Vilnius University
Faculty of Philosophy
Institute of Psychology

Lauryna Vilutytė

Organizational Psychology Program

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The performance pulse: a case study exploring lived experiences of performance, change, and growth in dynamic organizational cultures

Rezultatų ritmu: darbo rezultatų, pokyčių ir augimo patirčių dinamiškose organizacijų kultūrose atvejo tyrimas

Thesis Supervisor: Prof., PhD, Jurgita Lazauskaitė-Zabielskė

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SUMMARY

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This study aims to explore how employees experience performance, change, and growth within dynamic organizational cultures. A qualitative case study design was used to gain a nuanced understanding of subjective experiences among employees in a high-growth technology company, Hostinger. Empirical data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews with participants who had witnessed various stages of organizational development and transformation. The study draws on multiple theoretical frameworks: models of organizational culture (Schein, Hofstede, Denison, Cameron & Quinn), sense-making theory (Weick), dynamic capabilities theory (Teece), and psychological models such as the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) and Conservation of Resources (COR) theories. This multi-theoretical foundation enabled the analysis of both structural and interpretive elements of performance in contexts marked by speed, ambiguity, and change. Reflexive thematic analysis revealed two primary theme groups: (1) perceptions and characteristics of organizational culture, including its grounding in principles and values, and (2) the interplay of personal and organizational factors during periods of change, growth, and challenge, encompassing performance drivers, adaptive strategies, and support mechanisms. A standalone theme highlighted how subjective interpretations of performance do not always reflect measurable indicators. Findings suggest that performance in modern workplaces is not a fixed outcome but a dynamic, lived process shaped by both external shifts and internal meaning-making. Participants described performance as a developmental journey – marked by moments of clarity, ambiguity, and self-redefinition – strongly influenced by psychological safety, feedback mechanisms, autonomy, and a learning-oriented climate. This research contributes to organizational psychology by offering a layered, empirically grounded perspective on performance in dynamic cultural contexts. It underscores the importance of integrated approaches that combine system-level insights with lived experiences and support organizations seeking to foster sustainable growth and employee empowerment in rapidly changing environments.

Key terms: Organizational culture, Organizational culture dynamics, Multi-dimensional approach, Subjective experience, Organizational ambidexterity

SANTRAUKA

Lauryna Vilutytė. Rezultatų ritmu: darbo rezultatų, pokyčių ir augimo patirčių dinamiškose organizacijų kultūrose atvejo tyrimas (2025), 72 psl.

Darbo tikslas – gilintis į tai, kaip darbuotojai dinamiškose organizacijų kultūrose išgyvena veiklos rezultatų, pokyčių ir augimo procesus. Tyrimas remiasi kokybine atvejo analizės metodologija, pasirinkta siekiant detaliai suprasti subjektyvias darbuotojų patirtis technologijų sektoriaus organizacijoje „Hostinger“. Empiriniai duomenys surinkti atliekant giluminius pusiau struktūruotus interviu su darbuotojais, kurių darbo patirtis aprėpia organizacijos augimo ir transformacijų laikotarpius. Tyrimo teorinis pagrindas apima organizacinės kultūros modelius (Schein, Hofstede, Denison, Cameron ir Quinn), prasminės raiškos teoriją (Weick), dinamiškų gebėjimų teoriją (Teece), taip pat darbo reikalavimų – išteklių (JD-R) ir išteklių išsaugojimo (COR) modelius. Jie leidžia tyrime analizuoti tiek struktūrinius ir strateginius veiklos aspektus, tiek asmenines prasmių konstravimo ir psichologinės gerovės dimensijas. Analizės metu išryškėjo dvi pagrindinės temų grupės: (1) organizacinės kultūros suvokimas – kur akcentuojami principai, vertybinės nuostatos ir jų pasireiškimas kasdienėje veikloje, ir (2) veiksnių sąveika augimo, pokyčių ir iššūkių akivaizdoje – apimanti darbo rezultatams įtaką darančius veiksnius, asmeninius prisitaikymo būdus bei palaikymo šaltinius. Taip pat identifikuota savarankiška tema, pabrėžianti subjektyvų požiūrį į darbo rezultatus – ne visuomet atitinkantį objektyvius rodiklius. Rezultatai atskleidė, kad darbo rezultatai šiuolaikinėje darbo aplinkoje yra nebe statiški rodikliai, o kintantis, situatyvus ir subjektyvus reiškinys, formuojamas per asmeninius ir organizacinius pokyčius. Darbuotojai apibūdina savo patirtis kaip nuolatinį prisitaikymo, augimo ir tapatybės perkonfigūravimo procesą, kuriame svarbų vaidmenį atlieka psichologinis saugumas, aiškūs lūkesčiai, grįžtamasis ryšys, socialinis palaikymas ir mokymosi kultūra. Apibendrinant, šis darbas prisideda prie organizacinės psichologijos plotmės, pateikdamas daugiasluoksnį ir empiriškai pagrįstą požiūrį į tai, kaip darbuotojai patiria veiklą, augimą ir pokyčius dinamiškoje kultūrinėje aplinkoje. Gauti rezultatai svarbūs organizacijoms, siekiančioms tvaraus augimo ir darbuotojų įgalinimo neapibrėžtumo sąlygomis.

Raktiniai žodžiai: organizacinė kultūra, organizacinės kultūros dinamika, daugiaplanis požiūris, subjektyvi patirtis, organizacinis dvilypiškumas

KEY TERMS

Organizational culture – the set of shared values, beliefs, and norms that influence and shape employees' thinking, feelings, and behavior within an organization. It encompasses collective behavior and assumptions that new members are taught as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to organizational issues (Schein, 2010; Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010)

Organizational culture dynamics – the ongoing processes through which cultural elements within an organization interact, adapt, and influence one another. This includes mechanisms for transmitting culture to new organizational members, implementing changes, resolving conflicts, and integrating new practices or procedures. Factors influencing this dynamic include (but are not limited to) leadership, communication styles, external environmental changes, and internal organizational structures (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013; Smircich, 1983)

Multi-dimensional approach – a specific approach to organizational culture and its analysis that involves understanding it from multiple perspectives and levels. This approach acknowledges the complexity of culture and incorporates various dimensions such as values, practices, symbols, and core assumptions to present a holistic picture of organizational culture (Martin, 2002; Denison, 1996)

Subjective experience – in the context of organizational culture, this refers to the individual perception, interpretations, and emotional reactions that employees have toward cultural aspects of their organization. It encompasses how different individuals experience and make sense of organizational culture based on their personal values, roles, and interactions within the organization (Ashkanasy, Wilderom & Peterson, 2010; Maitlis, 2005)

Organizational ambidexterity - The strategic and cultural ability of an organization, especially in high-growth technology firms, to simultaneously pursue *exploration* (innovation, risk-taking, experimentation) and *exploitation* (efficiency, standardisation, scalability). This dual capability ensures continuous innovation alongside stable, high-quality delivery. It can be enabled through structural approaches (e.g., separate innovation units) or contextual mechanisms where individuals shift between innovative and operational tasks (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013; Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004)

FOREWORD

In recent years, the nature of work has been reshaped by profound and ongoing disruption. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated long-standing shifts, propelling both employees and organizations into states of constant adaptation. As Gartner (2022) reports, by 2022 the average employee experienced ten organizational changes in a single year – five times more than in 2016. At the same time, the widespread adoption of hybrid work models, increasing digital interdependence, and the growing influence of automation have made unpredictability a defining feature of contemporary working life (Kniffin et al., 2021; Makridakis, 2017).

Within this new landscape, organizational culture plays a critical role in shaping how people navigate change. Etymologically derived from *cultus*, meaning "care" (Coyle, 2018), culture provides the normative infrastructure that informs behavior, meaning, and well-being in the workplace – where adults spend approximately one-third of their waking lives (Schneider et al., 2013). In environments marked by technological acceleration and intensifying performance demands, culture serves not only as a stabilizing force but also as a platform for adaptation, enabling organizations to foster resilience, innovation, and ethical conduct (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Hofstede, 2001).

Yet culture alone cannot offset the challenges posed by the volatility of modern work. Emerging research has underscored the reality that neither employees nor organizations are static entities. On a global scale, disengagement represents a staggering cost: each minute, an estimated US $148 million in potential productivity is lost – amounting to US $8.9 trillion annually, or 9% of world GDP – because only 23% of employees report being engaged in their work (Gallup, 2024). However, the issue runs deeper than engagement alone. Performance itself is inherently variable; studies show that on any given day, an individual's task performance may fluctuate by as much as one-third around their personal average, with these variations cascading across teams and organizational systems (Sonnentag et al., 2020). Together, these macroeconomic costs and micro-level fluctuations highlight an urgent need to rethink how performance truly functions within today's dynamic organizational cultures. This research will specifically examine what sparks changes in employees' performance, how they interpret these shifts, the strategies they use to meet new challenges, and the organizational and personal supports they rely on to adapt and maintain deliverables. It will explore these dimensions qualitatively, diving deep into lived experiences and individual approaches – a perspective often lacking in modern research that seeks to understand the interplay of these constructs.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Recalibrating Performance in the Post-2020 Workplace

The contemporary organizational landscape is marked by profound and ongoing disruption (Pfeffer, 2018). In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations have been propelled into a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Kniffin et al., 2021). These conditions have been compounded by accelerated digitization, the rapid deployment of automation technologies, and the transformative influence of artificial intelligence (AI), all of which have reshaped the nature of work and skill requirements across industries (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2017; Makridakis, 2017). High-growth sectors such as technology are particularly affected, as product development cycles are increasingly characterized by hyper-iteration, rapid experimentation, and frequent strategic pivots. A scoping review of post-pandemic studies in healthcare illustrates that stress and burnout levels remain elevated (Chang et al., 2022). These findings are echoed in Gartner-based research, which reports that the average employee experienced ten planned organizational changes in 2022 – five times the volume recorded in 2016—amid declining employee support for such initiatives (Gartner, 2022; O'Morain & Aykens, 2023). These patterns are emblematic of wider global dynamics, underscoring the need for novel approaches to sustaining organizational performance (Parker et al., 2017; Spreitzer et al., 2012; Teece, 2007; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000).

In this disrupted context, the concept of performance is undergoing a significant redefinition. Once confined to static, retrospective evaluations based on key performance indicators (KPIs), performance is now increasingly understood as a fluid, longitudinal phenomenon that evolves over time. This shift reflects the growing emphasis on adaptive, creative, proactive, and self-regulated dimensions of work. In high-change environments, individuals must navigate shifting expectations, unclear feedback loops, and heightened pressures for self-management (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; London, 2003). Performance is no longer simply an output to be measured but emerges as a lived and situated experience – non-linear, contextual, and deeply shaped by identity, meaning-making, and the capacity to respond to dynamic demands.

Organizational culture and climate play a pivotal role in enabling employees to navigate turbulent conditions. Culture functions as a collective sense-making system that provides coherence amid uncertainty, fostering alignment with organizational values and supporting coordinated adaptation (Weick, 1995; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Simultaneously, organizational climate serves as a real-time barometer of how individuals perceive and experience their work environment. When culture promotes psychological safety and a feedback-rich learning

climate, it acts as a buffer against the strain induced by rapid change, supporting resilience and fostering innovation (Edmondson, 1999; Newman et al., 2017). Understanding how performance is experienced in dynamic organizational settings, therefore, requires a nuanced engagement with the nature of organizational culture.

1.2 Understanding Dynamic Culture and Climate

Understanding how performance is experienced in dynamic organizational settings requires a nuanced engagement with the nature of organizational culture. Edgar Schein's seminal multi-level model remains a foundational framework in organizational psychology, conceptualizing culture as a layered construct consisting of observable artefacts, espoused values, and deep-seated underlying assumptions (Schein, 2010). In high-growth technology organizations, these layers manifest in both formal mechanisms – such as agile rituals, OKR frameworks, and continuous performance feedback loops – and informal norms that encourage autonomy, experimentation, and learning. However, while Schein's model offers valuable insight into the structure and persistence of culture, its assumption of cultural stability over time renders it less agile in the face of the exponential transformations seen in fintech and other fast-scaling sectors. In these environments, culture evolves rapidly alongside organizational strategy, product cycles, and talent models, necessitating frameworks that account for speed, fluidity, and iteration.

Complementary models, such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede, 2001), provide a cross-cultural perspective on organizational values, offering useful insights for globally distributed fintech firms navigating diverse employee expectations. However, Hofstede's framework is often critiqued for its national-level generalizations, which may obscure micro-level dynamics within fast-changing firms. Meanwhile, Denison's model of organizational culture links cultural traits – such as adaptability, mission, involvement, and consistency – to measurable performance outcomes (Denison & Mishra, 1995). This model is particularly relevant for fintech organizations, where adaptability and innovation are tightly coupled with competitive advantage. Similarly, Cameron and Quinn's Competing Values Framework (CVF) classifies organizational cultures into four dominant types: clan, adhocracy, market, and hierarchy (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Fintech firms typically skew toward adhocracy cultures, which prioritize innovation, agility, and risk-taking – traits essential for survival in volatile markets.

Comparatively, Schein's model excels in capturing the depth and implicit power of shared assumptions but underrepresents the dynamic tension between cultural stability and change in high-velocity contexts. In contrast, models like Denison's and the CVF provide performance-linked and typological lenses better suited to rapidly evolving organizational forms. For fintechs, an integrated cultural perspective is essential – one that recognizes the symbolic

depth of culture (Schein, 2010), the value–performance linkage (Denison & Mishra, 1995), and the structural tension between innovation and control as described in the Competing Values Framework (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Ultimately, understanding how employees enact and experience performance in such contexts requires not only examining formal cultural artefacts but also attending to the fluid, emergent, and contested meanings that arise in response to shifting strategic and operational demands.

While culture comprises enduring assumptions and collective norms, organizational climate captures the surface-level, shared perceptions of day-to-day organizational life. Climate is more fluid and responsive to immediate conditions, encompassing perceptions of fairness, safety, recognition, and support (Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013). In dynamic organizations, climate functions as a real-time signal of deeper cultural dynamics. Employees' lived experiences, especially their sense of psychological safety or perceived autonomy, provide valuable access points to understanding how cultural values are enacted in practice. In this way, climate narratives offer a situated lens into how individuals interpret and internalize organizational life, particularly under conditions of volatility and rapid change.

Dynamic organizational cultures – especially in digital-native, high-growth contexts – are characterized by adaptability, learning agility, and continuous experimentation (Goncalves et al., 2020). These cultures typically exhibit high tolerance for failure, openness to feedback, and encouragement of proactive role crafting. Psychological safety is not only preserved but actively cultivated, enabling individuals to take initiative without fear of negative consequences. Such features constitute the cultural signature of fast-scaling technological firms, in which high levels of autonomy are coupled with equally high performance expectations. A well-known example is Netflix, whose culture of "freedom and responsibility" exemplifies how trust, transparency, and radical candor can foster both innovation and accountability (McCord, 2014). In these environments, culture is not static; it evolves in tandem with the firm's learning cycles and market responsiveness.

While traditional models such as the Competing Values Framework (CVF) (Cameron & Quinn, 2011) offer a useful typology – clan, adhocracy, market, and hierarchy – they often fail to capture the hybridized cultural configurations present in high-growth, digital-era organizations. The case of a high-growth tech firm reveals a complex mix of cultural orientations: the innovative spirit of adhocracy, the collaborative ethos of clan culture, and the performance focus of market culture. This hybridity reflects a situationally responsive cultural profile that flexes based on organizational goals, growth phases, and market conditions, resisting the rigidity of typological categorization.

The dynamic interplay between culture and climate exerts a significant influence on how performance is understood and enacted. Deep cultural assumptions shape climate perceptions, while climate, in turn, reinforces or challenges cultural norms through everyday interactions. This reciprocal feedback loop is pivotal in shaping how employees interpret performance expectations, navigate ambiguity, and engage in growth-oriented behavior. As Schneider et al. (1990) note, organizational culture provides the deeper context for climate perceptions, while climate reflects how those cultural elements are experienced on a daily basis. In fast-paced environments, the agility of this system becomes essential; performance adaptation relies not solely on individual competencies, but on the quality and elasticity of the surrounding culture–climate ecosystem.

Importantly, the effects of culture and climate on performance are moderated by contextual variables such as industry turbulence, organizational life cycle stage, and technological maturity. For high-growth tech firms operating in VUCA environments, these boundary conditions influence the degree of cultural plasticity and the clarity of climate signals. Early-stage companies may benefit from cultural flexibility and experimentation, while more mature organizations may require structured reinforcement mechanisms to sustain cohesion and alignment. Recognizing these conditions is essential for understanding how culture and climate co-evolve and how they shape performance trajectories in dynamic organizational systems.

1.3. Theoretical Foundations

To investigate performance in dynamic organizational contexts, this study draws on a combination of theoretical frameworks that collectively illuminate the structural, interpretive, and psychological dimensions of adaptive performance. These frameworks were selected for their complementary strengths: they enable a multi-level analysis of how performance is shaped, not only by formal systems and strategic imperatives but also by lived experience, evolving expectations, and fluctuating organizational demands. The integration of cultural, cognitive, strategic, and motivational theories provides a robust scaffold for understanding performance as an emergent, context-sensitive phenomenon, particularly within the fast-scaling, hybrid technology sector.

The analysis begins with Schein's (2010) multi-level model of organizational culture, which distinguishes among artefacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions. While originally developed to explain stable cultural systems, this model remains a foundational tool in organizational psychology and offers a valuable entry point for examining the symbolic and structural dimensions of culture. In high-growth technology companies, observable artefacts – such as daily stand-up meetings, sprint retrospectives, and OKR frameworks – materialize espoused values like agility, transparency, and iterative learning. However, the volatility and pace

characteristic of scaling firms frequently lead to the emergence of team-level subcultures and context-specific adaptations of core values. These informal, dynamic expressions of culture – manifested through language, rituals, and peer interactions – challenge the static assumptions embedded in Schein's original framework. Therefore, while Schein's model offers conceptual clarity, it must be extended to capture the plasticity, fluidity, and multivocality of culture in rapidly evolving environments.

To supplement this cultural perspective, Karl Weick's (1995) theory of sense-making provides an interpretive lens that explains how individuals actively construct meaning in the face of ambiguity and change. In contrast to the structural orientation of Schein, Weick's model focuses on the micro-processes through which people enact and interpret their organizational realities. Employees in high-growth, hybrid firms do not simply absorb company values; they engage in sense-making to reconcile organizational goals with shifting role expectations, unclear feedback loops, and evolving team dynamics. Interviews conducted in the case study organization reveal that staff members regularly reinterpret values like "freedom" and "impact" through personal narratives that incorporate both internal experiences and external disruptions. These narratives play a critical role in shaping how performance is defined, negotiated, and enacted within teams. Thus, sense-making theory enhances our understanding of the lived, adaptive dimensions of performance that lie beneath formal structures and espoused values.

Building on these cultural and cognitive foundations, the theory of dynamic capabilities (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997) contributes a strategic perspective by conceptualizing organizations as systems that can purposefully adapt to change through processes of sensing, seizing, and transforming. In technology-driven contexts, dynamic capabilities are not confined to senior leadership or corporate strategy; they are enacted daily by employees who are expected to adjust to shifting priorities, reconfigure roles, and continuously update their skillsets. These forms of micro-level adaptability are particularly evident in internal mobility, lateral experimentation, and self-directed learning. As the case study illustrates, performance is closely linked to an individual's capacity for reflexivity, initiative, and resilience under conditions of strategic fluidity. Dynamic capabilities theory, therefore, offers a crucial bridge between the organizational imperatives for innovation and the individual behaviors that sustain them.

To address the psychological sustainability of such continuous adaptation, this study also draws on the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989). These frameworks conceptualize performance not simply as output but as a function of the ongoing negotiation between environmental demands, such as workload, ambiguity, and change velocity, and the personal and organizational resources available to meet them. In high-growth settings, where demands are

intense and evolving, resources such as autonomy, social support, feedback, and psychological safety are critical for sustaining engagement and preventing burnout. The organizational climate, in this context, acts as a signal system – shaping how employees perceive their resource sufficiency and influencing whether they engage in adaptive behaviors like proactive learning or disengage in response to perceived overload. The JD-R and COR frameworks thus provide insight into the motivational and affective mechanisms underpinning adaptive performance.

Taken together, these theoretical frameworks offer a layered and integrative lens through which to explore performance in dynamic organizational environments. Schein's model uncovers the deep cultural foundations that inform behavioral norms; sense-making theory reveals how individuals interpret and enact these norms in fluid contexts; dynamic capabilities theory links these interpretive actions to broader organizational adaptability; and the JD-R and COR models anchor the analysis in the psychological realities of working under continuous pressure. This theoretical integration enables a more nuanced understanding of performance, not as a fixed metric or outcome, but as a situated, negotiated, and resilient process. In high-growth technology organizations, where the pace of change demands constant recalibration, performance must be understood as something co-constructed across multiple levels of analysis: cultural meaning systems, team climate, individual cognition, and resource dynamics. By foregrounding this complexity, the present study contributes to a more holistic and human-centerd understanding of what it means to perform in the modern, ever-evolving workplace.

1.4. Performance, Change, and Growth: From Factors to Lived Experiences

From 2020 to 2025, a constellation of external pressures has reshaped the contours of organizational performance and growth – especially in high-growth, hybrid technology firms. Three macro-level forces underpin this turbulence. First, artificial intelligence and automation are diffusing rapidly across job families. A 2020 systematic review highlights a sharp rise in both productivity gains and technostress associated with AI adoption (Goncalves et al., 2020). Second, product and service development cycles have accelerated dramatically. The 2023 *Accelerate State of DevOps* survey of 36,000 professionals found that many teams now deploy code multiple times per day, rendering continuous change an embedded feature of daily work (DeBellis et al., 2023). Third, the pandemic's aftershocks – including hybrid work norms, labour mobility, and supply chain volatility – continue to destabilise strategic planning and coordination.

Within this context, performance, change, and growth emerge not merely as conceptual pillars but as dynamic, interlocking processes. Performance is increasingly measured through indicators such as responsiveness, cross-functional impact, and learning agility – factors that go beyond static KPIs. Growth, both personal and organizational, is framed not just in terms of

scaling or advancement but also in terms of adaptive capacity and resilience. Change, far from episodic, is now the baseline condition: a continuous stream of micro-adjustments in tools, roles, processes, and strategic orientation. These dimensions interact closely, creating feedback loops where successful adaptation enhances growth potential, and growth in turn demands higher levels of performance under evolving constraints.

Key to this adaptation has been the organization's investment in a trust-based culture supported by clarity and feedback. Employees point to transparent OKRs, structured retrospectives, and peer reviews as critical anchors in the absence of in-person oversight. These systems, in turn, shape climate perceptions – reinforcing a sense of alignment, fairness, and inclusion when implemented well. Moreover, the organization has intentionally cultivated a learning-oriented climate (Senge, 2006; Marsick & Watkins, 2003). Learning Management Systems (LMS), peer-led communities of practice, and growth tracks create infrastructure for continuous development. Such practices signal an organizational expectation of constant reflection, iteration, and stretching beyond one's current capacity.

Psychological safety has emerged as a core enabling condition. High-performing teams are often those where individuals feel safe to challenge assumptions, admit mistakes, and ask for help (Lencioni, 2002). In these contexts, employees are more likely to initiate change, seek mentorship, and recover constructively from setbacks. Where psychological safety is weak – often due to inconsistent leadership or poor communication – employees report higher levels of anxiety, ambiguity, and disengagement. These climate dynamics strongly influence whether individuals interpret their roles as opportunities for growth or as threats to stability (Edmondson, 1999; Newman, Donohue, & Eva, 2017).

This empirical landscape sets the stage for a more granular exploration of how performance, change, and growth are not just observed phenomena but also lived experiences. In dynamic, high-growth organizations, performance is no longer experienced as a fixed output or linear trajectory. Instead, it unfolds as a developmental journey shaped by both organizational shifts and personal transitions. Employees often describe their performance stories in episodic terms – marked by moments of clarity, periods of uncertainty, and phases of intense growth or plateau (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). These inflection points are frequently catalysed by strategic pivots, leadership changes, or the rollout of new tools and workflows.

Equally impactful are personal life transitions – such as becoming a parent, relocating, or recovering from burnout – which recalibrate one's motivational bandwidth and redefine what performance means. In interviews, employees recounted how promotions or lateral moves often triggered both confidence and anxiety, pushing them to renegotiate their internal definitions of success. This identity work – the ongoing process of reconciling who one is with who one is

becoming – is central to understanding performance as a lived and evolving construct (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

To navigate such volatility, employees engage in a range of adaptive strategies. Cognitively, they reframe ambiguity as an opportunity for growth (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Weick, 1995). Emotionally, they lean on peer support, coaching, or mindfulness practices to sustain engagement and resilience in the face of uncertainty (Carmeli & Gittell, 2009; Spreitzer, Porath, & Gibson, 2012). Behaviorally, they seek out new learning through formal courses, shadowing, or informal skill swaps. These individual efforts are often scaffolded by organizational supports: regular one-on-one meetings, mentoring programmes, self-directed LMS pathways, and a performance dialogue culture.

Recent research reinforces this framing of performance as a developmental and meaning-making process. For instance, studies in organizational learning suggest that initial mistakes or adaptation failures can act as catalysts for future innovation by stimulating reflection and experimentation (Carmeli & Gittell, 2009; Cannon & Edmondson, 2005). These findings support the view that learning from failure, particularly in dynamic environments, can enhance organizational adaptability. Furthermore, research by Burke et al. (2006) highlights a robust association between leadership behaviors and team adaptability, indicating that high-quality, supportive leadership facilitates proactive learning and flexible performance responses under changing conditions.

In sum, performance, change, and growth in high-growth technology organizations are best conceptualised as mutually reinforcing, contextually embedded, and personally constructed phenomena. While external forces – such as AI, rapid iteration, and hybrid work – shape the landscape, the meaning of performance is co-authored by individuals who must continuously align internal expectations with external realities. Understanding these dynamics requires moving beyond surface-level metrics to consider how people interpret, internalise, and respond to the conditions that shape their working lives. It is only through this integrated lens – spanning numbers and narratives, systems and subjectivities – that we can fully grasp what it means to perform, change, and grow in the modern workplace.

1.5 Anticipating Future Needs: Organizational Ambidexterity

In the context of high-growth technology companies, the ability to balance innovation with operational stability – commonly referred to as *organizational ambidexterity* – is emerging as a strategic and cultural imperative (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013; Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004). Ambidexterity refers to the simultaneous pursuit of *exploration* (e.g., experimentation, discovery, and risk-taking) and *exploitation* (e.g., standardisation, efficiency, and scalability). This dual

capability enables firms to innovate continuously while delivering consistent, high-quality outputs. According to O'Reilly and Tushman (2004), ambidexterity can be achieved through structural arrangements (e.g., separate innovation units) or contextual mechanisms, where individuals dynamically shift between divergent tasks. In high-growth environments, both approaches coexist. Agile product teams explore new market opportunities, new products while being anchored by engineering governance frameworks, mature data infrastructure, working products, and defined quality standards.

The successful enactment of ambidexterity depends heavily on the underlying organizational culture and climate. Culture provides the symbolic scaffolding for switch-thinking by embedding shared values such as curiosity, learning, adaptability, and responsible autonomy (Mom et al., 2015). It legitimises behavioral oscillation between exploration and exploitation and supports employees in navigating ambiguous or shifting cues. Climate complements this by shaping employees' real-time perceptions of psychological safety, fairness, and autonomy—all of which are critical for role flexibility (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). When individuals perceive the environment as supportive, they are more inclined to experiment, voice dissenting ideas, and embrace ambiguity. Empirical studies further validate these dynamics. Cameron and Quinn (2011), through extensive application of the Competing Values Framework, demonstrate that organizations blending adhocracy and clan culture traits tend to cultivate participatory climates that enhance both employee engagement and adaptability. Cristofaro (2020) similarly emphasises that sense-making is enabled through cultural elasticity, especially in contexts characterised by volatility and decision ambiguity. These findings suggest that ambidextrous cultures are not just theoretically appealing but empirically grounded in improved performance, learning, and change-readiness, perfectly adapted for future *performance-pulse.*

The imperative for ambidexterity will only intensify in the foreseeable future. As artificial intelligence, machine learning, and automation permeate more functions, the nature of performance will become increasingly fragmented, dynamic, and cognitively demanding (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2017; Tarafdar et al., 2019). Moreover, innovation cycles are compressing; digital products are iterated rapidly based on user data, necessitating a near-constant recalibration of direction, metrics, and methods (Rigby et al., 2020). These pressures force organizations to operationalise agility not as a short-term initiative but as a permanent operating condition. Field evidence from DevOps environments confirms that teams operating in *generative cultures* – marked by open learning, high cooperation, and a balance between experimentation and delivery – outperform those embedded in more rigid, control-oriented settings (Forsgren et al., 2018).

This shift toward ambidexterity also has profound implications for individual performance and career development. Traditional hierarchical trajectories are giving way to adaptive, non-linear paths defined by *role hybridity*, skill elasticity, and cross-functional collaboration (Barley et al., 2017). Employees are increasingly expected to co-design their roles, integrate diverse knowledge streams, and develop *meta-skills* such as coaching, systems thinking, and sense-making. Leadership development models have adapted accordingly, placing greater emphasis on complexity navigation, psychological safety cultivation, and team enablement (DeRue & Ashford, 2010).

Crucially, ambidexterity is not maintained through formal systems alone; it relies on a culture that normalises experimentation, supports failure as a learning mechanism, and distributes authority across the organization (Yoo et al., 2005; Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008). Informal norms – such as celebrating learning from mistakes, giving space for voice, and encouraging proactive problem-solving – form the "cultural glue" that sustains ambidexterity at scale. Employees internalise these values not as abstract ideals but as daily lived expectations that influence how they approach uncertainty, conflict, and growth.

1.6. Knowledge Gaps and Research Justification

Despite increasing academic interest in the relationship between organizational culture and performance, notable empirical gaps persist, particularly in understanding how performance is experienced as a situated, evolving phenomenon in high-growth, fast-changing environments (Pulakos et al., 2015; Grant & Parker, 2009). There is a scarcity of qualitative, EU-based case studies – especially within the Baltic or Lithuanian technology sectors – that capture the dynamic interplay between organizational systems and individual adaptive processes over time. Moreover, phenomenological and qualitative approaches remain underutilised, limiting insights into the lived, affective, and interpretive dimensions of performance as it unfolds. Existing research tends to rely on output-driven definitions of performance, overlooking narrative-rich accounts that reflect its emotional, relational, and developmental contours (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

Theoretically, the interdependence of organizational culture, climate, and ambidexterity remains under-theorised. While each construct has been explored in isolation, there is limited understanding of how they interact to enable or constrain adaptive performance. From a practical standpoint, organizations – particularly People and HR teams – often lack actionable guidance on designing systems that support ambidextrous behavior in dynamic contexts.

Methodologically, organizational research is still shaped by a cross-sectional bias, relying heavily on static surveys and retrospective reporting. This limits our grasp of the iterative, developmental nature of performance adaptation. There is a compelling need for embedded,

longitudinal, and phenomenological methodologies that surface the unfolding experiences of employees as they navigate organizational change.

This study addresses these empirical, theoretical, and methodological gaps by adopting a phenomenological case study approach focused on Hostinger – a high-growth, digitally distributed Lithuanian technology company. Hostinger's fast-paced, global, and culturally distinctive environment makes it an ideal site for examining how individuals experience and adapt their performance amid ongoing changes and what role does organizational culture play into all that. Specifically in this research, the focus is to strive toward exploring these dimensions through a qualitative lens, emphasizing personal experiences and unique individual strategies, an aspect often overlooked in contemporary research on how these elements interact.

1.7 Research Aim and Objectives

Aim of the research:

This research aims to explore, understand, and describe the role that a dynamic organizational culture plays in employees' performance, change, and growth journeys.

Research Objectives:

1. To explore and describe employees' lived experiences and perceptions of Hostinger's organizational culture.
2. To identify the factors, including specific aspects of organizational culture, that shape employees' personal development, performance, and adaptability during periods of change.
3. To examine how employees perceive and interpret shifts in their performance over time within a dynamic cultural environment.
4. To explore the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral strategies employees employ when facing challenges, organizational changes, and evolving performance expectations.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Participants

The final sample comprised 10 full-time employees from a single private organization, Hostinger UAB. Participants' ages ranged from 23 to 35 years (M = 29, SD = 4). Regarding gender, 4 identified as women and 6 as men; 0 identified as non-binary/other or preferred not to disclose.

Respondents were based in 4 countries: Brazil, Indonesia, Croatia, and Lithuania. They reported 3 mother tongues: Indonesian Bahasa (n = 2), Brazilian Portuguese (n = 2), and Lithuanian (n = 6). All interviews were conducted in English to ensure equal opportunity for expression; English is also the organization's primary language of communication.

Educational attainment was high: 3 participants held a Bachelor's degree or equivalent, 6 held a Master's degree, and 1 held a high school diploma (n = 1).

Average organizational tenure was 3 years (SD = 1.7), and average tenure in the current position was 1 year (SD = 0.8). 3 participants (30%) occupied formal leadership roles (e.g., team lead, department manager) at the time of interview; the remaining 7 (70%) were individual contributors without supervisory responsibilities.

Regarding turnover intentions, only 1 respondent (10%) had recently considered leaving the company. No participants (0%) had been placed on a Performance Improvement Plan in the preceding 12 months.

All participants provided informed consent and were assured anonymity; pseudonyms replace all personally identifying information in research outputs. A detailed demographic breakdown is presented in Appendix 1, Table 1.

2.2 Theoretical Basis of the Research

To analyse the dataset, this study adopted Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis (2006, 2013), a qualitative approach renowned for its methodological rigour and versatility. Specifically, the study followed the reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) variant, which offers a coherent lens for examining meaning-making processes. RTA conceptualises themes as the product of an iterative dialogue among data, researcher, and theory, foregrounding reflexivity and theoretical sensitivity (Braun & Clarke, 2020). This approach is sufficiently flexible to embrace micro-narratives of lived experience while simultaneously mapping macro-level cultural dynamics.

Thematic analysis is one of the most widely used qualitative analytic methods; it identifies patterns by assigning codes to meaningful segments of text. The study selected this method for its procedural transparency, theoretical independence, and applicability across diverse data types.

When conducted rigorously, thematic analysis enables researchers both to systematise and condense the dataset and to construct a comprehensive, multifaceted account of the phenomenon under investigation (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). The detailed seven-phase procedure articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006) – now one of the most frequently cited methodological guides – served as the analytical scaffold and is described fully in Section 2.4 (Data Analysis).

This study employed an inductive orientation: themes emerged organically from the data rather than being imposed a priori. To ensure reliability and validity, the research adhered to the established guidelines for qualitative research in psychology and related disciplines (Elliott et al., 1999), which are elaborated in Sections 2.5 and 2.6. The researcher also engaged in continuous reflexivity throughout the process to adhere to the aforementioned guidelines and to explore the depth of the RTA variant (see Appendix 6).

2.3 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed with Braun and Clarke's (2020) Reflexive Thematic Analysis. This flexible approach sees themes as products of the researcher's continual reflection on the data. The six overlapping phases below (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013) outline the procedures undertaken and the outputs generated at each stage:

1. **Familiarisation with the data:** Conducting a thorough, line-by-line reading of all transcripts, making reflexive margin notes that capture emerging insights and acknowledging how researchers' assumptions and positionality shape what is noticed.
2. **Systematic data coding:** Identifying meaning-bearing units relevant to the research questions. Generating flexible codes and assigning them to these units (or combinations thereof), allowing the code set to evolve throughout the analysis.
    a. *Semantic coding*: code names emerge inductively from the explicit meaning of the data.
    b. *Latent coding*: code names reflect the researcher's interpretation of underlying ideas, values, or assumptions.
3. **Constructing preliminary themes:** Reviewing all generated codes and grouping related codes into candidate subthemes. Clustering subthemes into overarching themes that represent patterns of shared meaning organized around a central concept, then drafting a thematic map illustrating these relationships.
4. **Reviewing and refining themes:** Iteratively re-examining the candidate themes in dialogue with the dataset and your theoretical framing:
    a. Adjusting code–subtheme and subtheme–theme allocations.

b. Considering each theme's internal coherence and the distinctiveness of the overall thematic map.
c. Ensuring the analysis tells a coherent, reflexive story that honours participants' narratives.

5. **Defining and naming themes:** Articulating the essence and scope of each theme, clarifying how it contributes to the analytic story. Finalising concise, evocative theme labels that convey the key concept.
6. **Producing the report:** Compiling a rich analytic narrative that weaves together illustrative data extracts, reflexive commentary on your analytic journey, and a discussion linking the themes back to the research questions and broader literature.

2.4 Instruments and Research Flow

Instrument: A semi-structured interview guide was developed specifically for this study. Its design drew on (a) best-practice recommendations distilled from the authors' earlier bachelor-level qualitative research and (b) experience gained while collaborating with Jr. Asst., PhD Cand. Miglė Marcinkevičiūtė and Prof., Habil. Ph.D. Danutė Gailienė on related projects (Marcinkevičiūtė, Vilutytė & Gailienė, 2024). The draft protocol was critically reviewed for content validity and clarity by the supervisor of this research, Prof., PhD Jurgita Lazauskaitė-Zabielskė. A pilot interview with one volunteer employee was then conducted; the volunteer's feedback on wording, sequence, and pacing informed several minor refinements before data collection began.

In the prepared semi-structured interview protocol, the planned question categories are: overall experience; personal growth and change; organizational culture and impact; navigating change; closing reflections; and demographic questions. A sample semi-structured interview protocol is provided in Appendix 3, where detailed key questions and possible follow-up questions can be viewed.

Research flow: Data collection began at the end of February 2025, after the company completed its quarterly performance evaluation exercise and extended-form calibration sessions during which peer‑level managers discussed results to minimize bias. With permission from the appropriate stakeholders, the researcher obtained Q3 and Q4 2024 performance‑evaluation data for all 883 employees, along with each employee's manager‑change status and tenure. Using these data, the researcher employed a two‑stage sampling procedure (targeted sampling followed by random sampling). In the first stage, three eligibility criteria were applied:

1. **Tenure**: Employees must have worked at the company for at least one full year, ensuring they have experienced a complete performance‑management cycle and were fully socialized into the company culture.
2. **Performance Change**: A measurable increase or decrease in performance scores from Q3 to Q4.
3. **Manager Continuity**: No change in manager between Q3 and Q4, so that shifts in evaluation scores reflected the same evaluator's perspective.

After applying the tenure criterion, 521 employees remained eligible. Filtering for performance change reduced the pool to 135, and imposing manager continuity yielded 70 potential participants.

In the second stage, the researcher drew a simple random sample of 30 from these 70 eligible employees. Anticipating a 35–45 % response rate based on prior studies (Daikeler et al., 2019) and given the company's rapid growth, the researcher contacted these 30 via Slack, the company's communication platform. Of the 30 contacted:

- **8** declined, citing lack of interest or discomfort with the interview format.
- **12** expressed willingness but were unable to commit time due to competing priorities, asking to be informed of future research opportunities.
- **10** respondents agreed to participate; these 10 were enrolled in the study, matching the planned sample size for medium‑sized qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

All interviews were conducted online via Google Meet & by the author of this research. Before each session, the researcher:

- Reiterated the study's purpose and reviewed informed consent (Appendix 4).
- Explained confidentiality procedures (secure storage and anonymization during analysis and reporting).
- Described audio‑recording protocols.
- Informed participants of their right to withdraw or request data removal at any time.
- Provided access to the researcher for questions before, during, or after the interview.

All interviews followed the same semi‑structured format (Appendix 3) and were audio‑recorded in full, including recording consent: 9 participants provided consent online, and 1 signed a paper form before recording commenced. The opening question was: *"First, I invite you to share or describe your overall experience working in this organization."*

Subsequent questions addressed the remaining topic blocks, with follow-up probes tailored to participants' responses. At the conclusion, the researcher checked each participant's well-being and provided support if needed. Audio files were then transcribed into separate Microsoft Word

documents (transcription conventions are in Appendix 5) and imported into MAXQDA for analysis.

2.5 Ethical Aspects of the Research

To safeguard research participants comprehensively, the study adhered to the core ethical principles outlined in the American Psychological Association's *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (2017) and the principles for clinical psychology research described by Barker, Pistrang, and Roberts (2015):

1. **Informed consent.** Section 2.4 explains how the study, its aims, and procedures were presented to potential participants. This occurred twice: once at initial contact and again immediately before each interview. After the first contact, all participants received the informed‑consent form, which they signed during the interview session.
2. **Avoidance of harm.** Although participants were not classified as a vulnerable population, every effort was made to protect their psychological and emotional well-being by:
    - **Establishing a respectful, safe, and supportive rapport.** Before recording began, the interviewer reiterated the study details, clarified its format and duration, invited questions, and confirmed that the participant's circumstances had not changed.
    - **Providing emotional support and active listening.** The interviewer attended to both verbal responses and nonverbal cues (e.g., body language). If signs of distress appeared, the interviewer asked how the participant was feeling and offered to pause or terminate the interview.
    - **Ensuring participant comfort.** At the end of each interview, immediately after stopping the recording, participants were asked how they felt and invited to provide feedback.
3. **Assurance of confidentiality.** To maintain confidentiality, each participant received a unique code and a pseudonym. In transcripts, any identifying nouns were replaced with standardized symbols (Wengraf, 2001), and all data were fully anonymized so that neither participants nor any third parties they described could be identified. Access to the raw data was limited to the researcher and the study supervisor.
4. **Assurance of privacy and choice.** All 30 prospective participants in the second stage of random sampling were informed of their rights to:
    - Decline participation (n = 20; most cited discomfort with the format or time constraints).
    - Withdraw from the study at any time (none exercised this option).
    - Pause or terminate the interview (none exercised this option).

- Retract permission for use of shared information (none exercised this option).

2.6 Quality-Assurance Aspects of the Research Process

In striving to ensure the comprehensive quality of the study, specific validity and reliability criteria for the qualitative research process and data analysis were applied during both the planning and execution phases.

2.6.1 Criteria for Ensuring the Quality of the Data Analysis Process

In this section, the criteria applied to ensure the quality of the data analysis process are described. Table 1 presents a summary of those criteria, as identified by Braun and Clarke (2021) in "A Tool for Evaluating Thematic Analysis (TA) Manuscripts for Publication: Twenty Questions to Guide Assessment of TA Research Quality," along with an explanation of how efforts were made to fulfil them within the framework of this study. The authors of this tool also proposed more generalized quality criteria in their earlier research (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013), however, because this study adopts a reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) approach, updated quality metrics were opted for.

Table 1. Aspects of the Quality Assurance of the Data Analysis Process

Nr.	Quality assurance question	Answer	Elaboration
1.	"Do the authors explain why they are using thematic analysis (TA), even if only briefly?"	YES	More info in section 2.2
2.	"Do the authors clearly specify and justify which type of TA they are using?"	YES	More info in section 2.2
3.	"Is the use and justification of the specific type of TA consistent with the research questions or aims?"	YES	More info in sections 1.5 & 2.2
4.	"Is there a good 'fit' between the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the research and the specific type of TA (i.e. is there conceptual coherence)?"	YES	More info in sections 2.2 & 2.3
5.	"Is there a good 'fit' between the methods of data collection and the specific type of TA?"	YES	More info in sections 2.2 & 2.4
6.	"Is the specified type of TA consistently enacted throughout the paper?"	YES	More info in sections 2.2 & 3
7.	"Is there evidence of problematic assumptions about, and practices around, TA?"	NO	None of the common problematic assumptions (Braun and Clarke, 2021) are observed in the research.

8.	“Are any supplementary procedures or methods justified, and necessary, or could the same results have been achieved simply by using TA more effectively?”	NO	No additional methods were employed in the research apart from RTA (Braun and Clarke, 2021)
9	“Are the theoretical underpinnings of the use of TA clearly specified?”	YES	More info in sections 2.2 & Appendix 6
10.	“Do the researchers strive to ‘own their perspectives’ (even if only very briefly), their personal and social standpoint and positioning?”	YES	More info in sections 2.2 & Appendix 6
11.	“Are the analytic procedures used clearly outlined, and described in terms of what the authors actually did, rather than generic procedures?”	YES	More info in sections 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 & Appendix 7
12.	“Is there evidence of conceptual and procedural confusion? “	NO	No evidence of the common procedural confusions (Braun and Clarke, 2021) is observed in the research.
13.	“Do the authors demonstrate full and coherent understanding of their claimed approach to TA?”	YES	More info in sections 2.2, 2.3 & Appendix 6
14.	“Is it clear what and where the themes are in the report? Would the manuscript benefit from some kind of overview of the analysis: listing of themes, narrative overview, table of themes, thematic map?”	YES	Themes and subthemes are described in depth in section 3 of the research.
15.	“Are reported themes topic summaries, rather than ‘fully realised themes’ – patterns of shared meaning underpinned by a central organizing concept?”	NO	Fully realised themes are described in depth in section 3 of the research.
16.	“Is a non-thematic contextualising information presented as a theme?”	NO	Contextual information is presented separately, not as a theme. Fully realised themes are described in depth in section 3 of the research.
17	“In applied research, do the reported themes have the potential to give rise to actionable outcomes?”	YES	More info in the section “Recommendations”
18.	“Are there conceptual clashes and confusion in the paper?”	NO	More info in sections 2.2 & Appendix 6
19	“Is there evidence of weak or unconvincing analysis, such as: Too many or too few themes? • Too many theme levels? Confusion between codes and themes? Mismatch between data extracts and analytic claims? Too few or too many data extracts? Overlap between themes?”	NO	More info in section 3 & Appendix 7
20.	“Do authors make problematic statements about the lack of generalisability of their results, and or implicitly conceptualise generalisability as statistical probabilistic generalisability?”	YES	More info in the section “Limitations”

3. RESULTS

This section of the thesis presents the results of qualitative data analysis, revealing the lived experiences of performance, change, and growth in dynamic organizational cultures from an employee's perspective. During the research, the goal was to investigate and understand what sparks change in employees' performance, how they interpret these shifts, the strategies they use to meet new challenges, and the organizational and personal supports they rely on to adapt and maintain deliverables.

Below are the results of the data analysis. From a total of 1,211 codes, 9 main themes and 20 sub-themes were identified. These form 2 thematic clusters along with 1 standalone theme, all of which collectively reflect the research objectives.

It is worth mentioning that while some themes captured a single coherent concept, many others were further divided into sub-themes to reflect their internal diversity. The themes that emerged in the study reflect more of the scope of the data, offering the reader a general overview of the topics addressed across all interviews. In contrast, the sub-themes provide insight into the depth of the data – indicating the direction within each theme that warrants further attention or highlighting what is significant (see Picture 1). Picture 1 presents the structure of the themes and sub-themes in the form of a "map." This visual representation aids in understanding the research results more clearly: the relationships between themes, their hierarchical structure, and a broader perspective on the research topic.

The following section discusses these thematic clusters, the themes within them, and their respective sub-themes.

THEME GROUPS	**Company culture and its perception**				**The Interplay of Factors and Strategies for Navigating Growth, Change, and Challenges.**				**Standalone - not in a group**
THEMES	**Culture - Principles Not Only on Paper [10; 145]**	**Culture - Five Cornerstones Beyond Principles [10; 136]**	**Culture - Not For Everyone [8; 20]**	**Culture - The Wall You Lean On [10; 64]**	**Performance-Shaping Factors [10; 305]**	**Growth-Driving Factors [10; 142]**	**Anchors of Support in Times of Change and Challenge [10; 31]**	**Self-Sourced Solutions for for Navigating Change & Challenges [10; 234]**	**Performance shifts are not always the objective truth [9; 50]**
SUBTHEMES	Company values are felt in live form [10; 37]	People Are the Culture [10; 49]	-	-	Personal drivers [6;14]	Growth Mindset [9; 67]	Given context provides comfort [4; 9]	Perception Change [10; 80]	Performance evaluation might change but the effort does not [9; 30]
	Principles through examples and stories [10; 108]	Culture is speed and it is huge [8; 19]	-	-	Context and curiosity [8; 25]	Context Inspires and Enables [9; 32]	Leaders' Role [10; 22]	Perceived Control over the Situation [9; 86]	Extra mile or challenge conquered is seen as performance increase [6; 20]
	-	-	-	-	Expectations and clarity [10; 51]	People: From Leaders to Peers [10; 31]	-	Self-Development and Growth [9; 68]	-
	-	-	-	-	Principles [10; 156]	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	Leadership [9; 35]	-	-	-	-
	-	-	-	-	Other significant people [9; 24]	-	-	-	-

Picture 1. Theme map defining theme widths and depths

3.1 Theme Group 1: Company culture perception and characteristics

When participants were asked, "*In your own words, how would you describe Hostinger's organizational culture? What is it for you?*" they shared many stories and experiences from which the picture of culture emerged. It is worth mentioning that later on in the interviews, when participants shared how culture affects their performance, growth, and navigation of change, many more insights were shared about the culture, and they were coded as well. In the research data set, four main themes emerged concerning the characteristics and lived experiences of Hostinger's culture: (1) Culture is principles not only on paper; (2) Culture – five cornerstones beyond principles; (3) Culture is not for everyone; and (4) Culture is the wall you lean on (for many reasons). Below, each theme is described in detail: its defining features, the number and nature of its subthemes (illustrated with excerpts from interviews).

3.1.1 Theme: Culture – Principles Not Only on Paper

Culture – Principles not only on paper [10;145] is the largest theme in the first group of themes. The theme consists of two subthemes: Company values are felt in live form [10; 37] and Principles through examples and stories [10;108]. These subthemes complement each other by illustrating that participants understand culture through both lived experience – seeing principles in the behaviors of themselves and others – and through stories and examples that highlight those principles. The second subtheme differs from the first because it focuses on distinct principles illustrated by examples, rather than on the direct experience of feeling principles in action. Together, these subthemes paint a picture in which culture is more than words on a wall or on paper; it is lived and experienced.

First subtheme contributing to the theme is that **Company values are felt in live form**. This subtheme provides the foundation of the theme: participants describe how principles are alive. In the second subtheme, these same principles are explored through examples. Daniel, culture is not lip service but a lived reality: "*Everyone is following the principles too, it's not just written, that's what I want, that's what I'm trying to say, it's not something that, like, you joke about or in a meeting just a reminder – we have to do this and that's it, and we forget about.*" Ryan shared in his interview that "*So, seeing a company with a customer obsession, being a customer is really, like, something that really fulfills me.*" He feels the culture pulsing from both ends – as employee and customer – and later adds, "*I don't know how to say it properly but we have the principles right and those type of principles, like, we breathe them on.*" Isaac's simply sums up the subtheme of principles being felt live: "*I like our principles and…. how at least all of us try to follow principles of Hostinger.*" Daniel's thoughts complement Isaacs's almost synonymously: "*I think the cultural principles of Hostinger, they're not just in theory, so they are applied*" when

describing how connected and alive the principles are for him, and how he sees them manifested in others: "*From my side, personally, since I've joined, I've always felt quite connected to the values the company has. So it's always been for me, personally, quite motivating to work here as well as I've been quite, I think, grateful for the people that I'm surrounded with. So a lot of people are fairly detail oriented, who are always wanting quick results.*" But the most illustrative conceptualizing quote comes from Peter, who sums up the subtheme: "*Generally, company principles are just there on the board or for you to read once and never look back again, speaking from my own experience. Every single company I was part of, they had principles. They had it neatly printed and ready for you on day one, but they never drove those principles. They went like, 'This is what we believe in and this is what you should do.'*" In many organizations, principles or values are written in introductory slides or handbooks but are not acted upon. Though they are theoretically part of culture, they are not experienced as such. Here at Hostinger, culture is defined by principles – but even more so by the fact that those principles are felt in live form.

Second subtheme contributing to the theme is **Principles through examples and stories**. In this subtheme, we see codes naming principles alongside concrete examples. Out of ten company principles, seven were coded through examples (Hire and develop the best; Customer obsession; Ownership; Learn and be curious; Courage and candidness; Transparency [unofficial principle]; and Freedom & responsibility). The remaining principles – Bias toward action; Focus and deliver results – are interwoven with other themes described below. Although they belong to the same principles group, they did not feature prominently in this context; rather, they were described as factors or components of other mechanisms that, in the final theme map, still contribute to the overall perception of culture.

This subtheme uniquely complements the first by showing how participants experience principles as part of culture through real examples. Peter shares how Courage and candidness are alive in the company: "*But quick enough on my feet to kind of take in the negative aspects to it and try to apply the positives. Generally people don't like to receive feedback, more often than not, looking for it because for example if I work…*" Angela adds that speaking up – something that might not be standard in other companies – is alive through her actions and how it is received: "*So I kind of just went for it because there were things I wanted to ask and it was very easy… and this year I'm going again for summer fest and I'm so excited. I already know who I have to meet and what I want to talk about, and the fear is not there anymore because I know it's okay, people do.*" Moreover, Eve demonstrates how courage and candidness – or feedback, for lack of a better word – can change team dynamics: "*How are you going to help the team because we see that we're struggling and we need that team lead right now? And she really took that feedback. She really changed and she really tried to support that team and say, 'Hey, I'm here for you,' changed the*

way she, her manager, and the team work together for better and bigger goals." Courage and candidness are felt through feedback, and a learning culture is kept alive through discussions and inspiration. But those are not the only principles brought to life. Daniel shares a general sensation that "*I feel like there is a strong sense of ownership in everyone at Hostinger.*" Ownership is evident in how participants reflect on their experiences. Angela describes navigating an uncomfortable quarter with a mindset of "*not the most comfortable quarter for me so far, but I felt like there was no other way. I saw s*** happening basically. I had to change.*" Emphasizing her sense of responsibility, she adds "*I see what I do not like, so I do it myself.*" Participants commonly state that ownership is a default setting at Hostinger and is felt through their work: "*For me in a leadership position, you should be an example of ownership and you must deliver results, because for me it feels natural. Even in a specialist position, you still need to have those,*" says Valerie. "*And this is a must-have for you to work in Hostinger, because you're truly responsible for whatever you are assigned to do,*" adds Daniel. It is most interesting to observe how a few principles intertwine in Maria's story: "*But of course, sometimes it can come also with the cause that your curiosity means your time taken on a certain task, where sometimes I feel like I could be quicker, if I ask someone to help me with some part because, technically, I could just say it's not my job to do it but since I'm curious and I want to own the whole process more I take on and do it the way I would like to see the outcome.*" Most important to mention is how the cliché "Customer is always right" has become a positive, lived part of the company's culture: customer obsession. This principle was one of the easiest for participants to feel, as it is widely integrated into decision-making. Valerie illustrates: "*So if you're just going blindly into 'I need to do this and you need to do 100 things' without considering what's important or how it will affect customer experience, you're just doing stuff. Out of that, perhaps some great things will come.*" Angela echoes this: "*What is the one need my customer has when I'm promoting a product? What functionalities are important for them to know? How do I prioritize what I'm going to promote? I don't know, so talk to customers, go for it, listen to customers first, because you need a north star in this moment of chaos.*" Thinking of customers as a guiding star is seen by many participants as their operating system, and it is likewise felt in live form.

Last but not least, real examples that help participants experience company principles and culture through tangible experiences – rather than words on paper – include **Transparency and Context.** Though not officially Hostinger principles, they are often referred to as such and have organically become part of the culture. Peter shares how real transparency is at Hostinger compared to other companies: "*I had a couple of companies where they don't even let you know about future business ideas and stuff like that, whereas here you're very much part of that team and part of that conversation because you have to kind of put something out to the users and*

[project name] doesn't cover only [project component] pushing and stuff like that." For Angela, transparency means "*At Hostinger I feel like we know it all*" – a concept where everything is available and employees are trusted to handle information responsibly, without fear of failure.

All in all, participants cite principles through others' actions or their own, forming a subtheme of Principles through Examples, which significantly contributes to the idea that a culture of principles is not only on paper.

3.1.2 Theme: Culture – Five Cornerstones Beyond Principles

The theme "Culture – Five Cornerstones Beyond Principles [10;136]" emerges as a foundational framework through which participants experience and enact Hostinger's values. Though formally distinct from the codified principles, these five cornerstones – People, Speed, Drive, Challenge, and Change – are described not as add-ons but as the very bedrock upon which those principles stand. In other words, culture isn't just "what we say we do"; it's "how we actually live it", with these pillars serving as the living support structure that shapes every decision, interaction, and innovation.

Much like a house supported by its stones, Hostinger's culture is held aloft by these interlocking elements. Each pillar both describes a key aspect of day-to-day life and performs a guiding function – directing behaviors, setting expectations, and reinforcing the company's identity in moments of uncertainty or growth. Below, we trace how each cornerstone unfolds through participants' stories and reflections, revealing how culture is felt, perceived, and enacted across the organization.

At its heart, culture lives in relationships (Subtheme: **People Are the Culture [10; 49]**). When people arrive at Hostinger, they don't just join an organization – they join a community bound by shared purpose and genuine care. This pillar underlines that, no matter how clear the principles, it is through human connection that they gain warmth, relevance, and trust. Eve captures this communal spirit: "*Culture for me is maybe the common goal that people have.*" Her words remind us that shared vision transforms co-workers into collaborators, creating a network of mutual support. Henry recounts a formative visit: "*I have this pop-up in mind. The warmest is actually during my visit to Lithuania last year when I met with certain stakeholders that I haven't met before, I felt that all of the colleagues that at least I have relations in the context of my job are caring persons and…*" His memory illustrates how a single encounter can cement the sense of belonging that makes culture palpable. Tom celebrates intellectual fellowship: "*So, we have amazing talent density in the organization. There is a feeling that people with whom you work are as smart as you or, in most cases, smarter than you. And this pushes everyone, I believe, to get better, to bring arguments to that table and so on. And since our work is based on massive*

collaboration, we have cross functional product teams. We have cross functional product marketing teams now and…" Respect for expertise, he suggests, becomes a collective motivator, spurring continuous improvement.

Shared experiences such as offsites or informal gatherings become the bricks in the social architecture of culture. Together, these voices show that Hostinger's culture is activated and sustained by its people – an ever-living tapestry woven from individual connections that transform principles into practice.

Speed at Hostinger isn't merely a metric; it's a mindset that propels both product and people forward (Subtheme: **Culture is speed and it is huge [8; 19]**). This pillar acts like a high-performance engine under the cultural hood, ensuring that momentum never stalls. By elevating rapid iteration to a core value, Hostinger's teams learn to adapt on the fly, turn setbacks into springboards, and capture opportunities before they slip away. Henry notes the imperative to pivot: "*If something is not on target…we need to change it fast.*" His urgency reflects the cultural license to course-correct without bureaucratic friction. Ryan contrasts his departure and return: "*So when I rejoined the company, it really opened my eyes about how we are moving really fast in terms of technical things in terms of growth as a company and…*" His perspective highlights speed as a visible marker of Hostinger's evolving process. Angela frames novelty as normal: "*Because I feel like Hostinger also is a very innovative company. So everyone knows by heart: we don't know. So it's kind of one of the things that is very easy, it's not a problem, we are dealing with new product, new stuff all the time.*" Here, speed becomes synonymous with adventurous innovation. Eve highlights cultural identity: "*Speed is culture and it helps us: And why is it essential is because I don't think we would have so much success as we do without the culture that we have. I think it really helps us not only of course to hire the people with those similar aspects but also to do the job, that we do, so fast.*" She connects rapid iteration to individual and organizational growth, suggesting that the habit of quick adaptation forges resilience. Through these reflections, we see speed not just as an operational demand but as a defining characteristic that shapes Hostinger's trajectory and identity.

Beneath speed lies an engine of ambition and drive which for participants is part of culture or the culture itself (Subtheme: **Culture is drive and being driven**): a collective drive that fuels personal and organizational ascent. This pillar injects passion into the foundational mortar, turning static structures into dynamic forces. It highlights how Hostinger's people serve as both the architects and engineers of their own success – aligning individual motivation with a shared mission to generate collective momentum. Peter distills it plainly: "*In terms of culture there's a lot of drive…to get to that top of the mountain.*" His metaphor paints a vivid picture of culture as a joint expedition toward ever-higher peaks. Eve describes her inner spark: "*Me being able to strive*

for success, strive for better results, strive for growth was something that I got the chance to do here and that puts a fire in me to reach that I never had before." Here, culture ignites latent ambitions, turning professional roles into personally meaningful journeys. Tom elaborates on self-drive: "*Okay so our culture is developed to support constant selfawwareness, self push towards results and…*" & "*Collaboration but when I say self pushed, some people in our organization would say 'Totally, you and right, everyone in our culture pushes everyone to seek for results'. As an organization we are self pushed, I would say…*" He shows how mutual encouragement and personal accountability coalesce into a self-reinforcing cycle of performance. Valerie celebrates drive as a way to never stay in the same place: "*Right now I think why I am excited about changes and what goes from my mind, I don't want to be anymore in the same place and doing same stuff for a long time and…*" Her restlessness speaks to a culture that honors curiosity and scorns comfort. Drive transforms culture from a static backdrop into an ever-accelerating launchpad for innovation and self-actualization.

Challenge at Hostinger is not feared but welcomed as the terrain where growth happens (Subtheme: **Culture is Challenge**). This pillar functions like a pressure chamber: it applies stress that tests and tempers the organization, ensuring that only the strongest ideas and practices emerge. Rather than sidestep difficulty, participants embrace complexity as the proving ground for creativity and collaboration. Henry acknowledges difficulty as a constant: "*So it could probably give you a different context but overall the similarity that I found during my tenure here and then especially for Hostinger is that my impression working at Hostinger is that it's always challenging, like, it's not something that we usually write in a review in Glassdoor and say that this is like a hot state environment. It's just like a jargon there, here it is real.*" His candor affirms that challenge is integral, not incidental. Ryan reframes challenge as opportunity "*Cuz I think that's why I keep on seeing challenge as something exciting like opportunities."* Valerie sums it up: "*So it kind of supports both for me and to summarize it's a challenging environment and…*" And Tom confirms: "S*o overall vibe is good but we have challenges that we are solving. So yeah sometimes it's hard but overall good…*" Challenge then acts as both crucible and catalyst – invoking adaptability and collective problem-solving.

Finally, change is the air Hostinger breathes (Subtheme: **Culture Is Change – and It's Expected**): constant, anticipated, and embraced. This pillar underwrites the entire structure, ensuring that the foundation itself can shift without collapse. By normalizing change, culture becomes a self-renewing ecosystem where evolution is not an afterthought but the very condition of survival. Daniel observes perpetual flux: "*Very dynamic environment…changes all the time*" His statement normalizes change as the baseline condition. Valerie stresses adaptability: "*You need to learn a lot…never settle for bare minimum.*" Here, change becomes the teacher,

demanding continuous growth. Maria notes suspicion in static moment: "*If no change happening…you start to become suspicious.*" For her, movement is proof of life. Isaac distinguishes product shifts from core values: "*Lots of updates…but culture itself isn't changing.*" His insight reassures that while tactics evolve, principles endure. Ryan finds progress and promise: "*A lot…developed in a good way…work in progress.*" He captures change as an ongoing journey of refinement. Change, then, is both canvas and catalyst – providing space for continuous reinvention while preserving the integrity of Hostinger's core identity.

These five cornerstones – People, Speed, Drive, Challenge, Change – do more than describe culture. They function collaboratively to make Hostinger's principles tangible. People embody and transmit values, speed and drive compel action, challenge triggers creativity, and change sustains evolution. As living stones of the organizational foundation, they support one another in a dynamic interplay, ensuring that culture remains both stable in its core and agile in its expression.

3.1.3 Theme: Culture – Not for Everyone

Culture – Not for everyone [8;20] is the smallest theme in the first group of themes in this theme group. Although it lacks any subthemes and therefore does not offer extensive depth on its own, it illuminates how culture is perceived and described independently of other nuances.

Henry shares a story illustrating that culture is not for everyone: "*So yeah, that would be my overall impression working at Hostinger, but beyond that I also feel that my growth at the organization played a big part because I feel that even when I was asked by [NAME] a couple months ago regarding [PROJECT] or something like that, I would stick with my statement that working in an organization like Hostinger is not for everyone. I would this say because if you don't have your personal preferences – for example, you need to keep growing every quarter – you need to keep growing and…*" Eve, on the same topic, elaborates on why this might be the case: "*How I would describe it is two words: essential and strong. I would say these are two words that I would use because, personally, I have never seen a company with this strongly rooted culture.*" Having a strong culture and firm foundations – both technically and in terms of expected behaviors – can feel quite strict. To be part of this culture, to fit in, you must grow continuously, as Henry describes and as others have mentioned through the cornerstones of culture. Otherwise, it might simply not be for you. Tom further highlights this idea: "*I would describe, many people say, that our environment is very fast, and it's hard to be part of Hostinger because of that. So it's either you survive here or not, it really depends on each individual.*"

In other respects, the notion that culture is not for everyone reveals itself from another angle: those who surround you are seen as culture-fit because they embody the company's

principles. This, in turn, enhances the culture and drives other components such as performance. Daniel illustrates the opposite side of this theme – how having the right people around you, who act on principles, actually enables you: "*When people follow the principles, it's easier to work with them. I know that, for example, if I'm going on vacation, I can fully trust my work to other people. I can split the tasks with them, and it's going to be done. It's going to be finished in a good way. It's not just like they're going to – when I have time – check this…*" Though this theme is small, it is significant in the context of culture being the central component of the company and a factor in other constructs. It is insightful to see that people look for personal connection and belonging with the culture, as Maria illustrates: "*From my side, personally, since I've joined, I've always felt quite connected to the values the company has.*"

Others share this experience, and they even highlight, consciously or not, that knowing the culture is not for everyone is, in fact, a strength.

3.1.4 Theme: Culture – The Wall You Lean On

The theme **"Culture – The Wall You Lean On [10; 64]"** first emerges as a quiet but powerful undercurrent: a steady presence that participants instinctively turn to when navigating uncertainty. Though it sits as the second smallest theme in the first group, its resonance is outsized – revealing culture not merely as an abstract ideal, but as a tangible support structure that shapes how people act, think, and feel within the organization. In this way, culture becomes less about formal policies or lofty mission statements and more about a living, breathing foundation that everyone can press against to steady themselves.

This theme's strength lies in its dual nature: it is both descriptive – illuminating how culture is perceived – and functional – demonstrating what culture actually does for individuals. Here, culture is not just a backdrop, it is an active agent, guiding choices and lending confidence. Participants repeatedly invoked metaphors of walls, bibles, and dekalogs to capture how culture offers clarity in the fog of everyday decisions and the heat of high-stakes moments. Henry, for instance, described observing senior leaders as critical to his own willingness to "walk the talk": "*Because for example, if I see the senior members at the organization are not doing that or walk the talk of the principles of the culture, I wouldn't have a courage to do the same or to internalize those things and it constantly happens.*" He emphasizes that culture's presence – or absence – at the top ripples throughout all levels, shaping both major strategic moves and mundane interactions: "*It's not just talking about big decision-making but also day-to-day decision making, and I feel like this culture at Hostinger is our culture. It impacts me even when I'm dealing with stakeholders for example… But it helps me see thing from a perspective when someone is doing something and they are thinking also the same thing, or key behavior from principles, then it*

becomes predictable. And sometimes when they're straying away from the principles that's where it usually catches me off guard in the scenarios." Peter's take on culture underscores its practical utility: "*Principles are like aplicatory guidelines for behavior, have it sorted by, kind of, applying these guidelines and it, kind of, helps drive the point point forward, which was made significantly easier than, I suppose, previous companies… So you can already, kind of, discard these because principles help you, kind of, frame that idea, to bring it to the person where there's no such thing, where you're just basically adding friction at this point.*" By framing principles as "applicatory guidelines," Peter shows how culture streamlines decision-making and reduces uncertainty. Angela adds that early attention to these guiding tenets can pre-empt confusion: "*I feel like the principles are really summaries of what is expected and if we're more attentive of this from the very beginning, it would be easier.*"

Eve's vivid comparison to a "10 points of God" dekalog emphasizes culture's almost spiritual authority: "*Rules that do guide each person on… how to act in specific situations they guide how to communicate with your colleagues and if something is missing you can also reflect… It's kind of 10 points of God, kind of, in a way that you have to do this, and this, and this, and you have to believe in that as well…*" And Isac captures how these shared norms forge a sense of unity by also referring theme to the analogy of Bible : "*I think there's 10 of them. Yeah and it's a small bible on how you should behave when you're working in Hostinger. Everybody more or less follows those rules and I think that way we can understand each other, as well, a bit better and, of course, all of those winter fests, how everyone comes into one place and how everyone is communicating with one another.*"

Together, these narratives weave a portrait of culture as a supportive scaffold: ever-present, reliably consistent, and deeply ingrained in both the day-to-day and the exceptional. It is the wall you lean on when you need to know what to do, the compass you consult when you're unsure, and the shared language that aligns everyone's steps – even when the path ahead is unclear.

3.2 Theme Group 2: The Interplay of Factors and Strategies for Navigating Growth, Change, and Challenges

To investigate additional objectives focused on understanding which factors and personal strategies shape employees' development, performance, and adaptability during periods of change – or when facing challenges, organizational shifts, and evolving expectations – participants were asked several questions (with occasional follow-ups to deepen our understanding). Key questions for capturing the lived experience – which often intertwined with participants' free-flowing thoughts – were: (1) "*From your first day here to today, how have you evolved as a professional, or how has your approach to work and performance changed?*"; (2) "*How does Hostinger's*

culture and environment influence your performance and development?"; (3) "*In the face of changes and challenges, what practices or mindsets help you move forward or adapt?*"

While answering, participants shared many stories and experiences, revealing the complex systems they navigate – interplaying and complementing one another – through which identical factors can have different effects on performance, adaptation to change, and responses to challenges. These insights cluster into four overarching themes: (1) Performance-Shaping Factors; (2) Growth-Driving Factors; (3) Anchors of Support in Times of Change and Challenge; (4) Self-Sourced Solutions for Navigating Change and Challenges.

Below, each theme is described in detail – outlining its defining features, the number and nature of its subthemes, and illustrative excerpts from the interviews.

3.2.1 Theme: Performance-Shaping Factors

Performance-Shaping Factors [10; 305] is the largest theme in the second group of themes, and also in the entire research. The theme consists of six subthemes: (1) Personal drivers [6; 14]; (2) Context and curiosity [8; 25]; (3) Expectations and clarity [10; 51]; (4) Principles [10; 156]; (5) Leadership [9; 35]; and (6) Other significant people [9; 24]. These subthemes complement each other by illustrating that, in participants' lived experiences, performance is influenced and affected by a plethora of components. In their stories, overcoming challenges and finding factors that shape performance intertwine; however, a few pillars remain strong and standalone, indicating what shapes performance – mostly to the positive side.

All participants reflect that, in the moment, it is hard to identify what affects performance. However, through stories and illustrative memories, it is seen that the following components have an important place at the table when understanding performance.

Below you will see factors and quotes from participants illustrating how each factor impacts performance:

As the first subtheme, **Personal drivers**, unfolds that performance is shaped by inner narratives. For example, Ryan shares that performing well gives him self-fulfillment: "*And when there's a difficult clients with technical cases and then, turns out, we are able to help them and they feel satisfied with, they give a positive rating but the fact that we are able to solve their problem, we're able to help to them and then it gives a sense of satisfaction, in a sense like self-fululfilledness, I don't know is that even a word right, so I kind of feel fulfilled as a person, like okay, it means I do right*." Peter also finds a similar aspect in being interested in cool things to do, which in return drives his performance through self-actualization: "*If I'm able to come up with a flow or a solution that takes the least amount of thinking from the user end, then I'm happy. I'm also interested in cool s***. So there's that. And Hostinger, since it's a very tech company and*

there's a lot of services behind it, there's a lot of room where you can play around with these things." Moreover, Isaac reflects that his personal driver to perform is some sort of inner bet with oneself: "*So yeah, I knew that she gave me a chance to improve and I have to take on it and prove her and prove myself that I can do it and I did it.*"

Self-actualization and passion to exceed one's limits goes hand in hand with the following subtheme: **Context and curiosity.** Being curious and, through it, gathering context as a tool for performance was mentioned concisely but elaborated on by participants. Tom puts it simply: "*Humble, hungry, whatever employee needs to know how to gather the context and if he's able to and he self-learned. So from that moment he can basically do anything. so this is the main skill and…*" You can do anything and do it well, in other words, perform, if you know where and in what context teams cooperate. Maria adds that the context you can get through other teams is invaluable: "*I think one part that is beneficial apart from things that I've mentioned it's the other team's availability to help you get the context.*" Maria even illustrates how she navigates her deliverables knowing that information: "*So for example, following what is happening with [PRODUCT], following what is happening in [DEPARTMENT], were there any downtimes, if – what was the impact, so that you're more aware of what is happening, so if a question comes – okay the [KPI] does not seem correct, you would for sure know because you read that there was an update, that hey this happened ,so the combination of understanding what is happening within the company……*" This leads to her being more confident in delivering tasks, as well as setting clear expectations for the future.

Performance is further shaped by a subtheme **Expectations and clarity** with which they are communicated, particularly in relation to identifying and addressing areas for improvement. Not just feedback, but aligned expectations of the deliverable, are key to making performance shine, as performance is ultimately evaluated by managers. Angela illustrates this through her idea exchange and alignment with leadership: "*All the time and it's even good for them because I feel like ideas that are here. Sometimes they don't know the ideas that are here and we just have to exchange to feel like we're all aligned and…*". Eve puts it plainly: "*For me what's really important in leadership is to really have everything set clearly.*" Peter even reassures himself and others wishing to perform well: "*As long as you keep expectations in check and you're a good sport within the team, it's going to be fine.*" On the flip side, Eve recalls a moment when misalignment or unrealistic expectations led to a downturn in performance evaluation: "*I have been working a lot with my team lead because a lot of that is missing, of being really really clear of what is expected from me because it really shifts a lot and even if we try to have clearer goals, then it's just unreachable or it's all over the place and in many different areas. So I think what's impacting sometimes.*"

All previously discussed subthemes are inherently grounded in, and cannot be fully understood without reference to, the current subtheme: **Principles.** This is the largest subtheme under Factors influencing performance. The codes add up to a picture of how following principles is the way to perform. From focus, which helps to deliver great work, Peter illustrates: "*Even though this was done in the past, but it's more properly done here because you basically just know what you need to focus on next. And the sole, kind of, reason for it is just, kind of, a business has to run.*" Valerie echoes that performance is almost entirely about focus: "*And if you're working with a lot of stuff where you need to be very good at prioritizing, very good at communicating with stakeholders what you will not be doing, taking the feedback, like giving it.*" Apart from focus, participants share that seeing others act according to the principles – alive and part of the culture – drives them to perform, inspiring them to do the job right: "*And you can counter those if somebody's challenging you from a subjective point of view, you can kind of also pull a principal card and kind ask them to be a bit more direct and candid and stuff like that. So it limits those kind of that time wasted where you would just basically generally disagree.*" – Peter.

To add more learnings from failures, mistakes, feedback, and new skills is also a wide factor for performance. It is part of the same principles, with principles being the culture. Maria shares how acknowledging failures enhanced her performance: "*And then admitting that you failed and then you move along and you adjust something.*" For Tom, a similar experience emerged: "*So by that time I did a lot of mistakes already and had some opportunities to learn from them and one of the struggles that I had during Q3.*" Learning from Q3 mistakes led to great performance in Q4.

We can boil down the fact that culture drives performance, and performing by cultural norms drives culture to stay alive, creating an endless cycle. To summarize how principles drive performance, it is quite easy – as the people say, performance is not just KPIs; it is also how you deliver them, which reflects the principles followed: "*because you have to kind of apply the principles before speaking them out and it removes all of the toxicity I suppose whenever you're not agreeing with something right like we've all been there when for example you've done some work and somebody just doesn't agree with it and their reasoning is I don't know why but this doesn't feel right So there's no argument behind it and there's no solution for it.*" – Peter. Tom adds: "*In Hostinger everything is a bit different because you have the freedom to manage your workload as it is convenient for you, that it's very important to basically deliver results and how you deliver results, I mean, that you need to be collaborative you need to share feedback*". Performing the job is equally important as the extent to which it displays the core principles, which together constitute the organizational culture.

These two subthemes show that it is not just constructs that affect performance, but also

Leadership and Other significant people. The influence varies from inspiring colleagues who are team players and help navigate challenges: "*Where you work with a team, if you can't really kind of have that camaraderie feeling, it gets to be lonesome. So I'm happy to say that there's a lot of camaraderie here, even in plannings and stuff like that.*" – Peter. For Isaac, Valerie, Maria, Daniel, Tom, and others, performance is shaped by the help they receive from others: "*So all the connections that I have, all the agreements that I make helps me to be very productive during that time when I'm working actually with the team…*" – Tom; Maria: "*But yeah, I feel like one of the good parts as well is when you have a great team around, which also helps you to kind of survive maybe the harder days as well.*"

Leadership provides support, delivers feedback, inspires, and is hands-on when things get tough: Isaac states: "*So she just told me step away and let's outside. let's go for a short walk. So actually this is kind of like both nice memory and a memory.*"; Peter: "*If you have those little conversations with your manager and he believes in, for example, your vision of an X task, for example, and he doesn't shy away of speaking that out, if it comes to it.*" They also enable learning from mistakes, which was mentioned as a driver.

To summarize the theme: its depth could be impacted by the questions used and the topic itself. Participants reflected on performance and factors interchangeably with challenges and culture. Performance at Hostinger is part of principles – meaning part of culture – hence so many things overlap and interconnect.

Taken together, multiple factors impact or enable individual performance, providing many avenues to enhance or personalize it for optimal adaptation.

3.2.2. Theme: Growth – Driving Factors

Growth-driving Factors [10;305] is the third largest theme in the second group of themes. The theme consists of three subthemes: (1) Growth Mindset [9; 67]; (2) Context Inspires and Enables [9; 32]; (3) People: From Leaders to Peers [10; 31];

For any research reader, this point could sound like déjà vu. Similar constructs drive performance and growth, while growth is also part of performance drive as described above. However, according to coding, in some cases the same constructs are separated and affect both growth and performance differently, in others, they create an endless loop of growth, performance, and results. These subthemes complement each other by illustrating that, in participants' lived experiences, growth is part of performance but also distinct. It is influenced by experiments through the contexts participants encounter and learn to leverage, and by the people around them – learning from them or being inspired by them to embark on their own learning journeys. At the foundation of all growth factors lies the largest subtheme with the most codes – a growth mindset

– a general approach to growth and the fact that growth is simply a default setting that drives engagement.

It is worth highlighting that this theme might sound homogeneous to the one above, however, the nuances and interpretative factors of the codes allow it to stand apart, providing a clearer picture of the participants' lived experiences and the complex interplay of factors, as noted in the theme group name.

To describe the foundation of a **Growth Mindset** (subtheme): the mindset of the need to grow is illustrated by Ryan: "*And of course it's my responsibility to ask myself 'what's next?' because I'm not really that old yet to feel comfortable where I am right now. I need to keep on growing myself.*" Peter also illustrates an almost uncontrollable need to learn, as if it were oxygen: "*I tend to work – no, I tend to learn on the go. Whenever there's something new I need to learn, I'll just do it immediately, especially when it comes to work. Outside of work, in similar situations, I just learn by doing…*" On a more lighthearted note, Tom even says that being curious is a problem and that this mindset has to be controlled: "*So for me, it's a different problem, but I'm just very curious and I just want to know how decisions are made, why they are made, and everything. That's why I just gather the context.*" This curiosity might lead to straying from the focus principle and later on, to not delivering... Maria also sheds light on how, if the mindset is there, growth possibilities are "limitless": "*I feel like the growth part is limitless here, especially since you essentially have no boundaries…*"

Secondly, context drives growth through information available via transparency, momentary learnings, and new knowledge. In other words, **Context Inspires and Enables**, the drive itself is the ability to use contextual opportunities to grow. A few illustrative points, starting with Angela's note that it's okay to pause work during the day to learn: "*It's like in the middle of work time, and it's totally not even acceptable, but also encouraged – even when we had Learning Fridays, I don't remember exactly the name…*" Available resources that are nearby push you to take advantage of them: "*When you are given tools and everything is enhanced with technology and AI – and other people are not – and you see a big difference in how you communicate, how you see things, how you have tried so many things and they don't even know about it. So I felt that shift in my friend group in my daily life. I guess there are certain things that I just brought back home from work, despite sometimes being stressed, but just simple things like how to use AI…*" shares Valerie. Even Tom shares that access to contextual information, new people, and stakeholders is a driver for growth, and that this reinforcement happens naturally: "*So that was actually a nice experience. It allowed me to just open my eyes, basically scale my perspective, and yeah, it really helped.*"

Last but not least, people drive growth, similarly to performance but from a different angle. This introduces the third subtheme: **People: From Leaders to Peers**. Ryan's thoughts introduce the idea that people inspire, one looks up to teammates and is pushed to grow, not wanting to be the anchor for the team: "*So having them as people that I can look up to sometimes helps.*" The fact that people are helpful and keen to share knowledge is highlighted in Isaac's experience: "*Helpfulness – in general, everybody is so nice. I don't know. It's so nice to be around colleagues. That's why I spend a lot of time in the office as well…*" Leadership roles also inspire growth in many ways, from modeling their own growth: "*I would say at this time I feel that he's way ahead of where I am. I rely a lot on his thoughts*," Valerie names her leader as inspiration to leaders who support, enable, and help you grow for personal or performance reasons. Tom illustrates it well: "*Which basically pushes us to share feedback and learn from it when you receive it. During that time, I continued to get very good growth feedback from my manager and my teammates.*" Maria broadens the growth scope and describes her leader's impact on her growth: "*From my side, leadership in general helps to improve yourself on…*"

To sum it up, growth as a separate construct is deeply intertwined with performance, also being one of the factors that impact performance itself. The way the theme was elicited was influenced by the interview question, which did not use the keyword "growth" but rather leaned on "evolved" to avoid leading the respondents. Also, as participants first prioritize reflections on performance – where growth appears – few organic snippets focus exclusively on growth.

3.2.3 Theme: Anchors of Support in Times of Change and Challenge

The theme "Anchors of Support in Times of Change and Challenge [10; 31]" emerges as one of the smallest themes in the research dataset. It becomes a small but powerful component among the complex factors shaping the navigation of growth, change, and challenge. The subthemes are (1) Leaders' Role [10; 22] and (2) Given Context Provides Comfort [4; 9]. The heterogeneity between this theme and the later-mentioned theme lies in what helps navigate the change itself – an external construct (context/information or leadership) – versus the inner factors described in the later theme, such as self-development, shifts in perception, or the pursuit of perceived control over the situation.

The theme is consistent within itself, though small due to the nature of its subthemes, and for the same reason it differentiates sufficiently from the later theme in the research. Its size might be influenced by the nature of the questions: participants were asked, "*In the face of changes, what practices or mindsets help you move forward or adapt?*", which does not highlight factors specifically beyond their control.

This theme can be illustrated with only a few but powerful participant quotes. For all participants, **Leaders' Role** (subtheme) is significant in navigating change and challenges – constructs that usually go hand in hand. Tom shares how his leader contributes to problem solving: "*We approach our teamwork work together, this way we solve problems together: me, also my peer [NAME], and our manager. So we are a team. We are solving the same problem mostly all the time or we split: you will do this and this, and we are just teammates, and this is actually very important. So I do see my manager as actually a team player and…*" – showing that leaders perform hands-on work in the face of problems, side by side with their direct reports, and that this creates meaning. Ryan shares how simple words of care from leaders help him: "*But I don't know in terms of navigating the changes as well. I think the support really means a lot for me this way because I think [NAME] knows me <...> like okay [NAME] this is the thing that you can do when you are at work and I don't think this is a good thing to do when you are at work.*" To conclude, leaders also provide reassurance of moving in the right direction during doubt, challenge, or difficult periods: "*So the particular part that I look for [in] leadership is, basically, confirmation that I'm moving in the right direction and, basically, just kind of double-checking, verifying ideas and stuff like that*" – highlights Peter.

The second subtheme of anchors that help is the context itself (Subtheme: **Given Context Provides Comfort**) – information that provides comfort and an understanding of why things are happening. Ryan, again, puts it bluntly: "*So when there's a changes in the organization then they communicate the changes with me I'll be more comfortable in adjusting myself.*" When you know the context of the change, you understand the "Why?" behind it, and it gains meaning. Henry also shares: "*When Daugis (company CEO) was telling that he almost got fired, something like that, I really love that type of story or messages when I see someone in the team's channel giving this transparency emoji, I know that the context could be what's happening there?*" This sheds light on how stories and transparency offer comfort by ensuring key information isn't missed and allowing a bit of reassurance.

All in all, only a few external factors influence change and challenge navigation, a significantly larger proportion lies within the individual, which is described and illustrated in the later theme.

3.2.4 Theme: Self-Sourced Solutions for Navigating Change and Challenges

To finalise and coherently sumarize the theme group The Interplay of Factors and Strategies for Navigating Growth, Change, and Challenges – the theme Self-Sourced Solutions for Navigating Change and Challenges emerges. This theme is unique within the group: whereas other themes formed around the constructs of growth and performance, Self-Sourced Solutions stands

apart because of its distinctive nature. From a research perspective, it is necessary to distinguish it for internal thematic coherence – its size and organizing concept differ sufficiently from the other factors to merit separate treatment, rather than being merged with them.

Theme: Self-Sourced Solutions for Navigating Change and Challenges [10; 234] is the second-largest theme in the study, underscoring its significance in participants' lived experiences. It comprises three subthemes, each representing a distinct strategy that coherently directs an individual toward the same goal – navigating change and challenge: (1) Perception Change [10; 80]; (2) Perceived Control over the Situation [9; 86]; (3) Self-Development and Growth [9; 68]. It is worth noting that, although growth as a construct was described above, along with its driving factors, here it serves a different function. In this context, growth is not primarily about enhancing performance but about fostering the personal development needed to navigate change and challenge.

Navigating changes and challenges requires conscious or unconscious shifts in perception. In this first subtheme (**Perception Change)**, all participants describe reframing their minds, thoughts or perceptions towards change and challenge, or specific instances identified as such. Ryan, for example, shares how he views change as his wish to no longer be the smartest in the room coming true: "*When I look back at that thought again, I'm like, wait, I always wanted to be challenged anyway. I always wanted to feel like I'm not the smartest in the room.*" Viewing situations from different perspectives also supports this shift, especially when challenges are larger and prompt deeper reflection: "*But then, when I see that was the kind of thoughts, then I was like, why are we doing this? But then I said okay, wait, let's take a pause and see it from a different perspective. What other hats can we use to see it from a different perspective? And so I started seeing it as okay…*" Peter explains that perceiving negativity or positivity towards changes is a choice, and he opts to set aside the negatives and focus on the positives: "*But quick enough on my feet to kind of take in the negative aspects to it and to it and try to apply the positives.*" Maria acts similarly: "*Then I would more go forward with just focusing on things that I enjoy, so I can a bit refresh and come back to work fully, fully new.*" Some participants even regard challenge as exciting rather than burdensome. Valerie points out: "*If the change directly affects me and there may be some adaptation period, you need to reorganize things but right now it always feels natural and I'm kind of usually excited about changes, and we're going to do this, okay, so how we should do it so change doesn't really bother me.*" Tom sums it up simply: "*Solve one problem at a time. So this experience helps to grow by very much. So I think for me, as an employee, it's very important and a nice experience.*" Overall, participants describe a range of perceptual shifts – reflection, detachment, optimism – that enable them to navigate uncertainty and return to deliverables with renewed clarity.

Navigating changes and challenges also involves establishing a sense of control – thus forming a second subtheme **Perceived Control over the Situation**. Participants describe various ways to anchor themselves metaphorically so they do not feel overwhelmed by uncertainty. Angela explains how she controls the scope of her involvement: *"Horizon's example is a very good one like we're dropping everything <..> and I was very skeptic about it and I was not dropping everything, I'm dropping 30% of my goals to look at it, and develop, and learn, and make tests because I have to test the product with the audience and stuff.*" Peter highlights the clarity that comes from focusing on a limited set of objectives before expanding: "*Clearer picture, especially, if it's a tool you haven't done before in this company, you're not sure how it's going to perform… You're just here to kind of focus on these three objectives, do those right and we're moving on forward. Maybe next iteration you're allowed to focus on four more things and then you move forward and then these accumulate into a big package.*" Many cultivate this control through iterative experimentation, allowing small-scale tests that minimise risk while promoting learning. Maria notes: "*I like to more get the final result that is beautiful and perfect, but also as time goes on, I'm trying my best to more shape the way I think to provide something quick and then build upon more that iteration culture as well.*" Tome gives a concrete example of iteration revealing new insights: "*So free [GOAL] did not work. We learned some new bottlenecks within one initiative, so now billing will drop even more. We go do different things now.*" Finally, understanding the "Why?" from within – rather than relying solely on external justification – emerges as another means of control: "*Now it's kind of a little bit different but I think this is not in relation with business but it's a bit more of personal growth like you understand reasoning and kind of attached to it.*" – Peter.

When perception shifts and control strategies are insufficient or in parallel, individuals turn to self-development as a self-sourced strategy – subtheme **Self-Development and Growth**. Participants describe reflecting on their own skills, knowledge, and emotional responses, then intentionally cultivating change. Peter describes how he built resilience over time: "*So I tackled them head-on and basically just asked okay, so within this reduced scope, what's the best solution I can give instead of hiding away and going so we're not going to do that… For me it took a while to get here but because it used to be that way, where if you're not able to do something or you're faced with a challenge you immediately put yourself in a box and… lock yourself up.*" Maria recounts learning to manage her emotions: "*I was more focused on the emotional aspect that okay, I f*** up. So it was more being able to a bit disconnect of that negative emotion and when you walk you also do a bit of, I wouldn't say cardio, but it's more a movement so you a bit move out those emotions out from you so you can come back and more look at it as this is a task and…*" Eve similarly emphasises emotional regulation as foundational: "*And when taking this right, I really*

see also myself differently and I hold myself to a totally different standard … Being able actually to evaluate those emotions and having that better emotional management was the thing that I learned here with all the principles that we have all the reflections that we had." Across these stories, reflection emerges as the first step in any growth journey. Valerie states it plainly: "*If you want to feel good both there and here you need to identify what triggers you and work on it.*" Some describe habitual reflection practices as essential: "*So so I don't let it be only a thought or assumption. So I jump right in. Okay, let me go back through the days. Let me go back to what I have feeling yesterday. In some worst days I don't even do the daily reflection. So I just live a day empty. So I be like okay why do I have three days streak of empty reflection and I will look back on the [CONCEPT] that I got assigned.*" Isaac adds: "*So yeah and I was okay with that but then it appeared and I think it's a good way on reflection like reflecting on what you have done what you could do different to improve yourself, what is your pain points.*" From these experiences, a clear pattern emerges: identify what needs to change, then engage in conscious self-development to navigate change effectively.

In summary, this theme coherently centres on self-sourced solutions – self-initiated acts that people undertake to navigate change. Across perception shifts, control strategies, and personal growth practices, participants describe a diverse yet interrelated set of strategies. In many cases, these are very conscious acts of both mindset and skill/approach change, all aimed at effective navigation of change and challenge.

3.3 Standalone Theme: Performance Shifts are not Always the Objective Truth

In the analyzed data, one main theme emerged related to performance shift interpretations. According to the participants, when asked "*Between Q3 and Q4 you had a shift in your performance. Can you describe what was happening in those two quarters and your observations regarding the performance changes? What influenced it the most?*", the majority reflected that it was even hard to remember those quarters (at the moment of the interviews the quarters in mind were only 3–5 months prior). Participants shared thoughts such as "*I'm not really sure…*". This theme is constructed from 50 emerged codes, clustered into 2 subthemes that explore how performance shifts are not always the objective truth.

First subtheme contributing to the theme is that **Performance evaluation might change but the effort does not [9; 30]**. Nine out of ten participants mentioned this in one way or another, forming a subtheme of 30 codes. According to their perceptions, the factor impacting evaluation was contextual perception, not their effort. Here are a few snippets of quotes to illustrate it: "*Last year when I got culture pick I was a bit surprised and… why and there was another OKR you're reliable but I'm like no I don't know it wasn't always I wouldn't say it's changing too much and you*

can do so much better in three months sometimes and just have more energy and I don't know just bring more value and sometimes you just do the stuff that's needed." – Valerie, noting that she was simply on a longer vacation during the evaluated period and did not move mountains. "*There's no question about it. I think the reason was that I was a bit burnt out at that time. I think and yeah, I was not doing my job that good as I did before.*" – Isac, explaining that his effort stayed the same but his quality suffered due to exhaustion. Personal reasons such as vacations or burnout were not the only contextual factors. Two more participants pointed to team dynamics: "*The ways of working changed – the hardships that me and the team had overall as a team that changed.*" – Eve. "*I would say that the drastic ways of changing work slowed the team down and…*" – Daniel, adding that it wasn't just him but the whole team. In a nutshell, participants agreed that performance-evaluation fluctuations – whether positive (from reliable performer to culture peak for 7 participants) or negative (from culture peak to reliable, or reliable to low performer for 3 participants) – had more to do with surroundings and opportunities than with effort: "*But yes, I said in the first quarter, but I don't feel like I put less effort.*" – Daniel. "*So it was, I would say, more situational: you had an opportunity more to show your skill of how you manage things and how you take care of everything since we had a few big changes on….*" adds Maria.

Second subtheme that emerged from the data and analysis is that **Extra mile or challenge conquered is seen as performance increase [6; 20]**. Six out of ten participants mentioned this in one way or another, forming a subtheme of 20 codes. Complementing the first subtheme, this one dives into the context of the effort. Doing the job might be good enough for reliable performance; however, when context changes, doing something beyond the baseline – even without additional effort – is perceived as higher performance. In other cases, a simple "extra mile" throughout the quarter is seen as a performance boost: "*So if you ask me specifically what changed between Q3 and Q4 – since at that time there were so many things that should be done by [NAME] was not being completed – I changed my approach in Q4 actually, so instead of waiting [PRONOUN] to complete the task, I completed it myself and after that I let the team know that okay, so this is done.*" – Henry. Angela also shares: "*I felt like, yeah, I put high standards on what I was supposed to do, which was basically performance in [COUNTRY]. But there was no other way for me to change it without changing everything else. So, there was no other way – that was my feeling.*" We see in these quotes that participants took ownership and went the extra mile to fulfill their goals without second-guessing themselves. One participant described a non-traditional approach to "extra mile": "*I feel like I was questioning more during Q4. So instead of just doing what we're told, I was more like, okay, do we have to do this? Why are we not doing that? And I feel like I was also questioning [CONCEPT]. So [CONCEPT] wasn't entirely correct.*" – Daniel. This later led to

improvements and changes, marking the extra mile's impact even though from a non traditional way.

On the flip side, high performers want to do inspiring things. One participant who went from culture peak to reliable performer reflected that, in that specific quarter, there were simply only the tasks that needed to be done – no time or space for an extra mile, even if desired (Valerie): "*So if I'm working on specific things that just simply need to be done in this time and there's limited space to shift the focus where I would, I don't know, show some extra mile. I know that I still can be trusted, I'm delivering and doing things that need to be done, but there is also not always the place to show it super extra.*" It seems clear that showing something extra, whether consciously or not, is perceived by participants as the way to shift performance upward.

The summarized observations from participants illustrate how sometimes a single instance of going the extra mile, in their opinion, impacted the performance increase, which circles back to the theme: is performance an objective measure or merely perception in managers' eyes, influenced by context and opportunities? Sometimes, extra-mile opportunities are the only ones that arise, and not entirely in the control of the employee.

The relatively small size of the discussed themes might be affected by the fact that not many participants remembered the details of past OKRs. The company operates quarterly, with new goals and focus areas each quarter. At the moment of the interviews, three months had passed since employees' evaluations of Q4 and six months since discussions about Q3. The Q1 period is seen as very intense – due to the New Year's sale – which can cloud memories of particular details by shifting focus to the present.

4. DISCUSSION

This section interprets the key findings of the study and situates them within the broader scientific literature. The goal is not only to describe but also to understand the significance of the results and their place in the context of existing psychological theory and empirical research. In keeping with the principles of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2020), the following discussion approaches performance, change, and growth not as isolated metrics or variables, but as lived psychological phenomena situated in the subjective experience of employees within a dynamic organizational culture.

The results of this study affirm that in a fast-scaling, high-performance environment such as Hostinger, organizational culture is not merely a background condition – it is a dynamic, constitutive force that informs employees' interpretations of themselves, their work, and the organization. Culture at Hostinger emerges not as a static manifesto but as a dynamic, multi-faceted system of principles that are enacted through daily interactions and decisions. It is experienced not as abstract ideology but as an everyday psychological structure that offers orientation, support, and constraint. This aligns with Schein's (2010) conception of culture as a multi-level construct comprising artefacts, values, and underlying assumptions. However, this research extends Schein's model by revealing how culture is re-enacted and reinterpreted in real-time through stories, rituals, and behavioral examples, supporting the argument that culture is not static but negotiated and situated (Weick, 1995; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014).

Importantly, culture here serves as an interpretive lens through which performance is understood. Rather than being framed exclusively in terms of output, performance at Hostinger is understood by participants as a function of identity, alignment, and adaptability. This finding resonates with Wrzesniewski and Dutton's (2001) concept of job crafting, where employees actively shape their roles to generate meaning and coherence amid ambiguity. Furthermore, the principle-based culture described by participants suggests a climate rich in psychological safety and value congruence – factors that literature identifies as central to fostering resilient, high-performing teams (Edmondson, 1999; Carmeli & Gittell, 2009).

The connection between culture and sensemaking also aligns with Schneider et al.'s (2013) view of culture and climate as interacting levels of organizational experience. Where culture sets deep-seated norms, climate offers real-time feedback about the lived organizational reality. The findings confirm that when employees experience alignment between cultural values and climate signals, such as transparency, fairness, and autonomy, they interpret performance expectations as coherent and credible. In contrast, cultural-climate misalignment tends to produce uncertainty and disengagement, highlighting the importance of coherence between values and daily practices. Furthermore, the five cultural cornerstones identified in this study – People, Speed, Drive,

Challenge, and Change – resonate with Denison and Mishra's (1995) adaptability dimension, reflecting an innovation-oriented climate where agility and learning are not just supported but expected.

One of the central findings – that Hostinger's culture is perceived as both enabling and demanding – mirrors the dual role of organizational ambidexterity as discussed by O'Reilly and Tushman (2013). Ambidexterity requires balancing innovation with operational excellence, and the lived experience of Hostinger employees suggests that this balance is achieved not through rigid structures, but through a culture that embeds ambidexterity in everyday norms, legitimising experimentation while maintaining accountability for results. Employees' descriptions of speed, ownership, and customer obsession illustrate this duality: the same principles that empower also pressure. This tension, far from being dysfunctional, appears to be a catalyst for personal and collective growth, echoing the findings of Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004).

This interplay between challenge and support reflects the concept of developmental stretch zones, where individuals are pushed beyond their comfort zones but not beyond their capacities (Carmeli & Gittell, 2009). Employees described their culture as one in which high expectations were matched with high trust and autonomy – a finding that echoes the self-management and accountability principles central to Laloux's (2014) vision of evolutionary organizations. This congruence between challenge and support is also a hallmark of generative cultures as discussed by Forsgren et al. (2018), which outperform control-oriented environments in innovation and adaptability.

Another noteworthy insight is the theme of "performance as not always an objective truth." This view challenges traditional performance management paradigms and aligns with Weick's (1995) assertion that people enact rather than discover meaning. Performance is socially and psychologically constructed; its contours shift based on context, relational cues, and internal states. It emerges as a co-constructed narrative rather than an objective metric, influenced by how individuals make sense of their environment and their evolving roles. Such an understanding calls into question overly instrumental or numeric models of performance evaluation and supports calls for more interpretive, phenomenological approaches in organizational research (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). Employees' narratives confirm that what counts as "good" performance often depends more on alignment with values and collaborative spirit than on raw output.

Participants described growth as both an organizational and psychological journey. Promotions, lateral moves, and developmental feedback were seen not merely as career events, but as identity transitions. This reflects Ibarra and Petriglieri's (2010) notion of identity work – an ongoing negotiation of self-concept in response to contextual changes. Growth at Hostinger is thus not linear or metric-driven, but episodic, emotional, and reflexive. Individuals reinterpret success,

reconfigure their roles, and at times struggle with the dissonance between performance expectations and personal bandwidth.

In dynamic contexts, growth is often accompanied by ambiguity, insecurity, and even temporary regression. These transitional moments, however, also serve as rich learning zones where employees experiment with new behaviors, seek new mentors, and reframe their narratives of effectiveness. This aligns with Kozlowski and Ilgen's (2006) findings that team effectiveness and adaptability hinge on shared learning, developmental feedback, and contextual scaffolding. At Hostinger, the presence of mentoring programmes, self-reflective tools, and cross-functional learning spaces provides scaffolding for these complex developmental journeys.

Psychological safety again emerges as a foundational enabler. Where it is present, individuals feel empowered to take risks, seek help, and narrate their setbacks as learning episodes. This finding reinforces prior research indicating that psychological safety is essential for adaptive learning and high performance in dynamic settings (Newman et al., 2017; Edmondson, 1999). Conversely, where safety is low, employees resort to defensive routines, suppress dissent, or disengage, highlighting the fragile interdependence between culture and psychological well-being.

While most participants embraced Hostinger's pace and expectations, the theme "Culture – Not for Everyone" reveals a shadow side. A minority of participants hinted at experiences of misfit, overwhelm, or cultural exclusion. This suggests that even supportive cultures can become exclusionary if their norms are too narrowly defined or too intensely policed. This nuance echoes Smircich's (1983) critique that culture, while often positioned as a unifying force, can also function as a mechanism of control. The implication here is that cultural strength must be balanced with pluralism and flexibility, particularly in globally distributed organizations.

Another surprising element was the perceived centrality of storytelling in maintaining cultural coherence. Participants often cited stories of colleagues, founders, or high-stakes moments as sources of guidance. This corroborates Maitlis (2005), who argues that sensemaking in organizations is narrative in nature, and that stories serve as shared templates for meaning-making and action. These stories do not merely entertain—they encode norms, transmit values, and offer ready-made scripts for interpreting unfamiliar situations.

Also worth noting is the role of self-sourced strategies. Several participants described using mindfulness, journaling, peer coaching, and informal advice-seeking as tools to manage ambiguity and sustain performance. These practices are consistent with the literature on psychological capital and proactive coping (Spreitzer et al., 2012), but they also signal a decentralised, self-directed approach to resilience. This raises questions about the degree to which organizational cultures can

and should formalise such strategies, and whether their informal status makes them more adaptive or more precarious.

Participants employed a range of strategies to navigate performance shifts, including cognitive reframing, seeking feedback, and building peer support networks. These behaviors reflect elements of self-regulated learning and psychological capital—constructs tied to resilience, optimism, and efficacy (Spreitzer et al., 2012; Hobfoll, 1989). Resources such as peer mentorship, feedback systems, and LMS platforms were experienced not merely as tools but as scaffolds for identity and growth. Their perceived efficacy depended heavily on the degree of psychological safety and the quality of leadership, consistent with findings from Burke et al. (2006).

The study thus supports the JD-R model's proposition that performance is shaped by the balance between demands and resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). However, it extends the model by illuminating how employees interpret these demands and resources in emotionally and socially rich ways—not merely as inputs to productivity, but as signals of inclusion, meaning, and future potential.

Furthermore, the dynamic capabilities theory (Teece et al., 1997) helps explain how employees adapt not only through formal learning but through sensing opportunities, seizing moments for impact, and transforming their roles in response to change. This sense of agency was prevalent across interviews and speaks to the strategic dimension of adaptability in high-growth environments. Employees' ability to self-organize, switch tasks, and absorb uncertainty indicates a form of distributed dynamic capability, embedded in individual routines as well as team practices.

In sum, this discussion reveals that performance, change, and growth in dynamic cultural settings cannot be understood through linear or objective models alone. Instead, they are best approached as emergent, meaning-laden processes shaped by psychological safety, identity dynamics, and cultural sensemaking. This understanding not only bridges critical gaps in the literature but also offers practical insights for cultivating adaptive, inclusive, and resilient workplaces.

LIMITATIONS

Despite its contributions to understanding performance variability in dynamic organizational cultures, this study has several important limitations that warrant cautious interpretation and suggest avenues for future research.

First, the research was confined to a single organization, Hostinger UAB, as a case study. While this yielded a richly contextualized understanding of performance variability in that specific context, it limits the generalizability of my findings to other global or local companies. Hostinger's unique blend of cultural norms, operational practices, and resource configurations may not reflect conditions in other industries. Future work should therefore replicate this design in firms across different sectors or adopt comparative, multi-site approaches to test the robustness of these insights.

Second, a qualitative sample of 10 participants selected from an initial pool of 70 candidates who met the inclusion criteria raises concerns about selection bias. Those who opted in may systematically differ in motivation, self-awareness, or openness from those who declined or were unavailable. Accordingly, the themes that emerged, while internally coherent and theoretically rich, may underrepresent the full spectrum of employee experiences at Hostinger. Subsequent investigations would benefit from larger, stratified samples and purposive outreach to voices that might otherwise be excluded.

In addition to sampling concerns, conducting all interviews in English imposed an expressive constraint on participants whose native languages were Indonesian, Lithuanian, or Brazilian Portuguese. Variations in English proficiency may have impeded some individuals' ability to convey subtle emotional states or culturally nuanced interpretations, potentially leading to underreporting of affective dynamics. Future studies could incorporate multilingual data collection, such as offering interviews in participants' preferred language with professional translation, or use back-translation protocols to safeguard against meaning loss.

Moreover, reliance on self-report via semi-structured interviews introduces well-known risks of recall bias and social desirability effects. Triangulating interview data with archival records or real-time diary studies could help mitigate these biases.

Finally, the use of reflexive thematic analysis foregrounded interpretive processes that – despite rigorous reflexivity practices (e.g., maintaining a reflexive journal) – are inherently shaped by the researcher's theoretical commitments and organizational familiarity. To enhance analytic credibility and transferability, future work might employ multiple independent coders with cross-coding checks or integrate complementary analytic methods, such as grounded theory or discourse analysis.

By addressing these limitations – through broader sampling, multilingual methods, data triangulation, and diversified analytic strategies – subsequent research can build on this case study's findings and advance a more generalizable understanding of performance variability in dynamic organizational cultures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the research findings and literature review, several recommendations emerge for Hostinger, however can be applied more broadly. The most key generalisable recommendations are as follows:

1. Reinforce “Culture-in-Action” practices: Because employees internalize organizational values most effectively through enacted behaviors, Hostinger should continue to embed concrete examples of its five cornerstones (People, Speed, Drive, Challenge, Change) into live and virtual forums – such as all-hands meetings, team retrospectives, and departmental workshops. Systematic storytelling of real-world instances will sustain a vivid, performance-enhancing culture.
2. Contextualize performance evaluations: Given that performance ratings often reflect situational influences as much as individual effort, it is advisable to recalibrate quarterly review processes by embedding structured prompts that require managers and employees to co-construct narratives around relevant contextual factors (e.g., peak-sale periods, team turnover). This co-construction promotes perceived fairness, makes contributors feel more understood, and aligns evaluations with the complexities of real-world conditions.
3. Institutionalize organizational ambidexterity: Hostinger’s culture already supports both innovation and efficient delivery. To strengthen this, the company could formalise separate workflows for innovation sprints and regular delivery cycles. Clear role expectations that encourage switching between these modes would help make variability a strength, not a weakness, and improve the organization’s ability to meet changing performance demands.
4. Implement “Reflection & Reset” interventions: Recognizing that employees deploy diverse cognitive and emotional strategies to navigate change, a concise, monthly “Reflection & Reset” practice should be introduced. Individuals would respond to prompts such as “What challenge taught you most this month?” and optionally discuss insights in small peer groups, thereby fostering structured reflexivity and bolstering resilience in a high-velocity environment.

Most of these recommendations are applicable to any organization seeking to strengthen a lived culture, enhance performance, and build talent density through enacted values and structured reflexivity.

CONCLUSION

1. Hostinger's culture functions as a set of dynamic, living principles—manifested through everyday behaviors, narratives, and rituals—rather than static, on-paper declarations. This confirms that culture is deeply rooted in foundational values and expressed through the five dimensions of People, Speed, Drive, Challenge, and Change, continuously constructed in daily interactions.

2. Across our analysis, seven elements consistently emerged as the most influential drivers of personal development, performance, and adaptability during periods of change: Principles, Context, Expectations, Leadership, Other People, Failures, and Experimentation. These drivers operate largely outside an individual's control yet profoundly shape how employees grow and perform.

3. Performance rating fluctuations appear to reflect contextual factors—such as team turnover, sudden workload surges, or episodic project efforts—more than individual effort alone. This suggests that performance evaluations are co-constructed narratives, raising critical questions about their reliability as standalone measures of talent density.

4. In response to ongoing challenges and change, employees draw on both organizational anchors and, even more, on self-sourced strategies—such as personal development initiatives, shifts in mindset, and efforts to regain perceived control. These self-driven strategies intertwine with and influence other concepts, including performance and growth.

5. Ultimately, the interplay among culture, performance, growth, and challenge navigation forms an autonomous, reinforcing loop. Culture both drives and absorbs change, creating a stable yet living system. While this self-sustaining mechanism underpins consistency and resilience, it may also pose a future innovation risk if entrenched stability limits disruptive experimentation.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants

Nr.	Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Highest Education Completed	Time with the company	Time in current position (years)	Considering leaving the company	Leadership position
1.	Ryan	Male	24	Bachelor's (or equivalent)	1	0.5	NO	NO
2.	Angela	Female	31	Master's (or equivalent)	2	0.1	NO	YES
3.	Peter	Male	35	Bachelor's (or equivalent)	1.5	1.5	NO	NO
4.	Eve	Female	27	Bachelor's (or equivalent)	3	1	YES	NO
5.	Henry	Male	30	Master's (or equivalent)	3	1.5	NO	NO
6.	Daniel	Male	31	Master's (or equivalent)	3	1	NO	NO
7.	Tom	Male	27	Master's (or equivalent)	6	1	NO	YES
8.	Maria	Female	24	Master's (or equivalent)	3	1	NO	NO
9.	Isac	Male	23	Highschool diploma	3	3	NO	NO
10.	Valerie	Female	32	Master's (or equivalent)	6	1	NO	YES
		AVERAGE	28.4	-	3.2	1.2	-	-

Appendix 2. Interview duration and code distribution per interview

Nr.	Pseudonim	Duration of the interview	Code count per interview	Post-review code count per interview	Post-review semantic code count per interview	Post-review latent code count per interview
1.	Ryan	0:56:57	**110**	**108**	98	10
2.	Angela	0:53:32	**103**	**103**	96	7
3.	Peter	0:56:09	**167**	**166**	152	14
4.	Eve	0:57:04	**145**	**144**	137	7
5.	Henry	1:18:54*	**147**	**145**	135	10
6.	Daniel	0:50:03	**93**	**91**	87	4
7.	Tom	0:51:36	**99**	**97**	95	2
8.	Maria	0:44:41	**159**	**157**	145	12
9.	Isac	0:36:11	**64**	**63**	61	2
10.	Valerie	0:47:19	**137**	**137**	125	12
	Averages:	**0:53:15**	**122**	**121**	**113**	**8**
	Total:	**8:52:26**	**1224**	**1211**	**1137**	**80**

*The ratio of the interview's duration to the number of codes doesn't match the others because technical issues extended the call without adding any substantive content.

Appendix 3. Semi-structured interview protocol

RESEARCH PROTOCOL

MEMO FOR THE RESEARCHER

Research Topic (versions):

- **EN:** The performance pulse: a case study exploring lived experiences of performance, change, and growth in dynamic organizational cultures

- **LT:** Rezultatų ritmu: darbo rezultatų, pokyčių ir augimo patirčių dinamiškose organizacijų kultūrose atvejo tyrimas

Aim of the research:

This research aims to explore, understand, and describe the role that a dynamic organizational culture plays in employees' performance, change, and growth journeys. It will examine what sparks changes in employees' performance, how they interpret these shifts, the strategies they use to meet new challenges, and the organizational and personal supports they rely on to adapt and maintain deliverables.

Research Objectives:

1. To explore and describe employees' lived experiences and perceptions of Hostinger's organisational culture.
2. To identify the factors, including specific aspects of organisational culture, that shape employees' personal development, performance, and adaptability during periods of change.
3. To examine how employees perceive and interpret shifts in their performance over time within a dynamic cultural environment.
4. To explore the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural strategies employees employ when facing challenges, organisational changes, and evolving performance expectations.

Interview structure:

1. Informed consent is signed and discussed
2. Collection of demographic data
3. **[START OF AUDIO RECORDING]**
4. If the interview is conducted remotely, the informed consent is also recorded
5. Semi-structured interview questions

1

6. Follow-up questions
7. Providing an opportunity to add anything the participants considered important but were not asked
8. **[END OF AUDIO RECORDING]**
9. Discussion of well-being and thanking for the dedicated time

Reminders for the researcher:

- From the very beginning, we focus on building a good relationship with the research participant.
- During the interview, we collect meaning rather than facts (examples of questions: what do you think it meant, how do you think it contributed to…; how do you think it affected you?);
- Protecting research participants. If necessary, we stop, pause, or terminate the interview.
- **Bold** - main questions, and the rest are additional questions (not necessary to ask, but can be used to broaden the experience)

Interview with employees from "Hostinger UAB"

{Signing Informed Consent}

{Start Audio recording}

Overall Experience

1. **First, I invite you to share or describe your overall experience working in this organization.**
    a. What moments stand out as especially positive, meaningful, or memorable?
    b. What difficulties or negative experiences have you encountered?

Personal Growth & Change

2. **How does working at Hostinger differ from your previous roles or companies?**
    a. Which processes, cultural norms, or management styles feel noticeably different?
    b. How have those differences influenced your growth or day-to-day work?
3. **From your first day here to today, how have you as a professional or the way you approach your work/performance evolved?**
    a. What mindset shifts, habits, or rituals have you adopted over time?
    b. What specific experiences or events led to these changes?

Organizational Culture & Impact

4. **In your own words, how would you describe Hostinger's organizational culture? What is it for you?**
    a. What principles, values, or behaviours feel most central?
    b. Besides principles, what other elements (e.g., access to people or information) shape the culture for you?
5. **How does Hostinger's culture and environment influence your performance and development?**
    a. In what ways does it motivate, challenge, or support you?
    b. Can you recall a time when culture helped—or hindered—your results
    c. In what way does leadership affect how you approach your work and your performance?

Navigating Change

6. **In the face of changes, what practices or mindsets help you move forward or adapt?**
    a. How does culture help you navigate changes?
7. **Between Q3 and Q4 you had a shift in your performance. Can you describe what was happening in those two quarters and your observations regarding the performance changes?**
    a. What influenced it the most?

Closing Reflections

8. **I believe I've covered everything I wanted to ask. Is there anything else you'd like to add or think would help me better understand what it's like to grow, adapt, and maintain performance in this organization?**

{Stop Audio recording}

{Thanking the research participant for the dedicated time}

9. **How do you feel after our interview?**

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA ABOUT THE PARTICIPANT:

1.	**Your gender: Male / Female / Other / Prefer not to say**
2.	**Your age: _____ years**
3.	**Country you live in: _____**
4.	**Your education (highest achieved level):** 1. High school education. 2. Short-cycle (specific) education. 3. Bachelor's or equivalent level. 4. Master's or equivalent level. 5. Doctoral or equivalent level.
5.	**Tenure in the current company: _____** years
6.	**Tenure in the current position: _____** years
7.	**Mother-tongue language: _____**
8.	**Are you currently thinking about leaving the company?** • Yes • No
9.	**Have you been issued a Performance Improvement Plan (with a possibility of contract termination) within 1 year?** • Yes • No
10.	**Are you in a leadership position?** • Yes • No

Appendix 4. Informed Consent Forms in English and Lithuanian

Data: _____

INFORMUOTAS SUTIKIMAS

Esu Lauryna Vilutytė, Vilniaus universiteto Organizacinės psichologijos magistro studijų programos studentė. Šiuo metu rengiu baigiamąjį darbą ir atlieku kokybinį tyrimą tema: **„Rezultatų ritmu: darbo rezultatų, pokyčių ir augimo patirčių dinamiškose organizacijų kultūrose atvejo tyrimas“**. Šio tyrimo tikslas – ištirti, suprasti ir aprašyti, kokį vaidmenį dinamiška organizacinė kultūra atlieka darbuotojų veiklos, pokyčių ir augimo patirtyse. Tyrimas nagrinės, kas skatina darbuotojų veiklos pokyčius, kaip jie patiria šiuos pasikeitimus, kokias strategijas taiko naujiems iššūkiams įveikti ir kokią organizacinę bei asmeninę paramą pasitelkia, kad prisitaikytų ir išlaikytų rezultatyvumą.

Kviečiu Jus dalyvauti šiame tyrime ir pasidalyti savo asmenine patirtimi bei išgyvenimais, sukauptai laikotarpiu tarp 2024 metų trečiojo ir ketvirtojo ketvirčių. Pokalbio pradžioje paprašysiu papasakoti apie bendresnę patirtį dirbant organizacijoje, o vėliau pereisiu prie konkretesnių klausimų. Interviu trukmė – nuo 30 minučių iki 1,5 valandos, priklausomai nuo Jūsų turimo laiko ir dalijimosi apimties.

Tyrimo metu surinkti duomenys bus įrašomi ir vėliau transkribuojami. Visa gauta informacija bus laikoma konfidencialia ir tvarkoma anonimiškai – tyrimo rezultatai bus pristatomi tik apibendrintai, tad dalyvių tapatybės nebus įmanoma atpažinti nei išoriniams asmenims, nei kolegoms toje pačioje organizacijoje.

Viso interviu metu kviečiu Jus pasakoti tik tiek, kiek norite. Dalinantis patirtimi gali iškilti įvairūs išgyvenimai ar jausmai. Atminkite, kad bet kada galite interviu nutraukti, neatsakyti į pateiktą klausimą arba galite paprašyti pašalinti Jūsų duomenis iš tyrimo net pasibaigus mūsų interviu susisiekdami su manimi.

Šiame dokumente niekur nerašykite savo vardo ir pavardės, pakaks parašo.

Ar sutinkate dalyvauti tyrime?

☐ Taip

☐ Ne

*Tyrimo dalyvio parašas:*_____

*Jeigu po tyrimo kiltų klausimų arba norėsite susipažinti su tyrimo rezultatais, galite susisiekti su manimi Lauryna Vilutyte, tel. nr. **+370 620 20090** arba el. paštu lauryna.vilutyte@fsf.stud.vu.lt, arba darbo vadove Prof. dr. Jurgita Lazauskaitė-Zabielskė el. paštu jurgita.lazauskaite@fsf.vu.lt*

Date: _____

INFORMED CONSENT

My name is Lauryna Vilutytė, and I am a Master's student in the Organizational Psychology program at Vilnius University. I am currently conducting a qualitative research project for my final thesis entitled *"***The performance pulse: a case study exploring lived experiences of performance, change, and growth in dynamic organizational cultures.***"*

This research aims to explore, understand, and describe the role that a dynamic organisational culture plays in employees' performance, change and growth journeys. The study will examine what sparks changes in employees' performance, how they interpret these shifts, the strategies they use to meet new challenges, and the organisational and personal supports they rely on to adapt and maintain deliverables.

I kindly invite you to take part in this study and share your personal experiences and reflections from the period between the third and fourth quarters of 2024. At the beginning of the interview, I will ask you to speak about your general experience working within the organization, after which we will move on to more specific questions. The interview will last between 30 minutes and 1.5 hours, depending on your availability and the extent to which you choose to share.

The interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed. All collected data will be treated strictly as confidential and anonymized. The results of the study will be presented only in a summarized form, meaning your identity will not be recognizable to either external readers of the thesis or colleagues within the same organization.

Throughout the interview, you are encouraged to share only what you feel comfortable with. Please be aware that reflecting on your experience may evoke different emotions or thoughts. You have the right to stop the interview at any time, skip any question, or request that your data be withdrawn from the study—even after the interview has been completed—by contacting me directly.

Please do not write your name or surname anywhere in this document, a signature will be sufficient.

Do you agree to participate in the study?

□ YES

□ NO

*Participant's signature:*_____

If you have any questions after the study or would like to learn about the research findings, you can contact me, Lauryna Vilutytė, by phone at +370 620 20090 or via email at ***lauryna.vilutyte@fsf.stud.vu.lt,*** *or contact the research supervisor, Prof. Dr. Jurgita Lazauskaitė-Zabielskė, via email at* **jurgita.lazauskaite@fsf.vu.lt.**

Appendix 5. Convention Symbols Used in Interview Transcripts (adapted from Wengraf, 2001)

Symbol.	Example	Explanation
[ ]	[NAME];[CITY]	Real names or places replaced by generic labels in square brackets.
(3)	D: "but you know… uhm (2) I mean if you take that first case."	Number in parentheses marks a pause length in seconds.
—-----	D: "then I was very sad and thought that I could just prove it to them"	Underlining shows strong emphasis or raised voice.
WORD	D: "the person starts not to endure them anymore… AND TO TELL THE TRUTH…"	All-caps indicate shouting or very strong emphasis.
.hhh	A: "I can feel .hhh"	Marks a deep sigh or exhalation.
(...)	"In the future there will be a lot of unrest (…) but what's here"	Empty parentheses with ellipsis mark an inaudible passage.
(word)	"Do you see (in that story) anything positive?"	A lowercase word in parentheses is the transcriber's best guess.
-	D: "I can't go on any further pas–"	A dash at the end of a word shows it was cut off or not completed.

Appendix 6. Researcher's Reflection on Experience and Positionality

As a researcher conducting the study *"The Performance Pulse: A Case Study Exploring Lived Experiences of Performance, Change, and Growth in Dynamic Organizational Cultures,"* I acknowledge that my dual role as both an employee and investigator within the same organization presents potential biases that must be transparently explored. This reflection serves to critically examine how my positionality may have influenced the research process—from the selection of the topic to the interpretation of data.

The genesis of this study emerged not only from a scholarly interest in organizational performance and culture but also from a deep personal curiosity. My own experiences with fluctuating performance evaluations over recent quarters led me to question how performance is perceived and constructed in a fast-paced work environment. This curiosity was reinforced by frequent references to the term "performance pulse" within the organization, further motivating me to explore how others interpret and live through these dynamics.

Although the research aims to contribute meaningfully to the scientific community, the national research context, sectoral development, and business practice, it is important to acknowledge that the inquiry was initially sparked by personal introspection. The study, therefore, sits at the intersection of professional relevance and personal meaning-making.

One of my primary biases stems from my initial belief that performance evaluation is largely subjective, shaped by managerial perception rather than objective criteria. This assumption has been challenged and enriched through data analysis, where both latent and semantic codes point to nuanced constructions of performance that are often co-created through social interaction and organizational discourse.

A second bias arises from my tenure in the organization. At the time of this research, I had been employed for over two years and had transitioned through multiple roles and teams. These transitions occurred concurrently with the data collection and analysis phases, potentially sensitizing me to themes of change, speed, and adaptability. My immersion in these dynamics may have led me to foreground them more prominently than an external researcher might have.

Several deeply held beliefs and lived experiences shaped my interpretative lens:

- Belief in Hostinger's Organizational Culture: I perceive the organizational culture at Hostinger as deeply lived rather than merely stated. Upon being hired, my former manager mentioned, *"It has been three years for me now in the company, and there has not been a single day I have not lived by the principles."* This sentiment resonated with me and remains true after 2.5 years—regardless of role, the core principles remain a consistent guiding force.

- Ownership as a Cornerstone: I firmly believe that ownership is a fundamental element driving both performance and growth. This belief may have influenced the thematic prioritization of self-leadership and agency in the participants' narratives.
- Inner-Driven Growth: To me, authentic growth must originate from within. If growth is externally imposed, it risks resembling childhood instruction rather than adult development. This conviction may have led me to highlight participant experiences that align with intrinsic motivation and internal transformation.
- Contextual Flourishing: I also believe that growth flourishes in a context that provides freedom, responsibility, and a shared sense of ownership. Such conditions, in my view, are essential for self-actualization. This belief may have contributed to a focus on the enabling environment as a recurring analytical theme.

My professional role as an HR Business Partner within the organization adds further complexity to my positionality. As an advisor to C-level executives and a recipient of confidential insights, I am exposed to reflections and organizational dynamics that most individual contributors are not. This privileged access, while informative, may have subtly influenced my interpretation of participants' responses or shaped my sensitivity to certain themes. While care was taken to ensure confidentiality and objectivity, I acknowledge that these factors may have played an unconscious role in shaping the narrative arc of the research.

Rather than diminishing the validity of this study, I believe these reflections enhance its interpretative depth. They bring transparency to the analytic process and situate the findings within a contextualized framework. Recognizing and articulating these biases allows for a more authentic engagement with participants' lived experiences and adds richness to the thematic analysis. Ultimately, this reflexivity strengthens the trustworthiness and resonance of the research, making space for both rigor and empathy in understanding performance in dynamic organizational settings.

Appendix 7. Example of Theme Development Using the Thematic Analysis Method

Nr.	Exemplary quote	Code	Sub-theme	Theme
1.	*"Because that specific quarter, I had to deal with more complex situations and people. So it was, I would say more situational that you had an opportunity more to show your skill of how you manage things and how you take care of everything, since we had a few big changes of so it was related to …"*	Embracing a new challenge is a highway to high performance	Extra mile or challenge conquered is seen as a performance increase [6:20]	Performance shifts are not always the objective truth[9:50]
2.	*"I felt like yeah, I put high standards on what I was supposed to do, which was performance in [country]Spain. But there was no other way for me to change it without changing everything else. So, there was no other way; that was my feeling. "*	Not expected the extra mile is the highway to high performance		
3.	*"I feel like what I managed to do was pretty similar in comparison to the other quarter. So for me, it does feel more related to the timing and the questions and the people kind of brought out that outcome. "*	Context impacts performance perception, but not the level of effort	Performance evaluation might change but the effort does not [9; 30]	

Note: All themes and subthemes are described in detail in the RESULTS section. The numbers in square brackets—"[7;15]"—indicate the distribution of themes and codes in the study: the first digit shows in how many interviews (out of a maximum of 10) the specified theme/subtheme emerged; the second digit shows how many codes were assigned to that theme/subtheme.