

The Role of Consultants in Translating Agility

An Actor Network Approach to Consultancy in a Management Trend



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Abstract

With the speed of the business environment increasing more and more organizations are turning towards agility and agile ways of working. Agility is often expected to make organizations more flexible, allowing them to increase their operational performance in a fast-moving and complex environment. The popularity of agility is partly driven by a need for organizations to act faster and be more flexible but also because it is fashionable. Becoming an agile organization often means implementing agile frameworks and methods of working. To facilitate the implementation of these methods and frameworks, organizations often hire consultants that already have experience with agility. The empirical foundation for this paper are semi-structured interviews with 25 people from 12 different organizations who have experience from working in implementations of agility. In order to analyze the implementation process the translation model from Actor Network Theory was used. Through using the translation model this paper discusses the role of consultants during the implementation of agility, studying how consultants make clients and agility interact. In line with previous research on consultancy the findings suggest that consultants are often expected to drive change. However, this paper complements previous research on consultancy through using the concept of spokesmen from Actor Network Theory to discuss what happens once consultants leave the client. The main findings of this paper are: 1) As one size does not fit all, the interviewees argue that consultants need to tweak the concepts based on the individual needs of the clients. 2) It is more difficult for consultants to help with the implementation of agility in organizations who seek to copy the success of other agile organizations without understanding the extent of the change. 3) Consultants act as spokesmen for agility but the temporary nature of consultancy causes difficulties for anchoring agility long term.

Key Words: Agility, Implementation, Consultants, Translation, Spokesmen, Black box

Introduction

The role of consultants, as temporary members of an organization, is often to disrupt the routines of the client (Clegg, Kornberger & Rhodes, 2004). Consultants can play a part in framing and translating management concepts to integrate it into the client organization (Heusinkveld & Visscher, 2012). As the business environment is ever-changing and moves more rapidly than ever, firms are faced with an increase in both complexity and uncertainty (Prikladnicki, Lassenius & Carver, 2020). In an attempt to deal with this many organizations are turning to agility, making this trend a relevant topic for organizational research. Papers by Sohi, Hertogh, Bosch-Rekvelde and Blom (2015) as well as Sampath and Krishnamoorthy (2017) suggest that agility can help organizations dealing with complexity and increase the speed of seizing new opportunities, at least partly explaining the appeal. However Cram and Newell (2016) suggests that it is also a management fashion that some organizations adopt because it is a trend. Since agility originated in the 1980s within IT and software development, it has spread to other types of organizations (Conforto, Amaral, da Silva, Di Felippo, Simon & Kamikawachi, 2016). The underlying values and principles behind agile methods are outlined in the, so called, agile manifesto. Agile methods often include visualizing the work processes, daily meetings, frequent feedback and deliveries in short stages called loops or sprints as well as dividing larger organizations into smaller, self-organizing teams (Tonquist, 2018, pp 45-61). Agility aims to make organization more efficient and more flexible in order to be able to be responsive to changes within the market as well as market needs (Sampath & Krishnamoorthy, 2017). With more and more organizations trying to be more agile, how the concept is constructed and implemented has become a relevant research topic.

Making an organization more agile is no easy task, it is almost an ever on-going process which requires both the right competence and the right people. Most organizations face great difficulties when it comes to implementing agility, especially when it comes to factors such as understanding the concepts, the lack of guidance from literature, poorly customized agile concepts and people within the organization reverting into the old ways of working (Dikert, Passivaara & Lassenius, 2016). Cram and Newell (2016) found that in some organizations agility is seemingly a short-term trend while in others it becomes deeply integrated into the processes and the culture. Although agility is an organizational concept, there is little research on agility using theories on organizing and change. Many organizations today that want to become more agile hire external consultants to guide them in this change process. Consultants often play an important part in change processes and can affect strategy making (Ginsberg & Abrahamson, 1991). This paper therefore examines the role of consultants in the process of implementing agility. The aim of focusing on consultants is to show their part in the construction of the trend towards more organizations striving for increased agility. While becoming more agile is potentially an ever ongoing process (Cram & Newell, 2016), consultants often have a limited time frame as they will eventually leave the organization (Heusinkveld & Visscher, 2012). This paper discusses potential difficulties associated with this time constraint.

To get a theoretical understanding of the role of consultants but also of their tools and agility in itself, actor network theory (ANT) has been used as an analytical framework in this paper. ANT originates from sociology and is a framework for analyzing how human and non-human actors interact and influence each other to achieve stability or drive change (Callon, 1984). In this paper ANT has been used as a lens to frame the behaviour of the actors, particularly consultants in implementations of agility. To discuss the role of consultants and what happens when they leave the client, the concept of spokesmen from ANT has been used (Aka, 2019). The four moment translation model from Callon (1984) has been used to describe the implementation processes and structure the results. To gather material on the role of consultants in the process, 25 people with experience of consultancy from 12 organizations working with implementing agility have been interviewed. All interviewees were based in Sweden. The scope of the paper is limited to studying consultants and their role in translating agility. The question guiding the research for this paper is: How do consultants translate agility during the implementation process?

The contribution of this paper is a discussion of the role of consultants in translating the concept of agility as well as mobilizing and influencing other human and nonhuman actors in the implementation. The paper implies that the role of consultant varies depending on the client and the stage of the process, suggesting a way of defining the role of consultant for anchoring agility long term. In terms of structure, the paper will provide an overview of the theoretical framework that has been used as a lens for analysis. Then the methodology behind the research process is described. After the method the results are presented and discussed. Last but not least is a summary of the conclusions and a discussion of potential for future research.

Theory: ANT, Previous Research on the Role of Consultants and Agility

In this paper Actor Network Theory has been used as a framework and lens to study the various actors in the process of implementing agility. Concepts from ANT were also used to structure and analyze the results from the research. Previous research on the role of consultants was used to see what has previously been written about consultancy. This provided a framework for understanding the expected position of consultants in the network of change processes. Previous research on agility has been used to get a sense of how agility has previously been studied academically. In this paper agility is considered a nonhuman actor in a network during the implementation process. The translation model and other concepts from ANT are used to discuss how consultants frame agility as a business solution for their clients.

Actor Network Theory (ANT) on Change, Black Boxes and Artifacts

ANT originates from sociology but it has also been used in organizational studies to analyze processes of change (Caldwell & Dyer, 2020). In ANT human- but also nonhuman actors take part in building networks in which they operate (Callon, 1984). Using the notion of networks also allows the avoidance of distinctions between micro- and macro- factors as well as assumptions about relationships of order ranging from the top to the bottom (Latour, 1996). A study by Broer, Nieboer and Bal (2010) suggests that ANT might be used to open the black box of quality improvement processes, which agility implementation arguably strives to be. Quality improvement processes that can be considered finished are often labeled as black boxes, because the outcome tends to be presented without a detailed record of how it came to be (Broer, Nieboer & Bal, 2010). The network of a change or improvement process in an organization can become black boxed through the establishment of agendas, timelines and the outcomes of performance (Caldwell & Dyer, 2020). As long as the black boxes function as expected they can be taken for granted as there is no need for inquiry or further organizing (Lindberg & Walter, 2013). Lindberg and Walter (2013) argue that something that is black boxed, in their case an infusion pump, can struggle to function if it is deconstructed and reconstructed. Using the notion of networks allows the avoidance of distinctions between micro- and macro- factors as well as assumptions about relationships of order ranging from the top to the bottom (Latour, 1996). Burga and Rezanian (2017) have used ANT to discuss accountability within projects. Their case study suggests that accountability is often spontaneously negotiated between actors rather than being set by for example a written document. Further, their study implies that nonhuman artifacts often play a key role in disclosing information regarding the progress of projects (Burga & Rezanian, 2017).

The Translation Model

Building on ideas from Callon (1984), Caldwell and Dyer (2020) suggests that consultants can seek to redefine the network in a change process through the four moments of translation. During the problematization moment consultants aim to make other actors subscribe to their suggestion of a business solution for a problem. According to Caldwell and Dyer (2020) this is done through framing the solution and demonstrating how it will benefit the organization. In doing so an obligatory passage point is established and the consultants are positioned as indispensable. However, some actors in the network might disagree if the problem is not framed as their own. In the moment of interessement, the consultants try to align the interest of the other actors with the business solution. This is done through interactions with the tools and methods associated with the solution and the definition of the other actors as “owners” of the new methods. Interessement also requires cutting the ties with the previous methods that were practiced before the change process began. During the third moment, enrolment, the actors start to assume their allocated roles and the consultants define themselves as the main drivers of change. To

do this they may use visual artifacts as rhetorical tools, arguing for the change process. The fourth moment is called mobilization and happens when the business solution, that has been suggested by the consultants, has gained broad acceptance. During this moment the new methods become established facts, making the change process a black box. This makes the process increasingly immune to scrutiny and the network more solid. However the change process can require consistent renewal or it risks reversing again (Caldwell & Dyer, 2020). A key role in the translation model is that of the spokesmen, actors that supposedly represent a collective of other actors in the network. If the spokesmen are put into question or rejected the network becomes unstable (Callon, 1984) as it leads to dissidence. In a study by Aka (2019) a manager mobilizes promoters and regulators as spokesmen for a long term project, the construction of an electric vehicle. This suggests that human actors can act as spokesmen for other long term business projects. In this paper the spokesmen concept will be used to discuss the role of consultant in the implementation of agility as well as what happens when they leave the client. The distinctions between the four moments of translation are not immediately given and they do not necessarily happen in a chronological order (Bergström & Diedrich, 2011). However all four moments must be passed for the network to be stabilized (Callon, 1984).

Nonhuman Actors and Dissidence

The study by Aka (2019) suggests that a human actor in a leadership position can attempt to mobilize a network so as to make a nonhuman actor, such as a new technological solution, indispensable. However Neyland (2006) suggests that strategic documents can be produced in order to comply with external rules but then be completely neglected, implying that nonhuman artifacts can exist in a network merely to provide legitimacy. A study by Sage, Vitry and Dainty (2020) implies that the feelings and relations of people within a network create opportunities for the enrolment of some nonhuman actors, while possibly limiting opportunities for other nonhuman actors to be enrolled. This suggests that nonhuman actors such as tools, frameworks and artifacts can either be neglected or play a major part in the implementation of agility depending on other actors. Cutting the ties with old methods and artifacts while introducing new ones can create dissidence in which actors do not want to accept their role in the network (Caldwell & Dyer, 2020). Aka (2019) argues that dissidence can even lead to the complete disintegration of an entire network. A paper by Pollack, Costello and Sankaran (2013) suggests that while ANT can be used as a sensemaking tool that can be used to build concepts when looking at organizational change programs, ANT is poorly equipped to actually test the concepts. Hence, ANT is useful for describing organization change but cannot measure or test the effects. For the purpose of the paper, ANT will be used to look at what consultants do in the actor network of implementing agility.

Previous Research on the Role of Consultants

Sturdy (2011) states that while the impact of consultancy has both been exaggerated and understated, consultants are often seen as catalysts of change. Clegg, Kornberger and Rhodes (2004) suggest that the role of consultants is often to create noise and disrupt the routines of the client organization. While this can be risky, it can also facilitate new possibilities and ways of thinking. Fincham (1999) argues that consultants create formulae and methods in order to reassure the client during complex and uncertain change processes. In a paper on the impact of consultancy on management. Sturdy et al (2004) suggest that another part of the role of management consultants is to construct the management discourse through doing similar work in a variety of contexts. Alvesson, Kärreman, Sturdy and Handley (2009) state that consultants, as a general rule, will try to identify the main power brokers and decision makers in the client organization. A case study by Caldwell and Dyer (2020) suggests that consultants and their analytical tools can make change seem important, thus getting the rest of the organization on board. This is in line with an argument by Sturdy (2011) that consultancy is often a way of legitimizing change, though Sturdy (2011) also suggests that consultancy can be a scapegoat for management. Caldwell and Dyer (2020) suggest that the role of consultants in the actor network of a change process can be to act as mediators or intermediaries of meaning or information. This is in line with Heusinkveld and Visscher (2012) who state that consultants actively frame and translate management concepts into practice for their clients. Though it is also suggested that consultants have a tendency to use their experience to position themselves as obligatory passage points for the adoption of the concepts (Heusinkveld & Visscher, 2012).

The Relationships of Consultants and Clients

A study by Reid, Matthias and Bamford (2019) suggests that while consultants are intrinsically useful for organizations there can sometimes be resistance towards them. Reported reasons include suspicions that consultants might not understand the organizational culture and a willingness to learn rather than be taught how to do things (Reid, Matthias & Bamford, 2019). Research by Heusinkveld and Visscher (2012) indicate that consultants can work with cultural changes but that this requires a lot of time. Alvesson et al (2009) suggests that there might be subgroups and individual employees within the client organization who see themselves more as victims or targets of the consultants rather than clients. This is also in line with arguments by Fincham (1999) who suggests that the coexistence of both internal and external expertise in a client-consultant relationship can provoke tensions. Fincham (1999) states that consultancy is a knowledge industry and argues that the relations between consultants and their clients are varying in nature and that the power in the relationship can tip one way or the other. Alvesson et al (2009) further this argument, suggesting that the position and identity of the client organization in a client-consultant relationship is not necessarily fixed. Instead it is suggested that the position and identity of the client is continuously

changing through negotiations, conflicts and reconstruction (Alvesson et al., 2009). This paper aims to use the lens of actor-network-theory in which the participation and nature of various actors in a network is considered to be negotiated to look at the role of consultants when implementing agility.

Previous research on Agility

Conforto et al. (2016) argue that while agility is an emerging strategic concept in organizations, the efforts to define the concept have been inconsistent. In an attempt to define the concept Brueller et al. (2014) suggest that strategic agility is “the capacity of making knowledgeable, nimble, rapid strategic moves with a high level of precision”, also highlighting the capacity to learn as an important factor. Sampath and Krishnamoorthy (2017) states that strategic agility is “a multidimensional concept, which includes both the ability to detect, anticipate, and sense market opportunities, evolving conditions, and other environmental changes and the ability to seize the opportunity with speed and implement new solutions”. According to Brannen and Doz (2012) this would require a high degree of awareness regarding the organizational context as well as an ability to frame and communicate new strategic alternatives. Despite the idea of agility to facilitate fast decisions, agile teams can face some obstacles for decision making. For example there can be a tendency to avoid committing to decisions and a reliance on other group members as well as conflicting priorities as agile teams are likely to try to do several things simultaneously (Drury., Conboy & Power, 2012). Brannen and Doz (2012) highlight the importance of communication for facilitating agility, arguing that a rigid corporate language that is too contextually specific can make it difficult for organizations to adapt to new contexts.

Implications of Agility for Performance

Worley and Lawler III (2010) suggests that organizations should strive for increased agility to excel in the fast moving business environment. Agility has been discussed as an underlying element of the degree of firms' long-term success and survival in previous literature (Sampath. and Krishnamoorthy, 2017). This is in line with what Shin et al. (2015) found in their study about underlying factors that constitute strategic agility and whether these factors influence operational and firm performance. Their (Shin et al., 2015) results indicated that strategic intent toward agility has a positive influence on a firm's operational performance and customer retention. However the results showed no indication of agility having a positive influence on financial performance. Furthermore, Annosi, M. C., Magnusson, M., Martini, A. and Appio, F. P. (2016) suggest that the time pressure that is often imposed by the implementation of agility can limit the learning and capacity for innovation of agile teams. Sohi et al. (2015) as well as Azanha et al (2017) use a different angle in their articles, focusing on how agile project management can help organizations cope with complexity and define the aim of agility as increasing relevance, flexibility and quality, by doing so increasing business value. The main conclusion from

Azanha et al (2017) is that agile project management can add value through increased functionality in a short time.

Agility as a Management Fashion

In a study by Cram and Newell (2016) agility is analyzed as a management fashion. They (Cram & Newell, 2016) found that in some organizations the implementation seems to be characterized as a short-term, transitional trend while in others agility becomes deeply embedded within organizational processes and culture. Cram and Newell (2016) identified three categories for the patterns in the potentially never ending process of implementing agility: Crusaders who implement “pure” agility by the book; Tailors who adjust agile frameworks to suit them and Dabblers who adopt a few agile activities but do so alongside a more traditional business approach. Cram and Newell (2016) suggest that Dabblers are relatively likely to consider agility as a short-term way of working while Crusader and Tailors are more likely to integrate agility more deeply and long-term. Dabblers are unlikely to get the organizational benefits associated with successful agility as they tend to oversimplify the concept but can still gain legitimacy as they appear to follow the fashion. Crusaders have the benefit of consistently being agile long-term but this can be risky if pure agility does not suit their context. While tailors often benefit from adjusting agility to suit their needs, sometimes the adjustments mean that the agile methods do not work as intended (Cram & Newell, 2016).

Most of the reviewed articles on agility have been based on case studies, using interviews and questionnaires as their primary sources of information. While a number of case studies on agility have been made there are few papers that discuss agility using organizational theories. Despite the fact that agility is an organizational concept there seems to be little research on the implementation of agility using theories on organizing and processes of change. As there is arguably room for more theoretically grounded studies of implementing agility this paper uses ANT to frame the behaviours of the various actors in the process. The concept of spokesmen from ANT is used to discuss what happens when consultants leave the client.

Method

This is a study of the role of consultants in implementing strategic agility within different organizations. In order to answer the research question of this paper it was necessary to study how people work with the implementation of agility. As this means studying social processes the material gathered for this paper is qualitative (Silverman, 2017, pp7-9). To get insights from a variety of implementations, material has been gathered from 12 different organizations. Hence this paper is based on a multiple case study. This allows a discussion of the implementation of agility in general rather than a single case or implementations in one industry.

Setting

Though agility is normally implemented at physical workplaces the primary data was gathered through digital video meetings and secondary data was gathered through studying documents. Web-based meetings for the interviews were primarily held through the digital tool Microsoft Teams and the meetings lasted for 25 to 45 minutes. The web-based setting was imposed on the research process due to the ongoing covid-19 pandemic. While doing interviews through digital meetings means we could not visit the workplaces of the interviewees it provided flexibility. Digital meetings still provided the opportunity to establish rapport which helped in the interview process (Arcibald, 2016). In consideration to an ethical standpoint all interviewees and organizations were offered to be anonymous and to view the paper before publication if they so desired. The interviews were held in Swedish as all the interviewees were Swedish speakers allowing interviewees to speak without any hindrance or misunderstanding due to language barriers etc..

Data Collection

Data was collected from primary data sources in the form of interviews. Secondary data, in the form of findings from scientific articles, has been gathered from web-based sources. Using web-based sources of information allows for time-efficient gathering of relevant material (Kozinets, 2019, p385). However, when gathering data from web-based sources there are some ethical issues to consider as the data might not have been uploaded for the purpose of research (Silverman, 2017, pp112-115). The primary data was gathered through semi-structured interviews which allows for a balance between the interviewees talking relatively freely and the researchers asking follow-up questions in order to get relevant information. The meetings were recorded upon approval from interviewees in order to enable transcribing the audio material. This was done to enable the authors of this paper to go over multiple interviewees and compare them for result comparison. When doing semi-structured interviews the researcher faces the ethical dilemma of wanting to get access to interesting and relevant information without manipulating the interviewees into divulging something that they might not want to be revealed (Kvale, 2006). This dilemma has been handled through allowing the interviewees to be anonymous and avoiding the usage of leading questions. Before the first interview, a question template was created and developed. The template consisted of open questions while more direct follow up questions were improvised during the actual interviews. While the question template was the same for all interviewees, the follow up questions were varying depending on the answers the individual interviewees had for the questions from the template. The interviewees did not have access to the question template before the interview.

Sample

The sample subjected to the study were people that have worked or currently work with implementing strategic agility in different organizations either in a position as external consultants or internal employees. In line with the research question, all interviewees work as consultants or have been part of the process when consultants guide the implementing of agility. Regarding the individual interviewees, they were chosen on an access-basis. The first interviewees were accessed through emailing their employers, while the rest of the interviewees were contacted on a snowball basis as they were recommended by other interviewees. The snowball approach to choosing interviewees allows for access to people having insight regarding a certain subject but is also limited as it can lead to the same source being recommended several times (Emmel, 2014, ch2). Initial contact with the interviewees was made through email, providing the interviewees with a bit of background to the research question and the scope of the research topic as well as setting up a time for the interview.

The combination of access- and snowball based sampling lead to a sample of 25 interviewees from 12 different organizations that work with implementing agility. While all interviewees were based in Sweden, some have also had experience with working internationally. The organizations studied have experience in working with implementing agility across several different industries, such as manufacturing, software development and the public sector. This has provided a wide variety of perspectives on the implementation process and the consultant's role in this process. The wide variety provided insights from several industries and a broader more general perspective on agility rather than just agile software development. As the interviews progressed it became increasingly common that an interviewee had similar answers to a previous interviewee. Therefore the sample is considered solid. For an overview of the 25 interviewees, see the table below:

Person	Role	Organization	Date	Size
A1	Senior Consultant	A	26-01-2021	Large
A2	Consultant	A	11-02-2021	Large
B1	Team Leader	B	11-02-2021	Medium
B2	Consultant	B	15-02-2021	Medium
C1	Owner/Consultant	C	23-02-2021	Small

D1	Senior Consultant	D	04-03-2021	Small
E1	Consultant	E	05-03-2021	Small
F1	Release Manager/Consultant	F	12-03-2021	Small
D2	Consultant	D	12-03-2021	Small
F2	Scrum Master/Consultant	F	12-03-2021	Small
G1	Founder/CEO	G	15-03-2021	Small
F3	Consultant/agile coach	F	17-03-2021	Small
G2	Consultant	G	18-03-2021	Small
F4	Consultant/Scrum master	F	19-03-2021	Small
F5	Manager	F	23-03-2021	Small
F6	Project manager/consultant	F	26-03-2021	Small
G3	Consultant	G	01-04-2021	Small
H1	Consultant	H	01-04-2021	Small
I1	Consultant	I	05-04-2021	Small

J1	Senior Consultant	J	07-04-2021	Small
K1	Consultant	K	09-04-2021	Small
I2	Consultant	I	14-04-2021	Small

I3	Consultant	I	19-04-2021	Small
L1	Advisor/Founder	L	29-04-2021	Small

The sample has been divided into three different categories based on the number of employees as follows: small (0-50 employees), medium (51-200 employees) and large organizations (200+ employees) in order to provide an overview of the organizations in the sample. Organization A is a large, international auditing firm that also provides services within consulting and advisory. B is a medium-sized Swedish consulting firm focusing mainly on group development and IT-transformation. C is a small Swedish management consulting firm with focus on coaching and leadership. D is a small management consulting firm focusing on agility and stability. E is a small management consulting firm focusing on IT-transformation as well as providing courses and workshops for agility. F is a small consulting firm but part of a larger group, focusing mainly on consulting within software and IT. G is a consulting firm, specializing in agile transformations. Both H and I are consultancy firms specializing in agility. J is a general management consultancy firm that provides solutions for making budgeting and finance more agile. K is a small consultancy firm focusing on digitalization and agility. Lastly, organization L is an advisory firm focusing on agile training.

Analysis

Rather than first gathering all the data and then proceeding to analysis, the analysis has been conducted as the data was gathered. The transcriptions of the interviews have been coded to facilitate an analysis of the material. As the interviews were held in Swedish, parts of them have also been translated for the purpose of writing the findings section. Through coding the transcripts it was possible to identify recurring themes. Themes that were identified were “the agility concept”, “the role of consultants”, “tools” and “the implementation process”. These themes were used to get an overview of the role of the consultants and how they draw upon other actors when implementing agility for the client. While “the agility concept”, “consultants” and “tools” are all considered actors, “the implementation process” theme was used to code when the interviewees discussed how those actors interacted, often with the client involved. The translation model from Callon (1984) was used as a model for grouping the data, structuring the results section and describing the process of implementing agility. Previous research papers on agility were chosen based on their relevance, in the sense that they have implications that are connected to the data. This made it possible to put the data in a wider context and make comparisons between the data and previous research. ANT was applied as an analytical tool to make conclusions about the behaviors of the actors in the network of implementing agility.

Results and Analysis

In this section, the results will be presented and analyzed. The first part presents a background on what the interviewees have said about agility and how it has become a trend. Using the notion of networks means that the findings are presented without distinctions between micro- and macro factors or assumptions about relationships of order (Latour, 1996). Throughout the Results and Analysis sections the empirical findings will be presented and discussed using previous research on consultancy and agility. As ANT is used as an analytical framework, the findings are discussed rather than tested (Pollack, Costello & Sankaran, 2013). Following this part of the section, the results are divided into the four different moments of the translation model. The four moments do not necessarily happen in a chronological order (Bergström & Diedrich, 2011). Based on the interviews, the implementations go through all four moments of translation. In general the material from the interviews suggest that the four moments happen in the order from Callon (1984), starting with problematization, followed by interessement, enrolment and finally mobilization. However there are some exceptions as every implementation is unique. Notably some interviewees have suggested that the consultants are not always part of the implementation from start to finish. Therefore the translation model is a useful tool to describe the implementations as it does not assume that the moments happen in a chronological order (Bergström & Diedrich, 2011).

Several interviewees suggest that agility is a trend that is driven by a need for increased flexibility but also because of a “buzz” around the concept. This is in line with the suggestion by Cram and Newell, that agility is not only a way of working but also a management fashion. One of the key elements in the concept of agility is the capability of consistently having the right person and the right resources in the right place and the right time even in large organizations. If organizations can do this it creates better quality, better customer satisfaction and reduces costs. By doing this, agility can contribute to the creation of organizations that are better at taking advantage of their staff and other resources (Senior consultant A1). This is similar to suggestions made by Shin et al (2015) in their paper. Shin et al (2015) found that a strategic aim towards increased agility has a positive influence on a firm’s operational performance. Interviewee L1, a business advisor, stated that while there is a need to make organizations more flexible and able to react faster, few of his clients actually have a clear definition of agility. Interviewee F5, a development manager, suggested that while agility is a lot of common sense that is packaged within a framework, the trend has been driven through a snowball effect, causing more and more people to talk about agility. Several interviewees have suggested that part of the demand for agility is because it is a trend that is marketed, so there is a “supply” of agility. Some interviewees suggest that the agility trend is partly driven by consultancy firms who sell agile transformation processes by understating how difficult it really is. Consultant I2 stated that agility is in demand for two reasons, some clients want to be agile because they actually believe in agile values while other clients simply want to copy the success of other agile organizations without subscribing to the

values. In these cases the client has arguably seen the output of agility in another organization without understanding the underlying process. Similar arguments were by Broer, Nieboer and Bal (2010) who suggest that improvement programs are often black boxed. This is also in line with the differentiation between how dabblers, tailors and crusaders view agility by Cram and Newell (2016). Consultant B2 stated that agility is not just a way of working but also a mindset and a culture, indicating that jumping on the trend without subscribing to the values can lead to difficulties. This is similar to arguments by Cram and Newell (2016) who suggest that organizations not anchoring agile principles in their culture often fail to remain agile in the long term. As several interviewees have suggested that the trend is practically driving itself, agility is considered to be a nonhuman actor in this paper.

It is partly a fashionable word, I feel like a lot of organizations are stressed about their ability to attract talent. They want to be up to date and have heard about more or less cool corporations who work in a different way. They think, oh, this agility thing has gotten a lot of attention and believe that it will fix everything. So it is a fashion while it is also a highly relevant way of working for many organizations. (Consultant B2)

According to several interviewees, consultants are often involved in driving the transformation due to a lack of internal knowledge within the client organization but also because it is considered beneficial to get feedback from an external party. The expertise and previous experiences of consultants is often a selling point. Sturdy (2011) makes a similar conclusion in his study, arguing that consultancy is often used as a way of legitimizing change. However several interviewees have said that consultants are sometimes hired because the managers of the client organization do not want to be responsible for the change process. Hence, consultants sometimes become scapegoats to blame if the implementation of agility fails. This is in line with previous research suggesting that consultants become scapegoats for management (Sturdy, 2011). Advisor L1 suggested that another reason that organizations hire consultants when implementing agility is that the managers think the expertise of consultants means that they themselves do not have to learn and understand agility.

One of the common reasons why organizations take in external consultants is to have someone to blame and sacrifice if it goes wrong. It is horrible but it is true, I have even done it myself sometimes. (Advisor/Founder, L1)

Interviewees have stated that sometimes they are there from the start of the implementation and sometimes they come in when the process has already started because the client has problems. Several interviewed consultants have stated that they prefer to be part of the implementation process from the start but that this is not always the case. Consultant I1 stressed the importance of the support from the consultants and suggested that organizations usually do not need the same amount of support throughout the implementation journey, but a varying degree of support depending on which stage

the client is in. A similar suggestion was made by Alvesson et al. (2009) who argued that the balance in the relationship between consultant and client is not necessarily fixed but continuously negotiated. This can require a large amount of expertise in different areas from the consultant. While some of the interviewees argued that agility can be implemented in basically any organization, others suggested that organizations in stable environments or heavily regulated industries do not benefit from becoming agile. Before starting to work with the clients, consultants often make a qualitative analysis of the needs of the client organization before the implementation process in order to assess what needs to be changed or adapted for the client organization in the implementation process. In order to analyze the actual implementation process, the model of translation from ANT was used (Callon, 1984).

Problematization and the Framing of Agility as a Solution

The translation model starts with actors defining a problem and framing a solution (Caldwell & Dyer, 2020). According to interviewees this is sometimes partly done by the client organization who have already identified a problem which they seek help to solve by bringing in a consultant. Several interviewees have stated that the clients often ask them to implement agile methods as a business solution. Consultant A2 suggested it is easier to get everyone onboard with the change in organizations if they are facing a crisis since in those situations there is a greater willingness to change. This implies that it can be more difficult to agree on a problem and test agility among the employees of the client organization as a solution unless there is a sense of urgency. Therefore, the definition of a business problem is crucial at the start of the process. Consultant I3 suggested that there are three different kinds of problems which the client organizations usually face and seek the help of the consultant in order to solve them, 1) more straightforward problems 2) complicated problems and 3) complex problems. Consultants can be needed for the client organization to solve all three types of problems, however implementing agile methods works well especially when facing complex problems. According to Consultant I3 this is because one can not use a step by step plan to solve this type of problem in the same way as one can do with straightforward or complicated problems. Complex problems are such problems which can not be removed from its environment, solved and returned without affecting the environment. Furthermore, in complex problems there is no clear relationship between cause and effect, hence this type of problems are often hard to deal with (Consultant, I3). Agility and agile methods can help in navigating through this type of problem. Sohi et al. (2015) concluded in their article that the usage of agile methods can help coping with complexity, since the characteristics that complex problems have, such as they do not need a detailed plan or that they are capable of self-organizing, fits very well with the agile concept. Several of the interviewees have stated that they sometimes take part in this process together with the client organization to help them in defining the problem and discuss how they could implement agility as a solution. Thus the definition of the problem is influenced by the clients.

You need to have a common definition of what they want to achieve, a strong vision and purpose which can act like a lighthouse, if we are going to be a more agile organization, what does that mean for us? to really define that. (Senior Consultant, A1)

The objective for consultants is often to present a solution to the problem and make other actors subscribe to their suggestion of a business solution. This is done through framing the solution and demonstrating how it will benefit the organization in the long term. Based on arguments by Caldwell and Dyer (2020) this creates an obligatory passage point and positions the consultants as indispensable as they are experts of the solution. According to several interviewees, part of framing the solution is to help the clients create a clear goal with the process of implementing agility. This is supported by arguments by Sturdy (2011) that consultants are used to legitimize change. Interviewee G1, a founder and CEO of a consultancy firm, stated that defining what value is desired from the change towards agility can help create a sense of purpose. Senior consultant A1 stated that “It is crucial that the activities of the organizations are in alignment with the goal image, that there is alignment between what is planned and the desired goal” in order for a successful implementation. Senior consultant J1 stated that he often starts the implementation process through an inspirational lecture with positive examples, but also with explaining some possible pitfalls to avoid. Consultants often educate the people in the organization on what agility actually is and how it can benefit them. Thus framing agility as a solution to the problem.

Senior consultant A1 stated that “the views on the concept will vary a lot between the HR-department compared to the IT or R&D department for example. Since the different departments work in different ways, it can be hard to formulate a consensus around a single definition. An important step in the implementation process is for everyone in the organization to really think about a common definition of what agility means for them and of what they want to achieve. According to Conforto et al. (2016) efforts to define agility have been inconsistent, explaining why organizations create their own definitions. Several interviewees have suggested that they try to facilitate an organization-wide definition through asking questions such as “if we are to become a more agile organization what is that and what does it mean ?” and “what does this mean in practice for us?”. According to senior consultant A1 this is an important step so that the clients have a clear picture of what they want to achieve in detail as well as identifying what the obstacles might be and how to remove them. Getting everyone, especially the leaders, onboard with the goal of becoming more agile is crucial for the success of the change process according to numerous interviewees.

I think one important thing is to have the leaders on the change journey. That there is understanding and commitment from their side. Otherwise there is a big risk that it will not succeed. (Consultant, G2)

Several interviewees highlight the need to get support from top management in the implementation process. This is in line with suggestions by Alvesson et al. (2009) that consultants try to identify and get support from key players in the client organization. Several interviewees have suggested that this is more difficult in organizations who are not committed to anchoring agility long term or just seek to implement agility in some departments. This is in line with arguments by Cram and Newell (2016) who suggest that crusaders and tailors are more likely to successfully anchor agility long term than dabblers. In most cases the interviewed consultants said that they take part in the definition of a business problem as well as the framing of agility as a solution and goal. This is in line with arguments by Caldwell and Dyer (2020). However, according to several interviewees, people in the client organization, especially top management, also influence the problematization part of the implementation. So consultants often play a part in defining the problem at the start of the implementation but the framing of the problem is also influenced by the client. As the consultants frame agility as a solution they become an obligatory passage point through their experience with the concept, this is supported by arguments by Heusinkveld and Visscher (2012) on the role of consultants.

Interessement and the Introduction of Agility Through Coaching

In the interessement moment, the driver of a change network tries to get the other actors to try the methods and tools associated with the change and tries to align the other actors with the business solution (Caldwell & Dyer, 2020). Consultant C1 suggested that some clients want to be agile because they think the team-driven way of working seems nice and fun but fail to understand that there are principles and structures involved. Therefore it is important that the consultants introduce agile principles and ways of working. Consultants do this through the implementation of daily meetings and other ceremonies from agile frameworks. Agility is often implemented using a framework of methods such as SAFe and/or Scrum. Some clients have already chosen a framework so the consultants do not always have a say in the choice of framework. The framework is often adjusted to suit the needs of the client so the adjustments are often decided in a mutual process with both consultants and clients involved. This is in line with the suggestion by Caldwell and Dyer (2020) that consultants try to give the client ownership of the business solution in the interessement moment. Through presenting agility to the employees in the client organization, consultants arguably become spokesmen for agility (Aka, 2019). Advisor L1 stated that letting the client test concepts from the standard framework is a way to build “muscle memory” and in order to actually make the clients succeed with agility they need to understand the underlying principles behind the frameworks.

The client usually picks methods, or frameworks. But there are a lot of principles to lean on if you talk about Scrum or that kind of tools and frameworks, or principles. We are very good at SAFe amongst other things. You have probably heard about it so that is something we are good at. But we work in other contexts and with other frameworks. Sometimes you do not follow a framework but the lean, agile principles. (Consultant G2)

Most interviewees have stated that they often act as coaches or educators when the clients start testing agile methods. Several interviewees stated that they offer competence programs and workshops in order to teach their clients the right skills to work with agility. These programs can also include topics such as innovation or analytics in order to try to make the clients more innovative and better at analyzing their firm and its context. However, several interviewees stressed that it is important to note that these pre-designed programs are not usually copied and pasted in the same way to all clients. Instead they are based on the specific needs of each client. Furthermore, many of the interviewed consultants stated that they use different visual tools to show results and processes. When trying to align the interest of the other actors with the business solution, some of the tools are already in place in the client organization from the start. However, tools and methods are often adjusted and tweaked based on what the client organization needs to specifically look at or visualize. This is in line with Heusinkveld and Visscher (2012) who argue that consultants frame and translate management concepts, based on the clients needs, into practice. According to some interviewees, tweaking the methods and tools helps give the clients a sense of ownership. This is in line with previous research on consultants in the interestment moment by Caldwell and Dyer (2020). Most of the interviewed consultants suggested that they often try to use tools and ceremonies such as workshops in order to help the employees get a deeper understanding of agility. Thus facilitating the adaptation of the employees into their new agile roles.

Starting to work in agile ways also requires cutting ties with old methods which is often difficult. Several interviewees have suggested that it is difficult to get the clients to stop working in old methods because agility is viewed differently in different departments. As an example, advisor L1 stated that there is a massive “sunk cost” in status quo that makes it difficult to stop using old methods unless there is a great sense of urgency. Because it is difficult to gain broad acceptance for agility if it is only implemented in parts of the organization, several interviewees suggest that agility should be implemented in the entire organization. This is because there is often a lot of tension in organizations where some parts use agile methods and others do not. Based on arguments by Cram and Newell (2016), this can be seen as an example of organizations tailoring agility to the point where the concepts do not work as intended. According to consultant I2, difficulties in implementing agility in certain departments is often due to misunderstandings and prejudice against the concept. Consultant I2 described how a sales department was sceptical towards agility because they thought it would mean that they had to stop documenting things entirely, which according to consultant I2 is not the case. Some organizations try to become agile while simultaneously clinging on to old ways. According to consultant F4, a common problem is that employees in the client

organizations get new roles within agile teams but are still expected to continue working in their old roles. According to consultant F4 this causes problems as both the new and the old roles are full-time jobs in their own right. This is in line with arguments by Drury et al. (2012) who suggested that agile teams face the problem of trying to do too much at the same time.

When an organization is going to implement SAFe they usually assign the new roles needed to employees who already have the old roles assigned to them, for example being both line-manager and product owner. Being a product owner is a full time job in itself, so what happens when the employee all of a sudden has two roles? Well, this means that the employee can't assign enough of his time to either of the roles which is problematic. (Consultant, F4)

Many of the interviewees have stated that a key component in implementing agility is the shift in leadership and decision making. When implementing agility the decision making shifts from managers to the employees that are closest to the customers. The clients often need coaching to facilitate this shift in decision making. However several interviewees have suggested that this shift is very difficult to make. Reid, Matthias and Bamford (2019) suggests that sometimes there can be resistance towards consultants. They further argue that reasons include suspicions that consultants might not understand the organizational culture and a willingness from the client to learn rather than be taught how to do things (Reid, Matthias & Bamford, 2019). According to some interviewees, the command and control structures within the client organization is often an obstacle for this shift. Consultant G3 suggested that it can be difficult to switch systems and structures because people in the client organization feel that they are experts at working with the old systems. This is in line with arguments by Fincham (1999) that there can be tensions between internal- and external expertise in the relationship between consultants and clients. Several interviewees have stated that they try to build trust within the client organization as well as take part in building agile teams to facilitate more agile decision processes. During the intressement moment the consultants mainly introduce agile concepts and methods while also educating and coaching the clients on how the concepts and methods can be applied. However it can be difficult to cut ties with the old ways of working.

Enrolment, Redefining the Roles of Agility and Employees

In the moment of enrolment, the consultants try to define the roles of the other actors in the network and make them allies in the agile change network (Caldwell & Dyer, 2020). According to a large majority of the interviewed consultants, agility itself seems to be an actor that needs to be defined and enrolled as the concepts and frameworks are often tweaked to suit the client. During this moment in the translation model the boundaries of change network shifts and begins to emerge in a more well defined form. With the help of the consultant the actors take on their new roles they have been given and the new

network starts to interact on a more regular basis (Caldwell & Dyer (2020)). Several consultants suggested that they have knowledge of various agile frameworks but that these frameworks need to be adapted to fit the needs of the clients. This is in line with the suggestions from Heusinkveld and Visscher (2012) that consultants actively frame and translate concepts for the client. Common frameworks that were mentioned by interviewees include Scrum, Safe and Lean. Several of the interviewees suggested “cherry picking” ideas and concepts from different frameworks to build a way of working that fits the client as it is unlikely that adopting a “pure” framework fulfills the needs of the client. This suggests that becoming a crusader, an organization that implements agility completely by the book (Cram & Newell, 2016) is unlikely to solve the clients business problems. Consultant I2 suggested that in some cases it is best to not mention agility at all because some people misunderstand or distrust the concept. In these cases, consultant I2 suggests talking about the underlying values or purpose with the implementation instead to get the people and the concept to interact better. Multiple interviewees suggest that consultants can help decide what part of the new agile strategy needs to be standardized throughout the entire organization and what can be adapted to fit the specific context of different departments. This is in line with Heusinkveld and Visscher (2012) who argue that consultants actively frame and translate management concepts into practice based on their clients needs. An interviewee stated that her role is “often to create accuracy in the implementation, so the clients get the type of agility they desire” (Consultant A2). This implies that consultants can try to define the clients as tailors that adjust agility to suit them (Cram & Newell, 2016). It also suggests that the consultants take part in deciding how the agile frameworks and the client interact with each other.

In order to implement agility and agile management, consultants use many different tools. Mostly tools which are used to analyze and track how the implementation is moving forward. Therefore several interviewees have suggested that analytical tools can be important for a successful implementation. Consultant B2 stated that sometimes the client will need to adopt new digital tools and IT-systems in order to become more agile. Implying that new tools are sometimes enrolled during the implementation process. Consultant F3 stated that he uses different questionnaires and assessment tools to see where the members of a team are in the agile process. Senior consultant J1 stated that his firm has a tool for analyzing how well agile steering models fit the client organization. Several interviewees stated that visual tools are sometimes used to rhetorically support the transformation and help the client organization overcome obstacles as well as helping the transformation move forward. Thus the tools are enrolled, as is suggested by Sage, Vitry and Dainty (2020) who imply that the relationships within a network create opportunities for the enrolment of nonhuman actors. This suggests that nonhuman actors such as tools, frameworks and artifacts can play a major part in the implementation of agility. For example consultant F2 stated that a gap-analysis showing the difference between where the client is now and where the client wants to be can be useful in helping the implementation move forward.

There are different types of assessment that I usually do when I come to a new team to see their level. Kind of read them. They get a self assessment, a number of questions with a scoring system. Based on that and the evaluation I make. I do not do the assessment but I know, I notice things but I do not interfere. But twelve times out of ten the result coincides with what I am seeing. The assessment helps them realize the problems themselves. Then they get insights and you can prioritize and work with the problems. (Consultant F3)

Advisor L1 argues that a principle for making an organization more agile is to bridge the gap between the people developing products and the people buying the product. As L1 suggested that those gaps are often very big, bridging the gap would mean redefining the roles of the people developing products. Getting the people in the organization to assume their new roles can be difficult. Several interviewees have suggested that the reward systems of the client organization can be an obstacle for the implementation. Consultant A2 stated that keeping the old reward system when implementing agility can disturb the process as it creates incentives for working in the same way as before. Senior consultant A1 stated that it is crucial to remove such systemic obstacles and that part of his role is to make sure that the systems and plans are in alignment with the vision of becoming more agile. This is in line with arguments by Sturdy (2011) suggesting that consultants often act as catalysts of change. Removing the old reward system suggests that a new reward system might need to be enrolled if agility is to be successfully implemented. Otherwise, there is a risk that the employees fall back into their old ways of working, this would suggest that the organization falls into what Cram and Newell (2016) refers to as the “dabbler” category. In which agility is often only considered a short term response to a trend rather than a long term way of working. Several interviewees suggest that it is not uncommon that employees quit their job during the change process as not everyone wants to work in an agile way. Many interviewees suggest that the primary way to get people on board with agility is coaching and education even when there is resistance. This is in line with a suggestion by Caldwell and Dyer (2020) who suggest that the role of consultants is often to be a mediator of information. Consultant F6 who worked as a project manager stated that she would try to find people within the organization who do not work in agile ways and try to talk to them about agility to get them onboard. According to senior consultant A1 the unions and HR department can be part of the resistance for change but potentially also act as “enablers” for implementing agility.

A lot of middle managers have a disadvantage of knowledge and do not understand why we are making the changes. It can be HR and finance people that are used to run command and control on everything, like measuring everything, every day. Suddenly you start to change the entire way of working. They face very difficult problems in understanding why we do this. So I think there are a lot of obstacles for agile organizations that you need to be aware of. For example managers, middle managers and line managers might understand why we are doing this. (Consultant/Owner G1)

Some interviewees have stated that line managers, middle managers and project leaders often struggle with the agile transformation as their role is often redefined in a radical way. Their role generally changes when moving from a traditional hierarchical structure into a more agile, team based structure where responsibility and decision making is shared. Interviewees suggest that the shift in decision making from the managers to the employees that are closest to the clients means that managers take on a more coaching or supporting role. Some interviewees argued that this can make the line managers and middle managers uncomfortable since they are used to being responsible for the decision making. Consultant D1 stated that middle managers often struggle to understand their new role. This can lead to dissidence which can be a huge obstacle in moving forward in the change process (Aka, 2019). Manager F5 who has been responsible for an agile transformation stated that it is crucial to educate middle managers and get them to assume their new roles as soon as possible in order to facilitate the process as they are often powerful members of the organization. According to manager F5 there is a lot of responsibility on the top management and consultants involved in the process to get them onboard in order for the implementation to be successful. This is in line with arguments by Alvesson et al. (2009) who suggest that it is important for consultants to connect with the powerful members of the client organization. Consultant K1 stated that a leading member in her team at the client organization was educated in agility as they prefer to develop people internally rather than hire new people. In conclusion, consultants generally act as a middleman during the moment of enrolment to redefine agility and make it more approachable for the client. However, agility still forces the people within the client organization to change their roles and behaviour which can be very difficult and lead to resistance.

Mobilization, Trying to Anchor Agility as a Long Term Change

Mobilization is the moment in which agility becomes the norm and the network is stabilized. To achieve this some consultants work with the culture of the client organization, from an agile perspective. For example senior consultant A1 emphasized the communication of consultants in consistently clarifying and motivating the implementation of agility. The network might collapse if agility has not been properly anchored. This can be connected to what Cram & Newell (2016) refers to regarding the three categories for patterns in implementation of agility. Cram & Newell (2016) argue that organizations that fall into the dabbler's category are relatively likely to consider agility as a short-term way of working rather than a long-term and sustainable integration of agility. Although dabblers use agile methods in a ceremonial way that employs a few agile techniques, their way of work remains primarily rooted in a plan-driven approach. Because of this, dabbler organizations have difficulties leaving their plan-driven traditions behind. This makes it harder to properly anchor the changes (Cram & Newell, 2016). Another obstacle for anchoring agility, according to several interviewees, is that some clients only want to implement agility in certain parts of the organization. This can lead to clashes between departments when they work together. For example, consultant

D2 stated that it can be very difficult to get acceptance for agile ways of working if the implementation is only started in one department.

A downside is that it can disturb the classic command and control structures. This can create conflicts within the organization. That is not criticism toward agile in itself. It is more criticism against trying to adopt agile methods on an agile island. Rather than the entire organization that remains a hierarchical bureaucracy. That can cause difficulty as you do not reap the benefits of agile methods. At least not in the entire organization.
(Senior Consultant J1)

According to consultant I2 the agile transformation often collapses because clients underestimate how long it takes to change their behavior. Often the consultants are expected to successfully make the organization agile within three months though properly anchoring the changes can take much longer (Consultant I2). An exception to this is consultant K1 who stated that she has worked for the same client for a couple of years and has built trust there. Consultant I2 stated that implementing agility should be considered a journey rather than a transformation, because the process never ends. Several interviewees suggested that implementing agile does not have clear start and end points. It is therefore almost a forever ongoing process regarding the culture and practices of the organization. This is supported by Cram and Newell (2016) who argued that becoming more agile is a potentially an ever ongoing process. Furthermore, consultant E1 suggested that short term agile coaching roles are well suited for consultancy while more long term roles should arguably be filled by permanent employees. The problem of the limited time for consultants was also highlighted by consultant I2 who suggested that while some agile teams learn fast, others can require a very long period of time before they start living by agile values. This is in line with research by Heusinkveld and Visscher (2012) implying that working with cultural questions in the client organization can require a lot of time.

Manager F5 suggested that a skilled consultant should make sure that the change is properly implemented so that the consultant can leave without leaving a gap. So while consultants are often driving the change in the early stages when tweaking the agile concepts, the client should arguably become the main driver before the consultants leave. This is difficult as consultants are often not only expected to drive the change, they can also be seen as spokesmen for agility as they are often the ones who introduce the concepts and frameworks (Aka, 2019). Consultant F2 suggested that it is important to let the staff of the clients be part of driving the change so the clients are not completely reliant on consultants in the agile implementation. A similar suggestion was made by consultant G3 who argued that consultants should avoid creating a situation in which the client is depending on the consultant. Consultant I1 brought up the importance of feedback and evaluation on how the people in the client organization think that the implementation is going. This is facilitated through asking questions about how confident they are about continuing to drive the implementation of agility by themselves. This consultant I1 stressed as an important part of the process, since if the client is not

confident in proceeding without the consultant, the organization will often not be able to maintain a permanent change in mindset and work processes. Thus often falling back to the old ways once the consultant is gone (Consultant I1). Several of the interviews suggest that while consultants are often seen as drivers of change they should make sure that they are dispensable before leaving the client since the change process is everlasting. As the consultants have introduced agility they can arguably be seen as spokesmen for the implementation (Aka, 2019). While Sturdy (2011) states that consultants are seen as catalysts of change, several interviewees suggest that the clients need to be able to keep driving the change in order to anchor it. Consultant B2 highlighted the importance of educating and coaching the clients top management while working with agility. Thus enabling managers to discuss the transition with their group and drive the change process themselves in order for it to last long term. This arguably means making the managers spokesmen for agility (Aka, 2019). If this fails the old habits from before the implementation can resurface once the consultants leave the client organization. Arguably this is more likely to happen in what Cram and Newell (2016) call dabbler organizations who do not necessarily consider agility to be a long term way of working.

We do not usually call it an agile transformation, we call it a journey. Because it never really ends. A transformation is a change we make and then it is over. That is one of the misunderstandings. You are never done. You can always get a little better. That is what it is about, to always improve. You never get done. But if you think it is over after three months it is easy to just hire a consultant. Then three months go by and things are going pretty well because you have started to work with the visible things. The top of the iceberg is showing and you have made it work. But you have not started to fix the things below the surface. So after three months the things at the top work. Great, throw out the consultant! But then the entire thing collapses... (Consultant I2)

Several interviewees suggested that if agility has not been properly anchored within the client organization, and there is a lack of the knowledge and drive for change it is likely that the implementation will collapse. According to senior consultant J1 it is common that the change towards agility fails because key people, for example top executives, leave the client organization. J1 suggested that the internal leaders are more important than consultants in anchoring agility long term. This is because the new people replacing them might want to implement something other than agility. Advisor L1 also argued for the importance of the leaders in the client organization in driving the change. L1 stated that the employees in the client organizations tend to trust the internal leaders more than they trust external advisors and consultants during change processes. Consultant F4 suggested that consultants rarely see the consequences of a difficult agile transformation as they are rarely there once the real difficulties appear, also suggesting that it might be beneficial to hire people permanently for driving the implementation. In summary agility sometimes struggles to survive within the client organization once the consultants leave. This is in line with arguments by Callon (1984) suggesting that if the spokesmen are put into question or rejected the network becomes unstable as the consultants are spokesmen for agility and leave the network. Some interviewees have suggested that this often

happens because the client underestimates how difficult it is to properly anchor the cultural and behavioral changes that agility requires. Successfully implementing agility long term requires anchoring it in the organizational culture. This is difficult for consultants to do if they do not have a lot of time (Heusinkveld & Visscher, 2012). Thus consultants are useful as coaches and supporters of change but the main responsibility for driving the implementation and acting as spokesmen for agility should be placed on the internal leaders of the client organization. Otherwise it is difficult for the network of the implementation to become stabilized and black boxed.

Conclusion

This paper has investigated the role of consultants in translating the concept of agility as well as mobilizing and influencing other human and nonhuman actors in the implementation. The implementation of agility was studied through the lens of actor network theory. Emphasis has been put on what the consultants do in this process and what tools they use to influence the other actors in the network through the four-moment translation model from Callon (1984). Cram and Newell (2016) suggest that organizations view and implement agility differently, some view it as a short term way of working while others seek to anchor it in their culture long term. This is in line with the findings of this paper and influences the situation of consultants when they work with the clients. Several interviewees have suggested that some organizations want to implement agility because they want to jump on the trend but do not understand the principles and purpose of agility. This can be because the organizations that are already successful in working with agility can be black boxed. This is in line with arguments by Broer, Nieboer and Bal (2010) who suggested that change programs that can be considered finished often become black boxes. The organizations that seek to copy them just see the output but do not know the underlying processes and principles. As several interviewees suggested that agility is not only ways of working but also a trend that in some ways is driving itself, agility has been studied as a nonhuman actor in the network of implementation. The interviews conducted for this paper suggest that in many cases, consultants are expected to drive the implementation. This is in line with previous research on the role of consultants as catalysts of change (Sturdy, 2011). Additionally, as several interviewees suggest that consultants represent the change, this suggests that consultants can be seen as spokesmen for agility (Aka, 2019). Combining insights from interviews with ANT as well as previous research on consultancy and agility has allowed for a discussion of how consultants act to define the relationship between agility and clients.

In the problematization moment, the material from the interviews suggest that getting a common definition of the problem at client organization is crucial. Because every client organization has different problems they want to deal with, the interviewees suggested that consultants need to use their experience and expertise to reframe and adjust agility. As one size does not fit all, the framing of the problem and agility, as the solution, will

vary from client to client. This is similar to results from a previous study on consultants by Heusenkveld and Visscher (2012) who suggested that consultants frame and translate concepts for their clients. In the problematization moment, the objective for consultants is to present a solution and make other actors subscribe to their suggestion of a business solution through framing the solution and demonstrating how it will benefit the organization. During this moment an obligatory passage point is established and the consultants often become indispensable for the implementation, similar to suggestions by Heusenkveld and Visscher (2012). Framing agility as a solution is often done through educating employees in the organization on what agility actually is and how it can have a positive impact. Consultants often try to help the client create a common goal image to build a sense of purpose with the implementation. It is also important that the client organizations activities are in alignment with the goal image in order for a successful implementation. So an important part in the problematization moment is to create consensus around the problem and a goal to build a sense of purpose with agility throughout the client organization. Gaining support for agility from top management is crucial for consultants during this moment in the translation model.

In the interessement moment the consultants, as drivers of the change process try to get the other actors to test the methods and tools associated with agility. Thus aligning the other actors with the business solution. Several interviewees have suggested that this gives the client ownership of agility, similar to suggestions by Caldwell and Dyer (2020). Often the consultants introduce ceremonies such as workshops and agile frameworks like scrum, the agile manifesto and SAFe in order to help the employees get a deeper understanding of agility. Consultants often act as coaches and educators when introducing these agile concepts. Thus facilitating the adaptation of the employees into their new roles. However, material from the interviews suggest that it is often difficult to cut ties with old ways of working. An important component in agility that can be difficult to achieve is the shift in decision making from managers towards employees that are close to the customers. Based on the interviews this is especially true in organizations who only want to implement agility in certain departments. This is in line with previous research by Cram and Newell (2016) who suggested that there can be difficulties when agility is not fully anchored. Misunderstandings and prejudice against agile ways of working can also cause difficulties for consultants during the interessement moment. Thus the educational role of consultants is very important in order to build understanding for agile methods and frameworks.

In the moment of enrolment, the consultants try to define the roles of the other actors in the network and make them potential "allies" in the agile change network. In order to define how the client interacts with agility the agile frameworks are often adjusted towards the needs of the client as one size does not fit all. This also includes adjusting the systems and tools that are used by the client in order to define how they work with agility. For example the reward system in the client organization might need to change. Similar findings were made by Sage, Vitry and Dainty (2020) who argued that relationships in the network allows for other, nonhuman actors, to become part of the

network. Changing the roles of the actors in the client organization is often difficult and can lead to resistance. Especially middle managers often find it hard to adjust to agile ways of working as decision making often moves from managers to the employees that are closest to the customers. Material from the interviews suggest that it is important for consultants to get middle managers onboard with the change. This is similar to arguments by Alvesson et al (2009) who suggested that it is important for consultants to connect with powerful members of the client organization. The moment of enrolment is especially difficult in organizations who underestimate the extent and difficulty of the process to become agile. In some organizations the employees might be expected to continue in their old role while simultaneously adopting a new role during the implementation. During enrolment, consultants often act as middlemen, taking part in negotiating the roles within the client organization and tweaking agile concepts to suit the needs of the client.

In the mobilization moment, agility should become the norm and the network should be stabilized. To achieve this some consultants work with the culture of the client organization, from an agile perspective. However, several interviewees have suggested that they often do not have time to do this as clients often underestimate the extent of the change process. This is in line with previous research on agility by Cram and Newell (2016) who suggested that some organizations do not anchor agility as a long term change. Based on the interviews, the temporary nature of consultancy can be a major problem during the mobilization moment. As consultants can be seen as spokesmen for agility, based on material from the interviews and previous research by Aka (2019), the network often becomes unstable once consultants leave. Consultants should therefore prior to leaving, make sure that the client organization is ready to continue to work with agility themselves. Some interviewees have suggested this should also be the responsibility of leaders within the client organization. Arguably consultants should move from change drivers to coaching and educational roles as it is easier to anchor agility if the people in the client organization are driving the change. So while the client organizations can expect consultants to guide them and help them tweak the agile frameworks, the leaders of the client organizations need to be prepared to drive and anchor the implementation themselves. This also means mobilizing new spokesmen for agility within the organization. If there is no one to speak for and represent agility it is unlikely to become black boxed and standardized as a culture and a way of working within the organization.

Through discussing consultants as spokesmen for agility during implementation processes, this paper contributes to consultancy research with an ANT perspective on what happens when consultants leave the client during a change process. The main findings of this paper are: 1) As one size does not fit all, the interviewees argue that consultants need to tweak the concepts based on the individual needs of the clients. 2) It is more difficult for consultants to help with the implementation of agility in organizations who seek to copy the success of other agile organizations without

understanding the extent of the change. 3) Consultants act as spokesmen for agility but the temporary nature of consultancy causes difficulties for anchoring agility long term.

Regarding the implementation of agility, the interviews suggest that consultants tend to tweak the frameworks and concepts to suit the needs of the clients. This is similar to suggestions from a previous study on consultancy by Alvesson et al (2009). Cram and Newell (2016) suggest that while it is often beneficial for organizations to adjust agility to their needs, sometimes this can lead to the concepts not working as they are supposed to. Several interviewees have made similar suggestions, especially for implementations when clients just want to make some departments agile, rather than the entire organization. The material from the interviews also suggest that it is more difficult for consultants to help with the implementation of agility in organizations who seek to copy the success of other agile organizations but do not understand the underlying principles. Clients who jump on the trend in this way have often just seen the output of an agile organization as the processes behind a “finished” change program are often black boxed (Broer, Nieboer & Bal, 2010). In these cases it is difficult for consultants to anchor agility for the client long term. This is similar to arguments by Cram and Newell (2016) who divided organizations implementing agility into different categories, suggesting that some of them viewed it as a short term trend. Adding the perspective of consultants to this provided the insight that it is more difficult for consultants to work with clients who just jump on the trend and that consultants are often scapegoated if the implementation fails. Consultants act as spokesmen for agility but the temporary nature of consultancy causes problems when the consultants leave as the network becomes unstable. When the network becomes unstable it gets difficult to black box agility and anchor it long term. This has practical implications for organizations who want to implement agility as they need to make sure that they are able to carry on with the implementation after the consultants leave. Otherwise it is likely that the network collapses and the implementation fails. Although the findings of this paper are similar to previous research on consultants and agility, using the lens of ANT provides a new theoretical perspective on the reliance on consultants in implementation processes.

Future Research

The gathering of primary material for this paper has been limited to interviews with individuals who have experience working with implementing agility and consultancy. Future studies of the implementation of agility could be enriched through observing meetings and seeing what happens when actors discuss agility together in a physical setting. As most of the interviewees work with agility as management consultants, interviewing people in more different positions and further investigating their roles in the process would also provide more perspectives on the implementation of agility. For example the roles of line managers and middle managers change thoroughly during an agile transformation. Studying how they deal with the change would be beneficial for a deeper understanding of agile transformations. As this paper has discussed the role of

consultants in the implementation of agility, another potential topic for future research could be to study whether the role of consultants in the implementation of agility varies depending on what industry they consult in. Future research could also study whether the role of the consultants differ depending on the size or age of the client-organization. The perspective of consultants as spokesmen could also be used to see whether the dependency of consultants is different in other kinds of implementations and change programs.

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