativity of the visual mode was also expressed. Jørgen explained in our interview that the CEO, Jan, has trained him in creating visual presentations to make the communication easier to understand. Jørgen explained *“Not so much in presenting, but in creating it. I had a tendency to add too much text, and it is more difficult for people to understand. Therefore, when we do presentations internally, text becomes shorter and shorter. The graphs are added because they are important, but you need to make sure you have something visual, meaning some illustrations, because it does not work with a lot of text when you present for a longer period of time [...] Internally, when we communicate at meetings or Monday meetings presentations, we do our best to make them as simple as possible, but still with some great content, which brings the message [...] I do not present numbers anymore. I have stopped presenting numbers in a sheet. I do graphs, and all these kinds of visuals, and I do my absolutely best to make it as short and simple as possible, which actually is something to be honest, our CEO has taught me, because he does it really simple [...] and yes, you can call it visuals, but not with a lot of big Excel sheet because no one wants to look at it and therefore, it becomes visually oriented”* (Interview 2, U41, U43 ).

In relation, Jørgen explained why the visual mode makes communication simpler: *“Because people understand it better.”* (Interview 2, U47). Later on, Jørgen elaborated, a lot of text and numbers are old school and not something buyers, which is the case were described as young, understand very well or have an interest in. Jørgen said: *“If you are not able to match the numbers, you have a challenge, but on the other hand, if you are not visual, you will not get the customers we want, which are our influencers and so on, they are mostly looking at the visual. They are most interested in it”* (Interview 2, U49). Jørgen also expressed, Rains uses the visual mode to create the desired Scandinavian, city, and outdoor lifestyle brand, and they change logo to move on. Rains uses the new logo to tell a story about change, growth and development (Interview 2, U59-101).

To conclude the interview, Jørgen looked at the wall in front of him and expressed: *“When I look at the logo, I have not created it and therefore, I am not proud of it in this way, but I think, it is a cool working environment, and when I look at it, I reflect on the journey, which in three years also has developed me even though I am senior. Therefore, I think it is cool we can have fun and speed. That is actually what I think about rather than brand awareness, and I also think the way the Light House is built is really cool [...] That we have all functions in-house”* (Interview 2, U91 & U93)

In the interview with Mai, she also expressed how the visual mode in the context of Rains performs. Mai explained, like Jan did, when we talked about the new logo how the logo symbolizes growth. Rains is no longer a rainwear company and as Nike, Rains want to establish their own swoosh. Mai said: *“It should be like, when you see the sun, you know it is Rains”* (Interview 3, U42-U48).

Mai also explained, like Jørgen did, how the visual mode is introduced by management at Rains: *“Even though it is just an internal presentation, when we see it, and no one is external because the information is confidential, a lot of time is spent. It is really well thought with the logo in the corner and the illustrations is a specific way”* (Interview 3, U62)

At the end of the interview with Mai, she also expressed, like Jørgen did, how things have changed. According to the participants, people use the visual mode more and learn better from it.

Mai explained: *“I believe, with the journey the modern consumer is on, you have to constantly think out of the box and innovate and it is especially the visual mode you can use to engage the consumer and build interest and, at the end, convert them to buy [...] and it also creates some hype in a specific environment, and I do not think it is something Rains is afraid of. We want to provoke in our own Rains style. We like to be the frontrunners, and we like to challenge things. We do not show off ‘now are we doing this’. People must discover what we are doing. We have a cool approach, and that is also why we sometimes do some extreme things”* (Interview 3, U64)

Based on the theoretical framework, data and analysis, the management practices introducing the visual mode of meaning construction in the case of Rains illustrate how management uses the visual mode to shape stories and facilitate change. In this case, the leader, Jan, introduces the visual mode to shape and tell the story about Rains. Management is to some extent in control. They make the decisions and do their best to create the circumstances, which influence the participants in communication to interpret, acquire meaning and act according to the desired outputs. However, at the end, it is the employees, who enable the performance needed to achieve the goals. In the case of Rains, the leader, Jan, does his best to hire and develop employees, who have the ability and want to become ambassadors of the organization and brand. The internal of Rains is the foundation for the external, and to explain the actual process of communication and how the visuals perform, *the CCO perspective* to communication is applied.



Communication is acknowledged as the fundamental process, which shapes our social reality and constitutes our social world. It is a way of explaining organizational reality and how organizations and organizational phenomena come into existence, persist, and are transformed through interconnected communication practices (Taylor, 1999; Koschmann, 2012; Schoeneborn, Kuhn, & Kärreman, 2019 p. 476). According to CCO, communication is a process of meaning production and negotiation, which tells something about *how* the organization and organizing practices emerge and happen in communication. It is through the process of communication the organization is constituted and made recognizable to those who identify with it as its members, or who have to deal with it. In constitutive terms, communication is a process in which contextualized actors use symbols and make interpretations to coordinate, and control both their own and others activity and knowledge (Kuhn, 2008, p. 1232). Communication concerns human beings and all the things that are communicated through what is said, done, and written; ideas, beliefs, values, positions, and emotions and through the latter of these; realities, situations, and facts (Schoeneborn et al., 2014). All the things communication happens through involve also visuals, which are an equally important resource for the social construction of reality. Like words, and often together with words, visuals materialize, organize, communicate, store and pass on knowledge and therefore, the visual performs as described in the process of communication as an effective vehicle for management to facilitate change such as improved understanding, performance, decision-making, and contribute to growth, learning and development (Meyer et al., 2013).

### **5.3. Discussion of findings**

To interpret and describe the significance of the findings, this section will in light of what is already known and being explored, explain how Rains strategically leads with visuals. The discussion will provide insights, which have emerged as a result of exploring how organizational images and visual artifacts strategically communicate, organize and perform. The discussion of findings explains how my theoretical framework can be used as a meaningful management tool and potential starting point for future research. To provide the best understanding, the discussion is structured as the theoretical framework and case illustration with input, output and throughput.

#### **5.3.1 Input**

The input section explained based on my theoretical framework, data and analysis, the three inputs of the communicative process. The inputs leader(s), participants in communication, and relationship were explained separately, but as mentioned, they were interconnected and impossible to separate.

As a result of exploring the inputs and how people organized and related to each other in the case of Rains, it became evident that all inputs are crucial to make the process of communication possible (see figure 1). My theoretical framework and the case illustration illustrated, it is the established and encouraged engagement, interaction and connectivity between people, the leader and participants in communication, which makes the process of communication possible and determines the first part of the process. To benefit from introducing the visual mode, the leader needs to engage and interact with the participants in communication and establish communicative relationships, which are the input enabling the output of the process of communication. The output, certain cognitive effects and organizational goals, only emerge, are negotiated, contested, implemented, resolved, etc. when the leader and participants in communication engage in a communicative relationship. In the process of communication, which I have constructed to explore the performative nature of organizational visuals in strategic communication and management, it is the complex dynamics between leader, participants in communication, and context, and the performativity of the visual introduced, which constitute the communicative process. In the case illustration of Rains, it became evident that a communicative relationship between the leader, Jan, and the participants in communication, Rains employees, was established. The case illustration demonstrated, for example, with the visualization of Rains strategy the Light House of Rains, how engagement, interaction and commitment can be facilitated and encouraged by management constituting a common framework, which organizes and connects people, and promotes an environment and culture, which make the framework possible. When management practices give people something meaningful to relate to, for example the DNA, journey and lifestyle of Rains characterized by a trust and transparency, high willingness to commit to achieve organizational goals, performance, and a workplace and culture people like, management enables connectivity on the emotional and mental plane, which give rise to a strong communicative relationship between the leader, Jan, and the participants in communication, Rains employees.

In the case illustration of Rains, with the visual mode introduced, the leader, Jan, illustrated how management practices combining the visual mode with the verbal language strategically can shape and tell a specific and meaningful story, selected participants in communication interpret, acquire meaning to and perform according to, and pass on. The visualization of Rains' strategy, The Light House of Rains, illustrated for example how the visual mode can perform as a valuable resource for communicating the strategic direction of the organization, and create the setting, which makes the strategic direction possible.

The case illustration of Rains demonstrated how management can use organizational visuals to facilitate change (e.g., improved learning, performance, decision-making, problem-solving, development and growth) *if* a relationship between the leader and participants and among the participants is established. The process of communication, which I have constructed to explore how organizational images and visual artifacts strategically communicate, organize and perform, requires a leader and participant relationship and therefore, when applying my theoretical framework, leadership, followership *and* relationship must be considered.

### **5.3.2 Output**

In the output section, the potential outputs of the visual mode introduced were explored. The section illustrated how specific organizational visuals introduced by the leader, Jan, potentially could lead to valuable cognitive effective effects and organizational goals. Based on the theoretical framework, the section explained how visuals introduced by the leader, Jan, communicated meaning and how the meaning was interpreted and determined by the participants in communication. The section demonstrated, the aim of the visuals introduced was to provide and enhance information, improve understanding, learning and decision-making, facilitate performance, growth and development, and construct a framework, which gave management and organizational members a specific strategic direction including goals, structure, culture and values to relate and commit to. The leader and participants illustrated how the visual mode introduced by the leader, Jan, stood in communication as symbolic devices, stories and narratives, elicited emotional and analytical responses, and influenced the participants' beliefs, attitudes, values and opinions, which led to meaningful change. The leader, Jan, had communicated clearly why the participants were engaged in the process of communication and exposed to the specific organizational visuals, for example the visualization of Rains' strategy the Light House of Rains and the new logo, and since Jan introduced the visuals in a meaningful way, he communicated meaning. The case illustration demonstrated, the participants in communication found the visuals introduced by the leader meaningful, and therefore, the visuals were able to tell a specific story. The participants in communication found the visuals relevant and understandable and therefore they opened their mind to the external information, which due to the leader and participant relationship enabled the desired outputs, for example improved understanding of Rains' strategic direction and goals, learning and performance.

According to the theoretical framework and interviews, combining the visual mode with the verbal language in a meaningful way enables more processing capacity to learners and enhances memory. In general, visuals involve less effort and therefore, the visual mode is meaningful to introduce to improve understanding, learning and decision-making. For most people, the visual mode is easier to understand, remember and learn from, and since the visual mode of meaning construction according to literature represents a powerful resource for mental and physical well-being and has the ability to promote greater self-awareness, reduce negative and stressful emotional experiences, and enhance memory processing, it is meaningful to introduce in the process of communication (see figure 1).

In the case illustration of Rains, since the culture is perceived and expressed by the participants as something people relate to, are proud of, and find meaningful, the culture tells something about why the participants in communication open their mind to the visual mode introduced by the leader. The participants representing the organization were included, related, proud, engaged and committed, which illustrated why the visuals introduced were able to influence the participants. According to my theoretical framework, when the leader, Jan, introduces a specific organizational visual, for example the visualization of Rains' strategy the Light House of Rains, which tells a meaningful and understandable story, the visual has the potential to facilitate change. When the visual represents something meaningful to the participants and is introduced in a relevant setting, the visual catches the participants attention and influences processes in the brain, which can lead to change such as improved information, understanding, learning, growth and decision-making. When the leader, Jan, strategically introduces a specific organizational visual on a frequent basis, which makes sense to the participants in communication, he communicates meaning, tells a specific story and expresses the underlying character, ideology, or value system of the organization (Meyer et al., 2013).

When applying my theoretical framework, the group size of the participants in communication is also important to consider since the output may vary depending on how many the leader engages and interacts with in the dynamic process of communication. The same organizational visual may mean different things to people from different cultures or societies and therefore the specific context including group size must be considered. Every participant arrives in the process of communication with a repertoire of different textual elements (e.g., words, phrases, turns of speech, metaphors, anecdotes) as a result of learning to speak his or her own language.

The elements are stored in the individual's memory and influenced by personal and collective history of previous interactions and therefore, individual interpretations must be acknowledged (Taylor, 1999). The output of the communicative process depends on the specific context including the organization, industry, strategy, goals, identity, image, culture, structure, and members. The participants in communication arrive and interpret differently and to identify the specific output of the dynamic and interactive process of communication multiple interpretations are meaningful to explore. In the case illustration of Rains, the output of the process was explained based on my theoretical framework, interviews with two employees, who represented and explained on behalf of the organization Rains, my knowledge and experiences from consulting the CEO of Rains, and a case study I did last summer about Rains. For future research, a larger group of people, for example employees, could be relevant to interview and observe. Interviewing and observing a larger group of people could enable me to explore if Jørgen and Mai represent the general or a group of people.

### **5.3.3 Throughput**

The last section to be discussed is the center piece of my thesis, which concerns how the visual mode performs and stands in communication, and can lead to the outcomes, the explained cognitive effects and organizational goals. The section explains the performativity of the visual mode and how Rains strategically leads with organizational visuals. To explain how specific visuals perform, theoretical elements of the theoretical framework are applied. The elements became evident during the case illustration of Rains and therefore they are part of the discussion of findings.

The performativity of the visual mode starts when the leader, in this case the CEO of Rains, Jan, introduces a specific organizational visual, which stands in communication as a symbolic device, story or narrative. The visual performs in a dynamic and interactive communicative process a mode, which exerts influence and impacts the participants perception, interpretation and evaluation of reality. The visual constructs meaning because the leader introduces the visual strategically and tells a story the participants in communication find understandable, relevant and meaningful. When the leader communicates clearly why the visual mode is introduced and a communicative relationship is established, the participants open their mind to external information and influence. Due to the inputs and the performativity of communication, the visual mode introduced influences the participants in communications cognition, which are the mental processes involved in gaining knowledge and comprehension (e.g., language, imagination, perception and planning).

These mental processes strengthen the participants positive psychological states, for example self-efficacy, optimism, hope, resilience, memory, attention, and willingness to commit, as the visual mode is introduced by the leader in a meaningful and understandable way. The organizational visual has the ability to lead to change because it performs in communication as a symbolic device, story or narrative, which tells the story of a specific event or action, which bring meaning and value to the participants in communication. The visual introduced means something to the participants in communication, and due to the specific story told, the visual is able to lead to meaningful change such as improved understanding, learning, development, decision-making and problem-solving.

## **6. Implications**

### **6.1. For Theory**

This thesis illustrated theoretically and with a case illustration of a real-life company, when a leader introduces a meaningful organizational visual for selected participants in communication, the leader strengthens, through the visuals performativity, the participants positive psychological states, and as a result promotes a positive work climate, which increases engagement, motivation, and interaction and improves performance, decision-making, problem-solving and understanding (Lydia, Arran & Lester, 2010; Meyer et al., 2013). Through the performativity of the visual mode, leadership and followership, an established communicative relationship, and a meaningful setting, the leader can improve learning, understanding, development, performance and decisions-making and facilitate growth. The management practice introducing the visual mode for participants in communication is constructed as a social, dynamic, and interactive communicative process directed towards a specific organizational goal and when the management practice combines the visual mode with the verbal language strategically, it enables the potential outcomes of both modes of communication, visual and verbal. The visual mode tells a specific story the participants in communication interpret and acquire meaning to, and as it connects people and constructs meaning, the visual mode serves as a valuable resource for management to facilitate meaningful change. For future research, it could be relevant to explore the mental processes and how the brain works in an organizational context when management introduces the visual mode. This could be done by applying a fMRI brain scanner. For future research conducting other case illustrations with the use of my theoretical framework is also relevant. This could bring meaningful understandings and insights for practice and organizational and management theory, and hopefully inspire future research and new management tools.

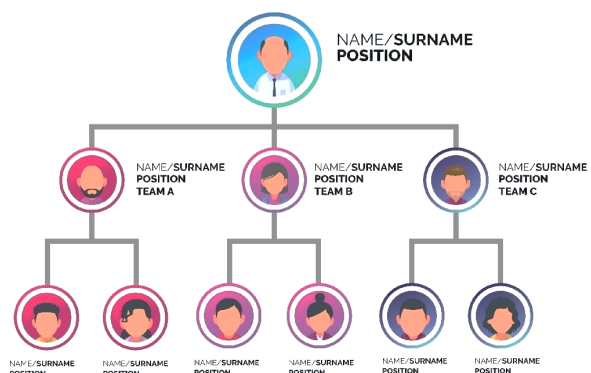
## 6.2. For Practice and Proof

At the end I will discuss how management can achieve the effects of the visual mode of meaning construction in three different ways. The opportunities are based on the theoretical framework, case illustration of Rains, and a conversation with the CEO of Rains, Jan. The first way to achieve the effects of the visual mode is by applying visualization as a management tool to improve employees understanding of the organization's strategy. As illustrated in the case of Rains, when management combines the visual mode with the verbal language strategically, instead of using language alone, management simplifies reality, constructs and communicates meaning, and as a consequence make it easier for employees to understand what the company desires, stands for, believes in and expects. *Organizational strategy* is better understood and therefore, management can improve understanding and the level of interaction, commitment, engagement and performance. These effects can also be achieved by management using visualization and the visual mode to construct and communicate *organizational structure*. The next way of achieving the effects of the visual mode is based on a conversation with the CEO of Rains. Jan explained, he avoids the traditional hieratical visualization of organizational structure as he wants a flat organization. Jan explained, Rains will not achieve a flat organization and the desired young and dynamic culture characterized by equality and freedom if he visualizes the organizational structure as a traditional hierarchy. Instead, he also uses the Light House of Rains to visualize and communicate structure. Jan explained, he wants to avoid:

Statement from management:

*"We want to be a flat organization"*

Visualization of organizational structure →



According to Jan, communicating and encouraging a flat organizational structure, but visualizing a traditional vertical hierarchy would employ double standards and not facilitate the desired structure, journey, lifestyle and culture of Rains. Visualizing equally important departments, functions, roles, values and goals, and communicating it frequently to all members with the statement ‘everyone is of equal importance; we are dependent on each other at Rains’ enables and encourages the desired structure, values, belief and attitudes, atmosphere, performance and organizational goals. In the conversation, Jan and I also discussed dress code as clothing also represents the visual mode. Jan expressed, he does not want to encourage a dress code because he wants the employees to live in their dynamic and constantly changing young world. According to the leader, Jan, having a dress code is against the goal of building, sustaining and developing a dynamic culture characterized by honesty, personality, freedom, equality, and transparency. Jan explained: *“if you have a dress code, or have a culture, which place boundaries on clothing, you will take some of peoples freedom away and as a consequence our people will not have the opportunity to live in their constantly changing, social, young and dynamic world, which is crucial for our brand, organization and growth”*

The last way management can achieve the effects of the visual mode concerns *brand guidelines and logo*. In the case of Rains, it was illustrated that the desired visual expression starts internally. The employees create and represent the visual expression of the company and/or brand and by providing clear brand guidelines and using them internally management can better control the construction of brand image, identity and expression. Similar effects can be achieved by operating with a *symbolic logo*, which means something valuable to the employees. When the logo communicates meaning, exerts influence, and provides organizational members a feeling of inclusion, being important and proud, the logo can help management to relate and engage people in both culture and performance.



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