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Translating the Ambiguous:

A comparative study of Agile Organizations

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Abstract

Agile is a management concept currently gaining momentum in a variety of industries, presented as a solution to the rate of change in the organizational climate. Like other management concepts, it has not received consistent treatment neither in the academic literature nor among practitioners. Previous research has failed to go beyond the normative approach and has paid little attention to the complexity of the context. This study places interest in how different organizations understand the concept of agility and how they can manage such an ambiguous concept. Based on a comparative, multiple-case study, and with a translation perspective, this study shows how organizations adopt the agile idea by adjusting it to their local context. By complementing the time-space view of the context with the meaning of a word, this study shows how organizations navigate in the jungle of both values and tools attached to the agile concept, and how one can understand the complexity of the context. Further, the study presents insights into why a management concept such as agility can be understood as ambiguous, by highlighting the heterogeneity of agile practices.

Keywords

Agile, Circulation of ideas, Context, Imitation, Isonymism, Management fashion, Translation theory

Introduction

Industry 4.0, or the forth industrial revolution, refers to the prevailing development where digital enterprises are formed, combining physical and digital technologies to create more informed decision-making. This through the use of analytics, artificial intelligence, cognitive technologies and Internet of Things. However, few organizations claim to be adequately prepared to harness the changes associated with this shift (Deloitte, 2018). Further, the

digitalization at large entails new competence requirements, which calls for reforms of the labor market (The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise, 2016). According to data from both private and public-sector organizations, employers of today experience increased difficulties in recruiting (Swedish Public Employment Service, 2017). In order to adapt to dynamic environments, organizations invest resources in the exploitation of new ideas (Radaelli & Sitton-Kent, 2016). In an organizational climate characterized by uncertainty, it could be argued that the adoption of new ideas in form of management concepts contributes to perceptions of an organization as both legitimate and as an attractive employer. Over the last decades, the emergence and disappearance of management concepts has received a growing interest among management scholars. It has been argued that organizations are treated as mass audiences (Abrahamson, 1996), supplied with management concepts designed to 'fit all' – leading to vague and ambiguous definitions of the concepts (Nicolai & Dautwiz, 2010; Giroux, 2006). So, if organizations - irrespective of their different characteristics - apply the same concepts, it could be argued that the complexity of the context needs to be understood more thoroughly.

One management concept currently gaining momentum in a variety of industries, especially targeting the rate of change in the environment, is agility. Like other management concepts, it has not received consistent treatment neither in the academic literature nor among practitioners. Agility was first introduced by researchers of the Iacocca Institute and applied in the context of manufacturing (Nagel & Dove, 1991). Accordingly, agile manufacturing is a manufacturing system which allows for quick shifts among product models or between product lines, thereby enabling quick adaptations to change in customer demand. Thus, such a system has capability to meet the rapidly changing needs of the marketplace (Nagel & Dove, 1991). Since then, the concept of agility has received increased attention by both researchers and practitioners, brought up in industries varying from production and human resource management to information technology. Today, it is most commonly recognized as a project management method, particularly prominent within the IT-sector – although there is evidence from other organizations' application as well (Beaumont, Thuriaux-Alemán, Prasad, & Hatton, 2017; Waldron, 2017). The embrace of the term by the IT-industry dates back to a conference in 2001, where 17 developers met up to discuss methods for software development. The group managed to agree upon four values and 12 principles and presented them in the 'Agile Manifesto', which forms the foundation for what today is referred to as agile methods. Individuals and iterations are to be valued over processes and tools, working software over comprehensive documentation, customer collaboration over contract negotiation and responding to change over following a plan (Beck, et al., 2001). Based on these principles, several software developing methods have been developed. So, on the one hand, organizations are presented with clearly defined tools, such as the agile methodology Scrum (Schwaber & Sutherland, 2017), and on the other hand, consultancy firms report on the relevancy for organizations outside of software development to apply it as well (Boston Consulting Group, 2017; PwC, 2017)

In research, the agile concept has been given numerous definitions across situations. Many scholars consider it to be an ability or a capacity (Zhang & Sharifi, 2000; Backhouse & Burns, 1999; Meredith & Francis, 2000; Sambamurthy, Bharadwaj, & Grover, 2003), while others refer to it as a strategy (Sanchez & Nagi, 2001). It has also been described as efforts to

create opportunity-driven structures arising from the removal of organizational walls and silos (Li, Nagel, & Sun, 2011). The conducted studies have departed from a variation of approaches. Scholars have made attempts to assess the level of agility of a firm (Vinodh & Aravindraj, 2012), explored how agility can affect firm performance (Yang & Liu, 2012; Yang, 2014; Roberts & Grover, 2012) and proposed managerial tools and actions for an agile organization (Bottani, 2010; Doz & Kosonen, 2010; Winby & Worley, 2014; Fourné, Jansen, & Mom, 2014). Thus, the research on agility is predominantly normative, often prescribing general tool boxes for practitioners looking for ways to leverage on agility. However, it could be considered fruitful to go beyond the normative studies in search for the context's implications on agility. This has been indicated by for example Fourné et al. (2014), who with the use of multinational enterprises showed that environmental settings may explain the heterogeneity of agility. Most qualitative studies on agility are case studies. In some instances, multiple cases are covered, but in such occurrences, relatively few cover more than one industry (but see for example Lewis, Andriopoulos and Wendy, 2014; Fourné et al., 2014). Overall, there is a lack of comparative studies.

Given the increased popularity of the concept and the usage within and across industries, agility can be seen as a management idea which is constantly interpreted, reformulated and spread by various actors as it travels between settings. Translation studies, and specifically those conducted by Scandinavian Institutionalists place a predominant focus on the aspects of circulating ideas: how and why they become wide-spread, how they are translated as they travel from one context to another, and what organizational consequences that could bring (Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996). Examples of studies which have examined the travel of ideas empirically are Hwang and Suarez (2005), who show how strategic plans and websites are translated and reconstructed in different settings and Löfgren (2005), who looked at how the idea of the experience economy was translated as it arrived to Scandinavia. Some scholars have chosen to focus on the translation of ideas in form of management concepts in particular (Morris & Lancaster, 2006; Sturdy, 2004; Hansen & Clausen, 2017). Empirical studies have been conducted both in private (Bürkland & Zachariassen, 2014; Bergström & Diedrich, 2011) and public sector (Wæraas & Sataøen, 2014; Czarniawska, 2002). Taken together, this indicates that a translation perspective can help to examine the context's implications on a newly adopted idea, and in this case, the agile concept.

There seems to be a lack of studies addressing the topic of agility from a non-prescriptive perspective. There is also a need for more research on agility concerning comparative studies, especially those collecting empirical data from several industries and types of organizations. This study is an answer to the call by Bottani (2010), who claims that there is a need for more empirical research of how the implementation of agile ideas can vary depending on the size of the organization and the industry in which it operates. Moreover, it answers the call for more research on agility using a comparative perspective which addresses several fields of industry (Rosengren & Windahl Strömblad, 2017). This study places itself in the context of three different organizations – one organization which provides software solutions for banks, one municipality and one organization which sells software solutions for the car industry. Following this discussion, this study complements the existing normative studies about agility. It places interest in how different organizations understand the concept of agility and how they can manage such an ambiguous concept. Using a comparative

approach, this study fills a gap in research on agility and provides a comprehensive understanding of the context's implications on the agile concept. The aim of the study is to increase the knowledge about contextual settings and their implications on agility as a circulating management concept. The study intends to answer the following: 1) how do organizations adopt a management concept, such as agile, to their context? and 2) what are the implications of the fact that a management concept consists of both tools and values?

The report will first present a theoretical framework which covers the concepts that are to be employed in order to understand agile as a circulating management concept. Second, the methodological choices for how to reach the aim are motivated. Third, the empirical findings are presented. Forth, the theoretical framework is used to discuss the findings. Finally, conclusions and implications of the study are presented.

Theoretical framework

Introducing translation theory

The issue about how organizational ideas and practices circulate the sphere of organizations has been a topic of research for several decades. Starting with the neo-institutionalism, scholars developed theory around the phenomenon of isomorphism - why organizations become increasingly homogeneous (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), and how the application of institutional myths can increase the legitimacy of organizations (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). According to this view, organizations adopt the ideas rather passively, making little impact on the traveling notion itself. This type of spread of ideas is commonly referred to as the model of diffusion (Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996). The concept of translation originates from the sociologists of science and technology Michel Callon (1984) and Bruno Latour (1986), based on inspiration from the philosopher Michel Serres (1982). This view entails that the spread of anything is in the hands of people, and that each of them can modify, betray or add to the token which travels (Latour, 1986).

Inspired by that very idea, Scandinavian Institutionalists embraced the concept and modified the traditional view of an organization supported by neo-institutionalists. Instead of portraying organizations as passive entities, merely receiving and passing along organizational ideas, Scandinavian Institutionalists suggested that organizations are to be perceived as active creators and recreators of ideas. This as organizations tends to imitate other organizations which are considered successful (Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996). Imitated ideas can include business strategies, policies, organizational structures, technologies, preferences and products (Sevón, 1996), typically packaged into transferable objects, such as texts, presentations or other media forms (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). As argued by Czarniawska and Joerges (1996), the travel of ideas is made possible by the energy of the people who translate it for their own or somebody else's use. For any idea to transfer between local settings, it must be translated from the form it had in its previous setting. The idea is separated from its institutional surroundings, sent away, and then re-embedded in other time and spaces, through translations. Thus, translation implies movement and transformation, and the idea reforms as it travels. This as certain elements are discarded, and others are added as the idea transforms into actions (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996).

Selection of ideas

Viewing the circulation of ideas as processes of imitation gives rise to questions regarding on what basis organizations select ideas to adopt. This is interesting to investigate in as it can contribute with the understanding of the context's implications on management concepts. According to Sahlin-Andersson (1996), imitation is based on perceived identity, as organizations tend to compare themselves with actors they consider to be similar to in one way or another, and imitate those they want to resemble. Such similarities are often based on the concept of organizational fields, as suggested by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), which are conceived to be shaped on the basis of the similarity between organizations' activities. Within such fields, Sevón (1996) argues, organizations have the same thought world. This notion, referred to as shared frames of meaning, are constructed as organizations base their interpretation of the environment on available frames within the social space in which it operates. However, imitation can also occur across thought worlds (Sevón, 1996).

Building on that idea, Sahlin-Andersson (1996) claims that the process of imitation does not only involve identification of one's present state, but also the identification of one's desired future state. Assuming this, an organization's self-identification will vary with reference group, which in turn is dependent on the organization's perception of its context. What seems to be the most prominent issue in the environment of the moment will affect the organization's matching with other entities in the surrounding (Sevón, 1996). As described by Sahlin-Andersson (1996), it is evident that organizational actors sometimes emphasize the similarities and disregard the differences when one idea is to be transferred from one context to another. Thereby, similarities are constructed and the imitating as well as the imitated organization may obtain a new identity. Thus, according to Sevón (1996), as organizations translate the idea according to their own conditions, the result of imitation is that fields are partly homogeneous and partly heterogeneous. Sahlin-Andersson (1996) illustrates this with the example of public organizations. Due to the frequent comparison with private organizations, a new language has entered their sphere, with a new way of perceiving activities and the mission of the organization.

Further, Czarniawska (1997) argues that another way to understand how organizations select which ideas to adopt is to perceive mimetic processes as the social phenomenon of fashion, rather than a cognitive process. Doing so, one acknowledges both an organization's ambition to be similar to others and the ambition to be unique. On the one hand, organizations are afraid of being left behind, and on the other hand, they strive to be the first to adopt an idea (Czarniawska, 1997). Czarniawska and Sevón (1996) argue, building on the work of Tarde (1890/1962), that fashions will always circulate. This as an imitated object loses its attractiveness with time and as imitators increase in number.

Ideas meet organizations

Given the interest for the travel of ideas, translation theory also investigates the reception of the idea when it has reached its new time and space. Lamb, Örtenblad and Hsu (2016) argue that translation needs to be considered from a forward-oriented approach and claim that too much focus has been on the historical acts of translation. As suggested by Røvik (2008), translation entails the de-contextualization of an idea - that is the unpackaging from its original context - the packaging and the subsequent transmission of an idea, followed by the

re-contextualization - meaning the adaption to the different contexts. Whereas Røvik (2008) conceives the process of re-contextualization to be primarily the receiving organization's efforts to locate and learn from organizations which have adopted the same management concept, Lamb et al. (2016) emphasize the importance of assessing one's own contextual genesis and the underlying values of the management idea. As such, re-contextualization will give rise to varying translations, depending on the context. Thereby, conditions can either facilitate or constrain translation in different contexts (Lamb et al., 2016).

As translation is enabled by the people who act on the idea, and translation is performed in accordance with each individual's frame of reference, Czarniawska (1997) suggests that the encounter between the traveling ideas and the ideas in residence in the local setting should be studied. When the global idea meets the local setting, friction may arise. However, this is to be seen as an energizing clash where translation and negotiation takes place, leading to the transformation of both the idea and the ideas in residence (Czarniawska, 1997).

Naming as a contributor to contextual understanding

In order to fulfill the aim of this study, it is important to acknowledge the complexity of the context. Building on the idea of increasingly homogeneous organization fields, Erlingsdóttir and Lindberg (2005) suggest possible complements or competitors to isomorphism. If isomorphism leads to the homogeneity of forms and structures, isopraxism is suggested as a possible result where similar organizational practices have different names. Further, isonymism is presented as homogeneity in the use of names but a variation in organizational practices (Erlingsdóttir & Lindberg, 2005). Following this argumentation, the complexity of the context requires theoretical tools to look at the meaning of a word.

As suggested by Solli, Demediuk and Sims (2005), the name can play an important role for the understanding of reforming. This as names give identity, even in such cases when local circumstances have resulted in activities different from the original (Solli et al., 2005). According to Czarniawska and Joerges (1996), the simplest way of objectifying an idea is turning them into linguistic artifacts. This can be done with the use of verbal tools which are constructed to create shared meaning (Czarniawska-Joerges & Joerges, 1990). As argued by Czarniawska-Joerges and Joerges, labeling is a "linguistic structuring of (social) problems" (1990, p. 340), implying that things without names do not exist. Turning ideas into linguistic artifacts generate systems of meaning which is essential for collective actions. This as linguistic artifacts enable the creation of shared meanings (Czarniawska-Joerges & Joerges, 1990). On the same note, Strannegård (2007) claims that such artifacts contain interpretations which facilitate action. Thereby, a linguistic artifact becomes a performative tool which can encourage certain actions in an organization (Strannegård, 2007).

Brunsson (2010) contributes to the debate of the name's meaning in the context of management fashions by arguing that the naming of a management technique can generate both positive and negative emotions. With empirical evidence, it is shown that even in such cases when a management concept provides satisfactory results, skepticism towards the actual concept can be observed (Brunsson, 2010). Thus, by recognizing the word through the lens of translation theory, this study is able to increase the knowledge about contextual settings.

Methodology of the study

Design of study

In order to reach the aim of increasing the knowledge about contextual settings and their implications on agility as a circulating management concept, we have conducted a qualitative, multiple-case study. The study was based on semi-structured interviews and internal and external documents, which provided data which not would have been possible to obtain through a quantitative approach. According to Flyvberg (2006), the choice of method should be based on the particular problem in focus and the related circumstances. Further, a method should be picked if it is appropriate to what the study is trying to find out (Silverman, 2013). As a qualitative method stresses words rather than quantification (Bryman & Bell, 2013), this choice was regarded as suitable for the aim of this study. Using a qualitative method allowed us to obtain in-depth details, as suggested by Silverman (2013) and Collis and Hussey (2013). Moreover, it also provided us with the conditions that are needed in order to reach the aim of this study, which addresses the contextual settings. According to Bryman and Bell (2013), qualitative research creates conditions for detailed descriptions which are helpful if one seeks to understand the context and the social reality.

According to Flyvberg (2006) case studies can help researchers to understand a complex issue. Some argue that one case cannot provide knowledge about the many, but Flyvberg (2006) argues the opposite, given that the choice of case is appropriately selected. Eisenhardt (1989) states that case studies can be well-suited in research areas which are either new or where theory seems to be insufficient. In our case, the research about agility as a product of the context seems to be insufficient. The amount of details which can be provided by case studies are therefore helpful to provide knowledge on a wider level and contribute to the research area. In order to increase the knowledge about contextual settings, it was also decided that the study should include several cases and take a comparative approach. That way, we were provided with a rich variation of stories, enabling us to look at the problem from a number of various contexts. We argue that by extending the study to multiple cases and using a comparative approach, we can acquire more knowledge about the concept since we can analyze the multitude of stories on an aggregated level, but still get information from several viewpoints. The purpose of interviewing several organizations were to compare and contrast information to increase the possibility of getting deeper insights about the context from a multitude of sources.

Collection of field material

Concerning the selection of organizations, a criterion for an organization to be regarded as suitable for the study was that it should be explicitly formulated that they work agile. Thereby, we follow Flyvberg's (2006) recommendations about choosing an appropriate case and increase the ability of reaching the aim of the study. A large number of organizations operating in different industries were contacted. However, due to heavy workload or an insufficient number of available employees that could act as respondents, several organizations rejected. Eventually, three of the affirmative organizations, representing different industries, sizes and ownership structures, were selected as study objects. The selected organizations differ in terms of customers and represent both the private and the

public sector (see more in table 1). Given our aim and research questions, it was considered appropriate to pick different types of organizations which could contribute to a wide range of understandings from a variety of contexts. However, differences in complexity and size of organizations turned out to limit the variation in professions of respondents in two of the case organizations, compared to the third one, where respondents represented a larger variety of occupational groups.

Organization	Industry	Main product	Main owners	Employees	Head office
Crosskey	Bank (Crosskey, 2018)	Software (Crosskey, 2018)	Ålandsbanken Abp (Crosskey, 2018)	230 (Crosskey, 2018)	Mariehamn, Åland (Crosskey, 2018)
Municipality of Ängelholm	Municipality	Services for citizen needs: divided into the 'main missions' of: (1) Health, (2) Learning and Family and (3) City Environment (Municipality of Ängelholm, 2017)	N/A	3200 (Municipality of Ängelholm, 2018)	Ängelholm (Municipality of Ängelholm, 2018)
Volvo Cars Retail Solutions	Car (Volvo Cars Retail Solutions, 2018)	Software (Volvo Cars Retail Solutions, 2018)	Volvo Cars Sweden AB (Volvo Cars Retail Solutions, 2018)	200 (Volvo Cars Retail Solutions, 2018)	Gothenburg (Volvo Cars Retail Solutions, 2018)

Table 1: Summary of participating organizations

As a primary source of data, interviews have been conducted. This enabled us to get information about daily activities, which enhanced our understanding for how agility is understood by the individuals. As a complement to the interviews, secondary data in form of a consultancy report, internal and external presentations and statements of work have been collected. This was considered to be essential for obtaining a sufficient scope of information from the organizations. Moreover, it both facilitated the preparatory work for the interviews and widened the understanding for the stories that were told during the interviews. This is in line with Collis and Hussey´s (2013) discussion about the importance of contextualization and the collection of background information when it comes to qualitative data. Accordingly, the background and history are essential parts to be taken into consideration when the data is analyzed (Collis & Hussey, 2013).

Concerning the selection of respondents, we aspired to get a wide range of understandings from different perspectives. Therefore, after the initial contact with each of the organization was made, we requested to get in contact with respondents with different titles and responsibilities. Subsequently, the contact persons suggested employees who were

available for interviews. This way, we were able to get access to eligible candidates who could contribute to our study (see table 2). However, it could be argued that such a selection method can increase the risk of getting a selection of respondents based on the interests of the organizations. For example, in the case of Ängelholm we were only presented with contacts in managerial positions, positioned in the municipality building.

Moreover, as a result of the selection of organizations, Ängelholm also turned out to be the case organization which provided a significant larger degree of variation of professions among respondents compared to the other organizations. However, this was regarded as acceptable due to the study's limitations in scale and scope. The variation of operational belonging was regarded as more important than the hierarchical position in the organization. In the case of VCRS, the result of having the organization to choose respondents came with the implication that we were only provided contact information to employees working in the department which had already started its agile journey. Although it would have been interesting to examine the other departments perspective on the matter, it was decided that the study of VCRS should be limited to the research and development department as the other departments did not meet the criteria of explicitly working agile. In the case of Crosskey, the consequence of identifying respondents according to the organization's suggestions was that three of the six interviews had to be conducted remotely. Despite the negative consequences of this, such as the decreased interaction between the interviewers and the interviewee, it opened up for interviews with respondents from a larger variety of positions. This as the three respondents who were interviewed remotely were placed abroad.

Crosskey	Municipality of Ängelholm	Volvo Cars Retail Solutions
CEO	Head of Local Government	Department Manager
Department Manager	Head of Main Mission Health	Group Manager
Business Area Manager	Environment & Construction Manager	User Experience Design
Product Area Manager	Culture and City Manager	Developer
System Architect	HR manager	Product Owner
Application Developer	Upper Secondary School Manager	Scrum Master
	Customer Service Manager	Tester

Table 2: Overview of participating respondents

One week before the interviews were scheduled, an e-mail consisting of the key topics for the interview were sent to the respondents. This in order to give the respondents the opportunity to be more confident and prepared for the approaching interview situation. Like the selection of respondents, it could be argued that such a decision could increase the risk of getting responses adopted to own interests, as interviewees are able to prepare in advance. However, the advantages of allowing the respondents to prepare, together with the fact that themes rather than concrete questions were sent out, justified this choice.

Before the interviews, an interview-guide with a small number of semi-structured questions were produced, which according to Silverman (2013) allows the interviewee to set the pace. The guide covered the four themes: interpretation of agile, agile work in the organization, agile work over time, and potential reasons to be agile. The interview-guide helped us to stay focused on the topics of importance for our study, and the semi-structured questions allowed the respondents to speak freely about the topics. Thereby, respondents were

given the opportunity to present his or her own perspective of the questions and include personal experiences, which otherwise can be left out, according to Bryman and Bell (2013). From an ethical perspective, this is also positive as completely structured interviews can lead to the respondent's perception of being forced to give answers in a specific direction (Silverman, 2013). This is also beneficial for us, as interviewers, as we are able to be more flexible and shift focus in the interview if needed (Bryman & Bell, 2013). This would not have been possible with completely structured nor open-ended questions.

The length of the interviews at the participating organizations varied between five and six and a half hours. Important to note is that the participating organizations allowed us to use the names of their organizations, and that all of the respondents gave us the permission to publish their working titles in the report. Each of the interviews enabled us to cover all of our questions and get a deep understanding of the respondents' thoughts of the topic. All interviews were made face-to-face, with the exception of the already mentioned three respondents who were positioned abroad. These three interviews were instead conducted with the use of tools for video-conference. All respondents approved that the interviews could be recorded, which made it possible for us to concentrate on what the respondents had to say and ask follow-up questions, instead of only taking notes. To ensure that ethical aspects were taken into consideration, the recorded material and the transcriptions of them were promised not to be shared with third parties or to be used in other purposes outside the scope of the study. Moreover, the material was promised to be destroyed when it would no longer be needed for the study's specific purpose. Although the interviews were recorded, we decided to take certain notes during the interviews in order to highlight answers which were needed to get further examined, as suggested by Czarniawska (2014). Another ethical aspect which was considered when conducting the interviews was the double role of an interviewer, as described by Kvale (2006). Accordingly, as a result of being both a participator and an observer, the interviewer is in a dominant position which can get the respondent to open up more than intended. Therefore, efforts were made to remain as close to the role of an observing researcher as possible. Data was collected until a perceived saturation was reached, as suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This was at the point when the interviews and the internal and external documents had provided us with the field material which was required to understand the variety in context of the selected organizations.

Analysis of field material

In order to handle a large amount of qualitative data in form of interviews and internal and external documents, an approach inspired by grounded theory was considered appropriate. According to Turner (1981), a grounded theory approach is appropriate in such circumstances. Grounded theory is also stated to be useful for describing social phenomena (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which motivates this choice further. After all interviews were conducted and all of the internal and external documents were collected, the data was transcribed in its entirety. The process of coding was divided into several steps. The first level of coding resulted in 13 codes, which all were close the empirical material. Such codes included names such as agile structures, prerequisites to become agile and previous understanding of agile. Codes were subsequently compared and contrasted, in the search for patterns among them, as suggested by Czarniawska (2014). This resulted in a categorization

of five wider themes, covering the scope of the study. The five themes that were formulated are: motivation to transform, understandings of agility, organization specific adaptations, agility in practice and future of agility. Furthermore, to move towards a higher level of abstraction (Martin & Turner, 1986) and to organize and analyze the empirical facts (Van Maanen, 1979), codes closer to the theoretical framework were formulated. Such codes could include materialization and energy. That way, translation theory and the naming literature helped us to understand how the concept of agility was reflected upon and understood in each organization – adapted and translated into the local context.

Empirical Data

Several challenges – one remedy

The three studied organizations have either gone through or are in the process of going through a transformation journey, leaving behind an old way of working in exchange for an agile methodology. In the case of Crosskey and VCRS, this old way of working was following traditional 'waterfall' principles – characterized by extensive preparatory work and clearly defined stages building on each other, leaving little space for adaptions other than the maintenance activities scheduled at the end of the project. In the case of the municipality of Ängelholm, the starting position was accordingly 'traditional' in its organizational structure and its subsequent form of working, with a large number of committees and specialized divisions. This structure caused little collaboration across divisions and distinct silos where employees worked in the interest of their own department rather than taking a holistic approach, striving for what is best for the municipality as a whole.

For Crosskey, the idea of starting to work agile was a result of a customer request in 2012. The customer, a mobile phone operator, worked in accordance with the Scrum methodology and requested the project together with Crosskey to be carried out based on a Scrum framework. Consequently, the members of the department working by order of that customer got acquainted with the agile way of working and delivered in accordance to the customer request. In addition, as some of those members had previous experience from organizations employing agile methods, the department found ways to organize themselves to deliver agile projects. A few months after the request from the customer, Crosskey recruited a new CEO and a team manager from a company which had gone through a transformation to become agile a few years earlier. As firm believers of the agile way of working, they brought those ideas to Crosskey and decided to initiate a transformation of the whole organization, leaving behind waterfall methods and establishing new, agile processes.

In the case of Ängelholm, the idea of transforming the organization was initiated by the municipal politicians. In 2013, the city council took the decision to rearrange the political organization and gave the municipal executive board the mission to adapt the executive, municipal organization after the new political organization. Both of the new organizations were due to take effect in January 2015. The purpose was to get a municipality that could, to a higher degree, satisfy the needs of the citizens and to encourage more collaboration among Ängelholm's varying competencies, across the numerous operations. Once the mission was formulated, the municipal organization initiated a collaboration with a consultancy firm. This eventually led up to a plan on turning into a new, 'agile' municipal organization. The

transformation project was determined to last until spring 2018 and in order to give all employees competence development in agile work, the municipality received money in form of EU contributions.

At VCRS, the decision to change from waterfall to agile methods was mainly driven by poor operational delivery. The division of research and development was an object of frustration for the rest of the organization and was widely associated with slow deliveries. As expressed by the department manager, while the employees put a lot of effort into the products, the common view of the customers was that nothing happened. The time from idea to launched software varied between 12 and 18 months. In 2016, the organization recruited the current manager for the division of research and development and gave him the mission to improve it. After an analysis of the current situation, based on interactions with both organizational members and external parties, the division manager disentangled the main issues. Accordingly, the agile way of working matched the issues well, and was presented as a solution. Subsequently, the division manager received the mandate to transform the research and development division.

All of the three organizations state that being agile enable them to keep up with the pace of the surrounding world. According to presentation material employed when agile working methods were motivated to employees at VCRS, the organization would cease to exist if they would continue to work according to old methods. This as they were perceived as slow, non-transparent and expensive in comparison to competitors. If they instead manage to deliver the opposite, that enables them to benefit from the possibilities that the fast-moving world offers, namely in form of analytics, machine learning and chat bots. On the same note, a respondent from Crosskey claims that he believes that it would be impossible to be competitive or even survive as a future company or society if not taking an agile approach. Respondents from Ängelholm state that the needs of the citizens' change at an accelerating pace, and that their old way of working, typically easing for the employees and the politicians rather than the citizens, would not be able to keep up with such a pace. Thus, despite the differences in the issues of each organization, agile is seen as a solution to their problems.

Agility - more than a dog sport?

Concerning the terms associated with agility, all organizations mention flexibility, customer focus, shared responsibility and collaboration. Most respondents suggest flexibility as a first association to describe the term. However, they emphasize that agility entails more than flexibility, some arguing that being agile requires structure and direction. A respondent from Crosskey with experience from other agile organizations stresses the need for a balance.

> My previous place of work claimed to be agile, but I would rather call it Wild West conditions.
> The fact that you are flexible and adapt to changes quickly does not automatically make you
> well-preforming. In my opinion, that's not being agile. (Respondent, Crosskey)

A respondent from VCRS argues that agility is about striving towards a flexible goal. Thus, there is a need for awareness about where one is placed in relationship to the goal in order to adapt. Accordingly, the opposite of being agile is to make plans in the beginning and then to make efforts to approach that goal. On the same note, one respondent from Crosskey claims

that the highest level of agility would be to adapt your methods every day, in accordance with what you learned the day before. Thereby, there would be little use of a framework which was composed years ago.

At the municipality of Ängelholm, respondents emphasize the holistic approach that an agile way of working brings. Although the large number of entities in the organization represent a large number of different public service responsibilities, there are certain issues which coincide. Therefore, there is a need for co-ordination across the entities, based on the root of the problem. This provides a holistic approach which proceeds from the citizens' needs. An illustration from this is the school kitchens. When one of the respondents started working in the municipality, the respondent discovered that the kitchens were in bad condition. The food inspector insisted that there was a need for an improvement, but as the responsibility for the kitchens were allocated on several parties, they had trouble finding a way to go forward. As an agile action, they decided to invite all of the parties to a meeting, where they came up with a plan of the priorities that needed to be carried out. According to the respondent, this prevented certain parties to take own decisions without taking other parties with other information into account. In worst case, this could have resulted in a renovation of a kitchen that would close down two years later. Taking a holistic approach of the problem created collaboration, which prevented unnecessary investment costs.

In the case of Crosskey and VCRS, terms from agile software development methods, such as Scrum and Kanban, are used to describe agility. In fact, these are the words used in the everyday context of the workplace rather than the actual term agile or agility, which is used only rarely. The words can include sprint, backlog, scrum master, product owner, stories, estimations and daily stand-ups. One respondent from Crosskey claims that although the word agile is not used widely, it underlies the way of thinking, the business strategy and the daily practices. Instead, they use words from the Scrum or Kanban terminology, which encourages step-by-step approaches, feedback and shorter timeframes for planning processes. One respondent from VCRS claims that the use of the word could be a matter of internal and external communication.

> We work agile, but we might not use the word that much within the company. However, when we talk with external parties we say that we work agile. (Respondent, VCRS)

In order to encourage an agile approach, employees at VCRS uses phrases such as "done is better than perfect" and "good enough for now, safe enough to try". These work as guidance for the employees to ensure iterative working methods and to avoid long periods of isolated work. Respondents from the municipality of Ängelholm express that the word agile occur frequently. This is also evident in the documented plan for the transformation project towards an agile organization, in the statement of work for managers and in the design of the keychains carried by employees, stating "Agile Ängelholm". One respondent from Ängelholm shares that according to a survey, 97% of all employees in the organization is aware of the fact that the municipality should work agile. She stresses the benefits of uniting around a word.

> I can meet a person who works in the municipality who I've never met before, and we can start talking about the fact that we are agile. The agile is common to us. To me, that is cool, because that is an indication that we have reached out. (Respondent, Municipality of Ängelholm)

A respondent from Ängelholm argues that it should be up to individuals to manage their time. As collaboration is one of the corner stones of agility in the organization, the respondent argues that it would be to go against their agile approach if a superior would decide on whether her or his employee could serve a request coming from another part of the organization.

> Whenever someone comes to me to ask if they can use an administrator for a specific purpose, I always say, go and ask them. It must be up to them to say no, I don't have time, or I don't want to, that is not a task for their manager. (Respondent, Municipality of Ängelholm)

In the case of Crosskey and VCRS, it is seen as something problematic to use a team member for a purpose that is outside the scope of the team's goal. According to a respondent from VCRS, this behavior interrupts the sprints, as the developers lose focus on what is planned for the time-period. Thereby, the team cannot reach their goals. At Crosskey, it is purposely avoided to use resources from the team to accomplish individual tasks.

Regarding previous experience of agility, the employees of the three organizations have varying degrees of preunderstandings of the term. VCRS and Crosskey both have employees who have been introduced to the methodology in higher education studies or have experience from working agile in other organizations. A respondent from VCRS states that one can utilize the experience of agile work which has been received in consultant missions at other organizations. A respondent from Crosskey claims that due to the agile content in previous education, theoretical equipped was known once the respondent started working in the organization. Conversely, all respondents from Ängelholm, with the exception of one, state that the term was entirely new to them prior to the transformation of the organization. That respondent was presented to the method in connection to master studies. Several respondents from the organization stress that there has been a specific jargon around the associations made of the term. Several respondents explain the development of the word since it was first introduced.

> At first, we made fun of it. We thought it was a strange word, in some way... Made connections to the dog sport. But now, I would say, it's starting to settle. (Respondent, Municipality of Ängelholm)

> In the beginning, it was almost like a dirty word, like 'are you agile, you bastard?' But now it's different. And it's impressing how they have managed to change the attitude in such a large organization. It has turned out well. (Respondent, Municipality of Ängelholm)

Generally, the organizations' foundational understandings of agile are shared. However, certain differences are identified, both regarding which principles the organizations follow, and organizational members' usage of the word agile. In Ängelholm, the word agile occurs frequently and is described as a unifying notion, whereas Crosskey and VCRS use other terms

to express their agile way of working. The following section describes how the agile principles of the organizations are expressed in structures.

From shared principles to various structures

Unlike Ängelholm, Crosskey and the R&D department of VCRS are organized in form of teams. They are cross-functional, meaning that every assignment is handled by the team as an entity, rather than by one person. In the case of VCRS, every team member has its own expertise, but also a width of competences. As expressed by a respondent, they use the metaphor of the letter 'T', indicating that naturally, everyone will have their deep focus area, but as long as they can handle the basics of the other areas as well, it works. For instance, a person with high competence within requirements specifications should also have a certain level of competence within testing, and possible even within usability aspects of a product. At both Crosskey and VCRS, every team works in time-periods, called sprints, of two and three weeks, respectively. Within that time-frame, a specific amount of clearly defined tasks is completed. At the start of each sprint, all of the teams within the department of VCRS are gathered to coordinate what needs to be done within the period. This is referred to as big room planning. Each day starts off with a briefing to see where in the process the team is, and what should be completed during the day. After each sprint, evaluations in form of retrospectives are done to see what could be improved in the future. At Crosskey, similar practices as those carried out during big room planning are performed at company planning, which takes place every fourth sprint. A respondent from Crosskey claims that this allows for synchronization between the teams, and that this decreases the risk of having one team working on a task that is not of use for another team before later. A respondent also states that this allows for the management to share their prioritization of the projects so that the teams can make their prioritization in accordance with that. In addition to this, Crosskey, like VCRS, also do retrospectives at the end of each sprint in order to improve.

In the municipality of Ängelholm, agile arenas are part of the organizational structure. When one main mission is not able to solve a problem on their own, an agile arena is initialized. This way, different competences from different parts of the municipality or external parties can be gathered to solve an issue which directly affects the citizen. One respondent stresses how this can simplify the process of collaborating with parties external to the school and illustrates this with a current example.

> The number of unaccompanied children has increased. Due to different reasons, many of them have a high level of absence. What we know is that if a pupil has a 100% attendance, that person will most likely succeed in school. So, if a problem with a pupil arises, we can initialize an agile arena, where the school together with the Social Security Authorities can create an action plan for how to solve this issue. (Respondent, Municipality of Ängelholm)

Whenever an employee identifies a citizen need, he or she sends a signal through the intranet. If the solution to the problem is expected to directly increase the service of the citizen, if the problem requires employees to work outside of their own main mission and if it is estimated that the problem can be solved in three to five meetings the criteria to initialize an agile arena are met. After the signal is received, a process leader is assigned. This person is responsible for gathering participants who can solve the problem. The knowledge generated from the

solution of the problem is subsequently documented and made available for the rest of the organization through the intranet.

Both Crosskey and VCRS have established computer systems for facilitating the agile processes. According to the respondents from both of the organizations, the systems simplify the communication and clarify the stages of the processes. A respondent from Crosskey expresses that additionally, the program increases customer contact. It contributes to transparency towards the customer, as some content can be made available for the customer to see. Moreover, the respondent states that it opens up for co-creation of the development, as the customer can log bugs in the system whenever they are identified. Contrary to this, Ängelholm do not use any systems for this purpose. However, some respondents express a lack of a system which enables coordination of processes within and between entities.

Shared responsibility is expressed as a principle by all of the three participating organizations. Crosskey and VCRS work predominantly in accordance with Scrum, which places responsibility to reach the goal on the team. A respondent from VCRS argues that much of the specialist knowledge is within the teams, and not in the hands of the managers, as typically is the case in traditional firms. The role of the manager is rather about working with people-related issues and solving conflicts. Decisions concerning if, when and how a product should be developed is instead in the hands of the product owner, which is part of the scrum team. A respondent from VCRS claims that this way of working invites to participation in the entire process. Several respondents from the municipality of Ängelholm argue that the increased level of shared responsibility has resulted in more of a helpful climate. Several respondents state that regardless of the matter, when one person invites to a meeting with participants from several functions, they show up. According to the respondent, the greatest benefit of working agile is that people help each other to make it happen.

Education on the agile topic in form of lectures and workshops, is deployed at Crosskey, VCRS and Ängelholm. When the municipality of Ängelholm got the mission to transform their organization, there was a high level of inclusion of employees in the process of adapting it to the political organization. According to the project plan, a number of workshops were arranged at an early stage of the process, where representatives from various parts of the organizations participated. This way, an agile organization could be developed, based on the viewpoints of employees working close to the citizens. A respondent states that although some people in the organization would argue that they were flexible even before the transformation, this choice enabled a development where the agile values were formulated as common principles to all entities within the organization. Moreover, the agile way of working and the agile approach are also explicitly encouraged in the managers' statements of work. This is expressed by all of the respondents in the municipality, whereas the respondents from Crosskey and VCRS indicate that statements of work are of little importance, and are most often outdated. Crosskey and VCRS describes a more method-focused way of introducing the agile way of working, in comparison to Ängelholm. A respondent from Crosskey indicates that this could have been done differently.

> When we started to introduce the agile way of working, we might have turned to the methods a
> bit too quickly. Kanban and Scrum are methods which describe how to work, quite in detail. So
> now I would say, we are trying to catch up, because I think you need to start by looking at the
> overall principles before you can focus on the methods. (Respondent, Crosskey)

Taken together, the organizations deviate more in terms of agile structures than they do in terms of agile principles. The structures in Crosskey and VCRS are more similar than the structures in Ängelholm. The next section presents how the studied organizations perceive agile as a developing concept.

An agile journey without a check-list

All three organizations state that since the start of their transformation towards agility, they have made structural adjustments along the way. An example of such an adjustment is from Ängelholm, who after the change to an agile organization noticed problems with long term sick leaves. After the change, some employees were formally employed fifty percent by one main mission, and fifty percent by the service support entity. This resulted in an ambiguity for the individual concerning who to take orders from and which tasks to prioritize. Consequently, the municipality decided that such employments were unsustainable, and the concerning employees had to decide which entity they wanted to belong to. Another example is from Crosskey and VCRS, who after the formation of teams and the implementation of methods realized that they lacked in processes of synchronizing between the teams. Thus, practices to solve such issues emerged, along with other adjustments such as the introduction of external agile coaches as well as an expansion in the number of teams and a decrease in the number of members.

Moreover, representatives from VCRS and Crosskey claim that the adjustments that are made are not always based on formal decisions, but rather take place constantly as part of a subconscious process. One respondent from Crosskey describes that they have not changed their way of working since they became agile, but one can assume that minor changes take place constantly, without noticing it. A respondent from VCRS shares this view and illustrates it with an example.

> A while ago, we had so many meetings. Now, it has developed into more on the go-meetings and our daily stand-ups play a more important role. We do less of the pre-booked meetings and more of the random meetings where we go to the whiteboard and decide on something whenever we need to. I think that works better. Meetings always suck. (Respondent, VCRS)

All of the respondents state that their organizations have not yet completed their agile journey. At VCRS, management has decided that the agile way of working can be expanded to also cover departments outside of the R&D department. This is positively embraced by the respondents, who shares opinions on the difficulty of working agile in one department only, when processes directly or indirectly build on each other. In the case of Ängelholm, respondents emphasize the managers' role in the development ahead. According to several respondents, they have a responsibility of maintaining what has been grounded during the project of becoming agile. Two of them claim that there is a divergence in approaches and how managers communicate the idea of an agile organization, indicating that this could be a challenge going forward. At Crosskey, the idea is to proceed in letting the teams and the departments increase their agility in a step-by-step manner. One respondent exemplifies that the HR department has a large potential for development, especially within areas such as wage determination and staff issues.

In all of the organizations, there is a belief that any organization has the possibility to be agile. However, there is a shared opinion that every organization has to do it their way. A respondent from VCRS claims that there is no such thing as a check-list, so one has to absorb the ideas and reflect on how they can be carried out in one's own specific setting. A respondent from Crosskey states that due to the agile manifesto, there is a common understanding for what agility implies within the IT-industry. However, the respondent claims that the implementation and how it is performed in the daily activities differ from firm to firm. This is confirmed by a respondent from VCRS, who claims that in the encounter with other organizations employing agile methods, it is oftentimes communicated that they use Scrum, but with a twist. A respondent from Crosskey highlights that there could be a value for any organization to work agile.

> I definitely believe that any organization could benefit from learning about this way of working. But simply copying from other organizations – well, that never works. You will have to adapt to the reality which you find yourself in. (Respondent, Crosskey)

All organizations emphasize the people in the organizations as crucial for establishing the agile mindset and claim that it is important that every employee has a will to work agile. Representatives from Ängelholm stress that you cannot build an agile organization on people who shut themselves away and refuse to collaborate with others. A Crosskey respondent argues that how far you reach in your agility is a determined by the personal attitude rather than the working tasks one has. Moreover, all of the organizations highlight the importance of having a management team which supports the idea to work agile. VCRS and Crosskey argue that their customers also can restrict their ability to be agile. A respondent from VCRS claims that this can be due to inexperience. In the work with some of their customers, there is no need for adaption to the customers way of working. However, the respondent claims that some customers come from another setting where another culture is predominant. In those situations, the parties meet in a compromise, where VCRS deviate from some of their agile principles. At Crosskey, regulations in the industry of their customers affect their ability to be agile.

> The banking sector and the financial system is highly regulated and does not allow for much flexibility. Therefore, to be totally agile in such a context is a challenge. Then again, I'm one of those who believe that banks can be a lot more agile than what they sometimes believe they can be. But it's still some type of restriction in such an industry, compared to an organization which not manages peoples' money or are super monitored by authorities. (Respondent, Crosskey)

In Ängelholm, the municipal politicians are additional stakeholders with substantial influence on the municipal organization's ability of being agile. Since the municipal organization works by order of the politicians, the municipal organization always has to comply with the decisions made by the politicians. Thus, according to one respondent the politicians could de facto give them the mission to adapt to another political organization and change their organization at any point. This is evident among the respondents of the organization, who express an anxiety for the upcoming election.

Common to both Crosskey and VCRS is that respondents imply that they might have an advantage over other organizations to embrace the agile ideas. A respondent from Crosskey proposes that this might be due to the fact that they act in a business environment where the agile principles were born. In contrast to this, Ängelholm is presented as the first agile municipality. However, a respondent indicates that more municipalities might have the need to follow.

> Privately-owned companies, which constantly look for ways to become more profitable, might have an easier time embracing the agile way of working. However, I would say that municipalities, which work very traditionally, with high levels of hierarchies and often in separate silos, have the greatest need to adapt to this way of working. (Respondent, Municipality of Ängelholm)

All three organizations express that the agile ideas will be relevant in the future. Representatives from the municipality of Ängelholm claim that the society will impose different requirements on organizations operating in the future. For example, several respondents believe that the demands that the municipality will face in the future will be more individualized. Thus, the pace will increase and the agile ideas can facilitate in that journey. VCRS and Crosskey also emphasize the good fit between a faster-moving world and an agile organization. One respondent from Crosskey states that currently there is no better existing way of working that matches the movement of the business environment. However, all organizations believe that the working methods which enable an agile approach may be adjusted and developed with time. Respondents from VCRS and Crosskey proposes several possible future strings of development of agility. Sociocracy is one of those brought up by both organizations.

> The agile methods will be adjusted over time, most definitely. We took a training course in something called sociocracy. The idea of that is that those who do the job are most often those who know how the job should be done. Therefore, they should lead the decision process instead of having someone on top deciding what to do. The extension of this could be a discussion of the importance of departments. Why should we even have departments, anyway? And wages, couldn't we set them collectively and transparently? (Respondent, VCRS)

This section shows how all of the studied organizations have made structural adaptions since their agile transformation journey started. Moreover, all organizations claim than any organization has the possibility to be agile, but express different examples of stakeholders who can restrict their agility. In the section ahead, the respondents discuss the meaning of having a word for something.

The use of a word – a source of provocation or an ease of communication?
Respondents from all of the organizations argue that gathering working methods and working principles under a word can come with both positive and negative consequences. One respondent from Ängelholm states that using the word agile, as opposed to for example flexibility, forces people to think and discuss. This as the word itself was generally unfamiliar to most of the employees in the organization prior to the transformation. Accordingly, these discussions have led to an establishment of the term which is acknowledged organization-

wide. A respondent from Crosskey believes that there are examples of organizations in industries other than the one that person is situated in, which are very agile but have yet not defined their way of working. According to the respondent, there could be a value in using a term as it can facilitate in the communication of how the organization should work. A respondent from VCRS emphasizes the value of having a word which is filled by content which every team member agrees on. When it is time for the team to move forward, someone simply expresses that it is good enough, and the members address the next task. According to that respondent, this would not have worked before the agile transformation started.

However, respondents also share experiences and views of how using a word for something can lead to negative consequences. A respondent from Ängelholm describes challenges which they were met with initially, coming from not only internal parties, but also from external stakeholders.

> Many people were very provoked by the word. We had an open house for the citizens, and there was always someone who was extremely provoked by the word agile. But we chose to keep it to demonstrate how it represents something entirely new. (Respondent, Municipality of Ängelholm).

In addition to the positive effects of more effective communication, one respondent from Crosskey also stresses the risk of meeting negative attitudes when using a word inspired by another industry, in a company where the employees do not have previous experience from it.

> Buzzwords can also create opposition. 'Who are the IT-people to teach us about our way of organizing?' Sometimes it could be a risk to use a term such as agile or lean due to the value it carries. This can lead to rejection as people associate it with things which they do not find suitable for them. (Respondent, Crosskey)

A respondent from the R&D department of VCRS agrees on the fact that words can create emotions. Although they have not decided to change the word for another one, they have realized that the word agile does not enthuse people outside of the R&D department. Thus, in their agile journey ahead where the plan is to involve the rest of the organization, there will not be an emphasis on the word agile. However, although not focusing on it in the communication, the agile ideas and methods will remain. This as they give the best opportunities to adapt to a flexible goal. Therefore, concerning the communication, the idea is to focus on the underlying reason to be agile.

> We have a clear reason to why we need to act differently. This is far more important to talk about than the word itself. (Respondent, VCRS)

Moreover, a respondent from VCRS claims that since they cannot know what the environment will demand in five years from now, it will be their ability to adapt which will determine their competitiveness in the future. Regardless of what they decide to call the mastering of such a skill, that respondent argues that organizations must live with the uncertainty and face it. Similarly, a respondent from Crosskey does not see any intrinsic value in the word agile. Conversely, that respondent believes that something new will emerge in the near future, as has been the case previously. According to the respondent, there could be two

reasons to this. First, it could be due to the fact that employees lose their creativity and their adaptability when they get too comfortable in their way of working. At that stage, the organization needs something new in order to regain energy. Second, the respondent argues that it could be the case that the term becomes too wide. Accordingly, what usually starts as something narrowly defined and adapted to one specific industry, often ends up in a state where several industries have absorbed it. Thereby, the term becomes too wide and it could be considered difficult to know what it really means.

Taken together, the studied organizations claim that having a word for something can come with both advantages and disadvantages. In the case of VCRS and Crosskey, the negative aspects play a larger role, whereas Ängelholm seem to value the positives aspects to a larger extent.

Discussion

Isonymic behavior in a complex context

Organization	Agile focus	Use of the word 'agile'
Crosskey	Tools	Small extent
Municipality of Ängelholm	Values	Large extent
VCRS	Tools	Small extent

Table 3: Summary of the organizations' translations of agile

In order to increase the knowledge about the context's implication a management concept in general and on agility in particular, the field material presented above is discussed with the use of a translation perspective. According to the empirical findings, it seems as though the positive effects of using the concept of agility are evident regardless of the context which the organizations are situated in. This might stem from the similarity in the overall challenges which the organizations are faced with, namely in form of an increasingly fast-moving organizational climate. In particular, this seems to be based on higher expectations of the customers. Moreover, the fact that three disparate organizations have adopted the agile concept could indicate organizational imitation. Due to the variation of the contextual settings, the practices which are carried out in relation to the agile idea differ significantly. As seen in table 3, this is evident both in relation to which agile focus the organizations have, and the use of the word agile. Thus, more than isomorphism or isopraxism, the results of this study suggest that the adoption of the agile idea may result in isonymism – the adoption of the same name but with a variation of practices, as suggested by Erlingsdottír and Lindberg (2005). From a translation perspective, the fact that the practices which are carried out differ is the result of translations of various sizes. The more translations that are made, the larger become the variations. The following sections maps out practices where translations have been made due to the specific context.

According to the collected data, the context where the agile idea started its journey in the studied organizations differs. Using the terminology of Czarniawska and Joerges (1996), this could be seen as a variation in the time-space settings. Despite this, the values attached to the agile approach are to a large extent common. As given by the empirical material, the words include flexibility, customer focus, shared responsibility and collaboration. It could be

argued that these values correspond to the values proposed by Beck et al. (2001) to some extent. This as flexibility could be derived from the agile value of responding to change over following a plan and customer-focus from the value of customer collaboration over contract negotiation.

This section illustrates three examples of how the agile idea can form a variation of practices. In line with the idea of re-contextualization, as suggested by Lamb et al. (2016), the organizations have assessed their contextual genesis and subsequently adapted the values of the agile idea. First, this section shows how an organization attach a value which is not shared by the other studied organizations, but due to the context and the subsequent translations, it becomes central for that organization's agile work. Second, this section shows an example of when two values are shared by all of the organizations, but due to the context and the subsequent translations, the tools and structures vary among the organizations.

The first example, illustrating the variation in the values attached by the organizations, is Ängelholm's use of the term holistic. This is a case when the contextual genesis of Ängelholm led to the holistic emphasis of the agile idea, well-suited to the challenges that come with a complex and silo-characterized organizational structure. Thus, the municipality of Ängelholm seems to have taken their genesis into account, as is suggested by Lamb et al. (2016), who claim that one of the factors that needs to be considered in the re-contextualization process is the assessment of one's own contextual genesis. As the holistic approach has been translated to the structure of agile arenas, employees are able to work across the functions of the organization and are thereby able to put the customer, in this case the citizen, in focus. As a citizen issue does not take any limits of the organizational units into account, a customer focus requires employees from different units of the municipality and external parties to gather in order to solve it.

The negative consequences which could be avoided using a holistic approach, are illustrated by the examples of the school kitchens and the pupils with high absence. Due to the spread of the operational areas, this did not take place before the introduction of the agile structures. In the case of Crosskey and VCRS, a holistic approach is not required as the spread of the operational areas is smaller. There is no need to gather across the divisions of the organizations in order to put the customer in focus, as the variation of competences is represented in the teams. Applying the notion of ideas in residence, as suggested by Czarniawska (1996), the holistic approach in the municipality could be seen as part of the traveling idea which could be argued to clash with the ideas in residence, causing friction. This as the organization of a typical municipality has traditionally been characterized by distinct operational silos, individual work and a large focus on the units' respective interests, rather than the municipality as a whole - leaving large marks on the organization's ideas in residence. When the new idea traveled into the organization, friction and the energy that resulted from the clash between the ideas, led to the transformation of not only the new idea, but also of the ideas in residence. Thus, in line with the suggestions by Li et al. (2011), the agile idea led to a decreased level of operational silos. This through the creation of a new forum, the agile arena, although certain barriers still are evident between the entities. With lectures and workshops on agility, employees were able to act on the idea and translate it according to their own frames of reference, when passing it along to each other. Moreover, the content of the lectures and the workshops could also be seen as elements which affect the

individuals' respective frame of reference, which in turn affects the translations of the idea that are made after the education takes place. This way, the organization's ideas in residence are transformed, and the traveling idea is passed along and translated according to the context of the organization.

The second example shows how the tools and structures developed to support the idea can deviate, even in cases when the values attached to the agile approach are shared by the studied organizations. This confirms the idea that organizations borrow only certain features, rather than the whole pattern of an idea when imitating other organizations, as suggested by Sevón (1996). This could due to the re-contextualization processes (Lamb et al., 2016), as the organizations have translated the agile idea into their own structures. The overall aim for VCRS and Crosskey is to develop a software product, whereas the municipality of Ängelholm is to provide services which satisfy the citizen's need. This has implications on the translations that have been made in the development of the structures that support the agile values of collaboration and shared responsibility. At VCRS and Crosskey, the value of collaboration is evident as work is organized in form of cross-functional teams. Contextual factors that might have influenced the translations in such a direction might be the need for frequent deliveries and efficient division of work. In the municipality, the translations that have been made to organize the work based on the idea of collaboration have not resulted in teams. Due to the holistic idea and the aspiration to be able to solve any citizen need, there is a difficulty in forming pre-determined teams. Instead, collaboration has been translated to an organization-wide encouragement of solving issues across the borders of the entities. In contrast to this, the teams of Crosskey and VCRS are formed based on the idea that they should be able to accomplish the tasks on their own. Therefore, it is not appreciated when resources from one team are used to complete a task which is outside the scope of the team's goal.

Concerning the value of shared responsibility, VCRS and Crosskey work in teams towards a common goal and thereby let the teams share the responsibility for the delivery of the product. The municipality of Ängelholm are not organized in teams, but verbally emphasize the importance of sharing the responsibility. However, it could be argued that they leave much of the work to the individuals, as they, except for the responsibility to send a signal whenever there is a need for an arena, lack in formal structures which encourage such initiatives. Instead, as the empirical material show, sharing the responsibility is much more of an informal expectation. Thus, the values of collaboration and shared responsibility has been translated to various forms of tools based on the contextual settings of the studied organizations.

The travel of an idea resulting in different focuses

An element which seem to have had a large impact on the organizations' translations and thereby their respective practices, is the distance to the context in which the idea of agility has gained ground the most. The fact that VCRS and Crosskey have clearly defined tools and structures for agile work could be due to the fact that despite their different customers they operate in an industry where the agile manifesto was formulated. For example, certain customers might expect an agile way of working. Therefore, various tools, structures and software solutions for how to work in accordance with the principles and values are available.

This is in contrast to the case of Ängelholm, where the agile structures for the daily work are not as clearly defined. Contextual factors which could explain this are the longer distance to the manifesto and thereby also the smaller supply of agile structures and software solutions. Consequently, this has required translations efforts to set a structure for the agile work, in comparison to the other two organizations. Thereby, the idea to value working software over comprehensive documentation, as suggested by Beck et al. (2001) can be challenging to pursue. This could also explain the differences between the agile structures which are in place, for example the difference between an agile arena and big room planning or company planning.

Another consequence of the difference in distance between the organizations and the industry where the manifesto was formulated could be the focus which is chosen to approach the idea. While the software developers choose to focus on the tools, the municipality places a larger focus on the values attached to the agile idea. Thereby, the word agile occurs often in Ängelholm, both among employees and in print, despite the jargon around the word in the early stages of the project. A reason to why the word is emphasized could be that many of the employees do not have any former experience of the concept, hence the need for an extensive spread of it. Thus, as Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) suggest, the idea is objectified and thereby made possible to transfer to new settings. The companies with a larger focus on the tools do not use the word agile as extensively as is the case in Ängelholm, which could be due to the pre-experience of agile among the employees in the organizations. As suggested by Czarniawska and Sevón (2005), ideas must materialize to travel; if not physically, at least in somebody's head. Thus, it could be argued that there is a smaller need for physical inscription of agility in a setting where the employees are well-aware of the concept. This as the amount of efforts required to materialize the idea in somebody's mind is smaller when employees are familiar with agility. Hence the reportedly smaller use of physical inscriptions, such as key chains and statements of work which encourage agile work.

Despite the variation of contexts, all organizations present factors which are regarded as barriers to be agile; such as customers, industry regulations and politicians. As given by the empirical material, even those organizations which operate in an industry where the agile manifesto was formulated seem to be bounded by stakeholders. Thus, it could be argued that it is not only the ideas in residence inside of the organization that determine the success of the new idea, but also the ideas in residence of the organizations which operate in direct connection to it. This as it seems to be difficult for an organization to be completely agile if the stakeholders around are not open to translate the idea for their own use. This is in line with the theoretical assumption that for an idea to travel, it needs energy from people (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996).

In addition to the short distance and the agile experience of employees among the software developers, another contributing factor to Crosskey's tool focus could lie in the motivation to work agile. Since this was a result of a customer request, and newly recruited managers believed in agility, the organization was quick to apply the methods. Nevertheless, it is important to note that despite both of the software developers' short distance to the manifesto, local translations have been required to meet the context specific circumstances. This has resulted in small variations in elements such as sprint lengths, degree of customer involvement and routines for synchronizing between the teams. Thus, if the practice of

adopting the agile idea is seen as a process of imitation, the empirical material confirms Sevón's (1996) argumentation that fields are homogeneous, but also to some degree heterogeneous.

Agile as a linguistic artifact

As discussed in the sections above, the context seems to have played a central role for the translations of agile, which in turn has resulted in a wide range of practices in the organizations. This confirms previous research on traveling ideas (Hwang & Suarez, 2005; Löfgren, 2005). As the organizations apply the idea of agility, the idea is materialized into the minimal object of a word, which is translated into the local context of individuals who pass the idea on to each other. This is in line with the idea of isonymism, suggested by Lindberg & Erlingsdottir (2005). Moreover, if practices are seen as a combination of the values attached to agile idea, and the tools and structures that have been put in place to support it, the spread of tools and structures seems to be more prominent than the spread of the values. The empirical material shows that the organizations seem to deviate in terms of focus areas; while the municipality seems to focus more on the values attached to the concept, the software developers seem to concentrate on the tools and structures. This seems to implicate whether the word is emphasized. Using a translation approach, it could be argued that this focus could be derived from the combination of the agile idea's position in the context of which the organization operates and how the organization values the positive and negative effects of emphasizing the name of the concept.

The reason for gathering around a word, despite a variation of practices and a variation in the use of the word, could be explained by the common idea that is shared by all of the organizations – that any organization has the possibility to be agile, but they have to do it their own way. Similarly, Sahlin-Andersson (1996) argue that an organization which decides to adopt a concept, tends to emphasize the similarities and disregard the differences between the organization's own context and the context from which it is separated from. Thus, according to this view, it is not surprising that a management concept can be evident in several contexts. Additionally, this reconfirms the notion of isonymism (Erlingsdóttir & Lindberg, 2005) - as the reception of a concept requires local translations. Viewing this from a translation approach, one could argue that since an organizational concept could be the solution to a number of various problems, and thereby be applied by a variation of organizations, this will inevitably result in a number of various practices. As shown in this study, this could imply a focus on the values attached to the idea or a focus on the tools and structures. So, given the isonymic behavior - that is the sharing of a name - the following discussion will address the meaning of having a word for something.

The use of a word as a result of the context

Although all of the organizations state that they work agile, there is a variation in the usage of the word agile. The empirical material shows that the municipality uses the word agile extensively, in comparison to the software developers, who to a large extent use terminology related to agile methods and in some cases chooses to focus on the undesirable effects of working according to waterfall methods. So, in order to understand the possible underlying causes of this, one must first understand the agile idea's position in the context of which the

organizations operate. Concerning the sphere where the software developers operate, it is evident that the agile way of working is more or less taken for granted, and that working agile is merely an expectation from most of the actors operating in their social space. Using the words of Sevón (1996), it could be argued that agile work is part of their shared frames of meaning, as actors perceive their environment based on the interpretative frames constructed within that space. Thus, if the frames which are constructed are based on organizations imitating each other's agile work, it is likely that any organization operating within that social space will perceive it as a taken for granted way of working. In such a context, it could be argued that there is a low need for the word agile. Moreover, the short distance to the agile manifesto entails employees with a high level of prior knowledge of agile work, which opens for a direct application of the methods. This was made evident in the case of Crosskey, when the request from a customer required quick action, leaving little time for introductory exercises.

Regarding the agile idea's position in the field where the municipality operates, Ängelholm is the first explicit agile municipality. Their agile efforts stand out in the environment of Swedish municipalities, enabling them to use the idea of agility as a statement for renewal. Thus, as suggested by Solli et al. (2005), Ängelholm can use the word agile as an indicator for reforming, and thereby give themselves a new identity. This regardless of the distance between their practices and practices closer to the original agile idea. Moreover, as Sevón (1996) claims that the choice of reference group varies with the predominant issues in the context of the time, it could be argued that Ängelholm has been forced to change reference group when no municipality with a solution to the issue of increased citizen demands has been identified. Therefore, other reference groups, with a potential solution to the issue have been identified for imitation. As is suggested by Sahlin-Andersson (1996), public organizations' comparison with private organizations brings a new language and a new way of perceiving the mission of the organization. Under these circumstances, one could argue that there is a larger need for the use of a word. In contrast to the other organizations, the municipality has a long distance to the agile manifesto, entailing a low supply of methods which support their organizational characteristics and little previous experience of agile work among employees. Therefore, it could be argued that it would be difficult for the municipality to turn directly to the structure and tools, hence the need for a word. Moreover, Czarniawska-Joerges and Joerges (1990) claim that collective actions are impossible without shared meanings. Thereby, the linguistic artifact agile plays the role of creating shared meanings in a context of a municipality operating at a distance far from the agile manifesto. As suggested by Strannegård (2007), using a linguistic artifact in such a setting can ensure that certain actions are carried out. Thus, the word agile becomes a performative tool which can encourage certain action as it contains interpretations which facilitate action.

In line with the idea of friction (Czarniawska 1997), if the new idea differs significantly from the ideas in residence there will be a significant number of translations carried out in the organization. Ängelholm, as other municipalities, were to a large extent organized based on traditional ideas. As these formed the foundation of the ideas in residence, and the agile idea can be considered far from those, it could be argued that the time scope of the transformation project and the resources which were received by the EU were needed for the number of translations that were required for the ideas to meet. For instance, the

competence development of employees was used to encourage individuals to adapt the idea of agility according to their own working situation. Thus, the traveling idea of agility and the ideas in residence were able to transform as individuals passed the new idea on to each other, allowing for translations of it according to their respective frame of reference. Much of the work involved the processing of the values attached to the word agile rather than the tools which could be used - hence the extensive use and the organization-wide awareness of the word agile.

The use of a word as a result of expected consequences

As indicated above, the answer to the organizations' areas of focus when applying the agile idea can also lie in how the positive and negative effects of having a word for something is valued by the organizations, given Brunsson's (2010) argumentation on how names can generate both positive and negative emotions. As given by the empirical material, the spread of an organization's way of working could be more prevailing when attaching it to a label. For instance, it can facilitate the communication of the organization's way of working. This is in line with the argumentation by Czarniawska and Joerges (1996), emphasizing the importance of turning an idea into a linguistic artifact for allowing it to travel. The negative effects evident in the material, for example the jargon around the term agility in Ängelholm, shows how a word can generate opposition, as individuals can be provoked by it. This confirms the findings of Brunsson (2010), who reports that even in cases when a management concept generates satisfactory results, skepticism of the word itself can be noted.

The empirical material of this study show that the municipality seem to value the positive effects of having a name for a concept, more than the negatives. This as they are situated in a context where an extensive usage of the name is required, due to the need for spreading the way of working in the organization. The software developers, on the other hand, seem to value the negative aspects more. The empirical material also shows that the word becomes less important if one departure from the assumption that the future demands are uncertain. Accordingly, what would be more important is one's ability to adapt. Using the terminology of Czarniawska (1996), it could be argued that the ability to adapt will be determined by the clash between the ideas in residence and the new idea, regardless of which management concept that might be. This as this study shows that individuals can perceive agile as a traveling concept among others. For instance, there are suggestions for how the need for new concepts can be explained, one of them addressing the issue with sticking to a concept when organizations in other industries start to adapt the concept. This view is supported by Czarniawska and Sevón (2005), who highlight the constant emergence of new fashions. As the attractiveness of a fashion declines with the spread of the imitation, one could argue that the spread of an idea could de facto imply the downfall of the same idea. Thereby, there would be room for new fashions. Thus, as the constant flow of meetings between new ideas and an organization's existing settings require work in form of negotiation and interpretation (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996), it could be considered desirable to have ideas in residence which do not generate a high level of friction when a new idea is introduced. This might be accomplished by toning down the name of the concept. Considering the context in which these organizations act, it could be argued that the high rate of change in their environment requires the adaption of other management concepts in the future. Therefore, it becomes more

important for such organizations to enable a smooth clash between the ideas in residence and the traveling concept, hence the down-toning of the name itself.

Bringing back linguistics into translation

The results of this study confirm that organizations adopt a management concept by translating the traveling idea to the contextual settings in which they are positioned. As the same management concept can be perceived as the solution to a range of contextual challenges, organizational imitation leads to homogeneous fields. Additionally, as local settings give rise to translations, heterogeneous practices are formed. Moreover, as such a concept can comprise both tools and values, organizations focus more on the tools or the values attached to the concept, due to their local contexts. Thus, as agile seem to include more than the tools and methods, organizations as the municipality of Ängelholm are able to undertake the agile idea through re-conceptualization. If the agile idea would not also include an element of values and the benefits related to an extensive use of the word would not be considered, such organizations would not see the value in applying it. Correspondingly, the predominant focus on the methods in the software companies would not be understood if the down-toning of the name would not be considered in relation to the friction which is created between ideas in residence and new ideas.

If one aims to understand the ambiguous nature of a management concept, it has been proven fruitful to use a translation perspective in order to see the complexity of the context. By complementing the time-space view of the context with the meaning of a word, using the literature on naming, one can recognize several dimensions of management concepts: values and tools. Doing so, the understanding for the concept is expanded. Thereby, one can understand the large variety of organizations and practices, originating from the application of the same management concept. This can explain the ambiguity of the management concept and increase the understanding for how it is adapted to the context - and thereby for how isonymism becomes the result of imitation. As shown above, an expanded understanding of a concept can also lead to organizations leaving a concept, which creates room for new fashions. This provides an additional model of explanation to the rise and the subsequent fall of management concepts as trends.

Conclusion and implications

This study set out to increase the knowledge about contextual settings and their implications on agility as a circulating management concept. This by conducting a comparative study of three different organizations within different industries, and thereby answer the call for further research on agility using a comparative perspective which addresses several fields of industries (Bottani, 2010; Rosengren & Windahl Strömblad, 2017). The aim was addressed in two questions, where the first one concerned how organizations adopt a management concept, such as agile, to their context and the second one addressed an interest for what the implications of the fact that a management concept consists of both tools and values, could be.

This study has shown how organizations adopt the agile idea by adjusting it to their local context and how organizations navigate in the jungle of both values and tools attached to the agile concept. The solution for the organizations has proven to be to focus more on the values or the tools, which shows how organizations are able to translate it according to their

own context. Assuming organizations' tendency to imitate, a larger variation of agile organizations is evident when organizations are given the opportunity to focus more on the values attached to the agile idea. This as organizations then will allow themselves to search for a management concept to imitate, such as agility, outside of their own industry. Correspondingly, it also gives answers to organizations' choice to tone down the word of a concept. On a wider level, this study presents insights into why a management concept such as agility, can be understood as ambiguous, by highlighting the heterogeneity of agile practices. By complementing the time-space view of the context with the meaning of a word, through the use of the literature on naming, one can more comprehensively understand the complexity of the context. This opens for the understanding of how concepts include several dimensions. Thereby, translations in different contexts are enabled, and as the translations do not look the same there is a variation in organizational solutions - hence the ambiguous nature of the concept. What is more, it seems as though this ambiguity remains although the use of the concept is evident in various organizational settings. Could it perhaps even be so that the ambiguous nature of the concept is the source of its attractiveness?

The contributions of this study are fourfold. First, it contributes to the research on agility by highlighting the impact of the context – something that not has been the focus in previous research. Second, the theoretical implication of this study is the contribution to translation theory's time-space view of the context by complementing it with the meaning of a word. Third, this study contributes with practical implications on how organizations, and especially those operating globally, need to pay extra attention to the global and local settings, as every context will require a different adoption of a management concept. Recognizing a concept as twofold can play an important role in an organization's search towards legitimacy and towards being perceived as an attractive employer in industry 4.0 – or in any dynamic organizational climate with prevailing challenges concerning maintenance of competence. As such, organizations are able to adapt the distribution of values and tools, together with the use of the word of the concept, according to their context. This might guide both private and public organizations in a world where the emergence and disappearance of a large variety of management concepts prevail. Finally, this study also come with implications for consultants and trade associations by showing the potential from understanding a concept as both values and tools. Recognizing this, such actors can better support organizations in their search for solutions to adapt to an uncertain organizational climate. This as having both in mind can facilitate the understanding of the spread of the practices, and thereby how large varieties of organizations are able to adopt a management concept as a solution to a wide spread of management issues.

Concerning possible limitations of the study, it could first be argued that a longitudinal approach has not been adopted. Although it would have been interesting to see the development of the agile concept in the three cases, it is not the journey itself that has been the object of interest in this study, but rather the prevailing understandings of the concept in the different contexts. Second, it could be argued that there are two limitations concerning the selection of organizations which can have affected the variation of understandings of agile. One explanation is the distance to the context in which the concept has gained ground the most, and not the industry of the case organizations' customers, as first expected. Moreover, the differences and similarities in the complexity of the organizations,

can have affected the variation of respondents in each organization. Despite efforts to interview as different positions as possible, this resulted in a smaller variation of professions in two of the organizations, in comparison to the third one, where respondents represented several professions. Third, a limitation with the small sample of organizations is that only three organizations might not give an understanding for how agility is understood in other organizations.

For future research, it would be fruitful to examine how other organizational contexts can play a role in the adoption of the agile concept, given its composition of values and tools. It would also be interesting to conduct similar studies on other management concepts. Moreover, future research using a translation approach may also further explore the meaning of a word in order to better understand the role of the context.

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