



**DEPARTMENT OF
APPLIED IT**

MAKING SENSE OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION:

How sensemaking is used to drive early stage
change

Brandin Anna

Larsson Ylipuranen Petra

Thesis:	30 hp
Program:	Digital Leadership
Level:	Second Cycle
Year:	2019
Supervisor:	Dina Koutsikouri
Examiner:	Johan Magnusson
Report nr:	003

Abstract

This thesis investigates sensemaking in an IT company that undergo change in connection with digital transformation. The study focuses on the managerial perspective in the early stage of change where the main challenge often is to motivate and lead people. The theoretical framework with eight sensemaking mechanisms by Iveroth and Hallencreutz (2016) is used as an analytical lens throughout the study. Empirical data in forms of in-depth interviews, informal observations and documents were analyzed in order to identify how different mechanisms of sensemaking is used by managers in the organization when they communicate the change message. Out of the eight mechanisms, we identified that *change through logic of attraction, provide a direction, translate as well as stay in motion* is essential during the early stage of change, where they can be used by the change leader to mobilize support from the employees. The findings can guide managers to lead when they prepare for change. Further, the results contribute to the body of knowledge about sensemaking and how it is used during early stages of change processes. Our conclusion is that the framework by Iveroth and Hallencreutz is useful when applied to understand a sensemaking process.

Keywords

Sensemaking, digital transformation, organizational change

Foreword

We would like to thank our supervisor Dina Koutsikouri, who has given us useful feedback during our work with the thesis and repeatedly reminded us of the complexity of the subject. This really helped us to make sense of sensemaking.

Further, we would like to thank the company we conducted the study at for letting us study their digital transformation. Being at the company has given us immense insight that has contributed to our learning, but also a lot of joyful moments during coffee breaks to remember.

Table of contents

1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 RELATED WORK	3
2.1 ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE	3
2.2 MANAGING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE	4
2.3 DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION	5
2.4 SENSEMAKING	5
2.5 SENSEGIVING	8
3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	9
3.1 EIGHT SENSEMAKING MECHANISMS	9
4 METHOD	12
4.1 RESEARCH SETTING	12
4.2 DATA COLLECTION	12
4.2.1 Interviews	12
4.2.2 Observations	14
4.2.3 Documents	14
4.2.4 Reflection over choice of method	14
4.3 DATA ANALYSIS	14
5 RESULTS	16
5.1 REASONS FOR CHANGE	16
5.2 CHANGE THROUGH LOGIC OF ATTRACTION	17
5.3 PROVIDE A DIRECTION	17
5.4 TRANSLATE	18
5.5 STAY IN MOTION	18
5.6 LOOK CLOSELY AND UPDATE	19
5.7 CONVERSE CANDIDLY	20
5.8 UNBLOCK IMPROVISATION	20
5.9 FACILITATE LEARNING	21
6 DISCUSSION	22
7 LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH	24
8 CONCLUSION	25
9 REFERENCES	26

1 Introduction

The ability to manage change as well as handling responses to change among employees are key challenges in digital transformation processes (Porter & Heppelmann, 2014; Wood, 2007; Reim, Parida & Örtqvist, 2013). Uncertainty arises when organizations are required to increase their flexibility and constantly be ready to adopt new methods as the shifting environment makes it difficult to predict market movements in advance (Wood, 2007; Gareis, 2010). There is a need to constantly be resilient and refine the use of technologies to stay competitive in today's digital environment (Porter & Heppelmann, 2014; Svahn, Mathiassen & Lindgren, 2017). However, new requirements do not only entail new technologies, digital transformation also require a revised organizational structure and a new mindset to stay relevant in today's digital environment (Vial, 2019). It is especially important to acknowledge and capture value that surface from new technologies, as it can enable new functionalities that increase efficiency (Porter & Heppelmann, 2014; Reim, Parida & Örtqvist, 2013).

A common misconception amongst incumbent firms is to interpret digital transformation to solely be about technological implementations, instead of putting emphasis on the digital strategies that are the actual core, and a necessity, of a digital transformation (Kane et al., 2015; Kane, Philips, Copulsky & Andrus, 2019). Skog (2019) clarify digital transformation to enable innovation and renewal of organizations instead of solely implementing new digital technologies, which is defined as an IT-enabled change. The IT-enabled change is gradual and more focused on only the implementation rather than a digital transformation that target on the organization and its social aspects (Skog, 2019).

In order to lead transformation efforts successfully leaders need to put more emphasis on how they communicate change (Iveroth & Hallencreutz, 2016; Kane et al., 2019). According to Iveroth and Hallencreutz (2016) embracing the change initiative is imperative and is more likely to lead to actual change than simply talking about it. It is important that leaders are aware of and embrace mechanisms of sensemaking in order to make sense of what they perceive and communicates to others, something that become especially important in complex and fast-changing environments (Ancona, 2012). Roddy (2011) further explains that it is particularly difficult to change people's behavior as it requires them to adopt a new mindset. When a leader utilizes sensemaking it is more likely that he or she will influence others in a desired way when they, in turn, are making sense of a situation.

One of the most important and essential tasks of sensemaking is to convey the message of change in a comprehensible way for the receiver (Ancona, 2012; Gareis, 2010). The communication should comprise knowledge about what capabilities the organization needs to be able to maximize the value creation (Reim, Parida & Örtqvist, 2015; 2013). The difficulty for many organizations is that they contain a various set of people with different backgrounds and experiences, this calls for extensive knowledge about the organization and how to lead a diverse set of people in order to lead the change (Anzola-Roman, Bayona-Sáez & Garcia-Marco, 2017; Kerzner, 2017). This requires a leadership that is intrepid and are able to steer through a time of digital disruptions (Kane et al., 2019).

Sensemaking can help to create a sense of what is happening in the environment and then guide the leader into what capabilities to use when driving change (Ancona,2012). Translated into a practical context, these capabilities include, for example, how to translate the vision of a change into graspable actions. This is particularly important in order to create a shared understanding in the early stages of change, which is viewed as the main challenge for the organization we study.

An important mechanism to assess during a change process is to establish a joint understanding of the change, an area where there today is a lack of literature (Lenka, Parida & Wincent, 2017; Anzola-Roman, Bayona-Sáez & Garcia-Marco, 2018). Further, it has been identified that sensemaking during the initial phase of a change project is particularly important, nevertheless a lack of literature and studies within this field has been observed (Kolltveit & Grønhaug, 2004). Therefore, this study aims to examine the initiation of a change process at a firm, operating in the IT sector, in order to understand the sensemaking mechanisms that leaders adopt when they communicate the change to the organization. The question this study aims to answer is as follows;

What sensemaking mechanisms do leaders use to mobilize support from employees during the early stages of digital transformation?

By identifying sensemaking mechanisms in use during an early stage of digital transformation in an IT firm. The intention is to fill the mentioned gap and provide knowledge of how leaders use mechanisms of sensemaking to facilitate a coherent vision and motivation for digital transformation.

2 Related Work

The literature on change and change management is vast and varied. In this section, related work on organizational change is presented along with the related concept of digital transformation. This will be followed by an overview of the concepts of sensemaking and sensegiving.

2.1 Organizational Change

Change occurs constantly in different situations which makes the concept complex and therefore difficult to pin down. The need for organizational change can be prompted by many different triggers of change. For example, *external triggers* can include new technology, changes in customers' requirements, innovations of competitors, legislation and government policies (e.g. GDPR) etc; whereas internal triggers can include appointment of a new CEO, adoption of new technology, inadequate skills and knowledge base, etc (Burnes, 2009).

A common distinction is between planned change and emergent change (Iveroth & Hallencreutz, 2016). Planned change, refers to a change that is deliberate, a result of conscious reasoning and actions. It has a distinct starting point, endpoint and sub-goals to be achieved along the way towards the end goal. Planned change initiatives are often provoked by a deficiency of an organization to continuously adapt to their environment (Dunphy, 1996). One way to explain planned change is by the three-stage model proposed by Lewin and Schein (Wirth, 2004). Their model consists of three stages: Unfreeze, Change, and Refreeze. The stage of unfreezing evolves around becoming motivated to change and “unlearn” practices that are about to change, the change step is about transit toward the goal state, in order to end up in the refreeze stage where the new practices are consolidated.

In contrast, emergent change is signified by constant and cumulative alterations of processes and routines (Weick & Quinn, 1999). In other words, it unfolds in an apparently spontaneous and unplanned way. In their comparison of episodic and continuous change, Weick and Quinn define three stages of continuous change; *freeze*, *rebalance*, and *unfreeze*. In the *freeze* stage, processes are made visible and routines are mapped. This leads to *rebalance*, where the mapped processes are interpreted and patterns of actions are remapped to achieve a goal (e.g. increase efficiency), then improvisation is resumed in the *unfreeze* stage where the new ideas are tried out (Weick & Quinn, 1999).

Bolin and Bergquist (2004, p.4) observe that: “*One can think of change as monolithic and revolutionary, differentiated and incremental, or invisible and continual*”. Planned change tends to be more disruptive than emergent change, as it often regards replacing one system with another while emergent changes are accomplished in small, incremental steps (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Wood (2007) support this by writing that the best way for an organization to create capabilities for innovation is to endorse innovative initiatives and encourage improvisation rather than to strictly follow a plan.

2.2 Managing organizational change

It is generally accepted that the ability to manage change effectively is critical to an organization's long-term survival (Burnes, 2009). Nevertheless, the vast and 'sprawling' literature on the management of change makes it a cumbersome endeavor, especially so for large organizations (Palmer & Dunford, 2008). Above all, any approach to change needs to take into account the reality of organizational life in terms of people, culture and structures (Burnes, 2009). Organizational culture takes more time and effort to change than rules and routines, mainly due to that it is not challenged on a daily basis (Scapens, 2006).

An emerging concept that has been used to illustrate different stages that an organization goes through during planned change is 'landscaping' (Iveroth & Hallencreutz, 2016). In times of transformation, a successful change leader navigates an organization through four landscapes: comfort, inertia, transformation, and consolidation. The rational underpinning this perspective is that people must become aware of and understand the meaning of the new things that are presented to them (e.g. a new system, routine etc) (ibid, 2016). The landscape of comfort is stable and fairly predictable and evolves around contemplating and consolidating the current situation rather than altering routines. To commence a change process, a general understanding that change is needed is established while being in this landscape (Iveroth & Hallencreutz, 2016). The importance of a shared sense of urgency is also highlighted in the well-known 8-step model of change by Kotter (2007). When change is about to take off, the organization enters the landscape of inertia. In this landscape, uncertainty is prominent. People are getting into new routines and unlearning old practices which can cause resistance since the landscape is not as calm and predictive as it previously were (Kotter, 2007; Leonardi, 2008; Vial, 2019). In this landscape, it is important that the change leader demonstrates the direction so that the change process does not stall. This leads to the transformation landscape, which Iveroth and Hallencreutz (2016) describe as iterations of action and relapse. This means that new possibilities are investigated, with varying results, hence it is important that the change leader cultivates a constructive climate of dialogue to enable learning from mistakes. When people are starting to adjust to the changes, the organization enters the landscape of consolidation. As the name hints, the acquired knowledge is consolidated, encouraged by change leaders that reward positive behavior. The landscape metaphor is not a linear process but iterative, as an organization could regress to a previous landscape instead of moving forward. Furthermore, the consolidation landscape will gradually become a new landscape of comfort when people settle in (Iveroth & Hallencreutz, 2016). Kotter (1995; 2012) observe that it is essential to keep the momentum of a change process going as well as having a clear vision that has a strong enough buy-in that will motivate people to adopt the change. The momentum can also be used to create and enhance new initiatives that aligns with changes in the market, which can benefit the organization (Kotter, 2012).

A clear and sensible vision accompanied by a strategy that easily can be communicated is fundamental to lead the organization in the right direction together with a leadership and people that feel encouraged to act on the vision (Kotter, 1995; Kane et al., 2016).

2.3 Digital transformation

There is no universal definition of digital transformation. One common definition is derived from Riedl, Belian and Hess (2017, p.7) *“The term ‘digital transformation’ is used primarily to describe the transformation from partly digitized business and society models into fully digitized business and society models.”*

There is a common misunderstanding of digital transformation to solely be the process of implementing new digital technologies. Emerging research shows that the digital transformation should be seen as strategies to integrate the technology with the business, resulting in an organization that is better prepared to meet changing requirements from the environment (Kane et al., 2015; Riedl et al., 2017). Digitalization can, if leveraged successfully, enable greater productivity and efficiency for companies, which are important capabilities in a competitive environment (Riedl et al., 2017). Digital transformation adds complexity into change as it not only requires organizations to enhance products and services, but also revise their operational structure to better support value creation and capture (Skog, 2019; Vial, 2019). The view on digital transformations can be the difference that makes one business more successful than another, as the digital maturity within companies stems from their understanding of how technologies can be merged into the business for creating new opportunities (Kane et al., 2015). Digital maturity derives from a digital strategy that allows and enhance the combination of digital processes and models with leadership and culture that push for the transformation onward (Matt, Hess & Benlian, 2015; Kane et al., 2015). Digital technologies can aid the change process that firms need to undergo to stay relevant in the digital environment, but they further require structural changes and a new mindset to manage a digital transformation (Vial, 2019). The essential part of digital transformation is, therefore, to evolve by incorporating digital technologies in business without losing the capabilities that made them competitive in the first place (Kane et al., 2015; Riedl et al., 2017).

In view of this, digital transformation is not a simple one-off project; it is a continuous process with no clear end. An added complexity is the difficulty leaders face to motivate get people onboard the change if there is no felt urgency (e.g. ‘the company is doing alright’) (Kane et al., 2016; Ancona, 2012; Fitzgerald et al., 2013). Further, a transformation becomes even more challenging to drive if the reasons for changing are insufficiently communicated and the vision of the intended result is unclear (Matt, Hess & Benlian, 2015; Fitzgerald, Kruschwitz, Bonnet & Welch, 2013; Weill, Apel, Woerner & Banner, 2019). For this reason, digital transformations require great leadership abilities and a shared vision (Fitzgerald et al., 2013). There is a need of executives who have experience of digital transformation strategies to be able to move forward with a clear vision and to manage the resistance that may arise in the process (Matt, Hess & Benlian, 2015; Fitzgerald et al., 2013; Kane et al., 2016).

In sum, it is imperative for a successful digital transformation process to formulate a clear change message (Fitzgerald et al., 2013). This pertains to the framing of the message so that everyone can grasp the vision, which is fundamental for preventing resistance towards change (Seyranian, 2014; Kane et al., 2016). According to Kane et al., (2019) there is a need to have clear vision that provides direction in a transforming organization. The vision for the change needs, therefore, to be framed in a positive matter and present the compatibility of change to resonate with the group of followers.

Seyranian (2014) propose that positive leadership is grown from the practical ground of re-framing the social identity in line with the change, this would be to present a compelling vision of the change for a group. Inclusive language such as “we” or “us” reinforce the social identity framing as it will help leaders influence groups facing or going through change (Seyranian, 2014; George & Jones, 2012). People within the change will feel included and part of the change that will enhance the perception of them being responsible and driver of it (Seyranian, 2014; Matt, Hess & Benlian, 2015; Kane et al., 2019).

2.4 Sensemaking

The concept of sensemaking refers to the process of reducing uncertainty that arise when faced with change or something previously unknown (Weick, 1995). This is important since resistance to change often stems from people’s concerns about how they potentially will be affected by change (Venus, 2013). Another way to explain it is that sensemaking is a thinking process where one reflects over past episodes in order to explain a present, unexpected event (Weick, 1995). Additionally, Iveroth and Hallencreutz define sensemaking to simply mean “*to make sense out of something*” (2016, s.47).

In sum, sensemaking is something that occurs when you apply meaning to an activity to understand it in order to determine how to act in the context (Iveroth & Hallencreutz, 2016; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Further, Anacona (2012) mentions that sensemaking activities often mean to move from something simple to something complex and then back to the simple, meaning that it becomes complex when new, complicated, information is acquired and reverts back to simple when the complex information is understood (as a result of sensemaking activities).

Applied in the field of business, sensemaking can, for example, involve learning about how technologies can be used, why markets are shifting, or to understand why a previously successful business model is no longer viable (Ancona, 2012). Sensemaking within organizations tends to be more complex than on the individual level, presumably because there are more actors involved and hence, greater variety in norms and language within the organization (Iveroth & Hallencreutz, 2016). Further, organizational sensemaking is mainly a social process, regarding interactions between people that creates generative effects (Iveroth & Hallencreutz, 2016; Seyranian, 2014).

One way to provide a context of meaning is the use of stories, which can be used to describe a situation and make use of cues from another familiar situation which makes it easier to understand the current, unknown situation (Weick, 1995; Bolin & Bergqvist, 2004). This is according to Weick (1995) an effective tool as a change leader can govern people’s point of reference, they influence people’s attention and their attitudes towards the change, which in turn affect the overall change process. When a group of individuals is connected through shared cues, they are starting to create a common understanding and meaning of the context. This shared sensemaking within a group is to be preferred over sensemaking in isolation (Iveroth & Hallencreutz, 2016).

Iveroth and Hallencreutz (2016) state that when an organization changes, people often have a hard time understanding what the change will mean for them personally and their work tasks.

They reason that this is where the sensemaking process becomes a way for leaders to influence the way people understand the change. In this regard, Weick (1995) have identified seven characteristics of the sensemaking process:

1. **Grounded in identity construction.** Meaning that past experiences contributes to our sensemaking, and new experiences continually redefine our identity in a dynamic process.
2. **Retrospective.** Meaning that sensemaking is a retrospective activity, since we first act and then make sense of the action.
3. **Enactive of sensible environments.** Meaning that the enactment consolidates the sensemaking process.
4. **Social.** Meaning that the context where sensemaking occurs affects its outcome, since an organization consists of intersubjectively shared meanings which are shaped through everyday social activities.
5. **Ongoing.** Meaning that there is no distinct starting- or endpoint of sensemaking since we are always in the middle of things.
6. **Focused on and by extracted cues.** Meaning that we make sense using cues, which are simple, familiar structures that we utilize in the unfamiliar setting.
7. **Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy.** Meaning that people seek the most plausible explanation rather than the most accurate. What is deemed as plausible is highly individual.

These characteristics explain what sensemaking is but is not to be seen as guidelines for how to achieve sensemaking. Building on Weick's (1995) work, Iveroth and Hallencreutz (2016) modified the sensemaking process by providing an additional mechanism, which emphasizes that sensemaking also is *prospective*. They lean on Gioia, Thomas, Clark and Chittipeddi's (p.378, 1994) definition on prospective which is: "*The conscious and intentional consideration of the probable future impact of certain actions, an especially non actions, on the meaning construction processes of themselves and others*". In other words, it is important to take the future in prospect when starting a change project as it can require changes in processes.

2.5 Sensegiving

The increasingly digitalized environment generates new challenges that need to be understood by organizations in order for them to adapt and stay competitive (Gareis, 2010; Porter & Heppelmann, 2014). Implementation of change within organizations continues to be a struggle and is difficult to succeed with (Hallencreutz, 2011; Matt, Hess & Benlian, 2015). Sensemaking is most challenging during the initial phase of change, as Iveroth and Hallencreutz (p.49, 2016) write; *“When change is introduced, employees and stakeholders feel that things are ‘up in the air’”*.

The concept of sensegiving stems from the process where individuals are trying to influence and aid others when they make sense of a situation. This could, for example, entail how the communication of how a certain context could be conveyed with the purpose to generate desired behavior from the receiver of the information (Iveroth & Hallencreutz, 2016).

Hence, the sensemaking will be affected by various sensegiving processes such as social interaction or external information. Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) gives the following definition: *“Sensegiving’ is concerned with the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality”* (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p.11)

In organizations, managers and stakeholders try to influence their employees to make sense of changes by establishing shared visions and goals (Iveroth & Hallencreutz, 2016). The sensemakers (employees) will interpret this, and will, in turn, perform change activities based on the information of the sensegivers. The sensegivers (managers and stakeholders) will perceive how changes unfold, adjust their plan and once again take on the sensegiver role. In an iterative process, the sensemakers will, in turn, become sensegivers for others. Therefore, one cannot exist without the other. Both mechanisms are intertwined and essential for individual’s creation of perception (Iveroth & Hallencreutz, 2016). For this study, the focus and emphasis are on the sensemaking process, however, it should be noted that the concepts are tightly connected.

3 Theoretical Framework

This section describes the theoretical framework that has been guiding the study and analysis. The framework is an expansion of Weick’s (1995) sensemaking characteristics as outlined in Related work

3.1 Eight mechanisms of sensemaking

Misunderstandings and uncertainty frequently cause tensions and create barriers in change processes. It is therefore essential for those who pursue change to also put effort into sensegiving so that the sensemaking becomes meaningful. In an attempt to provide guidance to organizations that pursue change, Iveroth and Hallencreutz (2016) suggest eight mechanisms to acknowledge in order to lay a foundation for meaningful sensemaking. These eight mechanisms are considered to support the development of the ones mentioned by Weick (1995) and are the following;

Eight sensemaking mechanisms	
Change through logic of attraction	This mechanism emphasizes to create inspiring leadership throughout the change process. When leaders focus on changing themselves instead of merely expect others to change, they will inspire others to change themselves and apply a new mindset (Iveroth & Hallencreutz, 2016; Kerzner, 2017). The leader provides a good example of a desirable attitude and demonstrate that for the change to be accomplished, people must be active rather than wait passively for the change to happen. If the leader manages to inspire to change, other people have the opportunity to mimic and copy if they are unsure about how to act (Iveroth & Hallencreutz, 2016).
Provide a direction	The focus here is for leaders to be able to provide a clear strategic view and alignment for everyone to understand and strive for a common goal, in order to successfully change. This will reduce the uncertainty of how to proceed and establish confidence in how to implement the change. People can be influenced and establish understanding when a common language is used. By using cues that are created upon visions, symbols or maps will help to create a common sense of the direction that will decrease the confusion (Iveroth & Hallencreutz, 2016). Educations and events of training, such as workshops can be used to map out the direction and motivate people to go through with the change (Iveroth & Hallencreutz, 2016; George, Jones & Sharbrough, 2005).

Translate	<p>Leaders need to know how to translate abstract decisions into concrete directives and actions in order to apply the change. This requires a holistic vision of the change and what issues and obstacles that need to be addressed to be able to face the reactions of change from the customers. A vision must be disassembled into actions, else it will not be brought to reality. This requires leaders to have a broad theoretical and practical knowledge of transformations to increase the likelihood of making a successful translation (Iveroth & Hallencreutz, 2016).</p>
Stay in motion	<p>Change initiatives have a tendency of getting stuck in the process, often due to the ability of leaders to delay the change with extensive discussions and analyses. To avoid this sort of delay, leaders should make large, visible decisions in a matter of days instead than after a decision process over numerous weeks or even months. People that show creativity and engage in initiatives and ideas should be promoted as they will be more eager to engage in the change when they feel like they are a part of something meaningful (Iveroth & Hallencreutz, 2016).</p> <p>Further, leaders should make sure that no company policies hinder actions related to the change. People should feel inspired to make changes, move forward and carry out the change (Iveroth & Hallencreutz, 2016).</p>
Look closely and update	<p>People in a change process need to stay constantly updated to avoid faulty decisions to be taken, and if erroneous decisions are made, it should be possible to detect them rapidly and take action. Leaders need to stay adjourned about the situation both from a leader's point of view as well as have good insight in what happens on the ground, to be able to inform the rest about the current and evolving situation of the change. Iveroth and Hallencreutz (2016) advise leaders to leave the conference rooms and learn the situation amongst those who are directly afflicted by change, by doing that it is easier to encourage people to pay attention to how their situation evolves.</p>
Converse candidly	<p>Leaders often assume that as long they have communicated the initiative and vision, people will understand and know what to do throughout the process. This is seldom the case and therefore having 'candid conversations' about expectations are key. This will help to create a sense of what people feel about the change and if there is anything that needs to be included or assessed in the process.</p> <p>Further, this emphasises that a leader must constantly communicate what is going on to ensure that everyone affected by the change is on board (Iveroth & Hallencreutz, 2016).</p>

<p>Unblock improvisation</p>	<p>This mechanism denotes the importance of letting others improvise and test ideas as part of the change process. The idea is to reduce the gap between planning and execution and encourage people to let go of existing frames and routines. The more people are included in testing and discussing ideas the more encouraged they might feel about the change since they have been part of the process. By letting people work freely, it becomes visible whether they understood an idea or not (Iveroth & Hallencreutz, 2016).</p>
<p>Facilitate learning</p>	<p>Emphasis on learning as an ongoing process is another key characteristic. It means that leaders need to encourage learning and provide support for people to obtain new skills and knowledge that allows them to be more flexible in the face of change. Formal education can aid the facilitation of learning, for example in the form of workshops or lectures. Following this, allowing time for reflection of what has been learned alongside giving feedback are also key. The leader should encourage outside-the-box thinking since that can result in new ideas. It is also important to view failure as an opportunity to learn how not to do instead of viewing it solely as a mistake, by giving accurate feedback the failure can instead be a learning experience (Iveroth & Hallencreutz, 2016; George & Jones, 2012).</p>

Table 1. Eight sensemaking mechanisms, adapted from Iveroth & Hallencreutz (2016, p. 120-123).

4 Method

The study was carried out using a qualitative case study approach. It was conducted at a company within the IT sector. A case study was deemed suitable for the research question since case studies are recognized as an empirical method that yields in-depth explanations of a specific phenomenon in its natural context (Zainal, 2007). The case study was confined to investigate sensemaking in an early stage of change, which from a broader perspective reflects where the company is situated in terms of their overall digital transformation process. Empirical data was gathered mainly through interviews, and informal observations and conversations at the company, which will be described further in section 4.2.

4.1 Research setting

The company is a large actor in the IT sector with business offices from north to south in Sweden, as well as operations in a number of European countries. The company employs around 2500 persons in Sweden, of which a lion part work as consultants. The core business of the company is to provide IT infrastructure. Traditionally, the company has been a business-to-business reseller of hardware, a position they still acquire, however they have evolved into combining the hardware services with software services and consultancy.

The company was deemed suitable as an example to study as an instance of a planned, large scale early change process, where change is motivated by the ambition to stay competitive in an environment that undergoes a digital transformation. The change is planned to generate an increased ability to innovate and nuance their way of working more digital. Contact was initiated with a manager at the firm, which led to a meeting where the possibilities for collaboration were discussed and after that access was gained to the company. Conforming to Zainal's (2007) notion that it is common to select a small geographical area or a limited number of people for a case study, this case study was limited to one of the company's business offices, located in Gothenburg.

4.2 Data collection

4.2.1 Interviews

The main data collection method was semi-structured interviews. In total, 9 interviews were performed with respondents working in the company as managers. According to Hennik, Hutter and Bailey (2011), the advantage of semi-structured interviews is that it provides the researcher with rich, qualitative data, that enables the researcher to gain a deeper understanding about the respondent's experiences and attitude towards the subject of interest, thus a qualitative approach was chosen for this study.

The interviews generated in-depth knowledge about the sensemaking activities that were present in the company, however, this was complemented with data from observations to obtain a richer empirical description (Eisenhardt, 1989).

The respondents were purposely selected because of their roles in the company, as they were assumed to hold knowledge and insights that would be relevant to answer the research question (see Table 2). E-mail addresses to the intended respondents were provided by our contact person at the company, and who also notified the respondents in advance that they would be contacted with the purpose to be recruited to take part in the study.

Respondent 1	Director of business development and innovation, part of the national business management group.
Respondent 2	Business area manager
Respondent 3	Consultant manager and project manager
Respondent 4	Business area manager
Respondent 5	Sales manager
Respondent 6	Consultant manager
Respondent 7	Marketing project manager
Respondent 8	Business area manager
Respondent 9	Consultant manager

Table 2. List of respondents.

As seen in Table 2, the respondents have managerial positions in the company, meaning that they hopefully, but not necessarily, will act as leaders throughout the change process. All the interviews were conducted in meeting rooms at the company's office in Gothenburg. The interviews lasted approximately 40-60 minutes. Both researchers were present during all interviews. Before every interview the researchers asked for approval before recording and informed that all gathered data will be handled confidential. The interviews were recorded, and notes were taken simultaneously during the interview. The interview guide consisted of open questions regarding the change, both in general and more specifically related to the ongoing change. The theoretical framework was used as a guide to construct the interview guide so that the questions would reflect the different mechanisms. The interview guide was not strictly followed as different follow-up questions could emerge depending on how the respondent answered and bring the conversation into a new direction.

4.2.2 Observations

When conducting an in-depth case study, it is recommended by for example Walsham (1995) to frequently visit the research site over an extended period of time. The researchers followed this recommendation and spent approximately 40 hours per week, with some exceptions, over four months at the company's office in Gothenburg. This allowed the researchers to observe employees in their daily work. It was a conscious decision to be at the business office, both in terms of having access to meeting rooms where interviews were held, but also in order to gain a better understanding of the organizational context. In that sense, the researchers were participants in the observed setting, conducting the study overtly. This gave insight in how the transformation were talked about in the office as well as confirming the results from the interviews. According to Hennink et al. (2011), the mere presence of a researcher may affect how people act, however, this effect diminishes over time as people get used to the researchers to a point where the researchers become a natural part of the setting. As a result, the researchers were aware of the researchers' potential influence on interviewees responses

4.2.3 Documents

Another important source for data was internal company documents such as quarterly reports and other materials stored in the intranet. These sources were instrumental in gauging how the digital transformation process was framed and if any sensemaking mechanisms were used (or could be gleaned). The documents were mainly used to affirm the information given from interviews and give deeper insight in what the transformation entail.

4.2.4 Reflection over choice of method

It could be argued that the chosen method has weaknesses in forms of its generalizability, since the data gathering has focused on a limited number of employees at the company. However, a quantitative method would have resulted in more data points, but the gathered information would be less in-depth. The chosen method was deemed suitable to pick up on the respondent's attitudes and generated rich information about the subject, which enabled the researchers to investigate the research question thoroughly.

4.3 Data analysis

The analysis was guided by Iveroth and Hallencreutz (2016) theoretical framework. The first step involved familiarizing with the framework and each of its mechanisms. This deepened the understanding of how it could apply in the analysis, and particularly how to hone in on the early phases of a change in which there is no clear path to follow.

The interviews were transcribed from audio to text so that they could be analyzed in-depth. The process of analysis was systematic and the framework with its categories helped in terms of sensitizing us to possible sensemaking mechanisms. The process followed a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The transcripts were actively read through, and presumptive codes were noted in a separate document that became the codebook.

The mechanisms from the theoretical framework became the foundation for the analysis and were thus established as codes since the analysis revolved around how these mechanisms were used by the respondents. Every code was accompanied by a description of what it means, and a note saying at which lines in which transcripts it appears, which aligns with Boyatzis' (1998)

description of how to conduct a thematic analysis. The process was iterative, meaning that the transcripts were read multiple times with the purpose of catching details that were not sensed during the first read-through. The analysis was an iterative process where it was focused on interpreting the meaning of every interview transcript in light of observations and secondary sources. The question asked constantly was: What sensemaking mechanisms is this an instance of? What is happening? What behaviour does this person engage in? This was actively discussing in what way sensemaking mechanisms were present or not, and/or how it could be articulated in writing.

In parallel with coding the interview material, observational data were continuously obtained and was integrated in crafting the empirical description. The challenge was to keep track of what observation fitted in what category in the framework. Observations that contributed to the analysis was mainly casual conversations between employees that touched upon the content of the upcoming changes and how it had been communicated since this could show different ways to make sense of digital transformation in general and the changes that the company is undertaking.

5 Results

The presentation of the analysis follows the eight sensemaking mechanisms as outlined by Iveroth and Hallencreutz (2016). These categories can assist managers to reflect on how to use different mechanisms of sensemaking to mobilize employee support when an organization is undergoing change, triggered by digitalization. Before moving into results connected to different mechanisms, the content of the planned changes and the reasons for the change will be described.

5.1 Reasons for change

The changes the company is preparing to implement can be boiled down to three areas of concern. The first one revolves around a new, revised business offer, by which the company adapts to changes in their environment. The second area of concern relates to improved efficiency, where the company has set a goal to decrease the hours spent on administrative work by streamlining their processes. Lastly, the third area of concern is the company's responsibility effort. This area leaves more room for the individual's own interpretation than the first two, but mainly concerns environmental responsibility and cultivation of a diverse organization. This assembling of changes was introduced for the whole company during a kick-off event a few weeks prior to the study. The transformation also concerns structural changes in the company in the form of reshaped business areas that specifically are formed to evolve the innovation in the organization together with new roles. Related to what was described in section 2.1, these changes are planned and due to external triggers. The main trigger is attributed to digital transformation, which requires the company to increase its flexibility in order to meet new needs from their customers.

Regarding the reasons for change, it is viewed as something inevitable;

"As an organization, we need to change. The company will die if we stagnate, it is that simple. We need to assure that we bring value to the market, our raison d'être lies in that we actually provide value for our customers." - Respondent 3

While it is not an option for the company to keep the status quo, and there is awareness of the need to change to stay competitive in the IT sector, there is also awareness that the challenge is to evoke motivation from employees to change. Since the company is currently doing fine and is seen as a forerunner in their field, one of the senior managers notes that;

"The hazard is if everyone thinks 'everything is going fine now, why should we change?', since everything is going great right now, really. [...] That is the biggest risk for us, if we do not feel a sense of urgency" - Respondent 1

The findings suggest that the company currently is entering the landscape of inertia (see section 2.2), where the change process has begun but uncertainty of what it will entail is still prominent.

5.2 Change through logic of attraction

This aspect is highly relevant from a leader perspective as it involves leaders to change themselves in order to lead the way for their employees. The respondents showed that they engaged in this sensemaking aspect when they acknowledge that their actions and attitudes as sensegivers influence how the employees make sense of the change, as reflected in the following response;

"In that sense, I have a great responsibility. I am as an advertising pillar. If I am calm, I think that my employees will feel calm about this." - Respondent 4

However, to commence the change and make others follow is easier said than done as people might not perceive that they are supposed to follow the example, which is described by another respondent;

"I try to forego with a good example. Being the first to do something new. But sometimes I think I shoot myself in the foot, because people think 'Sweet, he will do that instead of me'. And then it is not a good example." - Respondent 5

5.3 Provide a direction

The respondents stated that a vision and overall goals for the change were communicated to everyone during the kick-off event, a vision they try to consolidate further while awaiting further instructions. The respondents offered different views of how to interpret the direction of the change and how to spread it to provide a direction for other sensemakers, which signifies that there is yet no fully shared understanding of the change and why the change needs to be carried out. However, it is not necessarily wrong since part of the vision is open for interpretation;

"Well, how responsibility is interpreted depends on the interpreter. What I view as responsibility cannot be wrong, but perhaps it is not in the line of what 100 other persons think. But... it is not wrong." - Respondent 7

All of the respondents agreed that it is easier to provide a direction and create work regarding hard goals such as, for example, percentage of improvement to reach rather than the soft goals like taking responsibility or increase quality.

The analysis shows that the leaders themselves find the digital transformation to be somewhat difficult to grasp. One challenge the respondents identify is to define a point where soft goals are fulfilled, definitions that are necessary in order for people to convert the, sometimes blurry, goals into concrete actions. It is simpler to set goals measured by numbers, but the company need to aim for softer goals to achieve organizational change. Besides that, it is difficult to define a direction that comprise softer goals, it must then be deliberately communicated;

"You notice that this type of communication is extremely sensitive. It is easy that the vision gets banal if you try to attract people with a vision that is too far away. Then you will lose the propulsion" - Respondent 5

One aspect that repeatedly has been lifted from the respondents is the risk of not being able to provide a clear direction due to the lack of a coherent vision. One of the respondents expressed the importance of being 'strategical' as they often are too operational and poor at planning ahead.

"We are way too operational, and rarely strategical; we are not glancing forward often enough when working on the operational level. My take on this is that you need to plan one year in advance, so during the second half of every year, you plan what will happen during the subsequent year" -Respondent 9

5.4 Translate

A strategic direction of a change must be translated to concrete actions, the respondents are currently trying to figure out which goals their teams should set in order to work in the right direction. It was obvious that the presentation of the vision that occurred during the kick-off event was not enough to create a shared view that the employees who were present at the event can translate into actions to carry out in their everyday work. The respondents agree that there is a need for more extensive translation as the interpretations of the presented vision are likely to be diverse;

"Of all the 2500 people that were there, it was probably 2000 interpretations"
- Respondent 9

From the interviews, it became evident that some of the respondents felt that the vision is vague and difficult to translate into concrete steps of actions as it gets mixed up in the blur of the everyday work, even though they were keen to get started. It was acknowledged to be important to translate the vision into actions but there were no actual signs of it being done, except for some respondents that tried to avoid too visionary guidelines;

"I'm trying to provide the communication in a more concrete way to make it more clear about what this change implicates" - Respondent 6

There are hardly any indications at the workplace that definite actions have been implemented to translate the vision into more concrete actions to create a joint understanding of the transformation. When the respondents describe how they will translate the vision into action onwards, they emphasize that this will be something that the team jointly comes up with through discussions.

5.5 Stay in motion

Contrary to what the theoretical framework recommends, several respondents expressed that the change plans that were introduced during the kick-off event have since then not been converted into practical changes for most of the employees;

"A challenge that we already have is that this was promoted at the kick-off as big changes and so on, and then we returned to the office and more or less nothing happened" - Respondent 2

Another respondent has a similar view and draws on a battle analogy. The respondent jokingly says that it is as if the allies, during the invasion of Normandy in 1944, were prepared to overthrow fascists, but instead of starting the invasion they would stay in their boats;

"The boats are there, and we say, 'Let's kick out the fascists!', but you do not enter the shore. You stay in the boats. And the soldiers say 'Wait, were we not supposed to overthrow fascists?'. Like... we have to push them to the beach, so they at least can start digging a trench or something. [...] Here, we are staying in the boats for too long, I would say." - Respondent 9

Some of the respondents explain that it has been announced that everyone should 'sit tight' until further plans are made. This can be a challenge for those who are eager to pursue change since they might lose their motivation if everything is halted. Everyone does not perceive the lack of visible action as an issue. Those who, for some reason, resist the changes can see inaction as comforting as it signals that it will be a delay before they themselves must deal with change. The respondents are aware that however it is executed, the change will meet resistance in some form from some of the staff;

"We will face a bunch of people that will think 'Finally! This will be fun!' and others that will think 'I do not really believe in this'. And then we will see the ones that oppose this, who will work against this." - Respondent 1

5.6 Look closely and update

Only a few respondents have touched upon the subject of look closely and update. In situations where it was mentioned, some respondents mention how they try to update other about the situation by repeatedly communicating that changes are around the corner. Several respondents mentioned an absence of control mechanisms to ensure that receivers of a message have understood it as it was meant. This was identified as a risk as there might be a delay before misinterpretations are detected. One respondent elaborates on how he keeps updated;

"If they do not bring issues up by themselves, then I try to ask questions and commence a dialogue about it. And during the everyday work, you notice rather quickly if there is an issue" - Respondent 8

To always keep updated in order to rapidly detect upcoming issues is identified from the respondents as an important aspect of leadership;

"I think it can be really risky. I think it is a question of leadership, where you need to guide people in the right direction, the whole way and not lose anyone on the way"
- Respondent 7

5.7 Converse candidly

All respondents agreed that they are trying to establish an environment with candid conversations. One respondent describes the objective of finding the root of a problem rather than settle with discussing the symptoms it causes;

“By addressing the real problem. There are ‘5 whys’ that can be used for example. In order for me to be able to act, I really need to understand the issue. It is like that with attitudes, there is no right or wrong. It is a lot of emotions, and if I should address it, then I need to find the root of it.” - Respondent 4

By preserving a conversation climate where things are raised, change leaders are able to capture the sensemakers’ motivations on a deeper level. This is advantageous as one can distinguish change-prone employees and give them more salient roles where they can spread the message, as well as notice possible resistance, as Respondent 4 explains;

“We need to respect that everyone is different in their willingness to change, and what extent they want to be involved. However, the lowest level of commitment is still rather high, since we want to continue being a forerunner of our industry” - Respondent 4

Further, through informal observations, it became evident that consultants at the firm are aware of the changes since it was introduced at the company kick-off, but their perception is that no further notice regarding the change has been given since the announcement. Moreover, the consultants are aware that the management team runs a silent debate regarding how to carry out the changes. The overall opinion is that it would be positive if more people were included in these conversations as it is an opportunity to raise their own opinions regarding how to implement change.

5.8 Unblock improvisation

The way the leaders try to unblock improvisation is by encouraging people to try out new ideas if they see it advantageous for their business area. However, the opinions were somewhat differing regarding whether it is strictly positive or not. One respondent stated that a lack of translation from higher management between the vision and how the vision should be actualized can be viewed as something positive since those responsible of every business area can interpret the vision as they feel is suitable and create their own ways of pursuing it. From this point of view, a lack of guidelines enhances creativity;

"It releases creativity, it gives empowerment, both for personnel and coworkers. You can really do as you like and do things, that is an extraordinary strength, but it requires a lot more from you" - Respondent 9

While the encouragement of improvisation enhances creativity, it also requires the individual to take more responsibility. From another respondent, it was expressed that freedom to improvise can have negative results as it might cause confusion if people experience that there is no plan for the changes or lead to that the same work is done twice by different people.

From the analysis, it has been found that the respondents view the freedom in the company culture as permitting for improvisation.

Since freedom has been identified as a prominent aspect of the company culture, some teams took the initiative to start the change process early, even before the company introduced the changes. The respondent that mentioned this expressed that they already had a good sense of the direction the company was going to take, and thus it was not a particular risk to take;

“You can sense in which way things are moving, so we will not be caught off guard saying ‘Oh, we had no idea about this’, because we sense the market. And perhaps we are a bit antsy in my team, we did not want to wait for the big kick-off. We took some chances and it turned out we got it right.” - Respondent 6

5.9 Facilitate learning

This aspect was sparsely brought up by the respondents, who mostly describe that they themselves decide how to implement changes in their workgroups according to what they deem suitable. However, they all describe similar methods for the facilitation of change, for example by repeated discussions at meetings, regarding how that certain group will be affected by changes. One of the respondents expressed the importance of letting people take responsibility and try things out on their own;

“I like to let one person feel that they have my trust and that they cannot do anything wrong. [...] The worst thing that could happen is that they learn something, and the best thing would be that they learn something while succeed doing the business.”
- Respondent 5

Altogether, it is emphasized from the respondents that it is important that everyone aligns in a shared vision but the activities to realize the vision will presumably be diverse since the company has many branches whereof some have more to change than others. The diversity among the branches of the company means that there is no common solution for everyone;

“This is something we need to come up with together now, it is not like anyone has a solution ready or know how to do this. We have people that understand change, but this will entail something new for them too, which is important to remember”
- Respondent 8

No respondent had an articulated proposal yet for how changes shall be facilitated in the organization but was of the unanimous opinion that smaller teams should together discuss and form a plan containing how that particular group should work to align with the overall goals. One respondent elaborates on how it may be executed;

“I think of it as a challenge. We can gather... say 10 persons, and challenge them; ‘Okay, we are here right now, and we want to be over here in three years. Which customers shall we address? What are they interested in? How will we make deals? Who is responsible for what?’. It is like a challenge, and together we form a plan” - Respondent 4

6 Discussion

We set out to explore how leaders use sensemaking to mobilize support for change. Iveroth and Hallencreutz (2016) theoretical framework has been useful to pinpoint different occurrences of sensemaking from the empirical material. In what follows we will discuss the different mechanisms in relation to the early change process that we have been studying over a period of four months.

The results show that the sensemaking mechanisms *change through logic of attraction*, *provide a direction* and *translate* are interconnected. *Change through logic of attraction* is a way to translate a vision to something concrete, when a leader begins by changing their own behavior, they become role models, giving other employees an impression of how the vision could be interpreted. At the same time, *change through logic of attraction* denotes a way to provide a direction since the aim is to decrease confusion and instead show a direction that others can follow. *Provide a direction* and *translate* are tightly connected in terms of what the vision for the change is consolidated when it is translated into concrete steps of action, but the vision will not give any prevailing results if it is not successfully translated. On the other hand, translation without a coherent vision will most likely create confusion if there is no clarity of the purpose of a change. In that sense, *provide a direction* and *translate* are dependent on each other. This is further supported by Seyranian (2014) who advocates that one can influence by leading as an example and emphasize the importance of having a sensible vision that is easy to adopt. Our results indicated that one area of the change plan is easier to translate than the others. When describing the upcoming changes, the respondents seemed more articulated regarding the parts concerning environmental responsibility. This area is possibly easier to discuss since it, as one respondent mentioned, is more open for interpretation. The two other parts, the revised offer and improved efficiency, have the purpose to streamline the organization which the respondents may be more hesitant to elaborate on since they not yet have received enough specifics from top-down. If the company does not manage to translate the vision into a plan with concrete actions people can perform, it is unlikely that a change that prevails will be accomplished. We interpret these three mechanisms as the foundation for sensemaking in the startup phase of change, meaning that they can provide to coherent communication and guide people in the right direction. This is further supported by previous research that have found that it is necessary to be able to communicate a vision as well as translating it to concrete actions to make people accept change (Venus, 2013; Kane et al., 2019).

Another important finding is that the sensemaking aspect that commences the process, and is thus essential to highlight early (however, it should not be neglected further in the process) is *stay in motion*. To make visible changes as soon as possible signals that the initiative is about actual change and that it will not stagnate in a tedious planning process not leading anywhere. According to Kotter (1995; 2012), this aspect is essential throughout the process to keep momentum to avoid stagnation as well as encourage new initiatives to arise. Unfortunately, there is a growing notion amongst the employees that the change already has a lack of motion. When the management team introduced the upcoming changes during their company kick-off, they started the change process. Since then, the change work has focused on mapping competencies and services that the company currently possess and will need in the future, something that is found to be vital for a digital transformation (Vial, 2019).

This process is, of course, visible and in motion for those who are involved, however, those who are not directly working with it experience a lack of motion since their daily work has remained the same since the kick-off. This is found to be somewhat troubling and the company would benefit from including more people in the planning process. Based on our findings, the best-case scenario would have been if the company waited to introduce the changes until something substantial and concrete was about to change.

The sensemaking mechanisms; *look closely and update*, *converse candidly*, and *facilitate learning* is important for the sensemaking process but are not deemed to be as essential in the early phase of the digital transformation (they will, however, become increasingly important as soon as concrete changes are implemented). *Converse candidly* is identified to support *look closely and update*, meaning that the leader who wishes to obtain feedback in order to possibly reassess guidelines will receive more useful input if everyone feels that they can express their opinions freely. Our results reflect that the aspect *look closely and update* will require bigger emphasis in parallel with the introduction of new practices as it would help to avoid confusion and establish a desired behavior. *Unblock improvisation* is not viewed as necessary for the commencement of change, however, it seems as it can support *stay in motion*. This aligns with previous findings that suggest that improvisation is a way to stay in motion as new ideas are generated when people are allowed to be creative and innovative (Iveroth & Hallencreutz, 2016; Kane et al., 2019). Since the company currently is struggling to stay in motion, they might regain some motion by putting emphasis on *unblocking improvisation*. As the company commences their change journey, they already have an advantage innate in the company culture. The respondents have, on several occasions, highlighted how the work is characterized by freedom, where the leader can decide rather freely how they will proceed with changes. This signals that the aspect *unblock improvisation* is embedded in the company culture, manifested when the respondents describe that they do not have substantial guidelines for how to apply changes.

The limited occurrence of the aspect *facilitate learning* from the respondents was somewhat surprising since we view it as an aspect that ties the other mechanisms together. One explanation for the limited focus at this aspect could be due to the early phase of the change, with their current emphasis on planning. When the company enters a phase where actual, concrete changes are implemented, this aspect is presumed to gain more emphasis. It was noticed that the respondents were more prone to mention formal facilitation of learning, such as plans to conduct workshops, while informal facilitation of learning, such as providing employees with time and space to reflect and discuss among each other, was barely mentioned. Since *facilitate learning* consolidates new practices, it is important that the change leader affirm both formal and informal facet of this aspect further on.

To summarize, the most prominent challenges for the company at this stage of the change process is to *stay in motion* and *translate* the vision into actions. Following Iveroth and Hallencreutz (2016) this could be mitigated by focusing on repeating the vision (to provide a direction) as well as translating it into concrete actions which should be communicated to everyone, not just those who are involved in the planning. Further, and also in line with their sensemaking model, it is an advantage to involve more employees in the planning process, since some seem to be interested to share their opinions. To involve more employees is also seen as advantageous from a *stay in motion* perspective, where we believe that it would both generate more feedback, which can drive the process onward, and secondly, those who get involved in this process are likely to spread the word about this, resulting in a broader notion that the change is still in motion.

7 Limitations and suggestions for further research

This study has limitations regarding its scope, where we have chosen to focus on how the leaders use mechanisms of sensemaking. Notions from employees at lower levels have been registered, but it has not been the primary focus. A broader view of how sensemaking mechanisms are used would have been obtained by conducting interviews with employees other than those holding managerial positions. Hence, the perspective of those who are for example working as consultants (client-facing) and other roles affected by large-scale change could be investigated more in-depth in future research to broaden the understanding of sensemaking in companies.

Another limitation is that this study is restricted to account for sensemaking during an early phase of change. If one would aim to study sensemaking throughout the whole change process, it would be difficult to define a pronounced endpoint, but it would certainly provide more robust findings when it comes to understanding how sensemaking activities play out. This study could be complemented by future research that focuses on other stages of a change process, or in a more long-term perspective. Further, the changes that are investigated in this study are mainly structural as they primarily focus on how to reshape their business offer to better fit the digitalized environment and stay current. To complement the findings from this study, it would be of interest to compare to sensemaking that regards changes that are more operational, i.e. not as abstract.

Despite these limitations we argue that the study findings are valuable and can be applicable to guide early change in other similar settings within other IT organizations that consider engaging in large scale change. To further assess the generalizability of the result, future research should test how well the theoretical framework is applicable in other contexts

8 Conclusion

This study has aimed to answer what sensemaking mechanisms leader uses when they mobilize support from employees during the early stages of digital transformation. Iveroth and Hallencreutz (2016) framework containing eight mechanisms of sensemaking was used as a theoretical lens for the study.

The analysis yielded that the four most fundamental mechanisms, for the studied company, in an early phase of a digital change project is *Change through logic of attraction*, *Provide a direction*, *Translate* and *Stay in motion*. However, change leaders should not ignore the rest of the mechanisms and should acknowledge them throughout the process, but they do not need to be as prominent in the early phase. The framework has been found to be useful as it highlights mechanisms that often is overlooked by leaders when they prioritize the planning and execution process without giving enough effort to conveying the ‘change message’ in a coherent way. When organizations undergo digital transformation, it requires people to change in ways that can be difficult to grasp and predict, therefore they can benefit by engaging in sensemaking activities. The framework used in this study is valuable in this regard.

We have identified that the studied company has a strong organizational culture that endorses initiatives for change and plays a great role in the aspect of *Unblock improvisation*. It was however found that the company lacks focus and emphasis on the aspect *Stay in motion* as well as a lack in the ability to translate the vision into concrete practice, something that is found vital for keeping people motivated and encouraged to change. The lack of these mechanisms indicates that sensegiving in a transformation often are forgotten or not prioritized.

9 References

- Ancona, D., Snook, S., Nohira, N., & Khurana, R. (2012). Framing and Acting in the Unknown. *The Handbook for Teaching Leadership*, 3-19.
- Anzola-Román, P., Bayona-Sáez, C., & García-Marco, T. (2018). Profiting from collaborative innovation practices: Identifying organizational success factors along the process. *Journal of Management & Organization*, 1-24.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. SAGE Publications.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Burnes, B. (2009). Reflections: Ethics and organizational change—Time for a return to Lewinian values. *Journal of Change Management*, 9(4), 359-381.
- Dunphy, D. (1996). Introduction: Organizational change in corporate settings. *Human Relations*, 49(5), 541-552.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of management review*, 14(4), 532-550.
- Fitzgerald, Kruschwitz, Bonnet, & Welch. (2013). Embracing Digital Technology: A New Strategic Imperative. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 55(2), 1-12.
- George, J. M., Jones, G. R., & Sharbrough, W. C. (2005). *Understanding and managing organizational behavior*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- George, J. M., Jones, G. R. (2012). *Understanding and managing organizational behavior*. Sixth edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Gioia, D. A., & Chittipeddi, K. (1991). Sensemaking and sensegiving in strategic change initiation. *Strategic management journal*, 12(6), 433-448.
- Gioia, D. A., Thomas, J. B., Clark, S. M., & Chittipeddi, K. (1994). Symbolism and strategic change in academia: The dynamics of sensemaking and influence. *Organization Science*, 5(3), 363-383.
- Hallencreutz, J., & Turner, D. M. (2011). Exploring organizational change best practice: are there any clear-cut models and definitions? *International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences*, 3(1), 60-68.
- Hennink, M., Hutter, I. & Bailey, A. (2011). *Qualitative research methods*. SAGE publications.

Iveroth, E., & Hallencreutz, J. (2016). *Effective organizational change: leading through sensemaking*. Routledge.

Kane, G. C., Palmer, D., Phillips, A. N., Kiron, D., & Buckley, N. (2015). Strategy, not technology, drives digital transformation. *MIT Sloan Management Review and Deloitte University Press*, 14, 1-25.

Kane, G. C., Palmer, D., Phillips, A. N., Kiron, D., & Buckley, N. (2018). Coming of age digitally. *MIT Sloan Management Review and Deloitte Insights*.

Kane, G., Phillips, A., Copulsky, J., & Andrus, G. (2019). How Digital Leadership Is(n't) Different. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 60(3), 34-39.

Kerzner, H., & Kerzner, H. R. (2017). *Project management: a systems approach to planning, scheduling, and controlling*. John Wiley & Sons.

Kiron, D., Kane, G. C., Palmer, D., Phillips, A. N., & Buckley, N. (2016). Aligning the organization for its digital future. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 58(1).

Kolltveit, B. J., & Grønhaug, K. (2004). The importance of the early phase: the case of construction and building projects. *International Journal of Project Management*, 22(7), 545-551.

Kotter, J. (1995). Leading change: why transformation efforts fail. *Harvard Business Review*, 73(2), 59-67.

Kotter, J. (2007). Leading change: Why transformation efforts fail. *Harvard Business Review*, 85(1), 96-103.

Lenka, S., Parida, V., & Wincent, J. (2017). Digitalization capabilities as enablers of value co-creation in servitizing firms. *Psychology & Marketing*, 34(1), 92-100.

Leonardi, P. M., & Bailey, D. E. (2008). Transformational technologies and the creation of new work practices: Making implicit knowledge explicit in task-based offshoring. *MIS quarterly*, 411-436.

Matt, C., Hess, T., & Benlian, A. (2015). Digital Transformation Strategies. *Business & Information Systems Engineering*, 57(5), 339-343.

Between Dispositional Resistance to Change and the Orientation Toward the Change Agent. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 96(2), 337-349.

Palmer, I., & Dunford, R. (2008). Organizational change and the importance of embedded assumptions. *British Journal of Management*, 19, S20-S32.

Porter, M. E., & Heppelmann, J. E. (2014). How smart, connected products are transforming competition. *Harvard business review*, 92(11), 64-88.

Reim, W., Parida, V., & Örtqvist, D. (2013). Strategy, business models or tactics—What is product service systems (PSS) literature talking about. In *DS 75-4: Proceedings of the 19th International Conference on Engineering Design (ICED13), Design for Harmonies, Vol. 4: Product, Service and Systems Design, Seoul, Korea, 19-22.08. 2013*.

Reim, W., Parida, V., & Örtqvist, D. (2015). Product–Service Systems (PSS) business models and tactics – a systematic literature review. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 97, 61-75.

Riedl, R., Benlian, A., Hess, T., Stelzer, D., & Sikora, H. (2017). On the Relationship Between Information Management and Digitalization. *Business & Information Systems Engineering*, 59(6), 475-482.

Scapens, R. (2006). Understanding management accounting practices: A personal journey. *The British Accounting Review*, 38(1), 1-30.

Skog, D. A. (2019). *The Dynamics of Digital Transformation: the Role of Digital Innovation, Ecosystems and Logics in Fundamental Organizational Change* (Doctoral dissertation, Umeå Universitet).

Svahn, F., Mathiassen, L., & Lindgren, R. (2017). Embracing Digital Innovation in Incumbent Firms: How Volvo Cars Managed Competing Concerns. *Mis Quarterly*, 41(1).

Venus, M. (2013). *Demystifying Visionary Leadership: In search of the essence of effective vision communication*. (Doctoral thesis, Erasmus University, Rotterdam). Retrieved from <https://repub.eur.nl/pub/40079>

Vial, G. (2019). Understanding digital transformation: A review and a research agenda. *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*.

Walsham, G. (1995). Interpretive case studies in IS research: Nature and method. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 4(2), 74.

Weill, P., Apel, T., Woerner, S. & Banner, S. (2019). Leading Digital Change. *MIT Sloan Management Review and Deloitte University Press*, 40(3)

Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations* (Vol. 3). Sage.

Weick, K. E., & Quinn, R. (1999). Organizational change and development. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 50, 361-386.

Wirth, R. A. (2004). Lewin/Schein's change theory. Retrieved February 21, 2019. URL [<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.486.5728&rep=rep1&type=pdf>]

Wood, R. (2007). How Strategic Innovation Really Gets Started. *IEEE Engineering Management Review*, 35(1), 79.

Roddy, J. (2011). A model for cultural change. *International Journal of Manufacturing Technology and Management*, 22(3), 268-277.

Zainal, Z. (2007). Case study as a research method. *Jurnal Kemanusiaan*, 5(1).