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Using a Digital Internal Communication Strategy for Digital Capability Development

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to illustrate the multidimensional perspective of digital internal communication defined and applied in the context of strategic communication, and how digital capability development and training are embedded. We use a conceptual approach to integrate literature from the fields of digital transformation, digital internal communication, and digital human resource capability development. The findings reveal that an organisational system’s technical (channels and platforms, and policy) and social (leadership, culture, and collaboration) digital elements are interrelated across all communication levels, contributing to digital capability development. Furthermore, digital trust is required for and enforced by effective learning in the digital space. This study proposes a holistic digital internal communication strategy focusing on developing digital human resource capabilities as a strategic training initiative in organisational settings to promote strategic communication. Hence, a strategic map for digital capability development and training offers senior leadership a practical and adaptable tool. It allows them to create their own organisation-specific digital human resource initiatives, contributing to organisational learning and trust-building as the bedrock of organisational sustainability and success.

Introduction

Previous research suggests that new forms of communication currently challenge all areas of strategic communication, including the principles and practices used in fields such as advertising, public relations, sales promotion, and online communication (Moriarty et al., 2019). The application of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has transformed organisations in recent decades (Vial, 2019). Organisations’ digital transformation (DT) from analogue to digital has strongly influenced workplace collaborations (Riemke-Gurzki, 2017), which stimulate learning processes (Bulińska-Stangrecka & Bagieńska, 2019). Scholarly literature suggests new technologies as a ‘force’ influencing almost every aspect of working and workplace learning in organisations (Noe, 2020). As a result of organisational ICT applications, workplace realities have changed significantly towards digital workplaces (DWP) (Dery et al., 2017).

The increasing digitalisation of organisations also affects their strategic communication (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2024) and leverages communication activities in an online digital ecosystem (Badham et al., 2022). As a result, strategic communication as a field of research and practice is turning into digital strategic communication, which involves the targeted use of digital data and technologies as media in an interactive arena space by an organisation or an actor to manage internal and external communication activities.
aligned with the organisation’s strategic mission and goals (Badham et al., 2022). Similar to strategic communication, strategic training aligns with an organisation’s vision, mission, and business plan and contributes to its strategic objectives (Noe, 2020). Such strategic training is paramount in the digital age, where some leaders and employees thrive at their DWP using digital technologies (Chianias et al., 2019), and others experience technostress (Atanasoff & Venable, 2017). Successful organisations conduct a needs assessment typically involving organisation, person and task analyses to determine whether they need strategic training initiatives to upskill people to succeed in their workplace (Noe, 2020).

Capability development and education are an important purpose of internal communication (IC) (Rogala & Bialowas, 2016; Wasiela-Jaroszewicz, 2008), which still is considered a neglected research field despite its strategic management function (Welch & Jackson, 2007; Wuersch et al., 2023) and its importance for overall organisational success (Ruck & Men, 2021; Yaxley & Ruck, 2017). Similar to strategic communication, IC changed with the DT of organisations into digital internal communication (DIC) (Wuersch et al., 2023). A recent systematic literature review of DIC identified an increased research interest in the topic in the last three years (Tkalc Verčič et al., 2024). Extant literature, however, shows scant coverage on how organisations can create DIC strategies, methods and frameworks to guide organisations undergoing DT processes (Peter et al., 2020). Moreover, while there is a body of literature explaining how to create strategic training (e.g., Noe, 2020), literature on how to build a training-focused DIC strategy is scarce. However, to satisfy the emerging expectations of DWP, organisations need DIC strategies, including an emphasis on digital capability development. How organisations can best create such a digital skill-focused DIC strategy is unknown.

Our conceptual study aims to fill this gap and offers a strategic map (Figure 1) that considers digital capability development integral to DIC to satisfy the emerging expectations of DWP. The strategic map can serve as a practical tool focusing on digital capability development, contributing to a larger holistic DIC strategy (see Section 3). Generally, a map has a strategic intent, helps achieve organisational objectives (Kaplan & Norton, 2004) and identifies themes for capability building (Liao et al., 2023). Also, a map increases the effectiveness of knowledge transfer (Chen & Greider, 2003), supports internal stakeholders in fulfilling their routines and provides details of how tasks are interconnected and completed (Nelson & Winter, 1982). Our map for digital capability development based on the DIC strategy utilises a framework offered by Wuersch et al. (2023). It contributes to both the strategic communication and capability development literature, noting an overlap between the fields of communication and human resource management (e.g., Demps, 2008).

In particular, our research provides application examples to illustrate possible map implementations. Specifically, organisations can use the map in accordance with DIC affordances as ‘possibilities for action’ (Andersson et al., 2023) to engage human potential fully and achieve internal organisational aims. Such a map as a communication-based tool may help managers and employees to effectively create a shared understanding of DT processes and establish common sense-making through trust-building learning processes that strengthen relationships. Relationships based on trust, in turn, constitute organisations (Welch, 2006), leading back to the proposed map’s strategic dimension.

The article continues with an overview of extant research at the nexus between IC, DIC, DT and capability development, linking to strategic perspectives. We then develop and discuss the map for a learning-focused DIC strategy before concluding the article and identifying limitations and suggestions for future research avenues. Methodologically, we follow Reese’s (2022) suggested structure for writing a conceptual scholarly article.

Theoretical background

**Strategic IC and DIC enhancing learning processes**

**Strategic IC and learning in organisational settings**

IC extends from informal communication, such as casual chats and gossip, to formal communication, such as emails from senior management to all employees (Welch & Jackson, 2007). This broad range of
IC activities indicates that not all internal communications can be qualified as strategic. The strategic communication perspective concerns issues that align with and support organisational goals (Mahoney, 2016). Strategic IC generally refers to communication activities initiated by top management or communication departments pursuing the organisation’s top-level strategic priorities. Therefore, strategic internal communication can be defined as “the strategic management of interactions and relationships between stakeholders within organisations across a number of interrelated dimensions including, internal line manager communication, internal team peer communication, internal project peer communication and internal corporate communication” (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 184). For example, Greek communication practitioners, when providing input into strategic planning to strategic management of organisations, perform strategic tasks “by scanning the environment to identify issues and help management develop goals” (Triantafillidou & Yannas, 2023, p. 1).

As a driver of company management, IC is characterised as a strategic management function (Ruck, 2016), which increases employees’ loyalty to the organisation and fosters their performance in the workplace (Verghese, 2017). Recent scholarly literature emphasises the significance of IC as a collaborative sense-making process of internal stakeholders contributing to organisational culture (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2024), which facilitates building a healthy workplace climate. Through relationship cultivation and management, IC can prevent workplace discrimination (Lee et al., 2021). Furthermore, IC helps unite employees around the organisational mission, strategy, and values and supports employees in adapting to new challenges rapidly (Rogala & Bialowas, 2016). Similar to strategic employee training and development, which provides employees with the necessary skills to succeed in the organisational setting (Noe, 2020), IC plays a strategic role in organisational functioning and overall success (e.g., Ruck & Men, 2021). A more recent definition of IC combines its strategic management-centred function (Welch & Jackson, 2007) with a process-centred perspective (Kalla, 2005) and proposes strategic internal communication include

(1) the formal and informal communication between organizational members (managers and coworkers) taking place through various communication modes (digital media such as email, intranet and video meetings, but also various face-to-face meetings and print media); and (2) the strategic management and administration of internal communication. (Andersson et al., 2023, p. 19)

Such a twofold definition of IC signalises that it can be conceptualised variously. On the one hand, functional traditions emphasise technical organisational elements of IC, such as communication channels, strategies, structures and systems. On the other hand, meaning-centred perspectives highlight social elements contributing to communication in organisational settings, such as people, relationships and interactions between internal stakeholders, and organisational culture (Shockley-Zalabak, 2014). Organisations combine technical-procedural aspects with socio-cultural elements, for example, when incorporating technological advancement to gain a competitive advantage. In this case, aligned with the socio-technical systems theory (e.g., Appelbaum, 1997), organisations activate the four interrelated components of ‘structure’ and ‘technology’ (technical), and ‘tasks’ and ‘people’ (social) (Rogala & Bialowas, 2016; Wuersch, 2020). For example, introducing digital tools (‘technology’) across the hierarchy (‘structure’) may require staff training (‘people’) to better achieve organisational goals (‘tasks’). Such staff training is strategic as it supports the effectiveness of the business (Noe, 2020).

In organisations conceptualised as socio-technical systems, IC integrates communication channels and platforms with interactions and relationships at various organisational levels (Rogala & Bialowas, 2016). This includes both formal and informal organisations, that is, also interactions between organisational members (i.e., internal stakeholders) that take place outside the formal communication structures, such as line management communication and staff meetings (Andersson et al., 2023). Current scholarly communication discourse agrees that the scope of IC exceeds the mere transmission of information essential for employees to perform their tasks (e.g., Andersson et al., 2023; Badham et al., 2023; Wuersch et al., 2023). Instead, IC satisfies employees’ basic social needs of being heard, seen and acknowledged by others (Andersson et al., 2023) and influences their work motivation,
engagement, and productivity (Rogala & Bialowas, 2016). IC also gives employees a sense of belonging and a voice to express their views (Ruck, 2016). Furthermore, IC fosters employee education and promotes professional development (Rogala & Bialowas, 2016; Wasiela-Jaroszewicz, 2008), which can take place in strategic training ranging from informal on-the-job learning to formal learning (Harding, 2022). Overall, IC enhances organisational effectiveness by managing information flow and emotions between organisational members and motivating and engaging them by allowing the co-creation of meaning and knowledge (Tkalac Verčič, 2020).

**Strategic DIC fostering capability development**

Similar to IC, some scholars use the functional tradition to define DIC as the “use of digital tools and platforms to facilitate communication and collaboration within an organisation” (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2024, p. 3). However, as organisational culture and shared values are crucial for organisational performance and success (Neher et al., 2018), the social aspects of DIC are regarded as paramount. Therefore, the social constructionist perspective conceptualises DIC as a co-creative action beyond the mere transmission of information and defines DIC as “comprehensive human-focused social constructions founded in a multileveled socio-technical framework to digitally transformed workplace environments” (Wuersch et al., 2023, p. 3). Importantly, integrating social and technical elements enhances learning processes and ultimately builds trust. Such a socio-technical interplay leverages DIC to a strategic level as trustful relationships constitute organisations (Welch, 2006). For instance, introducing internal social media platforms can be an effective means of staff empowerment and participation (Ewing et al., 2019); using internal social media, leaders and employees become dedicated and experience a sense of meaning and purpose, fostering recognition and relationships. As such, online tools are shown to be effective ways of improving DIC practice, especially in organisational change processes (Duangekanong & Vate-U-Lan, 2019). Strategic communication deals with change processes “gaining support for corporate changes or new organizational practices” (Agerholm & Thomsen, 2016, p. 196).

Several scholars are searching for DIC conceptualisations that overcome the social-material dualism of digital environments. Badham et al. (2022) propose an interactive ‘digital media-arena’ framework, which merges both the functional tradition and meaning-centred approach into one ‘holistic’ framework. It integrates digital means and online communicative spaces used by organisations and stakeholders for communication purposes. Such a holistic framework comprises ‘media’ for organisation-managed communication tools and ‘digital arenas’ for ‘spaces of interaction’ where multiple publics and stakeholders come together to discuss matters affecting or affected by organisations and co-construct organisational meaning (Badham et al., 2023). Andersson et al. (2023, p. 21) add a strategic management component to the socio-technical conceptualisation of DIC and leverage it to a digital strategic communication level as “the formal and informal communication between organizational members taking place through various digital communication modes, and the strategic management and administration of digital internal communication . . . [whereby] organizations are continuously constituted, negotiated and contested in and through communication”.

Importantly, increasing digitisation (analogue information converted into digital bits) and digitalisation (implications of DT on society) cause the dissolution of time and space towards a ‘space of flows’ (Andersson et al., 2023). In such a flowing space, the blurring of communication levels provides co-workers with a voice in decision-making and allows for a ‘multilogue sensemaking process’, a dialogue from many to many (Murphy, 2015; Rosén, 2021). Similar to the boundaries between internal and external communication, which in contemporary organisations are often blurred (Putnam & Nicotera, 2009), the internal boundaries in contemporary organisations (Hay, 2019) are increasingly amalgamated. Boundaryless DIC may push towards a new understanding of organisations and communication as their primary activity.

Our conceptual study accepts Wuersch and colleagues’ invitation (Wuersch et al., 2023) to further discuss the multidimensional perspective on DIC. We specifically extend their foundational work by suggesting a strategic DIC approach focusing on digital capability development. For this article, we
propose strategic DIC to be understood as comprehensive human-focused social constructions in the ‘flowing space’ of digitally transformed workplace environments aligned with the organisation’s strategic aims. Similar to strategic training initiatives, which support organisational success, a DIC strategy focusing on digital capability development can guide organisations in their successful DIC practice.

**IC and DIC allowing for learning on various levels**

Extant conceptualisations of IC use communication levels and dimensions (e.g., McQuail, 2010). Kalla (2005), for example, explains IC as “all formal and informal communication taking place internally at all levels of an organisation” (p. 305). Some scholars explain organisational communication using a pyramid (e.g., Rogala & Bialowas, 2016), which integrates intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, institutional and mass communication levels. Others suggest utilising an IC matrix (Welch & Jackson, 2007), which stipulates dimensions according to four internal stakeholder groups: employees and superiors, team colleagues, project groups, and strategic management.

DIC has hardly been discussed in scholarly works (Riemke-Gurzki, 2017). Only recently, novel conceptualisations of DIC have been introduced as ‘tools and platforms’ facilitating IC and collaboration within the organisation (Tkalar Verčič et al., 2024); as ‘media-arenas’ (Badham et al., 2022); and as socio-technical ‘interplay’ of organisational elements on the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organisational communication levels offering a multidimensional perspective on DIC (Wuensch et al., 2023). Such a multidimensional perspective implicitly includes common values regarding digital capability development and interactive spaces of ‘digital arenas’ (Badham et al., 2023), where trust-building learning processes can occur. Notably, the mutual influence of communication technology and people creates novel forms of IC (Andersson et al., 2023) towards DIC.

On the intrapersonal level, DIC explains communication as biological and mental processes that occur when people create meaning and identity (Ruesch & Bateson, 1987). Such identity-building processes involve a complex system of socially constructed beliefs (Lindgren et al., 2017). IC influences people’s thinking, feelings, attitudes, intentions, values, and motivations (Maier et al., 2012). Digital tools, such as online platforms, can support individuals in increasing self-awareness and their endeavour to develop a positive self-image, often the beginning of more affirming communications with others (Adler et al., 2013). Similarly, an employee’s self-efficacy determines their “belief that they can perform their job or learn the content of the training program successfully” (Noe, 2020, p. 137). Hence, digital platforms can enhance learning, collaborations and relationships, influencing workplace success (Welch, 2011).

DIC at the interpersonal level involves at least two people (Rogala & Bialowas, 2016). Communication professionals must continuously develop their skills, knowledge, and competencies. They also need to train teams in communication skills and management in handling organisational communication processes. Finally, communication professionals need to mentor and network with peers and other organisations and share best practice examples with them (Tench et al., 2017). Leaders must be open to new technologies and continuously search for innovative work approaches and systemic learning opportunities (Dery et al., 2017). Generally, effective leadership communication in organisations is vital to promote trust, openness, and employees’ affective commitment, all influencing factors to achieve personal growth and positive organisational outcomes (Bambacas & Patrickson, 2008).

Organisational DIC, or internal corporate communication (Welch & Jackson, 2007), helps foster organisational culture. The concept of organisational culture is vital as it is embedded in the system of shared beliefs and values that guide the behaviour of members (Neher et al., 2022). In this way, organisational culture can strongly influence employee behaviour and, ultimately, organisational performance (Neher & Maley, 2020). Managing organisational culture is an increasingly critical task for management in contemporary organisations (Singh, 2013), and effective DIC can be a crucial protagonist in creating a positive organisational learning culture. Such an organisational learning
culture, rather than reduced to controlled digital channels and platforms, should be the result of shared sense-making processes of the public and organisations in less-controlled and more meaning-centred online ‘digital arenas’ spaces (Badham et al., 2023). Such arena spaces are similar to the socio-technical interplay of organisational elements, which supports competency development and trust building and contributes to learning organisations (Wuersch et al., 2023). A learning organisation “is a company that has an enhanced capacity to learn, adapt and change” and where learning is part of organisational culture and values (Noe, 2020, p. 67).

Learning together through the DT of workplaces

In parallel to external communication and customer relationships, DT has also found its way into IC (e.g., Ewing et al., 2019), shifting it towards DIC. Digital workplace transformation and the increasing adoption of digital technologies and online media within organisations began in the 1970s (Andersson et al., 2023) and has significantly shaped IC since the 2000s (Gustafsson et al., 2018; Wuersch et al., 2023). COVID-19 and the sudden need for remote work accelerated the DT of the workplace (Andersson et al., 2023; DeFilippis et al., 2022; Gomes et al., 2023; Nagel, 2020; Šavić, 2020a) towards DWPs.

DT, known as the ‘fourth revolution’, is a multidimensional and technology-driven phenomenon that affects the economy, society, and politics (Riemke-Gurzki, 2017). Utilising intelligent devices and social media platforms has radically changed communication between companies and stakeholders. DT can be explained as the “process that aims to improve an entity by triggering significant changes to its properties through combinations of information, computing, communication, and connectivity technologies” (Vial, 2019, p. 118). Furthermore, a recent study defines DT as the fast and extensive adoption of emerging technologies, such as cloud computing, big data, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and the Internet of Things, profoundly impacting organisational structures (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2024). As such, DT affects corporate communication to different extents; impacts of the DT process have been conceptualised in previous works as highly interconnected building blocks influencing external communication (e.g., consumer behaviour) and IC (e.g., organisational culture, leadership and employee roles) (Vial, 2019).

From an economic perspective, DT can be understood as using the internet and computer technologies to achieve increased economic value (Reddy & Reinartz, 2017). From a broader perspective, DT comprises the sum of changes accompanying digital technologies; strategically adopted digital initiatives, which influence business models and processes; and everyday workplace interactions to create prosperity. Hence, DT is much more than the digital development of technology in business; it is a strategic initiative transforming organisations (Šavić, 2020b; Schallmo, 2018). Such a change initiative requires employees to have the necessary skills to implement the change; otherwise, resistance may emerge (Noe, 2020). Digital innovation involves novel forms of organising, and “digital transformation is, without doubt, institutional change” (Hinings et al., 2018, p. 55). In turn, one of the main strategic purposes of DIC is to prepare employees for upcoming changes in analogy to IC (Rogala & Białowas, 2016).

In the practical field of strategic communication, managers reassess how DIC is implemented and defined (L. R. Men, 2021). Despite the augmented interest in research and practice, there are still many open questions; for example, it is not clear to what extent ‘digital-born’ companies (e.g., Amazon, Uber, Airbnb) using digital platforms-based business models (Chanias et al., 2019), also promote DWPs and DIC. Such DWPs enable data access, digital collaboration between employees, and connection with executives independent of time and place. Increased digital collaboration using digital affordances to reach a competitive advantage stimulates learning processes (Bullińska-Stangrecka & Bagieńska, 2019). This development, integral to DIC, generally increases transparency, productivity and innovation and enhances corporate operational efficiency and management ability (Y. Zhang et al., 2020). Therefore, DIC, focusing on developing digital skills, contributes to the organisation’s overall success. The following map for digital capability development offers organisations guidelines on how to create their DIC strategy centred on the training and development of internal stakeholders.
Map for digital capability development based on a holistic DIC strategy

Contextualisation

Wuersch et al. (2023) propose a holistic strategic approach to DIC. Holism means “the effect of an initiative throughout the organisation and beyond” (Ledingham, 2015, p. 48). In this study’s context, we understand ‘holistic’ as the interconnectedness and interplay of the social and technical elements across all communication levels, namely intrapersonal, interpersonal and organisational. Organisations should have a holistic IC strategy that can provide knowledge and affect cognition, support learning and growth at work, touch employees emotionally, and stimulate their motivation (Maier et al., 2012). Similarly, a DIC strategy and effective DT of workplaces into DWP are needed to succeed in the digital age. However, Bughin (2017) found that only a minority of companies successfully undertook DT, consistent with a distinctly articulated strategy.

Using the strategic DIC approach, our study develops a map for capability development based on a holistic DIC strategy. Developing internal stakeholder capabilities through training and education is critical for effective digital Human Resources Management (HRM) practices (Wang et al., 2022), which intersect with Communication practices (Demp, 2008) and contribute to digital business and employee performance (e.g., Mohamed, 2022). Appropriate training, education and knowledge among internal stakeholders across an organisation can play an essential role in removing barriers to implementing DT, with the benefit of increasing innovation and organisational growth (Scuotto et al., 2021). Despite the increase in research on digital HRM, recognising the importance of aligning an organisation’s communication strategy with the strategic relevance of capability development (Maley, 2018; Nicolás-Agustín et al., 2022), digital capability development in the context of DIC is yet to be investigated. While it has been acknowledged that IC is important in developing internal stakeholders’ capabilities (Scheurer, 2005), specific research using the digital strategic perspective of DIC is lacking.

In response, our article integrates current DIC and strategic communication literature (e.g., Falkheimer & Heide, 2022) with some digital HRM sources (e.g., Lowndes & Fu, 2021) to offer a strategic map (Figure 1) for developing digital capabilities using a holistic strategic DIC approach.

Discussion of the map for digital capability development

Figure 1 is based on the six interlinked themes of the DIC interplay model (Wuersch et al., 2023), consisting of a technical element (digital channels) and social elements (digital leadership, culture, training, collaboration, and skills). Similar to Tkalac Verčič et al.’s (2024) ‘tools and platforms’, our map (Figure 1) utilises ‘digital channels and platforms’. To further strengthen DIC’s socio-technical interplay, we include digital policy in the strategic map, which combines procedural guidelines and values (Badham et al., 2022). Digital policy guides the responsible use of digital platforms in organisational settings and contributes to trust-building (Mattila & Seppälä, 2016). In contrast to Wuersch et al. (2023), we consolidate ‘digital training’ and ‘digital skills’ within our focus theme of ‘Digital capability development’. As a result, the strategic map in Figure 1 illustrates the multidimensional perspective of the socio-technical elements forming our strategic DIC approach (DCh&P, DpO, DLe, DCu, DCs), jointly contributing to developing internal stakeholder capabilities based on trust-building. This map offers IC managers a practical tool adaptable to their organisational circumstances. In particular, the map allows them to guide HRM when creating their organisation-specific strategic digital capability development plan based on the DIC strategy to build the digital capabilities of employees.
In the following, we discuss each component of the strategic map and illustrate their meaning and application using examples from theory and practice.

**Digital channels and platforms (DCh&P)**

**Definition.** A communication channel describes the distribution of messages to the target public (Mahoney, 2016). Such a definition is underpinned by the functional tradition, which focuses on communication processes and systems (Shockley-Zalabak, 2014) and refers back to the pre-digital transmission model (Shannon, 1948). Communication channels allowing for symmetrical IC (e.g., Facebook business pages, instant messenger, and YouTube) are among the most effective communication strategies for employee relations (L. R. Men, 2014) and, as a means of strategic IC, allow for cultivating employee creativity (Lee & Kim, 2021). Badham et al. (2023, p. 5) define such channels as *media*, which are “more or less controlled one- and two-directional communication tools to disseminate organisational messages”. Hence, *media* are communication vehicles that enable organisations to vary the levels of control of their messages. In contrast, a meaning-centred definition of communication channels and platforms describes them as digital affordances supporting the co-creative meaning-making process on various communication levels (Wuersch et al., 2023). To acknowledge that digital communication technology has ushered in a significantly different phenomenon of organisational communication, Badham et al. (2023) use the term *arenas* for less-controlled two- and omnidirectional communication means, which allow publics and organisations to contribute to the formation and massaging of organisational messages. Digital arenas contribute to IC in terms of ‘digital collaboration’ and ‘digital culture’ as communicative spaces where internal stakeholders can engage with each other and co-create a shared digital culture. Combined, digital *media-arenas* are online communicative spaces ranging between unidirectional communication channels and omnidirectional communication discussion forums that can be utilized to varying degrees by strategic communicators adopting blended roles between senders of messages, facilitators of stakeholder engagement in organizational messages, and strategic improvisers of organizational messages gone rogue. (Badham et al., 2022, p. 421)

On the other hand, digital communication platforms used in DWP offer new communication options and thus can promote the exchange of knowledge and learning within the organisation. Digital communication platforms such as internal social media may even become strategic as employees, who can express their voice and gain support from others, may cause a ‘spiral of voice’ that can influence strategic management decisions (Madsen & Johansen, 2019). In fact, from a strategic communication perspective, internal social media encourages members to participate in...
organisational conversations and promotes organisational transparency and employee involvement in strategic problems and decision-making (Madsen, 2022). However, these platforms bear some risks; due to increased exposure, the willingness of employees to exchange information may decrease on these platforms (Andersson et al., 2023; Sivunen & Laitinen, 2019). Furthermore, participation can be ‘symbolic’ and become a ‘window-dressing’ pseudo action when participating does not have real impacts on the strategic decision-making of the organisation (Alvesson, 2013; Andersson et al., 2023).

Discussion. DT includes changing existing internal processes and structures, allowing the full benefit of new technologies to be tapped (Fenech et al., 2019). DT is also strongly associated with various DIC channels and platforms, such as an intranet and internal social media (Ewing et al., 2019). The increasing use of social media in organisations is changing the approach of IC toward DIC, and engaging in internal social media activities is interlinked with cultivating relationships (L. R. Men et al., 2023). At the interpersonal level, DIC channels and platforms to enhance collaboration are central. Digital apps and internal social media are often used to support collaboration and eventually contribute to organisational culture. For instance, in-house Facebook groups, sharing ideas and collaborating across silos (Dery et al., 2017), or apps provide features like employee recognition, which contributes to a ‘rewarding’ culture (Berges & Kon, 2019). Organisations using DIC channels and platforms can create an environment and mindset of continuous learning, a feedback culture that empowers teams to thrive and produce more expeditious innovations (R. Zhang, 2016).

Personalised interfaces and DWPs are related to the intrapersonal DIC level. For example, individualised learning platforms can offer online courses focusing on the individual’s strengths and potential for improvement (Singh & Hess, 2017). Overall, DT goes well beyond mobile gadgets and apps. Technology is increasingly interrelated with social elements such as digital leadership, culture, skills and training, and collaboration (Wuersch et al., 2023). By becoming more ‘social’ and ‘digital’, organisational DT is becoming more conversational, dialogical, interactive, and humanised (Ewing et al., 2019). Dialogue, in turn, may become a strategic communication tool (Kent, 2022), particularly in an online communicative space of media-arenas (Badham et al., 2023). It is worth noting that although social media offers much potential for IC in terms of shared learning, relationship building, dialogue, and participatory communication, it has not yet reached its full potential (Andersson et al., 2023). Besides the benefits of DT and channels, adverse impacts on employees may emerge if digital technologies are not used appropriately. Technostress, for example, can cause mental health issues and affect physical well-being (Atanasoff & Venable, 2017). Therefore, preventing potential impacts is essential through organisational digital capability development and training.

Examples. A practical example of ‘digital channels and platforms’ is a company that introduced an app called StarMeUp to thank employees and recognise the company’s values in other coworkers (Berges & Kon, 2019). In another organisation, call centre employees set up “social media platforms (e.g., on Facebook) to share ideas, collaborate across silos and self-organise” (Dery et al., 2017, p. 140).

Digital policy (DPo)
Definition. Organisational digital policy comprehends a compilation of policies focusing on utilising digital technologies in their internal processes to shape the organisation, management, culture and values (Torfs et al., 2022). A social media policy, for example, provides codes of conduct and guidelines to the employees for accessing social media, disseminating information on social media, and communicating with the preferred language and tone (Mazzei & Butera, 2016).

Discussion. Organisations’ digital policy is essential for the responsible and appropriate use of digital technologies and DIC communication content. Ewing et al. (2019) argue that clear social media policies are required to guide employees using the platform. Indeed, the line between internal and external digital communication is blurred, and effectively managing insiders-outsiders interaction in the online environment is challenging (Kulik et al., 2012). Therefore, internal stakeholders across the
organisation need to know what internal content can be communicated externally and how it should be done. As such, social media policies should provide codes of conduct and guidelines for internal stakeholders’ access to social media platforms, information sharing, and preferred tone of voice (Mazzei & Butera, 2016). To effectively embed digital policy, including guidelines and codes of conduct, within the organisation and its culture and thus manage everyone’s behaviour, digital communication training and skills development play a vital role.

Ewing et al. (2019) highlight that training should support open communication rather than controlled communication, and Thelen (2021) affirms that organisations should take the time to educate their employees on employee advocacy. Such a strategic training initiative is linked to digital leadership and anchored in a DIC strategy. As online behaviour is critical for organisations, digital policies and guidelines addressed to internal stakeholders and related digital training initiatives to enhance collaboration can be crucial to crisis prevention (Mazzei & Butera, 2021; Weatherbee, 2010). Overall, DIC policies should clarify two main issues: communication effectiveness and prohibitions (Sussman, 2008). Communication rules are more likely to be understood and followed by individuals and teams when they are integrated within the organisational culture and communicated through dialogue; illustrated arguments explaining the risks and costs of failing; and framed in a win-win instead of a disciplinary perspective (Gilsdorf, 1998; Stohl, 1986; Sussman, 2008).

Structurally, some authors (e.g., Nicolás-Agustín et al., 2022; Rokka et al., 2014) suggest integrating digital policies, such as social media, with HRM practices, including open communication, fair treatment, and well-being programs. Nicolás-Agustín et al. (2022) highlight that executives can influence employees’ digital capabilities by amending HRM policies. In contrast, authors (e.g., Johnston, 2015; Mazzei & Butera, 2016) consider social media policies part of corporate governance. Mazzei and Butera (2016) found that companies were mainly concerned with avoiding legal, ethical, reputational and social risks, indicating that digital policies are a corporate governance instrument. Hence, it appears fair to say that either position has its merits. Organisations should take the most appropriate approach, ensuring concerted communication and training, as there is no one-fit-all recipe.

**Examples.** Illustrating employee training, the 3M’s social media policy requests that “in order to conduct any business as a representative of 3M on social channels, you must first complete mandatory training” (Mazzei & Butera, 2016, p. 11). Apple, conversely, refers to leadership and the HRM department if employees are unsure about policy alignment: “If you’re about to post something and you are concerned whether you are following these guidelines or any Apple policy, please discuss it with your Leader or HR before posting” (Mazzei & Butera, 2016, p. 11). From a DWP perspective, Atanasoff and Venable (2017, p. 328) stress that “interactions with the [DWP] environment also include ICT policies about work-life balance”. To avoid risk, Duke Energy developed a prescriptive (control) digital policy stating that “inappropriate and/or unauthorised posting of internal reports, policies, procedures, contracts or other internal business-related confidential communications is also prohibited” (Mazzei & Butera, 2016, p. 9).

**Digital leadership (DLe)**

**Definition.** Digital leadership combines a leadership style (e.g., transformational) and the use of technology (Shin et al., 2023). Similarly, Bresciani et al. (2021) define digital leadership as a combination of leadership and digital abilities to improve performance using the benefits of digital technologies. Sometimes, digital leadership refers to leadership roles that are responsible for an organisation’s DT and require skills such as open communication, innovative spirit, courage and entrepreneurship (Abbu et al., 2020; Della Corte et al., 2020). In the context of a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) environment of the digital age, Petry (2018) characterises digital leadership as trust-based and consisting of agility, openness, networking and participation. Overall, leadership communication and digital literacy are essential to DIC and become even more critical when organisational members work remotely. As initiators and facilitators of shared sensemaking
processes, leaders in the digital age must bring in the corporate perspective, collective vision and common goals (Andersson et al., 2023). In the fourth industrial revolution, the relationship-oriented leadership approach of managers is becoming increasingly important, and authentic leadership cultivating quality employee-organisation relationships becomes strategic (L. R. Men & Stacks, 2014). As such, scholars in the field of strategic communication increasingly emphasise the importance of organisational listening on digital internal platforms (Macnamara, 2019).

Discussion. Leaders must create a clear digital vision (Singh & Hess, 2017), which will be an asset for organisational success. Companies with a strong digital vision, in which technologies (e.g., big data, cloud, social technologies) are a crucial part of the infrastructure, are profitable on average and achieve a higher market valuation and sales than competitors without such a vision (Schwertner, 2017). Additionally, digital leaders are essential as they can adapt to the digital age environment and alter organisations’ strategies (Shin et al., 2023). It is thus crucial that leaders develop their digital capabilities on an ongoing basis (Kane et al., 2019). Importantly, digital leaders must possess or acquire digital communication and collaboration skills (Schwarzmüller et al., 2018).

At the same time, digital leaders must ensure that their employees develop a digital mindset and skills that can respond to “disruptions associated with the use of digital technologies” (Vial, 2019, p. 129). Digital leadership positively influences digital capabilities across the organisation (Jagadisen et al., 2021). Chalias et al. (2019, p. 22) felicitously summarised that organisations need leaders who want to “surf the digital wave” rather than “get ahead of the digital tsunami”. Overall, leadership with digital skills is in demand as it is likely to enhance DIC and DWP strategies and organisational cultures using digital technologies, thus unifying the workforce. The COVID-19 pandemic illustrated the importance of digital communication executed by leadership teams. Bamberry et al. (2022) found that digital leadership skills enhanced communication and employee satisfaction. Our modern digital culture will presumably require digital capabilities from leaders and employees sooner rather than later. Hence, digital capability development across all hierarchical levels will be or remain (depending on the maturity of the digital organisational transformation) a priority item of an organisation’s strategic agenda.

Examples. Over a five-year longitudinal study, Kane et al. (2019) found that leadership is changing due to digital disruption. One key finding was that all leaders can understand new technologies at the strategic level and make required decisions. “One solution here is simply to have ongoing continuing education sessions with your organization’s leadership. As a part of those sessions, leaders can engage in what many in Silicon Valley call zoom-in/zoom-out strategizing, guided by facilitators with deep digital knowledge.” (p. 38). Gilli et al. (2023, p. 6) emphasise the importance of the human being and, hence, leaders in our transforming digital age:

People, not technology, drive DT, and organizations require leaders, not necessarily technological specialists, to manage the complex changes that comprise an organization’s DT. Technical and methodological skills can be substituted with the use of new technologies, but leaders’ interactional, social, strategic and conceptual skills are gaining importance.

Digital culture (DCu)

Definition. Digital culture is a set of values, norms, practices, and expectations regarding how people (should) act and interact within a contemporary society directly affected by digitalisation (Shin et al., 2023). By considering values and beliefs, Duerr et al. (2018) understand digital organisational culture as collaborative and trust-based for creating new (digital, technological) knowledge and increasing inventiveness, thus supporting the creation of new (digital) products and services. The collaborative nature of digital culture aligns with a recent study, which indicates how symmetrical (two-way) communication and responsive leadership communication created a positive organisational culture, which enhanced employee-organisation relationships (Ghorbanzadeh et al., 2023).
Discussion. DIC goes beyond technology and requires the right set of values, beliefs, and organisational culture (Berges & Kon, 2019; Fenech et al., 2019). Such values may incorporate digital inclusion comprising digital literacy and training for the entire workforce (Bejaković & Mrnjavac, 2020). Today, digital trust is seen as one of the core values of contemporary organisations (Pietrzak & Takala, 2021). By enacting values across all employees, an organisation increases its digital authenticity (Neher et al., 2022) and consequently establishes its digitally safe culture. Digital culture is vital for digitalisation and communication with internal and external stakeholders (Shin et al., 2023). While digitisation was mainly attributed to technology in the past, successful organisations today jointly use technology, leadership, and culture to access DT offers (digitalisation). Through digital training, job motivation increases (Mohamed, 2022), and thus digitalisation enhances organisational capabilities (Shin et al., 2023). A thriving digital culture requires ongoing digital capability development (Schwarzmüller et al., 2018). Altogether, digital leadership, values, and culture interlinked with digital affordances, also conceptualised as media-arenas (Badham et al., 2023), are strong themes discussed in the extant literature on IC (Wuersch et al., 2023). As a result, social and technical organisational elements across the intrapersonal, interpersonal and organisational levels are connected and determinants of DIC, contributing to internal stakeholders’ digital capability development.

Examples. In workplace practice, “having a digital mindset is equivalent to having an organisational climate or culture that emphasises the importance of, and supports, digital transformation” (Solberg et al., 2020, p. 3). Such a digital mindset can “entail identification of the changes needed in processes, technologies, culture, and leadership approaches to get marketing, supply chains, and people engagement more in tune with the needs of new customers” (Natarajan, 2016, p. 37), and thus generate added value and competitive advantage.

Digital collaboration (DCo)

Definition. Technology can enable digital collaboration. The use of technology enhances and extends stakeholders’ – within the organisation, leaders, and employees’ – abilities to work together without any geographical limitations (Salopek, 2000). Digital collaboration requires a tool such as a computer, tablet or smartphone with a web browser or app to communicate either synchronously or asynchronously between the users (Noe, 2020). Digital collaboration includes, for example, electronic messaging and meeting systems, social networks, and online learning communities (Noe, 2020) and takes place in the online communicative space of media-arenas (Badham et al., 2023).

Discussion. Digital tools can support collaboration; therefore, many companies invest in their organisation’s DT (Peter et al., 2019). For example, using interactive features, such as internal social media, effectively empowers employees and stimulates their dialogue. Such increased interactions intensify employee engagement and support employees in building relationships, increasing mutual understanding, encouraging collaboration, and eventually facilitating interactions with management (Ewing et al., 2019). As a result, employees increasingly embody organisational values, motivating them to engage in their work activities and showing more dedication and commitment to accomplishing their tasks (Neher & Maley, 2020). Social media platforms enhance employee connectivity (Dery et al., 2017).

Team orientation is strengthened when strongly connected, fostering cooperation across the organisation. Such increased collaborations support organisations to be innovative and thus align with the digital age requiring digital skills (Bulińska-Stangrecka & Bagierinska, 2019). Using skills, digital collaboration enables online communities of learning, allowing leaders and employees to access interactive discussion areas and share training content (Noe, 2020) in a co-creative process of organisational meaning-making, using the online communicative space of media-arenas (Badham et al., 2023). Digital collaboration and communication are essential competencies and require digital training (Schwarzmüller et al., 2018). From a DIC perspective, digital training through digital collaboration can occur across the organisational, interpersonal and intrapersonal levels. Digital
learning (encompassing electronic and mobile learning) creates learning environments that allow productive collaboration and communication between internal stakeholders and individual training (Basak et al., 2018).

**Examples.** Bayer Pharmaceuticals used a large-scale computer-based training simulation that, on the one hand, required teams of trainees to communicate intensively and collaboratively manage an extensive project and, on the other hand, included online work that trainees had to complete before the training, including a self-assessment test (Noe, 2020). Ewing et al. (2019, p. 123) interviewed senior-level IC practitioners working for global companies where “many of the interviewees recommended providing guidance with helping employees find like-minded peers who can help them become more empowered both personally and professionally through using internal social media”. Hence, digital platforms and digital training can make cross-border collaboration more effective. Similarly, the online collaborative software Slack, which uses chatbots, facilitates collaboration and team communication (Laitinen et al., 2021).

**Digital capability development**

**Definition.** The emphasis on capabilities is a fundamental element of understanding DT (Malchenko et al., 2020), as it “is not a one-off application, but a strategic choice towards acquiring and embedding digital capabilities” (Pagoropoulos et al., 2017, p. 370). The strategic approach alludes to the future, which aligns with capability development that helps prepare employees for the future, referring to job experiences, relationships, and assessments of skills and personality (Noe, 2020). In contrast, training is generally focused on the performance of the current job; however, training is becoming increasingly strategic (i.e., related to future-oriented business goals), and thus, the differentiation between training and capability development is gradually blurring (Noe, 2020). Some scholars view both concepts as working together to improve organisational practice (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2009). Therefore, our study integrates training into (digital) capability development.

**Discussion.** Developing digital capabilities has become a lifelong learning process (Murawski & Bick, 2017). To develop digital capabilities, internal stakeholders must obtain a suitable set of digital skills acquired through digital training to perform their tasks now and in the future. Digital training involves digital channels and platforms (technical elements), such as internal social media, and the capacity to learn, train and empower people (social elements). For instance, online platforms allow employees to share knowledge with their peers, and by learning from each other, employees are empowered and motivated (Metin, 2019; Woo, 2021). Digital training enables internal stakeholders to use digital platforms and tools. It provides an understanding of the content’s relevancy and what they are allowed to share – that is, no proprietary, confidential, or offensive content (Ewing et al., 2019). Therefore, to effectively use DIC, an organisation needs to provide clear policies and guidelines, which require dedicated training to allow and increase employees’ confidence and trust in themselves and the organisation. Consequently, there are links between capability development, interpersonal trust, collaboration and innovation (Bulińska-Stangrecka & Bagieńska, 2019). Hence, using digital technologies to learn together and collaborate contributes to trustful relationships in organisational settings.

Developing digital skills requires flexibility, learning abilities, and an open attitude. Thus, digital capabilities are not restricted to data analysis or programming but include a wide range of skills, from digital problem-solving to knowledge about privacy principles and cybersecurity (Dobrowolska & Knop, 2020). Adequate digital hard skills, such as digital literacy and social media proficiency, are the main precondition for an internal stakeholder to succeed in the DWP (Bejaković & Mrnjavac, 2020). Digital literacy allows them to use online applications confidently, maintaining adequate privacy in workplace settings (Boerman et al., 2021). Additionally, a continuous learning mindset is crucial to DT in organisations, including testing innovative ideas, being flexible and collaborative, and learning autonomously (Kovaitė et al., 2020; Solberg et al., 2020). Digital soft skills include an open attitude towards DT, teamwork, leadership skills, and emotional competencies (Dobrowolska & Knop, 2020).
Having technical tools and a digital mindset allows employees to play an essential part in the organisation and increase their engagement and communication (Ewing et al., 2019; Solberg et al., 2020). However, long-standing employees do not necessarily have the inherent digital skills to seamlessly change to new digital work formats. As a result, they may be unable and potentially unwilling to join the digital adoption without training (Lowndes & Fu, 2021).

Developing digital capabilities is not merely learning new skills or using new technologies. It enables internal stakeholders to connect and collaborate, behave appropriately in an environment like a digital arena (Badham et al., 2023), where leadership creates a trustful culture, and diligently and socially responsibly uses digital affordances. If done successfully, digital capability development can be utilised strategically and become a sustainable competitive advantage (da Silva et al., 2022; Scheurer, 2005). For example, Blair Shepard, CEO of Duke Inc., self-critically observed (and also included executive development) that “senior executives don’t realize that capability development is their primary strategic tool. And, that’s our fault” (Scheurer, 2005, p. 2). Therefore, our proposed DIC strategy can be a suitable vehicle for strategic digital capability development in a trusted organisational setting.

Examples. Blair Shepard’s (CEO of Duke Inc) observation mentioned above aligns well with the case of Polaroid, where the executives just watched digital technology taking a larger share of the photography market. “Polaroid’s capability and business strategy was based in chemistry, not digital electronics” (Scheurer, 2005, p. 3). Executives’ strategic approach should have been to invest in digital capability development and compete and potentially develop innovations and other product platforms (Scheurer, 2005). An example in a DIC setting illustrates that agility can be considered a strategic advantage because “the essence of [an] agile approach is the mindset of constant learning, designing, delivering, getting feedback, adjusting and re-delivering. Companies that create an environment in which [an] agile approach flourishes find that teams can churn out innovation faster in both new products and services” (R. Zhang, 2016, p. 4). At Banco Galicia, they followed an inclusive digital capability development and training by offering a ‘Digital Academy’ to their free internal courses, “an academy of sorts with an array of trainings related to digital skills that anyone keen on the subject can join, even if it is not strictly tied to their daily job” (Berges & Kon, 2019, p. 214). In another example, an interview participant (HRM practitioner) highlighted the relevance of digital training. “Employee training is an important factor in driving digital implementation particularly when employees have been in a company for a long time; they need to learn how to do things differently and without the training they are reluctant or unable to” (Lowndes & Fu, 2021, p. 20).

A map for capability development resulting in trust building
DIC on the intrapersonal, interpersonal and organisational levels and the socio-technical elements (DCh&P, DPo, DLe, DCu, DCo) are interlinked. The human organisational elements, such as climate and culture, leadership and collaboration and structure, only change slowly, if at all (Madsen, 2021). For such fundamental organisational elements to be adapted to the new possibilities of digital tools and platforms for a comprehensive DIC, free and open dialogue between internal stakeholders is required (Pekkala, 2020). Accordingly, the digitalisation of IC depends on both the digital tools and platforms and on collaboration, leadership, organisational climate and culture and intra-organisational trust – all digitalisation-influenced areas that require further research (Andersson et al., 2023).

When applied in conjunction, the interplay of the socio-technical strategic elements creates trust-building processes of learning and development at all communication levels and in an interactive digital sense-making space. It can be argued that creating a holistic DIC strategy leads to capability development, which – supported by technological tools, systems and processes – occurs at the intrapersonal level through digital skills development; at the interpersonal level via training and online collaborations; and at the organisational level through a learning-oriented workplace culture. Capability development and continuous learning in organisations are vital for DT processes, shifting communication from traditional channels to digital affordances. Conversely, using digital affordances, such as internal social media, online conferences, or video streaming, fosters ongoing learning (R. L. Men & Bowen, 2016).
Furthermore, the digital policy guides using digital affordances appropriately to achieve an ethical online communicative arena space (Badham et al., 2023) as a ‘flowing digital workspace’ where human-focused social constructions contribute to organisational strategic aims.

Both managers and employees must share their knowledge and gain a common understanding of DT to facilitate dynamic capabilities and organisational learning (Senge, 2006). This is critical as the main challenges for DT do not lie in the technology but in the human being; employee resistance against DWP transformation can arise if organisational change parallels multiple technical errors hindering daily work tasks (Herrero Motzer et al., 2020). Another cause for resistance can be missing digital skills because if “employees do not feel they are confident in using the new technology, they will give up using it” (Y. Zhang et al., 2020, p. 10). Therefore, dynamic organisations promote capability development and personal growth to enhance employees’ motivation, engagement, satisfaction, and, as Yeomans and FitzPatrick (2017) advocate, well-being in organisational workplace settings. Fenech et al. (2019) conclude that intellectual capital developed through DT is increasingly recognised as a competitive advantage of organisations.

As previously stated, one of the primary purposes of IC is to develop internal stakeholder education (Wasiela-Jaroszewicz, 2008). Individual learning and personal mastery at the interpersonal level are a precondition for organisational learning and, ultimately, lead to organisational growth (Senge, 2006). Developing personal mastery, such as digital skills, improves collaborations and organisational excellence. Capability development also supports the trust-building processes of individuals, groups, teams, and organisations (Bulinska-Stangrecka & Bagien'ska, 2019), stimulating personal confidence and interpersonal trust. Hence, training throughout the organisation using digital communication affordances as an integral part of DIC can create and maintain trustworthy employee relationships and establish trust in leadership; or, in the words of Kovaitė et al. (2020, p. 175), “achieving mutual trust is essential for digital internal communication”. Employees need to feel safe using internal social media; thus, mutual trust is a precondition for successful DIC. Being confident is one of the ten most desirable soft skills in the workplace (Robles, 2012), and trust has been acknowledged as a key component of relationships (Welch, 2006). Trust-based relationships support internal collaboration and promote a healthy workplace climate (de Graaf, 2016).

Trustworthy IC stimulates employees’ satisfaction and contributes to organisational trust-building linked to organisational functioning and success (Vokić et al., 2020). Without trust, relationships cannot be formed (Welch, 2006). Hence, trust within organisations is a strategic key advantage, enabling energy flow. As a result, (digital) trust is directly linked to organisational performance and overall outcomes (Shockley-Zalabak & Morreale, 2011). In contemporary organisations, digital trust is crucial as it measures all stakeholders’ confidence in an organisation’s ability to protect data and individuals’ privacy (Pietrzak & Takala, 2021). Hence, the internal stakeholders’ behaviours and state of knowledge need to be regularly evaluated, including potential digital training and capability development.

**Conclusion, limitations and future research**

**Conclusion**

Our conceptual work aimed to illustrate DIC’s multidimensional perspective and use a holistic DIC strategy to support organisations in developing digital capabilities. The conceptualisation shows the interplay of technical and social organisational elements (digital channels and platforms, digital policy, digital leadership, digital culture, digital collaboration) across the DIC levels (intrapersonal, interpersonal, organisational). The socio-technical elements conjunctly create trust-building processes and relationships of learning and development at all communication levels and in an interactive digital sense-making space. Developing digital capabilities emerges at the heart of the DIC strategy and thus
can be used as a strategic tool to guide senior leadership. Trust is the bedrock of intrapersonal processes, interpersonal relationships, and organisational functioning and success.

Our study conceptualises how DT impacts socio-technical elements on all DIC levels. Focusing on digital capability development is recommended and must be people-driven to guide organisations toward a DIC strategy. The proposed map (Figure 1) helps organisations develop a strategic digital capability development plan integral to their holistic DIC strategy for success in the digital age.

Limitations and implications for future research and practice

This study has limitations that need to be acknowledged. The research is based on extant literature, extends a previous theoretical study, and thus makes a novel contribution to the strategic communication DIC literature. Proposing a strategic map focusing on capability development can be criticised as an approach that is too narrow. However, such a narrow in-depth approach is beneficial as digital capability development constitutes a primary purpose of DIC and overlaps with digital HRM. Notably, the proposed strategic map has yet to be applied to practice.

Our proposed map has implications on how DIC is designed in organisational settings. The map proposes five socio-technical components of DIC contributing to the development of digital capability. To reach capability development as a primary purpose of DIC, organisations need digital channels and platforms, and policies on the one hand (technical) and digital leadership, culture and collaboration on the other hand. Digital strategic communication includes management in a digital environment, where strategic communicators play a continuing role (Murphy, 2011). This implies close relationships between organisational leaders and strategic communication practitioners regarding organisational structures and processes and shared understanding and meaning-making.

Future research could investigate the central concept of digital capability development, for example, how digital skills and training could be best promoted on the different communication levels. Such an investigation would offer a better understanding of how a human-centred approach to DIC could effectively be developed in the digital age. Consequently, an overall approach to DIC strategy building could be elaborated to enlarge the narrow digital HRM focus of this article and offer organisations a more general tool.

Furthermore, building organisational trust through IC has variously been investigated (e.g., Vokić et al., 2020). These previous works could be extended using a digital dimension. By exploring the link between trust in organisational settings and DIC and digital capability development, new insights could show how relationships and interactions can be strengthened in DWP settings of the ‘fourth revolution’.

As a contribution to practice, applying our map in a case organisation would provide validation and offer insights into the value of a strategy for DIC practice with the capability development plan, including opportunities for improvement of the map and its elements. Such a subsequent case study could provide a deeper understanding of the interplay of socio-technical elements of DIC on the various communication levels. Additionally, the map could be further developed into a maturity model with specific criteria for each socio-technical element. Using such a maturity model, organisations could assess the maturity level of their DIC.

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