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**Implementation of digitalization and strategy in the wellbeing services county  
Ostrobothnia: Strategy-as-Practice and the perspective of dynamic capabilities**

Master's Thesis in  
Strategic Business Development

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|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>LIST OF FIGURES.....</b>  | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>1. ABSTRACT .....</b>   | <b>4</b>  |
| 1.1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION .....  | 6         |
| 1.2. RESEARCH GAP .....  | 7         |
| 1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION .....  | 8         |
| <b>2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>  | <b>9</b>  |
| 2.1. STRATEGY AS PRACTICE .....  | 9         |
| 2.1.1. <i>Strategy tools as technologies of rationality.....</i>   | <i>10</i> |
| 2.2 CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC TOOLS IN SOCIAL AND HEALTHCARE .....  | 14        |
| 2.2.1 <i>Structural and Legal Barriers .....</i>   | <i>14</i> |
| 2.2.2 <i>Organizational Readiness and Change Resistance.....</i>   | <i>15</i> |
| 2.2.3 <i>Professional Identity and Autonomy.....</i>   | <i>18</i> |
| 2.2.4 <i>Technical and Usability Issues.....</i>   | <i>19</i> |
| 2.3. OPPORTUNITIES AND ENABLERS OF IMPLEMENTATION .....  | 20        |
| 2.3.1. <i>Strategic competence and organizational readiness .....</i>  | <i>20</i> |
| 2.3.2. <i>Scalability and system-level integration .....</i>   | <i>23</i> |
| 2.3.3. <i>Leadership and strategic communication.....</i>  | <i>25</i> |
| 2.3.4. <i>Inclusion and co-development .....</i>   | <i>27</i> |
| 2.4. GENERAL GOALS AND CHALLENGES OF THE WELFARE AREAS' DIGITALIZATION .....   | 27        |
| 2.4.1 <i>Development and distinctive features of digital services in the Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia .....</i> | <i>31</i> |
| 2.4.2. <i>Professionals' experiences and challenges in implementing digital services in Ostrobothnia .....</i>               | <i>33</i> |
| 2.4.3. <i>Residents' experiences and challenges in using digital services in Ostrobothnia.....</i>                           | <i>35</i> |
| 2.4.4. <i>Selected research frameworks .....</i>   | <i>36</i> |
| <b>METHODOLOGY.....</b>  | <b>38</b> |
| 3.1. RESEARCH STRATEGY AND METHODS.....  | 38        |
| 3.2. CASE SELECTION .....  | 39        |
| 3.3. DATA COLLECTION.....  | 40        |
| 3.4. DATA ANALYSIS.....  | 43        |
| <b>4. FINDINGS .....</b>   | <b>44</b> |
| 4.1. MANAGEMENT TEAM INTERVIEWS.....   | 44        |

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 4.2. RESIDENT SURVEY .....                                  | 52        |
| 4.3. PERSONNEL SURVEY.....                                  | 59        |
| 4.4. STAKEHOLDER SURVEY .....                               | 62        |
| 4.5. SYNTHESIS .....  | 64        |
| 4.4.1. Awareness of the strategy .....                      | 64        |
| 4.4.2. Digital tools as enablers and barriers .....         | 66        |
| 4.4.3. Results.....   | 67        |
| <b>5. DISCUSSION .....</b>                                  | <b>70</b> |
| 5.1. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS.....                          | 70        |
| 5.2. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS .....                          | 73        |
| 5.3. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH .....                  | 74        |
| 5.4. LIMITATIONS .....                                      | 75        |
| <b>REFERENCES.....</b>                                      | <b>77</b> |
| <b>APPENDICES.....</b>                                      | <b>82</b> |
| APPENDIX 1.....   | 82        |
| <i>Interview questions used with management team:</i> ..... | 82        |

## LIST OF FIGURES

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Figure 1: Research framework. (Author's own illustration, 2025).....  | 37 |
| Figure 2: Summary of data collection. (Author's own illustration 2025). .....   | 41 |
| Figure 3. Residents' attitudes toward digital health services. (Resident survey, 2025).....   | 52 |
| Figure 4. Factors influencing the adoption of digital services. (Resident survey, 2025). ....   | 53 |
| Figure 5. The digital competence and service awareness of residents. (Resident survey, 2025).....   | 54 |
| Figure 6. Accessibility and efficiency. (Resident survey, 2025).....  | 55 |
| Figure 7. Resident preference for digital channels (Resident survey, 2025).....   | 55 |
| Figure 8. Residents' trust and influence on service development. (Resident survey, 2025).   | 56 |
| Figure 9. Public perception of the wellbeing county's operations. (Resident survey, 2025).<br>.....   | 56 |
| Figure 10. Utilization of digital services. (Resident survey, 2025).....  | 57 |
| Figure 11. The effectiveness of services. (Resident survey, 2025).....  | 58 |
| Figure 12. The role of services in supporting mental well-being. (Resident survey, 2025).   | 58 |
| Figure 13. Knowledge of the Ostrobothnia wellbeing county's strategy. (Personnel survey, 2025).....   | 60 |
| Figure 14. Experience in digital services. . (Personnel survey, 2025). .....  | 61 |
| Figure 15. Evaluate the current strategy of the wellbeing services county of Pohjanmaa: stakeholders view. (Stakeholder survey 2025). ..... | 62 |
| Figure 16. Synthesis of findings: digital tools in strategy implementation. (Author's own illustration, 2025). .....                        | 68 |
| Figure 17. Integration between SAP - digitalization - DC and the public sector. (Author's own illustration 2025).....                       | 71 |

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**1. ABSTRACT**

Digitalization has become a key tool for the renewal, accessibility and effectiveness of social and healthcare services. Digitalization is an inevitable part of every organization, so the introduction of these digital tools and the successful implementation of the strategy become a key theme. Wellbeing areas form a new type of operating environment, where the success of digitalization can be a decisive part of the entire strategy. The study material consisted of three surveys and one interview. The surveys were conducted with personnel, residents and stakeholders, and the interviews were conducted with the top management of the wellbeing services county of Ostrobothnia. The analysis was based on the Strategy-as-Practice research tradition (Whittington, 1996; Jarzabkowski, 2008; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015) and the theory of dynamic capabilities (Teece, 2007). The study aimed to investigate the role of digital tools in strategy, the obstacles and opportunities for using the tools, and the experiences of different stakeholders.

The results of the study show how important support from top management is in the introduction of digital tools, and how central participation and concrete guidance are in the successful implementation of digital tools. The benefits of digital solutions have been widely recognized, and accessibility and efficiency were particularly highlighted. However, the solutions are not without gaps, and the compatibility and usability of the systems in particular pose challenges. Residents' trust was weakened by a fragmented palette, which involved many disconnected service channels,

The theoretical contribution of the study is created when the SAP perspective and the theory of dynamic capabilities are combined with the public sector context. The results show that digital tools do not act as neutral, but as active modifiers of strategy practice and strengthen capabilities. The study also provides practical recommendations that can help management support the successful implementation of digitalization and strengthen the implementation of the strategy as part of everyday life.

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**KEYWORDS:** Digitalization, Strategy Implementation, Strategy-as-Practice, Dynamic capabilities, Change management

### **1.1. Research background and motivation**

In social and health care, digitalization aims to enable even greater effectiveness, availability and impactfulness. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2025) emphasizes in its national goals how important the integration of digital services is in new solutions and in achieving strategic goals. Digitalization is an unavoidable transformation to which organizations must adapt with agility. The Wellbeing Services County of Pohjanmaa is special in this context, as it has, as a new organization, combined social, health and rescue services into one entity. The Wellbeing Services County of Pohjanmaa is also an interesting case due to its bilingual nature, which means that the implementation of services requires effective cooperation between several different organizations, professional groups and stakeholders. However, concrete questions arise in particular about the implementation of the strategy in day-to-day operations and everyday life, as well as the experience of implementing digital tools, which are of practical significance for this study. If digital solutions are not integrated into the daily lives of professionals, they will remain disconnected, and their potential benefits will be limited.

Digitalization acts as an enabler and a tool for achieving strategic goals. Heinäsenaho, Virtanen & Hyttinen (2025, p. 11) emphasize in the report of the State Council how various digital tools facilitate the accessibility of services and generate savings. Implementation is more challenging than innovation plans, as users must accept new digital tools and integrate them as part of their service package. According to THL surveys (Reponen et al., 2018, pp. 7–9; Vehko et al., 2022, pp. 310–311), the use of digital services has increased, but regional inequality and barriers to use are still obstacles to success.

Scientific research related to the topic includes, for example, the Strategy-as-Practice (SAP) research tradition, which sees strategy as an active practice rather than a static entity, i.e. it translates strategy into practice. Whittington (1996, pp. 732–734) discusses the foundation of the SAP field, emphasizing that strategy is not a document or some feature of the organization, but is reflected in everyday life and organizational functions. Jarzabkowski

(2008, pp. 621–624) added how strategy is built in interaction and local contexts, and Vaara & Whittington (2012, pp. 289–290) emphasize that these everyday practices determine what and how strategy is formed. Digitalization is therefore not strategy but rather supports it by introducing new dimensions and tools to make and implement strategy in concrete terms. (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015, pp. 541–552). In the field of welfare, digitalization is an interesting concept, and new digital tools and services create an increased need to study strategy at a practical level. Orlikowski (2007, pp. 1435–1438) emphasizes that technology is not just a tool, but a changing and constantly constructed phenomenon in socio-material practices, which changes its form and ways of functioning. This makes the research relevant both from an academic and practical perspective.

## **1.2. Research gap**

Previous studies have provided insight into the role of digitalization in healthcare. A good example of this is Hospodková et al. (2021, pp. 13–16), who show that the implementation of digital innovations in a hospital environment largely depends on effective change management, engagement and gradual implementation. Similarly, Jeilani & Hussein (2025) point out that the acceptance of social and healthcare professionals and their perceived workload in the change have a decisive impact on the success of digitalization and the adoption of digital tools. The Strategy-as-Practice literature highlights the view that strategy tools directly affect the practical implementation of the strategy (Jarzabkowski, Spee & Smets, 2013, pp. 273–275). Strategy-as-Practice research has developed significantly in recent decades, forming a diverse and interesting research area that combines different theoretical traditions and perspectives on strategy making (Kohtamäki, Whittington, Vaara & Rabetino, 2022, pp. 210–211). These tools give and define meaning and coordinate strategy, but successful implementation depends on how well they are embedded in concrete and daily activities in the organization (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015, pp. 541–552).

However, current research is not without gaps, as Barney (1991, pp. 106–107), for example, early on highlighted the basis of competitive advantage in the resources and capabilities of an organization, and Teece (2007, pp. 1320–1340) has developed a framework of dynamic

capabilities (sensing, seizing, transforming) that helps to understand how organizations adapt in a rapidly changing environment. However, the relationship between digitalization and dynamic capabilities has not been examined in contexts such as welfare areas and public organizations. Jarzabkowski (2008, pp. 623–624) states that the institutionalization of strategy into administrative practices may cause rigidity, and the risk increases especially in welfare areas. Welfare areas are relatively new organizations, and their operating culture and structure are still in transition, still searching for their final form. The research gap therefore arises from how insufficiently the effects of digitalization implementation have been studied in strategic practical implementation in Finnish welfare areas and in this study in the Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia. Also, understanding how different groups of actors, such as staff, residents, management team and stakeholders, experience the role of digital tools, the strategy and the role of tools in the implementation of the strategy.

### **1.3 Research problem and theoretical contribution**

The aim of this study is to fill the research gap described: How does the implementation of digitalization affect the implementation of the strategy in Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia? Research questions: How do digital tools shape and enable collaborative practices between different organizations and units? What factors support or hinder the successful implementation of digital solutions, and how are these related to the development of the organization's dynamic capabilities? How are the experiences of employees, residents and the management team in using digital tools reflected in the implementation of the strategy in practice?

In the theoretical contribution, the study combines the Strategy-as-Practice literature (Whittington, 1996; Jarzabkowski, 2008; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015) and the dynamic capabilities theory (Teece, 2007) in the context of the public sector. Utilizing these, the research produces new information about the impact of digital tools on the implementation of strategy in practice and how they function both as practice modifiers and as enablers of organizational capabilities.

From a managerial implications' perspective, the research produces valuable information for managers about how the introduction of digital tools should be supported and implemented, what kind of resources and means of inclusion are needed, and how the strategy can be embedded in everyday life in a way that supports the needs of all stakeholders, staff, and residents.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Strategy as practice**

All practical actions execute strategy, including meetings, speeches, filling out forms and quantitative analysis. How these things are carried out in organizations shapes the organization's strategy (Whittington, 1996, p. 733). Studying strategy implementation is important because it is ingrained in everyday routines, activities and everyday life (Whittington, 1996, p 732). Moreover, we currently have insufficient information about how strategy is enacted in companies and what strategy makers do in practice to carry out the strategy. (Whittington, 1996, p. 735). Strategy making has also evolved to a changing and increasing technological environment. However, the benefits of digital innovations in an organization are much easier to demonstrate and validate than to implement these innovations and embed them in daily activities and routines. (Hospodková et al., 2021, p. 15.) McKinsey commented in its collaboration with the World Economic Forum that new challenges arise in strategy implementation, especially when utilizing digital tools. Innovations are much easier to design than deploy. This further highlights the research topic on strategy implementation using digital tools, as the most contentious area of change is related to IT and digital tools and the use of their innovations. (Hospodková et al., 2021, pp. 13-15)

As in other sectors, the healthcare sector is also during a digital transformation. Industry 4.0 brings with it possibilities and threats, so the strategy must respond quickly to these development cycles and ensure agile adaptation methods (Hospodková et al., 2021, p. 16). In addition to effectively generating savings and efficiency, the changes must also be enduring. In healthcare, this largely means the ability of staff and residents to adjust to new

technologies, and the SAP approach focuses on improving practical skills in tangible routines. The academic world of strategy theory has recognized the SAP perspective as an important research area in recent decades, challenging more established approaches, thus enriching the theoretical and methodological foundation of strategy science. There is a particular emphasis on research methods that move away from traditional quantitative approaches towards doing, which helps to introduce richer methods that delve into micro-level phenomena. (Kohtamäki et al., 2022 p. 225). Strategy professionals have an important role in achieving these goals, and the SAP literature emphasizes the distinct skills that healthcare management teams and stakeholders offer. Another important factor is the right kind of training and lifelong learning, which are essential for developing and maintaining the skills of healthcare professionals (Whittington, 1996, p. 733). The vision must also be coherent, and Hospodková et al. (2021, p. 1) emphasize that broad involvement of both staff and stakeholders, clear rules, and the phased introduction of technology provide a strong foundation for the adoption of different technologies. The wellbeing services county of Ostrobothnia (2025) highlights those unified bilingual operating methods, the development of a digital customer experience alongside traditional ways of doing business, and safe operations form the core of the strategy. The wellbeing services county of Ostrobothnia is indeed an interesting research target for the implementation of digital tools due to its strong bilingualism and the ongoing pilot implementation of digital health services, this emphasizes on strategy implementation as a dynamic and social process and highlights how significant strategy making is in practice and how it materializes. (Finnish Government, 2025).

### **2.1.1. Strategy tools as technologies of rationality**

Whittington (1996, pp. 732–734), Jarzabkowski (2008, pp. 621–623), and Vaara and Whittington (2012, pp. 289–290) express the social concept of strategy as a generative activity that occurs in the interaction of many actors, which takes place locally. Kohtamäki et al. (2022, p. 210). identify six main clusters in the Strategy as practice (SAP) framework, which are praxis, sensemaking, discourse, sociomateriality, institutional and process. which together describe and shape strategy work and its diversity. This describes how SAP research has expanded over the years and expanded from the original practices-praxis-practitioners

framework towards more multi-level perspectives on strategy work. Jarzabkowski (2008, pp. 621–623), and Vaara and Whittington (2012, pp. 289–290) continue to explain that SAP challenges traditional strategy by inviting people to act and actively formulate strategy. Thus, strategy is not just merely perceived as organizational attribute, but rather active work and its construction. Einola (2018 p. 17) emphasizes the perspective of sociomateriality in the Strategy-as-Practice (SAP) research, in which digital systems enable everyday strategic practices and the interaction of its various actors. This sociomateriality research has become widespread in the field of management in recent decades, and in Einola's dissertation, sociomaterial practices were approached particularly from the perspectives of strategy tools and participatory practices. With digitization, the environment changes rapidly, and therefore a static strategy fails to support this fluid operating environment. Strategy should be understood first and foremost as active doing that enables experimentation and learning. When strategy is understood as practice, it opens new avenues for thinking and making strategy (Whittington, 2007, p. 730). Strategy is therefore not a static pre-existing entity of a company, but a continuous doing that only comes into existence when practicing strategy. When moving into practice, the core is to take work and speech seriously so that the strategy can be executed. (Jarzabkowski, Spee & Smets, 2013, p. 41; Whittington, 1996, pp. 731.) To better understand strategy implementation in practice, it is key to follow the practical strategy implementation and the routines that generate strategy. When strategy is understood as an active factor, it emphasizes community and is actualized in all parts of the operation, not just as a top-level plan and (Whittington, 1996, pp. 733-735) provides a view From a leadership perspective, where important to understand that strategy cannot be thought of as an abstract thing or concept, but also as an active actor in the environment defined for it. All actors can carry out strategy in different ways in the organization.

Strategy tools allow organizations to structure and analyze their operating environment, future, and implement strategy. However, they are not just Rational means to achieve desired results but should be thought of as Rational technologies that facilitate and shape the process of strategizing. Rational technologies in the article refer to the tools, models, frameworks, and techniques that form the software for Rational decision-making in organizations.

Strategy implementation is not done in isolation but is implemented as part of the daily activities of the organization's personnel, meaning that they are constantly embedded in social practices. How strategy tools are used influences how strategy is seen and how it is implemented. For example, a chart is a chart until it becomes strategic if it is done in the name of strategy implementation. Therefore, the most important strategy tools can already be found in the organization's processes. Certain tools may yield the desired result, in which case such tools will continue to be preferred when making strategy. It is vital to understand the role of strategy tools in strategy implementation, as strategic failures are not necessarily due to poor planning but to insufficiently translating the strategy. Different strategy tools contain enormous potential and opportunities, and the tools are not solely instrumental for solving practical, immediate problems. The use of tools creates a strategic common language and provides space for discussion of different interests. The results of the best applied tools achieve results all the way to the individual, group, organization and industry levels. This raises the question of how new tools are integrated into organizational practice. (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015, pp. 537-552; Vaara & Whittington, 2012, p. 297.)

Strategy tools have material, i.e. physical and concrete, uses, as well as conceptual, i.e. abstract, uses that direct the use of the tools. Strategy tools therefore have built-in features about what kind of information should be preferred and what kind of uses they have. In a concrete environment, strategy tools often operate in a social context, where use is influenced by the uses and users. It is therefore important to consider how new tools are embraced in practice in organizations. (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015, pp. 541-552.) A strategy leadership trainer should not understand strategy as an abstract thing but should be able to embed strategy into the daily activities of the organization and see what strategy looks like in practice. This thinking of strategy as concrete action shapes its direction, as it includes all concrete everyday activities. (Vaara & Whittington, 2012, p. 320) As mentioned, the greatest doubts are related to the introduction of digital innovations, but the adoption of innovations is never streamlined, and it should not be assumed that its adoption and acceptance is an easy process. The readiness of the organization is the most important way to introduce new strategic tools and processes. This includes the organization's willingness for change,

resources, the resilience and attitudes of employees, and the organizational climate, i.e. how clear the goals are. The healthcare industry is a multi-process and strategically complex environment, affected by bureaucratic culture, professional autonomy, and a lack of resources and dynamic capabilities. It is not appropriate to produce a tool whose main purpose is to maximize cost-effectiveness, as the risk is that the patient experience will be prioritized below this. In this case, the service will not be cohesive and will not be implemented correctly. A well-designed solution requires meticulous and careful planning, especially regarding the unspoken consequences of strategy tools, as well as good change management and leadership. (Hospodková et al., 2021, p. 14-15)

In today's operational management, there are indications that profit is created precisely by understanding how different subsystems, different functional areas of the organization and processes are interconnected and affect each other. Understanding and concretely implementing the different processes that generate competitive advantage for organizations, i.e. the processes that operate behind dynamic capabilities, is a complex and multi-step matter that requires deep knowledge of the actors in the field, as well as the ecosystem of the competitive field. The increased need for efficiency, quality assurance and maintaining competitiveness has given rise to many different management tools and techniques. Companies may have achieved operational improvements, but organizations have difficulty translating these into sustainable ways of generating profit. Methods for correcting decision-making biases do not yet exist. However, it can be stated that the ability of companies to adapt, refine and possibly replace their functions is the basis of dynamic capabilities. (Teece, 2007, pp. 1320-1332.) An organization's competitive advantage arises when it executes a strategy that creates value in a way that no current or potential competitor has been able to do at the same time. However, strategy implementation is not streamlined, and healthcare involves a complex operating environment that must be understood comprehensively to be able to prepare for and adapt to changes. If the conditions of the organization's value, rarity, inimitability, and irreplaceability are met, the organization's resources and capabilities can be a source of highly sustainable competitive advantage. Strategy tools are active technological means that implement strategy and shape how an organization understands and

responds to changes in the external environment. The tools do not act passively, but rather alongside dynamic capabilities and help guide decision-making and embed strategy implementation in daily operations. (Barney, 1991, pp. 102-116.) Kohtamäki et al., 2022, p. 222 point out how SAP research in recent years has sought to combine practice-based perspectives and actions with different theories of strategic management at the micro and macro levels, taking into account the role of digitalization in strategy work. An example of this is its connection to dynamic capabilities, which helps to understand strategy work in different operating environments that are complex.

## **2.2 Challenges of implementing strategic tools in social and healthcare**

### **2.2.1 Structural and Legal Barriers**

In social and healthcare, initial contacts will transition to digital channels, and various digital solutions for service control and care or service need control based on artificial intelligence or rule-based logic will become essential parts of the service system (Heinäsenaho, Virtanen, Hyttinen, 2025, p. 21). 36.5% of adults used digital social and health services in 2022, compared to 25.8% in 2020 (THL, blog 14.7.2023). In the future, most initial customer and patient contacts will be handled through digital services. Standardized digital service control implemented nationwide would create agile and dynamic management of customer flows and the development of various service models that transcend regional or sector boundaries. A centralized national cooperation structure for the development of artificial intelligence is generally viewed with optimism, but regional differences and local innovation activities must also be considered. From a strategic perspective, this means that top-down control can eliminate the agility and adaptability of strategy, which are central to SAP activities. (Heinäsenaho et al., 2025, pp. 21–28.) As innovative digital products are introduced with increasing urgency into use with relatively short development cycles and limited adaptation periods, it creates a rapidly changing market and challenges in implementation. New innovations therefore require a re-evaluation of internal work processes that are currently used in the organization. (Hospodková et al., 2021, p. 4).

The development of artificial intelligence in social and healthcare involves many complex and open questions, the most challenging of which are usually political in nature, and there is a general discussion about the extent to which it is desirable to give tasks traditionally handled by humans to artificial intelligence and at what point artificial intelligence solutions are sufficiently reliable to perform these tasks. Current legislation restricts the use of AI solutions in the public sector, for example in training customer data. From a strategic perspective, this creates a lag in the implementation of innovative AI solutions in practice for legal reasons. This legal gap shows that although strategic goals are often aspirational, their practical implementation is not necessarily always possible due to external factors. These legislative obstacles hinder the implementation of the strategy and may be an obstacle to the leveraging of future AI applications, which creates ambiguity and tension between visions and the concrete reality that has been realized. Strategy, regulation and digital solutions thus form a multifaceted environment that requires negotiations and strategic interpretation. When legislation prevents the implementation of the strategy, the risk is an unmanaged loss of significant economic and human benefits or a delay in the materialization of the benefits. (Heinäsenaho, Virtanen, Hyttinen, 2025, p. 26.) The widespread digitization of healthcare and the deployment of electronic services requires a comprehensive approach, which includes various organizational processes and their structures, human resources and adequate training, as well as legislative requirements and other factors that need to be regulated for the purposes of electronic services (Hospodková et al., 2021, p. 14).

### **2.2.2 Organizational Readiness and Change Resistance**

It has been acknowledged that healthcare is a complex sector with many interdependent stakeholders and is highly regulated by governments. This can lead to a lack of collaboration and functionality between stakeholders, and management must tackle these emerging challenges when approving change. This includes issues related to infrastructure, data integration, interoperability, and security. These reasons make healthcare reluctant adopter of new technologies. From a SAP perspective, challenges in development and implementation are related to the opportunities and limitations of the operating environment. (Hospodková et al., 2021, p. 14.)

In healthcare, in particular, leaders face complex challenges in both the adoption of new technology and the development of new products and services (Kim, Gaukler, & Lee, 2016; Gjellebæk et al., 2020, p. 2). Management must address the challenges of digitalization in its embrace of change, such as issues related to infrastructure, data integration, interoperability, and security. (Hospodková et al., 2021, p. 14). In the future, the ability of leaders to implement digital transformation is uncertain and challenging, and the traditional command-and-control leadership style becomes ineffective in a changing and disruptive environment. The SAP framework understands that strategy is implemented in practice and interaction, shifting its focus from decision-making to enabling practices and showing direction. Orlikowski (2007, p. 1437) reminds that it is important to see digitalization as a concrete way of shaping habits and strategy, not just as external tools.

In addition, top-down orders and instructions are unclear and ineffective to leaders if they do not understand what the content of different directives should be, creating contradiction with the requirements of dynamic capabilities which highlight agility, continuous learning, and distributed decision-making. Change management is becoming more complex, and many leaders are uncertain about their abilities to develop new products and services and lead the healthcare sector through digital transformation. Digital change requires constant agility and cooperation, in which case a gap forms between current leadership skills and the requirements of digital change, which undermines the organization's readiness. This highlights Orlikowski's (2007, p. 1442) observation that the introduction of technology is not just a one-off solution and that usage patterns are not permanent, as they require continuous reshaping. The lack of top management competence also weakens the work of middle management, which feels that it does not receive enough support from top management to promote developmental learning. Middle management has the impression that top management does not have the necessary tools and expertise in innovative processes and organizational development. Middle Managers also criticize top management's ability to describe organizational changes and present ongoing and future changes to employees. The IT sector also hopes for more project managers who understand the processes of digitization

and who have information about how the project should progress and what issues to consider. Middle management has also commented on the perception that decisions related to changes, such as the technologies to be used and service delivery methods, were made by anonymous or non-transparent actors at a higher level of hierarchy. (Gjellebæk et al., 2020, p. 2; Hospodková et al., 2021, p. 2.)

The change process often falters over a misunderstanding of how much energy or effort the change will require. If there is a doubt that something will have to be given up, the change is usually not perceived as necessary. The necessity and benefits of the change are rarely strong enough motivators. In addition, change processes are associated with doubts about the organization's and individual's abilities to absorb new information, as well as fears of failure. Electronic systems are perceived as difficult and are met with a lot of preconceptions. Comprehensive organizational change requires perseverance and long-term persistence, and can require active monitoring for several months, because otherwise old patterns easily and unnoticeably take over. Through the lens of the SAP framework, we see that resistance to change occurs when there is a desire to protect established practices within an organization, which in turn hinders innovation and the implementation of new strategic processes. This also encapsulates Orlikowski's (2007, p. 1443) idea that what is essential is not what technology is, but what it does in practice, i.e. in the everyday lives of employees and managers. Successful change management emphasizes genuine interaction between line managers and employees, as line managers help employees understand the need for change, the decisions made, and their justifications. Different perspectives and team thinking help to understand complex issues. Dynamic capabilities, such as being flexible and learning new skills, can help leaders with this and drive change forward purposefully. The team should also be able to process the emotions caused by the change; to be inspired by the enthusiasm of others and ease collective anxieties. If you can share your thoughts with others in a confidential atmosphere, it will be easier to work through your own resistance. Orientation, guidance, effective communication, and experience of genuine influence help build a strong foundation for change, which always takes time. Change usually causes confusion in people's minds long after the technical implementation has been completed. Major organizational changes are

processes that last several years. It can easily take months to learn new ways to become habitual. To overcome resistance to change, active management of the process of understanding and accepting change is needed. In addition, open discussion and giving time to change are emphasized. Motivation, enthusiasm and open and honest handling of different emotions clarify actions and create confidence in employees. The leader must ensure that daily goals remain clear and tangible even during change. (Kyytsönen et al., 2023).

### **2.2.3 Professional Identity and Autonomy**

This limited level of employee involvement creates the perception that changes are only being implemented to save money, which can lead to resistance to change, and the value of the change can be overlooked among employees. There was a general feeling in organizations that a top-down approach created a sense of uncertainty in taking ownership of new processes, especially when employees were not sufficiently involved in the process. The general view, both at middle management and employee level, was that this type of approach often leads to doubt and resistance to change. (Gjellebæk et al., 2020, pp. 1-7)

Poor leadership leads to failed change projects. Hospodková et al., (2021, p. 1) show that up to 60 percent of change projects fail precisely for this reason. The figure also includes all change projects and doesn't exclusively discuss healthcare projects. Hospodková et al., (2021, pp. 13-14.) continues by explaining how top-down changes feel imposed and kill enthusiasm among healthcare professionals. This creates a problem when implementation is not successful, and professionals do not share the same views on innovation processes. Vision fails when it is not implemented at the employee level, resulting in dreams and reality colliding when contradictions arise. The desired changes must be well explained to the staff, and investments in transformative leadership development are a prerequisite for a digital strategy to be realized, technical training of staff alone is insufficient. Gjellebæk et al., (2020, p. 7) remind us that no one is immune to the feeling of mistrust generated by uncertainty and open questions. Managers may criticize and question the change, but the same happens with employees, as they equally want to understand why the changes are needed, what changes are needed and how they will be implemented. The importance of communication is

emphasized, as inadequate and unclear communication or message interruption usually stems from employees not being sufficiently involved in the planning and development of organizational changes and not being given the necessary information. It is also possible that the obstacles arise directly from the innovation provider, who fails to clarify the service so that it is practical, credible or user-friendly. (Hospodková et al., 2021, p. 15.)

#### **2.2.4 Technical and Usability Issues**

The biggest obstacles to innovation and digitalization implementation are not technical but rather human-centered, and success in the adoption of digital services largely depends on how people adapt, and organizational behavior is interpreted. From the SAP perspective, it is emphasized that a purely technological approach does not lead to the anticipated results. (Hypponen & Ilmarinen, 2018, pp. 11-12). These factors can include healthcare professionals' hesitation to learn new things, an uninspiring and unconstructive work environment where new technologies and practices are resisted, and professionals' fear of losing autonomy. The most common fears are also related to security, privacy, costs, technical challenges, and potential loss of productivity during implementation. For example, over 70% of doctors report experiencing some degree of stress related to healthcare IT. It is therefore essential to foresee and manage potential employee resistance. Resistance is natural and occurs in other sectors as well, as people are naturally wary of change. Artificial Intelligence and other digital services should be introduced incrementally to avoid long-term problems among employees. (Hospodková et al., 2021, p. 14).

It is worth noting that more than half of Finnish citizens experience barriers to using online services, the largest of which are related to the reliability of services and trust. This emphasizes the importance of understanding the social context and user experience. Many residents are concerned about electronic transactions, meaning that even if the technology itself is functional, its implementation may fail due to suspicions and fears. Clear differences between population groups and regions are noted in the experience of barriers. For example, those who define their health status as poorer experience more barriers than those who perceive their quality of life as generally good. Age group also has an impact, and the older

population experiences more barriers to implementing new technologies than young people. For many of those who experience barriers to implementation, the situation becomes more difficult when services are transferred online, or health centers are merged or closed. This is why the phased introduction of digital services is important, and the traditional service channel must be maintained alongside the digital channel for situations where those in need of services are unable or do not have the opportunity to use electronic social services, even with assistance. These social barriers are significant and through the SAP perspective, prioritizing them shows whether the desired solutions can ever be realized in their strategic potential (Hyppönen & Ilmarinen, 2018, pp. 11-12).

### **2.3. Opportunities and Enablers of Implementation**

For the implementation of a digital strategy to be successful in the healthcare sector, in addition to identifying challenges and barriers, it is necessary to understand the enablers and potential of digitalization. Successful implementation is the sum of many factors, and these interrelated factors form the basis for sustainable change and the realization of benefits.

#### **2.3.1. Strategic competence and organizational readiness**

The productivity of digital healthcare services depends on how skilled and flexible the professionals providing digital healthcare. This competence constitutes a strategically essential resource. (Heinäsenaho et al., 2025, p. 23.) Successful implementation of digital health services requires strong and deliberate leadership, preparedness for change, and proper allocation of resources (Jeilani & Hussein, 2025, p. 2). Resources include all assets, capabilities, processes, property, information, know-how and all other elements that the company controls and that enable the planning and implementation of the company's strategy. These resources improve the company's productivity, performance and competitiveness. When we talk about people as capital resources, we mean individual company managers and trained personnel who, with their experience, discernment, relationships and insights, create value for the company. Organizational capital resources include the formal reporting structure of a firm, its formal and informal planning, control, and coordination systems, and the informal relationships between groups within the firm and

between different functions of the firm and its environment. (Barney, 1991, p. 101.) Resources are valuable if they allow the firm's strategy to be designed and implemented in ways that improve the firm's productivity and performance. (Barney, 1991, p. 106.) Barney (1991, p. 117) further states that such irreplaceable, valuable and rare resources that are difficult to imitate are a source of sustainable competitive advantage. In the context of digital healthcare services, this refers to the ability of personnel to internalize new information that forms an important resource and thus strengthens organizational capital.

The organization's internal practices, values, infrastructure, financing, ethics and training are things that affect the uptake of technologies (Jeilani and Hussein, 2025, p. 3). It is equally important that the organization is ready for change, change readiness includes the organization's motivation, resources, attitudes and organizational culture (Hospodková et al., 2021, p. 14). When change leadership is integrated in the organization and its culture and the importance of change is embraced throughout the organization, it is better prepared for all possible future changes. (Hospodková et al., 2021, p. 1). Organizational readiness is also key, and this includes motivational factors, resources, attitudes, adaptability and factors affecting organizational culture (Hospodková et al., 2021, p. 14). In organizations, strategic capability refers to, for example, the ability of personnel to adopt new ways of working. Structured and clear leadership and the examples of other pioneers create a sense of security in the implementation of new health technologies and their adoption among healthcare professionals. Implementation is not immediate and requires ongoing development of competence to be successful. When implementing the strategy, it must be ensured that employees are prepared to act in accordance with the new requirements and not only focus on the set goals. If organizations increase training and awareness activities related to digital health technologies, it will also facilitate implementation and increase confidence. (Nascimento et al., 2023, p. 18, Table 4.) However, training programs should be constantly developed, and employees should be actively involved so that knowledge and skills remain up-to-date, and training meets employees' needs and knowledge gaps. In addition, investing in training programs helps to understand possible knowledge gaps in employees and enables them to prevent them and correct incorrect practices. Almost one in five adults feels that they

need guidance on the use of digital social and health services. (THL, 2023). The majority of those involved in the preparation of the welfare areas reported that the competence of customers using digital services has not yet been sufficiently taken care of in the area, and they need more support, guidance, guidance or training. Development needs are also identified in many areas in the professional competence and information security competence required by digital services for personnel working at the customer interface. (THL, 2023). In the development of digital services, it would be useful to consider solutions to the competence gap among customers, so that the use of the services would be possible for everyone who wants to. (THL, 2023.) It has also been noted that front-end factors, such as user-friendly and visual design, effortless navigation and accessibility, play a crucial role in improving product performance and adoption. In addition, they facilitate gathering, entering, processing, and organizing data of further analyses. (Nascimento et al., 2023, p. 17.) Adoption is enabled by understanding the effectiveness of technology (Nascimento et al., 2023, p. 1). Hyppönen and Ilmarinen (2018, p. 1) mention that two out of three citizens used at least one social and healthcare online service in 2017. The most popular of these were searching for information, viewing one's own information, and making an appointment online.

The dynamic capabilities of an organization enable development, creation and implementation that support effectiveness, sustainability and performance (Teece, 2007, p. 1319). Dynamic capabilities must be continually developed and practiced, as they often open paths to both success and failure. An innovative organization is ahead in research and development, in addition to which it must protect its intellectual property rights. In addition to investing in these, innovative companies must be able to create and implement organizational and management innovations to maintain its competitiveness. The dynamic capabilities framework includes three core components: sensing, seizing and transforming. In the context of the healthcare sector, sensing can be, for example, following technological developments, seizing resources and developing skills, and organizations can transform their operations, for example by modifying operating models, which is at the heart of implementing digital services. (Teece, 2007, pp. 1320-1321.) Teece (2007, p. 1323) points

out that the ability to perceive opportunities is not necessarily distributed equally among companies or individuals. The ability to recognize potential depends on the individual's abilities and existing knowledge, as well as the employee's organizational knowledge and learning abilities. In the dynamic environment created by digitization, static competence becomes obsolete quickly, which is particularly emphasized when identifying needs among users and when developing existing and new solutions. Teece, (2007, p. 1323) complements the idea by clarifying that even if certain individuals in the organization have talents in creative and Cognitive skills, it is more desirable to embed the innovative approach and creative processes within the organization itself. The organization leaves itself in a vulnerable position if all perception, innovation, and knowledge acquisition tasks are assigned to mental faculties of a few individuals. Teece (2007, p. 1323) points out that organizational processes can be introduced within the organization to generate new technical information and exploit scientific developments, to identify customer needs and monitor competitor activities, and with all of this to shape new services and processes. If companies do not focus on these activities, they will not be able to assess the development of markets and technologies or detect emerging opportunities. The ability to renew is a source of sustainable competitiveness.

### **2.3.2. Scalability and system-level integration**

National, unified digital service management would create new opportunities for agile management of customer flows, and for strategy implementation to be successful, these digital solutions should extend across regional and sector boundaries. However, this can only be achieved if the functions are supported at the local level. Welfare areas operate separately and in their own systems, and this tension affects the possibilities of scaling. This becomes a strategic problem if the vision is incoherent, and the desired impact is not achieved. (Heinäsenaho et al., 2025, p. 21). When new systems are created for welfare areas that operate technically separately, it also makes the structural reform of social and healthcare more complex and expensive (Heinäsenaho et al., 2025, p. 15). Similar benefits to electronic prescriptions can also be achieved in several other areas of health technology, but this requires a strategic reconsideration of the division of labor in terms of information

management and information systems (Heinäsenaho et al., 2025, p. 20). Success would require a comprehensive and in-depth approach to the challenges and national planning (Heinäsenaho et al., 2025, p. 16). Nationally compatible services, such as the development of Kanta services into a common and high-quality data repository, enable effective management of customer flows. This reveals a fragmentation paradox, when digital health services are expected to be harmonized, which clashes with the local level of dispersed system development. This is partly due to self-governance and partly to weak national governance. (Heinäsenaho et al., 2025, p. 18-19.)

For the strategy to be successful, technology is not just an option but has been implemented as part of everyday operations. To ensure quality, more incentives could be created for social care professionals who generate information. Obligations enable better and clearer functionality between Kanta services and customer and patient work, create incentives and reduce bureaucracy. (Heinäsenaho et al., 2025, pp. 18-19). At the same time, legislation concerning social and health care services and inappropriate authority boundaries that make it difficult to serve patients would be eliminated. (Heinäsenaho et al., 2025, pp. 18-19). The integration of DHS into healthcare systems optimizes operations and improves diagnostic capabilities, as well as ensuring fair access to healthcare for clients. An example is the electronic patient information system, which improves interoperability and institutional support. Digital health technologies are part of the modernization efforts of healthcare systems, and the successful integration of these technologies improves performance and promotes better communication between healthcare institutions, enhances operational efficiency and improves customer experience. (Jeilani and Hussein, 2025, p. 3). However, the success of implementation depends on many Actors and Jeilani and Hussein (2025, p. 3) highlight the previously mentioned factors such as staff training, organizational readiness, ease of use and the ability to implement and effectively utilize the systems. In addition, they mention the need to address the challenges related to infrastructure development to maximize the potential of health technologies. If we had integrated technologies and services, we could also consider exceptional situations and preparedness needs more quickly. Managing and directing customer flows and service communication would also be more seamless.

(Heinäsenaho et al., 2025, p. 21) Reponen et al. (2018, p. 1) recognize that significant developments have occurred in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in healthcare in Finland in recent years.

Achieving adaptation is challenging, and the dynamic capabilities framework reflects a departure from the five forces. Dynamic capabilities do not refer to the environmental context of an industry, but rather to the business ecosystem, which is made up of organizations, institutions, and communities of individuals - all factors that affect the organization, its customers, and suppliers. Strategic competitive advantage is created when the right technologies and business models are selected. By utilizing these, an organization can target hard-to-imitate resources, which drives market dynamics. (Teece, 2007, p. 1325). This idea can be summarized by saying that dynamic capabilities are based on the organization's ability to create, adapt, and refine business models as needed (Teece, 2007, p. 1330). Technological development occurs in ever-changing conditions, which emphasizes the setting of organization boundaries. The strategic element is the organization's capacity to identify critical resources and manage them so that they end up in the value chain from invention to market (Teece, 2007, p. 1319). Decision-making should take into account the importance of diversifying sources of innovation, interoperability issues, and development paths, which must be integrated. (Teece, 2007, p. 1332). The organization's ability to integrate information increases the organization's successful performance, which Teece (2007, p. 1337) calls for the importance of integration skills. The best results are achieved in organizations that have the autonomy to make changes quickly, but the change is clearly coordinated. This is a delicate balance, the implementation of which is an important part of the micro-foundation of dynamic capabilities. Effective incentive models for learning, knowledge sharing and integration are also central to business performance and an essential part of the palette of (micro)dynamic capabilities (Teece, 2007, p. 1339).

### **2.3.3. Leadership and strategic communication**

Heinäsenaho et al., (2025, pp. 9–10) emphasize that the successful implementation of health technologies requires robust and strategic leadership that steers development at the entire

level of the service system. In Finland, the desired national guidance does not remain at the same level as the welfare areas, and the information and communication technology architecture has been restructured. Now, stronger strategic national guidance is needed, and the division of labor and the governance model should be clear (Heinäsenaho et al., 2025, p. 37). The primary task of decisions and prioritization is to serve the needs of citizens and welfare areas, and the information needs of state authorities are a secondary task. For this reason, the people representing information management participating in decision-making also represent the executive management of the organizations. The management models must identify the decisions at different levels and the accountabilities they include, and the responsibility for leveraging the development lies with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, which is also responsible for financing the development. In order to achieve the desired benefits from these national development measures, welfare areas and their management must be engaged in the development process early and at a sufficient level when formulating the strategy. (Heinäsenaho et al., 2025, p. 38).

Strategic planning is important, but in addition to this, the benefits achieved must be tracked in some way and their implementation must be advanced concretely. Abstract goals must be made tangible so that the strategy can be implemented effectively. From an SAP perspective, it can be seen how strategy is not only formulated from the top down but also includes everyday tools and practices that empower employees to implement the strategy. Managers work with pilot projects or use case demonstrations that translate the strategic intent into everyday work. Digital tools therefore facilitate strategy implementation and cross organizational boundaries. (Heinäsenaho et al., 2025, p. 39). Based on discussions with welfare regions, it seems that strong state guidance is also a requirement for welfare regions to be able to agree on procurement at the level of the cooperation region and adhere to decisions regarding them (Heinäsenaho et al., 2025, p. 75). Jarzabkowski et al. (2013, p. 41) note that managers use material objects when making strategy, with which they simplify abstract information and replace real situations with these representations, i.e., complex things are distilled using material. Effective digital transformation management can include these tangible tools and practices that help conceptualize and communicate strategy.

### **2.3.4. Inclusion and co-development**

Digital health technologies are supported by educational programs that are organized in a structured manner (Nascimento et al., 2023, p. 1). Vehko et al. (2022, p. 321) state that using electronic digital services makes it easier for customers to manage their health issues, as customers can do things independently regardless of time and place. This is one of the most notable potentials of digital services, especially when they are designed with the user in mind. Hyppönen and Ilmarinen (2018, p. 1) mention that the use of digital services is not always seamless, as more than half of Finnish citizens experience difficulties in use. Most frequently discussed of these were difficulty in use, insufficient tools, lack of interest in digital services, and the fact that comprehensive services did not exist or could not be found. These obstacles highlight the importance of participatory design and co-development when it comes to ensuring the user-friendliness and accessibility of digital services and meeting the complex needs of customers. Co-development enhances implementation and identifies gaps in knowledge and tools, which already promote the participatory implementation of digital health services. Strategic tools and co-development enable strategy in healthcare and social care, which summarizes the SAP thinking.

Involving healthcare professionals significantly increases technology acceptance, as they can contribute to the creation of user-friendly services. The performance of digital healthcare services is improved by integrating professionals in the design, while at the same time reducing the workload. (Nascimento et al., 2023, p. 1.) The integration of an inclusive work environment into practice becomes a strategic task for middle management. Leaders must be flexible and learning-oriented, and they must involve different stakeholders and be able to embed learning as a natural part of work practices. (Gjellebæk et al., 2020, p. 1) Low employee engagement creates a perception among professionals that changes are made only to save money. In this case, the change is no longer seen to have the same value. (THL, 2023).

### **2.4. General goals and challenges of the welfare areas' digitalization**

The digitalization of welfare areas is often accompanied by a demand for continuous, efficient service delivery and the need to implement radical, strategic change, forming a

paradox of performing (Einola, 2018 s. 47). The transformation of social and healthcare is in progress and needs a guiding national vision towards which the evolution is directed. (Heinäsenaho et al., 2025, p. 8). It is necessary to understand those areas of information management and digitalization, the realization of which enables functions that are currently not possible or very difficult to execute in the ICT structure of welfare areas. (Heinäsenaho et al., 2025, p. 4). These opportunities are largely accentuated in multi-disciplinary operating models that bridge regional and sector boundaries, as well as in digital services for basic customers (Heinäsenaho et al., 2025, p. 5). Making data interoperable and information management efficient is not the only objective, but they facilitate productivity, effectiveness and security (Heinäsenaho et al., 2025, p. 35). The possibilities of digitalization are widely recognized in welfare areas, but the concrete execution largely depends on the area's expertise, infrastructure and management. For example, artificial intelligence is also seen as offering broader application potential in municipalities, and it can be a potential area for developing the quality of services and productivity in various municipal functions and sectors. However, implementation is still fragmented in many municipalities due to technical incompetence, which requires strategic management to stabilize the situation. (Setälä et al., 2024).

Digital transactions are increasingly common in social and health services, and in 2022, 36.5 percent of those using healthcare services had interacted with a professional digitally, compared to 25.8 percent in 2020. Within just a couple of years, digital transactions grew significantly, and in 2022, almost as many people had dealt with doctors alone (24.9%) as all social and health professionals combined in 2020. (Kyytsönen et al., 2023.) In fact, the majority of municipalities are already transitioning to cloud services and there is a strong desire to shift to digital services. (Setälä et al., 2024).

When examining the strategy for the welfare areas for the period 2025–2029, it emphasizes national impact. The goals include promoting well-being, health and safety, as well as equal services, high quality and cost-effectiveness. Digitalization also has a strong focus in these goals, and it is seen as empowering the set goals. Digitalization is being advanced extensively

in all sectors in different welfare areas (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2022/2025, no page number). According to THL, welfare areas have matured positively as adopters of digital services. Municipalities want to broaden the possibilities of automated decision-making to more municipalities, so that they can be offered higher-quality services faster and would also improve the productivity of municipal service production. (Setälä et al., 2024).

The biggest challenges in the adoption of digital services are related to individuals' ability to use and utilize these services (Kyytsönen et al., 2023). It is common for digital services to be perceived as difficult to use or for individuals to not know how to utilize these services properly. This significantly impedes the strategy if the end users do not get the intended benefit or usage from the services and from an SAP-perspective, we see that strategy is not just a management job and it needs to be visible to residents. Many residents are not even interested in learning about e-services and a large proportion of people prefer face-to-face meetings and do not feel that e-services offer the same value. (Hyppönen & Ilmarinen, 2018, p. 1.) Most of those who were involved in the preparation of the welfare areas reported that the competence of customers had not been sufficiently considered when discussing the introduction of electronic digital services. Customers would need more guidance, support and training than at present. (Kyytsönen et al., 2023.) According to the 2024 Municipal Digitalization Survey, Municipal resources are a particular obstacle, especially in smaller municipalities, and the bureaucracy associated with this cannot always be resolved. (Setälä et al., 2024). For example, about the Service Data Repository (PTV), most respondents (62%) export data to the service data repository manually, and there are 168 municipalities that have organized PTV work but whose PTV data has quality deficiencies or whose data is too limited (Setälä et al., 2024). Also, according to the DVV survey, the problem for municipalities in PTV work is a lack of resources. Of the respondents to the survey, 56 municipalities do not have sufficient resources for the work and 101 municipalities suffer from a lack of resources from time to time. Although there is therefore a strong desire for digitization, this unequal distribution, especially in smaller municipalities, alters the functionality of digital strategies. Without addressing the resource gap, some services will not be implemented, and the SAP approach will be hindered by resources. (Setälä et al., 2024.)

For now, legislation prevents municipalities from benefiting from automated decision-making in several potential use cases. Municipalities or their sectors have not identified automated decision-making processes or have not had sufficient comprehensive discussions about them, and the problem of promoting automation is seen as the lack of understanding and resources in municipalities. The introduction of artificial intelligence is not easy either, as it involves significant information security and protection challenges, and the solutions developed are also expensive. In addition to the lack of understanding, there are no suitable employees in welfare areas, and the expertise is not sufficient for implementation. In addition, improving digital security and optimizing costs are the key focus areas in the development of cloud services in the coming years. (Setälä et al., 2024.)

It is also important for personnel working at the customer interface to embrace the use of new digital tools, and their professional and information security expertise needs to be developed extensively in different areas. (Kyytsönen et al., 2023). Information systems are facing extensive change needs, and maturity levels still vary significantly by region (Heinäsenaho et al., 2025, p. 16; Reponen et al., 2018, p. 5). For example, software suppliers have not had time to integrate artificial intelligence into systems already in use (Setälä et al., 2024). Health care is experiencing changes in organizational structures, such as the social and health care reform, and these affect the development of information systems. (Reponen et al., 2018, p. 5). According to the Municipal Digitalization Survey 2024, small municipalities would need money as well as basic instructions, training and use cases - with a strong emphasis on peer examples, support in interpreting legislation and the need for national policies to support the use of artificial intelligence. Digital tools therefore have a significant role in executing strategies in areas of well-being, but the practical impact largely depends on how the tools are applied within the organization. From a Strategy-as-Practice (SAP) perspective, strategy only becomes tangible through its realization in everyday life, i.e. digitalization is not just a technical change but a societal and strategic endeavor. This is connected to the perception of strategy and acting across borders. (Setälä et al., 2024.)

### **2.4.1 Development and distinctive features of digital services in the Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia**

The advancement of digital services in welfare areas refers to various areas of information management and digitalization, the nationwide implementation of which enables forms of operation that are difficult to carry out in a welfare area-specific ICT structure. Such potential areas of development are particularly associated with operating models that span regional and sector boundaries, as well as core digital services. (Heinäsenaho et al., 2025, p. 4). The social welfare reform has a substantial impact on the development of information systems and necessitates the extensive renewal of the information systems used, and the needs for change are becoming crucial. (Heinäsenaho et al., 2025, p. 16) In the Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia, the regional government addressed an IT strategy in 2022, which prepared to develop a unified and comprehensive customer and patient information system (The Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia, 2022). Citizens increasingly want rapid service and to enable this, they are ready for independent digital services online. The Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia has had several digitalization projects of different magnitudes over the years. The current digitalization project in The Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia is called the Prima Botnia project, where the main goals are to widely introduce various digital tools to make customer transactions easier and streamline staff communication. These innovations include chatbots, electronic appointment booking, chat services, greater use of remote receptions, and wider use of self-care. (The Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia, 2023.) In addition to enhancing the customer experience, the increase in such digital services is also driven by the pressures on welfare regions to make service production more cost-efficient in social and healthcare, and digital services offer relief from the costs of service production (Government of Finland 2025).

In 2025, a major study of digital health services was initiated in the The wellbeing services county of Ostrobothnia. Over 170,000 residents of Ostrobothnia are involved in the experiment (Government, 2025). The pilot will last from April 2025 to January 2026, during which the wellbeing services county of Ostrobothnia will evaluate and enhance the service's functions, and after success, it is intended to be expanded to the entire welfare region (In The

wellbeing services county of Ostrobothnia; Government 2025). In the experiment, the population of Ostrobothnia has been divided into two test groups by random sampling, one group of which uses the services as before and the other half is offered a new healthcare chat channel. In the chat, the customer can contact a nurse and, if necessary, a doctor. (Government 2025.) What makes the the wellbeing services county of Ostrobothnia noteworthy is its bilingualism and geographical dispersion, which are determining factors in the development and planning of digital services. From a strategic perspective, digital solutions must not only be functional but also accessible and user-friendly. This underscores the need for participatory planning and strategic precision, as user experience is part of the implementation of the strategy. Bilingualism affects strategic communication and the usability of systems, and these require adjustment at the local level. The widespread area brings into concrete form the previously mentioned fragmentation paradox, since although the goal is to achieve uniform solutions, the situation in practice requires a nuanced and tailored approach. These regulatory elements and the fragmentation paradox are concrete examples of the tensions that undermine SAP operations and the resilience of dynamic capabilities. If governance hinders the adoption of certain digital tools, strategy cannot be realized and the organization cannot embrace or adapt to these changes, exposing a systemic challenge between expectations and realities. Abstract objectives are challenged when the region is dispersed, multilingual and multicultural. The vision of the wellbeing services county of Ostrobothnia is to effectively create safety, operational capacity and well-being in two languages together with the residents of the region. (Ostrobothnia Wellbeing Services county, 2025.)

Resources hamper the progress of digitization, especially in small municipalities, and the related bureaucracy cannot always be managed. The 2024 Municipal digitalization survey indicated that implementing strategies is still demanding in small municipalities. For example, exporting data to the service data Warehouse (PTV) is still done manually, which is inefficient and of poorer quality. In addition, the amount of data is limited. Although the strategy prioritizes digitalization, its practical implementation is not flawless and is affected by bureaucracy, making municipalities regionally unequal from a strategy perspective. There

is a shortage of resources in PTV work, and small municipalities do not have the expertise or resources to coordinate secure or sustainable IT solutions. To implement AI solutions in the right ways, it requires the personnel to be able to acquire new skills that not all personnel have. The SAP approach emphasizes the interconnectedness of employees in everyday life and employees as part of implementing the strategy, so this lack of skills creates a gap for implementation. The focus of cloud service development is on improving digital security and optimizing costs, for which smaller municipalities need funding, guidance, training and practical examples, while large municipalities want coordinated and unified action, not individual solutions. The SAP perspective emphasizes the perspectives of staff and citizens over a technical approach. When understood, it explains why insufficient resources, lack of skills and fragmented implementation hinder the implementation of the strategy. The wellbeing services county of Ostrobothnia is characterized by bilingualism, a fragmented geography and different types of capacities of municipalities, which emphasize the contextual and participatory nature of the strategy. The strategic success of digitalization largely depends on how well digital tools are successfully integrated into concrete actions and interactions that cross organizational boundaries and reflect the needs of residents. This is essential for the research question, as it reflects how digital tools enable both strategy and organizational integration across sectors. (Setälä et al., 2024.)

#### **2.4.2. Professionals' experiences and challenges in implementing digital services in Ostrobothnia**

From an SAP perspective, the proper involvement of professionals enables the successful implementation of digital tools, especially in the social and healthcare sector, where there are many personnel. The top-down transition approach does not reassure employees, but on the contrary creates uncertainty among them. (Gjellebæk et al., 2020, p. 7.) Nursing staff experience stress regarding healthcare IT, and services are often intermittent or in many information systems at the same time, which makes it difficult to work in a unified manner (Hospodková et al., 2021, p. 14; Heinäsenaho et al., 2025, p. 12.) The integration has been implemented so that regardless of which welfare area the customer wants to contact, professionals have one system at their disposal. However, records regarding care and service

are more fragmented, with each welfare area having its own customer and patient information systems. (Heinäsenaho et al., 2025, p. 65.) Multiple information systems make it difficult to utilize scalability, and an individual professional cannot adopt an unlimited number of new information systems and practices. (Heinäsenaho et al., 2025, p. 66.) Heinäsenaho et al. (2025, p. 42.) continues that doctors and nurses spend an average of 3 hours and 15 minutes on daily records, and a third is duplicated records. This is in contradiction with the desired benefits of digitalization, which is specifically intended to make operations more efficient and facilitate everyday work. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2024) reminds that the use of artificial intelligence has the potential to automate routine tasks such as recording, which frees up nursing staff for other tasks and at the same time allows citizens to receive services more easily and regardless of location (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2024). Among professionals, the need to create a shared understanding (sensemaking) of the new operating environment and manage other competing goals is emphasized in implementing digitalization. This directly challenges everyday decision-making and strategic work. (Einola, 2018 s. 1)

A new customer and patient information system has been introduced in all Well Being Services County of Ostrobothnia units in 2025 (Well Being Services County of Ostrobothnia, 2025, p. 40). Digital services are mainly perceived as a positive thing, but many challenges were associated with the successful implementation and user experience of digital services (Pennanen et al., 2023, p. 95). Many employees also feel that they do not have sufficient knowledge of the use of digital tools or electronic healthcare services. Learning and daring to experiment is time-consuming, and employees do not always feel that they have sufficient resources to take control of new digital tools. (Gjellebæk et al., 2020, p. 7.) This highlights the need for support from superiors among staff (Pennanen et al., 2023, p. 97). As a result of the implementation of digital services, the role of professionals becomes more guiding and evaluative. With this modification of the content of work tasks, routine tasks are transferred to digital solutions. However, the implementation of these services is perceived as burdensome, and many professionals experience an increased sense of urgency. This is an interesting observation from the perspective of the goals of digitalization, which advocate

the simplification of work tasks as manual work is automated. (Pennanen et al., 2023, p. 102.) The phenomenon may be due to the perceived lack of training in the implementation of digital devices and the lack of skills in utilizing artificial intelligence. (Hospodková et al., 2021, p. 10.) In addition, professional identity changes as work tasks are modified and roles are renewed through digitalization. (Gjellebæk et al., 2020, p. 7.) According to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, a project underway in the wellbeing services county of Ostrobothnia has shown that digital services cannot replace face-to-face encounters, and artificial intelligence cannot replace empathetic professionals in nursing work (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2025). Communication is essential in the implementation of digital services and must be addressed at the entire organizational level to avoid creating more resistance to change than the inherent doubts and challenges of implementation. (Pennanen et al., 2023, p. 97)

#### **2.4.3. Residents' experiences and challenges in using digital services in Ostrobothnia**

The level of resident satisfaction in the wellbeing services county of Ostrobothnia is high, despite extensive changes. Patients are satisfied with the level of care they receive, which from an SAP perspective indicates that, for example, the gradual implementation of electronic digital services into practice has been perceived as beneficial. The strategy of the welfare region highlights the desire to develop digital services to meet customer needs and improve customer experience (wellbeing services county of Ostrobothnia, 2025 p. 19.) Many welfare regions have indeed begun to develop and standardize digital services offered to both professionals and residents. Digital services have the potential to improve the availability of social and health services, which is important from the perspective of equality for residents. In addition, in the wellbeing services county of Ostrobothnia region, services reduce unnecessary travel for customers and thus improve the efficiency of time use. Strategic goals become concrete with the help of these new digital services. (Pennanen et al., pp. 25-27.)

In 2025, the goal of the wellbeing services county of Ostrobothnia has been to develop digital platforms that help with prevention and self-care. (wellbeing services county of Ostrobothnia, p. 4) Special attention must be paid to the accessibility and availability of

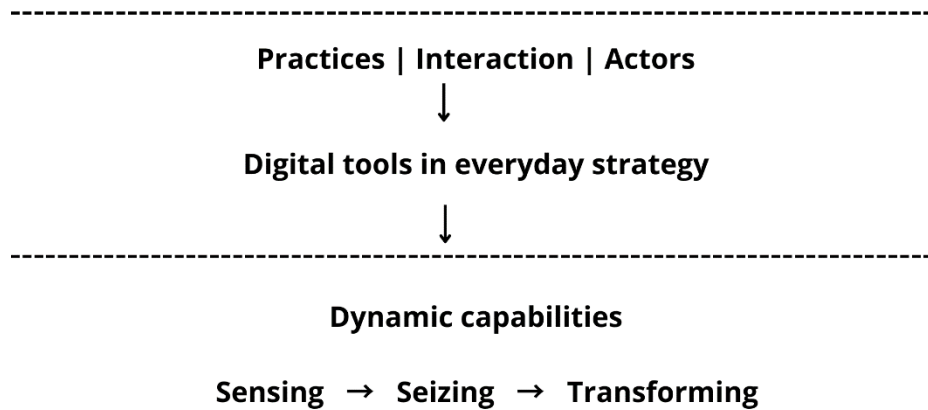
customers, which is achieved by adding various digital services, such as chatbots or remote home care. (wellbeing services county of Ostrobothnia, p. 12). The need for digital support in the population is growing, and there are not necessarily enough professional resources for support (Pennanen et al., p. 56). In particular, older age groups are left behind in the turmoil of digitalization implementation, whose cognitive abilities are declining despite their active participation in training. This increases the risk that some will not receive the necessary services when they do not have the opportunity to deal with another person face to face. (Pennanen et al., p. 70; wellbeing services county of Northern Finland, p. 41). As a solution, Pennanen et al. (p. 70) suggest further strengthening the competence of customers and building training environments for residents. Digital tools can be challenging, but the strategy is implemented in practice when platforms are developed, and residents are trained. Digital tools not only support strategic work but are part of the implementation of the strategy across organizational boundaries, which is centered on customer orientation.

#### **2.4.4. Selected research frameworks**

Following the literature review, two guiding theoretical perspectives and their combination have been selected for the analysis. Strategy-as-Practice (SAP) and dynamic capabilities. SAP thinking emphasizes strategy in practice and concreteness, as well as its interaction and embedding in daily activities. (Whittington, 1996; Jarzabkowski, 2008.) Dynamic capabilities complement the perspective by emphasizing the organization's ability to perceive opportunities (sensing), seize them (seizing) and modify its operations according to requirements (transforming) (Teece, 2007). Together, these two frameworks enable an examination of how the implementation of digitalization affects the implementation of strategy in the wellbeing services county of Pohjanmaa. The Strategy-as-Practice (SAP) and Dynamic Capabilities (DC) frameworks complement each other, as they examine strategy work at different levels, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 shows how the Strategy-as-Practice (SAP) and Dynamic Capabilities (DC)

# Strategy as practice



**Figure 1: Research framework. (Author's own illustration, 2025).**

frameworks are linked to each other in the context of this study. At the top, we see SAP thinking, which reflects practical strategy work, i.e. all the interaction situations and actors that strategy implementation requires to succeed. In the middle, digital tools in everyday strategy act as a bridge between the two theoretical perspectives. An example of this is digital tools, which concretize strategy work but at the same time enable dynamic capabilities. At the bottom, the figure shows the three phases of dynamic capabilities: sensing, seizing and transforming, which help an organization identify changes in the operating environment, seize the opportunities that arise from them and change its own operations accordingly.

## METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Research strategy and methods

The aim of the study is to examine how the introduction of digital tools and transition management are implemented in the wellbeing county of Ostrobothnia's strategy implementation. The selected study is a qualitative case study in nature. This research method enables an in-depth and multidimensional examination of the inside of the organization, its implementation processes and strategic management. Case study refers to a research strategy that helps to understand and study phenomena in depth to create new theories or test existing theories, in this case from the perspective of strategic management of the implementation and implementation of digital tools (Eisenhardt 1989, p. 534). The research method involves the study of social entities and situations using various data sources in an iterative research process. Case studies answer "how" and "why" questions and focus on functional characteristics, which are investigated using qualitative techniques. (Dubois et al. 2010, p. 130.) Typically, these techniques are combined, and methods include interviews, questionnaires, and observation, which can be qualitative, quantitative, or both in nature. (Dubois et al. 2010, p. 130; Eisenhardt 1989, p. 534). The research consists of multi-method approaches, as the research has utilized both interviews and surveys. The qualitative nature of the study, i.e. management team interviews, provides a deeper understanding of decision-making and management. The survey material consists of resident, stakeholder and staff surveys, which provide a broad and comprehensive overall view and experience of the topic.

Case studies are used for a variety of purposes, in this case, to understand the strategy for implementing digital transformation, as well as human relationships and social entities. The research processes focus not so much on frequency or prevalence, but on finding functional connections and exploring processes. Research surveys offer the opportunity to test theories or develop new ones, especially in areas where empirical evidence is currently fragmented or contradictory. Qualitative and quantitative data help to understand phenomena that are difficult to measure using other methods. Case studies are therefore a way to gain new insights, develop new theories, explore dynamics, and understand complex phenomena as

they are. (Dubois et al. 2010, p. 130.) In this study, there is a lot of interview and survey data, and the subject area is broad, but this analysis is limited to topics that specifically concern the introduction of digital tools in the strategy process and the implementation of the transition management strategy. The limitation is made on the grounds of the limitations of the research questions and time resources. The research process proceeded by first selecting the research questions and deciding on the scope for studying the introduction of digital tools and transition management. After this, the data was collected by conducting a management team interview, a resident survey, a staff survey and a stakeholder survey. The most relevant responses were selected from the responses, which were analyzed by combining qualitative and quantitative data. The strengths of the chosen method are its broad scope for comparison, context-specific understanding and triangulation, i.e. combining different data sources to obtain a comprehensive picture. (Dubois et al. 2010, p. 130; Eisenhardt 1989, p. 534). The scope decided on means that not all of the data can be utilized in this study. In addition, the results do not reflect other wellbeing counties, and they cannot be used to generalize to other organizations.

The Master's thesis has utilized OpenAI's GPT-5 language model, which supported language formatting, sources and citation practices. The analysis, surveys, and interviews of the study are entirely the researcher's own creation and are the author's responsibility.

### **3.2. Case selection**

The organization to be studied was selected based on its specific characteristics and the progress of digital transformation. The wellbeing county of Ostrobothnia is a bilingual and widely populated area, where new digital services are being introduced, and they will be further developed in the upcoming strategy period 2026-2029. The wellbeing county of Ostrobothnia's management also plays a significant role in strategy implementation and change management. This significant and strategic digital transformation, change management and organizational structure, and its stakeholders provide a suitable context for studying the introduction of digital tools and transition management. The research is guided by the following questions: How do organizations and units in the Ostrobothnia welfare

region utilize their dynamic capabilities in implementing digital solutions to improve collaboration? What challenges and enabling employees and residents experience in implementing digital tools, and how do these affect the welfare region's ability to renew itself and implement its strategy?

The presented data consists of four key sources: management team interviews, resident, staff and stakeholder surveys, from which the most relevant perspectives and experiences for the research topic have been selected. The data has been selected because they provide a diverse and in-depth overview of organizational structures, operations and the experiences of different parties with change. Executive team interviews broaden strategic-level decision-making and justify managers' decision-making, while surveys provide a broader understanding of the experiences and views of different stakeholders. The data has been selected based on their relevance to the research topic and research questions, which allows for focused analysis to enable a successful case study. This also explains the limitation, so that the relevance of the analysis remains, and the focus is on the implementation of digital tools and change management.

### **3.3. Data collection**

The empirical data for this study was collected using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The data used were management team interviews, residents, staff and stakeholder surveys, which were directed at the organization and its various stakeholders.

| Data source                | Time period       | Collection method                                | Participants                      | Main content  |
|----------------------------|-------------------|--|-----------------------------------|---|
| Management team interviews | 12-24 March, 2025 | Semi-structured interviews (2 interviewers)      | 20 members of the management team | Status of strategy implementation, development needs, leadership, and dynamic capabilities                    |
| Resident survey            | 1-21 April, 2025  | Online survey (Polis system)                     | 756 respondents                   | Experience of service accessibility and quality, digital services, participation, resource allocation         |
| Personnel survey           | June 2025         | Electronic survey with open and closed questions | 246 employees                     | Implementation of digitalization and change management, everyday work, well-being, strategy, received support |
| Stakeholder survey         | June-July 2025    | Electronic survey                                | 23 respondents                    | Cooperation, communication, future development needs, external collaboration                                  |

**Figure 2: Summary of data collection. (Author's own illustration 2025).**

The first interviews with the management team were carried out in the spring between March 12, 2025, and March 24, 2025. There were two interviewers and the full interview questions can be seen in Appendix 1. The interviews covered themes related to the participation of the

strategy, the status, development needs and implementation. The purpose of this was to observe the status of the strategy implementation, its participants and the management team's assessments of the development directions. The implementation theme examined how the strategy should be made concrete for residents and staff. This was followed by a follow-up theme on how the strategy should be visible in everyday life and what kind of leadership is needed in the upcoming strategy period 2026-2029 to achieve the goals. In addition, the interview expanded on themes related to the challenges of the wellbeing county of Ostrobothnia from the perspective of residents and the organization, resources and their priorities, as well as the future vision and views on opportunities. Questions related to dynamic capabilities explored the competitive advantage and strengths of the wellbeing county of Ostrobothnia that help to stand out, and how these capabilities should be managed in the future. The interview ended with a discussion of the challenges and opportunities of strategy and what areas of strategy each person in the management team should focus on in their own sector during the upcoming strategy period.

The resident survey was carried out between 01.04.2025 and 21.04.2025. The resident survey was conducted using the new Polis survey system. The resident survey was extensive and collected views to support the development of the strategy. Residents' perspectives were obtained on the functionality of social and health services and rescue services, future challenges and areas for service development. The survey contained 53 statements, which were answered in a yes/no format. The survey provided information relevant to research on residents' experiences regarding the accessibility and quality of services and the smooth use of digital services. In addition, information was obtained on the role of services in supporting well-being, residents' views on resource allocation and future challenges, and individual opportunities for influence in decision-making. The survey provides a broad view of residents' needs and experiences and thus serves as key data for the research, which can be used to analyze the role of digital tools from a resident perspective and observe the implementation of the strategy in practice.

The personnel survey was conducted during June 2025. The personnel survey was conducted on the electronic Webropol-platform with a structured questionnaire consisting of both closed and open questions. These were used to investigate themes related to the implementation of digitalization, the implementation of change management, and their effects on everyday work. The survey examined personnel's views on digitalization, the success of change management, the support measures received, and the effects of digitalization on working methods and customer service. Open questions made it possible to highlight the most challenging issues and development targets directly from the employees' perspective. The survey's target group was intended to be as comprehensive as possible, including individuals from different fields and job descriptions. The data can be used to better analyze the success of digitalization implementation and the role of transition management from the personnel's perspective, and to obtain development suggestions for the strategy.

A stakeholder survey was also carried out as part of the ongoing strategy implementation of the wellbeing county of Ostrobothnia for the years 2026–2029. The survey was carried out on the Webropol platform, and its aim was to collect the views of different stakeholders on the wellbeing area's operations, the functionality of cooperation, communication and future development needs. The survey's respondent groups were municipalities, companies, organizations, schools and other partners in the area. The survey consisted of multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions. The survey focused on the functionality of cooperation, the activities of stakeholders in strategy implementation, the future trends of the wellbeing county of Ostrobothnia and the most essential points of the upcoming strategy period.

The results of all surveys were used both to support the wellbeing area's strategy implementation and as material for this master's thesis, especially from the perspective of implementing digitalization and change management.

### **3.4. Data analysis**

Qualitative content analysis was used in the analysis of the data, which was used to identify all the issues related to the implementation of digital tools and transition management in the

wellbeing county of Ostrobothnia (Eisenhardt 1989, p. 534). A careful review of the survey and interview responses, selecting the parts most relevant to the research questions, and grouping the findings into thematic categories for further interpretation.

The analysis was carried out systematically so that all themes related to the topic could be reliably highlighted. The interview results were transcribed and read in their entirety, after which the relevant and related topics for the research were selected. I selected all questions related to transition management, digitalization and the organization's capabilities and goals for the study to obtain the broadest possible picture. I repeated the same when examining the results of all surveys so that I could get the views of all participants in the study on the same topics. Different data sources were collected and compared with each other, following the principle of triangulation, so that the results remain reliable. This ensured the reliability of the data, even though the analysis method relied largely on careful review of the results and their thematization.

## **4. FINDINGS**

This section presents the results of empirical research. The data consists of interviews with the wellbeing county of Ostrobothnia management team, resident and staff surveys, and a stakeholder survey. The interviews and surveys have been analyzed thematically, and the results have been grouped around themes that are central to the research questions. First, the key results of the management team interviews are presented, followed by the resident survey, staff survey, and finally the stakeholder survey. After the presentation, all of these groups are compared with each other, after which the key findings are summarized in a synthesis section.

### **4.1. Management team interviews**

The management team interviews were conducted in spring 2025, and there was a total of 20 interviewees. The management team's opinions on the strategic implementation of digital tools and transition management are important, as they are key in both creating the strategy

and implementing it. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured thematic interview and the interview outline can be found in Appendix 1. Each member of the management team was interviewed separately, and each interview was scheduled for 45 minutes. The questions were chosen to support the development and implementation of the strategy and to answer the research questions. The key results of the interviews are presented below, grouped by theme based on relevance.

The first theme is strategy implementation and engagement, which covers questions 1 and 3, relating to strategy implementation stakeholders and implementation for staff and residents. The interview emphasized themes related to participation and its practical implementation:

*“The strategy implementation must engage all personnel, residents, organizations, and other key stakeholders. In practice, this is implemented through surveys, workshops, and public consultations, among other methods. The goal is for the strategy to be genuinely shared and to address the needs that exist within the area.” (Management Team Interviews 2025.)*

The quote above supports the SAP mindset, where strategy is implemented in everyday life. In the management team interview, it was emphasized that the most important groups in terms of participation are the staff, the management team and third sector organizations. Staff includes all employees, different levels of management and intermediate supervisors. Involving staff in a tangible way can take place, for example, through surveys, workshops and hearings, which allow staff to influence strategic policies, and not just individual decisions. Actively involving staff implements the SAP idea in such a way that the strategy is not just top-down directives but is integrated into everyday life through workshops and surveys, which shape strategic policies and thus the strategy lives in practice. The management team feels that it has a central responsibility in implementing the strategy, and the responses emphasized the management's responsibility to implement the strategy for staff, and that making and implementing the strategy is a social and organizational process by nature.

The importance of staff involvement was understood, as it was mentioned as increasing commitment and understanding of joint decisions. Based on the management team interviews, it was observed that documenting the strategy is not enough, but it must be implemented through practical actions:

*“The strategy has been honed for a long time, but it should be condensed and compressed into a diamond so that it is easy to understand and implement. Everyone should be able to speak the same language about the strategy and recognize what it means in their work. There should be a clear foundation and core messages, a clear theme, the message is conveyed in the same way even if it is of different significance. It is repeated often enough and concretely enough. The population does not think in terms of strategy but more in terms of promises, concrete measures are more important to them.” (Management Team Interviews 2025.)*

Practical implementation facilitates operationalization (seizing’). Several members of the management team also emphasized that the strategy is successful when it is embedded in the organization's daily work and activities, thus strengthening the organization's dynamic capability to learn and react. The role of middle management was also seen as crucial in implementing the strategy for the staff, and several interviewees pointed out that the risk of preventing the implementation of the strategy occurs in uncertain middle management. The essence of implementation was described in management team interviews (2025) as follows:

*“The strategy is implemented by putting the things sought in the strategy into action. The strategy should also be clear to them and should be concretely related to everyday life and services. This functionality is at the core of SAP thinking. Staff involvement and ensuring comprehensibility supports the continuous renewal and learning of the strategy (learning-by-doing).”*

The involvement of residents was another important group, because even if the strategy is not formed entirely on their terms, their participation is part of the opportunity to influence. The management team strongly felt that residents feel trust in the services:

*“I think one of our biggest concerns is that residents in our area need to trust our services so that when they need help, they will get it” (Management Team Interviews 2025).*

*“Transparent processes increase trust, and residents can be concretely involved through hearings and resident surveys. “We aim to build trust, among other things, through accessibility. Accessibility then means that whether they start communicating with us via chat or phone, they need to be able to trust that they can get in touch quickly when they need to” (Management Team Interviews 2025).*

Digital platforms should be prioritized, which allows residents to have discussions and thus participate in the development of the strategy. From an SAP perspective, involving residents ensures that the strategy interacts with its social environment – including external stakeholders (Vaara & Whittington, 2012, p. 308). The interviews emphasized that it is important to understand the needs of residents and strive to integrate these residents’ needs into operational decision-making and development work. Residents’ trust should be one of the key goals of the strategy, as they should feel that they are receiving help quickly and efficiently. Interviewees often raised themes related to the well-being of children and young people, such as physical activity, prevention of exclusion and preventive services, in which residents themselves are expected to participate so that solutions can be targeted correctly. Another group of people emerged as elderly people, and in particular the maintenance of their well-being and support for their functional capacity. Here, the members of the management team hoped for accessibility and easy ways to contact them, such as chat services and remote receptions.

From the perspective of participation, third sector organizations and the municipalities and cities in the region were identified as important, with whom strategic discussions should be held. Health and social care organizations and associations were mentioned as being over 800 different parties, whose participation is challenging, but possible by utilizing digital platforms. The interview emphasized that communication of the strategy should be clear and

easy to understand, for example using visualizations. Stakeholder disconnection was seen as a concrete obstacle, and the use of digital channels was seen as a solution to the scalability of inclusion:

*“There are over eight hundred social welfare organizations and associations alone, so ensuring their voices are heard is a real challenge. There is really no better way to achieve this than by using digital tools and platforms that make participation easier and more meaningful” (Management Team Interviews 2025.)*

As practical participation opportunities, digital platforms and channels and forums were primarily mentioned for discussions with municipalities and the third sector. The participation of these parties enables expert perspectives, which helps to shape the strategy on a practical level. Digital platforms can be seen here as part of the everyday practice of the strategy process. The management team also underlined the importance of the involvement of the council and the government in the planning and implementation of the strategy, as it is part of the political context. The participation of the council and the government was mentioned as emphasizing power relations, legitimacy and decision-making practices, which are central to SAP thinking.

The next theme deals with the role and challenges of leadership, and this includes observations and conclusions from questions 5 and 6, which deal with strategy management now and in the future and address sector-specific challenges. Several interviewees mentioned that good strategic wording is such that it can be turned into a concrete goal, i.e. the strategy is implemented in everyday life and at different management levels and is reflected in daily decisions: As emphasized, the importance of digitalization in implementing the strategy and that launching digital reception is very important:

*“A good strategic statement is one that can be translated into a concrete goal, i.e. operationalized. And not so general that it doesn't actually translate into any action.” (Management Team Interviews 2025.)*

Operationalization is a core issue in the ‘seizing’ phase. The role of leadership was particularly emphasized as a guide and example. It was emphasized that the implementation of the strategy starts with the management and thus flows naturally down the hierarchy:

*“Everyone in management or a supervisory position should have a strategy on their desk. What does this mean for my job? What issues do I deal with as a supervisor?” (Management Team Interviews 2025.)*

According to the management team, strategic goals and messages must be raised continuously and in a sufficiently concrete way. Strategy talk quickly turns into unclear organizational jargon, so communicating through concreteness ensures the clarity of the strategy in everyday life. Digital tools were seen as part of the concrete implementation of the strategy. The importance of middle management was also frequently raised in this section, and it was mentioned that weekly meetings are organized with middle management to review the goals. Some respondents felt that the implementation of the strategy for the personnel largely falls into the hands of middle management. However, some argued that the strategy process is long and multi-stage, which can weaken commitment. Continuous development of the strategy, repetition of communication and the use of digitalization in creating new operating models strengthen the dynamic capabilities of the Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia (Finnish Government, 2025).

When the interview delved into sector-specific challenges, the sufficiency of resources, cost-saving measures, integration difficulties, preventive work and the need for data and digital tools emerged as recurring themes. The economic situation is causing pressure and the demand for savings were seen as one of the biggest challenges:

*“It's really difficult to make changes in the middle of the budget year... As long as it's structured like this, I don't know if it's even possible to achieve real integration. I doubt it.” (Management Team Interviews 2025.)*

The tension presented partly explains why strategic priorities do not always translate into action. Concerns also arose about the adequacy of personnel and the personnel budget and the availability of skilled labor. Silos were also raised as a challenging factor, as operations within the organization are divided so that different departments or units operate more in their own “boxes” than in cooperation with each other. The members of the management team were concerned that when everyone focuses on their own areas, common goals will be forgotten. Preventive measures were mentioned throughout the interview as an important area of focus, but this is also associated with resource pressure that leads to acute situations. In general, change led from above was felt to be burdensome and in terms of transition management, the employees’ experience of changes is greater than that of management. The need for data and monitoring tools arose from the need to receive quick warning signs if quality or safety starts to deteriorate somewhere and the current methods do not respond to these effectively enough. In addition, technology would be needed to assess what kind of skills and how much are needed, in what timeframe skills are disappearing, and how to provide more training. Digital tools for preventive work could support both patients and employees, who could receive more information, understanding, and guidance.

The last theme to be discussed from the management team interviews relates to resources and future prospects, to which I have combined questions 8 and 9. The answers broaden the management team's views on where resources should be allocated and what kind of changes and adaptation skills are expected for the Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia in the coming years. Strategy implementation was a theme that was raised several times and the need for clarity and consistent operating methods was highlighted. The goal should be a clearly implemented strategy that guides operations and enables the efficient use of resources, and if the Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia succeeds in implementing the strategy, the wellbeing county can be stronger and more sustainable in five years.

*“I see our welfare area in 5 years in a situation where our economy is balanced... we can handle some of it digitally and we can secure those heavy services” (Management Team Interviews 2025).*

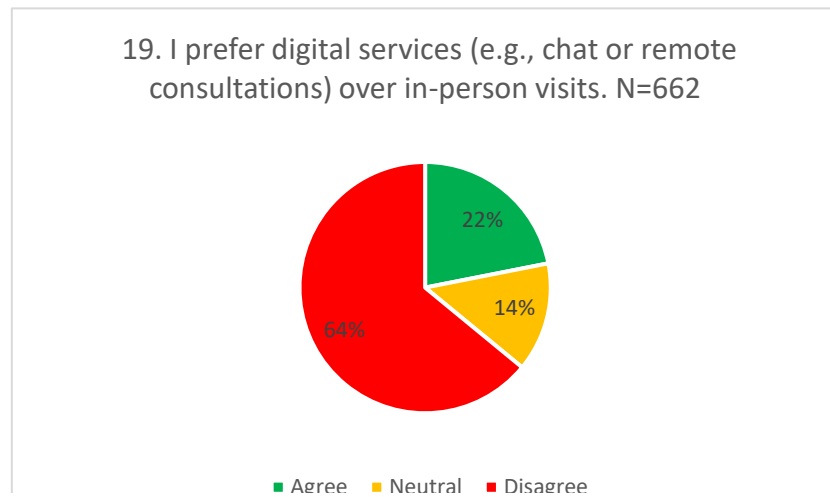
According to the management team, social care should focus particularly on preventive services, staff availability and the development of services according to customer needs. These were believed to contribute to the population staying healthy and improving when preventive services started to work as desired. Digital services were also seen as playing a significant role in this matter, and artificial intelligence would be integrated much more strongly into the care processes and the whole, increasing efficiency in many areas. For example, some customers could be treated digitally, thus ensuring the capacity of heavy services.

*“As emphasized, the importance of digitalization in implementing the strategy and that launching digital reception is very important” (Management Team Interviews 2025).*

The interviewees saw the scarcity of resources and the small population base as the biggest resource challenges. The optimal population base was named 200,000–250,000 inhabitants to ensure efficiency. Another factor that would increase efficiency would be the utilization of artificial intelligence services in the care process, and digital services were seen as a key part of the service package. The management team felt that they had to constantly balance between what they could do and what they could afford to do. Staff shortages were also seen as a recurrent threat in the future. Employer image was seen as important in terms of attractiveness, and the management team felt that the organization is agile and adapts quickly to changes, thus maintaining a positive and active working atmosphere. Accessibility and trust also emerged as key themes in the questions, which emphasized the importance of actions, not just promises. Here too, digital services can promote accessibility and functionality (e.g. callback, Lifecare), which are critical for trust. However, criticism was raised that callback does not work during the same day due to new digital tools, making access to services more challenging.

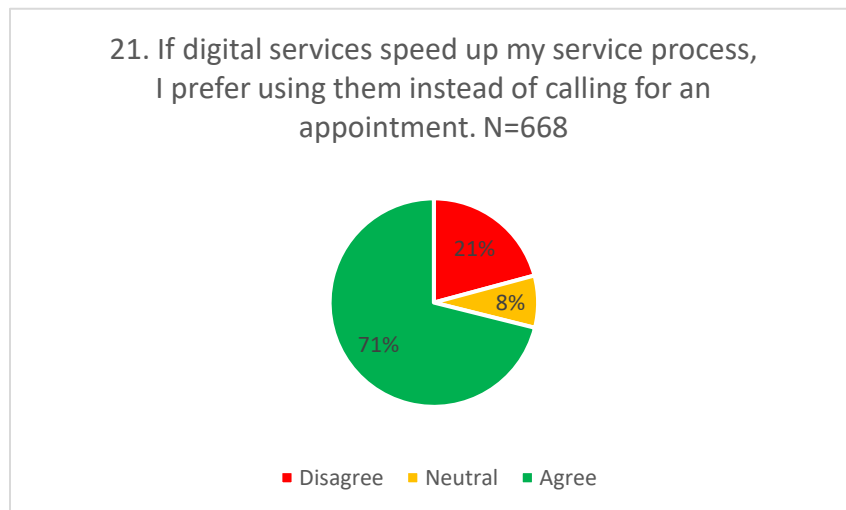
## 4.2. Resident survey

The content and results of the resident survey are presented below in a way that fits the research questions. The resident survey was organized in late spring 2025 and contained a total of 52 questions related to services, strategy, inclusion, trust and digitalization in social and health care. 758 residents responded to the survey and the questions were set in yes/no format, with the option to choose neutral. The survey was published on the Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia websites and was promoted on their social media channels and in press releases. The survey was conducted on the electronic Polis survey platform, where participants can anonymously express their opinion on the claims made on the topic. This is the first time that the Polis system has been used on this scale in the Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia, so the survey also served as a pilot as a digital participation tool. The platform experiment enabled the evaluation of the digital tool as an interactive support for the strategy process and as a means of bringing out the voices of stakeholders. In addition, the survey platform can be used to examine how digital inclusion builds new practices for collaboration and decision-making support and creates insights and shared understanding (Vaara & Whittington, 2012, pp. 315–316). The analysis of the questions was approached from the perspective of the research questions, and how the implementation of digitalization affects the implementation of the strategy in the Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia was investigated.



**Figure 3. Residents' attitudes toward digital health services. (Resident survey, 2025).**

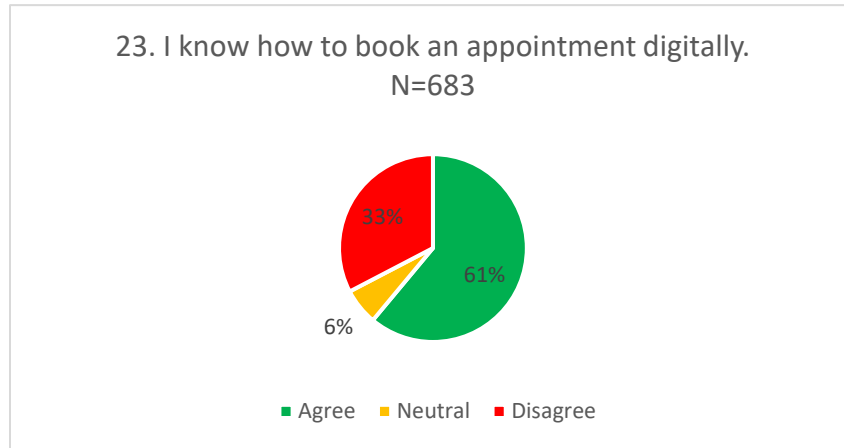
Question 19 aimed to investigate people's attitudes towards digital social and health care tools in service use. There were 662 respondents to the statement and the results show that the absolute majority, 24%, do not favor digital tools when dealing with social and health care. 22% were positive about digital services, and 14% were neutral. The results show that the general attitude towards the introduction and use of digital tools is skeptical and residents perceive face-to-face meetings as an important part of the quality of care. However, a small proportion of respondents who prefer digital services indicate that there is also a demand for remote services.



**Figure 4. Factors influencing the adoption of digital services. (Resident survey, 2025).**

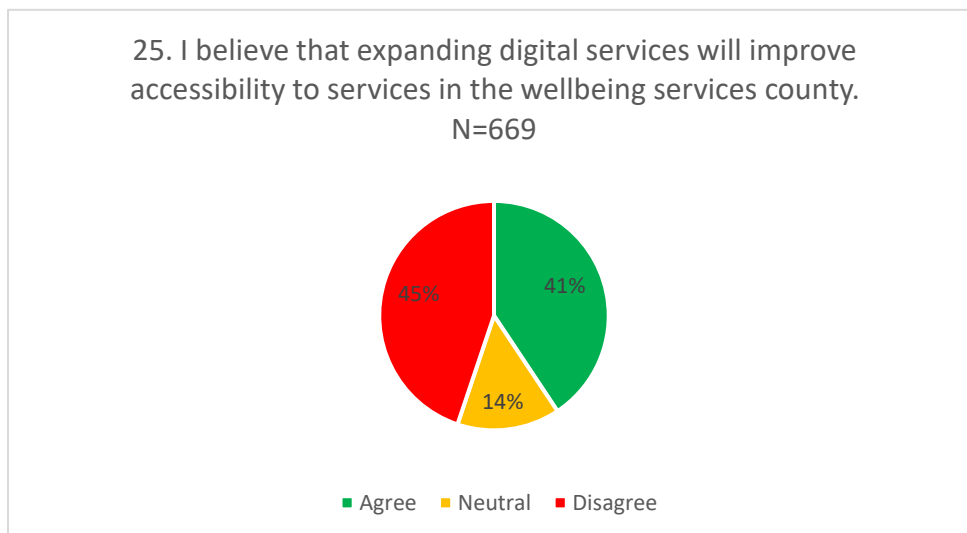
Question 21 was related to the availability and efficiency of services and aimed to determine whether residents are willing to switch from traditional telephone and face-to-face reception to digital reception if this speeds up the process. There were 668 respondents and 71% of those who responded were ready to use digital tools if they speed up the services. 21% disagreed with the statement and 8% of respondents were neutral. The question shows that if digital tools bring demonstrable benefits, residents are ready to use them instead of traditional processes. The difference between questions 19 and 22 is that in question 22, a potential

benefit for residents was suggested in digital tools and their use, which clearly raised interest in the introduction of digital tools.



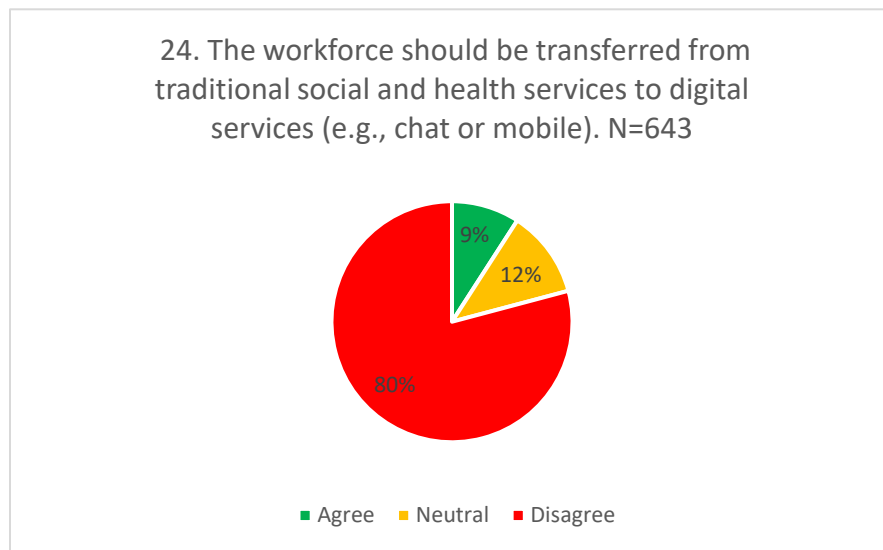
**Figure 5. The digital competence and service awareness of residents. (Resident survey, 2025).**

Question 23 aims to determine the residents' competence in using digital tools by asking whether residents know how to book an appointment digitally. There were 683 respondents to the statement and 61% of the respondents stated that they knew how to book an appointment digitally, while 33% disagreed with the statement. 6% of the respondents were neutral. Residents' awareness of the use of digital tools is not complete, which may have an impact on the experience of using digital tools in social and healthcare services.



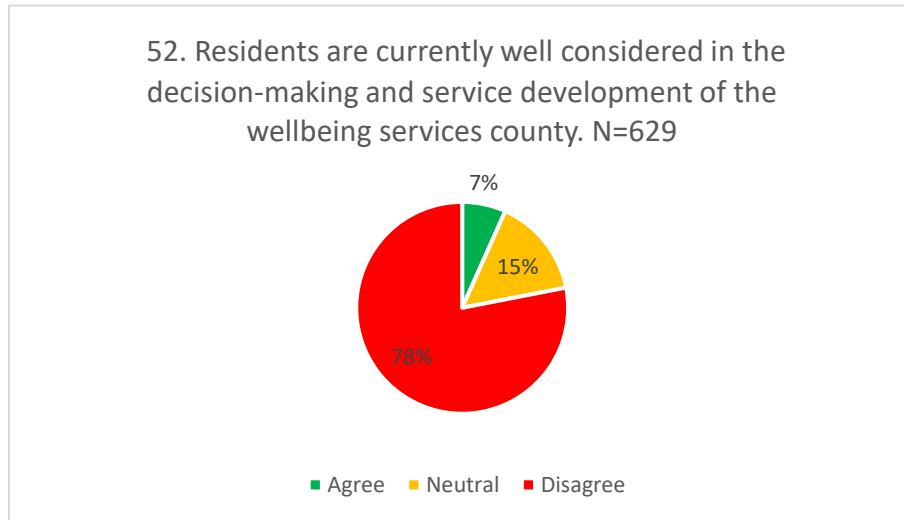
**Figure 6. Accessibility and efficiency. (Resident survey, 2025).**

Question 25 asked residents whether the use of digital tools in social and health care would make services more accessible. There were 669 respondents. The answers divided the respondents into two categories, 41% of whom felt that accessibility would be easier, while 45% of respondents disagreed with the statement. 14% of respondents were neutral. The answers to the statement indicate that the benefits of digital services in terms of accessibility may still be unclear to residents, or that the usability of digital services is not perceived as as valuable as face-to-face assistance.



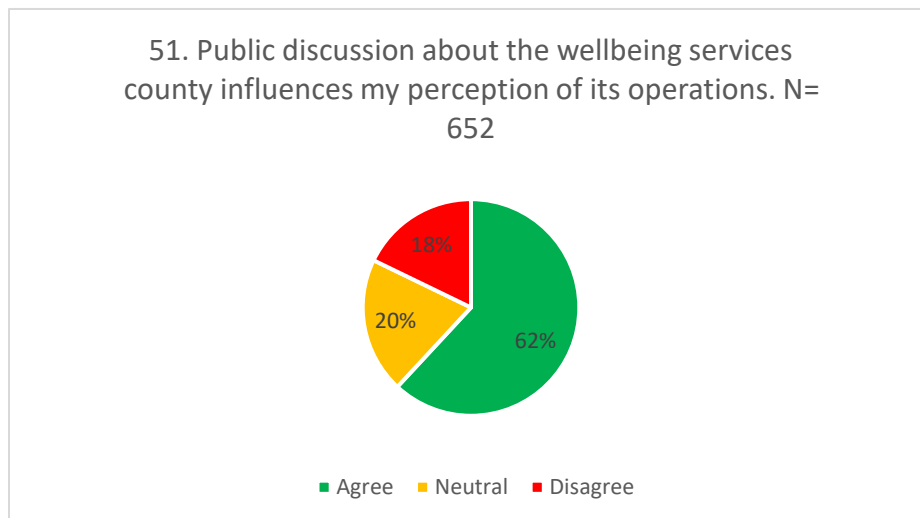
**Figure 7. Resident preference for digital channels (Resident survey, 2025).**

Statement 24 asked residents whether care staff should be transferred from traditional services to digital services. There were 643 respondents and 80% of the respondents disagreed with the statement, 12% agreed and 9% were neutral. The responses show that residents do not feel the need to transfer care staff to digital services. When comparing statement 24 to statement 25, it can be seen that many residents do not feel that access is easier with digital tools, and therefore do not want to transfer care staff to these services.



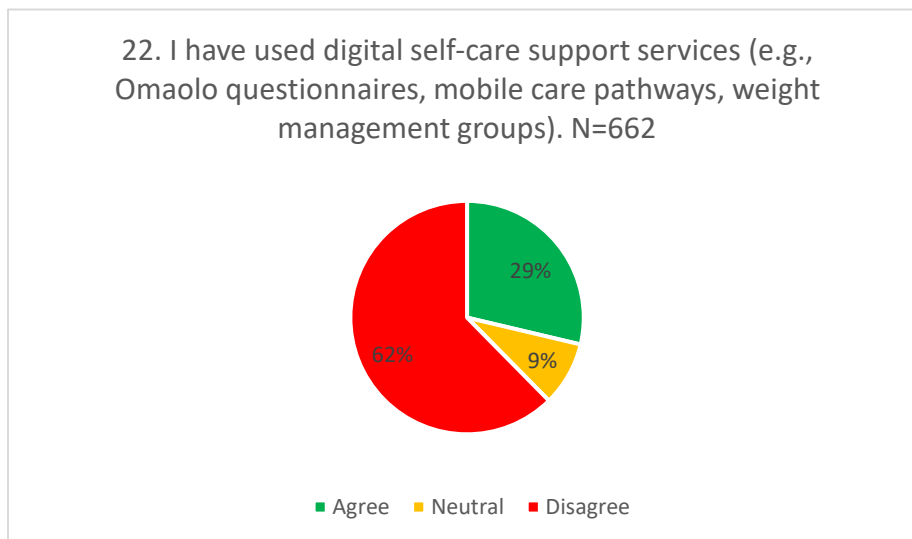
**Figure 8. Residents' trust and influence on service development. (Resident survey, 2025).**

Statement 52 asked how well residents feel that they are taken into account in decision-making and strategy-making in the Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia. There were 629 respondents, of whom 78% thought that they were not taken into account sufficiently, 15% were neutral and 7% agreed with the statement. The vast majority of residents therefore feel that they are not adequately considered in decision-making.



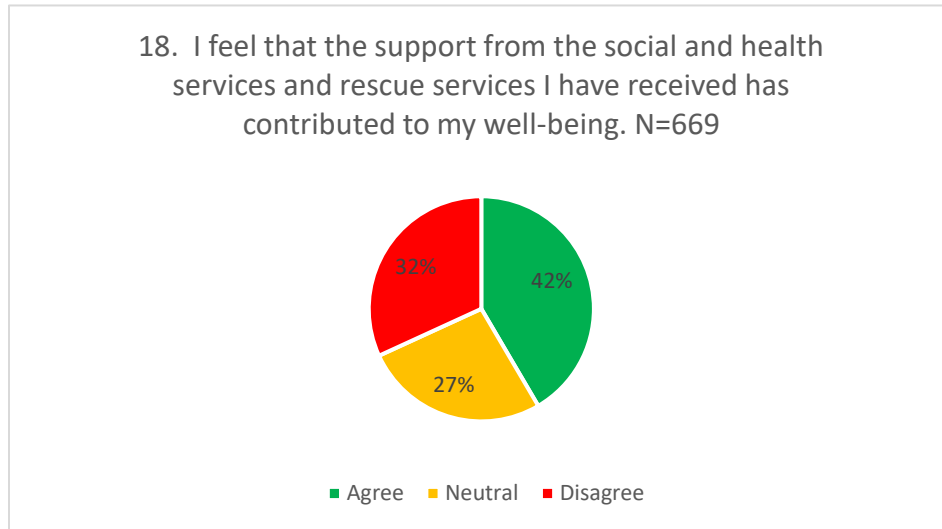
**Figure 9. Public perception of the wellbeing county's operations. (Resident survey, 2025).**

Statement 51 examined how residents perceive public debate to affect their perception of the Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia's operations. There were 652 respondents to the statement, of whom 62% felt that public debate influenced their perception of the county's operations, 20% were neutral and 18% disagreed with the statement. It can be seen from the responses that public debate has an impact on how residents perceive the Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia.



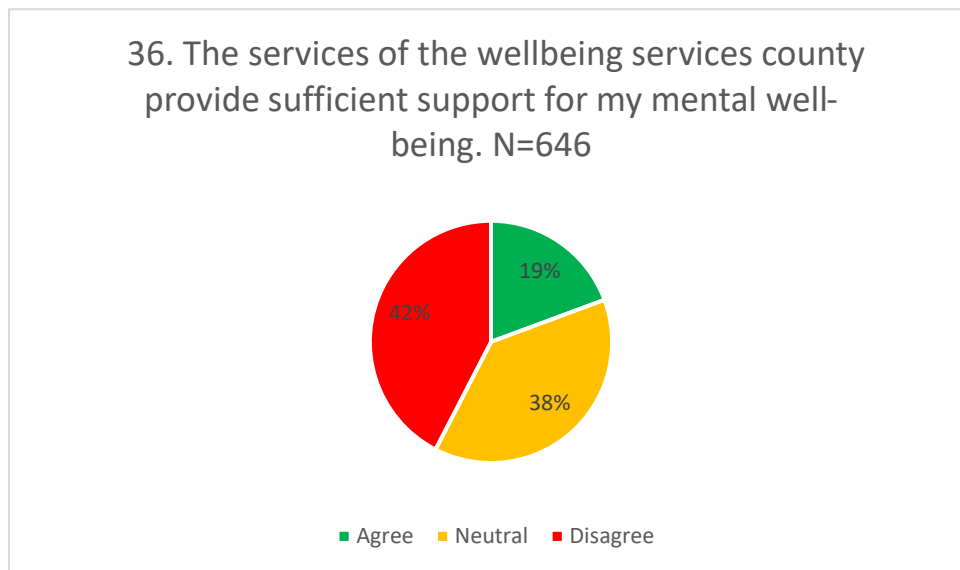
**Figure 10. Utilization of digital services. (Resident survey, 2025).**

Statement 22 examined the level of adoption of digital services supporting one's own well-being in the Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia. There were 662 respondents to the statement and 29% of respondents said they had used digital tools, while 62% of respondents had not used digital tools to support their own care. 9% answered the statement neutrally.



**Figure 11. The effectiveness of services. (Resident survey, 2025).**

Statement 18 examined how well health and rescue services have supported the well-being of residents. There were 669 respondents and 42% of those who answered felt that the services support their well-being, 32% of respondents disagreed with the statement and 27% answered neutrally.

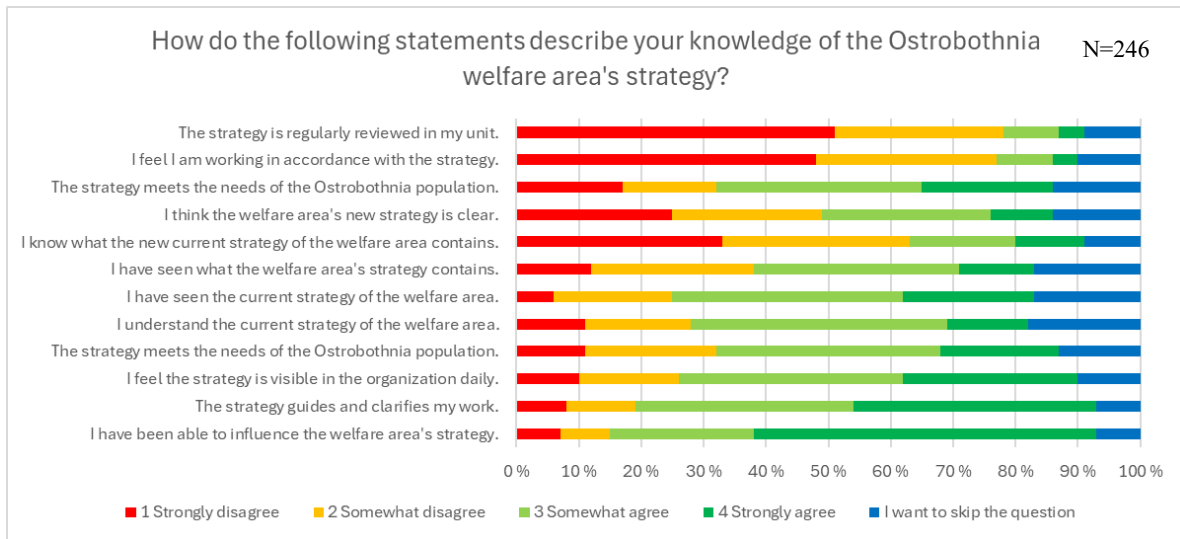


**Figure 12. The role of services in supporting mental well-being. (Resident survey, 2025).**

Statement 36 examined how well the Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia's services support the mental well-being of residents. There were 646 respondents to the statement, of which 19% felt that the services support their mental well-being, 38% were neutral and 42% felt that the services do not support their mental well-being. Judging from the responses, residents may need more services that support mental well-being to cope and function in everyday life.

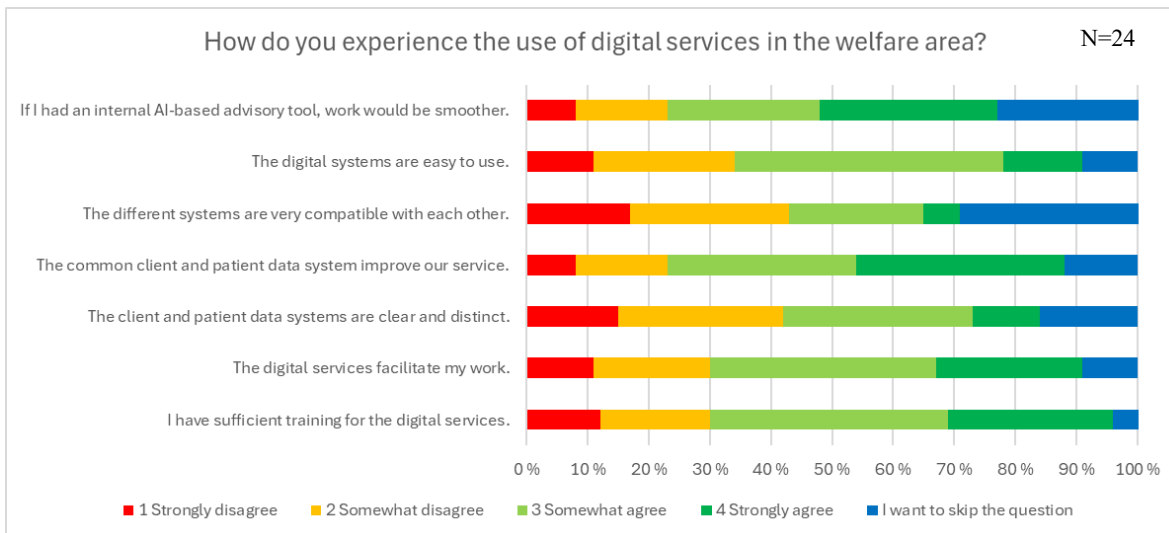
### **4.3. Personnel survey**

This section presents the results of the Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia's personnel survey. The personnel survey was carried out using Webropol and was open from 5 to 30 June 2025 in the personnel intranet. The survey contained a total of 28 questions, which were both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. 246 personnel representatives responded to the survey. The questions were addressed through the themes of strategy, workplace culture, job satisfaction and digital tools. The survey was answered by 246 employees of the Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia from different service sectors, and the aim of the survey was to collect views on the functionality of the strategy and the use of digital solutions as part of everyday work. The responses were collected on the electronic Webropol platform, and the survey was answered anonymously. The survey results will help in the planning and implementation of the 2026-2029 strategy. The results of the survey provide important information on the current status of the implementation of the strategy and the role of digital tools in supporting change. The Strategy-as-Practice literature (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015; Jarzabkowski, Spee & Smets, 2013; Vaara & Whittington, 2012) provides insight on how digital tools are implemented, how strategy is understood and perceived by staff, and how digital tools function as practical aids in strategy implementation. The survey also relates to the dynamic capabilities framework (Teece, 2007), as the results reveal the organization's adaptability to changes in digitalization and the functionality of everyday solutions. The study selected two survey sections related to strategy and digital tools, through which the understanding of the themes related to strategy implementation and digitalization is enhanced from the staff's perspective.



**Figure 13. Knowledge of the Ostrobothnia wellbeing county's strategy. (Personnel survey, 2025).**

The multiple-choice question shown in Figure 11 sought to determine how well the strategy is known to the staff, and how well the strategy is perceived to have been implemented in everyday activities. The responses show that the level of familiarity differs, as many feel that the strategy is familiar as a concept, but its content is perceived as difficult and not visible in everyday life. In particular, the responses to the statement “I feel I am working in accordance with the strategy” show that the strategy is not perceived to guide daily work or decision-making. The responses also highlight the perception that the strategy is not examined enough in the units, which can cause a feeling that the strategy is not consistent and comes from above. However, many of the respondents feel that the strategy corresponds to the needs of the area. Areas for improvement for the 2026-2029 strategy would be to unify and clarify the strategy for the staff so that it is perceived as part of daily activities and as a factor guiding decisions. Challenges in the visibility and functionality of the strategy in concrete everyday work are typical challenges in change management and strategy implementation, as well as its communication (Vaara & Whittington; 2012, 285-286).



**Figure 14. Experience in digital services. . (Personnel survey, 2025).**

Figure 12 shows a promising picture of the introduction of digital tools, as the responses are mainly positive. Digital services are considered to make work easier and faster, and a common customer and patient information system is perceived to improve services. However, three points to note emerge, of which the weakest assessment is given to the interoperability of systems. This may be seen in everyday life as redundant, unnecessary manual work and entries that reduce efficiency, i.e. cause the opposite of the desired outcome, where many systems slow down operations. The claim that the systems are easy to use was perceived positively but did not emerge as strongly as the benefits. This contradiction between high benefits and mediocre usability indicates that usability friction is tolerated because of the benefits seen. The internal AI-based tool model was also positively received, but the claim also had a high pass rate. This may indicate that the AI model is not yet seen as significant. The value of digital tools has therefore been acknowledged, but the fluidity is not as streamlined. Most of the criticism seems to arise from interoperability issues, which is reflected in other claims. AI readiness is positive, but interoperability is a bottleneck, meaning integration should be prioritized before introducing new technologies.

#### 4.4. Stakeholder survey

The stakeholder survey was carried out as part of the preparation of the wellbeing area strategy for 2026-2029. The survey was carried out with the help of Webropol and was open from 27 June to 10 August 2025. The survey was sent by email to partners: municipalities, companies, organizations and other parties, and 23 organizations responded to the survey. The summer season certainly had an impact on the lower than desired number of responses. The survey was carried out anonymously.



**Figure 15. Evaluate the current strategy of the wellbeing services county of Pohjanmaa: stakeholders view. (Stakeholder survey 2025).**

70% of respondents reported that they had seen the current strategy of the Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia. The strategy is therefore reasonably well known to stakeholders and 74% of respondents considered the strategy to be clear, which also indicates a good level of clarity. Only 46% of respondents felt that stakeholders are considered in the strategy, and this is the weakest result of the set. Trust in the use of resources is also moderately high. Participation also emerged as a strong important value, and respondents on average felt that their own role in the organization was important. The strategy is therefore known, but it is

perhaps not completely clear in terms of content. Stakeholders do not feel that they are included as a need and at the same time they felt that participation was one of the most important themes for them. The organization's own role is mainly clear.

To supplement the respondents' thoughts regarding the strategy, two open-ended questions were also selected for the survey regarding the Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia's strategy. The first question was “What should the Ostrobothnia welfare region focus on in the next strategy period 2026–2029?” and the second was “An open-ended response field on the current or future strategy of the welfare region.” These questions provided a deeper picture of the strategy and the stakeholders’ perspectives on it. The following paragraphs have compiled observations, and the most important findings based on these answers.

The respondents felt that the goal “we use our resources effectively” is not currently working. Service chains were felt to be severely stagnant, siloed operations were criticized, and they did not feel that they were able to smoothly utilize multi-professionalism and multi-agency. The effectiveness of resource use and the integration of service chains require development. However, the answers show that the strategy also saw a lot of functionality and ambition. The realism of the measures, however, raises doubts, as the respondents felt that the goals of the strategy were not necessarily achievable. The agility of the strategy also received comments, stating that strategy implementation is a continuous active process, where new forms of service are boldly introduced. The bilingual accessibility of the strategy is an essential strength among the respondents, which should be focused on in the future.

At the resident level, concerns are particularly raised about the well-being and coping of young people, as well as the prevention of exclusion. Young people, students and families were seen as key target groups for the next strategy period by the respondents. The importance of preventive work was noted for residents, and individual themes raised included, for example, the prevention of loneliness, good exercise habits and mental health. Strengthening is hoped for in preventive social and health care work. Accessibility-related topics were also raised in the comments, and several respondents emphasized the speeding

up of access to care, the elimination of queues and the importance of local services. Among the elderly, concerns were raised about the availability of care at home and the availability of care places, which were hoped to be increased.

Cooperation and communication have also raised thoughts among respondents, and respondents hope to develop cooperation between organizations, interface cooperation and experience activities and elevate them to strategic goals, as well as clarify the division of labor. Regarding communication, they hope for clear information, mapping the needs of the population and considering the placement of services. Deepening cooperation, strengthening trust and the fair use of resources are seen as important strategic priorities.

#### **4.5. Synthesis**

The section combines interviews, surveys and stakeholder insights to examine what common themes can be identified from the findings about the impact of digital tools on strategy work. The analysis focuses in particular on three key findings: the fragmentation of strategy work at different levels of the organization, the role of digital tools and the lack of a shared consensus and understanding of the meaning of strategy and its implementation.

##### **4.4.1. Awareness of the strategy**

The familiarity and clarity of the strategy was a common theme throughout the responses. The strategy easily remains distant if its concretization is missing or fragmented. (Whittington, 1996, p. 733.) The majority of stakeholders have seen the strategy and find it quite clear, but the results show that the content is not necessarily transparent. The results of the personnel survey found the same elements when the strategy is known, but the practice remains distant. Leadership and driving change forward were also seen as a challenge. This observation is related to SAP literature, as strategy lives in repetitive routines and concreteness. The management team interviews highlighted more visions and a broader picture, but the tangibility remained looser. This emphasizes the top-down model identified in the strategy-as-practice literature Whittington (2007), which is then difficult to live in practice.

A gap was also found in participation, where, for example, stakeholders find participation extremely important, but do not feel that they are being sufficiently involved. Commitment suffers if participation is not implemented in the desired way. Residents also felt that the strategy was clear in its main features but felt that their own participation was weak. Based on open-ended answers and multiple-choice questions, it was found that staff would like to participate in the strategy but did not feel they could influence it. This means that the value of the strategy is not integrated into daily work, and there is no motivation in investing in it. This reflects another typical problem of top-down communication, where the voice of the staff is not heard enough. (Jarzabkowski, Spee & Smets, 2013, p. 41.) In open-ended interviews, the management team did emphasize the importance of staff participation. They see strategy as a key tool in achieving common goals, but their view differs somewhat from that of the staff. According to them, participation is already underway, and management feels that it is active, recognizing the gap in communication and practices. This is also evident in the SAP study, where strategy is seen as a plan at the top, but is not perceived as guiding everyday life at the bottom (Whittington, 1996, p. 732; Vaara & Whittington, 2012, p. 320). The experience of the staff highlights how important it is that strategy work does not remain disconnected from everyday work.

Stronger embedding of strategic tools is needed, as the management team sees the tools as a means of systematizing and monitoring, but the staff does not necessarily see their own role as strong in implementing the strategy. The use of the Polis platform in the resident survey was a pilot, but residents could not influence the free discussion using the platform, which limited participation. Stakeholders highlighted that “the use of resources is not effective” and service chains are stagnating, which indicates that strategic tools, such as resource plans and indicators, do not guide operations correctly and are therefore not rooted in practical applications. Hospodková et al. (2021, pp. 13–16) discuss the difficulties of implementation, which were also raised in the responses to surveys and challenges. The management team emphasized that service chains do not yet operate seamlessly, i.e. practical implementation is still underway, even if the plans are finalized. There is also resistance to change in the

workplace culture, which supports Hospodková et al. (2021, pp. 13–16)'s idea that implementation should be carried out in stages, that inclusion should be invested in, and that planning is always easier than practical implementation.

#### **4.4.2. Digital tools as enablers and barriers**

From the interviews and surveys, it was noted that although digital tools are seen as key drivers for strategy implementation, significant challenges are identified in their usability, interoperability and accessibility. The management team's responses highlighted the importance of digitalization from a competitive perspective. Digitalization was seen to bring cost-efficiency and accessibility, which is also highlighted when Teece (2007, p. 1342) points out how an organization must be able to detect changes (sensing), seize opportunities (seizing) and modify its operations (transforming). Digital tools also determine the way and conditions under which participation takes place, and thus act as gatekeepers for participation. (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015, pp. 541–552.)

Employees mainly experienced digital tools as positive and as tools that facilitate everyday work and support daily tasks. However, the responses also raised challenges, especially related to usability and system compatibility, for which a more unified solution and practices were needed. This observation also supports the view that tools shape practices and strategy and may limit the flow of information and prioritization (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015, pp. 541–552). It is important that digital tools are integrated naturally into the daily context so that their potential is not left unfulfilled and that digital tools themselves do not act as bottlenecks for smooth customer work. This observation supports Jarzabkowski's (2005) view that strategy work functions as practices, where strategy gains meaning when connected to the concreteness of the work and common ways of operating.

Residents also recognized the benefits of digital tools and channels and were mostly positive about them. Residents felt that the increase in digital channels could mean easier accessibility and self-service channels speed up transactions, but concerns about usability were particularly focused on the aging population. The level of use of digital tools by older people

is lower than that of the rest of the population, and at the same time, the older population uses a lot of social and health care services. Digitalization, if poorly implemented, can increase inequality if issues of accessibility and guidance are not resolved (Kyytsönen, Jääskeläinen & Vehko, 2023). Digital tools act at the same time as an enabler for inclusivity, but they can also marginalize a large part of service users, thus also increasing risk. Residents and stakeholders highlight a key observation about the duality of digitalization, where it supports inclusion and discussion on the one hand, and limits who participates in strategy work on the other. This observation supports Jarzabkowski and Kaplan's (2015) view of strategy tools as technologies that can both enable and constrain participation.

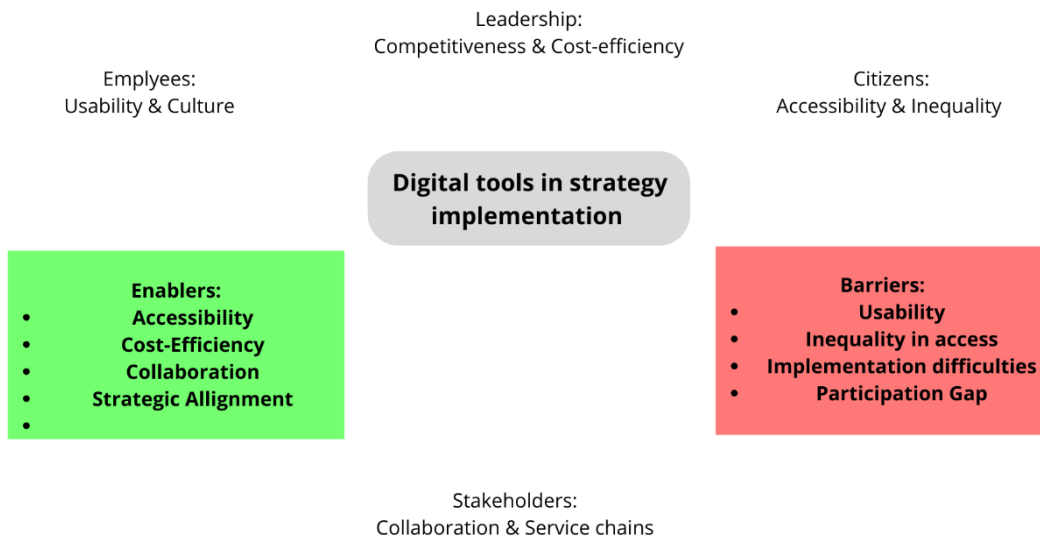
By combining the data, it is noticed how digital tools convey strategy, but do not necessarily increase their visibility or understandability. The value and effectiveness of the tools largely depends on how well they can be implemented into everyday routines and how the tools are utilized in communication and decision-making. Strategy work should be viewed as a whole, where social and technological themes are linked, which is also indicated by the combination of SAP and dynamic capabilities frameworks.

In summary, the cross-case analysis highlighted digital tools as strategy agents that, in addition to increasing efficiency, shape everyday life and their practices at different organizational levels. Effectiveness is largely related to the success and support of integration, as digital tools alone do not produce strategic results. The findings provide the basis for the next chapter, which focuses on the theoretical themes and conclusions of the study in more depth.

#### **4.4.3. Results**

Figure 14 was constructed to better illustrate the synthesis of the results. The focus of the figure is on digital tools in strategy implementation, around which four influential groups were positioned. In the figure, the role of digital tools is seen as central in strategy implementation, and the management team, residents, staff and stakeholders help to understand its complex operational requirements and implications for strategy

implementation. Actors see the enabling and limiting aspects of digitalization, which are also described in the figure. Digitalization is not just one or the other, but elements can be found in both benefits and limitations, and the role of tools is not neutral, but strongly embedded in practice and work culture.



SAP: Tools As Practices | Dnamic capabilities: Sensing , Seizing, Transforming

**Figure 16. Synthesis of findings: digital tools in strategy implementation. (Author’s own illustration, 2025).**

The management team interviews emphasized digital tools as part of improving competitiveness and cost-effectiveness. The management team felt that digital tools improve accessibility for residents, improve resource allocation and thus have a positive impact on the customer experience. The findings were related to the dynamic capabilities framework, and in particular sensing, where the organization can detect changes, seizing, where the organization then adapts to changes by modifying its operating models, which is transforming. (Teece, 2007, p. 1342). However, the management team emphasized that value is only created when the tools genuinely support management and everyday life, i.e. digitalization as an umbrella concept is not enough in itself.

The staff raised more themes related to usability and work culture. Digital tools were viewed positively as making work easier and even essential in modern times, but implementation was partly challenging. The interoperability of systems was felt to be particularly burdensome, for which not enough attention was paid. This corresponds to Hospodková et al. (2021, pp. 13–16)’s views on how digital innovations may be more difficult to implement and apply on a practical level. This is why the role of phasing, inclusion and role-playing is emphasized in literature on the subject. Clear rules of the game and training were also needed for change management, so that the tools do not work in isolation, but enable seamless work.

When we move on to examining the results of the resident survey, it can be noted that the themes were mainly related to accessibility and equality, which digital channels should help to facilitate. Residents would be happy to use self-service options and speed up their transactions with digital tools, but at the same time there was a fear that groups with weaker digital skills would be overlooked in the change. Digital tools are therefore dual in nature, because while they can promote inclusion on the one hand, they can also increase the risk of exclusion. Participation is also constrained, and residents did not feel they could directly influence the strategy.

Stakeholder responses were more related to collaboration and service chains, where the strategy was seen as a threat of remaining distant unless it was integrated into clear cooperation structures and well-defined roles. Stakeholders felt that participation was very important, and they wanted their voices to be heard in the strategy process. However, it was felt that this did not always happen in the desired way, which creates a role for strategy tools as “gatekeepers”, when different tools determine what kind of information is brought to light and what remains hidden under the surface. Jarzabkowski & Kaplan (2015, pp. 541–552) discuss the phenomenon as technologies of rationality, where tools not only convey strategy, but also shape what is perceived as meaningful and what is not.

When looking at the synthesis and figure 14, it can be seen that digital tools act simultaneously as both enablers and obstacles to strategy implementation. Enabling factors

include accessibility, cost-effectiveness and strategic alignment, while barriers include usability issues, inequality and difficulty of implementation, and different levels of expertise. When these pro and con factors are understood, it is understood that the real value of a strategy comes from practical integration, implementation and continuous interaction between actors. Theoretically, the synthesis shows that SAP provides a framework within which digital tools can be better studied. They should not be seen only as technical neutral solutions, but as practical tools that guide decision-making. Another framework used in theory was dynamic capabilities, which recognize that the benefits of digitalization only arise when changes can be observed within the organization and adapted to these changes and operations modified accordingly.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

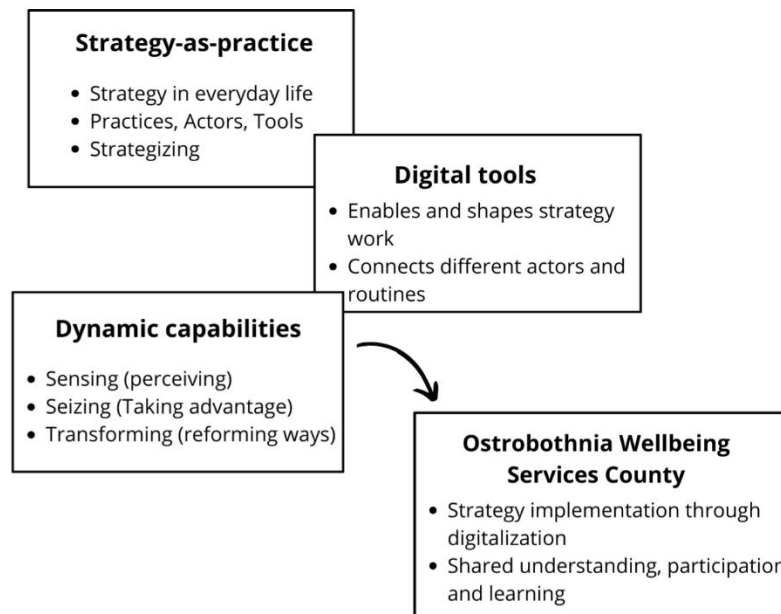
This section aims to combine empirical findings and theoretical frameworks, from which the Strategy-As-Practice and Dynamic Capabilities frameworks and their combination were selected for the study. Whittington (1996) and Jarzabkowski (2005) offer insights into everyday strategy and its practices and how strategy is concretely implemented in everyday life. Teece (2007) presents the theory of dynamic capabilities, which deals with the ability of an organization to perceive, seize and transform opportunities. These two form the basis for the functionality of digital tools as strategy tools and strategy shapers.

### **5.1. Theoretical implications**

The SAP perspective emphasizes strategy above all as an interaction between practices and actors, which this commissioned study confirms. Whittington (1996, pp. 732–733) reminds us that strategy is an inseparable part of practice and should not remain at the level of mere planning. The data shows how the management team, residents, staff and stakeholders experience digital services shaping their understanding of how strategy is implemented. Digital tools were seen as useful and facilitating everyday life, but compatibility problems and poor implementation caused doubts about their functionality, which can lead to resistance to change. Residents, on the other hand, emphasized the themes of accessibility and equality,

which digital tools can strengthen. For staff, the functionality of digital tools meant the success of the strategy, and for residents, correspondingly, making everyday life easier with the help of the tools. If residents, on the contrary, experienced digital services as burdensome, the strategy was perceived as a failure. This reinforces the idea that the successful implementation of a strategy is a lived experience for the respondent groups, especially at a practical level, and not just plans presented on paper.

The figure below illustrates these findings, summarizing the most important ones and how they relate to the theoretical framework. The figure shows how digital tools shape and enable strategy and strengthen the dynamic capabilities of the organization, acting as a mediator for them. Whittington (1996) and Jarzabkowski (2005) argue that strategy is realized in social practices, while Teece (2007) emphasizes the organization's ability to perceive, seize and transform opportunities. The figure crystallizes the idea of how perspectives meet in the empirical context of the well-being county of Ostrobothnia.



**Figure 17. Integration between SAP - digitalization - DC and the public sector. (Author's own illustration 2025).**

Figure 16 illustrates that digital tools function as social artifacts that enable and shape strategy. In this way, digital tools are not seen only as technical tools, but they strengthen effectiveness, competitiveness and collaboration. Digital tools support the sensing phase when they make information transparent, the seizing phase by enabling seamless collaboration and coordination, and the transforming phase when these new ways of working become part of routines. This finding encapsulates the idea that the public sector, and in particular the wellbeing services county of Ostrobothnia, only strengthens its dynamic capabilities when the integration of digital tools into daily work is genuinely realized.

Jarzabkowski (2008, p. 623) states that a strategy is built in such an interaction, where it is constantly shaped and can be renewed with agility. This view was also particularly emphasized in the perspectives of the management team and personnel, where digitalization was seen as an inevitable part of the strategy, but in practice the roles were perceived in different ways. Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015, p. 541) further argue that strategy tools should not be seen as neutral instruments, as technologies determine what information is meaningful and how the strategic discussion is guided. In the Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia, this was evident in the way that digital platforms framed which kinds of issues were raised in decision-making. Orlikowski (2007, p. 1438) also points out that technology and social practices operate simultaneously and co-construct each other. The data shows that digital services created new opportunities, while at the same time increasing resistance and uncertainty among users.

The dynamic capabilities framework emphasizes the ability of organizations to detect changes (sensing) and seize them (seizing), and the organization must also be ready to adapt its operations accordingly (transforming) (Teece, 2007, p. 1321). This three-part process was also evident in the study. The management team understood that digitalization creates new opportunities to improve competitiveness and services, in which they highlighted other opportunities such as cost savings, accessibility and efficiency. In order for these to be realized, the opportunities must be seized, and the management team wanted to introduce new operating methods and digital tools, but the practical implementation was not

streamlined. In addition, organizations should strive to meet new needs in their operations, in which case, for example, the work of personnel would require a new organizational model, the level of digital competence should be raised, and old operating methods should be replaced with new ones that support the updated strategy. In other words, the management team recognized the opportunities of digitalization (sensing), but the personnel experienced challenges in implementation (seizing). The obstacles remained unresolved, which hindered practical implementation, so that transformation (transforming) was not fully successful. Barney (1991, p. 106) argued from the resource-based view that competitive advantage arises from those valuable, rare and difficult to imitate resources, which in the context of the Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia can be interpreted as the successful embedding of digital tools. However, this is only achieved if they are integrated into everyday life and the tools are visible in daily work.

## **5.2. Managerial implications**

For digitalization to succeed, the role of management is pivotal. Gjellebæk et al. (2020, p. 2) state that many managers feel uncertain about their own abilities to develop services and products that drive digitalization. This is evident in the data, as employees, including middle management felt that senior management had insufficient resources and expertise for development. Employees called for more guidance and resourcing, as well as concrete instructions on how to implement digital services in everyday work. Strategic goals were identified, but they remained disconnected due to the inability to commit to this concreteness. This leads to uncertainty all the way down to the employee level, as personnel felt uncertain about what the new tools meant for their work. In addition, decision-making was criticized, as it was perceived as originating at a higher level that was not interactive, making senior management feel remote. From an SAP perspective, the core of strategy implementation is practices and interaction, and in this case a gap is formed between goals and practice. This is also related to dynamic capabilities (Teece, 2007), when implementation is incomplete and employees do not receive the support they expect from management. According to Hospodková et al. (2021, p. 14), change management and phased change processes enable successful implementation in everyday practice. Many innovative digital projects collide

with practical constraints, when, for various reasons, implementation does not take place as desired, which causes frustration among the entire staff. Orlikowski (2007, p. 1440) adds that the implementation of technology requires that the way of doing work is changed, and new technologies also create new meanings for the organization. Leaders need to understand the purpose of these new tools and how they make everyday life easier.

For residents, the study highlighted the experience that the channels for seeking help are confusing to many. It was felt that there are many service channels, but they serve different purposes, the differences between which residents did not perceive. Some of the respondents were uncertain about whether it's most efficient for them to book an appointment digitally, by phone, or physically. This ambiguity causes uncertainty, which then reduces trust in digital services, and their value is not seen. This observation is in line with the national goals of the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs (2025), which highlight the importance of clarity, accessibility, and effectiveness of services. Residents should find the right services without excessive effort. However, the goals are currently not being achieved as hoped. Also, when viewed from the SAP lens, it is noted that the strategy is not only being implemented within the staff but is also visible in the everyday lives of customers. If the purpose of the strategy is to implement accessible and seamless services, but this is seen by customers as multiple channels and fragmentation, this creates a gap between strategy and practice.

This study combines the perspectives of strategy-as-Practice and Dynamic Capabilities, demonstrating their enabling link to digital tools, their practices, strategy, purposes, and everyday implementation. By understanding this dual role, organizations have the opportunity to move from the most abstract digitalization strategies towards concrete and collaborative action.

### **5.3. Suggestions for future research**

When examining the research, the need for further research in three areas becomes evident. First, it would be beneficial to compare the digitalization processes of different welfare areas. Such comparisons may highlight practices that support the successful implementation of the

strategy. Eisenhardt (1989, p. 533) points out that the strength of a case study is linked to its ability to generate theory using empirical data. Cross-case analysis supports broader generalizability and helps identify recurring phenomena. Welfare areas differ from each other, so in this context, comparison can enrich understanding and bring new perspectives. From the perspective of the SAP and dynamic capabilities framework, further research may provide insight into how the rooting of tools varies and how dynamic capabilities support their success.

The effects brought by digitalization do not manifest their full potential immediately. Therefore, longitudinal research could monitor the effects of digitalization over a longer time horizon. As Teece et al. (1997, p. 520) state: “dynamic capabilities are built over time through organizational learning and experience.” In newer organizations such as welfare areas, long-term research can also reveal which practices support and enable implementation, as well as those that remain fragmented or disconnected.

A third area for further research could focus more deeply on the role of leadership. Research could explore how and what kind of leadership practices support - and which hinder - the success of digitalization in the context of a public organization. Gjellebæk et al. (2020, p. 2) indicate that leaders have uncertainties about their abilities to lead digitalization, meaning that even though technology is advancing, the level of leadership skills is not necessarily aligned with the requirements of change. The results of this study found that management did not support digitalization sufficiently, and their skills were perceived as inadequate. This raises questions about which leadership styles can successfully implement change and what elements are required to make it happen. For example, participatory and hierarchical leadership approaches may have different implications for the adoption of digitalization, which forms a solid basis for further inquiry.

#### **5.4. Limitations**

The limitations of the study focus on the context and the limited scope of data. As Hospodková et al. (2021, p. 15) point out, “the success of digital innovation is always tied to

the concrete.” The results of this study cannot therefore be directly generalized to all welfare areas. The Wellbeing Services County of Ostrobothnia has clear distinguishing characteristics, such as its demographic structure and bilingualism, which influence the results obtained. Other welfare areas have different conditions, resources and management practices.

Another limitation concerns the size of the data, as small data sets can produce valuable understanding, but this cannot be generalized (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 534). The data for this study consisted of three questionnaires and one interview with the management team. However, it was not possible to equally involve all levels of the organization and stakeholders in the study. Certain service sectors and resident groups were less well-represented due to the limited data.

Time served as a third limitation, as the study was carried out in a relatively short period of time. The long-term effects of digitalization could not be assessed in more detail in this study. Change processes in the complex social and healthcare environment are often time-consuming and real changes may only be visible after years. This study only examined early-stage phenomena. The position and resources of the researcher must also be taken into account, as these may have affected the priorities set in the study.

Despite the limitations, the study provides valuable information on the interaction between digitalization and strategy in the public sector context and lays the foundation for further in-depth research. Theoretically, the study expands the SAP literature by showing that digital tools act as socio-material mediators. These tools also serve as a link between strategic intent and action, and the study provides a deeper insight into the potential of digitalization to support strategic goals and implementation. In the future, there would also be a need for more comparative research to see whether the topic is a widespread problem in the public sector. Further research would provide an even deeper understanding of digitalization in strategy work.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1.

#### Interview questions used with management team:

##### QUESTIONS:

What is your name and job title in the wellbeing services county?

Which stakeholders should be involved in the strategy work, and how is this carried out in practice?

How would you evaluate the strategy work now?

How should the implementation of the strategy be communicated and applied to staff and residents?

How does the strategy currently show up, or how should it show up, in the daily work of the wellbeing services county?

What is the role of leadership in strategy work now, and how should the strategy be led in the next strategy period to reach the desired outcome?

From the perspective of your own sector/field, what is the biggest challenge right now?

What do you see as the biggest challenges for the residents of the wellbeing services county in the future? What do you see as the biggest challenge for the wellbeing services county itself?

How do you see the current resource situation in the wellbeing services county? Where should resources be allocated in the future, in your opinion?

How do you see the wellbeing services county in five years?

What are the factors that have allowed the wellbeing services county of Ostrobothnia to distinguish itself from other wellbeing services counties, and how should these factors be managed going forward?

What do you see as the biggest challenges for the implementation of the wellbeing services county's strategy in the future? Which factors weaken or strengthen the success of the strategy?

In your opinion, what should your sector/field especially focus on during the next strategy period 2026–2029?

