

Louvain School of Management

How does the application of the Golden Circle contribute to shape the organizational identity of an international company?

Case study: La Marzocco.

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Declaration Regarding AI Tool Usage in Master's Thesis

During the preparation of this master's thesis, the author utilized ChatGPT and DeepL for the following purposes:

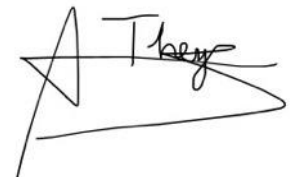
- Certain sections of this thesis were reviewed for syntax, spelling, and grammar, and some parts were reformulated with the assistance of AI. English is not the author's native language.
- Synonyms were occasionally sought to ensure the text was more suitable for academic writing.

After using ChatGPT and DeepL, the author diligently reviewed and edited the content produced by the tools. Full responsibility is taken by the author for the content presented in this thesis.

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Tuesday, August 13, 2024

Alizée Theys,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alizée Theys'. The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial 'A' and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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1 General introduction

“You can learn a technique, but passion is cultivated through dedication, love, pride and respect in your work” (La Marzocco, 2024). These words, spoken by Piero Bambi, the son of La Marzocco’s founder, illustrate the importance of the search for meaning that transcends technical skills to reach the identity dimension of professional experience. Indeed, this quest touches the very core of what motivates individuals to fully engage in their work.

The concept of organizational identity, while widely discussed in the literature, is often explored without considering its intrinsic relationship with organizational culture. As Hatch (2010) points out, most researchers in organizational identity tend to downplay or completely overlook the role of organizational culture. This thesis proposes to study organizational culture and identity jointly, viewing culture as the context within which identity is constructed and transmitted through the use of artifacts (Hatch, 2010). As Heersmink (2023) highlights, while the relationship between artifacts and cognitive functions for problem-solving has been extensively explored, the ways in which these artifacts contribute to shaping or expressing cultural identities remain under-theorized. This thesis aims to offer a new perspective on the use of artifacts, not only as cognitive tools but also as essential vectors in the construction of organizational identity.

This paper primarily focuses on the internal dynamics of organizations, specifically how interactions among members, their adoption of artifacts, and their engagement with the company's values contribute to the creation of a collective identity. This perspective allows for a deeper understanding of how organizational identity is formed, evolves, and consolidates to withstand external pressures and foster alignment among members around a common goal. The choice of an international context for this study is particularly relevant. International organizations, by their very nature, operate in multicultural environments where values, beliefs, and practices can vary considerably from one country to another. This presents unique challenges for identity construction, as the organization must not only create a coherent identity but also ensure that it is aligned across its various branches and cultures. This international context provides an opportunity to analyze the role of artifacts as tools for transmitting organizational values and as bridges between diverse cultures for facilitating the creation of a collective identity that transcends cultural differences.

Then, this thesis aims to analyze Simon Sinek’s Golden Circle, a model that structures organizational communication around three key questions: “Why?”, “How?”, and “What?”

(see Appendix 1). It is suggested as a potential tool for identity construction within organizations. Although the Golden Circle is recognized for its ability to clarify and align values and actions, its role as an identity artifact in an international context has not yet been formally established. By starting with the “Why?”, it proposes an approach that not only motivates members of the organization but could also serve to anchor their collective identity around a shared vision. To test this hypothesis, we will conduct a case study on La Marzocco, an international Italian company renowned for its artisanal espresso machines. Since 2014, La Marzocco has integrated the Golden Circle into its management strategy to maintain a coherent and aligned identity across its various international branches. This situation offers a unique opportunity to observe how the Golden Circle can be used to harmonize the internal dynamics of the organization and contribute to the construction of an organizational identity.

Thus, the objective of this thesis is twofold: first, analyze the role of artifacts in identity construction within organizations, and second, evaluate whether the Golden Circle can indeed be considered an identity artifact. This work will provide new insights into the potential of identity artifacts and the challenges of managing identity in an international context. To this end, we will explore the following research question: *How does the application of the Golden Circle contribute to shape the organizational identity of an international company? Case study: La Marzocco.*

To answer this question, this thesis adopts an exploratory approach centered on the case study of La Marzocco. We will begin with a literature review that examines the relationships between organizational culture and identity, particularly in an international context. This review will allow us to better understand the challenges and internal dynamics associated with building a coherent organizational identity in a multicultural environment. We will then focus on the role of storytelling and artifacts in identity construction, particularly Simon Sinek’s Golden Circle, to evaluate whether it can be considered as an identity-building artifact. Next, we will detail the qualitative data collection methodology for our research. Semi-structured interviews with executives from various branches will be conducted to gather empirical data on the impact of the Golden Circle on organizational identity. We will then discuss these findings, identify opportunities and limitations, and formulate a conclusion to address our research question.

2 Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review aims to establish a theoretical framework that presents the key concepts relevant to this thesis, which focuses on organizational identity and the application of Simon Sinek's Golden Circle within an international company, La Marzocco.

We will begin by exploring the dynamics between organizational culture and identity, two concepts that are often intertwined and difficult to differentiate in academic literature. This exploration will provide the foundation for understanding the internal processes involved in organizational identity construction, specifically how individual identities interact and converge to form a collective identity that eventually becomes institutionalized within the organization.

Building on this framework, we will address the challenges faced by international companies in the construction of their identity. We will analyze the strategies these companies can employ to overcome such challenges and maintain a consistent alignment across their various branches. In this regard, we will introduce the concepts of sensemaking and sensegiving to explain how organizational members interpret and communicate the organization's vision and values. The role of leaders in this identity-building process will also be discussed, with an emphasis on their ability to guide and inspire members through narrative practices such as storytelling.

Finally, we will delve into Simon Sinek's Golden Circle, a concept that has been recognized in the literature as a powerful tool for communicating identity across various contexts. We will evaluate how this tool can be leveraged as an identity-building artifact in an international setting, comparing it to the theoretical concepts previously discussed. These sections of the literature review will ultimately lead us to the central research question: *How does the application of the Golden Circle contribute to shape the organizational identity of an international company? Case study: La Marzocco.*

2.2 Culture and organizational identity: dynamics and interactions

In organizational literature, it is often challenging to draw a clear distinction between organizational identity and organizational culture (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). There exist multiple definitions of culture and identity, each shaped by different thought currents and theoretical perspectives (Abdelwahed & Antit, 2016). Hatch (2010) explains that researchers in organizational identity tend to underestimate or neglect the importance of organizational

culture. Although it is essential to distinguish between them, this difficulty stems from their interdependent nature, as they are frequently used to define each other (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). In the context of our study, it seems essential to analyze both the dynamics of organizational culture and organizational identities as a starting point to understand how an organization defines itself, perceives itself, and interacts with its members and environment.

2.2.1 The dynamics of organizational culture

Schein's (1985) model of culture

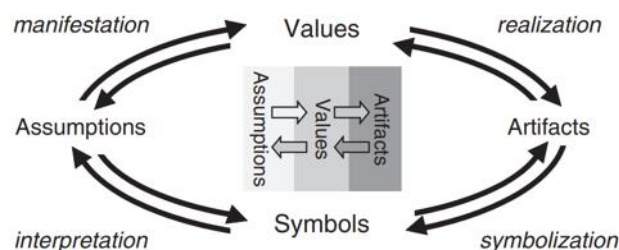
To begin this section, we refer to Edgar Schein's (1985) definition of organizational culture, which is widely used in the literature. According to Schein (1985), organizational culture is: “*a pattern of basic assumptions invented, discovered, or developed by a given group, as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, is to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.*” Schein (2006) sees culture as a learning process, as it arises from interactions between individuals.

According to his theoretical model of organizational culture, these basic assumption patterns are present in organizations at three different levels (Schein, 1985, see Figure 1). On the surface, artifacts are tangible manifestations that reflect the organization's values (Autissier et al., 2018b). These can include physical artifacts such as logos, office design, and clothing; behavioral artifacts such as rituals, ceremonies, and traditions; and verbal artifacts like anecdotes, specific jargon, and symbolic narratives (Hatch, 1993). Then, values define what matters to the organization's members and determine what is acceptable or unacceptable within the company (Autissier et al., 2018b). According to Vandangeon-Derumez (2017), these values can only fully exist if they are socially validated, creating shared beliefs. Lastly, basic assumptions are deeply rooted beliefs that unconsciously influence the perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of organization's members (Vandangeon-Derumez, 2017). Unlike values and behavioral norms, which can be discussed and revisited, these assumptions are considered given and are not consciously questioned. According to Schein (2006), culture unfolds from invisible basic assumptions to visible artifacts, through behavioral norms and recognized values within the organization.

Hatch's (2010) model of culture

Hatch (2010) expanded Schein's model and presents culture as a more dynamic process depicted as a continuous circle, adding a new component to the model: symbols (see Figure 1). While Schein views symbols as artifacts, Hatch distinguishes between artifacts as tangible manifestations and symbols as meanings associated with these artifacts (Hatch, 2010). Hatch's model describes processes in which assumptions, values, artifacts, and symbols continuously interact and evolve. She identifies several key processes such as manifestation, realization, symbolization, and interpretation (Hatch, 2010). Manifestation involves transforming intangible assumptions into recognizable values, thereby influencing the perceptions and expectations of organization members. Realization converts these values into tangible artifacts such as organizational structures or visual symbols. Symbolization enriches these artifacts with additional meanings, extending beyond their tangible form to include subjective interpretations and specific contexts. Finally, interpretation enables the creation of retrospective and prospective meanings of symbols, contributing to maintain or redefine the organization's fundamental assumptions (Hatch, 1993).

Figure 1 Edgar Schein's model is shown in the center as a reference point. Adapted from Hatch, 1993; Schein, 1985.

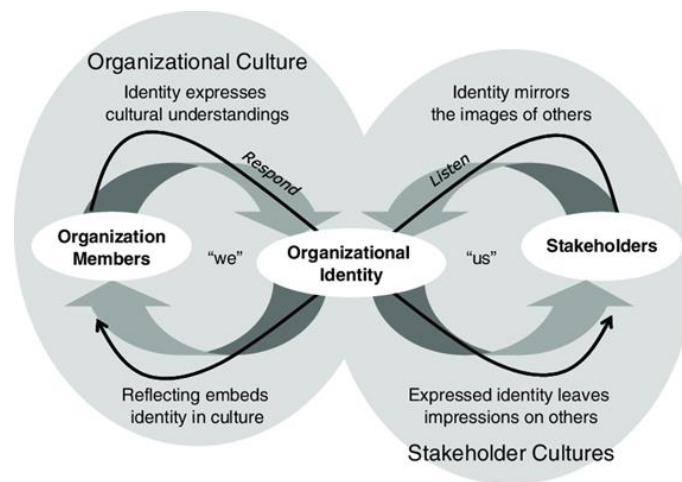


However, this model does not account for how external influences integrate into and change organizational culture. Although our analysis primarily focuses on internal dynamics, it is necessary to recognize that the organization is inevitably shaped by external factors. Ignoring this interaction would limit our understanding of the forces and contexts that influence and transform the organization as a whole. By integrating a perspective that encompasses both internal and external dynamics, we can better grasp the complexity and ongoing evolution of organizational culture. To this end, it appears important to explore the Hatch and Schultz's model (2002) of organizational identity dynamics in the next section. This model will also help us understand the interdependence between the concepts of culture and organizational identity.

2.2.2 The dynamics of organizational identity

Organizational identity, according to Hatch and Schultz's (2002) model, is viewed as a dynamic phenomenon emerging from the interaction between the organizational culture developed within the organization and the external images provided by stakeholders. We define organizational identity as *"a dynamic set of processes by which an organization's self is continuously socially constructed from the interchange between internal and external definitions of the organization offered by all organizational stakeholders who join in the dance"* (Hatch & Schultz, 2002).

Figure 2 Adapted from Hatch & Schultz, 2002.



On the left side of the model, organizational culture is the deeply rooted context that shapes, expresses, and projects organizational identity outward (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). According to these authors, organizational culture sets the context by providing symbolic elements and basic assumptions which enable members of the organization to develop their own collective identity or in other words to form their "we" in response to the "us". On the other side, stakeholders generate representations of the organization based on its perceived image and then share these representations with the organization's members. Thus, the "us" represents the collective identity perceived and constructed by the organization's members using the image and the perceptions provided by external stakeholders. Members, through this feedback on identity, gain insight into how "we" are perceived by others (Hatch, 2010).

The authors outline four processes that link organizational identity to culture and image (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Mirroring and impression relate to the connection between identity and image, while reflection and expression connect identity to culture. These four processes

together facilitate an understanding of how organizational identity is created, maintained, and transformed (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Indeed, organizational identity emerges through a continuous dialogue between the “we” and the “us”, which triggers processes of listening and responding. Specifically, the listening process occurs when the identity perceived by stakeholders (mirroring) is communicated to the organization’s members, who then reflect on this feedback through the lens of the organization’s culture (reflection) (Hatch, 2010). The members’ reflections on their identity are influenced by Schein’s basic assumptions and the prevailing values within the organization (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Therefore, organizational culture acts as a filter, shaping the meanings that stakeholder images convey to the organization.

The response process involves members of the organization using “*cultural material*” to communicate the organizational identity to stakeholders (expression), who then form their own impressions based on the meanings received from the organization (impression) (Hatch, 2010). Hatch & Schultz (2002) highlight the role of artifacts, which become symbols when they are imbued with deep cultural meanings and evolve through internal and external interactions. These artifacts serve as symbolic vehicles for expressing organizational identity, illustrating how the organization defines itself and is perceived (Hatch & Schultz, 2002).

These dynamics of organizational identity illustrate how cultural and identity influences shape an organization’s continuous adaptation to its environment (Hatch, 2010). They show how stakeholder perceptions impact organizational members, thereby affecting the construction and revision of collective identity. This model is particularly relevant for this research as it underscores the complexity faced by the international companies in maintaining coherence across their various branches, each one influenced by specific stakeholder perceptions. We will delve further into these challenges in the following literature review.

Having examined the dynamics of identity and organizational culture that influence and transform the organization as a whole, we now shift our focus to the internal definitions of the organization, which are central to our research. Although Hatch & Schultz (2002) offer valuable insights into the context in which organizational identity forms and projects outward, their model focuses exclusively on an institutionalized and shared organizational identity. It does not address the internal mechanisms by which members construct this identity, which is essential for understanding how the organization defines itself. We will explore this phenomenon in the following section.

2.3 Constructing organizational identity within the organization

The construction of identity within organizations is a complex and dynamic process through which individuals define and integrate who they are within their professional environment (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). According to Ashforth et al (2011), the construction of organizational identity is influenced by both objective elements, such as the tangible aspects of the company's mission and vision, and subjective elements, including values and shared beliefs. Again, this definition emphasizes the cultural context in which identity is shaped (Hatch & Schultz, 2002).

Ashforth et al (2011) views identity as *the central and distinctive characteristics of an entity, whether individual (Who am I as an individual?), collective (Who are we as a collective?), or as members of a collective (Who am I as a member of a collective?)*. These authors analyze organizations as systems of interactive identities, which they refer to as “*nested identities*” (Ashforth et al., 2011). Each level, whether it be a team, a department, or the organization, possesses its own identity. These identities are nested within each other, as the identity of a team is influenced by its members’ individual identities, just as the organizational identity is influenced by the identities of the teams that compose it. When applied to international businesses, the global identity of the company is therefore influenced by each branch of the organization. These interactions form a complex network of identities that contribute to shaping the organization's unique character (Ashforth et al., 2011).

According to him, each individual and group identity within the organization contributes to the formation of an institutionalized organizational identity, the one we find in Hatch and Schultz's model (2002). For Ashforth et al (2011), identity construction begins with the individual and their cognitions (“I think”), where each member of the organization develops a personal understanding of who they are and what the organization represents to them. This evolves into shared cognitions as members interact and communicate with each other. These interactions reinforce a shared understanding, allowing members to develop a common mental model of the organization’s identity (“We think”). This collective identity becomes institutionalized within the organization when the shared principles and values are integrated into management routines and practices (Ashforth et al., 2011). It becomes a “*self-referential for the collective*” (Pratt, 1998) or an enduring objective reality (“It is”), independent of the individuals comprising the organization. This process echoes Schein’s model, which conceptualizes culture as a learning process and social interaction (Schein, 2006), allowing organization members to define who they are and what they do as members of the group.

Moreover, when considering culture as the context in which identity is shaped, the interactions among the three layers of Schein's model (2006) help to understand the transition from «we think» to “It is” of Ashforth et al (2011). Indeed, visible artifacts and shared values serve as the foundation for collective discussions, establishing a common reference framework (“We think”). Through these interactions, the values gradually become basic assumptions influencing daily behaviors and reinforcing or transforming artifacts. This cycle creates a feedback loop where basic assumptions and artifacts mutually influence each other (Hatch, 2010). Thus, the cultural context acts as an environment where shared ideas (“We think”) are cultivated and internalized until they become collectively perceived realities (“It is”).

To summarize, collective identity emerges from nested identities, representing a coherent synthesis of the various individual and group identities within the organization. This implies a sense of unity, cohesion, and sharing of common values, norms, and objectives within the group (Ashforth et al., 2011). However, this sense of unity is particularly challenged in the context of international businesses, where maintaining alignment among members across all branches of the organization becomes way more complex (Rodgers, 1991). In the following paragraph, we will examine the various challenges faced by international companies in terms of organizational identity.

2.3.1 Identity construction in international companies: challenges

In an environment marked by the globalization of markets and rapid technological advancements, international organizations must not only maintain their competitiveness (Cœurderoy, 2016) but also cultivate a coherent corporate culture that supports their long-term strategy (Masmoudi, 2020). Our study analyzes these organizations to understand their challenges in navigating this complexity while preserving and strengthening their organizational identity.

As seen in Hatch & Schultz’s model (2002), the dynamics of organizational identity show how the images projected by external stakeholders influence the members' perceptions and the reconstruction of collective identity. When a company operates in multiple locations worldwide, it must contend with different stakeholders (internal and external) from various cultures who may perceive the organization’s identity differently (Rodgers, 1991). According to Rodgers (1991), cultures deeply impact perceptions and judgments, influencing ideas of what is right or wrong or what constitutes acceptable behavior. Consequently, stakeholders may project diverse images of the organization in each of its branches, leading to the emergence of multiple organizational identities within the global corporate identity. Indeed, geographic

expansion strategies can influence the creation of distinct subcultures rather than a uniform organizational culture (Burger-Helmchen et al., 2019). However, as Ashforth et al (2011) mentions with his principle of nested identities, the collective identity of the company must be a coherent synthesis of all its constituent identities.

As explored in Hatch and Schultz's model (2002), the response process involves organization members to reflect on the identity perceived by external stakeholders through the lens of organizational culture. Therefore, the challenge for international companies is to maintain coherence and alignment across all the countries where they operate by establishing a common and strong organizational culture that serves as a foundation for organization members. According to Rodgers (1991), one of the major challenges faced by multinational companies is their ability to communicate a set of shared values, practices, and beliefs across diverse cultures and contexts. An effective solution for managing this diversity is to create a strong and common corporate culture that serves as a unifying framework for all employees (Karjalainen, 2010). According to her study, members of a multinational tend to reject national cultural differences based on a “*universal rationality*”. Karjalainen (2010) refers to this term as a way of thinking and judging that is widely shared and accepted by all organization members, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. This form of rationality creates a common basis for decisions and behaviors within the company, allowing the overcoming of national cultural divisions. She further suggests that, universal approaches, which are considered more neutral, may be better at bringing together differences in an international environment than those that are strongly rooted in a specific national culture.

To create a strong corporate culture when an organization faces cultural diversity, effective communication, both verbal and non-verbal, is crucial to establish and maintain trust (Saeed et al., 2023). According to Rodgers (1991), international success relies on several elements, such as an inspiring vision and high-quality products, but he particularly emphasizes the importance of communication. Clear and coherent internal communication is a powerful tool for enabling all members to understand the company's objectives and their role in achieving them (Rodgers, 1991). This grants quick and effective decision-making, thereby enhancing the organization's ability to adapt to the changing challenges of the global market.

According to Rodgers (1991), leaders are responsible for conveying a clear direction at all levels of the organization. The challenge is that internal communications of the organization vary from one culture to another (Rodgers, 1991). Then, the main difficulty in cultural management is the creation of misunderstandings which, unlike disagreements, are invisible

because no one is aware of their existence. To avoid them, it is the leaders' responsibility to support messages with concrete examples and to explicitly verify that they have been well understood by all stakeholders (Rodgers, 1991). As we saw earlier, artifacts that Schein (1985) describes as tangible manifestations reflecting values and Hatch (2010) views as vehicles of identity, could clarify leaders' messages throughout the organization. While leaders can control artifacts to clarify communication, they face complex challenges when it comes to controlling the symbolization process (Autissier et al., 2018a).

In this section, we have explored the major challenges in the context of our study, highlighting the importance of articulating a strong corporate culture to enable members to share common values, practices, and beliefs. In an environment where international companies must maintain their competitiveness while cultivating a coherent culture, we have identified the need for clear and effective communication to strengthen collective identity and ensure cohesion within the company. In the following paragraphs, we propose to analyze some practices and strategies facilitating communication and identity construction within international organizations.

2.3.2 Sensegiving and sensemaking practices in identity construction

Firstly, we establish a conceptual framework to explore the construction of collective identity through the lenses of sensegiving and sensemaking, particularly within the context of strategic change. This context is of particular interest to us because the internationalization of a company can be considered as a strategic change (Masmoudi, 2020). Gioia & Chittipeddi (1991) define strategic change as a shift in organizational thinking and actions to seize opportunities or address threats. These transformations can impact the culture, practices, priorities, and goals of the organization, which may raise concerns among stakeholders (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). To facilitate the acceptance and implementation of these organizational changes, Hill & Levenhagen (1995) and Gioia & Chittipeddi (1991) highlight the practices of sensegiving and sensemaking with the use of discursive strategies.

During a strategic change, organizations may employ sensebreaking to disrupt existing identities and create a need for identity reconstruction (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016). To address this need, the sensegiving is used and entails leaders articulating and promoting a strategic vision to influence collective perceptions of the organization's future reality (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Simultaneously, the sensemaking, as discussed by these authors, concerns how the internal and external stakeholders revise and interpret information provided by leaders to build a framework of understanding and strategic actions. Thus, sensegiving and sensemaking are interdependent and iterative processes.

Then, Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) propose a four-stage process for helping to rebuild identities and for implementing strategic change. Initially, the leader creates sense by crafting a clear vision around the new reality. Then, they focus on transmitting this newly constructed sense (sensegiving) to both internal and external stakeholders of the organization to ensure shared understanding and foster commitment to the proposed strategic vision. In the third stage, stakeholders engage in sensemaking by attempting to assimilate and revise the meaning of the vision for their own roles and responsibilities within the organization. Finally, the fourth stage involves a return to sense transmission, but this time by the stakeholders themselves, as they respond to the proposed vision by seeking to influence its concrete implementation throughout the organization. This final phase energizes collective efforts to achieve strategic goals while allowing for continuous adjustments through feedback loops between the leader's sensegiving actions and stakeholder revisions. This process becomes more complex when considering Ashforth et al (2011) theory of nested identities. According to him, lower and higher-level identities must work in concert, even as he speaks of identity cascades where a clear organizational identity directly informs and legitimizes lower-tier convergent identities.

2.3.3 Role of leaders in identity construction

Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) emphasize the important role of leaders as «*architects*» of strategic change. According to Haslam and Reicher (2007), organizational leaders are described as «*identity entrepreneurs*». According to Schein (1990), members of an organization identify with the founder and internalize some of his values concerning the organization. When a company constructs its identity, it is undoubtedly inspired by the personality, convictions, and philosophy of its founders (Burger-Helmchen et al., 2019). By inspiration, we mean that the company's identity is shaped under the influence of the leader, who instigates the sensemaking process. He will then initiate the socialization process to harmonize the values and convictions of the members with those of the organization (Burger-Helmchen et al., 2019).

The leader's role also includes redefining existing interpretive frameworks within the organization to align actions with a new strategic vision. Indeed, to develop a new frame of reference, Gioia & Chittipeddi (1991) insist on the necessity of an inspiring vision as a symbol to enable organization members to rebuild their mental models (Hill & Levenhagen, 1995) and align with the new strategic direction. As a reminder, symbols are for Hatch (2010), the meanings associated with artifacts. The vision would then represent a symbolic tangible artifact to convey and clarify long-term objectives to all members of the organization.

To initiate the socialization process (Burger-Helmchen et al., 2019) and inspire others, it is essential for the leader to ask three existential questions (Vas, 2017): “Who are we?”, “What do we do?” and “Where are we going?”. According to Alain Vas (2017), the first two questions concern the company's mission which defines the company's “raison d'être” and its fundamental activities. In other words, the mission concretely describes the organization's identity, its DNA, as it ensures strategic coherence, motivates staff, and facilitates decision-making (Vas, 2017).

The third question, “Where are we going”, concerns the organization's vision. This projects the company into the future by establishing ambitious goals that guide its development (Vas, 2017). According to this author, the vision is a strategic management tool that inspires team members and stakeholders, strengthens organizational culture, and facilitates internal and external communication. To implement it, the leader must demonstrate leadership (Sahut et al., 2019). For Schein (2006), the role of leadership is central in creating and evolving organizational cultures, shaping perceptions, behaviors, and shared values within the organization (Vandangeon-Derumez, 2017). There are multiple definitions of leadership (Masmoudi, 2020). According to Pesqueux (2015), the complexity lies in the fact that leadership is a type of behavior, a set of skills but for Yukl and Becker (2006), a common characteristic across all definitions is the exercise of influence by one person over another to guide, structure, and facilitate the relationships and the actions of an organization (Masmoudi, 2020).

2.3.4 Discursive resources in identity construction

Ashforth et al (2011) insist on using discursive resources to frame and convey the identity. Kuhn (2006) defines these resources as “*concepts, expressions, or other linguistic devices that, when deployed in talk, present explanations for past and/or future activity that guide interactants' interpretation of experience while molding individual and collective action.*” To articulate organizational identity, Ashforth et al (2011) emphasizes the importance of two main discursive resources: narratives and metaphors, which play roles in both sensegiving and sensemaking processes.

Indeed, the use of discursive strategies helps the creation of sense by making abstract ideas more concrete and understandable (Hill & Levenhagen, 1995). “*Symbols mobilize action*” (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Again, it shows the importance of symbolic artifacts within an organization. According to Hill and Levenhagen (1995), discursive strategies help both to develop a clear understanding of the strategic environment (sensemaking) and to articulate this understanding to stakeholders (sensegiving). In other words, they provide “*a common language and communication base within the organization*” (Hill & Levenhagen, 1995).

Then, verbal articulation is a process that goes beyond simple cognition as it allows organizations to express their beliefs and missions in words. It brings stakeholders together around «*a commonly understood goal*» (Hill & Levenhagen, 1995). By creating an interpretable and less ambiguous reality, these strategies facilitate the adoption and the implementation of visions and missions initiated by organizational leaders (Hill & Levenhagen, 1995).

According to Ashforth et al (2011), discursive resources often narrate «*the organization's origins and its preferred destinations*», guiding actions towards a common purpose. In our research, we focus on narratives, specifically on storytelling as a tool to articulate organizational identity.

In contemporary contexts, storytelling constitutes the heart of a company's identity (Durand, 2018b). Companies have become the new storytellers, using storytelling to humanize their brand and forge emotional connections with consumers. For example, IKEA, which began by selling affordable furniture, now tells the story of a company dedicated to improving daily life, transforming the shopping experience into an immersive and family-friendly adventure (Durand, 2018b). Consequently, corporate narratives present values, missions, and visions that resonate with consumer experiences and aspirations. Nike doesn't just sell shoes, but stories of triumph and perseverance embodied by inspiring athletes (Durand, 2018a). These stories are no longer simply top-down (with a narrator and an audience) but become interactive dialogues in which the consumer, now the narrator, actively participates in the construction and evolution of these narratives (Durand, 2018a). This echoes the feedback loop principle described by Gioia & Chittipeddi (1991) between the leader's sense giving actions and stakeholder revisions.

To conclude this section, it has become evident that discursive strategies such as storytelling and the use of symbolic artifacts are powerful tools for helping international companies clarify their communication, strategy, and identity to all stakeholders. Indeed, these tools enable members of organizations to align around common values and objectives, thereby maintaining alignment among all members of the organization. In the following section, we will deepen our understanding of artifacts as tools for identity construction, as they are a central element of this research. Indeed, this literature review does not yet provide a concrete understanding of how these artifacts are applied and used to convey this identity. We will also analyze a concrete tool, the Golden Circle, to assess its potential as an instrument for identity construction.

2.4 Role of artifacts in identity construction

The question of artifacts has recently been developed in entrepreneurship as a management practice (Berglund & Glaser, 2021). What interests us in their work is not their contribution to the entrepreneurial world, which is not our research context, but rather the design approach on which the authors based their study (Berglund & Glaser, 2021). Indeed, their work allows us to consider artifacts as evolving objects contributing to the creation of meaning for the members of a collective. By adopting this perspective, we can deepen our understanding of symbolic artifacts according to Hatch & Schultz (2002), which embody and convey cultural understandings and identity reflections both within internal and external stakeholders of the organization.

Berglund & Glaser (2021) identify three types of artifacts that will serve as the basis for our interpretation. First, abstract artifacts are concepts that structure the thoughts and actions of collective members. They serve as mental benchmarks or theoretical models that help visualize, in the context of the authors, opportunities or problems more comprehensively. Berglund & Glaser (2021) use the Business Model Canvas as an example of an abstract artifact. Then, material artifacts are tangible and concrete objects that materialize an idea or concept. For example, PowerPoint presentations can be considered material due to their tangible nature and concrete use (Kaplan, 2010). According to Berglund & Glaser (2021), material artifacts should enable the transformation of abstract ideas into tangible realities that can be used by collective members (such as prototypes). Finally, narrative artifacts are “*sensemaking devices that are not defined by their materiality, but rather by their ability to relate individuals, objects, and events in meaningful accounts*” (Berglund & Glaser, 2021). They can take the form of stories or narratives used to communicate ideas, experiences, or values. They can also help relate the past, present, and future in a coherent and meaningful way for all members of a collective. Berglund & Glaser (2021) give the example of a pitch and a business plan as narrative artifacts.

These last artifacts particularly catch our attention. As we have seen previously, storytelling and artifacts are both essential in the construction (sensemaking) and transmission (sensegiving) of identity within organizations. While storytelling communicates the organization’s values, history, and aspirations through compelling narratives (Durand, 2018a), artifacts provide tangible manifestations that verbalize and articulate these messages around a common purpose and beliefs (Hill & Levenhagen, 1995). Together, these elements contribute to the construction of a cohesive and resilient organizational identity that guides behavior and promotes alignment with strategic objectives in an international environment.

In the next section, we will analyze Simon Sinek's Golden Circle (2009), already identified in the literature as a tool for communicating identity in an entrepreneurial context (Thomas et al., 2014), supporting learning in an educational context (Gumaelius & Paretto, 2020), and shaping organizational culture by leaders (Jacobs & Crockett, 2021). Our approach aims to determine its potential as an identity artifact in an international context.

2.4.1 The Golden Circle as a potential identity artifact

The objective of this section is to analyze the Golden Circle tool by comparing it with theoretical concepts to determine if it can, indeed, be considered as an identity artifact in an international context.

Simon Sinek is renowned in the world of management and leadership for his ability to inspire leaders and organizations to pursue goals that go beyond purely financial benefits. He is particularly known for his concept of the "Why", popularized through his book "Start with Why" published in 2009 and a TED talk that is among the most viewed in the platform's history (TED, 2009). His book rests on a simple but powerful idea: successful and inspiring organizations are those that clearly communicate the reason they exist before talking about what they do or how they do it.

At the heart of Sinek's narrative method is the Golden Circle, a model that breaks down organizational communication into three concentric circles: the "Why" at the center, representing the reason for being of the organization; the "How", which describes how the "Why" is realized through specific processes or distinctive values; and the "What", which concerns the tangible results like products or services offered by the company (Sinek, 2009). Together, these elements could form a coherent interpretive framework that facilitates sensemaking and sensegiving (see Appendix 1).

For Sinek (2009), the order of reading the Golden Circle is important. According to him, to inspire coherent and engaged action, one must first communicate the "Why" before describing the «How» and finishing with the «What». Starting with the "Why", leaders can articulate the organization's vision and core values. This clarity gives employees a deep sense of purpose, motivating them by offering a reason for their actions that goes beyond mere daily tasks (Hill & Levenhagen, 1995). We have seen that a major challenge for multinational companies is their ability to communicate a set of common values, practices, and beliefs across diverse cultures (Rodgers, 1991). The Golden Circle can help overcome this difficulty by providing a clear and inspiring vision that transcends cultural differences and unifies organizational members around

a common cause (Karjalainen, 2010). Next comes the “How”, which describes the processes, behaviors, and values that enable the “Why” to be realized. In an international environment, local practices can vary considerably, and without a clear framework, misunderstandings can arise and weaken team resilience (Rodgers, 1991). Finally, we end with the “What”, ensuring that every product or service aligns with the “Why” and the “How”. This approach helps the company to maintain brand integrity and reinforce customer trust (Sinek, 2009). The Golden Circle can thus provide a structured guide to align actions and processes with the organization’s core values, ensuring that every part of the organization works together towards the same goals. It would then represent an artifact conveying the organization's values (Hatch, 2010).

This approach reverses the common trend where most corporate communications and marketing start with the “What”, which, according to Sinek, is less likely to generate long-term interest and engagement. He relies on the fact that the most influential companies always operate from the inside out of the circle. It is in this context that the Golden Circle finds its relevance for our research. This tool offers a structured and intuitive approach to clarify and align the organization’s values, intentions, and actions. It acts as an artifact by transforming the abstract concepts of mission and vision into a tangible and coherent story that guides actions and inspires engagement at all levels of the organization (Hill & Levenhagen, 1995).

Sinek illustrates his point by analyzing companies like Apple. With its slogan “Think different”, it sells a vision of the world where innovation and design transform the user experience. This approach to the “Why” is presented as a powerful lever to gain consumer loyalty and employee engagement because it meets a fundamental human need to understand the meaning of our actions (Sinek, 2009). According to him, by clearly describing the reason for the company's existence, organizations can connect with the emotional and instinctive aspects of their audience. This way, leaders inspire their audience not only to understand but to believe in their vision or products. From a narrative perspective, it can be seen as an artefact that facilitate sensegiving: the leader craft the vision (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). We acknowledge also the power of storytelling, as described by Durand (2018a), which humanizes the brand and forges emotional connections with stakeholders. By engaging with the Golden Circle, stakeholders can internalize the organization’s values and mission, thereby contributing to the construction and maintenance of a shared organizational identity.

To continue, Simon Sinek insists on the importance of the balance of the Golden Circle to build and maintain trust, both internally with employees and externally with customers. According to him, a transparent “Why” inspires and motivates, a disciplined “How” reassures regarding the

company's ability to realize its vision, and a consistent “What” provides assurance of reliability and quality. Together, these elements, if followed in the correct order, form a virtuous circle that creates trust through alignment with the organization’s values and beliefs. However, an imbalance between these elements can lead to confusion, distrust, and decrease stakeholder engagement. It can occur when one of these elements does not align with the others, such as a product that does not reflect the company's values or operational practices that contradict the stated mission. That's why it is essential to have a strong and coherent cultural foundation as a context for building the organization's identity and avoiding misalignment (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Indeed, a company that does not know its purpose will tend to resort to manipulation (generic sales tactics) to increase its sales, but this will never create loyalty like inspiration does (Sinek, 2009).

Generally, these companies do not have a clear idea of their “Why”, and according to Sinek, generating profits is not a “Why”; it is the result of the “What” and “How”. To understand how to identify your “Why”, it is essential to draw a quick connection to Simon Sinek's second book, “Find Your Why” along with Peter Docker and David Mead (Sinek et al., 2017). They propose a narrative method to assist individuals and organizations in uncovering their “Why”. Indeed, discovering the “Why” enables the selection of employees whose vision and values align with those of the entrepreneur, which is essential for fostering cohesion and harmony within the team. As Sinek explains, “*People don’t buy what you do; they buy why you do it*” (Sinek, 2009). This principle also applies to employees: they are motivated not just by what they do, but by why they do it. As Ashforth et al (2011) described, each level of an organization has its own identity, or in other words, its own “Why”. To build the collective identity of an organization, it seems essential to know the “Why” at each level to strengthen the sense of unity, cohesion, and shared values. First, the discovery of the individual “Why” is beneficial for employees themselves because it allows them to ensure that they work in an environment where they feel aligned with the company's values. Next, Sinek recommends that teams, as distinct entities within the organization, also discover their own “Why”. As we have seen with Ashforth et al concept of “nested identities” (2011), each team can develop a sub-culture that reflects its own “Why” while remaining aligned with that of the company. It suggests that the “Why” could be also utilized for sensemaking, helping employees align with what matters most to them as part of the collective. The final why that is essential to discover is that of the organization, often linked to that of the founder (Burger-Helmchen et al., 2019). As a reminder, founders are the “*identity entrepreneurs*” (Haslam & Reicher, 2007) who instigates the sensemaking process.

On the contrary of manipulation, inspiration installs the will to act. We do not follow others for rational reasons, but because we feel compelled to do so (Sinek, 2009). Take the example of the Wright brothers, who built the first powered airplane in 1903. Unlike their competitors, they had neither a trained team, nor great industry connections, nor financial support. Their motivation was not the expectation of becoming rich or famous but simply the challenge of making the impossible possible. This devotion was the key to their success and gave them the necessary advantage over their competitors. Therefore, it suggests that the “Why” and its underlying philosophy could be utilized not only for sensegiving but also for sensemaking, helping employees align with what matters the most to them as part of the collective, even in environments where profitability and growth are salient.

Then, Simon Sinek suggests two metaphors of the Golden Circle to illustrate how a company can effectively structure and communicate its vision and values, in other words, as an artefact conveying identity (Hatch & Schultz, 2002).

The first metaphor is to consider the Golden Circle in a three-dimensional way, as a cone. This is used to describe the internal structure of the Golden Circle, explaining how a company's vision flows from top to bottom. At the top of the cone, the “Why” is articulated by top management, guiding every level of the organization towards unified actions and purpose. Descending the cone, we arrive at the “How”, the level where managers translate this “Why” into operational processes and practices that remain faithful to the original mission. They act as the link between the idealistic vision and its concrete implementation. At the base of the cone, we find the “What”, which represents the company's tangible actions and results implemented by the employees. It is at this level that the vision and strategies are directly exposed to customers and the market. The clarity and fidelity of the “Why” through the “How” to the “What” are essential to maintaining the integrity of the initial vision.

The second metaphor is to turn the cone into a megaphone to symbolize how this internal structure should communicate its vision and values outward. Starting from the top of the cone, the “Why” message is projected through the megaphone, and it is the “What” that propels it outward. This metaphor thus highlights the role of the “What”, which represents employees directly in contact with the market. They are, in fact, the company's spokespersons, using the brand's language to address the outside world. Every action, word, and product communicated by the employees carries within them the essence of the organization's “Why”. They play an essential role in how the company's values are perceived and experienced by external stakeholders. This metaphor perfectly illustrates the response process in Hatch and Schultz's

(2002) model where the members of the organizations embody and convey identity using cultural material, in this case, the Golden Circle, to leave positive or negative impressions on external stakeholders.

These two metaphors illustrate the sensegiving function of the Golden Circle as an artefact for crafting the culture. Internally, it structures the alignment of the company's vision, guiding actions from top to bottom. Externally, it amplifies this vision to the outside world, ensuring that the company's fundamental values are clearly communicated and understood. This alignment is essential to ensure that the company's mission remains consistent and inspiring. However, the metaphors fail in taking into consideration the sensemaking function of the Golden Circle. Indeed, according to the literature on collective identity construction, sensemaking is as important as sense giving. Employees are not mere receivers of the organizational culture. They shape it as well by enacting the artefacts proposed by their leaders, such as the Golden Circle and the narratives that it materializes. It is only when considering this sensemaking function that we can measure the importance of the Golden Circle a robust artefact to build identity, so that each employee embodies the “Why” in their daily actions.

Finally, according to Berglund & Glaser (2021), artifacts can be abstract, material, and narrative. The Golden Circle could be abstract as it articulates a conceptual framework for structuring organization's communication and strategy. It can help formulate a clear vision of the company's purpose, core values, and strategic positioning. This tool could also be material, as if it is used as a physical support or tangible element during presentations (Berglund & Glaser, 2021), it can facilitate the visual understanding of abstract concepts like the company's mission, vision and values. Finally, it could also be narrative as it functions as a sensemaking device. Indeed, it helps to tell a clear and coherent story about the company's purpose (“Why”), processes (“How”), and products or services (“What”). This can contribute to represent the organization's identity and vision in an engaging way for internal and external stakeholders.

2.5 Conclusion

This literature review allows us to propose a definition of organizational identity as the distinctive image that an organization constructs of itself through its values, beliefs, norms, practices, and symbolic artifacts. We also recognize that it is a shared perception, collectively constructed by the organization's members as well as its external stakeholders, reflecting what the organization is, what it represents, and how it positions itself in its environment.

When a company becomes international, it faces important challenges, including member alignment, building a strong culture, and managing cultural diversity. Sensegiving and sensemaking practices are essential in this context of change and can be facilitated by discursive practices like storytelling. A potential identity artifact is the Golden Circle, which could serve as a narrative, a material and an abstract support to help build the identity of an international company. We need to test whether this tool could genuinely contribute to the identity construction of an international company to overcome the challenges posed by expansion.

For our study, we suggest the Golden Circle as a potential identity-building tool, helping team members articulate their own perspective, “I think”, and develop a collective “We think” that reflects the shared values within the organization. This process is nonetheless complex because it involves the alignment of sensegiving by managers and sensemaking by employees. Given that our analysis is currently theoretical, it is essential to empirically study this approach. We therefore turn to our case study to answer the following question: *How does the application of the Golden Circle contribute to shape the organizational identity of an international company? Case study: La Marzocco.* To answer this question, we formulated one general hypothesis and five sub-hypotheses by comparing the theoretical aspects and the practical tool of the Golden Circle, which we will empirically test through our case study to confirm, refute, or adjust these hypotheses.

General hypothesis: The Golden Circle is an artifact for identity construction and transmission in an international company.

Sub-hypotheses:

- The Golden Circle allows leaders to craft the vision and mission (sensemaking) and transmit this identity to organization members (sensegiving).
- The Golden Circle allows employees to enact the organizational culture in daily actions (sensemaking) and communicate this identity externally (sensegiving).
- The Golden Circle contributes to align members by providing a structured framework to harmonize actions and processes with the organization's purpose.
- The Golden Circle contributes to creating a strong and unified culture that transcends cultural differences.
- The Golden Circle is both an abstract, material, and narrative artifact.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research strategy: Qualitative methodology

Qualitative research is defined as a “*naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in uncontrolled, context-specific settings*” (Harris et al., 2009). For this study, we chose a qualitative method because our research context, an international company that has used the Golden Circle as an identity-building tool, is very specific and requires an in-depth understanding of human interactions. Indeed, the qualitative method explores the meanings and perceptions individuals assign to their experiences (Harris et al., 2009), which is particularly relevant for understanding the employees' experiences and perceptions related to the implementation of the Golden Circle.

Moreover, the literature review led us to hypothesize that the Golden Circle could act as an identity-building artifact within organizations. The qualitative methodology allows us to gather empirical data to examine how the Golden Circle might shape organizational identity and thus validate or adjust our hypothesis based on the findings (Harris et al., 2009). Just like quantitative research, qualitative research is valuable for validating theories (Harris et al., 2009). We will delve into this point in detail during our discussion.

3.1.1 A Case Study

To conduct qualitative research, we can adopt various strategies to address research questions, each chosen based on the specific objective of the study (Harris et al., 2009). Among these strategies, the case study approach seems most suitable for examining a phenomenon in depth within a specific context (Harris et al., 2009). According to Hamel (1997), a case study “*consists of relating an event to its context and considering it in this aspect to see how it manifests and develops*”. Hogle & Moberg (2014) describe the case study method “*as a qualitative research approach that explores a single case or set of cases for the purpose of understanding the particularity and complexity of a single case*”. In this sense, the case study examines how the Golden Circle is integrated and adapted to the unique context of an international company to understand how this tool contributes to the construction and transmission of its organizational identity.

After conducting extensive research to identify such a company, we were recommended to contact La Marzocco by Peter Docker, co-author of the book “Find Your Why”, via LinkedIn. Docker emphasized that “*They have grown rapidly over the last few years and continue to live the Simon Sinek Golden Circle philosophy*” (see Appendix 2). We believe that the

recommendation of this company by one of the book's authors makes it a particularly relevant case study. Firstly, La Marzocco has evolved over the past decade, transitioning from a family business to a multinational company with global subsidiaries (La Marzocco, 2024). Secondly, after contacting the CEO and CMO of La Marzocco, we gained access to internal documents (company reports, Great Place to Work surveys, workshop materials) that allowed us to assess the company's relevance to our study. Following a thorough review of these materials, our initial project to conduct a simple case study evolved into an analysis of a promising success case. *“The success case studies approach focuses on successful examples of phenomena and examines what is working and how, by describing the example and identifying features that contribute to successful outcomes”* (Hogle & Moberg, 2014). Indeed, since implementing the Golden Circle in 2014, La Marzocco has fully integrated this philosophy, launching various initiatives to create a robust and inspiring corporate culture for other international organizations.

The objective of this promising success case study is not only to demonstrate a potential success but also to provide a detailed analysis of how it was achieved. By studying La Marzocco through this lens, we can gain an understanding of the application of the Golden Circle in a real-world context, offering practical and strategic insights for other organizations seeking to strengthen their culture and identity. We aim to explore the precise role the Golden Circle plays in this story and the extent of its impact.

3.1.2 La Marzocco as a promising success case study

Founded in 1927 by Giuseppe and Bruno Bambi in Florence, Italy, La Marzocco is renowned for its high-quality espresso machines, catering to both professional markets and high-end domestic use. With its 96-year history, the company has earned a global reputation for manufacturing innovative and durable espresso machines, by maintaining its artisanal character while delivering technological advancements to the industry (see Appendix 9). La Marzocco International was established in 1990 through its partnership with Starbucks. However, the company's internationalization truly accelerated over the past ten years with the opening of subsidiaries worldwide (La Marzocco, 2024). Today, La Marzocco employs over 800 people across 10 branches and collaborates with 9 preferred resellers in co-branding efforts, as well as more than 100 resellers globally (see Appendix 3).

La Marzocco is distinguished by a strong corporate culture, rooted in its heritage and focused on quality, excellence, and innovation (see Appendix 9). The company places great emphasis on always putting people at the center of its concerns. This philosophy is about *“working amongst talented people in a gratifying and safe environment where each person can flourish*

and is empowered to become a motor of our growth and an ambassador to the brand” (see Appendix 9). La Marzocco’s corporate culture has been recognized by the Great Place to Work certification, which was awarded for the fourth consecutive year with a Trust Index score of 83% (see Appendix 9).

In 2014, La Marzocco participated in a workshop led by Peter Docker to define its “Why”, “How”, and “What” through the Golden Circle philosophy. Ten years later, this philosophy remains at the core of the company, influencing its practices and organizational culture (see Appendix 5). Since this workshop, La Marzocco has implemented several initiatives to strengthen and disseminate its corporate identity among all stakeholders, demonstrating their commitment to maintaining a strong and coherent corporate culture (see Appendix 9).

Indeed, La Marzocco has held Family Days every two years since 2014, a company convention that brings together international teams in Tuscany for moments of *«closeness, learning, and mutual engagement»* (see Appendix 9). In 2019, La Marzocco inaugurated the Accademia del Caffè Espresso located in its former factory, which includes various facilities such as a company museum, a coffee plantation, research and education labs, and a workshop dedicated to the craftsmanship and production of custom espresso machines (La Marzocco, 2024). In 2020, La Marzocco launched the “People&Culture” workshop, aimed at promoting and preserving its heritage by sharing its history, vision, and values with employees at all levels and interested customers in its international offices (see Appendix 9). In four years, these full-day sessions have impacted more than 150 employees worldwide. The Golden Circle philosophy is at the heart of these workshops. We had the opportunity to access all workshop documents and synthesized the five modules (see Appendix 6), providing valuable data to analyze and address our research question. La Marzocco has also implemented a comprehensive integration program for new employees globally. A week-long orientation in Italy includes welcome meetings, technical courses on espresso equipment, factory and Accademia tours, the “People&Culture” workshop, and department-specific presentations. In the long term, new employees receive ongoing training for their personal and professional development (see Appendix 9).

La Marzocco's corporate culture has become a benchmark for other organizations. Ruffino, a luxury wine brand, benefited from the lessons of the “People&Culture” workshop to discover how La Marzocco shaped and integrated this culture into its daily operations (see Appendix 8). For these reasons, we see La Marzocco as a promising case study for the successful implementation of the Golden Circle. However, this can only be confirmed after analyzing the empirical results.

3.2 Data collection method

Qualitative data can be collected through various methods: focus groups, interviews, observation, etc. (Harris et al., 2009). We chose to gather data via individual interviews as this approach allows us to capture diverse perspectives from collaborators worldwide, which is essential for our study of a phenomenon in an international context. An individual interview is defined as “*an interpersonal encounter that leads to essentially verbal interaction: the data collected are therefore co-produced*” (Gavard-Perret et al., 2012).

We opted for two different interview formats. Initially, we conducted two in-depth interviews involving very general questions that encourage limitless exploration of the subject. Follow-up questions were adjusted based on each participant's responses (Harris et al., 2009). We used this format to interview the creators of La Marzocco’s “People&Culture” workshop to deeply explore the organization’s purpose and the role of the Golden Circle within it. Subsequently, we conducted semi-structured interviews with four employees. This format is ideal for exploring opinions, understandings, and attitudes on a specific topic and facilitating comparative analysis among participants (Gavard-Perret et al., 2012). These interviews rely on a flexible interview guide with open-ended questions, allowing us to obtain detailed information while remaining focused on the main themes (Harris et al., 2009). Given the complexity and richness of La Marzocco’s corporate culture, it was essential to remain focused on specific themes such as the company’s values perception, the vision of the Golden Circle, and the experiences with various initiatives of the company. We designed the questions to encourage participants to use storytelling, recognized in the literature as an effective tool for structuring and conveying identity (Ashforth et al., 2011). Indeed, “*personal stories are greatly regarded in qualitative research since the goal is to acquire insight into people's lives, and this is achieved by individuals telling stories about themselves*” (Vivek & Nanthagopan, 2023). By integrating storytelling into our qualitative approach, we have the opportunity to reveal emotional, cultural, and contextual aspects to complement traditional qualitative research methods (Vivek & Nanthagopan, 2023).

The interviews were conducted in person and in English via Google Meet, recorded, and then transcribed to ensure a complete and accurate analysis. The transcripts can be found in the Appendix 13 of this work. According to Harris et al. (2009), cognitive biases, often unconscious, are present in qualitative research. The most common biases during interviews are social desirability bias, confirmation bias, and the halo effect, which can influence participants' responses and create a gap between their perceptions and reality (Coron, 2020). To

mitigate them, it is important to ask neutral and open questions, structure the interviews to avoid cross-influences, and remain objective. While complete elimination of biases is impossible, considering and managing them before and after the interview can improve data validity (Coron, 2020). Our interview guide can be found in Appendix 12.

In addition to interviews, we will use internal documents (“People&Culture” workshop, collaboration with Ruffino, transparent report) as sources of qualitative data (Harris et al., 2009). These documents provide valuable contexts and additional information about the company, its operations, and its culture, thereby enriching our understanding of the context of the phenomenon studied.

3.2.1 Respondent profile

To select our participants, we applied the snowball sampling method (Harris et al., 2009). During our exchange with Peter Docker on LinkedIn, we obtained the contact details of the CMO and CEO of La Marzocco. Then, they recommended other individuals within the company who matched our search criteria for candidates from diverse cultures and various responsibilities. We began by interviewing the organization’s CMO, Chris Salierno, based in Italy, who played a key role in identifying the organization's “Why” during a workshop with Peter Docker in 2014. His subsequent mission has been to disseminate this “Why” as well as the Golden Circle philosophy throughout the organization. Our discussions with him covered La Marzocco’s history, culture, and leadership, as well as the motivations behind adopting the Golden Circle and the associated challenges and benefits. Next, we interviewed five other mid-management members of the organization: Giada Biondi, Corporate Communications Manager at La Marzocco Italy, who participated in creating the “People&Culture” workshop; David Bise, Director of La Marzocco Home at La Marzocco USA; Borja Agramunt, Sales Director at La Marzocco Spain; Matt Lee, Director at La Marzocco Korea; and Josie Parden, Marketing Manager at La Marzocco New Zealand. This diverse panel of employees will enrich our study by sharing their experiences and perceptions of the Golden Circle, each bringing a unique perspective shaped by their culture and responsibilities within the organization.

3.3 Data analysis method

The data analysis will address our research question by using the empirical data collected from interviews and the company’s internal documents. Initially, La Marzocco was selected as a promising case study based on preliminary analysis. The data collected from internal documents

allowed us to analyze the context in which the Golden Circle was implemented and to assess its impact over the following ten years.

To answer the research question, we opted for thematic content analysis, which first involves collecting the data (Gavard-Perret et al., 2012) and organizing it into a structured corpus (Delacroix et al., 2021). To do this, we divided the data into two separate tables, each structured according to the questions addressed during the interviews. You will find these tables in Appendix 10. This separation is necessary because participants were interviewed using two different formats. The goal is to structure the observations as objectively as possible to quickly find information in the corpus (Delacroix et al., 2021). Once this step is completed, we begin the thematic content analysis. This involves breaking down the raw data into thematic units to clarify what is being discussed in the analyzed excerpt, according to the research framework (Delacroix et al., 2021). In other words, we developed a coding grid that organizes the raw data from the two tables created in the previous step into different categories and subcategories based on identified themes. Four main themes were defined, leading to the creation of eight categories and eleven subcategories. You will find this table in Appendix 11. We adopted a deductive approach, which involves predefining categories based on existing theories and implicit themes discussed during the interviews. This method is known as theoretical categorization (Delacroix et al., 2021).

The analysis proceeds in two stages. First, we perform a vertical analysis, which is a synthesis of the results of each interview, highlighting the unique structure and individual logic of the discourses. The horizontal analysis aims to identify transversally how the different themes and categories are addressed across all interviews. This allows us to identify recurrences and differences between the different interviews (Delacroix et al., 2021). Content analysis is an iterative process as we constantly go back and forth between the analysis and data collection, as well as between the different phases of the analysis mentioned earlier. In the data analysis section, we will compare the results from the vertical and horizontal data analyses to answer our research question. Verbatim excerpts will be used to illustrate and support our analyses as we focused on storytelling.

4 Empirical Part

4.1 Introduction

The objective of the empirical section is to analyze the data collected during the interviews and establish a link between the theoretical concepts and the collected information. We will begin with the analysis of the results, presenting the empirical data collected through the interviews. The discussion will allow us to interpret these results in relation to the existing literature and discuss their significance. Indeed, we will revisit the hypotheses formulated in our theoretical framework and confront them with the empirical results, allowing us to validate, reject, or adjust these hypotheses.

4.2 Data analysis

This section focuses on the analysis of comparative tables (see Appendix 11) to extract the most relevant information from the interviews. Vertical and horizontal analyses have allowed us to explore in depth the implementation of the Golden Circle within La Marzocco.

Implementation Context

The three interviewees capable of describing the context of the Golden Circle's implementation are Chris S., Giada B., and Matt L., who were present during its introduction in 2014. As La Marzocco internationalized, the company noticed a gap between the “What” (manufacturing espresso equipment) and the organization's purpose (building relationships to enrich the lives of others) (see Appendix 4). Matt L. and Chris S. emphasized that internationalization complicated interactions, making it difficult to dedicate time to face-to-face and one-on-one meetings with employees to convey the company's philosophy. Chris S. explains that the founders had a clear vision which they communicated directly to employees, but this connection became strained with internationalization. *“We believe that a company of people who don't embody a founder's mentality risks dragging results and slowing momentum... Because of a lack of vision and understanding of purpose”* (see Appendix 7.1). According to Chris S., the new generations have not known the founders, making it essential to convey the organization's philosophy, as *“if your “Why” decreases, it will drag down your “What””* (see Appendix 11).

Objective of the Golden Circle

Sensemaking by leaders: discovering the purpose and crafting the vision

In 2014, after reading “Start with Why”, the C-Suite met Peter Docker, who introduced the Golden Circle model. They explored the company's centennial history to identify a common

thread: creating positive relationships (see Appendix 11). This reflection revealed that placing people at the center of concerns has always been at the heart of La Marzocco's philosophy. By articulating the "Why", they reinforced their understanding of the organization's purpose, aligning their actions and decisions with this central objective to consolidate a coherent culture. According to Chris S., the only one present at the workshop with Peter Docker, this model allowed them to find a common language to verbalize the actions, spirit of the founders, and core values of La Marzocco. It then facilitates the transmission of this identity to all employees. *"The book allowed us to create, to identify and articulate what we were doing, and then create a process that we could scale as the company grew. So, we can replicate and teach this philosophy to this next generation of employees"* (see Appendix 11). La Marzocco developed a summary sheet of its mission, philosophy and values for each member of the organization (sensegiving). Please refer to Appendix 5 for a comprehensive overview.

Sensegiving by leaders: conveying the Big Picture of the organization

With internationalization, the leaders understood the importance of establishing a structured system to maintain alignment between the organization's purpose ("Why") and the actions and decisions of its members ("What") on a global scale (see Appendix 11, Giada B.). *"We believe culture will be key to La Marzocco's continued success for several generations to come"* (see Appendix 7.4). In 2019, Chris S. and Giada B. created the "People&Culture" workshop, materialized by the Golden Circle and its philosophy, to coach employees on the culture (see Appendix 7). *"This is about creating an emotional connection between the employee, the customer, and the brand"* (see Appendix 7.1). The Golden Circle thus tells the organization's past to build its future. The first module of the workshop presents the tool and the misalignment encountered with internationalization. The second module presents the organization's heritage and coffee culture that helped find the common thread through the years. The third module emphasizes the power of the "Why" and proposes a narrative method to collectively discover this "Why" within the organization. The fourth module defines the organization's values through interactive activities and visual graphics. Finally, the last module reminds participants that they collectively contribute to creating the company's future and underscores the importance of each individual's role in spreading the organization's DNA. This workshop, structured around the Golden Circle, aims to convey the organization's global vision, allowing each participant to internalize and effectively disseminate the company's culture. Through interactive activities and presentations, it embodies and conveys the organization's values and identity, thus consolidating organizational culture on a global scale (as cultural artifacts).

The leaders of La Marzocco have also developed other systems that bring people together, build relationships, and transmit the organization's identity. In other words, these systems illustrate the processes ("How") that achieve the company's purpose ("Why"). The Golden Circle philosophy, centered on the "Why", plays a role in all La Marzocco's initiatives. These systems ("How") can be considered as artifacts that materialize the organization's identity. For example, the Accademia, a historic factory now dedicated to coffee culture, serves as a tangible place to convey the company's values, heritage, and objectives. *"It's a beautiful location that explains in a very concrete way why we do what we do"* (see Appendix 11, Chris S.). Dave B. noted that each visit to the Accademia allows him to understand the company better each time. Then, Family Days, a biannual event, is a concrete and recurring practice ("How") that brings together all members of the organization ("Why"). This event strengthens the sense of community by allowing employees to connect and engage emotionally with the company's culture (see Appendix 11). Presentations during this event use speeches and concepts to convey and concretize management ideas and practices. According to Giada B., La Marzocco's offices and workspaces also reflect the company's values in terms of well-being and show how the company materializes its cultural priorities.

Sensemaking by employees: assimilating and revising the culture

Although the primary objective of the workshop is to transmit the company's culture, it also provides employees with the opportunity to assimilate and revise it. Leaders aim to actively integrate employees into this culture, rather than seeing them as passive receivers. *"La Marzocco is the collective personality of all of us in this room. Culture is our collective personality. And cultivating culture is investing in ourselves as a group"* (see Appendix 7.4).

When we asked about the most impactful aspects of the workshops, Dave B., Borja A., and Josie P., who joined after the workshop's creation, all mentioned Module 4 on values. This module starts by presenting and defining the organization's values, as discovered during the workshop with Peter Docker in 2014. These values such as integrity, impact, curiosity, courage, and celebration, are considered *"the lens, the decision-making filters that help us think, act, and interact"* (see Appendix 11, Chris S.). Understanding these values is essential because they serve as a filter for decisions that support the brand long-term. Matt L. explains *"To make a decision, it's always based on the values of the company. And it doesn't matter how much money it's going to bring if it doesn't benefit the brand. It's always about making the brand stronger"*.

The module also allows employees to connect with their own values and clearly express them. Matt L. explains, *"The activities help us structure and verbalize thoughts we already have in*

our hearts or minds, and make others understand easier with the right words and explanations". This process helps employees see how their personal values align with those of the organization. Borja A. adds, *"if you ask me the values of La Marzocco, I might only mention two, like celebration and integrity, because those are my core values too. Our values are very aligned"*. He continues, *"The workshop was amazing. It helped us understand the company's values better. We had to design our own shield with personal values and things that were related to us. It involved telling people stuff that we had never tell before in public. It helped us to connect with each other."* Dave B. also highlights, *"showcasing our own core values in an exercise was a cool moment to bring individual ideas to a collective idea. It's beautiful to ask yourself why you are here and shows the culture driven by our own motivations."*

These moments refer to the personal values shield exercise, where employees discover similarities and differences between their values and those of the organization. This exercise fosters group cohesion and enhances mutual understanding (see Appendix 7.4). Josie P., during a workshop with Peter Docker, discovered that curiosity, important to her, is also a value of the organization. *"It's helpful to figure out what's driving our team, what resonates with them, and draw parallels. Working with Peter Docker and looking at La Marzocco through this lens was amazing. You need to know your company's values and your own motivations. So, I try to listen to my team and find out well, what are the things that are really important to them."*

Other values underpinning the organization's philosophy in the testimonies. For example, Chris S. and Borja A. speak about the value of community that encourages social interactions. Chris S. says, *"We host events that turn into social gatherings. This open-door policy is a long-standing characteristic of our company"*. Borja A. adds, *"The community is the actual motor that makes us grow every day"*. Borja A. and Josie P. also highlight the importance of the family spirit, focusing on caring for others and welcoming employees as family members. Dave B. summarizes La Marzocco's core value with Piero Bambi's phrase: *"You come as guests and you leave as friends"*. Another embedded value is taking the time to meet. Giada B. explains, *"In over 90 years of history, the milestones were the encounters"*. The moments where Dave B., Matt L., and Josie P. felt the most integrated into La Marzocco were those centered around encounters during Family Days. Josie P. recalls a dinner with the marketing team during these days as a true moment of belonging. Matt L. adds, *"Sometimes people I don't even recognize introduce themselves, and it's really nice to have someone intentionally meet you and say hi."* Dave B. shares, *"I didn't know many people, but Chris took the time to talk to me and to meet me on a 45-minute drive from the factory to Florence, showcasing the power of Family Days."*

These testimonies show that employees have deeply integrated the organization's purpose personally and authentically. The systems implemented by La Marzocco, always centered around the "Why", effectively transmit the vision to all staff. Then, the values described by participants always support the organization's "Why", ensuring alignment with it.

Sensegiving by employees: spreading the DNA

The "People&Culture" workshop aims to create brand ambassadors to generate a multiplying effect. Chris S. explains, *"We hope that we can create a multiplying effect in people and inspire them so that they can go out and inspire others."* According to Giada B., new employees initially follow procedures without fully grasping the company's essence. Over time, through tools and training, they develop their skills and naturally become ambassadors. She explains, *"As you become an ambassador, you will spread the word because you developed a passion for the company you work for. You understand our values and express our culture. We feel our employees are our best ambassadors, and if they feel good, they will reflect positivity when speaking to the market. It's a multiplying effect."*

Matt L. emphasizes the importance of collective contagion to address internationalization challenges. *"We can't always have one person in Italy making this contagious. We have to be contagious together, spreading the DNA"* (see Appendix 11, Matt L.). Borja A. illustrates this ambassador role by sharing his passion for La Marzocco with customers: *"What I tried to transmit to our customers is that we believe in what we do. We believe in better coffee and when somebody is investing in La Marzocco machine, they're getting a product that helps them serve better coffee and that lasts a lifetime. We know that this machine will make their life easier. I always tell everybody that buying a 20k machine is not going to change the quality if you are using bad coffee. You need the best beans available. The worst machine with the best beans you can at least have a decent coffee. But the best machine with the worst coffee won't deliver, and that's something that blows their mind. Once they hear that, they see that we speak genuinely. It's not going to change my life if I sell one or two more machines, but I know it's going to change somebody's life if you share an amazing coffee. I'm sorry because I don't have a stable connection so I cannot share my camera, but you should see my smile right now. It's something that I'm proud of. Super proud to be part of this. It's so special"*. Borja A. has fully integrated the philosophy of the Golden Circle, placing the "Why" at the center of all his actions. Josie also considers herself a cultural ambassador, embodying the organization's values and inspiring stakeholders. *"As marketers, we have the power to influence change and drive brand value through company culture. When others see your vision and join you, it inspires enthusiasm and*

buy-in". Finally, Dave B. views himself as an ambassador contributing to the company's legacy. By understanding the organization's vision through the Golden Circle philosophy, employees naturally become ambassadors, integrating the company's "Why". This allows them to passionately and convincingly communicate the organization's mission to external stakeholders, establishing a deep emotional connection.

Overall, the Golden Circle has left a significant impression on employees, as each can explain it clearly and personally. They have all identified the organization's "Why": building relationships to enrich the lives of others. After describing the Golden Circle, we asked them to clarify its role within La Marzocco. For Jodie P., the Golden Circle creates emotional connections with the organization and inspires loyalty within teams. *"I think organizations that clearly communicate their why are going to build stronger relationships."* It also allows local teams to embrace the organization's Big Picture and adapt this vision to their specific region while maintaining a connection with the company's overall goal. Jodie P. uses the tool daily with her team, while Borja A., Matt L., and Dave B. internalize the philosophy the Golden Circle conveys. For Borja, the Golden Circle verbalizes a true purpose that gives meaning to actions. *"I don't talk about the Golden Circle, but I talk a lot about the why. It's something I discuss every day."* According to Matt L., being aware of the "Why" facilitates recruitment by attracting people aligned with the organization's values. It differentiates La Marzocco from profit-focused companies, creating an emotional connection with customers. This system ultimately generates more revenue by fostering a culture of engagement and loyalty. He adds that the Golden Circle clearly formulates the purpose, making it easier for everyone to understand. Dave B. concludes, *"It's integrated into our culture so much that I don't even think about the Golden Circle."* He explains that the "Why" guides all his decisions and actions within the organization.

Challenges encountered and solutions implemented

Internationalization has introduced new challenges ten years after implementing the Golden Circle. *"Today, we're 820 employees. When I started in 2009, we were 40 employees, so the company has been relatively small for many years."* (see Appendix 11, Chris S.). The current challenge is maintaining the organization's purpose, its "Why", which aims to bring people together and build authentic relationships. Matt L. expresses, *"If we can have more occasions to meet each other in person, that would be much better... That fact for me is very special because I do not feel that with other companies. But with La Marzocco people, I feel that demand in myself."*

Through the interviews, we observed a misalignment between the “Why” (purpose) and the “How” (processes and values). This dissonance is evident in the logistical and financial difficulties faced in organizing upcoming Family Days. Chris S. explains, *“When you're asking me how it becomes more challenging, growing big as a group of 800 now, it's very hard. This year we have to find alternatives because we don't have a location or budget big enough.”* Although virtual meetings reach more people, they do not replace the impact of in-person interactions. Josie P. explains, *“Although we make all these efforts to connect digitally, it doesn't replace in-person interactions, which are irreplaceable. We need to meet face to face... We're growing as a company, and keeping our connections alive is more important than ever.”* Virtual interactions seem less effective in creating an emotional connection with the organization. This may explain why Josie P., who attended the “People&Culture” workshop virtually, mentions it less: *“We attended that in a digital format in New Zealand. It was good, but our team felt we needed more in-person interaction. Online doesn't land as well.”* When asked about the most memorable moments of the workshop, she immediately refers to one in-person seminar with Peter Docker.

Dave B. highlights the challenge of many employees not having participated in the workshops: *“La Marzocco has grown significantly in the last four years. Many new people haven't had this presentation or seen Chris. Repetition and consistency would improve understanding. We need to keep creating ambassadors.”* It is important to continue generating a multiplying effect while establishing authentic relationships, or the creation of ambassadors could be compromised. These challenges raise the question: how to readjust the Golden Circle when the misalignment is this time between the “Why” and the “How”?

To address the lack of interaction, the New Zealand team developed a subculture by organizing workshops with local companies. *“For us, it was valuable to see the “People&Culture” workshop, to show us what the company as a whole was trying to achieve and then augment that locally. We did workshops with our own team in person.”* They also joined a “Diversity, Equity, Inclusion” network to clarify and draft their policies, aligning all branch members with common goals (see Appendix 11). Despite this subculture, they remain faithful to the organization’s overall goals: *“We shared that golden circle from the global team but we put it through the philter of the New Zealand market. It's always a really big priority for us to tell our whole team this is what we're trying to do... We just finished that local strategy day in New Zealand where we focused on defining that, why, how, what. The thing that kept coming up from the strategy day was our relationships. They are so important.”* They have adapted the

Golden Circle to their team while maintaining a consistent “Why” with the organization. The challenge for La Marzocco International is ensuring subcultures remain faithful to this “Why”. Matt L. explains, *“Even the best tool won’t work if the individual isn’t willing to learn or understand the why and how. But with the right individuals, it’s a complete success.”* The Golden Circle tool is nothing without the reflexivity of the individual; it is the individual who must ultimately engage with the tool. In other words, it is the individual's ability to understand, interpret, and thoughtfully apply the tool that gives it its true impact and usefulness.

Other subcultures can emerge in international companies due to cultural diversity and different consumer types. Matt L. explains, *“Some companies insist on their own format for everyone. Korea is Korea. It's not the US, Europe, or anywhere else. La Marzocco says: “You do what you're good at.” We think globally, we do it locally. So, they always respect what we think of the market because at the end, we need mutual trust.”* Ensuring harmony within subcultures requires creating a climate of trust, recruiting individuals aligned with the company’s vision, and clearly communicating continuously the organization’s Big Picture. Dave B. emphasizes that in dealing with misunderstandings arising from cultural diversity, it is important to adhere to the principle of “always putting the salt back in the middle of the table,” a concept from the book *Setting the Table*. This means maintaining a common core of shared values and practices while recognizing and respecting cultural differences. The goal is to strike a balance between adapting to local cultural specificities and preserving a common foundation that ensures unity and cohesion within the organization.

4.3 Discussion

This section will examine the connections that emerged between the analysis of comparative tables and the key points addressed in the theoretical part. The literature review led us to hypothesize that the Golden Circle could function as an identity-building artifact within international organizations. In this discussion, we will revisit this hypothesis by analyzing its sub-hypotheses formulated in our theoretical framework. The aim is to confront our empirical results with what the literature suggests, confirming, modifying, or rejecting the sub-hypotheses based on the observed data.

The Golden Circle allows leaders to craft the vision and mission (sensemaking) and transmit this identity to organization members (sensegiving).

During the workshop with Peter Docker, leaders discovered and crafted the organization's “Why”. According to Alain Vas (2017), the vision is a strategic management tool that inspires,

strengthens organizational culture, and facilitates internal and external communication. This “Why” consolidated the organizational culture by concretizing the vision, mission, and core values that have driven the organization for 90 years. Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) highlight the essential role of leaders, who are considered identity entrepreneurs by Haslam and Reicher (2007), in articulating and promoting an inspiring vision. This approach illustrates Schein's model (1985), which considers that organizational culture develops from shared assumptions taught to organization members. The encounter with Peter Docker around the Golden Circle philosophy clarified the organization's fundamental assumptions into values guiding actions around a common goal. For Ashforth et al. (2011), identity construction begins with individual cognitions (“I think”), where each member of the organization develops a personal understanding of who they are and what the organization represents to them. This process was evident during the workshop, where leaders developed a deep personal understanding of the “Why”. Their reflections evolved into shared cognitions as they interacted and communicated, reinforcing a common understanding of the organization's identity (“We think”).

Once the “Why”, “How”, and “What” were defined, they created a structured system, the “People&Culture” workshop, materialized by the Golden Circle, to communicate its philosophy to all employees worldwide. This sensegiving process described by Gioia & Chittipeddi (1991) shows that leaders attempt to influence collective perceptions of the organization's future reality. The workshop's goal is to transmit the culture and to enable everyone to understand and internalize it, ensuring constant alignment between the three circles of the model. Thus, the Golden Circle acts as a symbolic artifact, concretizing and disseminating the organization's vision and mission, confirming this hypothesis.

The Golden Circle allows employees to enact the organizational culture in daily actions (sensemaking) and communicate this identity externally (sensegiving).

The “People&Culture” workshop, materialized by the Golden Circle and conceptualized by its philosophy, offers employees the opportunity to assimilate and revise the organizational culture. This is related to sensemaking, concerning how internal stakeholders revise and interpret information provided by leaders to construct a framework for strategic understanding and action (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). This perspective is essential for understanding how employees can become active participants in assimilating the organizational culture rather than passive receivers. This process echoes Schein's model, which conceptualizes culture as a process of learning and social interaction (Schein, 2006), empowering organization members to define who they are and what they do as group members.

The Golden Circle encourages employees to reflect, questioning the alignment between the organization's values and their own. In Schein's model (1985), self-reported values are those that employees declare important, while implicit assumptions are ingrained beliefs that unconsciously influencing behaviors. The narrative method and values exercises during the workshop make employees' implicit assumptions visible, helping them understand how these assumptions align with the organization's values. Employees undergo a genuine identity work, as described by Ashforth et al. (2011), asking themselves: “Who am I as an individual?” (reflecting on their own values and individual role within the organization), “Who are we as a collective?” (considering the organization's collective identity and how it manifests through shared interactions and values), and “Who am I as a member of a collective?” (exploring their identity as organization members, integrating personal and organizational values). As a cultural artifact, this workshop creates collective energy and establishes a common frame of reference (“We think”), which becomes institutionalized identity when shared principles and values are integrated into management routines and practices (Ashforth et al., 2011). The Golden Circle embodies the cultural context (Hatch, 2010), where shared ideas are cultivated and internalized until they become collectively perceived realities and integrated into management practices.

The “People&Culture” workshop also aims to create brand ambassadors, generating a multiplying effect by placing the “Why” at the center of all actions. The interviewees all see themselves as organization ambassadors, embodying its values and inspiring stakeholders. By understanding the organization's global vision through the Golden Circle philosophy and tool, employees naturally become ambassadors, integrating the company's “Why” and passionately communicating the organization's mission. This establishes a deep emotional connection with those who receive this culture. The reflection and expression processes described by Hatch and Schultz (2002) are particularly relevant here. By participating in the workshop, employees assimilate La Marzocco's organizational culture values and assumptions (reflection) and use these values to communicate the organization's identity to external stakeholders (expression).

Thus, our empirical findings confirm that the Golden Circle allows employees to enact the organizational culture in their daily actions and communicate this identity externally.

The Golden Circle contributes to align members by providing a structured framework to harmonize actions and processes with the organization's purpose.

The Golden Circle was established to align employees' actions and values with the organization's purpose. According to Hatch and Schultz (2002), organizational culture sets the context on which identity is built by providing symbolic elements and basic assumptions,

allowing members of the organization to develop their own collective identity. La Marzocco's Golden Circle makes this cultural context tangible, enabling everyone to fully understand and assimilate the organization's purpose. Testimonials show that the workshops help employees create emotional connections with the organization and inspire loyalty. The philosophy of the “Why” is internalized by each employee and guides their decisions and actions. Indeed, participants' testimonials reveal the integration of values such as community, family, and connection, which are lived out daily. Furthermore, the systems created by La Marzocco, centered around the Why (Accademia, Family Days, Workshop), effectively transmit the purpose to the entire staff. These systems are perceived as tangible artifacts according to Schein's (1985) theory, materializing the organization's identity. The Accademia, as a physical infrastructure, concretely symbolizes the organization's culture and values. The Family Days, as recurring events, are behavioral artifacts that reinforce the organizational culture through practices that facilitate social interactions and strengthen the sense of belonging to the organization. The philosophy of the Golden Circle is thus deeply embedded in organizational practices.

However, internationalization poses challenges in terms of misalignment between La Marzocco's “Why” and “How”. According to Sinek (2009), an imbalance between these elements can cause confusion, mistrust, and decreased stakeholder engagement. This occurs when operational practices are not aligned with the stated mission, as is the case for the “People&Culture” workshops, which are difficult to organize in person, and the Family Days, which face financial and logistical challenges. If the company can no longer create ambassadors, this could affect the impressions left on external stakeholders, thereby tarnishing its reputation (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). It is therefore essential to maintain a strong and coherent cultural foundation to build the organization's identity and avoid misalignments (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). This situation highlights the need to measure whether the “How” and the “What” remain consistent with the “Why” and to adjust the Golden Circle as needed to address misalignments and maintain a coherent organizational identity.

The hypothesis is confirmed by the observed results, particularly during its initial implementation, which fostered a strong sense of belonging and coherence among employees. However, with the perspective of ten years, it becomes evident that the Golden Circle needs to be adjusted to ensure that operational practices remain aligned with the organization's core mission. Without these adjustments, the risk of inconsistencies emerging between proclaimed values and actual actions could undermine the long-term effectiveness of the Golden Circle.

The Golden Circle contributes to creating a strong and unified culture that transcends cultural differences.

Our case study highlights the complexity faced by international companies in maintaining coherence among their various branches, each influenced by the perceptions of stakeholder and employees from different cultures. By providing a structured framework to articulate actions, core values, and the founders' spirit, the Golden Circle helps develop a shared vision within La Marzocco, thereby creating an institutionalized identity “It is” (Ashforth et al., 2011).

Schein's (1985) definition of culture emphasizes that it is a process of learning and interaction between individuals, which aligns with empirical observations that the Golden Circle helps local teams grasp the “Big Picture” and adapt it to their specific context while maintaining a connection to the company's overall goal. We observed this phenomenon in two instances: first, to address the lack of face-to-face interactions with the global organization (New Zealand team), and second, to manage cultural diversity (Korean team). Ashforth et al. (2011) discuss the concept of nested identities, explaining that each level of the organization has its own identity, influenced by the individual identities of its members and the identities of the teams that make up the organization. This complexity is heightened in the context of international companies, where maintaining coherence and alignment across all branches of the organization becomes a major challenge. This observation is supported by the theories of Rodgers (1991) and Karjalainen (2010), who emphasize the need to communicate an inspiring vision and maintain clear and consistent communication to overcome cultural divides and ensure alignment among members of the organization across different cultures.

To address misunderstandings, Rodgers (1991) points out that leaders must support their messages with concrete and precise examples and explicitly verify that they have been well understood by all stakeholders. The previously described cultural artifacts could serve as these tangible examples. Dave B. adds that the organization operates on the principle of always «putting the salt back in the middle of the table,» a concept that underscores the importance of maintaining a common core of shared values and practices while respecting cultural differences.

Furthermore, Matt L. emphasizes that the Golden Circle tool takes on its full meaning through the reflexivity of the actors, which involves their ability to interpret and apply the tool thoughtfully. The processes of interpretation and symbolization identified by Hatch's model (2010) show how artifacts come to life and become meaningful when contextualized by the organization's members. Simultaneously, the theory of Berglund and Glaser (2021) on artifacts, which they categorize as abstract, material, and narrative, supports the idea that these elements

help structure the thoughts and actions of an organization's members. It is through individuals' reflective capacity to make sense of these artifacts, as highlighted by Berglund and Glaser, that the Golden Circle becomes truly impactful.

In conclusion, while the Golden Circle helps create a strong and uniform culture by offering a shared vision and enabling local adaptation, it must be complemented by continuous efforts in communication and cohesion to truly transcend cultural differences.

The Golden Circle is both an abstract, material, and narrative artifact.

Firstly, the Golden Circle at La Marzocco is an abstract artifact because it allows leaders to identify the central theme of the organization's century-long history, leading to the concretization of the company's vision, mission, and values. This model has enabled the creation of a common language to verbalize actions, the founders' spirit, and thus the “raison d'être” of La Marzocco, thereby facilitating the transmission of this identity at all levels of the organization. Schein (1985) highlights that organizational culture consists of implicit fundamental assumptions that influence members' perceptions, thoughts, and behaviors. This aligns with the idea that the “Why” of the Golden Circle has allowed leaders to transform these fundamental assumptions into explicit values. It can thus be considered an abstract artifact guiding individuals' actions by structuring their thoughts and behaviors around the philosophy of the “Why”. According to Berglund and Glaser (2021), abstract artifacts are concepts that serve as mental benchmarks, thus structuring the understanding and actions of an organization's members. Indeed, the philosophy of the “Why” allows La Marzocco members to internalize the company's “raison d'être” and fundamental values, thereby creating a coherent alignment with the organization's global vision. For example, some employees, such as Borja, Matt, and Dave, live the philosophy conveyed by the Golden Circle daily, guiding their decisions and actions even if they do not directly use the tool. Matt L. emphasizes that awareness of the “Why” facilitates recruitment by attracting individuals aligned with the organization's values. This also allows La Marzocco to stand out from companies that focus solely on profit. Moreover, the philosophy of the Golden Circle has led to the creation of concrete systems such as the “People&Culture” workshop, the Accademia, and the Family Days. These systems are tangible manifestations of the Golden Circle philosophy, translating the “Why” into concrete actions that reinforce organizational identity and foster internal cohesion.

Secondly, we can affirm that the Golden Circle materializes through these concrete and tangible initiatives that embody the organization's vision and values. A material artifact, as defined by Berglund and Glaser (2021), is a tangible object that materializes abstract ideas, thus allowing

concepts to be visualized and concretized within an organization. For example, the “People&Culture” workshop uses the Golden Circle as a visual aid to coach employees on the company's culture. During these workshops, the Golden Circle is presented concretely, enabling participants to more easily visualize and understand the organization's philosophy. By materializing the abstract concepts of “Why”, “How”, and “What” in a visual format, the Golden Circle becomes a tangible tool that helps anchor the organization's values and mission in employees' minds. This helps maintain alignment between the organization's “raison d'être” (“Why”) and its members' actions and decisions (“What”) on a global scale. Moreover, it allows the organizational culture to be materialized by making the vision and mission concrete, and by transforming fundamental assumptions into explicit values. It then serves as a visual “Big Picture”, materialized in the “People&Culture” workshop, to convey organizational identity to all branches of the company, which will use it as a reference to build their own sub-culture.

Thirdly, it is evident that the Golden Circle is a powerful tool that tells the story of the organization and its mission. According to Berglund and Glaser (2021), narrative artifacts are sensemaking devices that connect individuals, objects, and events into meaningful narratives. As noted in our findings, the Golden Circle allows for recounting the past to build the future of the organization, establishing a deep emotional connection with those who receive this culture. Indeed, during the “People&Culture” workshop, participants explore the company's century-old history to understand the origin of its purpose. They also use a narrative approach to collectively discover the organization's “Why”. The sensemaking processes carried out during these workshops encourage the sharing of stories, creating a deep emotional connection between employees and the organization. Participants thus naturally become ambassadors, integrating the company's “Why” and communicating the organization's mission to external stakeholders. In other words, the Golden Circle uses storytelling to clarify and convey the company's “Why”, thereby aligning employees' actions with the organizational mission. This aligns with Durand's (2018) theory, which explains that storytelling is at the heart of organizational identity. The hypothesis that the Golden Circle functions as an abstract, material, and narrative artifact is largely confirmed, as it effectively guides organizational behavior, materializes the company's vision and values through tangible systems, and uses storytelling to convey and reinforce the organization's mission.

5 General conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to explore how the application of the Golden Circle contributes to shape the organizational identity of an international company, using La Marzocco as a case study. Through a literature review and interviews with key stakeholders within La Marzocco, the goal of this study is to provide practical and strategic insights for other international organizations seeking to maintain a coherent organizational identity across their various global branches. To address this research question comprehensively, one general hypothesis was formulated: "The Golden Circle is an artifact for identity construction and transmission in an international company," along with five sub-hypotheses. A qualitative methodology was employed to explore these hypotheses, based on in-depth and semi-structured interviews with leaders and employees from different regions, as well as an analysis of internal documents.

Through a retrospective analysis, we observed how the values and practices institutionalized by the Golden Circle have endured over time and shaped the organization's evolution in an international context. The results of this study clearly confirm the general hypothesis, further validating La Marzocco as a successful case study. The Golden Circle has played a central and decisive role in structuring La Marzocco's organizational identity and transmitting this identity across its various international branches. Its initial objective was to guide the behavior of the organization's members, ensuring a deep alignment between the organization's purpose ("Why") and the daily actions of its members ("What"). As an identity artifact, the Golden Circle embodies and conveys the organization's values and identity, thereby consolidating the culture on a global scale.

The internationalization of the company highlighted the importance of having a structured framework like the Golden Circle to facilitate the transmission of culture and values. The abstract nature of the Golden Circle allows for the conceptualization of the organization's purpose and core values, guiding daily behaviors and decisions, while its material incarnation facilitates the transmission of these concepts through workshops and events. Finally, as a narrative tool, it helps tell the organization's story and maintain an emotional connection with all stakeholders. This narrative role is particularly important in how employees perceive themselves and present themselves as ambassadors of the organization, thereby contributing to the construction and maintenance of a shared identity. In this sense, the Golden Circle has confirmed its role as an identity artifact in the processes of sensemaking and sensegiving. However, it is through individuals' reflective capacity to make sense of these artifacts that the Golden Circle becomes truly impactful.

By enabling leaders to crystallize the organization's vision, mission, and core values, and translating them into concrete actions and daily practices, the Golden Circle, as manifested in the People&Culture workshop, has truly served as a tangible manifestation of organizational culture. This artifact embodies the cultural context in which members first construct their individual identity by helping them understand how their personal values align with those of the organization. This identity then evolves into shared cognitions through their interactions and communications, eventually becoming collectively perceived realities integrated into management practices, thus forming an institutionalized identity. In an international organization, this process helps establish a common language and create deep engagement with the organization's global vision. This, in turn, aids the various branches of the organization in adopting this vision while adapting it to their specific context.

However, this hypothesis requires some adjustments to more accurately reflect the complexity observed. The Golden Circle can face limitations due to the challenges inherent in the company's internationalization. The geographical dispersion of teams has led some employees to participate in sessions online, which has sometimes diminished the emotional impact and depth of the collective experience, both essential for internalizing the organization's "Why." Moreover, the rapid expansion of La Marzocco over the past ten years has revealed difficulties that could compromise the alignment of the Golden Circle's three circles, thereby threatening the coherence of the corporate culture. Logistical and financial obstacles to organizing in-person events, such as the People&Culture workshop and Family Days, weaken the company's ability to align processes and values (How) with its purpose (Why). The fundamental value of encounter, essential for strengthening bonds and bringing teams together ("Why"), is particularly challenged by this growth, which has seen the company expand from fifty to over 800 employees in a decade.

These challenges underscore the importance of continually reassessing the tools and systems in place to avoid potential misalignments between declared values and operational practices. Therefore, for the Golden Circle to fully fulfill its role as an identity vector in an international context, it is essential to recognize and overcome these challenges through continuous strategic adjustments. We emphasize the need for a flexible and adaptable framework to maintain a coherent and strong organizational identity, capable of adapting to the dynamic international context while remaining true to the organization's values and mission.

5.1 Opportunities, boundaries and recommendations

The opportunities and limitations of this study will guide us in developing recommendations to optimize the use of the Golden Circle as an artifact in constructing and communicating identity within international companies. These recommendations are intended not only for the academic community but also for narrative practitioners, such as leaders, consultants, coaches, and educators.

First, our qualitative research presents certain limitations, particularly due to the small sample size (six interviews) and the exclusive focus on executives, thereby excluding employees and workers. This limits the generalizability of the results to the entire workforce of La Marzocco. As mentioned in the theoretical section, for the company's vision and ambitions to be truly integrated, they must be communicated and adopted across all levels of staff. Therefore, to strengthen the validity of the findings from this qualitative research, we recommend supplementing it with a quantitative approach. Harris et al. (2009) emphasize the importance of combining qualitative and quantitative research to fully explore a phenomenon. In this context, quantitative research could validate or challenge the findings from the qualitative analysis by relying on a much larger sample, thus allowing for the development of more robust theories.

Then, our study, which focuses on a ten-year period following the implementation of the Golden Circle at La Marzocco, allows us to assess the long-term effects of integrating this tool on organizational identity and company culture. However, it would have also been beneficial to adopt a longitudinal action research approach to observe the process in real-time as practices related to the Golden Circle are implemented and evolve. Such an approach would enable the capture of internal dynamics and daily adjustments that occur during workshops and interventions, providing a deeper understanding of the mechanisms for integrating values and identity practices. Unlike a study that relies on participants' retrospective accounts, action research would allow for direct observation of how narrative methods influence behaviors and offer a deeper analysis of how leaders have articulated implicit assumptions through the Golden Circle. Our current study does not clearly identify these assumptions, although it is likely that new ones have emerged. By being directly involved in the observation process, we would have been better equipped to understand these implicit assumptions through direct observation of practices and interactions, which represents a major limitation of our work. Capturing these underlying elements solely through participants' accounts is challenging, as they may only reflect what they consider important or relevant.

We also suggest expanding the current study framework, which focuses on international companies, to include the analysis of leadership transition contexts and multigenerational dynamics. It would be particularly interesting to examine how the Golden Circle has supported or hindered leadership transitions, especially in companies like La Marzocco, now in its fourth generation of leaders. Moreover, incorporating the multigenerational factor into the analysis would provide a better understanding of how different generations of leaders interpret and apply the Golden Circle, and how this influences the continuity or evolution of organizational values and practices. This approach could enrich academic research by providing additional insights into managing organizational identities in environments characterized by generational diversity and leadership transitions.

By focusing primarily on the left side of Hatch and Schultz's (2002) model of organizational identity dynamics, our study has explored the internal interactions between culture and organizational identity at La Marzocco. However, we have not fully explored how this identity is perceived externally. Sinek's megaphone metaphor underscores the importance of employees conveying the company's identity to the outside world. Future research could focus on analyzing the effectiveness of the Golden Circle in this transmission, examining how the company's "Why" is communicated to customers and how they perceive it. This would provide a complementary perspective by broadening our understanding of the Golden Circle's impact not only internally but also in external communication.

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