UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

Just like a virus, change is spreading

A qualitative study exploring how continuous change within a logistic company is perceived and executed by managers.

Axel von Homeyer & My Pousette

Master Thesis:	30 hp
Program:	Strategic Human Resource Management & Labour Relations
Level:	Masters/Second Cycle
Semester/year:	Spring/2022
Supervisor:	Freddy Hällsten
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Abstract

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Report No:	
Keywords:	*Continuous change, Effectiveness, Sustainable, Virus theory, Management, Leadership, Communication*

Purpose:	Together with a large logistic organisation, this paper investigates a change, called project S. This study explores the perspectives of the managers within the chosen case company, how they perceived, executed the change and how they experienced the effectiveness and sustainability of project S. Based on previous research, the various factors and the complexity of change, organisational change is vital to explore in order to pursue a better understanding of the processes. The purpose of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of how the managers perceived the change by exploring their lived experiences.
Theory:	This study applies Røvik's (2011) virus theory providing six different stages of change in the phases of *infectiousness*, *immunity*, *replication*, *incubation*, *mutation* and *dormancy*. Røvik's approach on organisational change provides a deeper understanding of the processes of change through different stages and the various challenges it might face.
Method:	The method used is a qualitative one, being 16 semi-structured interviews with managers at the logistic company. After collecting the empirical data, coding using thematization was used in order to discover patterns that can relate to the theory.
Results:	The main findings resulted in a thematic analysis creating themes connected to *leadership in transition*, *communication through change* and *closure of continuous change*. Within these themes, sub-themes were discovered and used to gain both a deeper understanding and a more elaborative result. The concise conclusion of the managers experiences, of project S with its sustainability and effectiveness, show connection to enhanced leadership style and adjusted communication techniques.

Foreword

First and foremost, we would like to thank the participants of our case company who have taken the time to contribute with their experiences and thoughts about the change project S. In this process we would like to express our gratitude to our contact person at the case company, who has been a massive support regarding information, contacts and communication during this thesis. We would also like to thank our supervisor Freddy Hällsten, for valuable feedback and guidance. Last but not least, we want to thank each other for a great collaboration, great energy and good humour throughout the creation of this thesis.

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1. Introduction

Organisational change is fundamental for organisations to remain relevant and profitable (Branson, 2008) and when approaching change, organisations face themselves before a choice of how to manage it. Change management has an important role in the outcome of the intended change and in this field there is a wide consensus that the majority of organisations fail to achieve the planned outcome (Hanson, 2013; Balogun & Hailey 2008; Sirkin et al., 2005; Beer & Nohria, 2000). How organisations manage change is of vital importance for their survival and how to do so is in need of constant research due to its numerous factors, contexts and management ideas (Todnem, 2005; Burnes & Jackson, 2011; Jansson, 2013). The various factors and why they result in success or failure differs vastly. It could be factors regarding culture, leadership, organisational processes, implementation and so forth (Gill, 2002; Brown, 1992; Burnes & Jackson, 2011). The role of managers in aspects of change is vital. Mostly since employees view their managers as the main source of information. When a change is occurring, employees will usually question how it will affect them and if they are at any risk. These questions will be directed at the manager hence why they need to be well informed (Ionescu, Meruta & Dragomiroiu, 2014).

Change is a field with vast differences of perspectives and controversies. The controversies start by investigating what change really is. According to Ford and Ford (1994) change is equal to time and is always present. The need for change can also be seen as a result of people not doing their jobs correctly and therefore enforcing change to take place (Dunphy, 1996). Even at such a general level of theory, opinions and conceptions of change differ which makes it vital to create a scope sufficient to this paper. By combining previous research and the theory chosen, this paper will strive towards a modern take on change. To create a modern take, well established theories will serve as the foundation and a support function to a more modern theory. Lewin (1939; 1943; 1958) is a well-known researcher who established several theories of change. An example is his explanation of change as a process going through three steps; unfreeze, moving and freeze (Lewin, 1958). Since his work in the research field of change others have developed different and more detailed versions. Kotter (1996; 2012) states that change should start with a sense of urgency. If not, resistance will be a major obstacle since change managers are agents for disequilibrium. More recently, Amaro De Matos and Clegg (2013) states that modern change usually is related to sustainability. Changes that are associated with operational sustainability are often more inclusive and flexible. The goal is often to reach better results within environmentally, social and ethical responsibility (Amaro De Matos & Clegg, 2013). Another view on change is the continuous nature of change, explained by Hayes (2010), who identifies it as the continuous updating of the organisation's processes and social practice. With these views stated, this study defines change by the common pattern of change being a dynamic process, moving through stages to evolve the organisation's past practices with the incentive to become as sustainable and effective as possible. Sustainable change in this scenario is seen as Sackmann, Eggenhofer-Rehart and Friesl (2009) states, meaning as a way for organisations to ensure that the change is long lasting and stable. Effective change strives more to ensure that the activities and processes performed by the organisation are accomplished within the given time frame (Carnall, 2007). As explained, change is a broad field and can be approached in different ways (Branson, 2008) but a common goal of becoming more sustainable and to remain profitable can be found in many organisations today (Hanson, 2013; Håkonsson, Klaas & Carroll, 2012; Brännmark & Benn, 2012; Morin et al., 2016).

This paper intends to focus on managers' perspective within continuous change, defined by Weick and Quinn (1999) as adjusting practices and actions to ensure a constant advancement as an organisation. Together with continuous change, the topics of sustainability and effectiveness will be essential in this paper. Since there is a high number of failures within change management (Hanson, 2013; Balogun & Hailey, 2008; Sirkin et al., 2005; Beer & Nohria, 2000) one could argue that to reach the planned change as intended, is a common issue within organisations today. Therefore, this paper strives to present itself as an applicable tool for change initiatives for organisations. To do so, this paper will be presented as a case study to be able to exemplify different aspects within the process of change. More specifically, this paper will investigate a continuous change in terms of management, sustainability and effectiveness within a large logistics company. The next section will introduce their recent change initiatives, followed by a deeper explanation of the problematization and the case company.

1.1 Case company and project S

As briefly mentioned, this study will focus on continuous change in the aspects of sustainability and effectiveness from the perspective of managers. To investigate the process of continuous change and how managers experience and execute this change a case study will be conducted. In this section the case company will be presented and to ensure anonymity towards the organisation in question, some information will be withheld. Due to the anonymity, the change that the case company has conducted, will be renamed and referred to as "project S".

Organisations constantly need to evaluate their process of change, a task, which the case company has taken on, not only to become more effective but also more sustainable. The organisation is one of the leading providers within logistics services in the Nordic regions. They have a responsibility towards the community, stated by the law. As a market leader in Sweden regarding logistics, the company serves as an important function for the Swedish community. The case company has since 2019 undergone a major change initiative, project S, regarding their distribution processes. The reasons behind the change initiative is based on the organisation's aim to maintain sustainability and on external factors affecting their business. Based on the market's demands, a decrease in volume has been the main factor behind the change. Because of this decrease in volume, the organisation initiated change to maintain their responsibility towards the society but also to aim for further sustainability and effectiveness, striving to be competitive.

What is regarded as unique for project S is how the change was not implemented within the whole organisation at the same time. Instead, they used a continuous change process, first implementing the change in a pilot region, from which knowledge was taken and applied onto the implementation of the next region. This is a different approach compared to previous changes within the organisation. With this new strategy the organisation is able to obtain and evaluate results from the change process. The organisation utilises different offices and terminals that also differ in sizes and geographical uniqueness. In this paper, these offices and terminals will be referred to as entities. The managers were informed about the reason behind project S, what it meant and a time frame for the change. It was then up to each manager to execute the change. To investigate the project, processes such as execution and perceived experiences are of interest. This paper intends to investigate the process of the change called project S, at stated case company, based on the managers perspective. Change is always present and will always be in motion (Burnes, 2004), simultaneously the organisation needs to gather and conclude the result in order to improve.

As described earlier, the reason the case company is enforcing project S is because the demand has decreased based on external factors, such as market change. This raises the questions of the difference between strategic change and process change. Strategic change is often related to external forces, such as customers, market demands etc (Ford & Evans, 2001). With that stated, process change can be viewed to change the internal structure of the organisation. According to Ford and Evans (2001) organisations want to improve actions in order to reach better results when processing change. This also aligns with the goals and reasons why the organisation applied project S. The reasons for organisations to use strategic change is to stay competitive and relevant on the market (Ford & Evans, 2001). Ford and Evans (2001) emphasise that an organisation does one or the other of strategic and process change, not both at the same time. This paper can therefore be considered contributing to new knowledge with project S both being a change within strategic and process nature.

There is a vast amount of research and papers describing cases of change from different perspectives (Lewin, 1958; Kotter, 2012; Amaro De Matos & Clegg, 2013; Hayes, 2010) but what makes project S unique is mainly two factors; change is implemented in a chronical order, from region to region while also relying on continuous change. The combination between these two factors contributes to a new type of knowledge but also a concern of the lacking knowledge. As stated earlier, there is a vast amount of empirical data and cases existing regarding change, with different perspectives and one of the reasons why this paper is of importance is to contribute to this field of research within continuous change. The subject of continuous change has been researched before, however there is a lack of studies that constitutes the region to region type of change of the continuous nature. Lewin's (1958) and Kotter's (1996) research is often conducted based on an organisation making the change as one process, not several. In these studies, organisations are not divided into different sections that are simultaneously in different stages of change which differs from the project S.

1.2 Stated issues of project S

One challenge with the project is the struggle to follow up on the continuous change and the collection of experience. Project S is designed to constantly develop new feedback and experience for the organisation through change. It also is designed to place responsibility on to the managers since they are the ones who receive the information first and are meant to execute the change. This means that the organisation needs to capitalise on the experience the project got from the first implementation, before making the same mistake. Another perspective is that it is not enough to receive reports of mistakes and then proceed. The organisation needs to deal with the issues from the previous change, in order to obtain sustainable and effective. Lastly, the background of this study is connected to the need for the organisation to ensure that the project is effective and sustainable based on the change perspective. The paper intends to investigate how the case company's managers have executed the change called project S. Connected to the background of this study the process of the change and how change management was conducted is of interest. However, the importance of the sustainability, effectiveness and the lived experience of the change can be understood as a core of this study.

2. Aim and research questions

The aim of this study is to provide a deeper understanding for how managers within a large logistics company manage continuous change and how they try to achieve a sustainable and effective process of this change. Within this research area the study will explore perspectives of managers in one region of Sweden who have executed the change while being responsible for the employees. This study is guided by the following research questions.

1. How do managers perceive and execute continuous change?

2. What do the managers describe regarding the effectiveness and sustainability in the process of continuous change?

3. Disposition of study

The disposition of this study is divided into seven sections. Firstly, the study has provided an introduction towards the subject of the study, leading to the research objectives, aim and research questions of the study. Secondly, the structure of this study involves previous studies on organisational change. The third section offers a description of the chosen theory and its possible contribution towards the analysis. Moving on to the fourth part, the reader will find a presentation of the methodology chosen to gather and handle the empirical data. In the next section, the results of the empirical data are presented to then be analysed by using the theoretical framework in the sixth section of this study. The final section of this master thesis sums up the study and provides a conclusion connected to the aim of the study by answering the research questions.

4. Previous research on organisational change

This section will provide an overview of the research area and what has been studied before within the field of organisational change. Firstly, the larger research area of change is presented, followed by categorised summaries of different fields within the sphere of change. In this section the reader will gain a deeper knowledge of previous studies within continuous change, sustainable change, effective change and change management. The section also provides attention to this study's contribution to the research of continuous change.

In relation to the conflict of the most suitable approach towards change there are several studies showing that change management has a high rate of failure, approximately 70-80% of companies fail to manage change (Hanson, 2013; Rhys Evans, 2020; Sirkin et al., 2005; Beer & Nohria, 2000). The difficulties and reason behind the rate of unsuccessful change, differs. Studies show that reasons vary from, for example, unattentive leadership (Sirkin et al., 2005), lack of knowledge and involvement from the HR-department (Tummers et al., 2015), absence of evidence-based theories (Todnem, 2005), lack of implementing tools (Rhys Evans, 2020) or a shortage of communication during change (Bansal & King, 2020). A common factor within the issues above is that change is implemented all at once and not in a continuous nature. This is unlike project S since the change is different from region to region and therefore is constantly evolving using continuous change. However, the studies do provide common challenges when conducting change which is of value to the research regarding project S. Since project S is also a project aiming at continuous change within the case company, the concept of continuous change is of interest to explore.

4.1 Continuous change

Weick and Quinn (1999) suggested that a continuous change is the idea of small and constant adaptations, created simultaneously within different units, which lead to substantial change. Within the continuous change they found three processes being *improvisation, translation* and *learning*, involving a continuous revision of shared models (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Evolving from Weick and Quinn's (1999) description, Brännmark and Benn (2012) provides an example of continuous change as a concept rather than an episodic change, highlighting the importance of learning, feedback and evaluation. According to Hayes (2010), the description of continuous change by Weick and Quinn (1999), can be understood as a means of repeated acts converting ideas of change. These repeated acts are within the whole organisation, embedded into useful processes of learning that strengthen or weaken the repertoire of responses. In regards to this, Burke (2002) stresses that even if an organisation manages to process continuous change it is still unlikely that there will be fundamental changes within the deep structure of the organisation.

The result of the continuous change depends on the level of interdependence within the subunits of the organisation (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Meaning, if the subunits are loosely interdependent the results of the change might not lead to a fundamental one (Hayes, 2010). This perspective embraces change as a part of the whole organisation whilst Kerber and Buono (2005) presents continuous change as a natural and vital part of an organisation coming from its units. Larger and smaller changes that are arising from different levels can be based on error and success. This could come from one unit to then be spread to other units (Kerber & Buono, 2005). Another aspect of change is the goal to remain or become sustainable (Amaro De Matos & Clegg, 2013). Whether the change is regarding sustainable subject, or any other perspective, it is still seen as the managers are the people to implement the process and oversee the project as a whole. To include the managerial perspective, Weick and Quinn (1999) describes that continuous change can include a risk for the managers as they have to constantly stay updated and involved in order for the project to go through. If the manager gets disoriented or the commitment for the change is decreasing, a similar reaction could reflect on the employees and then the change as a concept is at risk.

4.2 Sustainable change

To conceptualise sustainable change Sackmann, Eggenhofer-Rehart and Friesl (2009) discusses how the inflicted change needs to result in self-reflection and learning. The change also needs to be collective and therefore involve effort and commitment from both actors and stakeholders. It is important to apply the change into all aspects of the organisation such as strategy, process and structure in order to achieve sustainability. What can fail a sustainable change effort is a short term and closed mindset (Probst & Raisch, 2005). According to Probst and Raisch (2005), organisations might convince themselves that the change which is being implemented will fix a current issue and will at the same time disguise the solution as a sustainable change. In reality, the change might fix the current issue but it is not a long term solution and therefore the commitment fails the criteria for a sustainable change.

Probst and Raisch (2005) have conducted research regarding more concrete practices for why organisations fail to evolve a sustainable change. Before revealing the results, the authors stated that it is important to know that just because it is not sustainable change, it can still be a change. With that said, the research showed that five major factors developed during the change that resulted in it not being sustainable: *growth, change*, *leadership failure*, *organisational culture* and *the balance between these factors* (Probst & Raisch, 2005). Gończ et al. (2006) continues this spin on the concept of balance by refreshing the concept of sustainable change and development. In their paper, equity and equilibrium between economic distribution and social interaction is a must have to keep the sustainable process alive. According to Vora (2013) sustainable change for managers lies on three pillars which is *talent management*, *providing change in the right direction* and *project management*. These three pillars are the basis to execute change management. Failing on one of these pillars, depending on the scale of course, can jeopardise the whole project. Also globalisation i.e working together region to region is of high importance. People within the organisation need to be aware that their actions affect other parts of the organisation and accountability is important. This is applicable for managers since they are working towards the employees but also collaborating with other entities. Lastly, all the participation needs to constantly be committed (Gończ. et al., 2006; Levasseur, 2010). To summarise, change does not need to be sustainable in order to be a change, but if the change is to be implemented in a long-term fashion, a balance between important factors is key.

4.3 Effective change

Another possible outcome when processing change is the effectiveness of the process and the results. Effective change can be understood as closely related to the level of organisational effectiveness (Goodman & Penning, 1980). Carnall (2007) defines the effectiveness within organisations as achieving planned goals within a given time frame, using stated resources. The definition represents the effective use of these resources towards the goal but also includes possible adaptation to various circumstances to keep effectiveness over time. When assessing effectiveness within change it is helpful to view organisations as interdependent open systems that are simultaneously balancing a range of constituencies, each with their own agendas and goals (Hayes, 2010).

To understand effective change, Goodman and Penning (1980) discusses four perspectives: *the goal*, *the system*, *the organisation development* and *the political arena*. The goal perspective conceptualises the meaning of effectiveness as connected to how well the organisation accomplishes its goals. Whilst the system perspective focuses on the success of the functional part of the organisation, transforming important inputs into outputs which are then exported. According to Goodman and Penning (1980) the system perspective can sometimes be of more value when assessing effectiveness within an organisation. Moreover, the perspective of organisation development embraces the process of organisational learning that fosters renewal to survive. The quality of working life matters in this perspective and how the members of the organisation perform, are seen as indicators of effectiveness (Goodman & Penning, 1980). The fourth perspective, helping us to assess the effectiveness of the organisation, is the political arena, representing a collection of internal and external forces from which effectiveness is defined by the strongest force. By assessing change with the help of these perspectives it can be possible to determine if change has been effective or not. According to Hayes (2010) it comes down to the extent to which the diverse features of the input or the output system are oriented. Simplified, it comes down to how the four arenas from Goodman and Penning (1980) are related to each other. Pina E Cunha, et al. (2013) provides another type of definition on effectiveness in the field of change and emphasises the repeated processes that produce an outcome as effective. This perspective originates from the repeated actions and the learnings from earlier processes.

Effective change from a manager's perspective is described by Higgs and Rowland (2010) using four practices which are attracting, tension, containment and transforming space. The first practice, attracting is regarding leaders to connect with the employees and level with them. The goal being to feel as one unit moving forward. The tension requires the manager to be honest and upfront. When something must be addressed, there is no point in postponing it, or waiting for a better opportunity. Containment is regarding rules and boundaries. Employees should be aware of their responsible area and the manager likewise. Lastly, transforming space is regarding trust in the project and each other. Ensure that the change is moving forward and realise what responsibilities the manager has.

Several previous studies have been trying to connect issues and success factors regarding the results of effective change. Hoag, Ritschard and Cooper (2002) aims to debunk misconceptions that obstacles for effective change are cost, workload and legislation. Instead issues regarding effective change focuses on when the executive level fails to manage the organisation, its staff and culture. To clarify, it can be understood as any issues that managers encounter are results of their own making in earlier processes (Hoag, Ritschard & Cooper, 2002). In line with the importance of the manager role, Holt et al. (2007) as well as Budhiraja (2020) highlights the significance of having managers who accept mistakes and therefore a higher chance to successfully manage change effectively. Ben-Gal and Tzafrir (2011) stresses another perspective on the importance of trust between the different functions within the company during change. For example, having employees experience trust from managers, managers trusting their employees and stakeholders relying on organisational governance. Summarising, we find that effective change can be put in relation to the specific organisation with help of different perspectives but also an insight in which challenges organisations might face when aiming for effective change.

4.4 Change management and leadership

Today's highly competitive and evolving businesses compel the companies to adapt and change their business (Okumus & Hemmington, 1998; Luecke, 2003). Change management has been heavily investigated by scholars for decades (Cummings et al., 2016) and is a topic that has faced contradiction regarding different approaches and empirical evidence (Hanson, 2013). Managers' role within change has been on a journey of its own. According to Caldwell (2003), managers have gone from a role where they order employees to perform certain activities, to a role where they perform the same activities but together. According to Caldwell, (2003) the goal for the managers is to empower the employees and be the leader of change reassuring that the project in hand will be implemented in the best suitable way. It is relevant, when mentioning empowerment of employees, to include co-workership which is a term that has a mostly Scandinavian background (Andersson, Stockhult & Tengblad, 2021). Co-workership is based on the practice that employees together with the manager, take responsibilities for what matters for the organisation. It is up to change management to ensure that the employees reach a high level of empowerment, or co-workership, to prioritise the goal of the organisation (Andersson, Stockhult & Tengblad, 2021).

Within the field of change management, the importance of leadership is of interest. Why leadership and change management is important is defined by Nanjundeswaraswamy and Swamy (2014), stating how different leadership styles may affect the goal set by the organisation. Transformational leadership has been a dominant cultural style within organisations for a long time (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2014). Since organisational culture is affected by the leadership, the transformational style has focused on the overall job satisfaction and to drive the intended goals of the organisation to a finishing line. If the goals are clearly stated and structured, a transformational leadership style is commonly used. For people to make sense of their own experience and purpose, they try to search for answers that reassure them of safety and comfortability (Montuori & Donnelly, 2018). To search for these answers, people tend to turn to others who can represent them with leadership. This leadership needs to be based on attributes they can support and feel represented with. Montuori and Donnelly (2018) continues to elaborate that lately, transformative leadership is a style that is highly appreciated within certain organisations. Transformative leadership tends to include and involve employees in important decisions and processes (Montuori & Donnelly, 2018). For the leader that practices transformative leadership, employees are expected to contribute with their own expertise and knowledge.

As mentioned earlier, there is an extensive field of research conducted on why change management fails, since the fail rate is so high. However, Levasseur (2010) states different factors for how organisations can improve the success rate, or at least decrease the failure. Levasseur (2010) suggests that the implementation of change needs to be broad and include everyone who is affected by it, due to how people support what they help to create. This can be seen as closely related to the transformative leadership style described by Montuori and Donnelly (2018). It is essential for successful change management and leadership to create a two-way communication (Levasseur, 2010; Montuori & Donnelly, 2018). If the employees, as an example, only get a glimpse of the information about new processes and do not have a chance to reflect or impact on the change, resilience and resistance can threaten the project. Even if people are attending meetings, it does not mean that they are necessarily on board with the change, which is a common mistake that managers trap themselves in (Levasseur 2010). Managers tend to believe that just because the people are present and listen to the information etc. they are open to the change, but that is not the case. This aligns with the findings of Abdi and Rathmaya (2017) who conclude that an open communication and trust is a solid base when rallying the employees to support the change. In relation to this we find the importance of trust discussed by Gigliotti et al. (2019), who stresses the importance of trust when managing change. Another aspect of engaging the employees during change comes from Hanson (2013) who emphasises the vital role for leaders to assure vivid descriptions of the change and the future by applying a strong leadership voice. The balance between leading with a strong leadership voice and leading with a more trust focused reasoning, is a matter discussed by Jansson (2013). Management and leadership need to balance several aspects when facing change. If only managed through practical reasoning, lacking official lead may become superficial and if change is simply only guided through the hierarchy, the organisation might neglect the change (Jansson, 2013).

With these findings of previous studies, it is possible to gain several perspectives on the subject of change and together with a theoretical framework, this thesis will analyse the perspectives of the managers at the case company and their experience of the change, S. The previous studies on change provide a stable foundation whereas the theoretical framework supports the ability to analyse the collected data. Using the introduction to lightly define the complex concepts, the previous research shows what has been done before within this research area. Using sustainable and effective change has been done before but by applying a new theory, presented further on, a different approach will be introduced. Both sections will be developed further in the paper to contribute to a deeper understanding of the presented subject. The presentation of the previous research shows other theories used to understand the process of change. With this in mind, this study will contribute to the field of research by applying a more modern take, but also contributing by using this perspective in the field of continuous change.

5. Theoretical framework

In this chapter, the theoretical framework is presented. Before addressing the more modern take on the theoretical approach chosen for this study it is important to discuss some of the earlier theories. The introduced theories can be seen as underlying foundations for the modern take, which provides reason to why it's important to familiarise with previous theories to fully be able to grasp the more modern take.

"*There is nothing as practical as a good theory*" (Lewin, 1943).

This is a well-known statement that one of the key figures, regarding change, Lewin (1958) based his theoretical models on. When studying change it is nearly impossible to avoid bringing up Lewin and his contribution towards analysing different dynamics of change, especially for larger organisational groups (Hallin, Olsson & Widström, 2019) Thus, its relations to this study and its large organisational context. Lewin is commonly known for; *the force field theory* (Lewin, 1939) and *the three step model for change* (Lewin, 1958).

5.1 The force field theory

This theory is based on the assumption that organisations are always influenced by two different types of forces, one representing the current state of the organisation while the other consists of the intent to change (Burnes & Cooke, 2012). This relation between the forces is where Lewin (1939) emphasised the group dynamic and that it is the people's ability and inability to manage change. To achieve successful change, the people require an understanding of the reasons behind the force to change (Hallin, Olsson & Widström, 2019). According to Lewin (1939) it is the individuals within the organisation who are located within the force field both pushing for change and resisting it.

5.2 The three step model for change

The basis for this model is said to be established on Lewin's belief that organisational change is a process that requires learning but also emotional attachment from the people involved (Hallin, Olsson & Widström, 2019). Lewin's (1958) three steps consist of *unfreeze*, *change* and *refreeze* which aims to support the management of change in a structured and ethical manner. The first step represents a phase where it is vital to create understanding and present the necessary reasons for the change that shows the detail for what might happen if change does not occur. Weick and Quinn (1999) argue with the initial part of the change presented by Lewin and instead emphasise the need to start with *freezing* to gain insight about the company’s current state which is essential to conduct continuous change. Secondly, according to Lewin’s (1958) model, the organisation needs to start embracing change through learning and training. In the final phase, the organisation needs to refreeze and stabilise the new practice and structure which is in its turn connected to the culture of the organisation.

As mentioned before, Lewin's (1958) models are recurring when discussing change. His models have been rethought, redone and developed through time. Sonenshein (2010) states that the three step model for example forms the foundations for many recent subsequent change models, even if the new models don't state the connection. An example of such a type of development from Lewin’s (1958) three step model, can be found in Røvik (2011) virus inspired theory. This theory does not provide three steps but instead involves six features with ten connected processes (*Figure 2*). With the foundations from Lewin’s three step model and with the virus inspired theory from Røvik (2011) as an extension, change can be captured and analysed in a more complex way. Lewin has, according to Hayes (2010), argued that change is too often short-lived and by using Røvik’s (2011) theory as an extension, this study has the tools to analyse continuous change conducted by the case company.

5.3 Virus inspired theory

Røvik (2011) uses a new metaphor for describing a phenomenon and has learned from studying Cornelissen (2005). Cornelissen (2005) created a model with the purpose to use metaphors when trying to analyse phenomena. Using what Cornelissen (2005) emphasises, Røvik (2011) states that the goal when using metaphors is to find a subject that is relatable to the actual words that will be used but it must have its own identity. Therefore, a metaphor needs to be unique but still close enough to something that the reader can relate to. Since viruses have multiple steps from infection to cure, Røvik (2011) saw it appropriate to use the same approach to organisational change. Røvik (2011) also points out clearly that viruses have a negative initial perception but that is irrelevant for the metaphor. The point is that similarities between stages of virus and change can be seen and therefore it is easier to explain the latter to the reader. It provides an idea of a more active and complex host for change instead of referring to change as some rational and calculating management ideas with passive followers (Kieser, 2002). According to Røvik (2011) this approach provides a theoretical framework which allows insights regarding the management of ideas in organisation, which in this case would be the implementation, process and results of change. It also demonstrates what happens to the idea of change after it is embraced (Madsen &

Slåtten, 2015). Central to this approach is the belief of the temporary and superficial nature of fashionable management ideas being reflected in swift adaptation but also rejections, which affects the organisation's surface but rarely core practises.

Røvik (2011) argues that compared to recent management theory, the virus metaphor (*Figure 2*), with its six features and ten identified idea-handling processes, provides a more differentiated and nuanced understanding of how management ideas can be influenced when implemented into modern organisations. Røvik's (2011) six features of change as a virus and its ten processes are all related to one another in complex and different ways but to briefly describe the process it can be understood as following: (1) infectiousness, (2) immunity, (3) replication, (4) incubation, (5) mutation and (6) dormancy. These six features consist of 10 different idea-handling processes being, *adaptation, non-adaptation, isolation, expiry, rejection, entrenchment, maturation, translation, inactivation* and *reactivation* which all can be used to receive a deeper understanding for how change happens but also provides guidelines of what types of challenges the process of the change faces during the different stages.

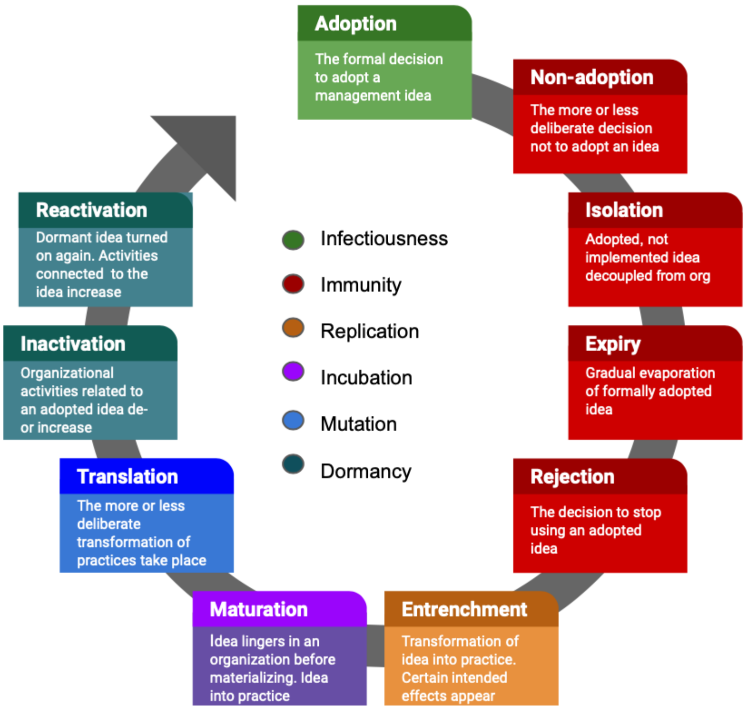

Figure 2 An interpretation of Røvik's (2011) model. *Viral Features and Corresponding Idea-Handling Processes*

5.3.1 Infectiousness

When viewing the process of change as a virus metaphor we find the first state of the process being *infectiousness* and through this metaphor the change needs a host to latch on to. The host of the change is not seen as a passive victim of the virus but rather an active host, absorbing the idea of change and aiming to spread it further (Røvik, 2011). The infection varies in each host but for the organisational feature of the infectiousness the processes of *adaptations* start to form in each active host. Some individuals might enrol, reject, emulate, combine or ignore the change but however, each host works actively translating the change and is in some way infected by the change. Connected to Røvik's (2011) statement about people within the organisation rejecting or ignoring, the change is also confirmed by earlier research made by Mintzberg and Westley (1992). Mintzberg and Westley (1992) saw this stage as someone who is effecting the company, copies, is aware, impressed or imports a new learning experience. This stage can also be referred to what Weick (1979) calls *sense making* which is when individuals are aware of change and react to it by creating their own truth.

5.3.2 Immunity

When the infectiousness of the change has started to spread within its hosts, the virus triggers a defence system. The defence system can be distinguished into *innate immunity*, an inherited resistance from birth and *acquired immunity*, a time-limited defence being consequences of previous infections (Røvik, 2011). From an organisational perspective one may ask whether some species in terms of organisations might have a stronger innate immunity due to their type of organisation. When infected with change, the host and the organisation will experience a bundle of processes all beginning with the choice to adopt or not to. This is followed by interpretation, negotiation and concretisation which provide various options to decelerate or terminate the idea of change.

The immunity with the hosts allows us to see different resistances and various adoptions processes. Røvik (2011) provides four examples for what consequences one might face when our immunity systems commence, being *non-adaptation*, *isolation*, *expiry* and *rejection*. The non-adaptation is the more or less deliberate decision not to adapt to the idea of change referring to innate and acquired immunity. The innate immunity can be understood as an immunity which has been inherited and can for example be found in the organisation's political or socio-cultural elements (Røvik, 2011). Whilst the acquired immunity can for example arise from the memory of an earlier unsatisfactory experience, such as previous change. The consequence of *isolation* occurs when the idea of change is adopted but not yet implemented and is still decoupled from the organisation (Røvik, 2011). This is, according to Brunnsson and Winberg (1997), common due to how leaders often find it more appealing to address new changes rather than on implementing the ones already adopted by the organisation. Leaders may also facilitate an expiry of the change if not focusing on implementing the adopted idea. The *expiry* stands for a gradual evaporation of formally adopted ideas of change. Another feature of the immunity process is the *rejection* of the change. This represents the decision to stop using an adopted idea and is according to Røvik (2011) often based on trajectories of experiential learning.

Rejection is a possible immune response which can occur when hosts experience a recognition of vital incompatibility when serious attempts are made to turn the idea of change into a real practice. A strong reaction of rejection is possible to develop when values or common practice are threatened. This phase could be interpreted as a modernization of Sheldon's (1980) explanation of resistance within an organisation that is changing. The case would be that individuals within the company would feel unstable and unsure on what to come if change is imminent. Sheldon (1980) describes how the employees can feel change as a threat for how things are usually done. If normal processes change, so might the need for them and therefore a risk of them losing their job hence why change can be frowned upon.

5.3.3 Replication

Another possible process when managing and experiencing change is the *replication* of the idea of change. This is where it starts to become a more embraced transformation of the idea of change into practice, also called *entrenchment*. During this transformation it is often common to see some intended effects appear. The definition of replication can be understood as the process where the virus takes control of the host metabolism and utilises it to quickly reproduce into a larger number (Domingo et al., 2000). Røvik (2011) highlights two mechanisms within the entrenchment being regulation and education, resembling the meaning of replication. Depending on the active regulations, the organisation might have to adopt a concept or maintain a specific practice to be able to continue the replication of the change. The reason for this can differ but it might be a result of politics, larger corporations, finance institutions etc (Morgan, 2006; Engwall, 2006; Marcussen, 2006; Wedlin, 2007). Education but also training is important for the entrenchment due to the possible need to coach the hosts with the new concepts provided from the change. It can be understood as both a teaching of the conceptual theoretical foundation but also the practical use. Røvik (2011) presents the idea of how well educated and trained hosts have a higher chance of replicating the change and having the effects reproduced to other hosts. This process is also explained by

Mintzberg and Westley (1992) who uses the term synthesis. Leaders might want to draw the workforce into the processes and initiate a vision. Which can lead to diffusions, using symbolic changes or concretise via new programs, activities, communication etc.

5.3.4 Incubation

Incubation is in this case, a reference to the time frame between the organisation deciding to make the change and seeing actual results. It is the time between managerial ideas and practice which can differ from hours until years, depending on the change. Why Røvik (2011) thinks that incubation is a suitable phenomenon to use, is because compared to earlier management ideas, the virus theory invites the incubation time to be more long term and static. To answer why incubation is a useful tool when investigating the change process, Røvik (2011) uses mechanisms, named *consistency rules for discourse and practice*. Consistency rules for discourse and practice is based on a survey of managers who waited to discourse change to the stakeholders, and when finally sharing the news and the knowledge, criticism and negative feedback where shared. Røvik (2011) states that the longer time it takes for the discourse to take place, the more likely it is that stakeholders, both internal and external will reject or resist.

While incubation is used by Røvik (2011) it refers to earlier research done by others. Meyer and Rowan (1977), Staw and Epstei (2000), Boxenbaum and Jonsson (2008) do not use the word incubation, but they describe the same consequences. Often, organisations can initiate a change, create long term strategic goals and try to start some kind of process. What then might happen is that only symbolic change occurs, but the actual process and change is left behind, or it comes a lot later than intended.

5.3.5 Mutation

Mutation is referring to the chance that the change will not always be the same for all people involved, it will mutate. Change, just like a virus, will differ depending on the host, and it might be a change for the better or worse. Then why does it change? Røvik (2011) states that mutation is like translation of language. Translating only simple words might not be a problem, but translating fast-paced conversations, involving complex definitions etc, might be a bigger challenge and almost all the time, something will get lost in translation. The same principle is applicable for change management, according to Røvik (2011). When a change is implemented at a local department or another region than the headquarter, for example, then all information might not be communicated exactly like intended and interpretation will become a fact. This means that the change will mutate and in the end of the process differ from the origin.

5.3.6 Dormancy

Dormancy is the last feature from Røvik (2011) and the one phase that is the most long lasting. It includes the settlement of the change within the organisation with opposite views and opinions, which struggles to affect the processes. Dormancy often emerges when the activity around the change has decreased. When there are not too many meetings anymore, or people do not refer to the change etc, is when dormancy is at its peak. Just because there is not much activity regarding the change, the phase that Røvik (2011) writes about, is still there, but hidden via dormancy. What is interesting about this phase is that dormancy can be active and inactive by going back and forth between these stages. Research done by Røvik (2011) shows that sometimes dormancy can get inactive by other processes such as meetings, meaning that change is on the surface. Then after a while, the relevancy of the processes gets stable and dormancy takes place. Mintzberg and Westley (1992) also states the need for rework, programming and modification to the change. They explain that after the change has been implemented, there might be need for adjustments of processes, and that kind of activity can change from time to time, just as Røvik (2011) suggests with the term dormancy.

5.4 Theoretical challenges

The theoretical framework inspired from the process of a virus has, according to Røvik (2011) and Quist and Hellström (2012) faced criticism for its negative attitude towards management ideas and its limits of clarifications between the biological and social phenomenon. In this case the virus metaphor intends to help the paper identify important processes of project S while avoiding stating the process as positive or negative. Even if Røvik (2011) as well as Quist and Hellström (2012) has faced criticism for seeing the negative aspect, as stated, this paper strives to compare the empirical findings to the theory without being too subjective to the choice of words in the virus theory. With the virus being a biological reference, the theory risks missing important parts of the social phenomenon, an important critique to be aware of when analysing the findings. It is understandable that it is easy to see change as negative when words like virus are used. Therefore, the paper clearly explains that virus is just similar to change via the steps and phases, but it does not emphasise if change is negative or positive, it only makes a comparison.

5.5 Applying theory

Since Røvik (2011) virus theory is a modern take on organisational change, with influence of established writers such as Lewin (1958), Mintzberg and Westley (1992) and Cornelissen (2005) etc. this paper tends to use the knowledge in order to analyse the empirical data. By moving away from complicated terms and models that can only be fitting to a certain number of cases, the virus metaphor aims to provide a comprehensive and logical explanation to change in different contexts (Quist & Hellström, 2012). As written, change is a phenomenon that has been studied by many scholars for a long time resulting in a variety of choices between theories (Todnem, 2005; Burnes & Jackson; Jansson, 2013). This paper intends to use virus theory to ensure that the reader can relate to the steps since it is easily explained but also trust that the facts are based on established writers.

This virus metaphor can provide a theoretical perspective of how the case company has managed the project, a continuous change, and allow a deeper understanding of its progress but also issues with for example their outcome of maintaining change. This theoretical perspective with its features and processes will allow an insight regarding the unique self learning change that the organisation conducts via project S, managing continuous change.

6. Method

This chapter will shed light on the process of the method of this study and similar to how the virus theory (Røvik, 2011) is using a step by step structure, the reader should be able to follow along and see the connections clearly. Using an abductive method, the reader can see the reasoning from facts to conclusion, back and forth (Haig, 2008). By using this method, according to Haig (2008), this paper can use common sense to distinguish important points that are found in the empirical data. This is highly relevant because the purpose of a method is to reduce the uncertainty that is regarding the complex subject (Sofaer, 1999).

6.1 Method and data collection strategy

When conducting a qualitative study, it is of value to start with assumptions of the research topic (Creswell, 2013) and since this study intends to research complex processes and individual experiences, a qualitative method is appropriate (Fetters et al., 2013). Bryman (2012) supports the use of qualitative methods when aiming to gain the perspective of how individuals perceive the social world around them. A qualitative method is not only used to find the answer but also asking the right questions. To approach this, semi-structured interviews were used. According to Luo and Wildemuth (2009), an interview in itself is meant as a meaningful conversation where one party or both receives value and reflection. Using semi-structured interviews, the conversation is structured but not stuck in an immovable framework. The questions and follow-up questions allowed the interviewee to explain, exemplify or elaborate on the answers, which according to Charmaz, (2014) strengthen the search for knowledge. The goal of this study is to explore individuals' experiences within change, and by using a semi-structured interview method it eliminates the risk of open-ended answers being unexplored (Luo & Wildemuth, 2009). By conducting interviews with managers of the case company, in contrast to using surveys, it was possible to receive a deep representation of the change process. The qualitative approach provides an advantage compared to a quantitative one by creating a closer relationship with the subjects of interest, due to its possibility of a more open discussion (Lewis & McNaughton Nicholls, 2014). Since the thesis is utilising change theory and more specifically change management, learning, feedback and evaluation are key parts (Brännmark & Benn, 2012). As stated earlier, Weick and Quinn (1999) describes that managers are the people to implement the change and act in between different stakeholders. They are the ones who particularly work with the feedback and learning which therefore makes them a perfect fit for interviews regarding continuous change.

Before conducting interviews with the managers, an introduction to the change project, S, and to the organisation was necessary. This was accomplished via dialogues with the head of change managers. By this information it was possible to construct an interview guide (appendix 1) which aimed to gain the perceptions of the phenomenon from the managers point of view and to answer the research questions. Two pilot interviews were conducted before collecting the perspectives from the managers, making sure the individuals had the possibility to fully express their perspective. The interviews were conducted and recorded according to the non-disclosure agreement (appendix 3). The duration of each interview took between 45-75 minutes and was afterwards transcribed to guarantee a transparent presentation of the managers' perspective. The transformation of dialogue into written words were precise and exact, a vital task according to Bryman (2012), to then be able to analyse the collected data.

To increase the level of validity and sufficiency of the study, access to earlier studies at the organisation, documents and information was granted, providing different forms of secondary data. The main data has been collected from semi-structured interviews from which it was possible to find representative themes that provided information towards the analysis of the change management, its effectiveness and sustainability. The aim was to gather 20 interviews but after conducting 16 semi-structured interviews it was possible to see saturation and repetitive answers. Alvehus (2019), states that there is no way to ensure complete empirical fulfilment, only the authors can estimate expected results. With this in mind, it is not possible for this thesis to ensure complete empirical fulfilment. However, it was possible to determine similar instances repeatedly which enhanced the level of saturation.

6.2 Sample and access strategy

Due to the aim of the study, the sample strategy has been a purposefully selected one which according to Rapley (2014) needs to be connected to specific characteristics of the settings to gain the lived experience of the organisational context, which in this case is the experience of the change. The managers selected for interviews have been managers at the case company during the change. When using purposive sample strategy, the aim is to gain as much diversity as possible (Ritchie et al., 2014) and to gain access to these individuals this study has, with the help of a contact at the organisation, used maximum variation sampling strategy, used to find common important patterns (Creswell, 2013). With this sample it has been possible to receive different perspectives of the purposely selected individuals, exemplifying the complexity of the subject (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007), being change. The case company provided a large number of possible candidates for interviews who fulfilled the criteria. With the large number of possible individuals to interview, 8 individuals were randomly selected by the researchers. From these 8 individuals the sampling procedure, snowball sampling was used. This sampling method is defined as the process when the researchers access informants through contact information, provided by other informants (Noy, 2008). Through the 8 individuals an addition of 8 other informants were possible, hence a snowball effect. In order to secure the anonymity of these 16 individuals, names, age, gender and region is not stated in this study. This study's sample strategy has limitations, such as the possible risk of receiving a smaller sample size in comparison to what a quantitative study's sample strategy would provide. However, the sample of this study and the sample approach are closely connected to its purpose of being able to answer the research question and can therefore be perceived as sufficient enough.

6.3 Coding and analysis strategy

To manage the empirical data, it is of value to analyse the gathered information. The following factors regarding data that have been obtained are, knowledge about the organisation and empirical data. These have provided a base to ensure that the analysis will be enough to answer the research question. To code the empirical data, the response from the interviews was thematized in order to both give an overview and also pave the way to reflection and consideration to what is relevant and what is not (Alvehus, 2019). When thematize the empirical data, a step by step process was conducted by the researchers. The interviews were firstly transcribed, which according to Braun & Clarke, (2006) needs to be done in order to be able to generate codes, reviewing and identifying themes. Secondly the transcription was used to consider possible themes and subthemes aiming to provide connections to the research questions. When doing a thematic analysis, the researcher can consider for example, repetitions, similarities, differences and theory-related material (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This is how the themes have been conducted in this study. The use of a thematic analysis is relevant due to its close connection to qualitative research questions and the influence of people's perception (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Braun and

Clarke (2006) argue that the goal of thematize is to acknowledge common patterns and trends within the empirical data, in order to better be able to analyse and connect to the theory. Initial codes were discovered by the researchers by looking into patterns, similarities, differences, repetitions, trends and theory-related material which then was clustered into themes and sub-themes. By coding and categorising the data, it is possible to explore the interconnection within the data, to then interpret meanings and thereafter start the initial analysis (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). Lastly, a reviewing of the themes by the study's researchers was essential in order to confirm a substantial, correct and direct interconnection between the themes and the research questions.

The analysis in this study is based on an abductive approach, moving between the empirical data and the theory, Røvik's (2011) virus theory, with the aim of not only confirming existing theory but to discover new patterns. As stated in the section 5.5 *Applying theory*, the structure of the analysis is based on the theory and its different phases, but the results also control the importance of the different phases. The researchers found that some phases were more representative than others which was found by the abductive approach by going back and forth between theory and results.

6.4 Reliability and validity

When discussing methods, reliability is of interest, concerning the measurement if another study replicating this one would reproduce similar results. Bryman and Bell (2015) discuss this as transferability. This study is not claiming full reliability in the context of transferability due the perspective of qualitative research being of a dynamic nature, connecting to its context and therefore hard to replicate (Lewis, Ritchie, Ormston & Morrell, 2014). However, the method chosen will support the reliability in the light of dependability, explained by Bryman and Bell (2015), due to the interviewees' ability to express their lived experience without internal biases. The validity of the study can be questioned due to the possibility of various interpretations of the results or misunderstandings (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007) and therefore it is important to aim for an unbiased interpretation and to make sure the transcription represents the individual's true description. However, the study strives for strong validity by presenting the different difficulties faced but also decisions, tools, and methods used to conduct the study, which according to Carcary (2009), is vital for validity. By having a transparent description of the conducted study, the validity is strengthened, showing how the study is investigating what it is supposed to (Kvale, 2007).

6.5 Ethical considerations

When conducting qualitative studies, the ethical aspects need to be addressed to ensure transparency and the protection of the participants (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Different ethical dimensions such as the willingness to participate, the trustworthiness and the confidentiality need to be assured (Silverman, 2005). To address these important aspects several actions have taken place. Before the interviews, all the participants were informed about the aim and use of the study and were provided with a consent form, from which they received the information about the participation being voluntary. Since the empirical data is collected using semi-structured interviews, an ethical consideration will always be consent (Luo & Wildemuth, 2009; Connelly, 2014). Consent consists of three key aspects. The interviewee needs to be capable of answering the questions that are being asked. The consent must be given freely. The interviewee should not be forced to participate by the manager or the interviewers. Lastly, the interviewee should be aware of the content and purpose of the interview. They should not be ambushed with questions that are surprising and unfit for the situation (Connelly, 2014). The participants were also provided with the information about the use of the collected data and of their anonymity. They were assured that the data were only to be used in the regards of this study to maintain integrity and confidentiality.

Another ethical consideration of this study is the function of the contact persons at the case company, who have functioned as gatekeepers since they are currently working as change managers for the project S. It is easy to presume that there is a risk where the contact persons might have been biassed in favour of the organisation since they have a relation to the company. They are the ones who initiated project S, being involved in order to improve organisational processes and implementations. However, the empirical data will not rely on the gatekeeper's perspective, but on the individuals who were presented through the sampling. Hence why the result will not be affected by one segment of one person's opinion. It is important to stress that the case company themselves have not interfered with the content of the paper. It would not be suitable for the organisation that is being researched to affect, change and influence the empirical data. Therefore, the organisation only provides advice on who to reach out to, documents and history.

7. Empirical findings

This chapter presents the results of the collected data gathered from the conducted interviews. The empirical findings show similarities in various areas but also shed light to differences within the perspectives of the managers. The focus during the collection of the data was connected to the aim of the thesis, pursuing a deeper understanding of how the managers perceive the change and what their experiences were. From the process of coding the transcription the following themes and subthemes were constructed (*Figure 3*).

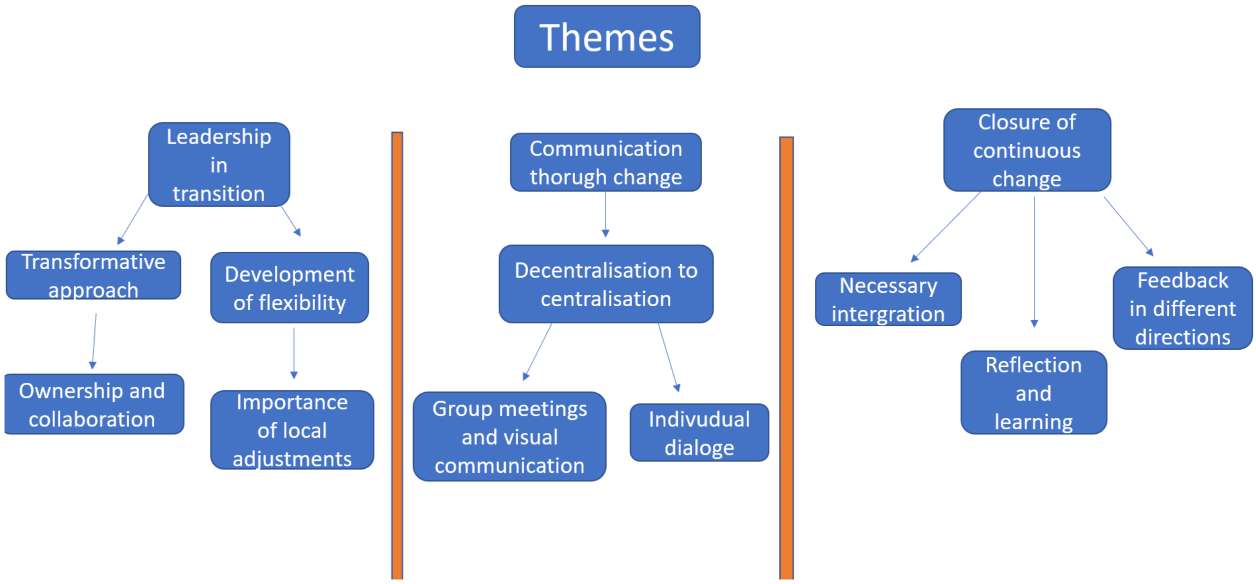

Figure 3

7.1 Leadership in transition

The first theme which was discovered quickly during the majority of interviews was leadership. Several interviewees discussed leadership in different ways, but collectively there are similarities and choice of words that relate to each other. To further elaborate on this topic, the report divides the theme leaderships into sub-themes (*Figure 4*). Several managers stated the words "transformative leadership" and followed up on a discussion regarding "taking ownership" and "collaboration". Other interviewees went another direction using words as "flexibility" and talked about "local adjustments". Both of these sub-themes will be presented alongside each other.

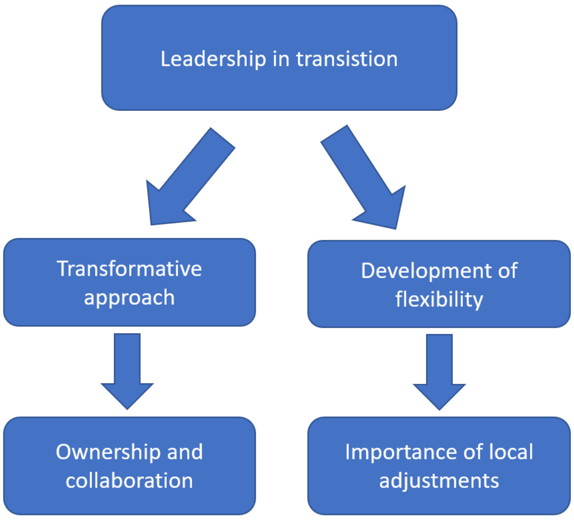

Figure 4

7.1.1 Transformative approach

Some managers explained the change as a relatively large initiative for the organisation. Where the leadership went from a more regulated style influenced by order and structure to a leadership in a transformative style, being more embracing of the employees and the social system. Several managers mentioned this change as going from a "transactional" to a "transformative" type of leadership. The transformative leadership was described as involving the employees further and making them a part of the creation of the change.

> "We as an organisation have always been used to a way of leadership where we get the resources and then a clear step-by-step instruction. It has been straightforward and boxy, so to say. With project S we experienced more information than instructions. More of a framework and an idea of what the end product would be, but we are the ones who need to do it".

The statement came from a manager who expressed a new type of implementation towards the change in relation to the history of change within the company. Others have also stated that the way the project was presented was in a different manner than they were used to. More open minded and visualising than strict or demanding. This was appreciated by the receivers and showed that the organisation wanted to utilise the employees' perspective and opinions.

The managers raised awareness about how the employees reacted to the introduction of change. Managers stated that the employees had a fear of losing their job when change was introduced. After talking about the change and explaining what the project involved, the manager described a calmer aura with the employees. A reason why employees were worried about losing their job was due to how previous changes in the case company has resulted in machines replacing the workers. Historically, changes in the organisation carries a risk for the workers, but that was not the case with project S, according to the managers. They explained that, previously, changes in the form of new machines, schedule structures etc. have resulted in less need for employees and because of this, change can be frowned upon. Adding to that, one manager stated that the people who designed project S from top management might not have thought about the aspect of employees being frightened about losing their job which might be a good lesson for the future changes. If employees would continue to worry about their job positions being replaced or discarded, the project would not survive very long which managers saw as un-sustainable.

> "I thought the news about the project would be greeted with happiness, which I guess it also was, but more than one employee also stated their concern. They have been employed for a long time and have seen changes, such as machines etc, have replaced them or decreased their presence at least."

When the worry and unease for the employees was addressed, the project could continue. In the introductions, the leaders were told to "involve the employees since they are the experts", which was a different way to approach a change than before. The difficult question was then how to ensure that the employees keep the motivation high and commit to the change throughout the project. This is something that the majority of interviewees mentioned "Ownership" and also "Collaboration with others" which is seen as tools to keep the project sustainable.

7.1.2 Ownership and collaboration

The interviewees realised that the solution to ensure that the employees stay motivated and engaged is to constantly keep them involved and appreciated. They are seen as the engine of the organisation and it is vital to keep the engine running by providing them the support and information so they feel trusted. When the project was as active as possible, the managers really represented ownership and collaboration by going the extra mile to ensure that everything went smoothly.

> “It was really nice to see that almost everyone really got invested in this change and wanted it to be as good as possible. Hearing employees talking about the change, even when they were working on something else, was, according to me, a good sign that this is going well.”

As an example, the employees went around the facilities with their own checklist even if that was not required, to check all the processes. It was clear that the message about transformative change was received and was also used to initiate a committed change in an intentional way.

7.1.3 Development of flexibility

A few other interviewees discussed the flexibility of the leadership. Since project S involved different changes in the processes, the interviewees took the opportunity to develop the flexibility. Before project S, the process for most of the employees was static and the same for each day. The managers described situations where an employee had the same route for the same day and that just carried on. Since project S indicates that areas will only have their deliveries in a different manner, the same employee can not do the same routines as they are used to. This is something that first was a bit frowned upon, according to managers, by a few employees but then later accepted for the most part. Since the managers had a lot of employees who have worked in the organisation for a long time, their mindset can be somewhat difficult to change but if they just get support and a reason why the change is necessary, it will get through eventually.

7.1.4 Importance of local adjustments

Since every entity only received the framework of the change and not the end product, local adjustments were inevitable. Every entity differs from each other in size, geographical location etc hence why one shoe fits all, does not apply in this case. The interviewee's following statement was that it took a while for them to realise that “we have to make it our own". Discussing once again the transformative leadership where the organisation wants each and every entity to adjust the changes so it fits them locally. Project S changed a lot of practical processes and therefore needed to be tailored for each entity. Leaders said that together with the employees, they figured out what box needed to go where, which sign needed to say what etc. These small but important changes helped out locally to make the processes go smoother but also encouraged the employees to “make it their own”.

> "Since no entity or office has the same kind of conditions, based on the amount of employees, local infrastructure etc, we need to adjust the change so it fits us. I was happy that the project was designed to have that kind of adjustment possible."

Looking at this theme, leadership in transition and it sub-themes the step by step process of project S and its effects have been accounted for. What could be seen as the most important point to bring up is the new way of introducing the change i.e transformative leadership and what challenges that puts on the managers. Leading the employees through such a change that is shaped differently than before, can be challenging to say the least but as shown by the sub-themes, the managers found their own way. By making their own changes and using the possibilities that the local adjustments provided, project S went well and is seen as a success.

7.2 Communication through change

The second theme presented from the data is connected to the recurring phenomenon of communication during project S, which was mentioned in all of the interviews without any exception. Through the collection of the data, it was possible to identify three sub themes to the main theme, *communication through change*, showing different aspects of communication (*Figure 5*).

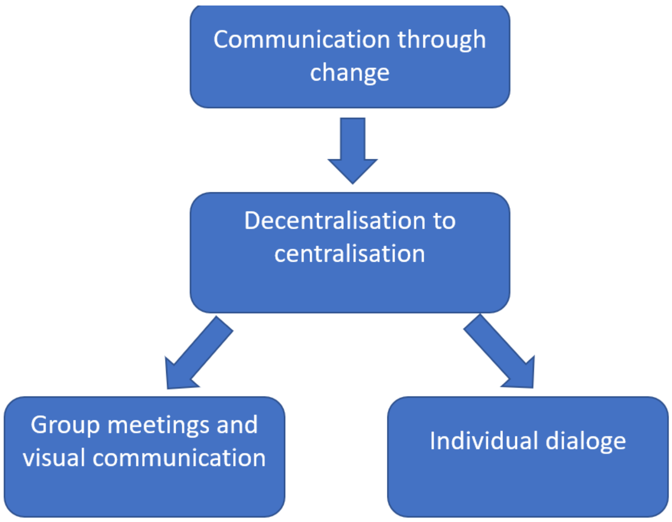

Figure 5

7.2.1 Decentralisation to Centralisation

A common pattern, gathered from the interviewees' perception, was presented in the process of information coming from top management and having to be transferred into the local context. Information, first being decentralised with vague details, needing to become more centralised and connected to the organisational workflow. Within this process, several managers described the importance of adjusting the information and communicating to the employees in a frequent and transparent way.

> "How do we communicate this in the best way to the employees? They will probably be worried about losing their jobs and feel insecure about this big change. It was important to translate the documents from top management and try to make them fit into my organisation. The structure was a good structure for a project but it lacked the local prerequisites which are vital".

Some managers did express their process of centralisation with good support from top management, including trust during the implementation of the developed structure of the project. However, in contrast to this experience, another manager had a different perspective, describing a feeling of a control function and a strict top-down management. The interviewee gave examples for how project S had strict and clear demands on the local processes. In this case the manager did not share the belief of the project being open to local adjustments and that the level of decentralisation depended on the manager.

> "I mean the project is clearly managed by top-down management. It is the central project that directs the process and determines what is allowed and what is not. The employees did not have much say but then it also depends on how brave of a manager you have, who might have the courage to disobey to make the change fit the local requirements instead".

The way the role of the manager is described in the two earlier quotes, was central in the interviews when asked about the implementation of the project S. The emphasis of connecting the change to the local requirements was a key aspect when the managers described the start of the project. From which the importance of communication emerged. Difficulties were described in relation to the struggle of how to ensure that the information was understood by the team and how to adapt to the project plan with its local processes. The decentralisation of the information did according to several managers need to become more centralised and connected to the different local businesses. A common description of the project S was its structure of change but how it was also in some ways open to local adjustments. This description did however differ depending on how far the different offices had advanced. The process of turning information from a decentralised context to a centralised context using communication is strongly connected to this theme. The need of centralised information was also represented in the interviews from the angle of how the individual within the different offices had a larger role to play. This leads us to the next subtheme within *communicating through change*.

7.2.2 Individual dialogue

In the description below a manager outlines the importance of involving the employees through communication and doing so by making sure that the individual receives the information:

> "I had to increase my level of communication. It was important to pay close attention to my co-workers and to see if they fully understood the message. Even if I speak in front of 40 people, I can never fully get a receipt on the effect and therefore it was important to have as many individual dialogues as I could".

Similar to this, another manager on a different site described the vitality of embracing the individual during the change by stating; "I always tried to make sure I can make the time for them, no matter how inappropriate the time might be, I will always take the time to make sure my employees can embrace the change". Both managers described how they started to have individual meetings with each employee. This was embraced not only in a one way communication but was also described to let the employees raise their worries or issues regarding project S. Several managers saw this investment in each individual as a way to increase the sustainability of the change. Based on the belief that project S was the beginning of several changes to come due to the market change, the importance of each individual being invested was crucial for the sustainability of the change. When asked about their employees' reaction to the change one manager replied:

> "You can discuss technical issues and work environmental risks but you can never forget that it is the individuals who create the biggest part of the

> organisation. Some might have great difficulties adjusting. I mean we had some people who chose retirement because they did not want to be a part of this. It is the soft values on the individual level that are important and as a manager you need to inform the individual not just the group".

An overall insight was how the different managers all highlighted the effect on their individuals and how this affected their need to improve communication. From the descriptions provided from the managers, the information to the individual was embraced and also its different techniques to involve the individual in the process of the change. Further on, we find another subtheme with representations of different techniques.

7.2.3 Group meetings and visual communication

When addressing types of communication, one manager highlighted straight verbal communication and eye contact when sharing information as a principal. The individual as a part of a workforce and a team was also representative during the interviews. Some managers emphasised the importance of the individual during the change but what the interviews also brought forward was how the managers described the communication towards a group using different approaches.

> "They have the screw and nut perspective so I used a whiteboard for the group. It was great for the level of communication to use the board because some people might not want to share it out loud. By doing so we got input both in verbal and in written".

Using verbal and visual communication the manager above expresses a greater chance of involving different types of people within the team. Similar to this another manager described the use of a task called "brown paper exercise". The brown paper exercise is a type of visual presentation of the working process where employees can follow the change, see differences between the new working flow and the past while also being allowed to raise questions by adding a paper to the board.

> "Employees were selected from various departments to be able to gain as many perspectives as possible in a focus group. S for me was implemented from below and up so we turned the pyramid and worked towards the goals together. We created a "brown paper" task and placed it at the entrance of the building".

This quote provides an example of how the brown paper exercise were conducted, involving both visual and the group communication. The brown paper exercise was also presented as a way to make the change more effective by enhancing its process and involving more people. Several managers expressed a continuous need for group meetings and how this enhanced the realisation of the change, its process and the expected results.

From the theme *Communicating through change* the results show different sides of communication brought to light by the managers. It is possible to see the importance of the local adjustment, the individual and the various types of communication techniques. The managers described similar challenges and solutions to handle the communication. However, the results also show different perspectives on the core implementation of project S. Some managers described the process as a top-down implementation and others saw the process as creation of the local context. The differences expressed from the managers were connected to the contrast in their statements regarding the communication. The managers who saw the project as a top-down project did not embrace as many different communication techniques as the managers who understood the project as created from the local context.

7.3 Closure of continuous change

The third and last theme collected from the data represents the time after the change or near the last part of the process. The sub themes for *Closure of continuous change* have been collected from the interviewees' perspectives on the continuous change, its effectiveness but also regarding the sustainability of the change. This resulted in *Necessary integration*, *Feedback in different directions* and *Reflection and learning* (*Figure 6*).

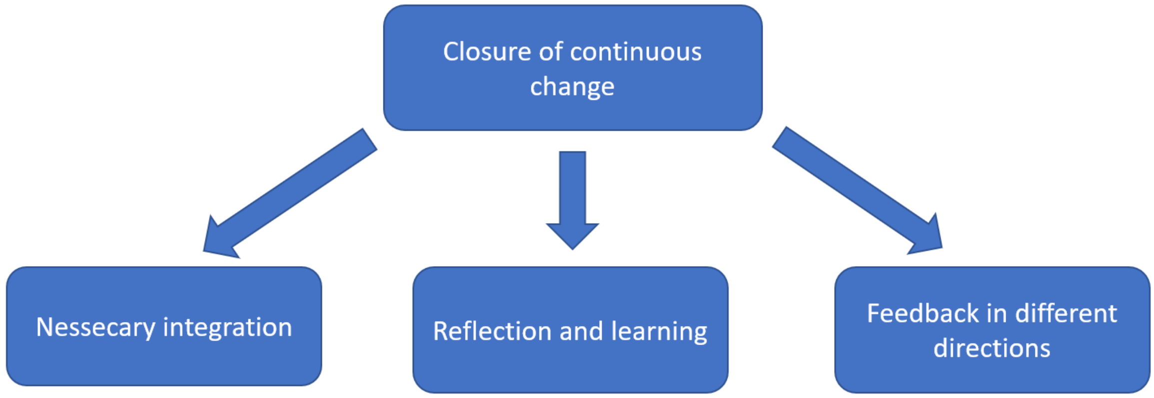

Figure 6

7.3.1 Necessary integration

When asked the question of how the change has functioned within their department the interviewees shared the attitude of the process being finished and that they had succeeded regarding the end results.

> "Some of my employees still might not like the layout of the processes but the newcomers can easily adapt. Today I can see how some of my experienced employees still struggle to understand the change. But we live in change, we live in S. No one would want to go back and I am pretty sure we are heading to the next step of S 2.0".

The mention of project S 2.0 could be found in several interviews with the managers. S 2.0 was described in the context of the need for continuous change. Managers described how they now are more aware of the coming future and how it is relevant to be ready for continuous change to be able to adapt to the market. One manager expressed this realisation as follows: "The volumes are still decreasing and what will we do then? Well, S is here to stay and it's the present way of working, next up is S 2.0".

Both the effectiveness and the sustainability of project S has been a recurring subject during the interviews. The overall picture given, is the struggle at the start and during the process but seeing the results many managers shared the idea of the change being necessary and the process being successful. One manager described the necessity of the change as a way to become more open to coming change and therefore becoming more sustainable. The change was described as a way to become sustainable connected to the demands on the market and therefore also a necessity to survive. The planned results were mainly described as achieved. However, some challenges were still addressed regarding the continuous change based on learnings from region to region: "It is pretty funny that we are making the same mistake as the other department even if it was meant to be a continuous change, learning from earlier processes, maybe they haven't really listened enough to the reality". This quote sets a perspective on the integration of the change, being necessary or not, it still faced challenges. Moreover, the quote also presents the next subtheme regarding feedback.

7.3.2 Feedback in different directions

In general sense, it was clear that feedback played an important part and also worked well in several areas. The interviewees addressed both how the feedback worked from them and upwards but also the feedback from the employees to the managers. One manager described the relation to top management as follows: “I very rarely had to report feedback to my manager. I simply reported if we kept track of the time schedule and the milestones that were set”. However, the feedback between employees and managers were more central during the interviews. The communication and feedback between the top management and the managers were mostly described as well-functioned. Regarding the project S and what was described as a framework that was given to each operation for them to make it their own, seemed to be constant throughout the project. The feedback that was mostly discussed in the interviews were therefore between the employees and the manager. Since it was understood and also expected by almost everyone that something like project S, i.e. a reaction to the decreasing volumes of letters, would happen eventually, the feedback was seldom about the change in itself. The described feedback was more regarding the new processes and practical matters.

> “I had to write, together with employees and colleagues, different documents and checklists to address the questions and inquiries we got. Sometimes feedback can be a bit scary to provide with the risk of yourself looking dumb or ignorant, so we thought that all the things that can be a bit difficult or complex, we will write a template or whatever you want to call it, so they don’t even have to ask”.

This was said by a manager who quickly noticed that the manager's learning curve was different from the employees and therefore wanted to support them before questions arose. A few responses to the feedback from the interviews was that they thought it was going to be worse than it was but if the problems were addressed and talked about it would not become a big problem.

7.3.3 Reflection and learning

To capture the interviewees' reflection and learning, the questions during the interviews were designed to capture their first reaction and idea of project S and then compare to how they feel at the end of the process. “When I heard about S and what it meant, it felt necessary and the way forward. At the end of S the feeling was the same”. These reactions are something that was seen throughout the interviews. The interviewees were open to change, had certain expectations and thought the result was satisfying. When the interviewees were asked about how they feel about project S in the end, the reaction that the majority gave was connected to a fear at first but then a realisation of it being uncomplicated. A number of interviewees expressed that they were nervous but also anxious to start since it was a change long waited for, but how this would work out felt like a bigger challenge than it was in practice.

The most worrying part was the learning process. Since this was a change not for a few managers or employees but for everyone, the learning process was of high importance. "Bear in mind, we did not get any clear instructions on how we should teach or communicate this to the employees, since the idea was to make it our own", was expressed by a manager when addressing the learning.

A process that the organisation has in general is called "meeting by the board" which is a daily meeting where general information is shared. This is where the learning started and it continued throughout. Adding to this, a majority of the interviewees stated that they also took personal conversations with the employees, just to see if they had any questions, concerns or message. This seemed to work out well, according to their own saying.

> "Even though I talked to maybe 30 people about S and what it meant, it was difficult to be sure that they understood. Some of them might not have the courage to ask questions in front of others etc. So, I called them in individually for maybe a five to ten minutes meeting to just talk to them and see if they understood what was going on".

An obstacle for a few employees was to understand what the change actually meant for them. The main message was that every customer would get their delivery in a different manner, but there was confusion as to how the employees would then work. This was something that early on was confusing but after explaining how they would structure this process within the organisation, the message got through. Another learning experience that was described is the comparison between the leaders' learning experience and the employees.

> "Since I was involved in meetings and was also the first one in my department to get all relevant information, I was further along the learning curve than the employees, and that was something I could sometimes struggle with".

This is stated by a manager who sometimes could be a bit frustrated with the implementation of new knowledge to the employees, but after reflecting on their own knowledge and experience, the realisation of the individual experience was conducted. It seems that a huge learning experience has been the managers positioning between input from the leader board and then the output to the employees and how they have oriented themselves in between.

With the three themes represented in the empirical chapter, data that is relevant for the paper have been discovered and will now be analysed. The ten subthemes, *Transformative approach*, *Ownership and collaboration*, *Development of flexibility, Importance of local adjustments, Decentralisation to Centralisation, Individual dialogue, Group meetings and visual communication, Necessary integration, Feedback in different directions* and *Reflection and learning* has provided various insights in the lived experience of the managers during the continuous change of project S. In the analysis, the empirical data, together with the theory, will be looked into in order to answer the research questions.

8. Analysis

With the results presented, this section will now focus on analysing the empirical findings by connecting the relevant theory. The structure of this analysis will follow the structure of the theory, combining the results and therefore follow a process of change. Using the six features, *infectiousness*, *immunity, replication, incubation, mutation, dormancy* presented by Røvik (2011), this paper will now combine the empirical themes to answer the research questions. The different themes from the results section will be connected with the process presented from the virus theory (*Figure 7*).

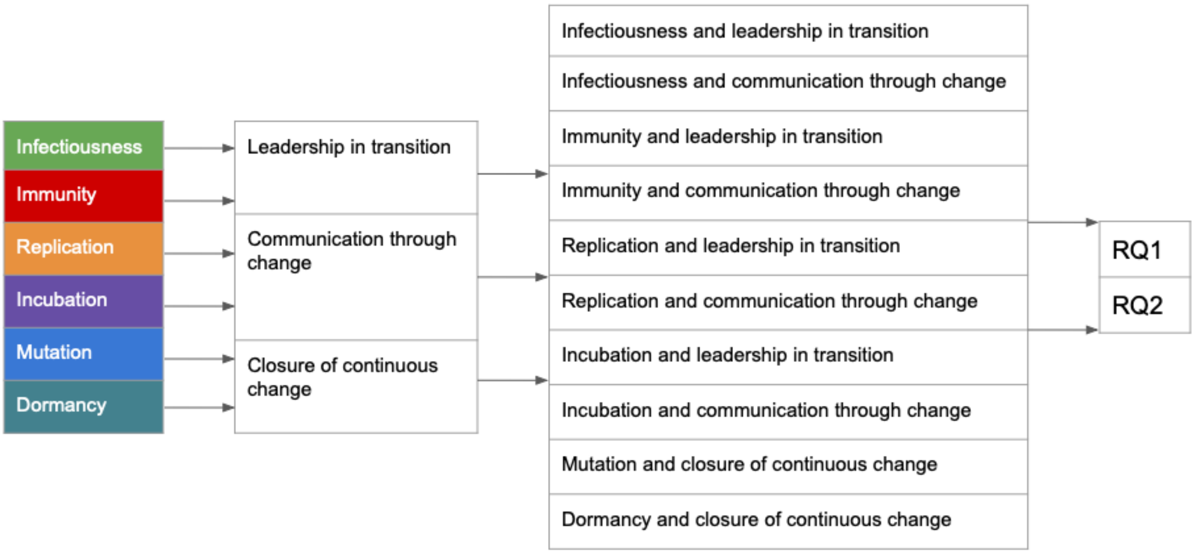

Figure 7 (RQ stands for research question)

8.1 Infectiousness and leadership in transition

During the infectiousness process, Røvik (2011) describes the host as an active actor of change, one who absorbs the idea of change in various ways. For the managers at the case company the adaptation of the change in connection to leadership in transition was described as the need to "take ownership" and to "show the way", providing examples for how the active host functions during the feature of infectiousness. The results can be understood as an example of how the managers are spreading the virus, being infectious and having an embracing attitude of the project S. In relation to Røvik (2011) description of the active host during the feature of infectiousness, Weick (1979) stresses the effect of the individuals process of sense making which could be found in the results of this study. The majority of the managers described project S as "necessary" which can be understood as a way of Røvik's (2011) idea-handling process, adaptation and Weick's (1979) idea of sense making. By analysing the managers statements regarding leadership in transition with the use of the perspective from Røvik's (2011) it is possible to see connections of how the managers have functioned as an active host during the infectiousness phase during the process of continuous change.

8.2 Infectiousness and communication through change

In the results part it is also possible to connect the importance of communication during the first feature of Røvik's (2011) theory. Several managers expressed a worry before presenting the change to their employees, emphasising the value of involving the employees early at the start of the change. Mintzberg and Westly (1992) stresses the importance of the manager at this stage, as someone who is affecting the implementation of the change and therefore the rest of the organisation. The managers' effect on the employees' adaptation is therefore central and the effect can be seen through the communication between the manager and the employees. The way the host, in this case, managers, spreads the virus further is clearly shown when they were asked what their first move was when informed about project S. Multiple managers stated that they wanted to adapt the transformative leadership by informing the employees right away. This included transferring decentralised information to centralisated, being more connected to the local requirements. The results do not provide the perspective of the employees. However, a number of the managers did express their lived experience of how they understood their employees' experience when receiving the news of the change. Some managers described that the majority of their employees understood the reason behind the change very well and therefore the sense making (Weick, 1979) as well as the process of adaptation (Røvik, 2011) can be acknowledged. In contrast to this, some managers described, when informing the employees, that the first reaction was an emotion of fear of losing their job. This can be connected to the immune system that Røvik (2011) describes as a quick follow up after the infectiousness stage.

8.3 Immunity and leadership in transition

The fear of losing their jobs, coming from the employees, can be seen as an example of an idea-handling process in the next feature explained by Røvik's virus inspired theory (2011), being immunity. According to Røvik (2011) the virus in this phase triggers a defence system based on either innate or acquired immunity, being an immunity inherited or based on consequences of similar situations. Sheldon (1980) stressed the risk of employees experiencing a threat regarding change when comparing it to how they normally have been operating. This experience of a threat could be found in this study's results with connection to the acquired type of immunity. The acquired immunity is shown through the fear of the employees losing their jobs due to similar situations in the past. The fear of losing jobs was according to almost all of the managers an issue which enhanced the immunity towards the change. One manager did explain the connection to the acquired type of immunity as a relation to earlier situations where people lost their jobs because of the technical development resulting in machines replacing the human workforce. Because of the clear level of sense making (Weick, 1979) the innate type of immunity was not as easily found in the results. The lack of indication on the innate type can be connected to its focus of non-adaptation described by (Røvik, 2011). The non-adaptation is based on a more or less conscious decision to either adapt or not, to the presented idea of change. The employees were described as having understood the reason for the change but they still experienced fear due to the results of the earlier process of change. In this case the employees can be understood as dependent on their manager to handle this fear, which some managers expressed during the interviews.

The idea-handling processes of expiry and rejection (Røvik, 2011) was a process hard to locate in the results. The reason behind this could be related to the earlier state of infectiousness where the managers effect of sense making infected the employees enough to create susceptibility towards the change. Another resistance described by the managers were the difficulties to adjust and that some of the employees struggled to change. A few managers expressed the variation of the change process for their employees, some were able to embrace and work towards the change on an instance while some needed more time to adjust. This shows an example of Røvik's (2011) process of isolation and how the consequence of isolation can occur when the change is too far from the local operation. To address this challenge one manager started to plan one to one meetings and enhance the communication which brings the analysis to the next theme, immunity and communicating through change.

8.4 Immunity and communication through change

To manage the insecurity of the employees, several managers stressed the importance of improved communication skills. Firstly the information needed to become more centralised to enhance the relation between the change and the local context. This can be understood as a way to increase the sense making explained by Weick's (1979) when providing examples from the local context. As mentioned before, one manager used a new technique when communicating with the employees and did so by inviting each employee to individual meetings to address the change. The improved communication can be understood as a tool to manage the process of interpretation, negotiation and concretization explained by Røvik (2011) which can support the option of accepting or terminating the idea of change. It was clear that the managers' experienced different levels of immunity within their workforce and expressed that some were able to discuss the issues directly and that some needed different ways of communication. This also shows the experience of change as a threat in different ways which according to Sheldon (1980) is common when approaching organisational change. The consequence of isolation during the change process of immunity can therefore be understood as varying, resulting in new demands on the manager's communication skills and change management.

8.5 Replication and leadership in transition

Since the organisational change was not optional, the managers had to solve the problem of immunity to ensure that the project was moving forward. When handling issues during the immunity stage the processes can be seen entering the replication state, which according to Røvik (2011) is when a concept goes from an idea to practise, known as entrenchment. Domingo et al. (2000) states that in this stage, the virus uses the host to spread itself further and reproduce into larger numbers. Here it is possible to connect to the results presented by the managers. The managers stressed how the employees had different attitudes towards the change and how it affected the change management and their leadership. Some techniques used to make the employees embrace the change was to provide time and to create selected groups within the organisation to then be able to spread the knowledge about the change further. This action can be connected to Mintzberg and Westly's (1992) description of synthesis, being leaders involving the workforce into the processes to enhance the acceptance. By focusing on a group in the organisation to get a deeper involvement in the change it is, according to Røvik (2011), possible to highlight the entrenchment by the education which in its turn can create a larger level of replication by a bigger number of hosts. Another example of improving the entrenchment, used by a few managers, was the need to create curiosity within the group. They did so by placing visible information about the change and how it was affecting the daily work. This phase in the virus inspired theory of change represents the process of the idea of change becoming more familiar within the operating context. Within this feature Røvik (2011), embraces the importance of training to be able to adapt to the change in practice. A few managers described how they had a few days with training but that they also experienced issues due to the individual differences within their team. One manager mentioned the importance of making the time for the individual employee to train, no matter how inappropriate the time might be. With education and training Røvik (2011) emphasises a higher chance of the change replicating and being reproduced to other hosts.

8.6 Replication and communication through change

To support the entrenchment of the change, managers expressed the need to improve their communication and the need to adjust to different styles of communication, such as visible, individual, group or written communication. Connecting the empirical data with the theory, the use of different communication styles can be seen as an example of Røvik's (2011) idea of education and training, having the same aim to enhance the replication. The importance of communication was heavily represented during the interviews and several managers expressed the value of the employee's perspective which was gathered through various communication skills. By implementing different techniques of communication, this can be seen as a process to intensify the synthesis, which according to Mintzberg and Westley (1992) is important when taking on change. In regard to the definition of replication as the process where the virus powers and utilises the hosts to duplicate (Domingo et al., 2000), these communication methods can be seen as examples of ways to manage the replication.

One manager stressed a struggle regarding the replication of the change in the nature of communication and explained the issue of not knowing if the individuals fully understood the change. This can be understood as an issue during the replication feature of the virus theory due to how it is not known whether the employees understood the change and could thereby replicate the change to colleagues. Since this study does not aim to gain the employees perspective it is difficult to state the level of replication in other perspectives than the managers.

8.7 Incubation and leadership in transition

The way Røvik (2011) describes incubation, it is stressed that the longer an organisation waits to enforce the change and involve the stakeholders, such as employees, the more risk of criticism and resistance. As stated in the result, multiple interviewees stated that the case company now wants a more transformative approach which differs from the organisation's history. The transformative approach indicated that managers, as soon as they found out about project S, started to involve the employees. As stated, managers were met with discomfort and worry from the employees since earlier changes have indicated that they were at risk of disposal. Røvik (2011) states that incubation is the time between the idea of change and the change taking action. Since the time frame for this was short and inclusive, the incubation period was more or less non-problematic. Røvik (2011) uses the term maturation which is seen as the time when the idea of change lingers in the organisation but does not take place from a practical standpoint. Using the idea of transformative leadership by taking ownership and collaboration, the employees and the manager took ownership together of the change and therefore more or less, eliminated this otherwise, according to Røvik (2011), critical stage. The transformative leadership could therefore be seen as a tool to decrease the risk of rejection and disengagement from employees when change is occurring.

Following the leadership in the transition theme but moving towards the development of flexibility, it is clear that there is a relation between the different themes. Since the change was given as a framework and that each entity needed to apply necessary practices to make the process work, the flexibility needed development. Boxenbaum and Jonsson (2008), Meyer and Rowan (1977), Staw and Epstein, (2000) states that if leaders wait too long to inform or involve the employees in the change, stagnation will occur and the process will slow down. To avoid this problem, the managers understood that the employees have the best knowledge of the process but they are also the ones that will be most affected by the change. Therefore, the involvement started immediately and to achieve the flexibility that the change demanded local adjustments were made. The local adjustments, which were heavily influenced by the employees, each entity went past the incubation stage swiftly. Both Boxenbaum and Jonsson (2008), Meyer and Rowan (1977), Staw and Epstein (2000) and Røvik (2011) write only about the consequences if organisations wait too long during the incubation phase, not what happens when organisations go through it quickly. As shown by the case company and transformative leadership, a short incubation period resulted in both an ownership of the process and also a flexibility.

8.8 Incubation and communication through change

Using the stated themes, incubation (Røvik, 2011) is a process that managers and employees went through together. An important part discovered in the empirical data is that only the framework of the change was communicated, hence the different entities needed to generate their own questions but also their own answers. During the incubation phase, managers involved the employees directly, which contradicts what is usually done, according to Boxenbaum and Jonsson (2008); Meyer and Rowan (1977); Staw and Epstein, (2000). It was shown that a combination of group meetings and visual learning was a key factor during the incubation phase. These two activities gave both information but in different ways and was a new technique in the change management for the managers. The group meetings that occurred often were used to keep employees updated during the incubation, but simultaneously the visual learning was always present. Because employees were always informed during the group meetings, they can see the information that was given, reflected by the visual communication in the form of folders, documents and signs which ensure that change was present.

8.9 Mutation and closure of continuous change

Røvik (2011) describes mutation as a phase where change can differ from entity to entity and therefore there is a risk of inconsistency throughout the organisation. For the case company, mutation is welcomed and embraced. One of the sub-themes is necessary integration which describes the organisation’s view on mutation of change. Since project S was both an expected and necessary change but most importantly only given as a framework, the organisation wanted the different entities to mutate the change so it fits them individually. Røvik (2011) compares the mutation to translation of language and the saying “lost in translation”. It was clear that managers were informed on how other entities were conducting their change, but knew that it would not work for them specifically, based on geographic circumstances, resources etc. That does not mean that the information regarding how other entities were unnecessary, on the contrary. It gave the managers perspective and was seen as a learning opportunity. When Røvik (2011) states that mutation is similar to translating languages, it does not indicate that the message will be incorrect. The framework was formed so that mutation was unavoidable on purpose so that the company could learn and reflect from each other. Learning and reflecting on other entities' processes gave the managers different perspectives and therefore a greater grip on the changes that needed to be made. It can be seen as Røvik (2011) describes that mutation is a critical phase with many risk factors within and the goal is to decrease mutation as much as possible, but in the case of this company, without mutation, the project S change would be ineffective and not sustainable at all.

8.10 Dormancy and closure of continuous change

From the interviewees, it was clear that dormancy was now a fact. All interviewees stated that project S was not discussed anymore but instead just the current way to work. According to Røvik (2011), dormancy is often effective from when the changes, processes etc have decreased and a more static way of work is at hand. Managers described that change is now fully accepted and works well, but there are from time to time situations that occur which challenges the project S. It can be seen as the necessary integration was a key factor in order to give the change a chance to settle in with the employees and managers. Røvik (2011) states that dormancy is active when the change is not really discussed or challenged by stakeholders but dormancy, as earlier stated, can go from active to inactive. This was seen by the managers from time to time, but the rework or changes that were needed, was not too difficult and did not pose a threat to project S. This could be viewed as a result of the feedback back and forth which gave the change a high sustainability. Mintzberg and Westly (1992) writes how rework from time to time is important and without it, risky processes that have not been addressed, can jeopardise the change. This is something that was discussed by the managers too, since they are aware of the heavy involvement of the employees, feedback and rework must take place when needed. The point of the whole project was to continuously learn and develop. Just as mutation was welcomed by the case company, inactivation and reactivation Røvik (2011) was embraced by the organisation. By going from inactivation to reactivation, project S was constantly relevant and also sustainable. The sustainability was enforced by the possibility of feedback that went in different directions. Without the feedback, dormancy would constantly be inactive (Røvik, 2011) and no rework or improvements (Mintzberg & Westly, 1992) would be conducted which could generate a risk of disengagement.

Since both managers and employees were mildly concerned about this huge change, in the dormancy phase, said stakeholders realised that everything in general had gone well. Also, stakeholders knew, after being involved in project S for a while, that reflection and learning can always be improved. It was welcoming to reflect on the changes and learn together, as far as necessary. This can be connected to when Røvik (2011) writes that dormancy can be when opposing ideas and opinions are raised but not damaging the change. The reason these opposing ideas and views did not damage the change could be because the feedback that was during the later stage of project S was still effective. It was not constant but when a situation occurred that was relevant for the change i.e. reactivation (Røvik, 2011), the issue was discussed and addressed. This made project S effective from a dormancy perspective since issues were handled swiftly.

9. Conclusion

This study aimed to provide a deeper understanding for how managers at a large logistics company manage continuous change and how they experience the sustainability and effectiveness of project S. The aim was guided by two research questions being*, How do managers perceive and execute continuous change?* and *What do the managers describe regarding the effectiveness and sustainability in the process of continuous change?* In this final chapter a summary of the findings of this study with a concise description based on the lived experiences of the managers at the case company, is provided. Further on, this chapter also discusses the contribution and limitations of this study, as well as its implications and suggestions for further studies.

9.1 Main objectives for the perceived experience of continuous change

With regards to this study's first research questions, the findings presented and its analysis, the research question can be answered within two main objectives, relating to the fields of leadership and communication. With the analysis of the findings, a conclusion that can be drawn is how the perceived experience from the managers was connected to their role as a leader through the different phases of change. The necessity of the change was a reoccurring shared experience among the managers. From which the analysis showed how the infectiousness affected the active hosts', being the managers', sense making of the change in a positive direction. The reason behind the execution of the continuous change was perceived as essential for a sustainable future, whereas the managers embraced the change. However, the lived experience of the change being more or less connected to the local context differed. Showing that some managers experienced the change as top-down implementation, whereas some experienced it as a locally driven change. Even if their leadership was established the managers now needed to adjust and enhance their leadership skills, being the host of the change. The results and analysis show that the managers took ownership over the change and became more flexible in their leadership style when addressing different challenges within their team. This conclusion is closely connected to the next main objectives being communication.

The need for improved communication was central in the empirical data and connected to the analysis the enhanced communication could be seen as a way to manage the immunity phase. A conclusion that can be drawn is the perceived experience of a constant adjustment depending on the change and the employees. The managers faced challenges whether the employees reacted to change in a embracing or rejective attitude. The need for consistent communication and different communications skills, such as individual meetings, group meetings, verbal communication, written and visual communication was described by the managers. The study reflects on the process of change and its effect on the employees which in turn affected the managers, their leadership and need for communication. A common description from the managers was connected to the employees fear of losing their job because of the change. To handle this challenge, several managers created new communication ways to be able to capture the issues and manage their employees' experience. These experiences described from the managers showed examples through the analysis of variations of education and training which enhanced the replication of the change. A concise summary of the findings in relation to the first research questions is the manager's experience of their enhanced leadership and their adjusted communications skills to both execute the continuous change but also manage different challenges.

9.2 The process of effectiveness and sustainability

The reason why project S was implemented was mostly the greatest factor that the project could be sustainable. Since the empirical data showed that the project S was necessary and long awaited, when the news came that the organisation would adapt to the external changes such as a huge decrease in the letter volume, managers and also employees were happy to welcome the change. This meant that the project had in the beginning a positive start, as it was expected but this differs from what could be expected according to the virus theory's phase of immunity. Because of the long-awaited change, it could be seen that project S got a head start since the project did not need to advocate for its existence and therefore decreasing the risk of immunity. To keep project S sustainable throughout the time, it was important to keep it relevant so the change would not lack ambition and engagement. The key to keep it relevant and sustainable was to constantly involve the employees and their expertise in the area of change. A way to do so was to use a transparency leadership to keep the employees in the same loop as the managers information wise. As seen, this was a challenge. Since the managers were always the first to be informed about changes and details, managers were on a different learning curve than the employees. To tackle this challenge and keep the project moving forward, the managers quickly realised that they were on a different learning level since they were closer to the change than the employees and realising this gave them the opportunity to adapt to the employees when discussing project S. If the managers did not realise this, there would be a knowledge and a communication gap between the employees and the managers which might have put the sustainability of the project at great risk.

The effectiveness of project S was attached to the managers realising that the employees are the experts and also the engine to the change. By initiating exercises like the brown paper exercise, managers saw how employees got attached to the change and could see it with their own eyes. It seems that making it their own was an efficient way to ensure that the project was moving forward and to decrease the risk of stagnation. As seen in the analysis, mutation was a fact during project S which was welcoming. Using the mutation, the different entities would feel as if the project S was something they created, on their own terms which gave a responsibility to ensure that the project would reach its goal in the most efficient way. Adding to the analysis and the dormancy phase, when problems, questions or uncertainty occurred, it was addressed right away. Reactivation of the change was therefore welcomed and appreciated. This seems to be connected to the transformative leadership style. If change was not allowed to be reactivated as it can be in the dormancy phase, the resistance and immunity would build up which could lead to a risk of failing the sustainability and efficiency goal set by the case company. To summarise the processes of efficiency and sustainability it is possible to see that involving factors as mutation and reactivation, phases that can otherwise be seen as obstacles, was a clever move and ensured a smooth project process.

9.3 Study's contribution

One of this study's contributions is the presentation of how using a modern theory that is supported by established writers can provide a nuanced perspective on a continuous change. Applying the virus theory to a continuous change is also considered as a contribution, since it has before been used for other areas within change. By applying the virus theory to a continuous change, the virus theory gains another aspect and becomes richer in experience. Adding to that perspective, this case shows that sometimes, doing the opposite of the theory can be a critical factor when implementing a continuous change. It does not mean that change theory, in this case the virus theory, is incorrect and therefore unnecessary, but it could mean that organisations can use theory to get influence and inspiration on how to conduct their own change. Using no theory can risk the project to fall into easy mistakes that could have been avoided, but in the details in theory can be seen as a framework to utilise. In a more practical sense, this paper shows that organisations do not need to fear introducing projects that lack detailed descriptions or instructions. It all comes down to trusting the stakeholders and ensuring that the resources are applicable. If there is a clear end goal, then establishing a framework and using communication wisely, results can be reached both effectively and sustainably.

With the studies aim to also present itself as a relevant tool when facing change for organisations, generalisation was intended. By using the virus theory by Røvik (2011) and presenting a case study, this thesis provides an example of how the theory can be used in practical matters when addressing processes of change. Therefore, this study is arguably not unique to the chosen case company, but more applicable for other organisations as well. This study has contributed to the research within the field of change by exploring the lived experiences of managers during the change of a continuous nature. Previous research has shown a vast scope within the field of change and this study adds to this scope by its contribution of a deeper knowledge of how continuous change can be perceived by managers and how the change can be understood by the use of the virus theory from Røvik (2011). With this study's results in mind, this study hopes to inspire researchers as well as organisations to embrace the need for local adjustments, enhanced leadership and the need for adjustable communications techniques. The study can be seen as not only representative for the change S but also for changes within similar organisations using continuous change.

9.4 Limitations and suggestions for further research

This thesis has its limitations, whereas one is connected to the context of the change. The conducted study is based on one region in Sweden where project S was conducted, which was the first segment in the organisation to implement the change. This means that the same change might encounter different challenges when it is implemented in the rest of the country. The limitation is connected to the possible differences in various regions which could affect the outcome of the change. For this study, some limitations do exist due to the context of the organisation, it might therefore be difficult to apply the same results on any organisation, due to possible cultural, operation and strategy differences.

With the expressed limitations and this study's results in consideration there are several possible topics and research questions relevant for further research. The focus of this thesis, being the lived experience from the perspective of the managers at the case company during the change of project S, shows an important perspective. However, a suggestion for future research could be to direct the focus on the perspective of the employees to gain another crucial aspect in the matter of change. If the employees' perspective were to be gained through either qualitative or quantitative research, a broader insight of the change project S could be possible. Moreover, this study represents one division in Sweden whereas future studies could increase the coverage by involving more or all divisions in Sweden through this change. By doing so, differences and similarities could be brought forwards and provide a deeper analysis on for example the sustainability, the effectiveness, the local context, the leadership or the different types of communication during change. For future studies it would also be a possibility to investigate continuous change using both the virus inspired theory and another theory to explore its contrast on approaching the process of change. Another suggestion to improve the analysis of how the virus theory can be applied to the process of change would be to conduct longitudinal research. Research with this prospect could capture the continuous change with the virus inspired theory as a tool and its process in a new context.

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11. Appendix

11.1 Appendix 1

Intervjuguide - Projekt S

- Axel von Homeyer & My pousette
  - Master på göteborgs universitet - Strategic human resource management and labour relations
- Tack för att du ställer upp!
- Lite kort ramverk-info om intervjun:
  - Den information vi får via dig kommer enbart användas i forskningssyfte och kommer vara anonymt.
  - Skulle en fråga ställas som du inte känner dig bekväm med eller inte vill svara på, går det självklart bra att vi hoppar den frågan
  - Intervjun planeras sträcka sig mellan 30 - 40 minuter
  - För att vi ska kunna ta vara på all information du ger så vill vi fråga om det skulle kännas okej att vi spelar in samtalet, detta är i syfte för att kunna transkribera. Inspelningen kommer att raderas därefter.
    - Är det okej för dig att vi spelar in?
- Information om grunden till intervjun:
  - Intervjun kommer främst syfta till att fånga processen S och din upplevelse av förändringen via tre steg där den sista delen väger extra mycket.
- Har du några frågor innan vi börjar?

Innan S

- vem är du ?
- Vad är S för dig?
- Hur blev S introducerat för dig?
- Vad var dina första tankar kring S?
- Vad det något som förändrades för ditt arbete?
  - isf vad?
  - Vad fick du börja med att förändra?
- hur tror du det landade hos dina medarbetare?
- Vad upplevde du som utmanande vid införandet av förändringen?
- Upplevde du nya möjligheter när S satte igång?
  - isf vilka och hur uttrycktes dessa?

Mitt i S

- Beskriv processen av S? -
- När sågs skillnader?
  - Olika arbetssätt/arbetsuppgifter?
- Vilka utmaningar fanns längs vägen?
- Hur såg stödet ut för dig från ledning? Information, hjälp, kommunikation?

Final stage för S

- Hur ser det ut idag?
  - Vart befinner ni er i processen?
- Hur ser kommunikationen kring S ut nu?
  - Från ledning till dig, från dig neråt?
- Har dina första tankar kring S förändrats efter processens gång, isf hur och varför/varför inte?
- Hur arbetar du nu till skillnad från då?
- Vad har du tagit för lärdomar av förändringen?
- Hur har möjligheten sett ut för dig att ge/få feedback?
- Hur skulle du säga att projektets effektivitet var?
  - isf varför/varför inte samt hur?
- Hur ser du på hållbarheten för S?
  - utveckla gärna
- Upplever du att det idag finns hinder gällande förändringen, isf vilka?
  - hur hanteras hinderna?
- Upplever du att det finns några förbättringsområden? isf vilka?
- Vilka fördelar/styrkor har du upplevt med S?
- Vilka möjligheter ser du framåt?

Avslutning

- Av allt de vi har diskuterat idag, vad tänker du är viktigt att belysa lite extra**?**
- Är det något vi inte har lyft idag som du vill berätta om?

11.2 Appendix 2

Information till deltagare

I det här dokumentet får du information om studentprojektet ”Just like a virus, Change is spreading” för en Master uppsats och vad det innebär att delta i detta. Master projektet görs av Axel von Homeyer och My Pousette med ansvarig handledare Freddy hällsten *Ph.D., Business Administration,* på Institutionen för Sociologi och Arbetsvetenskap vid Göteborgs universitet.

Vad är det för projekt och varför vill ni att jag ska delta?

Projektet "Just like a virus, Change is spreading" handlar om "Chefers upplevelse av projekt S som organisational genomgått". Jag kontaktar dig för att vi är intresserade av dina erfarenheter om "S".

Hur går studien till?

Om du vill delta blir du intervjuad på lämplig plats i uppskattningsvis 45 minuter. Intervjun kan även ske per telefon eller via Zoom.

Ditt namn och personliga detaljer är konfidentiella och kommer inte att användas muntligt eller skriftligt i någon text som studien leder till. Jag skulle vilja spela in intervjun för att ha möjlighet att lyssna på den och skriva ner den efteråt. Intervjufilen kommer förvaras på en lösenordsskyddad dator. Ditt namn kommer inte att synas på någon av dessa filer – bara en kod som döljer din identitet. Om du ångrar dig kan du när som helst välja att avsluta sitt deltagande. När studiens resultat presenteras/publiceras kommer alla deltagares identitet skyddas med hjälp av en pseudonym.

Vad händer med mina uppgifter?

Det insamlade materialet kommer att användas för att skriva en Masteruppsats och materialet kan komma att användas i en akademiska tidskrift eller rapport som är riktade till användargrupper och diskuteras på seminarium. Informationen hålls i säkert förvar och är endast tillgänglig för relevanta forskare. Dina svar kommer att anonymiseras så att inte obehöriga kan ta del av dem. Materialet kan eventuellt senare bli publicerat i någon rapport eller artikel i en akademisk tidskrift.

Hur får jag information om resultatet av studien?

Resultaten kommer publiceras i en Masteruppsats som blir färdig 1/6 som kan ladda ner via GUPEA. Deltagare är välkomna till presentationer om de vill när projektet kommer att presenteras.

Deltagandet är frivilligt

Ditt deltagande är frivilligt och samtycke ges muntligt eller skriftligt. Du har möjlighet att ställa frågor om projektet innan du signerar ett ’samtyckesformulär’. Om du ångrar dig kan du när som helst välja att avsluta sitt deltagande under pågående intervju och du behöver inte uppge varför du inte längre vill delta. Du har också rättighet att radera uppgifter i efterhand.

Kontakt detaljer

Master student - Axel von Homeyer
Phone: +46730434910
E-mail: axel.vonn.homeyer@gmail.com

Master student - My Pousette
Phone: +46766501712
E-mail: my.pousette@hotmail.com

Ansvarig Handledare - Freddy Hällsten
Phone: +46317861508
E-mail: freddy.hallsten@handels.gu.se