

# **HOW NORDIC AIRLINES MAINTAIN AND DEFEND THEIR LEGITIMACY THROUGH CORPORATE PURPOSE**

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**Author: Saara Kemiläinen  
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Supervisor: Vilma Luoma-aho**



**JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO  
UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ**



## ABSTRACT

Author Saara Kemiläinen	
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<p>Abstract</p> <p>This study has been conducted out of an interest in the purpose of a company and its definition. The purpose of a company has been used in research for a long time, but there have been mixed perceptions of its definition and meaning. The effects of a company's intent on its operations and the legitimacy of its operations have been challenging to demonstrate due to the subjectivity of the purpose and the lack of comparative information, but it is considered to be linked to financial success and the life cycle of the enterprise. This study examines the purpose of a company and the legitimacy it builds from the perspective of airlines. There has been previous research on the impact, ethics and communication of airline operations, but less attention has been paid to how airlines present their purpose in society and how to create a generally accepted or legitimate image of that purpose. In this study, attention is drawn to the purpose communicated by airlines and its basis for legitimacy. The study examines both the formation of purpose and the building of legitimacy on the basis of airline texts. The purpose of the company is determined using previous research. The theoretical background of the research is institutional theory, through which the concept of legitimacy is also defined. The most important theoretical models for the research are legitimacy strategies that describe the construction of legitimacy. In this study, with purpose and legitimacy, attention is also paid to business ethics and its implications for purpose and legitimacy. The research is qualitative, interpretive and critical. The method used in the study is critical content analysis, through which the purpose of the airline company has been sought to be perceived. Through content analysis, it has been possible to study society's self-evident, power relations and social expectations of companies. The research questions aim to create a picture of the purpose of the airline company and to identify the legitimacy strategies used to support it. The purpose and legitimacy of the airlines under investigation will be examined on the basis of the textual content of their own websites. The study identified four upper categories of content analysis on which airlines built their purpose. These are the airline's identification and differentiation from competitors, flying as part of the infrastructure, the airline as a responsible operator internally, and the airline's strategy and sustainability measures. Airlines were found to use the most legitimation strategies for rationalization and moralization, but legitimation strategies for authorization, narratification, and normalization were also identified from the material. In addition to this, the study identified sub-strategies of legitimation strategies that were specific to airlines. The results of the study provide new insights into the formation of a company's purpose and strategies that seek to justify that purpose in society. In the future, this research topic could be deepened, for example, by conducting research on companies in different industries and also taking into account the company's stakeholders when assessing its legitimacy. Further research could also be done on whether the purpose communicated by companies corresponds to reality and how it is reflected in practice.</p>	
<p>Key words</p> <p>corporate communication, corporate purpose, legitimacy, legitimacy strategies, airline purpose, airline ethics</p>	
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## TIIVISTELMÄ

Tekijä Saara Kemiläinen	
Työn nimi Kuinka pohjoismaiset lentoyhtiöt ylläpitävät ja puolustavat legitimizeettiään yrityksen tarkoituksen kautta	
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<b>Tiivistelmä</b> <p>Tämä tutkimus on toteutettu kiinnostuksesta yrityksen tarkoitusta ja se määritelmää kohtaan. Yrityksen tarkoitusta on terminä käytetty tutkimuksessa jo pitkään, mutta sen määritelmästä ja merkityksestä on ollut vaihtelevia käsityksiä. Yrityksen tarkoituksen vaikutuksia sen toimintaan ja toiminnan oikeutukseen on ollut haastava osoittaa tarkoituksen subjektiivisuuden ja vertailutietojen puutteiden vuoksi, mutta sillä katsotaan kuitenkin olevan yhteys taloudelliseen menestykseen ja yrityksen elinkaaren pituuteen. Tässä tutkimuksessa tutkitaan yrityksen tarkoitusta ja sen kautta rakentuvaa legitimizeettiä lentoyhtiöiden näkökulmasta. Lentoyhtiöiden toiminnan vaikutuksista, eettisyydestä ja viestinnästä on tehty aiempaa tutkimusta, mutta vähemmän on kiinnitetty huomiota siihen, millaisena lentoyhtiöt esittävät tarkoituksensa yhteiskunnassa ja millä tavoin siitä tarkoituksesta luodaan yleisesti hyväksytty eli legitimi kuva. Tässä tutkimuksessa huomio kiinnittyy lentoyhtiöiden viestimään tarkoitukseen ja sen legitimizeettiperustaan. Tutkimus tarkastelee sekä tarkoituksen muodostumista, että legitimizeetin rakentumista lentoyhtiöiden tekstien perusteella. Yrityksen tarkoitus määritellään aiempaa tutkimusta hyödyntäen. Tutkimuksen teoriataustana toimii institutionaalinen teoria, jonka kautta määritellään myös legitimizeetin käsite. Tutkimuksen kannalta keskeisimmät teoreettiset mallit ovat legitimizeettistrategiat, jotka kuvaavat legitimizeetin rakentumista. Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkoituksen ja legitimizeetin myötä huomio kiinnittyy myös yritysetiikkaan ja sen vaikutuksiin tarkoituksen ja legitimizeetin osalta. Tutkimus on laadullinen, tulkitseva ja kriittinen. Metodina tutkimuksessa on käytetty kriittistä sisällönanalyysia, jonka kautta lentoyhtiöiden yrityksen tarkoitus on pyritty hahmottamaan. Sisällönanalyysin kautta on pystytty tutkimaan yhteiskunnan itsestäänselvyyksiä, valtasuhteita ja sosiaalisia odotuksia yrityksiä kohtaan. Tutkimuskysymysten kautta pyritään luomaan kuva lentoyhtiöiden yrityksen tarkoituksesta ja tunnistamaan sen tukena käytettäviä legitimointistrategioita. Tutkimuksen kohteena olevien lentoyhtiöiden tarkoitusta ja legitimizeettiä tutkitaan niiden omien verkkosivujen tekstisisältöjen pohjalta. Tutkimuksessa muodostui neljä sisällönanalyysin yläluokkaa, joiden varaan lentoyhtiöt rakensivat tarkoitustaan. Nämä ovat Lentoyhtiön yksilöityminen ja erottuminen kilpailijoista, Lentäminen osana infrastruktuuria, Lentoyhtiö vastuullisena toimijana sisäisesti sekä Lentoyhtiön strategia ja kestävä kehityksen toimet. Lentoyhtiöiden huomattiin käyttävän eniten rationalisoinnin ja moralisoinnin legitimointistrategioita, mutta myös auktorisoinnin, narrativisoinnin ja normalisoinnin legitimointistrategiat tunnistettiin materiaalista. Tämän lisäksi tutkimuksessa havaittiin legitimointistrategioiden alastrategioita, jotka olivat ominaisia lentoyhtiöille. Tutkimuksen tulokset tarjoavat uutta tietoa yrityksen tarkoituksen muodostumisesta ja strategioista, joilla tätä tarkoitusta pyritään oikeuttamaan yhteiskunnassa. Tulevaisuudessa tätä tutkimusaihetta voitaisiin syventää esimerkiksi tekemällä tutkimusta eri toimialan yritysten parissa ja ottamalla huomioon myös yrityksen sidosryhmät sen legitimizeettiä arvioidessa. Jatkotutkimusta voitaisiin tehdä myös siitä vastaako yritysten viestimä tarkoitus todellisuutta ja kuinka se näkyy käytännössä.</p>	
<b>Asiasanat</b> viestinnän johtaminen, yrityksen tarkoitus, legitimizeetti, legitimizeettistrategiat, lentoliikenteen tarkoitus, lentoliikenteen eettisyys	
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Corporate purpose is a long-discussed topic around which the company's mission, vision and strategy are often built (Hollensbe, Wookey, Hickey, George & Nichols 2014). In recent years the discussion over the purpose of the company has increased and its role in society has been debated. Companies are now expected to take on more responsibility than ever before (Svensson & Wood 2008). Carrying out economic, environmental and social responsibility is now an important part of building a long-lasting and sustainable business, and the vision of companies for the sole purpose of making a profit for their owners no longer gathers full support. The purpose of the company can therefore be considered to be in a major transformation.

Whereas in the past it was thought that the purpose of a company is to maximize profit (Friedman 1961), the purpose of companies can be defined more comprehensively. Another way to look at a company's purpose is to focus on the organization's social relationship. For example, Barlett and Ghosal have already defined in 1994 the purpose of a company is declaration of its moral responsibility for its defined areas of responsibility, rather than the company exploiting its commercial potential. Newer definitions also support this idea. For example, Thakor and Quinn (2013) define the purpose of a company as something that produces a social benefit that goes beyond economic benefit and adheres to the ethical principles of society. Businesses face challenges as the economy is increasingly politicized and legitimacy, i.e. general acceptance of activities, has become a vital but difficult resource to achieve (Joutsenvirta 2009). A large proportion of companies are already aware of the link between responsibility and reputation and the potential risks it poses, and companies therefore seek to act on the wishes of stakeholders (Dawkins 2004).

Although the current study suggests that the purpose of a company is intended to go beyond economic benefits, previous research has focused deeply on the importance of the economic and social benefits of the purpose to the company rather than to society. Research on the benefits to the company, which comes with a clear and accepted purpose, has been extensive. According to

previous research, a strong and successful understanding of a company's purpose can contribute to success along different pathways (Gartenberg, Prat, & Serafeim 2019). Several previous studies (see e.g. Michaelson et al. 2014) have found that a clear and well-communicated corporate purpose leads to higher employee satisfaction and commitment to the company. Individuals find their work more meaningful, which leads to better job performance and increases the organizational citizenship behavior (Michaelson et al. 2014). It has also been studied that firms whose employees are satisfied have a better chance of surviving in the corporate world (Edmans 2011). A clear and socially accepted purpose also leads to better customer satisfaction and longer customer relationships (Du, Bhattacharya, and Sen 2007).

The purpose of the company has not been studied as extensively as an example of corporate social responsibility, corporate governance and company value creation. One of the reasons for the lack of research can be the lack of proper measurement technology to evaluate purpose and the difficulty of conducting research across companies through the years. Research is also hampered by the blurring boundaries of the definition of the corporate purpose. Legitimacy has been studied in the past among multinational companies (Joutsenvirta & Vaara 2015), focusing on the social responsibility of organizations (Richards, Zellweger & Gond 2017) and, for example, on various political institutions (Gronau & Schmidtke 2016). Based on my own search for information for this study, I did not find any previous study on combining the corporate purpose and legitimacy of a company in the context of air transport.

Examining the purpose and legitimacy of airlines provides additional information on the strategies through which their operations are justified and the necessary image of airlines is made. Exploring the legitimacy and purpose of airlines also provides an interesting and fresh perspective on ethical decision-making in society. Legitimacy research through strategies based on different languages seeks to show how through them an image of absolute need has been constructed in air transport, even though it is a perception of reality built through communication and influence. The research approach in this study is interpretive, but also critical, as the research seeks to produce new information about the unconscious structures of society.

The activities of companies are affected by the politicization of the economy and gaining the acceptance and legitimacy of the surrounding society is vital, but also difficult to achieve (see Joutsenvirta 2009). Previous research has focused on discussion about corporate purpose and significance of companies for society. Instead, less attention has been paid to the strategies used in corporate purpose by companies to seek social acceptance, or legitimacy, from various actors in society. In this study, the definition of legitimacy is Suchman's (1995) definition that a practice or organization's existence and action is legitimate when it is generally accepted in the surrounding society and in line with society's norms, values, beliefs, and definitions. In addition, this study examines the corporate purpose and legitimacy construction at the level of speech and text. The study builds on previous research that has found a variety of le-

gitimacy strategies with which companies seek to seek and maintain societal acceptance.

This study examines the corporate purpose and its legitimacy in the context of airlines. Airlines are an interesting subject of investigation, as the legitimacy of their activities is extremely much questioned by many parties and is under constant review. The focus of this study is in textual material on airline websites, which is seen as a tool to meet stakeholder expectations. It is stated that textual content is always communal in nature, their meanings arise and are formed by the needs of the community (Pälli & Turunen 2011, 287). In this study, online communication is seen as one way for companies to strengthen their own legitimacy in the eyes of stakeholders. Stakeholders form the target audience of online communication, i.e. the community on the basis of whose needs the entire communication and its content have been designed (Pälli & Turunen 2011, 287).

The ethical aspect of air transport also emerges in this study, as it may seem to be very strongly linked to the legitimacy of the company. If the industry is particularly under public scrutiny, articulation of business and environmental ideologies is essential (Coupland 2005, 355). In other words, the consideration of ethics in the context of purpose and legitimacy is natural. In modern society, companies are expected to report on their strategic and moral position from a societal perspective, as stakeholders expect companies to want to work for well-being. This is required of companies by, for example, legislation, NGOs and other rulemakers. If a company's actions, such as air transport in this study, are known to harm issues valued by stakeholders, companies are expected to actively discuss the topic. (Maignanin & Ferrellin 2004.)

The environmental debate in society is always influenced by common values, even if the views of different parties on the issue differ radically. Conversation is always connected to the surrounding society and culture. (See Joutsenvirta 2006; Joutsenvirta 2009.) The state of the environment and sustainable development is a reflection of the values of the surrounding society, and society has the opportunity to regulate, through various laws and regulations, what kind of business is acceptable and what is not. Society thus demonstrates its own values and morals in what it allows. Companies, on the other hand, show their own internal values in the way they implement, for example, environmental management.

The purpose of this master's thesis is to provide additional information about the purpose of an airline company, and to explore the ways in which they seek to build and maintain a license issued by society, in other words legitimacy, to accomplish that purpose. However, the research will therefore focus on how these issues are implemented specifically from a communication perspective. Study seeks to understand how airlines present their own corporate purpose in their online materials and what legitimacy strategies companies use to support that purpose. Since the company's purpose is now more on the surface than ever in the business world and especially qualitative research data is not yet widely available and also much of the research has been carried out with quantita-

tive methods, it is justified to carry out a research focusing on the term and using qualitative methods. In addition, the topic has not been explored widely in the past from the point of view of communication, but rather in the business sciences, which is why it can be assumed that from the point of view of communication management, important additional information can be gained. As society and the stakeholders around the company decide whether they accept the purpose of the company and consider its operation legitimate, communication management plays an extremely important role. Without successful external and internal communication, stakeholders will not have the information they need to determine a company's legitimacy. A well-executed and communicated corporate purpose, on the other hand, can bring a significant competitive advantage. For this reason, it can be considered important to produce research on this topic also from the point of view of communication.

## 2 CORPORATE PURPOSE

Based on previous research literature on corporate purpose, it has a number of different definitions and exclusions. There has long been a perception that the primary purpose of a company is to generate profit for its shareholders (Friedman 1961). Some of the definitions cling to the idea that the purpose refers explicitly to the company's social impacts. The other extreme, however, defines the purpose through the law. Company's legal obligation is to produce a profit for its shareholders, unless the company is exceptionally a non-profit organization (Moscary 2017).

The other approach, depending on the contributor, takes into account activities other than maximizing profit, such as its impact on society and the environment and also company's morals and ethics (et. al. Bartlett and Ghoshal 1994, Gartenberg, Prat and Serafeim 2019 & Moscary 2017). In this study, the purpose of a company is understood as a broader concept than just profit making. The modern idea of purpose is sometimes challenging to define, and there is still some variability in the way it is perceived by different parties. Today, the corporate purpose refers to something which reaches beyond the pure pursuit of profit maximization but instead focuses on the moral obligation of the company as part of society. (See e.g. Bartlett & Ghoshal 1994, Thakor & Quinn 2013 and Henderson & Van den Steen 2015.)

In order to define the concept of corporate purpose, the term must be broken down. What is meant by corporation? According to Moscary (2017) the corporation is a statutory entity based on the laws and contracts, and also affected by its stakeholders. Corporation is a separate entity from its owners and is subject to many of the same obligations as individuals: it can make contracts, it has to pay taxes and it can hire people, sue or be sued (Moscary 2017). Corporation internalizes contracts with the intention of saving transaction costs and also seeks to generate revenue and forecast its own business development. Corporations are also a vital part of the economy and society, as it creates a platform where factors and customers can freely make value-creating exchanges. (Moscary 2017.) Instead, the definition of purpose, according to the Oxford Dic-

tionary, is that purpose means “the reason for which something is done or created or for which something exists”.

Even today, businesses often see the only purpose of the corporation to make as much profit as possible by any means necessary. The mere pursuit of profit as a corporation’s purpose is particularly problematic if a company wants to succeed in the modern business world. If the company's only reason for existence is to maximize profit, it can cause major problems with other social institutions and exposes itself to conflicts with them. By setting the profit of the corporation's main goal, the company will increase the risk of alienating its employees, customers and community. (Moscary 2007.)

When this ideology of purpose is transferred to the corporate world and the scabies for the existence of the company, Henderson and Van den Steen (2015) writes that the purpose is “a concrete goal or objective for the firm that reaches beyond profit maximization.” Bartlett and Ghoshal (1994) defines purpose as “the statement of a company’s moral response to its broadly defined responsibilities, not an amoral plan for exploiting commercial opportunity.” In addition, Thakor and Quinn (2013) defines the purpose of a company as something bigger and above than the financial profit that the shareholders get from it. A large part of previous research supports this thinking to define the purpose. The purpose goes further than fulfilling legal and economic requirements, it is something more abstract.

As said, purpose does not mean any formal declaration, but rather a philosophy and a way of thinking. Often, when talking about the purpose of a business, the history of the company and the reasons for its creation are completely forgotten or ignored. A company is more than just a contract- or property-based entity. It’s easily viewed simply from too few points of view and neglects the idea that the company carries its own characteristics, limitations and, for example, purpose, even from the time of its founding. (Moscary 2017.) According to Gartenberg, Prat and Serafeim (2019) corporate purpose is the same as the company’s common beliefs which guide the actions of employees and management. This approach is supported by other previous studies. According to Hollensbe, Wookey, Hickey, George and Nichols (2014, 1228) the purpose of the corporation can be considered as containing the company's shared identity and founding philosophies and, also associated strongly with corporate values, institutional norms and logics.

Corporate purpose is strongly related to the company's objectives, its identity, the reasons behind the creation of the company and who is the founder. In addition, purpose involves, for example, entrepreneurial values, the mission and vision of the company, and of course how the company itself thinks it relates to society, i.e. what are the institutional values and logics of the company. An important part of the purpose is also how it appears on the company's management level, as well as other stakeholders - what is the company's governance. (Hollensbe, Wookey, Hickey, George & Nichols 2014, 1228.)

As stated, the purpose of a company as a subject of research is fragmented and diverse, and is often referred to simultaneously in the context of many other terms such as social responsibility, good governance, and social contract. It is therefore important for the purposes of this study to consider first the meaning of these terms and the extent to which part they mean the same thing and, on the other hand, the extent to which their use differs. The condensed explanations of the terms are summarized in Table 1 and thus make it easier to look at their differences.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Difference and use</b>	<b>Author and year</b>
Corporate purpose	Corporate purpose is related to the company's objectives, its identity, the reasons behind the creation of the company and who is the founder. Purpose involves values, the mission and vision of the company, and how the company itself thinks it relates to society. A part of the purpose is also how it appears on the company's management level.	The purpose of the company is a term very broad, like an umbrella term that covers underneath all the other terms below. The purpose includes both the company's philosophy and strategy, and on the basis of this, the company's legitimacy to act in society is assessed.	Hollensbe, Wookey, Hickey, George & Nichols 2014, 1228
Corporate social responsibility, CSR	CSR encompasses economic, moral, law-abiding, and shared good deeds that affect the well-being of a company's stakeholders. According to this, CSR describes how a company's processes produce positive impacts on its own community and the people around it, as well as the environment.	The term CSR focuses specifically on the social benefits brought by a company and requires companies to act specifically that goes beyond economic benefits. CSR is the most studied of the terms, as its limitation to the benefit that a company brings to the community is easier to define than, for example, the purpose of the company as a whole.	Hill, Ainscough, Shank and Manullang 2007, 165-174.
Corporate governance	Corporate governance refers to the systems of rules, practices, and processes by which companies are regulated. The corporate governance model followed by a specific company is the distribution of rights and responsibilities by all parts in the organization. The role of governance is to ensure that the organization operates in a proper and transparent manner in decision-making, and that it takes care of the interests of stakeholders.	Corporate governance focuses specifically on the way a company is run and managed, and on the fact that it benefits them from a stakeholder perspective, both economically and socially.	Gillan 2006, 382-383.

Social contract	The social contract is the philosophical idea that the individual has ethical and political obligations to society. Such agreements have written rules like laws or it can be a so-called wordless agreement about what is the norm. In business, the social agreement of companies refers to the obligations that companies have towards society and also for the world. This includes philanthropy, CSR and good corporate governance.	A social contract refers to everything that a company is committed to, for example through law, but it also means everything that is not worded that is expected of a company. Businesses in modern society are expected to benefit from it at many levels, and this agreement between society and business is a social contract.	Cragg 2000, 205-214.
Legitimacy	Legitimacy is the generalized perception of something as desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions.	In legitimacy, the term crystallizes all the actions and essence of a company that are either considered acceptable or unacceptable in the eyes of the surrounding society. Legitimacy is a space that a company wants to achieve and maintain by using different means and shaping its own purpose accordingly.	Suchman 1995, 574.

Table 1: Explanations and use of terms related to corporate purpose

## 2.1 Corporate purpose and business's success

Companies rely on the support for the surrounding community and stakeholders. The company's activities and its purpose affect society that offers companies their freedom to act - society decides what types of businesses are allowed to operate (Hollensbe, Wookey, Hickey, George & Nichols 2014, 1228). Moscarly (2007) states that companies are the creations of the surrounding society and that they are responsible for providing the necessary goods and services for the benefit of society and themselves. Corporations depend on the approval of the surrounding society and are intentionally seeking stakeholders approval to strengthen their right to act, or in other words their legitimacy. In general, society expects companies to "improve their lives" or "reduce their harm" as the ideal situation for everyone would be business that supports the well-being of society and vice versa. (Hollensbe, Wookey, Hickey, George & Nichols 2014, 1228.)

Maintaining, acquiring, and longevity the legitimacy of a company also depends a lot on the employees and their commitment to the company. Previous research found that a successful and inspiring purpose increases employee motivation and commitment (Grant 2008; Gibbons & Henderson 2012). A clear purpose also often supports management and can speed up and streamline decision-making (Bartlett and Ghoshal 1994) and often also has a positive effect on other stakeholders' perceptions of the company (Elfenbein, Fisman and McManus 2012).

It has been noticed that businesses have become more aware of the benefits of having a clear corporate purpose, and how it can help to make their business more efficient. As a result, the purpose of the business, especially the social purpose, is often put on the core of the business. The aim is to achieve a positive impact on the community and the environment, but also to generate more financial value for the company. (Springett 2004.) Particularly in relation to the environment, companies are constantly being required to take more active measures to reduce their own carbon footprint. Indeed, it has been studied that companies need to adapt their values and practices to the expectations of stakeholders if they want to maintain their license to operate in society. (Svensson & Wood 2008.)

As the demands of the surrounding society have grown, companies are striving to meet these demands. The most important tool for communicating one's own actions and values is communication. However, it is not always clear whether what the company is saying is true. It has been researched that companies produce information about the purpose of the company for internal and external use, but often these are just useless words that do not appear in the company's operations or results (Guiso, Sapienza and Zingales 2015, 62).

Companies that act genuinely according to their own values see themselves as trustworthy and believe they can build trust with stakeholders by acting ethically and creating innovative solutions to social problems. Such companies not only follow the law and listen to key stakeholders, but want to set an example and exceed the expectations that stakeholders have of them. These companies create new standards for other companies. In the operations of such companies, values and talk about sustainable development are not just glued-on speeches to the minds of stakeholders, but they are truly the cornerstone of a company's purpose and operations. The values have been genuinely incorporated into the company's strategy, so that the values have been the starting point for the formation of the strategy. (Austin 2008, 86.)

Even if a company's management has a clear state of mind about ethical conduct and the company's purpose, implementing it through the organization can be challenging. In many cases, the problem can be regarded as the fact that in companies people do not know or care about what the purpose of the company is (Bartlett & Ghoshal 1994). If the ambition of a company focuses only on a very narrow field interest of the company, the companies will lose their enthusiasm and commitment of their employees. If the purpose and values of a business become self-evident, companies will easily lose their identity and

pride of doing things, and this will quickly be seen by employees and customers alike. The most important thing in committing employees to the purpose of the company is appreciation and commitment from the management level. (Gartenberg, Prat & Serafeim 2019.)

Business purpose is the reason why a business exists, not just a business strategy. As a result, one of the most important tasks at management level should be to understand the purpose of the company and succeed in communicating and implementing it to its employees. (Gartenberg, Prat & Serafeim 2019). If research is to be believed, implementation is one of the biggest challenges for companies in terms of their purpose. Most senior-level executives believe that companies with a clear and shared purpose have higher employee loyalty. Still only a few, however, saw that they would be able to pass the purpose of the company's practices and business model (Gartenberg, Prat & Serafeim 2019, 19).

Numerous studies support the claim that high-ability employees are the ones to whom the company's purpose does matter and they want to do a meaningful job (Bode et al. 2015, Burbano 2016). However, research also shows that implementing the corporate purpose for work is the most challenging among high-skilled employees, for example, management and leadership development (Gartenberg, Prat & Serafeim 2019, 19). This kind of environment requires that the corporation leaders play a markable role. They should primarily create the company's strategies, but in order to operate and form emotional bonds they need to attach strongly to the corporation's broader purpose. This means that the organization should be the kind to which the employees as well as stakeholders can commit themselves and feel a sense of pride. (Bartlett & Ghoshal 1994, 81.)

Of course, there is not always a link between the purpose of a business and its success. In cases where the success of a business is not influenced by employee productivity or customer choices, the purpose of the business does not necessarily affect the success of the business (Gartenberg, Prat & Serafeim 2019, 2-3). There are studies suggesting that shareholder rights should be even more protected and enhanced (Bebchuck 2013). The idea that shareholder benefit is the most important reason for the existence of a company also supports the notion that profit-making is paramount and everything else can, at worst, have an effect on employee concentration. According to this thinking company with strong purpose, which is directed to a non-profit-making purposes, at worst case scenario, can lead to financial under-performance. (Gartenberg, Prat & Serafeim 2019, 19.)

All in all, it can be said that the purpose of a company is not irrelevant to the success and legitimacy of the company, but is a whole that every company should take into account in its own operations. A clear and meaningful purpose for stakeholders to generate benefits for a company's financial success, but it also makes it possible to strengthen stakeholder acceptance.

### 3 INSTITUTIONAL THEORY

In order for us to look at the purpose, and the way in which a company seeks to justify its activities in society, institutional theory must be included in the theoretical part of the study. Institutional theory is ideally suited to research that examines the purpose of a company and the legitimacy of its activities both of which are based on the idea of what is generally accepted and desired in society. Through institutional theory, one can look at the self-evident and generally accepted things that prevail in modern society. The theory allows for a critical examination of the purpose of the company. That is because institutional theory is based on the idea that organizations want to be effective but at the same time conform to the rules of society (Meyer & Rowan 1977, 340–341).

Because institutional theory is a very broad entity that combines several different doctrines, this study addresses only its core research tradition. Through theory, it is possible to critically examine the actors of society and their relations with others, as well as, for example, the relationship between permanence and change in the frame of reference of organizations. The theory brings a meaningful additional perspective to the research, as it examines the ability of different groups to argue for their own benefit. (Greenwood et al. 2008, 4.)

In this study, sociological institutionalism is used in more detail as a theoretical background. Sociological institutionalism seeks to explain the ways and actions of an organization and thinks that they have been shaped by the surrounding culture (Schmidt 2006). The so-called new institutional theory began to take shape in the 1970s, when research began to focus on the similarities of organizations and the formation of their structures. Much of the research focused on the popularity of bureaucracy. According to Meyer and Rowan (1977), organizations often resemble each other a lot in ways and structures because as a company adapts to other actors in the industry, it is easier for them to acquire and maintain legitimacy and gain more resources and visibility, for example, and thus strengthen their own survival. According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), the survival of an organization is not only about the financial side, but they need different resources, things, and institutional legitimacy. The organi-

zation must, in the opinion of the surrounding society, be entitled to act. As all organizations strive to survive and succeed, they begin to resemble each other. (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). Institutional theory thus seeks to understand from a sociological point of view the obviousness and rules of the operation of organizations, which are called institutionalized practices.

When we talk about the institutionalization of something, it means that the thing is, at least to some extent an act to be taken for granted. This occurs both at the individual and organizational level as well as in society as a whole. For example, handshake is an institutionalized way at the individual level and in organizations often structures and different calculation methods are also such. (Greenwood et al. 2017, 5.) According to Zucker (1977), institutionalized practices are such deep-rooted notions of what is rational that it is impossible to find alternative ways to those practices. Institutionalization occurs when a practice is sufficiently widely accepted and considered appropriate and necessary for the best possible functioning of the organization. This practice is ubiquitous and alternative practices are not considered an option. According to the new theory of institutionalism, institutionalized practices are considered to be self-evident operating models. However, it has been found that such practices do not guarantee success or effectiveness and are therefore not linked to them. (Tolbert & Zucker 1983, 25–26.)

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) have studied institutionalization and suggest that it can occur in three different ways. The ways in which institutionalization occurs are a compelling, mimetic, and normative way. Coercion means institutionalization that takes place through political pressure, meaning laws and regulations or other recommendations issued by a high authority. These are big factors in the institutionalization of organizations and thus in their similarity. By mimetics, DiMaggio and Powell refer to the tendency of organizations to copy each other, especially particularly successful organizations. In doing so, organizations seek to strengthen their own legitimacy and survive in a diverse operating environment. Normativeness, on the other hand, refers to the perception formed by each professional group of the ways in which work is done and of the obvious actions of the field. Normatism specifically affects groups of people and through it professional groups create legitimacy around them. Normativeness is similar to organizations because professionals “spread” their own normal around them and to others in the professional group. (DiMaggio & Powell 1983.)

The operating environment of organizations is institutional and can be seen as prisoners of their own context, but at the same time organizations are rationally functioning parts in a very diverse environment. Because the operating environment of organizations is complex and challenging, it increases the need to operate efficiently and effectively. On the other hand, an institutionalized environment increases the need for legitimacy in one’s own operating environment. (Tolbert & Zucker 1983, 22.) Because organizations are interlinked due to institutionalism and a complex operating environment, rationalized practices have emerged, but also so-called rational myths that organizations re-

sort to. These myths are those that organizations consider to be the best and most effective ways, but they have been adopted mainly because of external stakeholders and the legitimacy they achieve through them. (Meyer & Rowan 1977, 347.)

## 4 LEGITIMACY AND LEGITIMACY THEORY

Legitimacy is a key concept in this study, as the methods of its acquisition and maintenance are part of the second research question in this study. Legitimacy is also an important concept in institutional theory and is used extensively in the study of many different disciplines. According to the institutional theory outlined in the previous chapter, legitimacy is vital to an organization's existence, not so much financial success, for example. In this study, legitimacy is viewed from the perspective of empirical research tradition, which means that legitimacy is seen as a socially constructed and relative phenomenon. When legitimacy is examined from this perspective, it has much in common with elements of institutional theory.

The traditional definition of legitimacy is considered to be the definition of Suchman (1995). According to him legitimacy is the generalized perception of something as "desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions" (Suchman 1995, 574). More general way of thinking is that legitimacy is justification of existence (Suchman 1995). Also almost half a century ago, Weber (1968) emphasized the importance of legitimacy with his idea that legal order controls social activity.

Suchman (1995) defines legitimacy as a generalized assumption that an organization's actions conform to the norms, values and beliefs of a given operating environment around the organization. However, in reality an organization's performance may deviate much from the standards of the community that controls them, but the organization may still retain its legitimacy (Suchman 1995). This means that legitimacy is formed by the subjective perception of the organization by those who oversee it. Dowling and Pfeffer (1975), for their part, argued that the quest for legitimacy in an organization is explained by the organization's adaptation to its operating environment. In practice, the examination of legitimacy means the evaluation of various functions and activities in relation to the general values prevailing in society. In other words, an organization can gain legitimacy by being able to represent and prove that its activities are consistent with prevailing social values. (Mousa & Hassan 2015, 42.)

Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) see that the legitimacy of an organization is forming outside the company. Therefore, it is important for the organization to have a number of stakeholders who are sympathetic and supportive to its activities. Granting legitimacy to an organization occurs when stakeholders compare the organisation's performance with its environmental standards, such as cultural factors, accepted norms, and applicable laws (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978). According to Näsi (1997, 300), the legitimacy of a corporate is built on how the expectations of the surrounding society regarding the corporation's operations are met and how the corporate is seen, so it is not so much a question of the company's characteristics but of society's reception.

Tilling (2004) suggests that legitimacy grows and shapes with the organization's following steps: formation, retention, expansion, and defense. The formation of legitimacy is a significant part of the emergence of a new community, as its functions evolve to common standards. In retention mode, it is important to the organization to trust in the environment and respond to its attitudes and demands. Extending legitimacy comes when an organization, for example, expands its reach or wants to grow the amount of its stakeholders. Defense of legitimacy is also important because of emerging threats. (Tilling 2004.)

The survival of organizations in today's society is not simple, but is influenced by a company's know-how and technical know-how and efficiency, but the legitimacy provided by society is also vital (Powell & DiMaggio 1991). If a company acts against the institutionalized rules expected of it, legitimacy will begin to falter and may collapse. Legitimacy can be compromised by various accidents, ethical issues, or misconduct, and can lead to a society reassessing a company's permission to act (Suchman 1995) and making it more difficult to attract and maintain stakeholders (Dirks, Lewicki, & Zaheer 2009). At worst, in such a situation, stakeholders may call on the public authorities to close down the company and the company loses the support of its stakeholders, making it impossible to continue operating. (Kim et al. 2014; Russell et al. 2016). Even if a company's practices and values conflict with the surrounding society, it does not automatically lead to a reputation crisis or loss of legitimacy if the grievances have not attracted public attention (Suchman 1995). In other words, a company can, in principle, act against the wishes of society, but if it manages to hide it, these factors do not necessarily affect its legitimacy.

As a company strives to achieve legitimacy, it may face setbacks that may weaken its legitimacy. Changes in the company's operating practices and actions towards its environment may raise questions about the legitimacy that the organization is not prepared to answer (Suchman 1995). Especially with social media and the culture of instant messaging, the pressure on companies to justify their own operations is increasingly challenging. Media and stakeholders are constantly monitoring companies and their seeking after a positive brand and thereby legitimacy is ongoing. The changed environment has led companies to increasingly find themselves in situations where their legitimacy will be questioned. (Roper & Schoenberger-Orgad 2011, 698.) It can thus be seen that, for companies in the surrounding society has different needs, which is expected

to be responded to. Indeed, the legitimacy of an organization can be seen as a state or status that can be attained as well as lost (Deegan & Rankin 1996, 54).

Deegan and Rankin (1996) have noted in their study that companies use their social responsibility reporting in order to justify or legitimize their activities. In this way, the disclosure of information, even if the information is carefully selected, can guarantee the justification for continuing the business. This is also often referred to as a social contract between companies and those under its influence. Social contract obliges companies to act in accordance with social standards between organizations and society in order to obtain their full approval. (Brown & Deegan 1998, 22.) Dowling and Pfeffer (1975) stated that legitimacy is the circumstances in which a company's value is congruent with the larger social value system. Legitimacy theory explains the relationship between companies and society, and therefore, it is an important framework for analyzing the relationships between companies and their environment. Besides describing relationships between a company and the community, the legitimacy theory is used to explain companies' motivations, strategies, disclosures and responses to particular events or crises in social and environmental issues (Mousa and Hassan, 2015).

As stakeholders now expect companies to want to act in the common interest of society, the term corporate social responsibility can be strongly linked to a company's legitimacy and also its purpose. According to McWilliams and Siegel (2001), corporate social responsibility, or CSR, means a social good that goes beyond economic benefits and legal requirements. Hill et al. (2007) argue that CSR encompasses economic, moral, law-abiding, and shared good deeds that affect the well-being of a company's stakeholders. According to this, CSR describes how a company's processes produce positive impacts on its own community and the people around it, as well as the environment.

The company's legitimacy links to the company's sustainability. Corporate social responsibility, CSR, can strengthen a company's legitimacy by communicating company values that are the same as values and norms generally considered good in society (Du and Vieira 2012). CSR can also help a company identify itself from competitors and increase customer confidence in the company (Du and Vieira 2012). When a company operates responsibly and builds the image of an ethically operating company, it increases the company's chances of long-term success. (Andreassen and Lindestad 1998; Lai et al. 2010). Legitimacy is often included in the discussion when it comes to corporate volunteering for the environment and society benefit, and also it is strongly involved when it comes to corporate responsibility reporting. (Ks. esim. Deegan & Gordon 1996; Mousa & Hassan 2015.)

According to the legitimacy theory the purpose of corporate actions is first and foremost to attain and subsequently maintain and similarly repair its own legitimacy through society by activities that create public acceptance. This is of course also partly due to the current business environment and the spirit of the time, where numerous different environmental laws and stakeholders re-

quirements drive companies to actively communicate their impact and positive actions on society. (Mousa & Hassan 2015, 41.)

The purpose of the corporations and their legitimacy goes hand in hand. For this reason also, companies need to publish information openly for public scrutiny. When the purpose of the company is clear and communicated outward and information relating to the legitimacy is published, the company justifies its own existence. Deegan and Ranking (1996) argue in their study, that if the company is unable to justify its activities, the social contract may be canceled by society. This can make it difficult for a company to operate in many ways, such as slackening demand, making it more difficult to get employees, or running out of funding. Society can also tighten taxation, impose fines for negligence, and change legislation, making it difficult for an organization to continue operating (Deegan & Rankin 1996, 54). These actions punish a company that is malfunctioning in the eyes of society and seek to steer its activities in a direction that is acceptable. Indeed, the legitimacy of an organization can be seen as a state or status that can be attained as well as lost (Deegan & Rankin 1996, 54).

### **3.1 Types of legitimacy**

According to Suchman (1995), legitimacy is divided into three parts: pragmatic, moral, and cognitive legitimacy. Gaining and maintaining legitimacy is important to organizations for a variety of reasons. In order for an organization to be licensed to operate, it must be considered legitimate in the surrounding operating environment. Organizations want support from their stakeholders for their activities and their own purpose. Support can be passive or active support for the organization. (Suchman 1995, 577).

From an institutional perspective, legitimacy consists of all the beliefs that define the ways in which organizations are built and run and how they are understood and evaluated from the outside. (Suchman 1995, 577.) The types of legitimacy of Suchman are presented in Figure 1. Pragmatic, moral, and cognitive legitimacy, as defined by Suchman, are further subdivided into subtypes, which are explored in the following subsections.

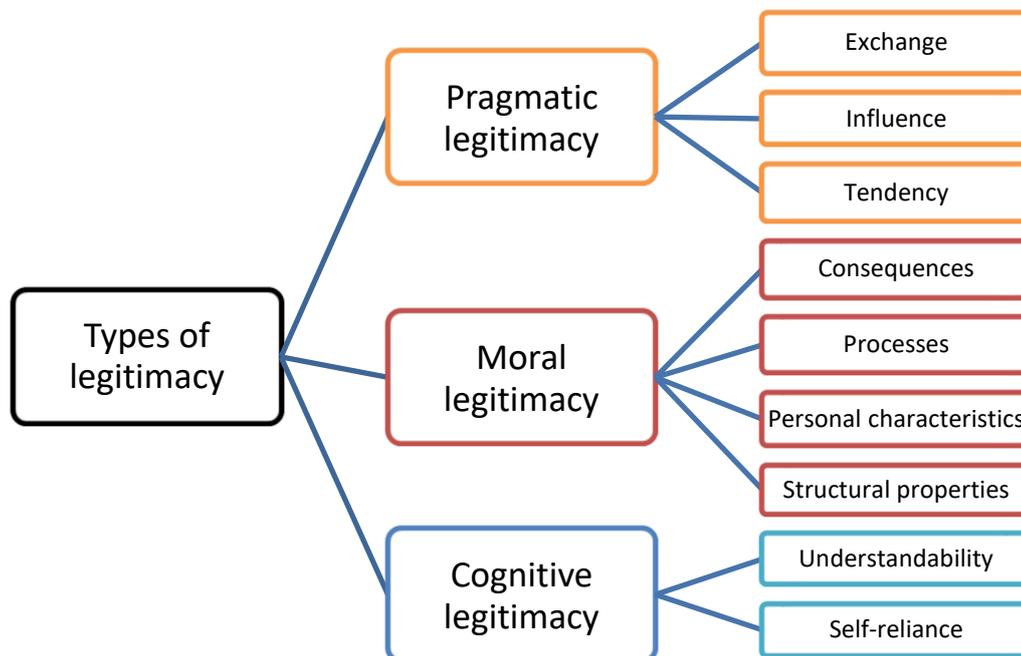


Figure 1: Types of legitimacy

### 3.1.1 Pragmatic legitimacy

Pragmatic legitimacy is based on the results of an organization or the influence gained through it. At the heart of pragmatic legitimacy is the pursuit of stakeholders' own interests, whereby legitimacy is formed among the organization's closest stakeholders.

According to Suchman (1995), there are three subgroups of pragmatic legitimacy: exchange legitimacy, influence legitimacy, and dispositional legitimacy. Exchange legitimacy refers to a concept where stakeholders support an organization because the outputs of its operations help stakeholders in their own actions. Another form of pragmatic legitimacy is linked to influence. In case of influence legitimacy, the stakeholders benefit from the influence of the organization, meaning there is no concrete direct exchange but the stakeholders support the organization because they feel that it benefits the intentions of the stakeholders. A third form of pragmatic legitimacy is dispositional legitimacy, in which an organization is perceived as a morally responsible actor whose goals and personality influence how stakeholders perceive the legitimacy of that organization. (Suchman 1995, 578–579.)

Pragmatic legitimacy has a strong connection to an organization's business and its design, as pragmatic legitimacy is built on customer interfaces. Legitimacy strategies focus on adapting to the needs of existing and potential new

stakeholders and convincing them of the importance of their own organization. In this case, adaptation, manipulation and selection are used as strategies for gaining pragmatic legitimacy. (O'Dwyer, Owen & Unerman 2011.)

Adaptation means shaping the organization to better meet the needs of stakeholders and actively working to achieve a more appropriate outcome for them. Manipulation usually refers to public advertising that seeks to activate so-called "silent stakeholders" and, through activation, seeks to convince them that they have a need for the products or services of an organization seeking legitimacy. Selection is used as a strategy to reassure selected and potential stakeholders that an organization's outputs meet their needs. Stakeholders therefore have a key role to play in gaining pragmatic legitimacy, as the benefits they receive from their organization legitimize the company's operations. (O'Dwyer, Owen & Unerman 2011.)

### **3.1.2 Moral legitimacy**

Through the moral legitimacy defined by Suchman (1995), the fairness of an organization's actions is examined. From a moral point of view, an organization is legitimate when it does promote morally right things, such as general well-being or equality. Moral legitimacy is divided into four subcategories: consequential legitimacy, procedural legitimacy, personal legitimacy and structural legitimacy. (Suchman 1995).

In terms of consequential legitimacy, the fairness of an organization is examined in terms of its achievement. The procedural legitimacy, on the other hand, focuses on the adoption of socially accepted actions and customs. The aim is to gain legitimacy through appropriate processes and working methods. The third subclass of moral legitimacy is personal legitimacy, which is related to the status of an organization's individual employees and, for example, their reputation. The fourth subcategory is structural legitimacy. It describes an organization's generally accepted position in the society to perform its activities and to exist. (Suchman 1995, 579-582.)

Examining and researching moral legitimacy is challenging because it involves several competing views. The definition of good moral action is complex and is greatly influenced by the actors' own environment. For example, Richards, Zellweger, and Gond (2017) consider that there are different platforms in society through which actors seek to build their own legitimacy. For example, civic and environmental movements, different markets, and industry are different platforms from each other, each with its own moral foundation and idea of the right moral model. (Richards, Zellweger & Gond 2017.)

### 3.1.3 Cognitive legitimacy

The third form of legitimacy, or cognitive legitimacy, means a deeper and also more unconscious acceptance of the existence and necessity of an organization in society. Cognitive legitimacy is considered to be more deeply rooted than other forms of legitimacy, and questioning it is considered the most challenging because it is based on self-evident and assumptions, so-called generally accepted practices. Cognitive legitimacy is divided into two subgroups. The first is comprehensibility, through which convincing descriptions of the existence of an organization are created using culture as support. The second subgroup is taken for granted, which is the strongest form of legitimacy, but also the most difficult to achieve. (Suchman 1995, 582–583.)

In real life, forms of pragmatic, moral, and cognitive legitimacy exist simultaneously and intertwined. According to previous research, pragmatic, moral, and cognitive types of legitimacy reinforce each other, but are also contradictory because different stakeholders' perceptions of legitimacy and its expectations of formation cannot occur simultaneously. (Kumar & Das 2007.)

Building cognitive legitimacy is the most time consuming process and the organization itself can influence the achievement of its own legitimacy. Organizations can achieve pragmatic legitimacy by exchanging with stakeholders as expected. Crisis with organizations' moral legitimacy can undermine the pragmatic legitimacy of all kinds of organizations. The form of cognitive legitimacy is the most enduring, but develops very slowly through a number of different experiences. (Kumar & Das 2007.)

## 3.2 Legitimacy strategies

According to Suchman (1995), the organization can use different strategies to manage legitimacy. All organizations need legitimacy to secure and legitimize their operations and use different strategies to build and maintain their legitimacy. In order to gain legitimacy, one can adapt to standards set by audiences, select audiences that support the organization's practices, or manipulate the environment by creating new audiences and beliefs as the basis for legitimacy. (Suchman 1995, 585-598.) Dowling and Pfeffer (1975), for their part believed that building legitimacy would be successful either by adapting to social norms, by modifying social norms, or by adhering to social values. Legitimacy is not a permanent state, but it is conceivable that companies will have to work constantly to maintain their legitimacy.

Once an organization has achieved sufficient legitimacy to support its operations, it needs to focus on maintaining legitimacy and possible remedies in the event of a loss of it. Maintaining legitimacy is usually experienced easier than acquiring or repairing it. In order to maintain legitimacy, efforts may be made to strengthen the organization's ability to detect public reactions and fu-

ture challenges in order to anticipate them, or to try to maintain legitimacy already gained through past achievements. (Suchman 1995, 587-598.)

Legitimacy strategies can be seen as goal-oriented actions aimed at creating and maintaining support for a system. In this context, support refers to favorable attitudes towards the functioning and existence of an organization, rather than support for individual actions. Legitimation strategies work through social norms and thus differ, for example, from an organization's public relations activities, which tend to focus on legitimizing an individual matter or decision rather than the existence of the entire organization. Legitimation strategies are interactive relationships between an actor seeking legitimacy and the object of a legitimation strategy. (Gronau & Schmidtke 2016, 541.) On the other hand, there are also differing opinions about the goal-orientation of legitimation strategies. For example, Joutsenvirta and Vaara (2015) discuss in their article that creating and maintaining legitimacy is sometimes more intentional and sometimes less conscious. (Joutsenvirta & Vaara 2015, 744.)

The study of legitimation strategies often refers to four typical legitimation strategies based on the classifications of Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) and Van Leeuwen (2008). These strategies are authorization, rationalization, moralization, and narrativization. Later, Vaara, Tienari and Laurila (2006) have added a fifth legitimation strategy, normalization, to this classification. These legitimation strategies are illustrated in Figure 2.

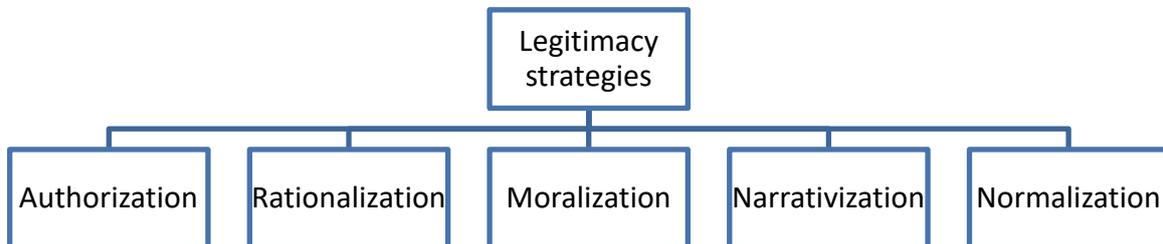


Figure 2: Legitimacy strategies

### 3.2.1 Authorization

Through the legitimation strategy of authorization, legitimacy is sought through authority. Relying on authority means relying on traditions, customs, laws, and influential people. A position of authority can be related to an individual actor and his or her position in the organization, such as the status of a leader or supervisor. Legitimacy based on authority is achieved through status, an actor with authority does not need any justification for its actions other than its position, for example, the relationship between a supervisor and a subordinate. Authorization can also take place through expertise and reference to re-

search, or also impersonally, in which case, among other things, laws, rules and guidelines are invoked. (Van Leeuwen 2008, 105–108.)

The position of authority of public actors is based on democracy and the promotion of the common good: the fact that they act not only for their own ends but also for the benefit of the citizens. The position of authority of public actors is based on democracy and the promotion of the common good: the fact that they act not only for their own ends but also for the benefit of the citizens. Actors using public authorization seek to act as advocates for various groups of people, such as taxpayers and students. Those who use the legitimation strategy of authorization appeal to altruism, that is, the selflessness and selflessness of their own actions. Altruism justifies legitimacy on the grounds that decision-makers have no interest in the decision but that it seeks to benefit others. (Reshef & Keim 2014, 76–77.)

### **3.2.2 Rationalization**

Rationalization legitimacy strategy uses means that invoke the benefit and purpose of the matter to be legitimized, that is, the desired goal. Rationalization can be achieved by appealing to concrete goals, impacts, and benefits. Rationalization is used to seek to legitimize the intentionality or effectiveness of something. Rationalization strategy can also be theory-based, arguing for necessity and appropriateness. This is very close to the normalization strategy, because rationalization also refers to the normal state of affairs. (Van Leeuwen 2008, 113–116.)

When rationalization is used to legitimize something, it is usually argued that there are no alternatives to and to the destination other than what has been presented. Often, however, when doing so, any other options are left out. (Reshef & Keim 2014, 99.)

### **3.2.3 Moralization**

When moralization is used as a legitimacy strategy, it is based on people's values. Simplified, there is good and bad in a value discussion, but usually the discussion seeks to create an image more subtly by using, for example, adjectives that are often associated with something negative or virtuous, such as healthy or effective. These words have a strong reference to good morals and values. Moralization can be identified, for example, through discourse analysis, but an analysis of why certain values are good or others are perceived as immoral cannot be assessed by its means. (Van Leeuwen 2008, 109–110.)

Direct moralization is rarely used as a legitimation strategy. Instead, moralization is often used as a tool for delegitimation, for example, in situations where it is desired to demonstrate the inappropriateness of action in the current situation. Often, legitimation strategies for moralization and rationalization go hand in hand and are used simultaneously. The concepts of rationalization and moralization are often confused and used in the same sense, although they have differences. Rationalization is based on morality and rationalization cannot ex-

ist without a moral foundation. However, the strategy of legitimizing moralization takes a deeper view of the value debate than rationalism. Rationalism is often based on more instrumental legitimacy, which means that it legitimizes more concrete actions and benefits. However, if a benefit is not perceived as morally correct, it is not considered a benefit at all, indicating a strong link between rationalization and moralization. (Vaara ym. 2006, 800-801.)

### **3.2.4 Narrativization**

Legitimacy can be built by means of storytelling, that is, by means of narration. Narrativization takes place through moral tales or cautionary tales. Through these stories, or so called narratives, the purpose is to entertain morally in an entertaining way that emphasizes some values and shows what is right and wrong. Cautionary tales provide an example of what wrong action can cause. (Van Leeuwen 2008, 117-118.)

When narrativization is used as a legitimation strategy, the stories seek to provide examples of good and desirable behavior as well as undesirable behavior. The stories take into account how things are told, who are the winners and losers, who is considered a hero. A special feature of narrative legitimation strategy is that the stories are also entertaining and it often affects the listener's interest. However, narrativization does not work independently, but supports other legitimation strategies. (Vaara et al. 2006, 803-804.)

### **3.2.5 Normalization**

According to Van Leeuwen (2008) there are four legitimation strategies outlined above. However, for example, Vaara et al. (2006) have noted normalization as the fifth strategy, which Van Leeuwen (2008) has set in his own research as a sub-concept of the legitimation strategy of moralization. Normalization as a legitimation strategy implies that legitimacy seeks to take place by referring to the normal or natural state of something or also, for example, through various role models. Normalization seeks to make a thing look legitimate on the basis of normalcy and its normal state. (Vaara et al. 2006.)

Legitimation strategies are ways in which language is used to build legitimacy around something. Applying legitimation strategies and analyzing texts from the perspective of critical discourse analysis provides information on organizational complexity, ambiguity, and potential conflicts of organizational legitimacy that are easily overlooked when using other research methods. (Vaara 2006). Legitimation strategies can be seen as processes designed to create images through texts or other social contexts. These images, with their hallmarks, determine which things are perceived as legitimate and which are not. (Joutsenvirta & Vaara 2015.)

Legitimation strategies for authorization, rationalization, moralization, narrativization, and normalization often occur simultaneously and intertwined.

In order for something to be perceived as legitimate, it must be based on generally perceived values and a consistent understanding of morality. Indeed, the moralization legitimacy strategy is often involved alongside other strategies, especially the rationalization strategy often manifests itself alongside moralization. Other legitimacy strategies must also be built on a morally acceptable basis. Nor, for example, does normalization coexist with moralization, because if one wants to refer to the normal and general state of something, it must be in accordance with prevailing moral conceptions. When examining airlines and their efforts to legitimize their operations and bring out the purpose of the company, all the strategies described above can be observed.

## 5 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the implementation of the study step by step. At first, this chapter describes the research task and research questions and explains their reasoning. After this, the research method and its arguments are described, after which the airlines used in the study are characterized and also how the material was collected. The chapter concludes with describing the research and processing of data and descriptions of the analysis.

### 5.1 The research task and research questions

This research follows the phenomenological-hermeneutic research tradition. This research method is not a schematic and thus learnable method for collecting and analyzing data, but it is connected to a large whole with various non-technical issues and solutions. The method emphasizes the continuous reflection required of the researcher on the different stages of the research and the evaluation of human perceptions and the construction of knowledge. With the method, research emphasizes human concepts such as experience, meanings, and the frameworks set by the community. (Laine 2010, 27–30.)

Phenomenology focuses on the study of a person's relationship to their own reality of life. In this tradition of research, man's relationship with the world is considered intentional, meaning that everything would have a meaning for people. Experiences are formed on the basis of meanings and meanings are specifically the subject of phenomenological research. The meaning of research is thus based on the idea that human action is based on purpose and that reality is made up of the meanings that are being studied. (Laine 2010, 28–30.) In phenomenological research, the researcher has a significant responsibility, as he or she must be aware of his or her own relationship to the research object and material. (Lukkarinen 2003, 125).

Instead, hermeneutics refers to the theory of understanding and interpretation. The aim is to find, so to speak, rules for interpretations, according to which the most correct interpretation of the phenomenon can be found. Hermeneutic research focuses specifically on interpersonal communication and focuses on human-created expressions that contain meanings. Meanings are approached by understanding and interpreting them, and this is based on people's communal life, where multiple interpretations are common. (Laine 2010, 31.) The researcher makes interpretations of the material by force already when collecting it. An attempt is made to get rid of this with the most critical and reflective attitude possible, and an attempt is made to obscure the researcher's own interpretation, as the aim is to interpret the people under study. The researcher makes suggestions for interpretation of the material one after another until he or she finds the most plausible interpretation of what the object of the research has meant. (Laine 2010, 36–37.)

The aim of this study is to understand how airlines present their corporate purpose based on the texts on their websites, in addition to examining what types of legitimacy strategies they use in the materials to support this purpose. The airlines were selected on the basis that their headquarters are located in the same geographical area, i.e. the Nordic countries, but at the same time they operate globally and are the largest of the Nordic airlines in terms of their passenger numbers and turnover, which are from 2019. As the study addresses legitimacy and corporate purpose, both of which are strongly linked to society and its operations, it made sense to study airlines from culturally similar backgrounds and from the geographically same area, but which are still operating globally. Eligible airlines were Finnair, Norwegian and SAS.

The aim of the study is to provide additional information on how the term corporate purpose is constructed and how airlines present their own corporate purposes in their website materials. The purpose of a company is strongly linked to how the company justifies its own existence. Therefore, the study also aims to provide additional information on what legitimacy strategies are used to support a company's purpose.

Based on the aim of the research, two research questions have been derived:

1. *How do airlines present their corporate purpose based on the texts on their websites?*

The purpose of the first research question is to provide additional information on the term company purpose and to examine the corporate purpose of the selected airlines based on the materials provided online.

2. *What types of legitimacy strategies do airlines use to support their corporate purpose?*

The second research question aims to provide additional information on the types of legitimacy strategies that airlines use in website materials to support their company's purpose and as a basis for company operations. The research question seeks to find out how airlines, despite their great harm to the environment, are allowed to maintain their operations and that it is accepted and even supported by society.

As the purpose of the company has not been studied much with qualitative methods, the aim is to create a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon through sufficiently broad research questions and a qualitative method, which will allow for a more detailed study of the phenomenon in the future. The aim of the research question is to get more information about what the purpose of the company really means and how and in what way it is presented to stakeholders online. The purpose of the study is to understand through which entities airlines present their own purpose and what legitimacy strategies are used to support it. The study also highlights the ethical aspect of the purpose of airlines and its implications for legitimacy. The aim of this study is to produce new and valuable information about corporate purpose over all that can be applied in future research and used in the study of the legitimacy of airlines.

## **4.2 The research method**

In this study, the research method refers to an overview of how the research is carried out and what kind of understanding it seeks. This study is a qualitative study and its research approach is interpretive but also critical. A qualitative research approach was chosen for this study as the purpose of the study is to try to understand holistically what is meant by the company's purpose, how legitimacy can be seen to be connected to it and because this phenomenon has not been studied qualitatively enough. The purpose of qualitative research is to try to understand, describe or interpret the phenomenon under study, rather than to make generalizations (Eskola & Suoranta 2014, 61).

The research approach is interpretive and critical. An interpretive research approach is also called social constructivism, which means the effort to interpret and understand people, their actions and motives for action (Koskinen, Alasuutari & Peltonen 2005, 33–35). Interpretive research seeks to generate new information and increase understanding of the subject matter through research. The researcher and the researcher's own interests in the research are part of the interpretation and therefore the researcher cannot be in a completely objective position. (Koskinen, Alasuutari & Peltonen 2005, 33–35). According to Tamminen (1993), interpretive research means interpreting the reality of a group of people. According to him, reality can be interpreted by looking for the meanings of different things and why and how some find certain things meaningful. Interpretive research is thus interested in the reasons for the choices and behav-

ior of research objects, as well as the values and expectations on the basis of which they are implemented.

Not only is this study interpretive in its approach, it is also critical. The basic idea of a critical research approach is based on the fact that all observations of reality are related to concepts and theories that are predetermined, which also means limitations on the independence of the researcher (Koskinen et al. 2005, 35). The purpose of critical research is to produce information about society's built-in practices and assumptions that are unconscious and thus forcibly limit people's behavior as well. In this study, the criticality of the study emerges in the content analysis, which serves as the research method. The purpose of the content analysis is to highlight the meanings of the text and find similarities and differences in them, but without losing their information value (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009). Therefore, qualitative methods can be considered suitable for this study. The qualitative research approach is reflected in the data collection and in the analysis of the data. As the research focuses especially on the purpose of the airline company and the search for legitimacy from the public, material was collected from online materials on the basis of which the content analysis was carried out.

The method chosen for this study was content analysis. The method was chosen because the study seeks to examine the image given by the airline of its own purpose to all stakeholders and the easiest and most modern way to do this is through a website. Content analysis is a suitable method because it can be used to examine text materials so that meanings are found and a concise overview is obtained but still without compromising its information value (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009). Since the purpose of the company is also a dense textual phenomenon, content analysis as a method is suitable for studying it as the characteristics of textual material become apparent (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009).

In order for content analysis to be taken from mechanical analysis to an interpretive and critical research approach the text under study must be seen as part of a larger whole. The text does not form a meaning in a vacuum but in order to be able to integrate the text under study into society, attention must be paid to the context and intertextuality of the text. Context refers to all factors that affect the meaning of the text and also those factors that enable or limit the interpretation of meanings (Pynnönen 2013, 11).

In different situations, the same expressions can take on different meanings, as language is fully understood and interpreted on the basis of the world around us. Contexts are not one-dimensional and can mean, for example, an interaction situation, context, or the state of society. (Pietikäinen & Pynnönen 2009, 29–30). Intertextuality refers to the dialogue between texts in their social and historical context. The language we use is not our own but is forcibly connected to previous text and speech from innumerable sources. In other words, we use language that is borrowed from something and thus recycled. When examining textual content, past language usage situations affect what we read. (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2009, 120.)

More specifically, a theory-driven content analysis was selected for the study. The purpose of a company is studied from the point of view of text material, but legitimacy types and legitimacy strategies are studied in a theory-guided way, in which case the researcher's reflection is guided alternately by theory and alternately by material. The units of analysis emerge from the text, but are interpreted and sorted based on theory. An advantage in content analysis can be seen in the fact that the research is guided by the data. The individuality and characteristics of each data set come to the fore, but the theory supports the meanings found in the theory-guiding method. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009).

In this study, the method uses critical content analysis, which aims to demonstrate aspects of the obvious in a social, political, economic, and societal context. Ideologies are of great importance for research, as they are used to create and maintain social order and power relations (Vaara et al. 2006). Fairclough (2003) defines ideology as a form of power through which power relations between people are presented through attitudes and beliefs. Critical content analysis is an excellent method for this research, as the research material is linked to the social and political context, and through it it is possible to study the factors behind the company's purpose.

### **4.3 Nordic airlines and data collection**

This study looks at the three largest Nordic airlines by number of passengers and turnover. The airlines are Norwegian Air Shuttle, 36 million passengers in 2019 (Norwegian 2021a), Scandinavian Airlines with 29 million passengers in 2019 (SAS 2021a) and Finnair with 14 million passengers in 2019 (Finnair 2021a). Overall, airlines operate a total of 80 million passengers in 2019. The study wanted airlines operating within a limited geographical area but flying worldwide. The airlines selected for the study are very different in terms of history and operation.

#### **4.3.1 Norwegian Air Shuttle**

Norwegian Air Shuttle, commonly known as Norwegian, is a Norwegian low-cost airline founded in 1993 and it has been a listed company since 2003, when it was listed on the Oslo Stock Exchange. In 2019, Norwegian flew more than 36 million passengers and is the fourth largest low-cost airline in Europe and the ninth largest airline in Europe overall. The company frequently offers domestic flights in Sweden, Norway and Finland, as well as to more than 150 destinations around the world. Norwegian is known for its "red-nosed" planes and pictures of Nordic heroes behind the planes. It employs approximately 11,000 employees and has approximately 500 routes to about 150 destinations. The company has grown very rapidly in less than two decades. Currently, Norwegian

has about 170 airplanes, which they say are the world's youngest and most fuel efficient. (Norwegian 2021a).

The coronavirus pandemic began in 2020 when the material for this study was collected. Of all the airlines, it affected Norwegian the most. Norwegian's value dropped nearly 80 percent in the open Market and they had to lay off more than 7,300 employees on March 16, 2020. In April 2020, Norwegian declared bankruptcy (Fortune 2021a). However, later in the month, Norwegian received financial support and a loan from the Norwegian state as well as a loan from the Swedish state (Fortune 2021a). In March 2021, the company announced a "new Norwegian," which meant about 120-130 aircraft in number of aircraft instead of the previous more than 160, as well as more limited routes (Norwegian 2021a). However, the company survived bankruptcy and was still in operation in the spring of 2021 when this research was conducted.

#### **4.3.2 Scandinavian Airlines**

Scandinavian Airlines, or SAS, is the national airline of Sweden and Denmark, as well as the largest airline in Scandinavia. The company was established in 1946. SAS Group operates flights with about 160 aircraft and flies to a total of 119 destinations. In 2019, the airline employed more than 14,000 people. SAS's main hub is Copenhagen Airport, from where the company flies to more than fifty cities in Europe. Oslo-Gardermoen Airport and Stockholm-Arlanda Airport with their thirty European destinations are other major hubs. During the 2019, the company's flights carried approximately 29 million passengers, of which approximately 1.3 million on charter flights. (SAS 2021a).

The coronavirus pandemic has also affected SAS's operations as global passenger numbers have plummeted. SAS passenger numbers dropped about 80% in 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic and reported a loss of \$ 243 million. However, the company is supported by state ownership, as both the Swedish and Danish states own 21.8 percent of the shares, being the largest individual shareholders. (SAS 2021a).

#### **4.3.3 Finnair**

Finnair is a Finnish airline that operates scheduled and leisure flights in the Finnish domestic and international markets. The company was founded on November 1, 1923 under the name Aero O/Y and the name Finnair was introduced in 1960 in the marketing of international flights and became the only name of the company in 1968. Finnair is still the fifth oldest operating airline in the world. It operates 161 destinations with about 80 aircraft. In 2019, company's flights carried approximately 14.7 million passengers. The Finnair Group's business areas are scheduled and leisure flights, technical services, catering, the travel agency industry and information and booking services in the tourism industry. At the end of 2019, the Finnair Group employed 6,700 people. Finnair

specializes in air traffic between Asia and Europe, for which Helsinki's major hubs' geographical location gives it a competitive advantage. (Finnair 2021a).

The Finnish state owns 52% of Finnair and the Finnish state thus has a dominant position in the company. Finnair's biggest competitive advantage is traffic between Europe and Asia. This is based on the airspace use agreement between Finland and Russia (formerly the Soviet Union). Finland and Russia have a central airspace agreement, thanks to which Finnair enables shorter flight times between Asia and Helsinki. This agreement only applies if the Finnish state retains the main ownership of the company. The coronavirus pandemic has also affected Finnair and the number of their flights has also collapsed by about 80 per cent. However, Finnair's situation is stable compared to many other airlines due to the good economic situation and the support of the Finnish state. In 2020, the Finnish state granted Finnair a hybrid loan to recover from the coronavirus. (Finnair 2021a.)

#### **4.4 Data processing and analysis**

After the research material of this study was collected from the airlines' websites, the researcher read all the material several times from start and went through the material on a computer. All three airline data were collected in a text file format in September and October 2020. Completely irrelevant and research-relevant items, such as aircraft specifications, were omitted from the material. The material accumulated a total of 80 pages in open font with Times New Roman font, font size 12 and line spacing 1.5. Content analysis was used to analyze the data.

Qualitative research using content analysis methods is based on literary theory and the humanities in a critical context. The method usually looks at a relatively small amount of textual material or material converted to such material, which is then examined at a very detailed level. The method is hermetic, as the researcher operates in his or her own social environment, which affects his or her understanding. (Krippendorff 2013, 17.)

Content analysis is a basic analysis method that can be connected to different analysis entities. Content analysis can be used to analyze material in written form objectively and systematically. The purpose of the method is to examine and understand the human meanings that appear in the material (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 91-104). Also the purpose of the method is to form a concise description of the phenomenon under study, which links the result to a broader context (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniikka 2006). The purpose of the method is to obtain the material to be examined in a concise and clear form without losing the information contained in it. The processing of the material is based on logical reasoning and the researcher's interpretation. In the method, the material is first broken down into parts, then processed and reassembled into a sensible whole. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 108.)

The words, sentences and identified units of the text material are classified on the basis of their meanings, looking for similarities and differences in the material. (Latvala & Vanhanen-Nuutinen 2003, 23). As the aim of the study is specifically to understand the purpose of the airline company on the basis of the material on their websites, it was justified to choose interpretive and critical content analysis as the method of analysis of the study.

Content analysis can be done in three different ways: material-based, theory-based, or theory-guiding. The material-based and theory-guiding analysis proceeds on the basis of the material, while the theory-guiding is based on the previous theoretical framework. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006.) In data-driven analysis, theoretical concepts are shaped on the basis of data, while in theory-driven analysis, the concepts are brought ready-made. In this case, the research is affected by the already existing knowledge on the topic. It is also possible to combine methods within the same study. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 117.) Theory-based content analysis, i.e. deductive analysis, is realized in such a way that the classification is based on a previous frame of reference, i.e. theory or conceptual framework. First, an analysis framework is formed, in which different categories of data are started to be included by content analysis methods. The analysis often proceeds from the general to the private and the analysis is guided by the theory produced by the previous research (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 113–115.) In this study, the purpose of a company is examined from a material-based point of view, as the aim of the study is to obtain additional information freely without any preconceived notions. However, when research examines legitimation strategies and seeks them out of the material, it is a theory-based analysis, as it seeks out strategies that have already been identified.

The study analyzed the purpose of an airline company as a material-based content analysis, mapping out the themes and entities on which the airlines built their purpose in the website materials. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the analysis of inductive data can be divided into three stages: reduction or reduction of data, clustering of data, and creation of theoretical concepts. At the beginning of the analysis, an analysis unit is defined, which contains the features of the entity under study. An item can be a word, a phrase, or a larger body of text. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 108, 110.) In this study, airline material is analyzed for larger entities, but still for a maximum of a couple of sentence-sized units. The material was collected from the websites and was converted into a consistent text format, after which the analysis of the content itself could begin.

The first step is to reduce the material, i.e. to reduce everything irrelevant from it. This can be the compaction or fragmentation of information and the purpose is to find the parts that are most relevant to the research task through spelling and coding. Pre-agreed units are searched for in the material, i.e. words or sentences, for example. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 109–110.) In the first stage of the analysis, reduced expressions were derived from the original expressions of the material, which were recorded in the text material. For ex-

ample, in the following quote, Finnair describes the matter from which the reduced expression was formed. The airline is talking about future climate investments.

**Example 1:** We increase the use of sustainable aviation fuels. By the end of 2025, we expect to spend approximately 10 million euros annually on sustainable aviation fuels.

The second step in the analysis is the grouping of the data, i.e. clustering of data, in which the coded original expressions are carefully reviewed and similarities and differences are searched for. Concepts describing the same subject are combined into a separate category, which is named to describe the content of the class. At this stage of the analysis, the material is condensed because larger concepts are assembled from smaller meanings. The classification unit can be, for example, a property of a phenomenon, or some perception. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 110.)

In this study each subcategory was given a name describing its content and its own color code so that the categories could be distinguished from each other. For grouping, a separate file was created listing the subcategories and their color codes, as well as the reduced expressions below the subcategories. As an example, the attached quote in which Norwegian speaks for itself as an employer and emphasizes its own responsibility in the task. This quote formed a simplified phrase Airline tells itself as a responsible employer, which was included in the subcategory Airline as a workplace.

**Example 2:** Norwegian employs 11,000 people in Europe, North and South America and Asia. Diversity makes the organization richer and better. Regardless of location, workers' rights, equality, non-discrimination, business ethics and anti-corruption are key priorities.

The third step in content analysis is conceptualization, also abstraction, in which theoretical concepts are created on the basis of data. At this point, the linguistic expressions found in the material proceed to concepts and conclusions. The categories will be combined for as long as possible in terms of the content of the material. In the conceptualization phase, the empirical material combines with the theoretical basis. When the results start to be collected in content analysis, the results are described on the basis of classification and the basis of the concepts, categories and their content obtained from it. The researcher's task is to draw conclusions from these about the different meanings they form (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 111.)

In this study the clustering of the data was continued by combining subcategories with the same content, which formed larger upper categories, of which a total of four were formed on the basis of content analysis. The upper categories were named to describe their content. For example, all subcategories that dealt with the company's services, brand, history, and other items related

to identification were combined into a top category called Airline identification and differentiation from competitors. On the basis of these four upper categories, a section corresponding to the first research task of the study was formed: The purpose of the airline company. Under this section came the following upper categories: Airline identification and differentiation from competitors, Flying as a part of the infrastructure, The airline as a responsible operator internally and Airline strategy and sustainable development activities.

The following figures (Figure 3) show the upper categories of this study and the upper categories below them. Below each upper class is an example of a few subclasses belonging to it.

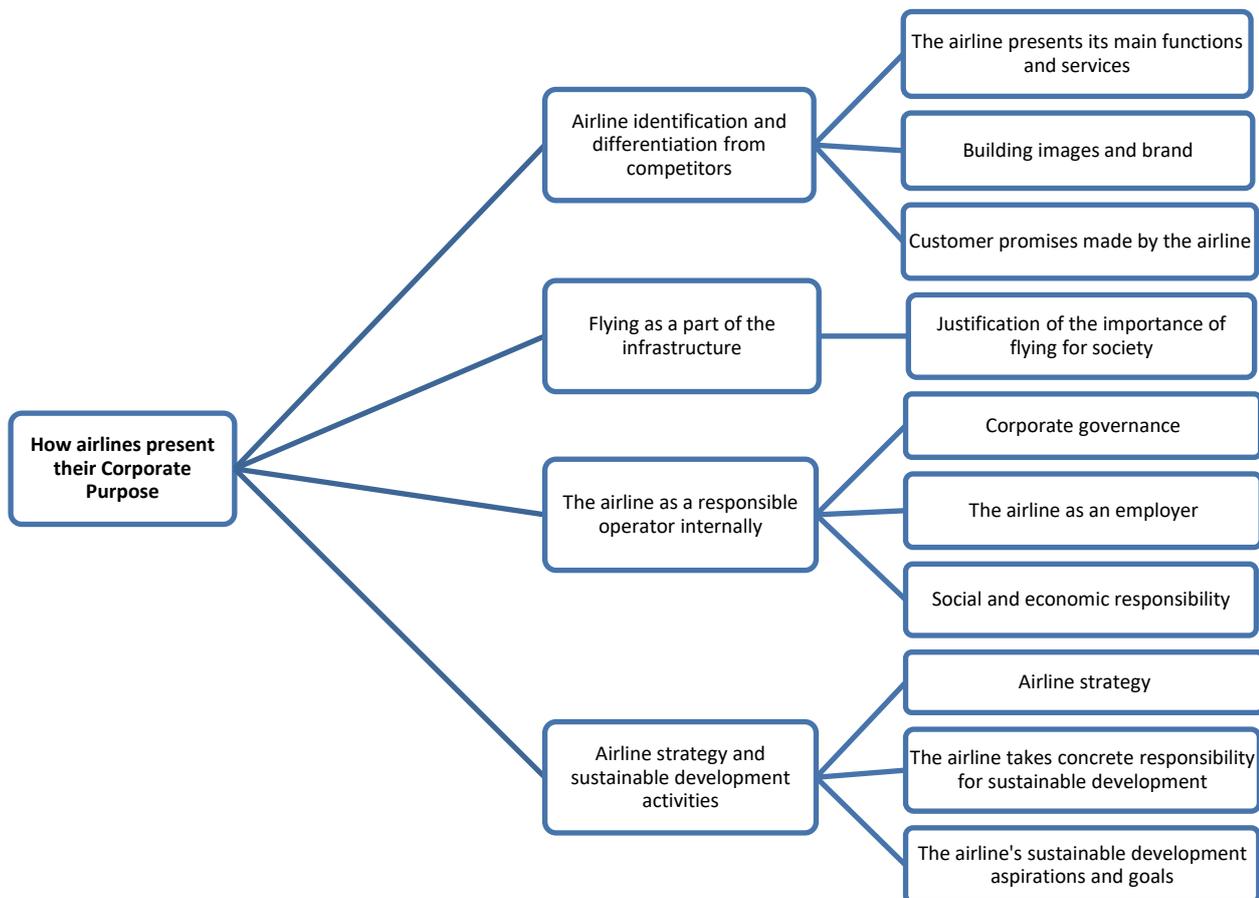


Figure 3: Content analysis categories

## 5 RESULTS

The aim of this study was to provide new insights into what topics airlines use to build their corporate purpose and what legitimation strategies are used to support that purpose. The aim was also to get a more comprehensive picture of what the purpose of the company means in general and how the companies present their own purpose. Based on the text-based analysis of the airlines' websites, four main themes emerged on the basis of which the airlines build a presentation of their own purpose. In addition on the basis of the same material, the legitimation strategies found in it to support the purpose were analyzed. These two entities form the main headings of the paragraphs of the study results. The results are illustrated using citations taken from online materials.

Based on the material collected from the airlines' websites, there were significant themes that were strongly repeated on all airlines. However, each airline's approach to stakeholders and brand in general was very different and thus the image of the company's purpose varied. The airlines selected for the study seek to differentiate themselves from other airlines through their own story and brand. Each airline also justified its purpose based on the world's infrastructure. The online materials also described how the company's purpose as part of society is seen from the employer's point of view. However, the biggest theme was sustainable development and the elimination of the disadvantages of air transport. Finally, the results chapter presents the legitimacy strategies identified in the study and details how they have been used to support the purpose of the airlines.

### 5.1 The airline presents its own corporate purpose

First, we discuss the topics through which airlines seek to differentiate themselves and build their own brand. This includes all means by which the airline seeks to identify itself. This is followed by a discussion of the justification for

the importance of air transport, which includes all the various benefits by which airlines justify the importance of their existence to society. Third, airlines address social and economic responsibility by looking at airline responsibility. The last is the airlines' strategy and sustainable development measures, through which the airline seeks to strengthen its reputation as a responsible and competent operator. These sections answer the first research question, which concerned the formation of the purpose of the firm.

First, this subsection discusses the way airlines describe their own identity to differentiate themselves from competitors, followed by a look at the importance of air transport for global traffic. It then describes how the airline justifies the importance of its existence from the perspective of employer and economic promotion, and the subchapter concludes with a discussion of the sustainable development of airlines.

### **Airline identification and differentiation from competitors**

Based on the content analysis, the material was distinguished by its own upper categories, through which the purpose of the company was built. The first was Airline identification and differentiation from competitors. Under this category are sections of material where the airline built its own brand and identity, presented its services compared to competitors and made direct promises to customers about, for example, experience and quality. This category of content analysis was an assumed result because every company, especially in a highly competitive field, strives to build the most unique brand possible and make its own customer promises to stand out from the rest.

Each airline highlighted the origins and culture of its own company in the materials. The airlines in the study emphasized either their own Nordic or Scandinavian nature. Finnair and SAS in particular emphasized their own origins and clearly combined them with quality and accuracy, showing that Nordic consumers are quality-conscious. Air transport is a highly competitive sector and travel volumes have been growing steadily throughout the 21st century. It is logical that the Nordic airlines rely heavily on their own Nordic roots in their brand and thus try to appeal to customers in their own region by seeming familiar.

Finnair's identity is based on its Finnish origin, quality and straightforwardness, which is also reflected on their websites. In Example 3, Finnair relies on the Finnish "sisu", and thus wants to invoke its own origin and strongly associate it with its own brand. SAS relies on its own purpose of existence, its well-established position in Scandinavia. In Example 4, SAS says that the Scandinavians travel a lot and thus favor the Scandinavian company. Norwegian also highlights its own roots in Example 5, but does not reveal in the materials exactly how Norwegian descent is reflected in the company's purpose.

**Example 3:** We have the courage to look to the future with an open mind. Courage is inspiration, creativity, Finnish “sisu” mentality, and the ability to step up and give feedback.

**Example 4:** We know that frequent and experienced travelers have higher demands and 60% of them prefer SAS. We are Scandinavian by name and nature and our operational priorities are: safety, punctuality and care.

**Example 5:** Norwegian has become part of the fabric of Nordic culture and we take great pride in exporting our Nordic values across the world.

Airlines also expressed their own core purpose through customer promises. In each study, the airline made different promises to its customers, but the content and priorities of the promises clearly varied according to the company’s purpose and overall philosophy. Example 6 shows how Finnair appeals to quality and a certain kind of elite, while example 7 shows well how Norwegian emphasizes the company's intention to enable as many people as possible to fly for prices by cutting services. Therefore, Finnair and Norwegian can be considered to be very different players in terms of their brand - one relies on pruned services and a low price level, while the other company emphasizes the quality and coverage of services and does not talk about its own price level in the materials.

**Example 6:** Finnair aims to belong to the elite in terms of quality, to bear its responsibilities and to act as a good example. Our company has significant expectations to fulfil in its role in society.

**Example 7:** We believe in affordable fares for all, as reflected in our vision, values, operational priorities and goals. To realise this vision, we offer quality flights at a low fare based on operational excellence and helpful, friendly service.

SAS, on the other hand, highlights the company’s own purpose by emphasizing its own importance in terms of infrastructure and increasing tourism, as can be seen from example 8. SAS also justifies its own existence by referring in several respects to the fact that they are the largest and one of the oldest operators in Scandinavia with the largest volume of flights. Their purpose and brand are largely built on emphasizing this established position and thus they present themselves as particularly trustworthy to stakeholders.

**Example 8:** We make life easier by making time matter to travelers, to employees and to the planet. Travel is growing with over 2 million Scandinavians making more than 5 trips per year. These frequent travelers

represent 70% of all ticket sales. We know that frequent and experienced travelers have higher demands and 60% of them prefer SAS.

The airlines in the study also tried to differentiate themselves through the quantity, quality, and price of services. The company's own purpose and identity were strengthened through various services and supplements. For example, Norwegian as a low cost airline offers several additional services, but all for an extra fee. Indeed, they invoke their own intention to make flying as cheap as possible and the need for customers to only pay for the services they use, as can be seen in example 9.

**Example 9:** Our affordable Premium cabin fares on international long-haul flights mean you can indulge in a premium flying experience, minus the premium price tag. Premium seating, relax with our inflight entertainment and enjoy the journey with complimentary drinks (excl. liquors), a 3-course Premium dinner, breakfast or light evening meal. That's what makes us the World's Best Low-Cost, Long-Haul Airline.

Finnair, on the other hand, relies on quality-conscious and Nordic-oriented services, as in example 10. They also have several services and extras already included in the price of several flights, and the company highlights how quality and services are self-evident to them.

**Example 10:** Nordic Kitchen: Food and Drinks. When flying with Finnair, you can enjoy fresh and tasty food options from delicious Scandinavian flavours to the exquisite Business Class designer menus. For our European flights, you can pre-order a delicious meal, or mix and match your favourites from our on board selection.

The results of the study show that airlines are well institutionalized as they deal with almost identical themes on their own websites. However, the biggest differences between airlines were clearly noticeable in this particular category of results, as each airline sought to build the most individualistic image of itself and clearly appeal to a very different group of consumers. The results of the study suggest that the airline's identity, brand and various means of trying to differentiate itself from competitors are strongly related to the company's purpose, as the brand justifies the existence of the whole company and the reason why this airline is the best in the industry.

It is also a natural continuum that airlines have created different service packages as the number of air passengers is constantly growing and different customer groups are looking for different services. It therefore makes sense for airlines to use a large part of their website to promote these services and benefits and thereby seek to engage customers. In each study of airlines, the purpose of the company included the idea of serving customers as comprehensively as possible, but the ways in which this was done were different.

## **Flying as a part of the infrastructure**

When it comes to the purpose of an airline company, the operation has its origins in the need to move people and cargo across land and sea as quickly as possible. Based on material “Flying as a part of the infrastructure” upper category was formed. This includes sections where the airline company emphasizes the importance of flying in today's infrastructure. Although the reason for the existence of airlines is now much questioned and stakeholders are encouraged to try alternative modes of travel, at least there is no such quick substitute yet.

Each of the airlines in the study highlighted the importance of flying in online materials, but each company's approach to it varied. In Example 11, Norwegian justifies the purpose of its own company with the importance of air transport in terms of cargo, business and leisure activities, but also argues that the airline creates jobs and supports the world economy.

**Example 11:** We will continue to support jobs, tourism and the wider economies in the destinations that we serve by providing vital air links that will benefit the leisure, business and trade industries.

SAS's approach to the corporate purpose is different from that of the low-cost airline Norwegian, but also slightly different from Finnair, which is branded little as a luxury. SAS emphasizes its Scandinavian nature in all its activities and, as can be seen from example 12, SAS specifically emphasizes the importance of its activities through its Scandinavian infrastructure. SAS especially appeals to Scandinavians who travel a lot and points out that these experienced travelers know how to appreciate them. Example 12 illustrates well the cornerstone of SAS's existence, a huge part of their corporate purpose is the contribution to the development of Nordic infrastructure.

**Example 12:** Aviation is a vital part of Scandinavian infrastructure. We maintain the highest frequency of departures to and from Scandinavia and connect smaller regional airports with larger hubs. Travel is growing with over 2 million Scandinavians making more than 5 trips per year. These frequent travelers represent 70% of all ticket sales. We know that frequent and experienced travelers have higher demands and 60% of them prefer SAS.

Finnair's approach is a little more subtle than other airlines. They emphasize their own significance and the purpose of their existence mainly because of their location. Finnair has an exemption for Russian airspace based on an air services agreement between Finland and Russia, and thus Finnair is allowed to fly more freely in Russian airspace and is therefore a special player in air traffic between Europe and Asia. In example 13, Finnair describes how their operations are particularly important because of the traffic between Europe and Asia, as it continues to grow.

**Example 13:** Finnair's mission is to inspire passengers to effortlessly connect and experience the world. Helsinki's geographical location gives Finnair a competitive advantage, since the fastest connections between many European destinations and Asian megacities fly over Finland.

Based on the results, therefore, each airline in the study was prepared to justify very carefully the necessity of its own purpose. Airlines use a variety of linguistic strategies in which they seek to give the impression that air transport is the norm in society and the only sensible option. In their own material, airlines do not mention alternative modes of transport or travel at all, but are very unequivocal that air transport is essential for good society and that no room for divergent thinking is given, on the contrary, it is even sought to repeal even support.

### ■ The airline as a responsible operator internally

The analysis formed the upper category "The airline as a responsible operator internally". Below that are the points where the airline in the website material talks about its ethics, financial responsibility, good governance and social responsibility. However, each airline highlighted these in different ways in the online materials and emphasized different topics in justifying the purpose of its own operations. Thus, based on the results, the themes addressed by the airlines in this area are also very similar, due to the degree of institutionalization of the companies. Also, several issues in this category are statutory from airlines and are expected to report publicly on issues such as good governance and social responsibility.

Each airline had on its own website a separate section on good governance and related plans as separate pdf files that were not included in this study, as were no other separate appendices. On its website, Finnair talks about governance only in the section reserved for it and relates to it very clinically and at a concrete level, as can be seen from example 14.

**Example 14:** The principal legislative authorities on corporate governance of Finnish listed companies are the Companies Act, the Securities Market Act, the regulation and guidelines issued by the Financial Supervision, the rules and instructions for listed companies issued by the Finnish Corporate Governance Code, all of which are complied with by Finnair. Company specific authorities on the governance of Finnair are the Articles of Association and the principles, policies and guidelines issued by Finnair's Board of Directors.

Each airline reported exactly how they complied with all required laws and regulations with great care and emphasized the transparency of operations. Good governance was presented as an automatic and built-in part of the com-

pany, it was used as a way to influence the image of the company in a positive and responsible way. As you can see from example 15 about SAS and example 16 about Norwegian talk about governance in a very similar tone. Good governance seeks to justify a company's purpose by verifying that all activities comply with the laws and regulations of society and are therefore acceptable.

**Example 15:** The objective of corporate governance is to provide SAS and its owners with effective management and control of its operations in combination with adequate transparency, clarity and proper business ethics.

**Example 16:** Norwegian's objective for Corporate Governance is accountability, transparency, fairness and simplicity with the goal of maximizing shareholder value while creating added value for all stakeholders. The objectives are designed in compliance with laws, regulations and ethical standards.

The company's purpose is also built on the basis of the relevance of the jobs produced by the company. Each airline tells in its online materials how much and from several countries they employ people either directly or through subcontractors. In addition, airlines communicate in very similar terms, emphasizing equality, diversity and transparency. As in example 17 you can see how Finnair describes the significance and importance of employees to the company, and in example 18 Norwegian talks about the diversity of employees and large amounts of employment.

**Example 17:** The wellbeing of our employees and customers are equally important to us. We take good care of our employees by investing in their health care and safety as well as providing training opportunities and promoting equality, non-discrimination and diversity.

**Example 18:** As a global low-cost airline, Norwegian employs 11,000 people in Europe, North and South America and Asia. Diversity makes the organization richer and better. Regardless of location, workers' rights, equality, non-discrimination, business ethics and anti-corruption are key priorities.

In the materials, each airline participating in the study emphasized its own responsibility as an employer and reported on how they act responsibly and support a diverse and equal work atmosphere. The actual concrete examples of the material were poorly found and little was tackled on various problems in the aviation industry, such as gender distribution. Finnair emphasized that it would strive to increase the number of female pilots by 2025 and said that the gender distribution in their managers was already almost 50/50. In any case, it could be seen from the materials that Finnair talks closely about several issues

related to the purpose of operations without unnecessary storytelling, but more on concrete levels than other airlines, as can be seen in example 19.

**Example 19:** The aim of the initiative is to improve female representation in senior and other under-represented areas of airlines by 25% by 2025. Currently 47% of our managers and 3% of our pilots are women.

Airlines also looked at their own internal responsibilities through supply chains. Airlines buy a lot of services and products from outside. Supply chains are linked to the purpose of their own company through ethics, quality and sustainability. In particular, SAS and Finnair highlight supply chains and underline their own responsibilities and ways of operating as ethically and environmentally friendly as possible. Even at these points, the content was very similar between the companies, as shown in example 20 from SAS and example 21 from Finnair.

**Example 20:** In choosing suppliers, the value of long-term and continuous access to the best product/service at the lowest total life cycle cost must be taken into account.

**Example 21:** We require our suppliers to comply with similar ethical standards as we do, and we evaluate the sustainability of our supply chain from start to finish. We also like to offer our customers the opportunity to do good by for example donating their Finnair Plus points to sustainability efforts.

All research airlines address their own social responsibility and their own corporate citizenship in the online materials. In these sections, when airlines talk about social responsibility, they use abstract expressions and do not actually open up their responsibilities at the concrete level, as in Norwegian example 22 and Sas example 23. However, both airlines recognize that social responsibility is an important part of corporate purpose.

**Example 22:** Local development and humanitarian engagement. Creating economic and social value at our bases and destinations are important objectives that underlines Norwegian's ambition to be a good corporate citizen.

**Example 23:** SAS' social responsibility primarily encompasses its own employees and the environment that is dependent on and impacted by SAS' operations in a number of countries, mainly in the Nordic region.

## **Airline strategy and sustainable development activities**

When talking about the purpose of the airline companies, the largest upper category was the Airline's strategy and sustainable development actions. As the main factors undermining the legitimacy of airlines are climate issues, it was to be assumed that they would emphasize this aspect when justifying the importance of their own business. As climate issues are strongly linked to a company's business plan, this category includes airlines 'strategy, sustainability goals, and actions already taken.

Airlines talk about their strategy in very different ways, which also makes their differences in the purpose of the company stand out. As you can see from example 24, Norwegian's strategic priority is affordable prices, even if it means compromising on quality. The purpose of their company is based on the fact that as many people as possible can afford to fly and this ideology is at least partially at odds with their high environmental goals.

**Example 24:** We believe in affordable fares for all, as reflected in our vision, values, operational priorities and goals. To realise this vision, we offer quality flights at a low fare based on operational excellence and helpful, friendly service.

SAS's strategy and vision are also different from other research airlines. As can be seen from example 25, SAS emphasizes its Scandinavian nature and the fact that they are often popular with traveling Scandinavians. The purpose of their company is intertwined with efficiency, utility and reliability. They also highlight the importance of sustainable development in their activities.

**Example 25:** Our strategic priorities are to win Scandinavia's frequent travelers, create efficient and sustainable operating platforms, and secure the right capabilities.

In its own strategy, Finnair focuses on top quality and its own geographical location, as you can see in example 26. The emphasis on quality certainly appeals to the growing Asian market in particular, and Finnair emphasizes the continuous growth of operations in its strategy. Finnair also emphasizes fuel efficiency in its operations.

**Example 26:** Finnair has a clear strategy for reaching its goals. The foundation for the strategy is seen in the high quality of its operations, Helsinki's favourable geographic position, growing focus markets, clear goals to increase revenue, modern fuel-efficient fleet as well as a strong balance sheet.

The purpose of the company is also emphasized when looking at the values of airlines. The values reported by the airlines participating in the study support

the strategies and corporate purpose. In its values, Norwegian emphasizes simplicity and innovation, as in example 27. The values fit their customizable services and the purpose of the Low Cost Airline. SAS, on the other hand, also emphasizes its own Scandinavianness and efficiency in its values, as can be seen from Example 28. Finnair's values are very similar to Norwegian's, the difference being that they emphasize that they are brave, as in example 29.

**Example 27:** Values: Innovation, Teamwork and Simplicity.

**Example 28:** We are Scandinavian by name and nature and our operational priorities are: Safety, Punctuality and Care.

**Example 29:** Finnair values are: Working together, Commitment to care, Simplicity and Courage.

Each of the airlines in the study had a lot of talk and promises about the environment and sustainability. Of all the companies that talked about sustainability on their websites, SAS talked about it the most and Norwegian the least. As the promises do not yet mean concrete actions, the study identified the points where airlines talked about sustainable development goals and plans separately from the points where they spoke about concrete actions that had already been taken for the environment. SAS had the most accurate goals for sustainable development up to 2050. In addition to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, they also focus on other nuisances, such as noise and waste, as shown in example 30.

**Example 30:** 2030 goals are 25% lower CO<sub>2</sub> emissions compared with 2005. 17% biofuel used - equivalent to the total SAS domestic production. 50% noise reduction compared with 2010. 100% sustainable materials in the SAS customer offering. 100% recycling where possible.

Finnair has very similar goals for the future in terms of sustainable development as SAS and equally ambitious goals for reducing emissions, as shown in example 31. Norwegian spoke about its environmental objectives mainly at a general level and there was no recorded plan for reducing emissions on the website, like in the example 29.

**Example 31:** Our goal is to be carbon neutral by the end of 2045. Our first milestone is already by the end of 2025; we will cut our net emissions by 50 % from the 2019 level. We are also working towards more sustainable catering.

Norwegian does not have such a clear strategy for sustainability, or at least the airline does not display it on its website. Their material is relatively limited compared to competitors in terms of a concrete strategy and plan to reduce adverse effects. However, they say they are committed to the ideas and have also

taken action against it. Norwegian speaks about its environmental objectives mainly at a general level and there was no recorded plan for reducing emissions on the website, like in the example 32.

**Example 32:** Norwegian is committed to actively engage in and support sustainable environmental policy, and to continue to reduce emissions from aviation.

Air transport is a major burden on the environment and is highly responsible for all of the world's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Air transport is infrastructurally important in today's society, but the legitimacy of companies' operations and their scale is undermined by concerns about the environment. SAS and Finnair both acknowledge on the website the harmfulness of air traffic and the problems it caused to the environment, as can be seen from examples 33 and 34. Circumvention or avoidance of the problem would be an underestimation of stakeholders and not credible.

**Example 33:** At the same time, aircraft operations in particular have an adverse environmental impact, primarily through emissions of greenhouse gases and noise around airports. SAS takes its responsibility seriously and despite the turbulent civil aviation market of recent years, SAS has chosen to maintain its commitment to sustainability-related issues.

**Example 34:** The most complex challenge with flying is the environmental impact. Aviation is imperative to manage global trade, increase the understanding between nations and individuals, and enable different aid and support initiatives.

In addition to the airlines' future sustainability goals, what the airline has already done in concrete terms in terms of environmental impact is also relevant to the company's purpose. Norwegian listed the actions they took very carefully on their website, as can be seen from example 35, and their biggest contribution to the environment is their really young aircraft fleet, which is the most energy efficient.

**Example 35:** We want to make aviation more sustainable. Fuel efficiency: We have been named the most fuel-efficient airline on transatlantic routes twice. Lighter aircraft: Our aircraft are constructed from lighter materials. This reduces the overall weight and saves fuel. Advanced weather data: Our pilots use a new weather system to make smarter route choices that reduces thousands of tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions annually. Modern aircraft fleet: We invest in new technology and have one of the youngest fleets in the world. Since 2008, we have reduced our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per passenger by 30 percent.

SAS does not describe its own actions in relation to the environment at all as accurately as Norwegian. Although they talk at length about their own sustainability goals on their websites, the real actions remain obscure to stakeholders. Finnair, on the other hand, strives for better concrete in its communications, and they say that they will invest billions in more fuel-efficient aircraft in the coming years.

**Example 36:** SAS' sustainability work is based on its policies, structured business processes and the commitment to adhere to the principles of the UN Global Compact, the SAS Code of Conduct, SAS' priorities and promise, Care. Work is focused on minimizing sustainability-related risks and capturing potential opportunities to avoid unnecessary cost and secure potential savings.

**Example 37:** During 2020-2025, we will invest 3.5-4 billion euros into the renewal and growth of our fleet. The fleet renewal will reduce CO2 emissions in Finnair's European traffic by 10-15%. We increase the use of sustainable aviation fuels. By the end of 2025, we expect to spend approximately 10 million euros annually on sustainable aviation fuels.

Overall, it was very clear that airlines are aware that stakeholders expect them to comment and take responsibility for sustainable development and CO2 emissions. Airlines are also clearly aware that major climate damage is a major threat to their legitimacy and use a very large part of their communications to present climate action and justify their own actions. Clearly, airlines have also made a big issue of both smaller and larger climate actions to emphasize their own responsibility. However, it is unclear to readers of the text which acts actually genuinely benefit and make significant changes to the carbon footprint and which things are left unsaid because of their harmful images.

## 5.2 Legitimation strategies in airline corporate communications

Although air transport has been increasingly criticized for some time and its disadvantages have also been addressed at the political level, in NGOs and in the media, air transport still has an established position in the world. The long-standing popularity of air transport suggests that it has a relatively legitimate position in society. The phenomenon identified by Clegg and Gordon (2012) can be found in the problematic nature of the disadvantages of air traffic and its true legitimacy. According to them, legitimacy is divided into actual and official legitimacy. This means that the internal culture and practices of the organization may not be in line with agreed practices or values, for example. Thus, in addition to official legitimacy, a company may have another, actual legitimacy that differs from the official line but is nevertheless accepted.

In the context of airlines and air transport, the division of legitimacy into formal and actual legitimacy can also be noted. Air transport has been studied to cause major environmental damage, especially through high CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. A number of global agreements between countries, country-specific legislation and guidelines from environmental organizations send a clear message about minimizing environmental damage and promoting sustainable development. Nevertheless, airlines are often state-sponsored and sometimes co-owned, and air transport has a well-established position in the world. The purpose of the empirical part of this study is to examine how, through the texts on websites, airlines seek to provide a legitimate picture of the operation of airlines and the changes made to its disadvantages. Legitimation strategies are sought in the argumentation of text on airline websites.

The different types of legitimacy and its construction are examined using Van Leeuwen's (2008) and Vaara et al.'s (2006) legitimation strategies. In addition to Van Leeuwen (2008) and Vaara et al.'s (2006) legitimation strategies I have identified three new legitimation strategies, which are exemplification, numbering and accountability. However, these can be considered related to other legitimation strategies, which I will review later in this chapter. In this chapter, I review all the legitimacy strategies I have identified from the material and highlight quotations from the material to support these observations.

### **5.2.1 Authorization**

Authorization as a legitimation strategy is often repeated in the websites of all airlines examined in the study. In the material, this is reflected, among other things, in abundant references to various unions, certificates and public actors. As a strategy of legitimacy, this is convincing, because it is an outside body that has been considered reliable and impartial. In this way, the company seeks to strengthen its acceptability and succeeds in concretizing its own good intentions, often in relation to environmental issues. When a company manages to use prestigious parties to support its operations, it is better able to justify the acceptability of its operations and its own practices. According to Vaara et al. (2006, 805), the authorization strategy is often linked to rationalization and moralization on legitimation strategies because authorities tend to represent some institution or perspective that has become such.

The legitimacy of airlines' operations is most affected by climate issues due to its high CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. As a result, airlines have clearly invested in repealing this on their own pages, giving a comprehensive account of all the measures they are taking to reduce the impact and promote sustainable development. In support of this, they often rely on external environmental actors, under whose guidance they operate or the airline itself is involved. For example, in the following example 38, SAS lists several partners in relation to environmental issues and thus seeks to strengthen its own image as a green actor.

**Example 38:** SAS is also involved in a number of national and international forums, such as the IATA/ATAG biofuel network, the Sustainable Biofuel Network in Copenhagen, Cleantech Cluster, Global Green Growth Fora (3GF), and various Scandinavian interest organizations working in the area.

Another group of authorities to which all airlines relied were various aviation awards. In particular, the low-cost airline Norwegian highlighted several of its awards on the website. This shows that Norwegian, in addition to the low-cost airline brand, is striving to prove that it is a quality player. In the example 39, Norwegian lists several awards it has earned in recent years.

**Example 39:** Experience an award-winning airline. When we win awards (which we do sometimes) it proves that our passengers appreciate our new aircraft, friendly service and low fares. That's why we've been voted Europe's Best Low-Cost Airline and the World's Best Low-Cost, Long Haul Airline by millions of passengers in the Skytrax Awards for several years in a row.

Airlines create a lot of jobs around them and are big employers, and that is one of the most significant societal benefits that airlines bring to it. Increasing employment can be seen as a rationalization, but also as moralization legitimizing strategy. This is also intertwined with the authorization legitimization strategy, as workplaces seek to refer to the need for employment through the functioning of society. Authorization can take place impersonally, for example by having an authority position in the market, i.e. jobs can be seen as an institution that has been given an authority position, the support of which is important for the company's own legitimacy (Vaara et al. 2006, 799). All the airlines in the study used the employment and cultural aspects to support the legitimacy of their own activities. In the following example, Norwegian describes its own employment impact:

**Example 40:** As a global low-cost airline, Norwegian employs 11,000 people in Europe, North and South America and Asia. Diversity makes the organization richer and better. Regardless of location, workers' rights, equality, non-discrimination, business ethics and anti-corruption are key priorities.

Means of authorization include, for example, appealing to the law, tradition or influential parties as an authority (Van Leeuwen 2008, 107-108). In the context of this study, the authorities are states and their legislators, as well as various global actors such as the UN and the European Union, all of which influence the operations of airlines. The various awards given to air transport operators are also seen as authorities. A special authority is represented by the states of the state-owned airlines, ie SAS and Finnair, ie Finland, as well as Sweden and

Denmark. When the state owns and financially supports the company, it sends a clear message about the legitimacy of the company's operations. Airlines are important for the infrastructure of states but also for the economy, and therefore societies are ready to support them. If states did not support airlines, they would be in a weaker position and the risk of other countries' airlines entering the market would increase.

### 5.2.2 Rationalization

Rationalization is significantly emphasized in the material for all airlines. Airlines try to rationalize their purpose when talking about the benefits of their own company and the services available, such as prices, schedules and amenities, but also when airlines talk about their own responsibility and sustainability. Rationalization A legitimation strategy refers to the benefits and purpose of an activity or practice, which may be, for example, an advantage obtained or objectives achieved (Vaara et al. 2006, 800).

In this context of research, rationalization focuses on the benefits of air transport for society, as no equally fast and thus efficient mode of transport has been invented and air transport has a well-established position in passenger and cargo transport. Rationalization is also used as a strategy when airlines talk about the social benefits they produce such as jobs and subcontracting. Rationalization also occurs when it comes to sustainable development and environmental action, but it is used specifically to support the environmental strategies taken by an airline, but does not rationally support ideas about the environmental damage or shortcomings of sustainable development caused by airlines.

Rationalization is very widely and widely used in airline online materials. In particular, common sense is invoked when it comes to the main service of airlines, i.e. the ability to get both people and cargo quickly from one place to another. Airlines appeal to the common sense by telling them about the numbers and speeds of their own routes. Nordic airlines in particular emphasize the importance of flying, as the Nordic countries are remote from the rest of Europe and the sea also separates countries from the rest of the world, making other modes of transport considerably more laborious and slower than air transport. This rationally increases the need for air traffic in this area. Stakeholder common sense was invoked when, for example, the airline spoke about its own scope of operations. In the following example 41, Finnair explains how it is possible for customers to get flights through them to most parts of the world.

**Example 41:** Over 100 destinations worldwide. We fly to over 100 destinations in Finland, Europe, Asia and North America via our transfer-friendly Helsinki hub.

In addition, air transport is being rationally legitimized through jobs, subcontractors and the benefits of increased tourism. Airlines emphasize that they are enablers, because without them, the Nordic countries would suffer considerably

as a tourist destination. Airlines thus bring significant economic benefits to their countries through taxes, jobs, subcontracting and tourism. For example, in the following quote, Norwegian legitimizes its actions with the benefits of flying for societal actors and diversity:

**Example 42:** Norwegian's international business activities, powered by the vision of "affordable fares for all", brings people, cultures and economies together. Global expansion and new routes boost local tourism, create new jobs, drive economic growth and social progress.

The only low-cost airline in the study, Norwegian, made the most of the airlines it rationalized on its website. Norwegian in particular uses this legitimation strategy when talking about money and appeals to people's desire to get service at the lowest possible cost. In the following example 43, Norwegian relies on the common sense of stakeholders from an economic perspective.

**Example 43:** To get there [company's goals] we will: Attract customers by offering competitive low fares and a quality travel experience. Maintain low operating costs and operational excellence. Offer "Freedom to choose": a core low-cost product as well as a more comprehensive package for those who desire more.

Airlines also seek to concretely illustrate the benefits, development and purpose of their operations and practices. Airlines compete with each other for coverage, functionality and availability of services. Customers are increasingly demanding from their airline. In addition to the flight, purchase decisions are influenced by, for example, on-board food and beverage service, entertainment packages, WiFi availability and other benefits. For these, airlines rely on customers' common sense by telling them about prices and availability of services. For example, in the following example 44, Norwegian describes the services available on the flight.

**Example 44:** Free WiFi on most flights within Europe. Video on Demand on our WiFi portal. State-of-the-art entertainment system on international long haul flights with our 787 Dreamliner featuring movies, TV shows, games and an interactive 3D map with travel tips for your destination. Our award-winning nMagazine. Find out more about how we can entertain you.

Rationalization is a natural continuum as airlines talk a lot about the sustainable development of their operations. Sustainable development as a concept is strongly related to the future, which is why communication often emphasizes the goals of operations. Sustainable development and environmental impacts are strongly related to the legitimation strategy of moralization, but rationalization is also used to support environmental issues. In the following example,

SAS illustrates how passengers can themselves measure the concrete value of their flight's CO2 emissions.

**Example 45:** We launched carbon offsetting options for our customers in 2006. In the SAS emissions calculator, which is available on [www.sasgroup.net](http://www.sasgroup.net), greenhouse gas emission calculations are provided for SAS flights.

Rationalization as a legitimation strategy is used to create the impression that the issue to be legitimized has only one possible course of development (Van Leeuwen 2008). Through rationalization, airlines create a very strong image for stakeholders that other transport options are inefficient and significantly worse than flying, and that Nordic airlines are vital to the region's infrastructure. The rationale for the purpose of airline operations is very much based on rationalization and economic benefits and advantages, but moralization is also present in the material as much as it occurs almost always at the same time as the rationalization legitimation strategy.

### 5.2.3 Moralization

After previous research and material collection, moralization as legitimacy strategy was an expected result. Different moral-based means were repeated often in the materials of all airlines. Moralizing legitimation tragedy does not focus on supporting benefits or interests, but focuses on what would be morally correct (Suchman 1995, 579). In the context of this study, the moralization legitimation strategy is used specifically to emphasize one's own morally correct actions, habits, or plans, while implying that not all competitors may be equally advanced.

Biggest moral issue for airlines is their sustainability and environmental impact for the climate and are the main factors undermining the legitimacy of airlines, so the materials sought to counteract them as effectively as possible and by highlighting the airline's efforts for the environment, which is a values-based theme aimed at securing global diversity and environmental well-being for future generations also. In the following example 46, SAS illustrates the disadvantages of air transport, but immediately seeks to justify its own actions by stating its own commitment to sustainable development.

**Example 46:** Aircraft operations in particular have an adverse environmental impact, primarily through emissions of greenhouse gases and noise around airports. SAS takes its responsibility seriously and despite the turbulent civil aviation market of recent years, SAS has chosen to maintain its commitment to sustainability-related issues.

The extent to which airlines emphasize and reiterate in their materials the importance of sustainable development and the reduction of environmental dam-

age proves that companies reaffirm the protection of the environment as their own value. This communication is aimed at all those stakeholders who expect or demand action and values in line with sustainable development and feel that they will receive a company that serves them and other stakeholders, ie also future generations. This conclusion is also supported by the study by Maignan & Ferrell (2004, 7), according to which stakeholders are also interested in the effects of the company's activities on other stakeholders.

Moralization is used to invoke good values and the end result according to them, but it is seldom done directly but is usually implicitly expressed (Van Leeuwen 2008, 109). In the example, Finnair describes the importance of sustainable development for them and then emphasizes that they also demand the same ethical line from their subcontractors. In this quote, the company relies heavily on the morale of its stakeholders, both in terms of the environment and otherwise ethical business practices.

**Example 47:** Social responsibility is a fundamental attitude, a way of working and responding to the expectations placed on a company's activities. Finnair aims to belong to the elite in terms of quality, to bear its responsibilities and to act as a good example. -- In a logistically demanding business with global reach in many different legal jurisdictions and cultural traditions, good intentions and instincts are not enough - clear ethical guidelines and principles for doing business must be articulated as well. As an airline, however, we are only at the tip of a very deep supply chain. Of equal importance we have the Code for Suppliers.

Moralization is also used as a legitimacy strategy in non-environmental themes. The study's only low-cost airline uses its own low-cost fare level and appeals to people's desire to live frugally. In the following example, Norwegian describes how cheap flights are their goal and they want to allow flying for as many people as possible and so it would work morally right.

**Example 48:** We believe in affordable fares for all, as reflected in our vision, values, operational priorities and goals. To realise this vision, we offer quality flights at a low fare based on operational excellence and helpful, friendly service. The way we conduct business at Norwegian is guided by our values and operational priorities. -- Our goal is to have affordable fares for all.

Moralization as a legitimacy strategy is also evident when the airline speaks for itself as an employer. Increasing jobs can be seen as morally correct, as can increasing tourism, which brings additional income to their countries. Moralization as a strategy of legitimacy is also used when talking about stakeholders other than subcontractors and passengers. Morality is invoked through the image of the employer. In the following example, Finnair illustrates its own role as an employer and a caring party for society.

**Example 49:** The wellbeing of our employees and customers are equally important to us. We take good care of our employees by investing in their health care and safety as well as providing training opportunities and promoting equality, non-discrimination and diversity.

As the biggest threat to the legitimacy of airlines' operations can be seen in the uneconomical nature of their activities, it is important to seek to influence stakeholders and get them to support their activities rather than oppose them. For this to succeed, the company needs to know the values of the stakeholders, and the expectations they ever have for the company. For this, moralization is an effective and widely used strategy. After finding out the common values, the company's task is to communicate correctly, extensively and the right issues to stakeholders. The most effective way can be seen as online communication on websites and social media, as it is an effective and fast way to communicate one's own values and highlight the actions taken by the company about the values shared with stakeholders.

#### **5.2.4 Narrativization**

One of the least represented legitimacy strategies in airline materials was narrativization. It was even remarkable how little airlines used storytelling to support their own actions, values, and brand. Narratives could be found in the material, but to a small extent and not much in support of legitimacy. According to Vaara (2006, 508), narrativization is strongly linked to normalization in the legitimation strategy. A narrative of its superiority and irreplaceability has been built around air transport as a whole, but also a narrative of what kind of lifestyle and what kind of people it is natural for. In this narrative, airlines put a lot of effort into the direction of communication and marketing. Narrative is also built on the fact that without air travel, people will be deprived of a certain kind of world of experience.

Narratives were found in the material when airlines told stories about their own birth and history, or when it presented their own charity projects that clearly wanted to appeal to emotions. In these stories related to history and especially to charity, the aim was to portray the airline and its employees as benefactors and heroes. The lack of narrativization is therefore even more peculiar, as the study finds it a very effective way to influence and engage stakeholders in their own support forces. In the following example 50, SAS describes its own Christmas Flights- operation and supports its own legitimacy by taking on the role of the hero of the story.

**Example 50:** Throughout the last many years, SAS has supported the "Christmas flight". The Christmas flight is an aid campaign operated by SAS employees, who cooperate with other volunteers throughout the year to collect goods and contributions from various cooperating com-

panies and private individuals. SAS provides an aircraft with full operational support, pilots and crew volunteer in their free time.

In addition, Norwegian combined narrativization and normalization legitimation strategies as they bring out various mainly northern heroes on their planes and strongly associate their own brand and planes with the innovators and heroes of their time.

**Example 51:** When Norwegian's first Boeing 737s took to the skies in 2002, we challenged a well-established monopoly. This is why we adorn the tails of our aircraft with personalities who have pushed boundaries. Today, we have tail fin heroes from several of the countries we operate in, including all the Nordic countries, as well as Spain, France, England, Ireland and Scotland.

Overall, airlines have also built a narrative around all air traffic. The narrative is a intimidating story of what would happen to the world without flying and the other half of the story is all the benefit that air transport brings to the world, the lesson of the story is that modern society would no longer be able to do without air traffic.

### 5.2.5 Normalization

Normalization was also very underrepresented in the materials, but was nevertheless found on each airline's website, albeit slightly. Because normalization is used as a legitimation strategy so as to invoke the normal state of doing and thus generally accepted, it was used to support the necessity of air travel. The normalization of the legitimation strategy was evident in the study when looking at the legitimacy of airlines as a whole. Airlines are using a lot of means, especially in their communications, to keep air transport as the norm as it is now.

Normalization refers to a legitimation strategy in which a thing or activity is considered normal or its natural state, in which case it would also be legitimate (Vaara et al. 2006, 798). Examples are often used to support normalization. In the following example, SAS justifies the normality of flying by invoking its prevalence and necessity. In doing so, the company seeks to influence its stakeholders by demonstrating that flying is a necessary and great benefit in today's society despite its disadvantages.

**Example 52:** SAS offers the most departures and has an attractive offering for people who travel frequently to, from and within Scandinavia. SAS conducted more than 800 scheduled flights daily in FY 2018, and a total of more than 30 million passengers traveled to SAS.

According to Vaara (2006, 798), an action or behavior is normalized by means of different role models, because an attempt is made to make the actions look le-

gitimate through routine and normal state. For example, Finnair uses this legitimacy strategy by setting an example of itself by saying that it is one of the oldest operating airlines in the world and thus setting itself in a state of normalcy.

**Example 53:** One of the world's oldest operating airlines. Over the decades we have grown from a small Finnish airline to a respected member of the international airline industry

### 5.2.6 Legitimacy strategies to complement previous research

The study clearly found all the legitimacy strategies identified by Vaara et al. (2006) and Van Leeuwen (2008). However, other new legitimization strategies were also found in the research results, a total of three. These new, clearly typical strategies in airline online materials are exemplification, numbering, and accountability. These identified legitimization strategies can be considered to be very typical in building airline legitimacy. However, all the new legitimization strategies identified in the study are linked to the strategies identified in the previous study and can be considered as sub-strategies of these, so to speak.

#### **Exemplification**

The first sub-strategy identified from the materials is exemplification. This means the ways by which an airline seeks to justify its operations through a practical example that can generally be considered positive, exemplary, or morally acceptable. One might think that it is typical for an airline to try to stand out from its competitors by strongly emphasizing actions that act morally right and act like an example. This strategy is very close to authorization, but because it is based on moral justification, it is also suitable for moralization.

As airlines set an example for themselves, especially through sustainable development and environmental investment, but also as employers and enhancers of global diversity, for example, this legitimacy sub-strategy can be seen as linked to an authorization strategy. In example x, SAS legitimizes its actions through exemplification. The company gives an idea of the way forward and the specific expertise related to social responsibility. This company code of conduct has a morally lofty purpose to work for human rights, against discrimination and slavery.

**Example 54:** As set forth in SAS Group Code of Conduct, SAS Group has committed to social issues and by joining the UN Global Compact, the SAS Group has pledged in all activities to defend and promote human rights and combat corruption, discrimination and all forms of forced laboratory.

## Numbering

Another legitimation strategy, that stood out from the online materials of all airlines, was numbering. This means converting activities and practices into numbers and referring to these amounts in support of entitlement. Values and quantities are compared with one's own past operations or, for example, with general standards, alongside which one's own current operations or practices are brought to a favorable light.

This sub-strategy was used extensively, in a number of different contexts, and legitimized a wide range of actions and raised its own company on a pedestal. Airlines use numbering in particular to support legitimacy when they talk about sustainable development, emissions and waste. As this strategy seeks to rely on factual information, it can be considered to be strongly linked to rationalization, where legitimacy is sought by justifying action through utility or efficiency.

In Example 55, Finnair seeks justification for its own operations by numbering. Through the numbers, the airline will tell you how much money it will invest in new aircraft in the coming years and how much emissions will be reduced through these new aircraft.

**Example 55:** During 2020-2025, we will invest 3.5-4 billion euros into the Renewal and growth of our Fleet. The Fleet Renewal will reduce CO2 emissions in Finnair's European traffic by 10-15%.

In Example 56, Norwegian also seeks justification for its own action by numbering. The airline highlights how much it has invested in new aircraft and thus reduced its own carbon emissions by a third. In addition to this, the company seeks legitimacy by comparing its own efficiency with the emissions of other airlines.

**Example 56:** Over the last 10 years we have invested billions in new aircraft improving our carbon efficiency by 33%, we are 33% more efficient than the industry average on Transatlantic flights.

## Accountability

A significant consideration in the material was that each airline emphasized on its website the responsibility of stakeholders and that those who use the company's services can themselves influence the amount of harm caused by air traffic. Thus, the third legitimation sub-strategy could be seen as accountability. By this I mean points where the airline directly or indirectly rolled the causes over to outside groups, at least to some extent. Since the transfer of responsibility is based on the moral ideology that everyone should take responsibility, accountability can be a sub-strategy of moralization.

Accountability does not mean blaming, but direct statements and encouraging the sustainable development of customers' consumption patterns. Responsibility is strongly linked to moralization and also rationalization based on the material. Morality is emphasized in accountability because it appeals to people's sense of the right and desire to act in accordance with their own values as much as possible, for example in environmental matters.

Accountability is a viable legitimacy strategy for airlines, as it can shift the focus of action to stakeholders. For this to succeed, the company must be aware of its own disadvantages and study the role of stakeholders in their emergence. Once these are known, a company can highlight the role of others in its marketing and materials about the disadvantages. Airlines are shifting responsibility to their stakeholders in particular in relation to consumption of services. For example, the points where the airline talks about the food that is reserved for customers on flights, the additional charges for different services, the number of luggage and the planning of flight routes. Another way was to indirectly refer to decision-makers and their responsibilities and, for example, when talking about noise nuisance, to urban planning.

In Example 57, Finnair appeals directly to its own passengers on its website and addresses them. The company says directly that the customer can influence the side effects of their trip.

**Example 57:** What can I do as a customer? Small things matter on our way to decrease the environmental impact of Flying. You can join us in the efforts to make traveling more sustainable.

In addition, in the context of airlines, airlines themselves benefit from a number of actions that passengers and other stakeholders can take, for example to support more environmentally friendly operations. For example, airlines encourage passengers to declare their food preferences before flights to reduce food waste, fly with less luggage to save fuel, and encourage them to pay compensation for CO2 emissions. All these actions also benefit the airline, including financially.

**Example 58:** With Norwegian, you choose whether to pay for baggage or not. It's all your choice. Fly Norwegian and everything starts with a simple, low-priced ticket. Then whatever else you want, add it on. Who wants to pay for all-inclusive if the things that are included aren't things you need? Why pay for bags you haven't got? Or on-board meals you don't want? We don't give you so-called "free stuff" that's not wanted anyway.

### **5.3 Legitimacy strategies used to support identified corporate purposes**

In the empirical section of this study, the purpose of an airline company and its legitimation strategies were examined using two research questions. The first the research question "How do airlines present their corporate purpose based on the texts on their websites?" the aim was to find out what kind of web material entities airlines present their business purpose through. The second research question "What types of legitimacy strategies do airlines use to support their corporate purpose?" analyzed the legitimacy strategies used to support the legitimacy of airline operations.

Using the content analysis, the study of the airlines' corporate purpose was considered to be built around four entities that were Airline identification and differentiation from competitors, Flying as a part of the infrastructure, The airline as a responsible operator and Airline strategy and sustainable development activities. These themes and the legitimacy strategies used to support their legitimacy are summarized in Table 2.

The purpose of this subchapter is to combine the identified legitimacy strategies with the material entities found in the data, which are the same entities through which the airline has constructed an image of its own corporate purpose. This study examines the airline's corporate purpose and the legitimacy strategies used to support it, the results are reviewed on an airline-by-airline basis and seeks to create a comprehensive understanding of how each airline presents its own corporate purpose.

#### **5.3.1 Airline identification and differentiation from competitors**

In the study it was noticeable that the purpose of airlines was intertwined with their brand and customer promises, as well as services, customer benefits, and company history, in other words, the things they strive to differentiate from other competitors. Each company's brand and thus the target groups differed from each other, as did, for example, the company's services, price level and scope of operations. These divergent features can be seen to be reflected in the fundamental purpose of the company. Although there are many similarities, there were significant differences between airlines in describing their purpose.

Norwegian is the only low cost airline in the study and therefore it strives to differentiate itself from other competitors, especially in its price level, which means a reduced number of services and benefits and also less convenience. Their customer promise is to enable flying for as many people as possible at an affordable price level, and they justified their own purpose based on it. The basis of Norwegian's entire philosophy and continuation of operations is the idea that as many people as possible should have the opportunity to travel.

Air travel has grown greatly over the century and has been largely a privilege for the better middle class and others who earn better because of its high cost. Because of this, Norwegian also markets itself strongly as a low-cost airline and with the idea that customers only pay for essentials, and everything else comes at an additional cost. The airline offers limited services and clearly the target group is the people for whom the price level is the most decisive factor. The Norwegian brand also has a large share of their Nordic roots and they bring it out especially through images of Nordic "heroes", meaning notable people in Nordic history, painted on airplanes. They also tell about this on various sections of their website, including strongly in the section where they talk about their own history.

As Norwegian seeks to differentiate itself from its competitors, especially through the price level, in it they utilize a legitimation strategy of rationalization. They seek to justify the importance of their activities and the importance of their existence by enabling air travel at a lower cost, and this directly invokes the rational need of people to want to save money. Norwegian's strong message that the opportunity to fly should not be so dependent on a person's income level is also a very moral theme, which in a way criticizes other more expensive actors. For this reason, the legitimation strategy of moralization can also be seen. In addition, they build their brand and philosophy on Nordic roots by introducing Nordic celebrities on their planes and on their websites. Here they take advantage of the legitimation strategy of narrativization.

SAS is the largest of the research airlines in terms of operating profit, passenger and flight volumes, and thus also the best-known player in research airlines. Based on the online materials, SAS also seeks to take advantage of this position in describing its own purpose. They emphasize in particular that they are popular with frequent travelers. They are not the cheapest airline, but they have an extensive operating network, most departures and the price of flights includes most standard services. The purpose of SAS's operations is therefore to serve the Nordic people who travel extensively, and they emphasize this origin in their own history and, for example, in their values. They appeal to Nordic travelers, for whom efficiency, punctuality and comprehensive services are paramount.

Relying on efficiency, accuracy, and scope of services are themes that combine the two legitimacy strategies. In these ways, the airline appeals to the rational side of consumers, as passengers want to fly as efficiently and effortlessly as possible. Morality is also visible, for when SAS places itself in its own material in a position where they emphasize their own punctuality and the know-how brought by their experience, and they have realized that these are things that competitors may struggle with. In addition, they also use legitimation strategy narrativization when they tell their own history and really emphasize many times their own Nordic origins and the fact that they are a big player in Northern Europe in particular.

Of the airlines surveyed, Finnair was the one whose brand was most aimed at achieving a sense of luxury. All of their online materials emphasize

quality, elegance, and the price of a plane ticket includes many services and benefits. Finnair does not compete on prices, but especially on its own excellent geographical location in relation to Asia, Finnish exotics and top quality services. Finnair also states in its own materials that it is one of the world's oldest airlines and strongly emphasizes its Finnish background and state ownership.

Through high-quality services and a particularly good geographical location, which speeds up air traffic in Europe and Asia, Finnair addresses the common sense of stakeholders and uses rationalization as a legitimation strategy. By explaining the state ownership and the fact that they are one of the world's oldest airlines, Finnair uses normalization as a legitimation strategy. Their activities are state-controlled and they have operated reliably for a long time. In addition, telling about one's own heritage and bringing out Finnishness is narrativization as a legitimacy strategy.

### 5.3.2 Flying as a part of the infrastructure

Based on the content analysis, a separate upper category "Flying as a part of the infrastructure" was formed, as each research airline highlighted the importance of flying in the material for modern society, and through it the purpose of the companies was emphasized. The importance of flying was justified by a number of different actions and it was suggested that, despite all its disadvantages, the benefits of air transport outweigh the disadvantages.

In his own materials, Norwegian highlighted the importance of air transport through infrastructure, but also the importance of airlines for society, in terms of the jobs they maintain directly and through subcontractors. Norwegian highlights the company's own purpose of enabling low-cost air connections and a major role as an employer.

When airlines emphasize the importance of their own operations through transport and connections, it uses the rationalization of a legitimation strategy. In addition, creating jobs, supporting the economies of destination countries and maintaining the activities of subcontractors appeal not only to people's common sense but also to morality, as the impact on employment is often widely seen as a positive and important part of society. Thus, it can be considered that Norwegian uses rationalization and moralization as legitimation strategies in support of the justification of the purpose of the company. In addition, Norwegian, like other airlines, wants to give the whole picture of flying as a norm and argues that flying is a normal practice in world traffic, so normalization is also one of the legitimation strategies used.

SAS, like other airlines, stressed the importance of air connections in today's world. In particular, their material was based on the important role SAS has played in the development of infrastructure in Scandinavia and the rest of Northern Europe, and they also underlined that they are still the largest and most comprehensive player in the Nordic countries. Although the layout for the purpose of action varies in part, SAS also uses rationalization and also, in part, moralization as legitimation strategies in its communications. They invoke their

own significant position in Scandinavian air transport, which is both a rational but a moral matter, for which they thus contribute to society and the societies of the destination countries. Also, SAS builds a strong image of the norm of flying in society and presents flying as a normal and integrated thing in modern society, so it uses a normalization legitimation strategy as well.

Finnair's approach, based on its own importance for air traffic, is mainly based on the development of traffic between Europe and Asia. In its materials, Finnair emphasizes how much air traffic between Europe and Asia has grown and will continue to do so in the future. They justify their own purpose of the company on the grounds that their geographical location between continents is ideal and speeds up several flight routes. When talking about these themes, Finnair also uses rationalization as a legitimation strategy. Talking about an important transportation connection, faster routes, and growing business, they appeal to common sense.

### **5.3.3 The airline as a responsible operator internally**

On the basis of the materials, "The airline as a responsible operator internally" was formed as its own upper category, which includes all the points where airlines talk about their own good governance, social responsibility, responsibility as an employer and, for example, their own development aspirations in these areas.

Norwegian says in its online materials that it values good governance. For them, transparency was important and highlighted that they follow laws and regulations very closely, and do even more. The airline also raised its own ethical principles according to which all of their operations take place. Speaking about their own administration, Norwegian emphasizes the value of employees and how they strive to maintain a diverse and equal working life, including in the countries of destinations of flights. Norwegian says they strive to be the best possible corporate citizen, and they create social and economic value while operating in airport destinations.

Norwegian explains and operates in accordance with its own responsible operations and how strictly it complies with laws and regulations. When an airline appeals to outside authorities it uses authorization as a legitimation strategy. Moreover, when Norwegian talks about its own governance and the responsibility of the employer, it makes a moral assumption and puts itself in a good light in that regard, and thus uses morality as a strategy. Rationalization as a strategy of legitimacy comes to the fore when an airline talks about the job benefits it offers and the jobs it creates because a sustainable economy benefits society.

SAS has been talking about itself as a responsible player on its website, both externally and internally. Their material emphasizes the pursuit of transparency and ethics and, for example, they have a comprehensive plan for good governance. SAS's materials are largely about internal sustainability and the fact that they demand the same ethics from their own subcontractors. SAS also

emphasizes its own responsibilities as an employer, and thus equality and diversity in working life are important to them. However, concrete examples can often be sought when an airline talks about large entities. Instead, individual projects, such as SAS-sponsored Christmas flights and air ambulance services, gain visibility in the form of stories.

In other words, SAS uses very similar legitimation strategies as other research airlines. With good governance and social responsibility, as well as sustainable development and employer responsibility, they use rationalization but also moralization as legitimation strategies, as these themes appeal to stakeholder morality, but also to reason because, for example, governance is well institutionalized. Internal responsibility is also emphasized through narratification legitimation strategy when an airline tells its own charity events in a story.

Finnair talks about all airlines most concisely about their own responsibility, especially from a social and corporate governance perspective. The company describes its own administration and operating methods from the perspective of the authorities, citing the authors of various laws and regulations. They have their own governance plan, as well as a plan for an equal and diverse workplace. When talking about these issues as well, Finnair refrains from the facts and gives precise figures on, for example, its own personnel and plans for its development. Finnair also highlights responsibility in the supply chain and requires certain conditions from its own business partners.

Finnair's way of talking about its internal responsibility and social responsibility is different from that of other airlines, but the themes are the same. Finnair uses rationalization and moralization as legitimation strategies when they talk about their own way of operating as an institution, but also invokes the moral perception of stakeholders with their own desire to act ethically. Relying on external authorities as a rule-maker is an authorization strategy. The use of numbers and figures in support of one's own cause is also rationalization and can lead to a new subtype of legitimation strategy which is numbering. Numbering can also be seen by other airlines as they justify their own cause through numbers and thus appeal to people's common sense. Normalization is also reflected in Finnair's legitimation strategies, as Finnair relies in particular on the status of its own company as normal, as they are one of the world's oldest operating airlines.

#### **5.3.4 Airline strategy and sustainable development activities**

The last, but also the broadest, upper category of the study formed on the basis of the content analysis is *Airline strategy and sustainable development activities*. The biggest factor undermining the legitimacy of airlines is the high environmental impact of air transport, so it is particularly emphasized in the strategies and themes that airlines highlight on the website about their own operations and their planning at a strategic level. Also, several laws, regulations and regulatory authorities in air transport set their own framework for airline strategy and practices. In other words, the airlines are extremely institutionalized and there-

fore very similar to each other. The biggest differences between airlines are found in brands and thus target groups, but also in concrete actions that are not required by any legislation or authority, but that are ethically correct.

Norwegian puts the lowest possible prices at the top of its strategy. It declares its values of simplicity, innovation and teamwork. Norwegian highlights affordability as a priority in all its materials, except where it talks about environmental measures, in which case it gives a picture of high standards and effort. The airline does not directly state in the online materials itself how significant the problem is the environmental impact of air transport, but emphasizes its strategy to commit to reducing emissions from air transport. The airline has taken concrete steps to commit to its environmental strategy and reports these actions extensively on its website. However, the material on the website does not indicate whether the airline is taking actions that would be excessive on their part, giving it an extra mile, and ethically correct, as well as benefiting the surrounding stakeholders, but not necessarily economically beneficial. Sustainability actions taken by an airline, such as new aircraft, benefit them themselves because of lower fuel costs.

Norwegian legitimizes its own activities, convincingly and in a complex way in online materials regarding the environment and sustainable development. The airline presents the environmental actions already taken in the material, such as new aircraft and modern equipment, and supports its own reputation as an environmentally friendly player by using a rationalization legitimization strategy, appealing to stakeholder common sense and, for example, presenting different numerical data. That is, use a numbering sub-strategy. Because the rationalization strategy is often associated with moralization, the legitimacy strategy also appeals to the morale of stakeholders through sustainable development. The airline also raises itself to an exemplary role because they have a very new fleet in use, allowing Norwegian to use an authorization legitimization strategy. Norwegian highlights the responsibility of its customers in environmental choices, i.e. uses an exemplary strategy, which can be seen as a sub-strategy related to moralization and authorization.

SAS puts frequent travellers in the Nordic countries at the forefront of its own strategy. The airline immediately emphasizes its own origins in its values, stating that it is Scandinavian at heart. In addition, their value is punctuality, which appeals specifically to commuters. SAS describes its environmental strategy very extensively on the website. They have a precise and ambitious plan to cut CO<sub>2</sub> emissions year on year. They use a lot of numbers and measurements to support this. They also make themselves exemplary by stating their own commitment to reducing emissions and other nuisances from aviation. The airline is involved in several studies, for example, and is widely committed to various climate agreements. The airline also reports directly on the website about the great climate responsibility of air traffic.

SAS legitimizes its own strategy and sustainability efforts through rationalization and moralization legitimization strategies. They appeal to stakeholders with a wealth of information on the various sustainable development

actions taken and what is planned for the future. The company uses a lot of numbers and tables to support the text, meaning SAS uses numbering, which is a sub-strategy for rationalization. The whole environment and responsibility issue is moral-based and SAS wants to give the impression that they are willing to do extra to minimize harm and promote the common good. In this case, they use a moralizing legitimization strategy. SAS is supported by a number of different authorities, such as various climate agreements and awards, so the legitimacy strategy authorization is also identifiable.

Finnair's strategy emphasizes quality awareness and especially traffic between Asia and Europe. The airline lists simplicity, working together, courage and caring as its values. Finnair reports on the disadvantages of emissions caused by air traffic on its website. The airline has a clear and ambitious plan to cut emissions radically in the future. Finnair uses numbers to support the strategy. In addition, Finnair reports on its extraordinary efforts to reduce nuisances, waste and emissions. They also have a recorded strategy plan for major investments in addressing these issues. It should be noted that a major influential factor in Finnair's strategy is probably that the company is mainly state-owned, which sets particularly precise and institutionalized practices and goals.

As might be expected, Finnair's legitimization strategies for sustainable development and strategy are also very similar to those of other research airlines. Finnair is very clear in its communication and expresses its own goals and actions in a concise but fact-based manner. They use a lot of rationalization legitimization strategy, but also the moralization strategy is visible when they tell about their own disadvantage minimization plans. Finnair also invokes authorities, such as the state and legislation, ie uses an authorization legitimization strategy.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this master's thesis was to understand and to define the corporate purpose of Nordic airlines and to gain in-depth knowledge of them, and to explore what legitimacy strategies airlines use in their online communications to support their own legitimacy and thus their own purpose. In addition, the aim is to compare the purpose of different airlines and the strategies they use. This chapter reviews the main results of the study and compares them with previous research. Reflection on the results proceeds in the order of the research questions. First, the company's purposes are reviewed on an airline-by-airline basis, followed by an examination of the various legitimacy strategies that airlines use to support these purposes.

### **6.1 How do airlines present their corporate purpose based on the texts on their websites?**

The study carried out a content analysis examining the texts of the airlines' websites. Based on the research, it is possible to gain a broader understanding of the themes through which airlines present the purpose of their own company to their stakeholders, as well as to look at how institutionalization is reflected in airline communications. Based on an analysis of the text in the website, the main themes on which airlines build their purpose are the increased need for travel, the airline's own brand, the importance of air transport for infrastructure, responsible internal and employer responsibility and strategy, and in particular sustainability actions and strategy. In particular, issues related to sustainable development and climate were highlighted in the material, which can be attributed to the fact that the problems related to these themes are the biggest threat to the legitimacy of airlines. Based on the content analysis of the study, four upper categories were formed, which were: Airline's identification and differentiation from competitors, Flying as part of the infra-structure, The airline

as a responsible operator internally, and The airline's strategy and sustainability measures.

Based on the results of the study, it can be stated that each airline addressed almost identical themes on its own website, only the emphasis on different issues varied between the airlines. Since the legitimacy of each airline is undermined by the same problems, the similarity of the content is a presumed result. The biggest differences between the airlines were found in the way they tend to differentiate themselves from other competing airlines in terms of, for example, brand, price level and target groups. This showed how institutionalized airlines are overall.

Also based on the results, it can be said that the purpose of airlines is a multidimensional entity. The purpose is based on serving customers, but also on following the instructions of legislators and society. The acceptance of legislators and society is therefore as important as the acceptance of customers for the purpose and legitimacy of the company. In the material, airlines talk about their purpose at the customer level, in which case their purpose is to serve the customer as well as possible through the airline's services, brand and, for example, prices. Norwegian's identity is very different from SAS and Finnair, as it is the only low-cost airline in the study. In its identity, Norwegian therefore emphasized the low price level and the fact that travel belonged to "everyone". SAS, on the other hand, emphasizes efficiency and benefits in the material, while Finnair emphasizes the connection between Asia and Europe, and the feeling of luxury.

All the airlines in the study emphasize the importance of flying for the world's infrastructure. It is true that there is no such thing as a fast and efficient substitute for air transport, and the world transport network needs it. The purpose was justified through both business and leisure trips, but also from the perspectives of freight, culture and hospital care, for example. As a Norwegian low-cost airline, stressed the opportunity for as many people to travel as possible because they offer low prices. SAS, on the other hand, justified its existence, especially through busy and high-travel customers, and Finnair justified its own importance on the basis of high-speed traffic between Europe and Asia.

Airlines also highlighted their purpose at the societal level. All the airlines in the study are major employers in their own countries of origin, but also in the countries in which they operate. In addition, they provide jobs for their subcontractors and others. In addition to this, airlines spoke, for example, about the importance of air transport for cultural diversity. Each airline emphasized its own good governance and recognized its own responsibilities as employers and social actors. The companies emphasized that their own operations complied with all laws and regulations, and they raised a number of other parties whose guidelines they acted on. Thus, airlines were able to justify the fact that their company's purpose is ethically and legally accepted in such a way that is legitimate.

The majority of the material on the company's website dealt with minimizing the nuisances of air traffic and plans to achieve sustainable development

goals. Airlines all talked a lot about sustainable development and reducing their carbon footprint, but there were differences in, among other things, acknowledging their own responsibility and taking concrete action for the environment, as well as the ambition of their strategies. Norwegian listed its own environmental actions firmly and convincingly, but did not open much long-term sustainable development plans in the material or say anything about investments, for example. SAS had used the most space on its website to present sustainability and environmental strategies. They also had an ambitious and precise strategy to reduce their own emissions, and they also highlighted, for example, noise nuisance and other flying problems. Finnair spoke closely and broadly about its environmental strategy. They listed concrete actions that had already been taken as well as concrete actions for the future. Finnair also had a clear plan for future developments and said they would invest several million in the future to achieve the goals.

## **6.2 What types of legitimacy strategies do airlines use to support their corporate purpose?**

By identifying these upper categories, it was easier to understand the themes around which airlines built their communications on their websites and how institutionalization can be seen in airline stakeholder communications. A comprehensive picture of the purpose of the airlines was central, as these upper categories, on the basis of which the purpose was considered to be formed, were used to examine the legitimacy strategies that support them, as suggested by Vaara et al. (2006, 797). The results obtained in the analysis confirm the assumption that these communications, built around the upper categories of content analysis, will be used to strengthen the legitimacy of airlines.

In their study, Vaara et al. (2006) found that legitimation strategies overlap and rely on each other, and the simultaneous use of multiple strategies is also a very effective way to legitimize things. In particular, rationalization and moralization legitimation strategies often occur together, due to the fact that rationalization always required a moral foundation to rely on as well (Vaara 2006). Here, too, it was found that often these two legitimation strategies appeared simultaneously (Table 2). According to previous research, the authorization strategy is also manifested in several contexts simultaneously with the strategies of rationalization and thus moralization (Vaara 2006). According to Vaara (2006), this is based on the fact that authority is based on institutions and perspectives that have gained their own legitimacy through rationalization and moralization. Also in this study, when authorization was used as a legitimation strategy and it was also used as mentioned above (Table 2).

<b>Airline</b>	<b>Corporate purpose</b>	<b>Content analysis upper categories</b>	<b>Legitimation strategies</b> (Vaara ym. 2006, Van Leeuwen 2008)
<b>Norwegian</b>	The purpose of the Norwegian company is based on enabling flying for as many people as possible through affordable prices. The airline's strategy is based on enabling low fares, increasing flying, a simple service structure and reducing environmental damage.	Airline identification and differentiation from competitors	Rationalization Moralization Narrativization
		Flying as a part of the infrastructure	Rationalization Moralization Normalization
		The airline as a responsible operator internally	Moralization Authorization
		Airline strategy and sustainable development activities	Rationalization Moralization Authorization
<b>SAS</b>	SAS's corporate purpose is based heavily on its well-established position in Scandinavia, a comprehensive and frequent flight schedule, efficiency and comprehensive accountability measures. The airline wants to best serve frequent travelers and favors those who are willing to pay for comprehensive services and environmental investments.	Airline identification and differentiation from competitors	Rationalization Moralization Narrativization Normalization
		Flying as a part of the infrastructure	Rationalization Moralization Normalization
		The airline as a responsible operator internally	Rationalization Moralization Narrativization Authorization
		Airline strategy and sustainable development activities	Rationalization Moralization Authorization
<b>Finnair</b>	The corporate purpose of Finnair is largely based on its geographical location, which speeds up traffic between Europe and Asia. The airline invests in a sense of luxury, quality and Nordic heritage. The company operates in a straightforward manner, investing in sustainable development, and they aim for target groups that value top quality and are willing to pay for it.	Airline identification and differentiation from competitors	Rationalization Narrativization Authorization
		Flying as a part of the infrastructure	Rationalization Moralization
		The airline as a responsible operator internally	Rationalization Moralization
		Airline strategy and sustainable development activities	Rationalization Moralization Authorization

Table 2: The results of the study compiled.

### **6.3 The relationship of the corporate purpose to the legitimacy of the company**

The corporate purpose largely defines, among other things, the company's values and norms, vision and mission, and philosophy for existence (Hollensbe, Wookey, Hickey, George and Nichols, 2014). On this basis, it can be concluded that the purpose of the company is largely embedded in the company's strategy and thus in its culture and way of operating. The results of this study also showed that what the airlines said were part of the strategy was also strongly part of the constructive themes of the company's purpose. It could be said that the airlines are well institutionalized with each other, as they used very similar entities to present their own purpose, and the airlines used very the same legitimacy strategies to support the purpose, and they were also used in very the same way. However, in society, airlines may not be considered to have an institutionalized position on the basis of the results, at least no longer, as the legitimacy of airlines is clearly under pressure.

Legitimacy is vital to a company's existence. In a strategic sense, organizations use and need legitimacy as a resource for themselves to achieve their own goals. Moreover, from an institutional perspective, legitimacy is everything that defines how an organization is structured, how it is managed, and how it is understood and evaluated from the outside. (Suchman 1995, 577.) A key result of this study can be considered how strongly the purpose of the firm is ultimately linked to the legitimacy of the firm. It is conceivable that the purpose of a company must be in line with the values, norms and expectations of the community in which the company operates in order to be entitled to exist and operate.

Stakeholders decide the life cycle of companies and it is important to listen to them - if a company does not act as expected by stakeholders, it loses its right to act in society. Responsible, stakeholder-oriented corporate governance produces even better financial results. (Kujala 2014.) Based on the results, airlines have a strong awareness of what the various stakeholders expect of them and thus strive to meet society's expectations so that they retain their legitimacy despite the factors that undermine it. According to the results, airlines emphasize the scope and excellence of services to their users, justify the importance of flying through infrastructure, emphasize their importance in society as employers and social actors and the strongest efforts are made by airlines to ensure that environmental damage is kept to a minimum.

It has been studied that consumers make their consumption decisions increasingly based on responsibility. It is therefore even more important for companies to maintain an image of themselves as responsible actors. Sensitively, even one irresponsible act that gets attention in the media, for example, can have a radical effect on business. It is therefore justified to examine corporate responsibility from different perspectives, especially if companies want to re-

main viable. It has been studied that companies should take into account the economic, social and environmental aspects of their strategy and strive to develop their operations responsibly. (Kujala 2014.)

Based on the research results, it can be considered that the purpose of the company is probably worth building in terms of the aspirations of the surrounding society and all the benefits for the company's own financial success. In today's society, legitimacy is particularly sensitive and legitimacy can jeopardize the future of the company as a whole (Roper & Schoenberger-Orgad 2011, 698). For a company to be successful financially, it must be legitimate in the eyes of the community. The most successful are those companies that are able to anticipate and change according to society's expectations (Suchman 1995).

Based on the results of this study, it can be seen, airlines are already clearly preparing in their material for the supposedly accelerating responsibility debate of the future, in addition to focusing only on the pursuit of operating profit at the moment. They seek to strengthen their own legitimacy in their online communication very strongly and defensively, using diverse legitimation strategies and creating a purpose that meets the expectations of the surrounding community. This can be seen in particular in the very large amount of talk about social responsibility, the underlining of the benefits of air transport, and the climate action taken and highlighting future investments.

## 7 EVALUATION OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate the reliability of the research both from the perspective of the research process and the results. It is possible to study the reliability of the research from many perspectives, which partly depends on the chosen research method. From a traditional perspective, research is evaluated through validity and reliability (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009, 231–232). However, these criteria are better suited to the evaluation of quantitative research, as in quantitative research, its evaluation is often based on metrics or possible errors.

In qualitative research, on the other hand, the choices and findings made by the researcher are significant for the research. When evaluating qualitative research, it is important to take into account the entire research process and the choices made by the researcher (Eskola & Suoranta 2014, 211–212). This Master's thesis has been implemented using qualitative research material. For this reason, the evaluation uses the evaluation criteria for qualitative research, namely the credibility, portability, certainty and validity of the study (Eskola & Suoranta 2014, 211–213). Also, as the purpose of air transport and the assessment of its legitimacy are influenced by ethical considerations, it is important to take into account the ethical framework when assessing the research process. Ethical aspects are described later in this chapter.

### 7.1 Credibility

Credibility describes the ability of a researcher to interpret his research material as accurately as possible. (Eskola & Suoranta 2014, 212.) Credibility is therefore a significant criterion in qualitative research and it refers to how well the results obtained by the chosen research method correspond to the perceived notions of the subject (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 296). Although the conclusions drawn from the results of the thesis are based on the findings of the researchers, the conclu-

sions also raised earlier research in support of the conclusions. In addition, the results of the researcher have been highlighted in order to make the findings clearly visible. In this way, the reader is also given the opportunity to consider whether the conclusions are legitimate or not (Eskola & Suoranta 2014, 217).

Researcher has been trying to stay as close as possible to the material from the early stages of analysis and avoid the formation of too early interpretations based on material. During the analysis phase, the meanings found in the material were attempted to be preserved even though the material was simplified according to the content analysis and merged into larger entities as the research process progressed. In support of the interpretations made when presenting the results of the research, direct quotations were made for material. This way the reader can also decide whether the interpretations are true and justified.

## 7.2 Transferability

A qualitative research does not seek to generalize the phenomenon to be studied, but rather to understand and describe it. Thus, the results are unique in their context. Transferability means how the results obtained and the interpretations made can be transferred to, for example, another context, that is, how the research functions in a similar phenomenon (Eskola & Suoranta 2014, 213). Since this study deals specifically with the purpose of an airline company, and its legitimacy, it is impossible to transfer the study as such to another context.

The study involved three major airlines operating in the Nordic region. Based on the results, it cannot be said that the same results would necessarily be repeated for other airlines. For the whole sector, no conclusions can be drawn from the study, although the results are certainly indicative. Instead, the research term company purpose can and should be explored among different companies and organizations with more qualitative methods as it would increase the understanding around the topic. Likewise, it would make sense to apply research theories about institutionalization and legitimacy to the purpose of the firm in other contexts as well.

It is true, however, that if individual cases or entities are examined correctly and in sufficient depth, it is possible to draw generalizable conclusions from research findings. This requires that the research be well conceptualized and described. For example, the purpose and legitimacy strategies of one airline represent one example of all airlines. In order to draw conclusions, the implementation of the research must be clear and have a strong theoretical frame of reference (Eskola & Suoranta 2014, 65). As the analysis and research questions of this study are based on previous research and are supported by a strong theoretical basis, it increases the transferability of this study.

Mobility can also refer to the application of some theoretical concepts in a different context to the original investigation. The aim of the research is to de-

scribe it step by step as closely as possible. Thus, it can be assumed that the portability of the research is also dependent on the reader. (Eskola & Suoranta 2014, 68). When the research and its phases have been accurately described, it may cause the reader to think about the results in other contexts as well, and thus the results may be transferable.

### **7.3 Dependability**

When assessing dependability, consider the *ex ante* assumptions of researchers and the external factors that might have affected the research process (Eskola & Suoranta 2014, 213). Researchers' preliminary thoughts and assumptions may affect the results of the research despite objectivity efforts. As the phenomenon and topic discussed in the research was already familiar to the researcher, the researcher may have had preconceived notions about the purpose or justification of the airlines' operations. In order to minimize the impact of the researcher's own preconceptions, the aim was to treat the research subjects individually and during the analysis phase the meaning of the material was to be kept as close as possible.

The choice of airlines was influenced only by their same geographical area and countries of origin, which were the Nordic countries. Thus, it was not possible to know in advance exactly what the research objects were like and what the material will eventually become. Thus, this study does not describe the purpose of the airline companies in a very broad way, as the material deals with a very small sample of all airlines and, for example, by examining airlines operating in different regions, the results could have varied.

It should be also noted that the researcher also has no previous experience in collecting and analyzing such online material. Efforts have been made to minimize potential errors related to the inexperience of the researcher by relying on the literature related to content analysis and by carefully preparing for the analysis phase and carefully considering, based on previous research, how the analysis would be best performed.

### **7.4 Confirmability**

The results of the study should also be considered from a viewpoint of confirmability, which means linking the results with the results and theories from previous studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The results of this study show the same phenomena as in the previous study, which has dealt with the purpose of the company (see e.g. Gartenberg, Prat, & Serafeim 2019; Michaelson et al. 2014) and also the formation of legitimacy (see e.g. Gronau & Schmidtke 2016;

Joutsenvirta & Vaara 2015). Thus, it can be stated that the results of the study also receive support from previous research.

The strength of research is also influenced by the subjectivity of the researcher at different stages of the research (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 300). It is almost impossible for a researcher to be objective throughout research, as perceptions and experiences related to humanity are always reflected in everything a researcher does. However, in this study, the data have been reviewed several times over a period of a few months, during which they were reviewed very carefully and with incubation.

When assessing qualitative research, it is also good to consider the adequacy of the material. Since it is a qualitative study, it is challenging to know how extensive the material should be. The qualitative research material may be considered sufficient when considered to have reached saturation point. This is referred to as the fact that collecting additional material is no longer considered to bring new knowledge of the phenomenon to be investigated and, for example, the definitions of the phenomenon begin to recur. (Eskola & Suoranta 2014, 62-63.) In this study, certain phenomena and themes, as well as ways of talking about things, began to recur in the data after the analysis had continued long enough. The material can be considered sufficient because there was a clear recurrence in the phenomena and topics, but new features and topics could also be observed.

## 7.5 Ethical aspect of the research

As the research progressed and the results were analyzed, it became clear that the research questions about the purpose of the company and the legitimacy built through it are very strongly linked to the ethical values of the surrounding society. Based on the results of this study, airlines are aware that climate change and emissions from aviation are a major threat to their legitimacy and have taken this strongly into account in their own strategies and emphasize this in their stakeholder communications. The purpose of this subsection is to examine the ethical framework of the study and to examine the link between the legitimacy of airlines and the ethics of air transport. In this study, the most meaningful thing is to look at ethics as a process and perceive it by characterizing it in general rather than trying to define what is ethically correct in modern society.

Business ethics refers to an area of ethics that examines the relationship between ethics and morality in business. Corporate ethics can also be viewed on a company-by-company basis. Business ethics is a broad concept and includes several aspects. It is possible to study the ethical principles on which ethics is based, ie to look at different trends in moral philosophy, or how broad ethics is, for example, in history or geography, or the relationship between ethics in context, for example in the community or business, and corporate responsibility.

According to Svensson and Wood (2008), corporate ethics is built on three parts, which are expectations, perceptions, and evaluation. In other words, corporate ethics is a process that continues and repeats throughout the life cycle of a company. Business ethics is not stable but a process that is constantly shaped by society's expectations and prevailing values. Companies have to change their own operations and values, for example with political change, in order for a company to maintain the acceptance of society. In today's society in particular, ethical demands on companies have increased, which is likely to be the result of an increase in instant messaging and an increase in the general level of education. (Svensson & Wood 2008.)

Companies gain a justification for existence from society in such a way that they do not harm the community but instead produce something for society that benefits it, mainly economic benefits. In society, companies are mainly considered to have an obligation to compensate and repair if they cause harm, the same as is expected of citizens. Legitimacy is strongly based on society's moral perception, which defines acceptable behavior from companies. Problems, however, can be caused by the fact that not all morally accepted ones are always recorded separately, but are taken for granted. Because national laws differ, international actors such as the UN or the OECD have issued their own guidelines on moral issues, but this is certainly hampered by the impact of different cultures on what is considered acceptable. (Kline 2005.) As in this study, airlines built their own legitimacy by relying on UN treaties, for example, and thus proved to stakeholders the legitimacy of their own actions. Here, the airlines relied on their legitimacy for the authorities and for the operation to be considered internationally acceptable.

In principle, in human history, nature has not been highly valued and the problem is not unique to the business world. Environmental problems have been recognized for a relatively long time, which indicates the value of nature in societies. At a practical level, this is reflected, for example, in legislation that has laws on the environment and sustainable development, but not to the extent that they limit the growing number of environmental problems or repair the damage already caused. The problem is not in business ethics, or not just in it, but there is talk of valuing society as a whole, where the environment is not valued above many other factors. For change to take place, the value debate should increase in the public debate, as prevailing perceptions would need to change widely. (Reser & Bentrupperbäumer 2005.) In other words, it is conceivable that while it is widely known how harmful air travel is its benefits and simply the desire of people to travel by air are valued higher. Increasing the amount of information and changing values as well as possibly some kind of threat or compulsion can change people's attitudes towards air travel and thus change how society values nature.

When it comes to international business and its ethics, engaging it in the community is challenging, as activities take place in different communities with different laws and perceptions of the legality of things. Global business ethics should be fair, equal, respectful of diversity and, of course, comply with legisla-

tion and common agreements, something to be said. To achieve this, it requires an ethical consensus and, for example, more research, information and transparency. (Asgary & Mitschow 2002.)

However, business ethics is not an unambiguous or straightforward issue. The immorality of business can also be justified by the importance of business. According to some, in fierce business competition, there is no opportunity to invest much in the moral dimension. According to this idea, entrepreneurship does enough for society by paying taxes, providing jobs, and thus as maintainers of a vital part of society. Tightening environmental and social responsibility laws and regulations would require resources that would be out of place in another part of the company, with the risk of relocating businesses to areas where regulation is less stringent and wages lower, for example. In addition, in business, rewards are given within the company for efficiency and making a profit, not most often for doing a morally good thing. (Kallio & Nurmi 2005, 7–10.) On the other hand, there are also many arguments in favor of it being profitable for companies to act responsibly and ethically, also from the point of view of economics. For example, according to Sen (1993), this is not just a debate based on values and ethics, but is based entirely on full fact and research.

As revealed in this study, ethics was very strongly part of companies' strategies and also purpose. In the online materials, each research airline provided an idea of how sustainable development and minimizing environmental damage in particular are at the forefront of strategies, as well as the overall social good. According to Hosmer (1994), ethics has become part of strategic decision-making because it is seen as increasing trust among stakeholders. Trust, on the other hand, reinforces stakeholder commitment, which increases, for example, innovation and cooperation, which are vital for business. As a previous study suggests, for example, Dowling (2014), responsibility as part of a company's reputation is an important competitive factor as it increases stakeholder confidence in the firm and, for example, increases stakeholder willingness to apply for jobs, use and purchase its services and even provide support in crisis situations. Also Hosmer (1994) has said that it is important to accept that ethical behavior also contributes to financial success and, as a result, companies should incorporate an ethical perspective into their strategy in addition to analytical thinking. (Hosmer 1994.)

Because ethics and ethical action are abstract things, combining them with concrete action within an organization is challenging, as each individual decides on their own set of ethical values. It is difficult to assess which factor ultimately has the greatest impact on how business ethics develops and progresses. Is there a need for more research on abstract ethics and its implementation, is there a need for more concrete moral codes? In addition, it is possible that change in operations will require unethical actors and corporate scandals that will direct others to act differently. (Stieber & Primeaux 1991.)

Based on the results of this study, it was clear that airlines highlighted their own ethical and moral obligation in their strategy, operations and communications and seemed to take it seriously. It should be noted, however, that

this study specifically focused on airlines' websites and the material on them, i.e. part of their stakeholder communications. Based on this study, it is impossible to say how the strategy will be implemented in practice and what the right degree of airline responsibility will be, for example. Airlines can radically influence their own ethical image based on what they say and especially emphasize and what things they omit altogether. It would therefore make sense to examine how words are translated into deeds and whether airline communications and marketing can be considered truthful and thus ethically correct.

As a final remark, although the researcher has endeavored to observe and record results and observations as objectively and as far as possible from the research subject throughout the research, the research and its results may have been influenced by the researcher's own ethical values. It has been proven that when conducting qualitative research, the researcher's own attitudes and values always influence the interpretation of the research topic and thus full objectivity is impossible to achieve (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 17).

## 8 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study has been to examine the purpose of an airline company and the legitimacy strategies used to support that purpose. The aim of the study was to obtain more information on the themes that airlines form the purpose of the company, but also on how to build an image of the general acceptability of air traffic, i.e. legitimacy. The purpose and legitimacy of the airlines were analyzed at the text level through critical content analysis through which it was also possible to focus on the institutional ways prevailing in the organizations. In addition, due to its legitimacy and purpose, the research involves related ethical aspects of air transport. All the material in the study had been collected from the websites of airlines of Nordic origin, so the results focused specifically on the companies own voice and point of view.

The corporate purpose of the airlines was first examined in the study on the basis of a previous study using critical content analysis as a method. Communicating the company's purpose to stakeholders is relevant to the company's operations, so the airline's purpose was thought to be well constructed in the textual content of websites targeted at different stakeholders. The study highlighted four themes on which the purpose of airlines can be considered to be built, and these were.

In this study, the theoretical framework consisted of two parts which were institutional theory and the related concept of legitimacy. Based on institutional theory it is seen that legitimacy is vital to a company's existence. It can therefore be concluded in this study too that maintaining legitimacy is the most important aspect for the continued operation of airlines. The study of legitimation strategies succeeded in obtaining answers to how the image of the acceptability of airlines' operations in society is constructed. Legitimation strategies also appear in speech and texts, so they were searched on the same online material as topics related to the purpose of the company.

For each upper category or theme found in the content analysis, two or more supporting legitimation strategies were found on which the justification of purpose was based. This study also identified three new legitimation strate-

gies, which were numbering, exemplification, and accountability. However, these could be considered as sub-strategies to the generally identified legitimation strategies. The themes related to the purpose of the company found in the study or the strategies used to legitimize the purpose are not the only ones that exist, but other smaller ones can be found. However, the themes or legitimacy strategies identified in this study provide a comprehensive picture of the specificities of airlines. After all, the corporate purpose of the airline company were extremely similar and an indication of how institutionalized the airlines are with each other. There were no major differences between the corporate purposes of the airlines. The biggest differences were related to the means by which the purpose was justified.

The legitimacy strategies used by the airlines differed only slightly. The rationalization strategy was used particularly strongly for all airlines, citing the general importance of air transport through infrastructure, but also justifying the airline's own superiority over competitors, for example through prices or services. Rationalization also occurred when the airline spoke about its own sustainability actions and strategies. The study identified numbering as a sub-strategy for rationalization, which was very much used by airlines to support legitimacy. However, it was very clear from the research results that moralization often occurs at the same time as rationalization, so it also occurred when airlines talked about, among other things, the impact on employment and, of course, all aspects of sustainable development and climate. The accountability sub-strategy identified in the study was considered to be below moralization, as the transfer and assumption of responsibility is based on moral foundation.

With rationalization and moralization legitimation strategies, an authorization strategy often intertwined. Authorization occurred both in connection with the identification of the airline, but also in connection with various climate measures and agreements. Under the authorization, the sub-strategy exemplification, which was used by airlines to set an example within the industry, for example in relation to the environment, was identified. Normalization appeared in every text as a built-in strategy throughout the text. The normality, necessity, and inevitability of flying were emphasized on several occasions, especially as airlines talked about themselves and the general importance of flying to the world. The least represented legitimation strategy was narratification. Narrative was only seen when airlines talked about their history or wanted to associate themselves, for example, in the case of Norwegian, with Nordic heroes under their own brand.

During the study, it was particularly interesting to consider whether or not air transport and airline operations were generally considered legitimate in the light of current information. Airlines, of course, strive to create the most legitimate image of their own corporate purpose and to give the impression that air transport is institutional. Airlines legitimize their own purpose in a very diverse and strong-handed way, despite the fact that the continuation of their operations has not been directly threatened at any level, especially by states or legislation. However, elsewhere in society and by various third sector actors, the

performance of airlines as such has been increasingly questioned, especially in the 21st century. It can be concluded from this that, at least, airlines no longer have a self-evident position in society, which is why airlines invest heavily in building legitimacy. Airlines and air transport are not taken for granted almost everywhere in society, but still the activities of airlines can be considered generally legitimate.

This study, in the target texts of the airlines' websites seeking to influence the institutionalization of airline operations. Airline operations have been almost the norm in modern society, but the current climate debate has begun to destabilize it. If airlines were fully institutionalized, they would be taken for granted throughout society and possible alternatives would not be considered or even desired. Efforts have been made to create a rational myth about the importance of air travel. Recourse to a rational myth is not always the most sensible solution, but is mainly aimed at underpinning the legitimacy of the organization. It is therefore possible to consider whether the activities of airlines are genuinely as relevant to society as its operators suggest.

It was precisely the legitimacy of airlines and its maintenance that raised an ethical perspective in the study. This is justified by the fact that legitimacy is very much linked to society's ethical values and that the conscious harm caused by air transport is a "matter for all citizens", to which it would be good to involve as many actors as possible. Although there are also at least partially substitutable alternatives to air transport and its very serious disadvantages to the environment are well known, the operation of airlines is still fully permissible and can be considered to be well institutionalized.

The communication of airlines on development and social responsibility was particularly prominent. Environmental issues and their integration into the strategy have a significant impact on the future of the world, and companies are in a position where they have a duty and the opportunity to act more socially responsible than before. This study concretely revealed that nature and sustainable development have not really been involved in business development, but that many other values have driven past them and it is only recently that the problem has begun to become more widespread. The study raised the assumption that the common good is still not at the heart of the action, although change has taken place. The change that has already taken place has meant that airlines have had to reshape their own strategies in order to retain their right to operate in society in the current way and have radically begun to prop up legitimacy through stakeholder communication.

As the study focuses only on the airlines' own voice on the purpose and legitimacy of the company, the way in which stakeholders perceive the purpose or legitimacy of the airlines is left out of the results. On the basis of the results, it is also impossible to assess whether the purpose and, for example, the goals communicated to the outside can really be seen in the implementation of the practice. The actions of airlines are considered legitimate, at least for the time being, but is the image given by the airlines themselves of the effectiveness, benefits or success of their actions realistic. It would be relevant to have more

information and research around this topic. It would also be important to consider this through the ethics of airline marketing and communications management. What kind of use of legitimacy strategies and presentation of things can be considered ethically correct and not, for example, misleading to stakeholders.

Based on the results and conclusions of this dissertation, practical applications can be made from the perspective of company success. The study has shown that the legitimacy of a company is vital for the company to continue to operate, so the company's purpose must be in line with society's expectations. In other words, those companies that are able to respond to and adapt to the changing needs of stakeholders and society have the longest success in business. Companies should therefore focus their strategy on clarifying the purpose, but also on implementing it inside and outside the organization. For this reason, communication management plays an extremely important role in maintaining the legitimacy of companies. Managing communications and implementing them in the right way will help build a bond with stakeholders, maintain legitimacy, and strengthen relationships with external actors. A clear purpose integrated into the communication supports the legitimacy of the company. Communication management has a particularly important role to play, especially in the context of instant messaging in modern society, as in the face of a crisis of legitimacy, communication is the only way to correct and restore a company's legitimacy. For this reason, it is important to integrate crisis communication expertise into business strategies in particular.

An interesting addition to the study was that the material was collected during 2020, when the global coronavirus pandemic also began and continued throughout the year, radically changing the scope of operations of airlines and the volume of air traffic. With the coronavirus, the importance of air transport in many sectors began to be weighed down by the compulsion of circumstances. However, the covid-19 crisis appeared surprisingly little on the airlines' websites, except in those sections where there was talk of regulations, amendments or compensation for passengers. Norwegian was the only airline that said the coronavirus pandemic changed its strategy radically, reforming its entire operations. Thus, the coronavirus was not taken into account in the analysis as it was not considered to affect the current purpose of the companies. However, it is likely to have a significant impact on legitimacy and this will open up great potential for further research ideas.

In doing this research, combining research on the purpose and legitimacy of a company proved to be an extremely interesting and rewarding research topic. This study was considerably limited and influenced by the fact that the study focused on the purpose and legitimacy of the airline company. It would make sense to produce further research on the purpose of a company in different corporate contexts and thereby further explore its features and how the purpose of a company has been implemented in different companies and has it been successful, and also whether there have been perceptible benefits. Research on the purpose of a company can well be applied to other theories and

different industries as well as research methods. In particular, from the point of view of communication management, it would be important to get more information about how well-communicated the purpose of the company has contributed to the company's operations and what means of communication are best to communicate the company's purpose.

Legitimacy research, on the other hand, could be applied to research on other modes of transport, such as private cars. Of particular interest in the study of different modes of transport is the variability in the amount of their emissions and the burden on the environment and its implications for their legitimacy. Of the airlines, it would also be particularly interesting to examine separately fully or partially state-owned airlines and their legitimacy, and how state ownership affects their level of institutionalization and legitimacy strategies. It could also be interesting for further research to study the ideological basis of the different modes of transport and how organizations try to correct their legitimacy after a legitimation crisis.

If, and as is to be expected, the results of research on the adequacy of the world's natural resources and the deteriorating state of the climate are true, the whole business community will have to reflect on its values with all the world's communities and thus make radical changes in all its activities. It would be important to note that the purpose of a company should be to give the company the right to act in its community and not to take environmental and social values for granted, as they inevitably have an impact on all individuals but also on the companies themselves. It is therefore conceivable that the corporate purpose thus has a significant opportunity to play an important role in the way companies operate and thus the future of the whole world. To make this possible, communication management and the implementation of strategies in organizations is playing a particularly important part.

Finally, in the business world of the future, those actors who are able to identify and respond to the wishes of their stakeholders and know how to anticipate a changing world will be most successful. In addition to the company's own responsibility, it is important to be able to communicate these responses to stakeholders correctly and to be able to act effectively even in crisis situations. The climate challenges of modern society are likely to cause tougher laws and pressure on companies from society, and then pre-prepared companies are the ones to survive change. Only by adapting to a changing world can the most far-reaching result be achieved.

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