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MASTER THESIS

MAKING SENSE OF STRATEGIC AMBIGUITY

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Preface and Thanks

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our case study company for their hospitality, co-operation and time. Due to their helpfulness, conducting this research and writing this thesis has been a pleasant experience. Thanks to all of our interviewees for prioritizing us and for being prepared and committed for the interview sessions. A special thanks to our supervisor at Blutex who has been very supportive from the very start in August 2012 and throughout the whole process.

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Last, but not least, we would like to give a special thank you to our girlfriends, for all the meals, support, and love.

Our ambition has been to conduct, not only a formal academic thesis but also an interesting and readable piece of literature, which we hope that You as a reader will enjoy.

Regards,

Peter Malmberg and Victor Malmqvist

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Abstract

Title	Making Sense of Strategic Ambiguity
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Authors	Peter Malmberg and Victor Malmqvist
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Key Words	'Sensemaking', 'Cues', 'Frames', 'Strategic Ambiguity', 'Organizational Change', 'Communication'
Purpose	Our purpose is to increase the understanding of an organization's change process by interpreting organizational members' lived experience during a change process where messages are being communicated ambiguously. We will draw on Weick's theoretical framework of sensemaking in order to analyze the effects of top managers' strategic ambiguity. We further aim to contribute to academia by addressing undertheorized gaps in the existing sensemaking theory regarding how cues and frames play part in the sensemaking process and thus affect how the change process is interpreted by organizational members.
Methodology	The study has an inductive approach. We have used a qualitative method and collected our primary data through semi-structured in-depth interviews.
Theoretical Perspective	Our case study draws on Weick's theoretical framework of sensemaking as the primary body of theory.
Empirical Foundation	Our empirical foundation is based on ten in-depth interviews and one pilot interview with organizational members at our case study-company. The interviewees worked on three hierarchical levels; top managers (3), middle managers (3), and salespeople (5).
Conclusions	We have developed a model for understanding the individual's sensemaking process. We concluded that this process is highly influential in change processes, especially when collective frames are missing and individuals are left to make sense from their own individual frames. This may result in diverse interpretations of the same organizational event, which in turn leads to diverse behavior from the employees. This is the conventional purpose strategic ambiguity. In our case study company, the top management was strategically ambiguous in order to create consensus in the initiated change process but viewed the diverse interpretations as an unwanted consequence. Top managers did not want to surrender the power to make strategic judgments to subordinates. However, they transferred the responsibility to turn the vision into practice to middle managers - a vision which the middle managers have not participated in formulating.

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1. Introduction

The first chapter of this thesis sets out the guidelines and defines the limits for in which we have conducted our research. We start off by presenting the background to our choice of research, which is based on Alvesson and Kärreman's (2007) idea of mystery creation. We then continue the chapter by problematizing the existing theories and by doing so also motivating our choice of theory. We finish off the chapter with concluding our purpose, research questions, and limitations.

1.1. Theoretical Background

Organizations are always in a state of change, but precisely what this entails is just a matter of choosing perspective:

> *"From a distance (the macro level of analysis), when observers examine the flow of events that constitute organizing, they see what looks like repetitive action, routine, and inertia dotted with occasional episodes of revolutionary change. But a view from closer in (the micro level of analysis) suggests ongoing adaptation and adjustment."*
>
> Weick and Quinn, 1999:362

Most change management literature make a distinction between 'first-order' (incremental) and 'second-order' (discontinuous) change when defining a change process (Palmer et al., 2009). However, as pointed out in the quote from Weick and Quinn above, the very same change process could be viewed as stable or ongoing depending on the chosen perspective. The perspective of stability, often represented by Lewin's (1951) three stages of change - unfreeze, change, refreeze - has been strongly questioned and problematized for its rationalistic and simplified view on organizations (Weick and Quinn, 1999). It has also been criticized for treating organizational change as a single and isolated event (Meyer and Stensaker, 2006). Organizational change is a much more complex area, which addresses different perspectives, contexts and people (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008). In order to obtain a more complete understanding of the micro level, the perspective of ongoing change is more preferable than the perspective of stability (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002).

However, it is common that change management literature (see e.g. Heath and Heath, 2010; Kotter, 1996; Kotter, 2008; Patton and McCalman, 2010) automatically chooses a top management perspective, where focus is on how a change process could be implemented effectively (Johansson and Heide 2008b; Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008). The last two decades' explosion of management models, theories and concepts has often chosen the rationalistic view on organizations (Sveningsson and Sörgärde, 2007). The focus here is on how to implement an organizational change effectively, rather than increasing the understanding of its complexity (Johansson and Heide, 2008b).

The presumption that the models actually would work regardless of organization reveals not only a fairly simplified view on organizations (Sveningsson and Sörgärde, 2007), but it also sheds light on the top management's insecurity regarding the pressures they face. We are often told that globalization, technological development and/or increasing competition force organizations to change (Sveningsson and Sörgärde, 2007). In this business climate, top management is faced with internal and external pressures to change (Palmer et al., 2009). However, the risks of changing must be compared to the risks of not changing. Beer and Nohria (2000) state that; "Most traditional organizations have accepted, in theory at least, that they must either change or die" (2000:133). The problem is that a majority of the change initiatives fail (Beer and Nohria, 2000; Palmer et al., 2009).

1.2. Problematization

The idea that top-down companywide change programs, quality circles or other training courses sponsored by corporate groups such as human resources, will transform organizations is incorrect according to Beer et al. (1990). So is the idea that new structural changes automatically will change the behavior of the organizational members. The authors state that organizational change is about learning, whereupon top-down change processes become "too risky as a deliberate strategy" (1990:159). In their four-year study of organizational change at six large corporations, Beer et al. (1990) concluded that senior managers often understand the necessity for change, but "misunderstand what it takes to bring it about" (1990:158). Furthermore, the authors state that bottom-up "grass-rooted change processes" are more successful in reaching the intended outcome, than top-down initiatives due to the organizational learning procedure. The most successful top managers in the study acknowledged their limited power and created a climate for change, rather than insisting on specific solutions or spreading lessons of success and failure. In conclusion, top managers are faced during organizational change processes with the paradox of "directing a 'nondirective' change process" (Beer et al., 1990:159) and a trade-off between allowing uncertainty and creating resistance, from the top management's point of view.

This situation naturally put pressure on top management since 'doing nothing' and 'doing something' are thus both seen as risky activities. In contrast, some top managers simply decide to change the organization for the sake of the change on a regular basis; "organizational change processes are often seen as 'strengthening sauna baths' – the more frequently recurring, the better" (Johansson and Heide, 2008a:289). Alvesson (2006) argues that changing for the sake of the change could be viewed as performing an illusion, where the image of performing something positive; being rational, politically correct, innovative etc., outweigh the change actions' substantial value. Alvesson (2006) connect these pseudo actions to institutional theory, which states that many organizational change processes are more influenced by a concept's popularity than its substantial value. Here, the mainstream trend reported in media or by change consultants has a large influence for top management in their choice of change initiatives. In addition to this, top managers tend to perceive and identify change initiatives in which they have been involved, as successful; "their self-serving bias may lead to ambiguous change efforts being not presented but also understood in a positive way" (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008:149). In this sense, institutional theory does not only depict the insecurity among top managers but also reveal the often vague reasons behind change initiatives.

In this thesis, we are looking at how insecurity and ambiguity within a top management group affect a top-down change process. We believe that the organizational members' perceptions are crucial for the change process' intended outcome. Therefore, we have examined how employees on different managerial levels perceive a change process characterized by ambiguity and insecurity among managers. We have analyzed how the organizational members' sensemaking (micro-level dynamics) have affected their behavior and thus the outcome of the change process (macro-level impacts). In this sense, we acknowledge Ford and Ford's (1995) view on organizational change, as being a phenomenon constructed by human social interactions, and thus a phenomenon that occurs within communication.

Scholars' interest of studying how organizational members make sense in complex organizational changes has increased during the last two decades, but various authors have stressed that there is still a need for more empirical studies within the field of sensemaking (Weick, et al., 2005, p.419; Balogun and Johnson, 2005, p.1597; Thurlow and Mills, 2009, p. 460). In addition to this, we have found undertheorized gaps in the existing sensemaking theory regarding the process of how cues and frames are connected and what the process of sensemaking looks like in detail. We would argue that the sensemaking theory will help us to increase the understanding of the empirical findings from our research.

1.3. Study Object

We have studied a currently undergoing organizational change process and how the organizational members make and give sense of the change process during the implementation of it. We conducted a qualitative single-case study at our case study company, Blutex (fictitious name). Blutex is carrying out a two-year top-down change program for their salesforce where the participants are asked to change their professional mindset, attitude, and behavior. The change program is a part of a larger fundamental strategic change process, in which Blutex aims to change its business model, organizational culture and identity. When conducting our research, we found elements that puzzled us. We saw how the top management's ambiguous communication within the top-down change process resulted in a strong consensus regarding the change's importance, purpose and intended outcome. Everyone was positive to the change process but there was a wide variety of interpretations among the organizational members and at the same time everyone was certain about their own interpretation being 'correct'.

We used this 'mystery' as a basis for this thesis along the concept of 'mystery creation' developed by Alvesson and Kärreman (2007) who emphasize the usage of empirical material as the base for developing theory by problematizing existing frameworks and focusing on what puzzles the researcher. This is meant to create research that is interesting rather than obvious or irrelevant, and to open up alternative ways of framing empirical material. The authors also encourage induction in research, letting the empirical material determine the path of the study as well as the choice of theory, where focus is on exploring the mystery of the empirical material. We will explain our method further in chapter 2.

1.4. Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of the thesis is to increase the understanding of an organization's change process by interpreting organizational members' lived experience during a change process. We aim to enhance the existing sensemaking theory by contributing with empirical research where sensemaking is used as the primary body of theory for analysis. As stated previously, we have during our research found the existing sensemaking theory to be undertheorized. Therefore, we have developed a framework in order for the reader of this thesis to understand our view on sensemaking and how cues and frames play part in the change process.

In order to investigate this we have established the following research questions:

> *1. What does the sensemaking process look like on an individual level from the perspective of cues and frames and how does it explain organizational members' perceptions and behavior in a change process?*
>
> *2. How is it that organizational members can have diverse interpretations of a change process and at the same time (a) have consensus of the change as being something positive and (b) be sure that their individual interpretation of the change is 'correct'?*

1.5. Limitations

The change program at Blutex is carried out during two years (between Q3 2012 and Q3 2014) in five implementation phases throughout Blutex's international salesforce. Since we are looking at the change process from a micro level we wished to exclude influential external factors by limiting our research to Blutex's Swedish salesforce. This is to exclude possible cultural differences between countries. Our empirical material has been gathered in the period between the first and second implementation phase, during Q1 2013. This is interesting because it allows us to study the mystery of how people make sense of abstract phenomenon while they are still experiencing it.

1.6. Disposition

In the next chapter, we will present our research method in terms of our epistemological and ontological standpoints, and describe how we have conducted our research. Chapter 3 will consist of the theoretical framework which we have used in order to analyze the empirical material, where we have focused on Weick's (1995) sensemaking theory. In chapter 4 and 5, we introduce our empirical material and analysis. In chapter 4 we will present the context of our case study company and the top management's problematization, followed by a description of the organizational members' perceptions. In chapter 5 we will analyze the empirical material using our theoretical framework. However, we will also present more detailed empirical material in chapter 5 in order to substantiate our argumentation. Lastly in chapter 6, we will discuss the case study's possible implications and make conclusions from our analysis. We then reflect upon our thesis in order to provide new reference points of the thesis' conclusions.

2. Method

In this chapter we will present our methodological, epistemological and ontological standpoints as well as describe the methods and strategies used for conducting our research and motivate why these are appropriate for our purpose.

2.1 Research strategy

Our research questions determine the course of action for the thesis. Since we focus on meanings and understandings rather than causal explanations, qualitative data is the most appropriate choice of research strategy. Qualitative research emphasizes words rather than quantification concerning the collection and analysis of data (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Normally this kind of research aims to generate theory and is therefore often inductive. This means that theory is the outcome of empirical research as opposed to having a predetermined theory that is to be tested through research, which is the case of the deductive approach. The two do however often entail a small portion of the other (Bryman and Bell, 2011) and this is true for our work as well. Our main approach have been inductive, though we made a brief theoretical overview before collecting data in order to increase our academic knowledge within the field of communication and organizational change. Choosing the qualitative research strategy demands certain epistemological and ontological standpoints, which are presented in the next two sections.

2.1.1. Epistemology

Qualitative research emphasizes the way individuals interpret their social world and is therefore closely related to the interpretivist doctrine (Bryman and Bell, 2011). This suits us as we will analyze the interpretations of employees at Blutex and interpret what they say in order to understand how they perceive their realities. We have further chosen to adapt the 'phenomenology' philosophy since this regards the question of how individuals make sense of the world around them (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Sensemaking is what we study in this thesis whereby the ways individuals make sense of different phenomenon are of great importance to this thesis.

2.1.2. Ontology

The ontological point of view suited for qualitative research and for the epistemological viewpoints presented earlier is 'constructionism'. This position treats everything as social constructions and implies that social phenomena and their meanings are being continually produced by social actors through interaction. Recently the term has also come to include the researcher's own part in the constructed reality he/she studies. This means that every researcher presents a specific version of social reality rather than a definite one (Bryman and Bell, 2011). We are aware that the socially constructed realities we have depicted are not definitive and are not descriptions of a 'true' or 'objective' reality. We share Alvesson and Sköldberg's (2007) view on collected data as basis for interpretations rather than representation of reality; "there is no such thing as unmediated data or facts; there are always the results of interpretations" (2007:9).

2.2 Research design

The research design is the framework for the collection and analysis for data (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Our research questions require us to analyze affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of individuals. Therefore, we have conducted in-depth research on a selection of employees in order to analyze their perceptions at a micro-level perspective.

2.2.1. Single Case Study

We have chosen to define our single case study according to Yin's (2003) established definition; "A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (2003:13). Furthermore Yin states that "the case study's unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence – documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations – beyond what might be available in a conventional history study" (2003:8). Usually the researcher of a case study is keen to shed light on the unique features of the case which is known as the idiographic approach (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Stake (1995) has established a set of case types; intrinsic and instrumental cases. The difference between the two is to what they aim to bring insight. The goal of intrinsic cases is to gain insight into the particularities of the situation, as opposed to the instrumental cases which are used as a mean of understanding a broader generic issue (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Hence we argue that our single case study is idiographic and intrinsic as we are interested in finding unique opinions and thoughts among the employees in order to understand what is going on inside Blutex during the change process rather than to increase the understanding of change processes in general.

According to Yin (2003) there are three ways to execute a case study; descriptively, explanatory and exploratory. We explore an undergoing change process, not with the purpose to explain or describe causalities, but to increase the understanding of the complex phenomenon - thus making our case study exploratory.

2.2.2. Research Criteria

Generally case studies with a qualitative orientation tend to play down the significance of research criteria as opposed to the quantitative studies which portray them as more important (Bryman and Bell, 2011). This also varies between authors as some, for example Yin (2003), talks about ways to improve the ability to meet the criteria, whilst others, for example Stake (1995), barely mention them at all. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have established a framework for research criteria for qualitative research where the main focus is on the trustworthiness of the research and its transferability. However, we believe this view becomes irrelevant in relation to our interpretative and constructionist perspective and we have therefore decided to mention the criteria of this study in a way that we believe is more relevant. We have chosen to discuss the following criteria; validity, reliability, and generalizability.

We prefer the definition of validity from quantitative studies even though this is a qualitative study. Validity in quantitative studies concerns the degree to which the researchers measure what they aim to measure (Bryman and Bell, 2011). If we directly translate this to our case, we want to study (i.e. measure) the perceptions of the employees. However, the only way of finding out what people think is simply to talk to them. This means that we in fact cannot measure what we want to measure. Instead we 'measure' what people say, which in some way reflects their perceptions. However it is important to have in mind that what people say may differ from what people think or feel. Reliability is a similar concept but regards how consistent the technique for measurement is (Bryman and Bell, 2011). We therefore regard reliability as the degree of credibility in the admissions of the interviewees. How we have taken these research criteria into account is further discussed in section 2.3.1.

Generalizability is the degree to which the case study's findings can be transferred to other contexts beyond those of the research (Bryman and Bell, 2011). We argue however that this is irrelevant for explorative case studies as each case has unique environments and conditions. According to Bryman and Bell (2011) there are many researchers that make generalizations from their cases and strive to achieve a degree of theoretical generalizability. We do instead share Lee, Collier and Cullen's (2007) suggestion, that particularization constitute the main strength of case studies rather than generalization. The goal should therefore be to concentrate on the uniqueness of the case and develop a deep understanding of its complexity (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

To sum up, as we conduct our research along Alvesson and Kärreman's (2007) idea of mystery creation, we share their key assumptions that social science is all about interpretations and that it is counterproductive to try to minimize the influence of subjectivity. Hence, instead of focusing on research criteria in this chapter, we will reflect upon our research in chapter 6.

2.3. Data Collection

In our in-depth research, we have chosen semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data. Furthermore, as secondary data we have analyzed corporate documents and other official material, such as Blutex's web page and PR-material. In addition to this, we have also made observations during our time spent at Blutex's head office and in our role as observing participants in meetings and training sessions.

2.3.1. Primary Data - Interviews

Qualitative research is often conducted through interviews, a method which offers high flexibility for the researchers (Bryman and Bell, 2011). We conducted ten in-depth interviews, a common number of interviews for a thesis like this (Ahrne and Svensson, 2011). The shortest interview was 60 minutes and the longest 100 minutes. In addition, we also conducted a 40 minutes long initial pilot interview with a top manager at Blutex as an introductive scope to our inductive research. To sum up; we interviewed 8 men and 3 women on three different hierarchical levels; top managers (3), middle managers (3) and salespeople (5). The interviewees had different working experiences and education and had been working at Blutex between 2 and 25 years. It has been important to interview people on different hierarchical levels since we are focusing on how people make and give sense in an organizational change process. We conducted our interviews in neutral environments such as conference rooms on four different Blutex sites in Sweden, except for one middle manager who was interviewed at his/her office. Our last interview was unfortunately made over the telephone, due to the interviewee's busy schedule and the geographical distance. In general, we have been keen on conducting the interviews face-to-face in order to make the interviewees feel comfortable and to increase the social interaction. Our choice of interview method is described in the next paragraph. We believe that our choice of interviewees has generated a fairly representative picture of the perceptions of Blutex's change process.

Interviews can be performed in a number of different ways which range from strict structured interviews to unstructured free interviews that are similar to normal conversations. In qualitative research there is a great interest in understanding the interviewee's point of view and in order to collect this, the interviewee must be able to speak his/her mind, thus sharing his/her social reality. Alvesson (2011) states that 'romanticism' as an interview method, encourages the interviewee to speak freely and talk about what he/she see as important. It is believed that subjective authentic experiences will be shared during the interview through romanticism, not only in terms of emotions but also cognitive perceptions about ideas, values and understandings.

We share this view and we have used romanticism to a great extent in our interviews. We have encouraged the interviewees to speak freely and to guide us through their perspective rather than to ask them pre-determined questions. The goal has been to make the interviewees share their social realities through open questions. The more critical questions from a holistic perspective, about contradictions or equivocalities, have seldom been asked directly to the interviewees. Instead, we have interpreted the answers to these questions by analyzing the transcriptions afterwards. To sum up, we gathered a rather fragmented material with lots of inputs, opinions, feelings, and understandings of the context, which we later categorized, structured, and interpreted by asking more straightforward questions to ourselves. How the material has been analyzed is described in further detail in chapter 2.4.

After our pilot interview, we conducted an initial interview guide which we used mainly during our two first interviews, whereupon we learned not only how to conduct an interview but also which specific themes we were interested in. The interviews have often departed from our initial interview guide and have provided us with an empirical material different from what we first expected. We have according with Alvesson's (2011) and Bryman and Bell's (2011) recommendations, focused on asking good follow-up questions to expand the possible analysis in order to get rich, detailed answers.

The interviews have been digitally recorded to the interviewees' consent and then transcribed the same day to the extent this has been possible. This was to keep everything fresh in mind and to get it all on paper as soon as possible. At one point we performed three interviews on the same day which made us fall behind with the transcriptions and they were instead transcribed a few days later. When transcribing, we have tried not to leave out any words, hesitations or pauses to be able to also analyze both what the interviewees say and how they say it. The transcriptions have then been sent to the interviewees with the invitation to respond if there were any factual errors. Except for two minor language corrections due to mishear from the recordings, all of the interviews were approved immediately. The selection of quotes has been made after our comprehensive analysis, whereupon the selected quotes have been translated from Swedish to English by us.

We would also like to emphasize the weaknesses of collecting data through interviews. Even though we use an interpretative perspective and a romantic interview method, there are fundamental risks in terms of reliability. We have indirectly asked people to share their socially constructed reality - affectively, cognitively and behaviorally. However, to what extent the interviewees answer honestly is hard to tell. It has been one of our most debated issues in our work; how do we make people to speak freely and how do we know they are honest? The simplest and probably most accurate answer is of course that we cannot know. Our approach to this methodological dilemma is that we consider the primary data as descriptions of organizational members' social realities rather than the actual social realities themselves. To further handle the inevitable weakness of interviews we have emphasized the anonymousness of the interviewees.

At the time we conducted our interviews, the first out of five training sessions had been completed for the salespeople. The first training session took place in January 2013, six months after the change program had been introduced.

2.3.2. Secondary Data - Corporate Documents and Official Material

As secondary data, we have analyzed some of the printed and published material from Blutex. Some of the material has been internal; such as corporate documents, teaching material, and intranet information, whilst other has been external; website information, Powerpoint presentations and other official PR-material. We have used the secondary data as a comparable 'official story' in our analysis. In other words, we compared the gathered material from our interviews where organizational members share their social realities, with the promoted material.

2.3.3. Participant Observations

In addition to the primary and secondary data, we have also made observations. Firstly, we have had our own office at Blutex's head office between January and May where most of this thesis' work has been conducted. During this time, we obviously have been able to make several observations by talking to other organizational members and walking around in the facilities. Secondly, one of us has participated as an observer in both preparatory interview sessions in the work of conducting the change program in August 2012, and during the change program's first training session for the middle managers in December 2012. In addition, the same one has also been working part time at Blutex with other work tasks since June 2012. This circumstance is discussed and reflected upon in section 2.5. We have used these observations as a complementary source where we compare the lived experiences of the organizational members with our own lived experiences, i.e. our observations.

2.4 Analytical Framework

Our empirical material is in the form of transcriptions which have been analyzed based on conversation analysis. Bryman and Bell (2011) defines conversation analysis as; "a fine-grained analysis of talk as it occurs in naturally occurring situations. The talk is usually recorded and transcribed so that the detailed analyses can be carried out" (2011:521). This goes hand-in-hand with Alvesson's (2011) idea of romanticism, to engage interviews as conversations. What can be questioned however is whether the interview can be described as a "normally occurring situation". We have had this in mind and tried to make the setting for the interview as informal and familiar as possible by conducting them in the home environments of the interviewees and keeping a relaxed mood during the interviews and trying to keep it similar to a normal conversation, which comes naturally with the open-ended questions.

A dilemma of the conversation analysis is that using it interpretatively to understand social action or culture carries the risk of misinterpretation and misunderstanding. On the other hand prohibiting speculations of this kind in order to avoid misunderstandings is potentially restrictive (Bryman and Bell, 2011). As stated in 2.2.3. we are aware that what we depict in this thesis is our interpretation of the interpretations of others, and the 'reality' we portray may be different from the reality of others.

2.5. Insider-Outsider Reflection

We have identified a few issues with our approaches which call for a reflection as to specify how these might affect our work. An important aspect is that one of the authors have been working at Blutex for almost a year and the idea of writing a thesis about the company was developed in unison with the top management of Blutex. Meanwhile, the other author had little knowledge about the company before the research project was initiated. Alvesson (2009) states that it is difficult to study something that one is heavily involved in, but that it may be a resource as much as a liability. He suggests that collaborating with an external co-author is an option to avoid one-sidedness of research. Björkman and Huzzard (2005) say that having an insider-outsider approach gives two distinct perspectives, as well as access to rich data sources that would normally not be available to researchers from the outside.

We have found that our insider-outsider approach first and foremost have given us a top priority within the company as well as high access to corporate documentation. It has for example been fairly easy to schedule interviews and getting in contact with interviewees. However, a weakness which we have reflected upon is that interviewees might be hesitant to answer the questions honestly, suspecting that answering critically or 'wrong' may have negative effects for them individually, since we co-operate with the top management. This may reduce the reliability of our case study but we have also felt that the insider has contributed to achieving a more casual setting for the interviews and as he has more knowledge about the internal context of the company, he has been able to ask more specific follow-up questions.

Furthermore when writing this thesis we have had a separate office at the Blutex headquarters which have been very beneficial since we have been able to work undisturbed, easily coming in contact with people inside the company and also being able to observe what actually is being discussed in the coffee room.

3. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter we will present the theoretical framework we have used in our analysis of the case study. The choice of theories is based on our inductive findings in the empirical material. We believe that the relationship between communication and change is undertheorized in organizational studies. Furthermore, we use the concept of sensemaking in order to increase the understanding of an organizational change from an interpretative perspective.

3.1. Communication

The importance of communication in change processes is often acknowledged within the academic literature, as an essential part of the change process (see e.g. Alvesson, 2002; Beer et al., 1990; Ford and Ford, 1995; Heracleous, 2003; Kotter, 1995; Mumby, 1988). Also in the vast amount of practitioner literature, communication is regarded as an essential ingredient in the change process. Lewis et al. (2006) analyzed Amazon.com's top 100 best-selling books on organizational change and concluded that; "Nearly all of these books (...) acknowledged the critical importance of communication in change" (2006:132). Unfortunately, the advice in the books; "often lacked detail and appropriate qualification" (2006:132).

On the one hand, there is consensus in acknowledging the importance of communication within change processes, but on the other hand the different views, perspectives, and goals of the research generate a fragmented picture of the meanings and implications of communication. Johansson and Heide (2008a) analyzed approximately 100 articles on organizational change published between 1995 and 2007, and categorized them by determining the authors' view on communication. Despite the framework's rather sophisticated categorization, we chose to see the framework as a description of the development within the research of communication and change. The traditional research uses a realist epistemology where communication is viewed as a "tool for transmission" (Johansson and Heide, 2008a:291) and sees organizations as rational and controllable systems. The purpose of using communication is to ensure that the members of the organization have understood the message of the change process, and thus establishing a 'sense of urgency' in terms of its vision, goals and reasons (Kotter, 1996; Kotter, 2008). According to Johansson and Heide (2008a) communication in this view becomes an important, but isolated phenomenon from the organization in this perspective. In contrast, an increasing number of scholars use a constructionist epistemology where communication is acknowledged as the very process in which change occur. Johansson and Heide (2008a) describe a trend where an increasing number of scholars are interested in understanding and explaining communication and change processes, rather than studying how leaders can make communication more effective in a rationalistic manner. However, this is not a new, nor a controversial view on change. As an illustration to this, we start the next section with a 25-year old quote which will represent this 'trend'.

3.1.1. Communication is Change

> *"In an organizational context, communication is the process through which meaning is created and, over time, sedimented. Communication - as an institutional form - articulates meaning formations which, when habitualized over time, provide the background of common experience that gives organization members a context for their organizing behavior. Communication is thus not simply the vehicle for information, but rather is the very process by which the notion of organizing comes to acquire consensual meaning. Organizing is therefore continuously created and recreated in the act of communication among organization members."*
>
> Mumby, 1988:14-15

We believe that it is within communication that organizing and thus change occur. Communication is more than a tool for explaining change (Ford and Ford, 1995) or a 'vehicle for information' (Mumby, 1988). In this sense, communication and organizing become the same phenomenon, where meaning and understanding is created within the communication (Alvesson, 2002). Ford and Ford (1995) state that change is a socially constructed process where the communication process create, modify and sustain new realities; "Producing intentional change (...) is a matter of deliberately bringing into existence, through communication, a new reality or set of social structures" (1995:542).

According to Beech and Johnson (2005), there is a high chance that the communicated information will be interpreted differently within a messy, socially constructed change process. The authors view the communication actions as micro-level dynamics with macro-level impacts; "If the impacts of the [micro-level dynamics] are dismissed as 'resistance to change' or the emotional reactions of individuals, then they are unlikely to be properly addressed" (Beech and Johnson, 2005:45).

In the next section, we will present and explain the theory of organizational sensemaking in order to address and analyze these micro-level dynamics. In other words, to explain and analyze how communication creates new social realities on an individual level.

3.2. Organizational Sensemaking

The organizational sensemaking concept was developed by Weick from his initial criticism of traditional approaches to organizational analysis (Helms Mills, 2003). It is closely related to psychology and the way people understand what they experience by categorizing and labeling. When we as human beings experience events, we immediately begin the work of organizing by labeling and categorizing to find a common ground to what is happening (Weick et al., 2005). George Lakoff (1987) explains the concept of categorization as the most basic principle for our thought, perception, action and speech. Several similarities to sensemaking can be distinguished.

For instance, Lakoff explains how categorization is automatic and unconscious and that it is central to how we think and understand the world. We will come back to categorization later in section 3.2.9.

Weick (1995) clarifies from the start that sensemaking is not as much a body of knowledge as a "developing set of ideas with explanatory possibilities" (1995:3) but his notion of sensemaking has become more refined over the last decades (Helms Mills, 2003). According to Helms Mills et al. (2010) sensemaking is not yet widely recognized as a method of analysis, but there have been several studies that use sensemaking as a heuristic for understanding the processes that leads to various outcomes. The authors conclude that sensemaking has explanatory power and can for instance be used to understand organizational disasters, decision-making, and resistance. They also point out that there is "a lack of empirical studies that draws specifically upon Weick's framework as a method of analysis" (Helms Mills et al., 2010:192).

3.2.1. What is Sensemaking?

As the name implies, sensemaking is literally about the making of sense (Weick, 1995). Weick (1995) cites Sackmann's (1991) established definition that views sensemaking as; "Mechanisms that include the standards and rules for perceiving, interpreting, believing, and acting that are typically used in a given cultural setting". What this means is that sensemaking is the cognitive maps (standards and rules) for how we perceive, interpret and act in a special context (cultural setting) for example in an organization. This further implies that organizational sensemaking as we are discussing here should be separated from everyday sensemaking, which is not in "a given cultural setting". This definition is also approved by Helms Mills (2003), hence this is the definition we have chosen to adopt. To simplify, one can say that sensemaking is a concept for understanding how different meanings are assigned to the same event in organizations.

Weick (1995) points out the difference between interpretation and sensemaking and that the two should not be confused with one another. Interpretation is only a part of sensemaking and the importance of sensemaking lies in the steps that precede interpretation; "Sensemaking is about the ways people generate what they interpret" (Weick, 1995:13).

Weick (1995) lists seven properties of sensemaking:

1) Grounded in identity construction
2) Retrospective
3) Enactive of sensible environments
4) Social
5) Ongoing
6) Focused on and by extracted cues
7) Driven by plausibility

We will summarize these briefly as they were explained in Weick (1995:17-62). (1) Sensemaking is grounded in identity construction since the way people make sense depends on that person's identity and identity needs. The individual sensemaker/sensegiver affects the sensemaking process to the highest degree. (2) Sensemaking is retrospective because we draw on past experiences and compare them to present ones in order to make sense of them. (3) Enactment regards the fact that people often produce a part of the environment they face, i.e. people affect the very environment that they are affected by when making sense. (4) Sensemaking is social. It is based on social interaction, communication, understanding, and discourse. (5) Sensemaking is an ongoing process that cannot be deliberately controlled. It happens continually over time driven by continuous flows of impressions. (6) Extracting cues is a central part of sensemaking as these are what people use to make sense; "cues are small familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring" (Weick, 1995:50). The importance of cues will be further discussed in section 3.2.8. (7) Accuracy in sensemaking is not necessary, instead plausibility is of greater importance. People use plausible reasoning in order to make sense. It is often based on incomplete information but as long as the understandings provide enough certainty and fits the facts then that is how that person makes sense, even though the reasoning may not be correct or accurate (Isenberg, 1986). Or as Alvesson et al. (2008) put it; "a map does not need to be accurate to be useful: the accuracy of a map may be less important than whether and how it is consumed" (2008:496). Since our research is based on the perceptions and behavior of the organizational members, their opinions and views are of great importance no matter how 'inaccurate' they might be. Hence the sensemaking theory fits well with our interpretivist epistemology.

3.2.2. The Role of Expectations

Weick (1995) also refers to Louis (1980) who views sensemaking as a recurring cycle of events that begin with people forming conscious and unconscious expectations and predictions about the future. When future events are discrepant from these predictions, it triggers the need for explanation, i.e. people start to act in a more conscious sensemaking mode (Weick, 1995) in order to develop meaning and interpret these discrepancies. Predictions and expectations are central in sensemaking as they guide people's interpretations and serve as strong filters of inputs (Weick, 1995). So when interruptions occur; asking "what did I do?" might be less appropriate than "what did I expect?" (Berscheid and Ammazzalorso, 2003:318 cited in Weick et al., 2005). Törestad and Nystedt (1994), scholars within psychology, reinforce this idea by saying; "individuals do not only interpret situations from what has happened but also from what they hope will happen" (1994:156, translated by Malmberg).

3.2.3. Emotion

When interruptions to expectations occur they do not only trigger the sensemaking process but also an "emotional response, which then paves the way for emotion to influence sensemaking" (Weick, 1995:45). Emotion is preceded by 'arousal', a neurological phenomenon, which trigger 'fight-or-flight' reactions (Berscheid, 1983; Mandler, 1984 mentioned in Weick, 1995). Sensemaking then works less effectively because arousal uses up attention and consumes information-processing capacity. The emotion does not necessarily have to be negative. If the unexpected event would accelerate the completion of a project, the emotion will be positive (Weick, 1995). It is however more likely that sudden interruptions summon negative emotions which are likely to occur when the interruption is interpreted as harmful or detrimental. If there are no means to remove or circumvent the interruption, the negative emotion becomes more intense the longer the interruption lasts and the person starts to focus more on his/her agitated state than the task at hand (Weick, 1995). Thus it is in the interest of the individual to make sense of the interruption in order to find a solution to the problem.

3.2.4. Sensegiving

Weick (1995) uses a quote from Wallas (1926) that illustrates an important aspect of sensemaking. "The little girl had the making of a poet in her who, being told to be sure of her meaning before she spoke said; 'How can I know what I think till I see what I say?'". This quote serves as an illustration to the finding of Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) that sensemaking is incomplete without sensegiving. Sensegiving may take any form as long as it forces the person to formulate his/her thoughts into action. It does not have to be communicated orally; it might as well be written or enacted. It does not even have to reach out to any other person because the sensegiving affects the sensegiver as much as any other target. When you hear yourself talk, you see more clearly what matters and what you hoped to say (Weick et al. 2005).

Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) describe the sensemaking process in four steps:

1) A sensemaking effort is made by someone in order to understand a situation.
2) A sensegiving effort is made by the same person in an attempt to communicate his/her vision to another person.
3) A sensemaking effort is made by the other person trying to figure out the meaning of what was communicated to him/her.
4) A sensegiving effort is made by the other person where he/she responds to the proposed vision. In turn affecting the first person in some way.

They refer to it as a feedback loop or as "cycles of cognition and action by the involved parties" (1991:443). Our view on the sensemaking process is slightly different from Gioia and Chittipeddi's rather general and straightforward model. We have however embraced their idea of sensegiving as the key that completes the process of sensemaking, as this notion has been acknowledged by Weick et al. (2005).

3.2.5. The Role of Identity Construction

Another distinction that is necessary to bear in mind is the difference between 'everyday sensemaking' and 'organizational sensemaking'. Helms Mills (2003) state that sensemaking at the organizational level can offer an explanation for understanding management of change, whereas at the individual level it offers an explanation for understanding the management of meaning. What further differentiates the two are that organizations have means of control such as incentives and measures (Weick, 1995) as well as rules, routines, symbols and language that will have an impact on individuals' sensemaking (Helms Mills et al., 2010). When routines and scripts are unavailable in organizations however, "the individual is left to fall back on his or her own ways of making sense" (Helms Mills et al., 2010:185). This is why identity construction is central in sensemaking. Coopey et al. (1997) acknowledge this by stating; "[when] faced with events that disrupt normal expectations and, hence, the efficacy of established patterns of meaning and associated behavior, individuals attempt to make sense of ambiguous stimuli in ways that respond to their own identity needs" (1997:312). Weick (1995) draws upon Erez and Earley's (1993) work where they distinguish "three self-derived needs that affect a person's process to develop and maintain its changing sense of self; (1) The need for self-enhancement, as reflected in seeking and maintaining a positive cognitive and affective state about the self; (2) the self-efficacy motive, which is the desire to perceive oneself as competent and efficacious; and (3) the need for self-consistency, which is the desire to sense and experience coherence and continuity" (1993:28). In simple terms; "People see what they want to see" (Helms Mills, 2003:126) in order for it to fit into their lives and to enhance their living. The authors state that this insight provides an important clue to understanding organizational conflict and resistance to change.

When people start making sense based on their individual cognitive maps, the organizational members start to make different interpretations of common events, whereupon the common frame of reference is lost. If coordinated activity is to occur, some level of shared understanding must exist (Barr and Huff, 1997) which raises the question whether sensemaking can be managed or not.

3.2.6. Can Sensemaking Be Managed?

According to Weick's fifth property, sensemaking is an ongoing process which cannot be deliberately controlled. This is true in terms of how the individual sensemaker respond to the information cognitively and affectively, something which is impossible to control. However, there are ways for top managers to decrease what they perceive as 'risks for misinterpretations' within communication. According to Heide and Johansson (2008b) researchers in the management area see the task of creating collective frames and achieving common understanding in organizations, as being of great importance for modern leaders. Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) conclude that the acts of making and giving sense about the interpretation of a new vision or change initiative in an organization, constitute key processes in managing change. Johansson (2003) conducted a survey on British companies that recently had implemented reorganizations to study the perceptions of the employees. What Johansson found was that there were immense gaps between how employees on different hierarchical levels perceived the change. Top managers saw great benefits with the reorganization whereas the employees saw big drawbacks. Other research confirms that managers on different hierarchical levels live in different realities and have separate perceptions on the operations of the organization (Johansson and Heide, 2008b). Johansson and Heide (2008b) conducted another survey on the employees of large Swedish corporations. The authors tried to measure the level of communication by looking at how well the employees could describe the goal of the change. A majority of the employees thought they could describe the goal well but their descriptions varied considerably from those of the management. The authors' conclusion was that even though employees feel they know the goal of the change they might have made sense of it differently than the management meant for it to be interpreted.

Balogun and Johnson (2005:1596) suggest that "'managing' change may be more to do with senior management striving to deliver clarity of purpose, expected outcomes and boundary conditions, and a shared understanding of these rather than trying to manage the detail". Managers need to acknowledge that the employees interpret change differently and reconstruct the original message from the top management and its meaning (Jian, 2007). As a response to this Balogun and Johnson (2005) suggest that managers should start to encourage employees to engage in interaction (i.e. sensegiving and sensemaking) with people on the same hierarchical level, in their presence. This in order to exercise more control over the contexts of sensemaking rather than trying to control the sensemaking process itself. On the other hand the authors question to what extent managers can intervene in sensemaking processes.

3.2.7. The Role of Middle Managers

Another important aspect in organizational change processes is the role of the middle managers. Middle managers are key in top-down change initiatives as they are both recipients and deployers of the plans designed by senior management (Floyd and Wooldridge, 1997). Balogun and Johnson (2005) recognize this as an area for future research as "we need to understand more about how middle managers, given their central role in change, and recipients, in general make sense of and therefore contribute to change outcomes in different contexts" (2005:1597). Middle managers are sometimes criticized for being opponents to change, but their role as intermediaries of change initiatives from top management is exposed and complex (Balogun et al., 2003). The interpretations they make about the change, affects (a) how they mediate it, (b) how they try to change personally, (c) how they help their co-workers, (d) how they keep the business running during the change process, and (e) what changes they actually implement in their departments. The informal communication often creates clearer frames of reference than planned communication does, which is why it is so important that middle managers are able to act as interpreters rather than informants (von Platen, 2006). Information is necessary for sensemaking but it is not enough on its own (Johansson and Heide, 2008b). Middle managers further need to support the change by being properly informed and involved in the change process as well as feeling loyalty toward top management and subordinates. Balogun and Johnson (2005:1595) conclude that the greatest amount of middle manager sensemaking activity occur through the informal interactions in the absence of senior managers, making it difficult to control for top managers.

3.2.8. Cues and Frames

We find that in order to increase the understanding of the sensemaking process, one needs to look at what we believe are the two main elements in sensemaking and the mutual relationship between the two; cues and frames. Sensemaking is according to Weick (1995:133); "about enlargement of small cues. It is a search for contexts within which small details fit together and make sense". Another way to describe it is as Weick et al. (2005) put it; "to make sense is to connect the abstract with the concrete" (2005:412), i.e., making connections between abstract cues and concrete cognitive frames. Helms Mills (2003) clarifies Weick's view on cues and frames; "frames are derived from past moments of socialization, and cues are the result of present moments of experience" (2003:48). However it is not the cue or the frame that make sense, it is the connection between them; "A cue in a frame is what makes sense, not the cue alone or the frame alone. Said differently, the substance of sensemaking starts with three elements; a frame, a cue, and a connection" (Weick, 1995:110).

The idea of cues and frames are not specific for the sensemaking concept. One can connect cues and frames without having to make sense. It is when cues are perceived as abstract that sensemaking is triggered which is why cues and frames are a very important part of the sensemaking process. For instance, if a salesperson is told to participate in a sales education, an obvious connection between an 'education-cue' and an 'education-frame' is made.

However if the cues are perceived as ambiguous, an obvious connection cannot be made. Ambiguity can take the form of either equivocality or vagueness. Weick (1995) defines equivocality as when several meanings can be assigned to the very same cue, as for example contradictory information. Ambiguity can in addition also be perceived as vague, for example lack of clarity. Equivocality and vagueness are subjective terms, as they depend on the person who is given the cue. A vague cue for example can make sense to someone if that person already has a solid frame for it, and an equivocal cue is equivocal first if the person already has a cue that is contradicting or inconsistent with the new cue.

When a person is given ambiguous cues and no obvious connections can be made, the sensemaking process is triggered. A detailed description of the process itself is however only provided by Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991), though their model does still not describe the process in the terms of cues and frames. There seems to be a lack of research on the role of cues and frames in the sensemaking process as well as descriptions of what the process actually looks like.

We felt that having a more detailed idea of how cues, frames and connections fit into the sensemaking process was necessary in order to analyze our case. Thus we have developed a framework to visualize the sensemaking process as we see it (Image 1). We have constructed it by gathering the existing descriptions of cues and frames, and discussing how they are related. Then we decided on how we view the process in order for it to fit with the descriptions in the literature (and so that it made sense to us).

3.2.9. The Sensemaking Process in Detail

From everything a person experiences, sees, hears, and so on – cues can be extracted. When a person is faced with a cue, that person wants to categorize it by connecting it to a frame. Frames are cognitive structures that are built up by previous cues (i.e. experiences). As long as there is an obvious frame to connect the new cue to, the person thinks he/she understands what the cue is and thus makes the connection. When the connection is made, the person is able to interpret that from which the cue originated. This is however not sensemaking since the cue immediately was placed into a frame. The sensemaking process is not triggered until the cue is abstract; meaning that it either fits into several frames or does not fit into any frame at all. When there is no obvious frame for a cue the sensemaking process starts with (1) an emotional reaction which influences the rest of the process. After the emotion the person tries to (2) categorize the cue cognitively; i.e. to make sense of the cue by comparing it with existing frames and previous cues and by looking for more cues to aid in understanding the abstract cue. Facing a cue and not being able to connect it to a frame is to lose sense of something which is deeply troubling for an individual (Weick, 1995). Hence, people want to connect the cue to a frame as fast as possible. If no new cues are found fast enough to aid the categorization phase, the person might settle for the frame that fits best – even though he/she is not sure that it is the correct frame. The frame that a person deems as 'best' cognitively is affected by (a) the person's identity, (b) his/her emotional reaction, and (c) external factors such as political interests, power, consequences, or persuasion (Mailloux, 1990). This is what Weick (1995) refer to as plausibility. In section 3.2.1. we mention the importance of plausibility; as long as the connection seems plausible a person can make sense. The objective 'truth' does not matter as there is no wrong or right, just a number of interpretations, and they are all 'true' to the person who made the interpretation. This is where a lot of the sensemaking theory has been focused - on what affects the sensemaking process. Helms Mills (2003) has for example contributed to the area by introducing 'critical sensemaking' which emphasizes the importance of context and power for sensemaking. These aspects are of course interesting, but we feel that it is necessary to first understand how the sensemaking process works in order to see how things as context and power come into that process.

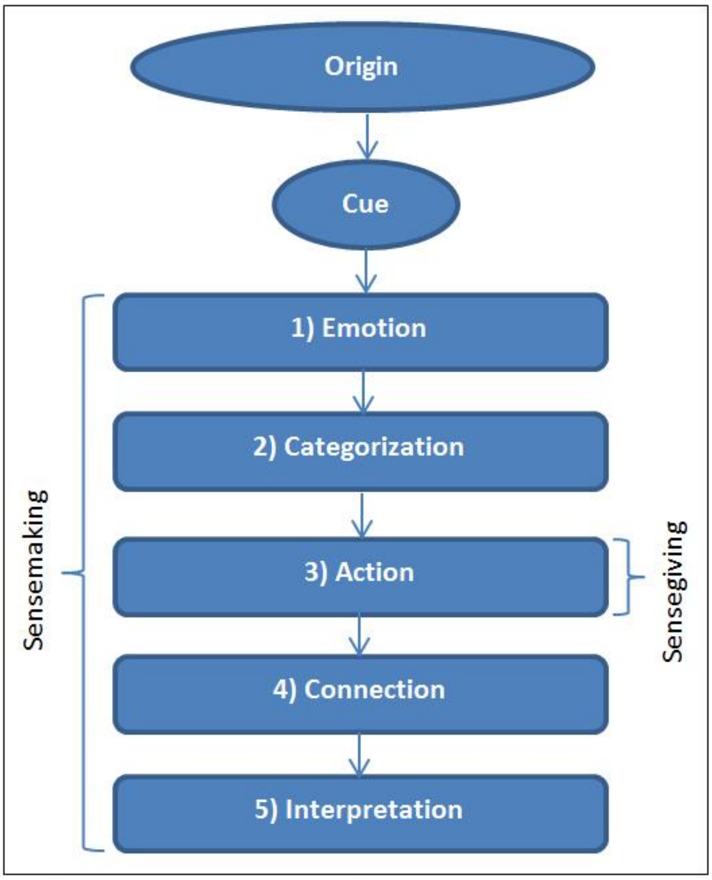

Image 1) A vizualization of the sensemaking process

To continue, when a connection between a cue and a frame has been deemed plausible, the person needs to (3) give sense about the cue and frame through action, in order to make the connection. As stated in section 3.2.4. this action can take many forms; written text, speech, or just by acting in a way that enforces the connection. The sensegiving activity generates new cues for people to make sense of, including the sensegiver him-/herself. But as the person formulates his/her thoughts into words the connection is confirmed and the person (4) makes the connection between the cue and the frame. Once this is done, the person is able to put the origin of the cue in a context and is thereby able to relate to it. He/she can then finally (5) make an interpretation of the origin and thus make sense of it.

However we want to bring to attention that the cues generated from the sensegiving may affect the sensegiver in a way so that he/she realizes that what he/she just said does not really fit into the person's reality, it simply does not make sense. They do not notice this however, until they actually hear themselves saying it; getting their self-created cue and trying to fit it into their frame. Then realizing it does not fit, and having to look for new frames to connect it to in order to get a bigger picture of the origin of the cue.

3.3. Summary

We have in this chapter presented the theoretical framework on which we will base our analysis in chapter 5. Our main body of theory is Weick's (1995) framework of sensemaking which we have extended by developing a model for how we view the individual's sensemaking process. We do however not see our theoretical framework as a general tool for analyzing change processes. Instead we will use it in order to create a common contextual understanding for our interpretations of the empirical material. In the next two chapters we will present our empirical material and analyze it by drawing upon our theoretical framework.

4. Empirical Material

In this chapter, Blutex and its organizational members are presented in terms of Blutex's context and the top management's problematization of the change process, and thereafter present the members' perceptions and behavior. The empirical material mainly originates from our interviews with members of the Blutex organization. Corporate documents and observations are presented as complementary sources in the empirical material. Ten in-depth interviews have been conducted with employees from Blutex on three different managerial levels; top management, middle managers and salespeople.

4.1. Blutex

Blutex is a Swedish business-to-business (B2B) company with a dominant position in Scandinavia and Northern Europe. The company was founded in the early 20th century and has traditionally been in the graphical production industry. Blutex and its organizational members are often described as reliable in terms of 'walking the extra mile' in order to deliver promised results, which our observations, interviews and analysis confirms. Within traditional production at Blutex, most procedures are highly standardized but within the salesforce it is different. Sales managers (referred to as middle managers) and salespeople are more autonomous than their colleagues within production. However, we have observed a similar strong organizational identity among our interviewees and they claim to be proud of working at Blutex.

The market in which Blutex operates has changed substantially due to the digital evolution according to the organizational members. Blutex has been successful in the past in adapting its product portfolio, but lately more and more output communication channels have become digital rather than physical. This has according to the top management at Blutex created new types of structural and cultural challenges for the company in general and for the salesforce in particular. As a response to this, the top management has decided to (a) make changes in the organizational structure, (b) make cultural changes by introducing a more proactive and business orientated mindset, and (c) educate the salesforce through a two-year change program referred to as 'Solution Selling'. Our focus will be on how the salesforce's perceptions of the change program affect their actions and behavior.

4.1.1. 'Vision 2020' and 'Solution Selling'

The biggest challenge for Blutex according to the top management is to change its identity from being a graphical and production based company to becoming a solution based communication company. A crucial part of this change is seen by the top management as starting to package and sell value-creating unique solutions rather than standardized products. Top managers believe that this requires new and different working methods for the salesforce as well as new attitudes and mindsets, something which is described by the top management as a rather revolutionary change for most people working at Blutex:

"To stop talking about 'costs' and 'price index' and to start talking about how Blutex can add value is a big change in mindsets for us"

Top manager, Blutex

This strategic change process has been formulated into a vision referred to as 'Vision 2020'; to become the number one provider of communication solutions for existing and potential customers, fulfilling their need for communicating, regardless of the distribution channel, format or method (Teaching material 2013, Blutex). The goal is to reinforce Blutex's position as a successful and dominant company by becoming a more professional communication supplier who increases revenues for its customers rather than cutting costs. The process of formulating 'Vision 2020' is described by Blutex's CEO:

"I believe that we, during 2,3,4 years' time, in different constellations and meetings, discussed the company's future direction, but it basically ended up with me going into 'the igloo' together with a consultant. Then I formulated, based on everything I had heard - and I've been here for several years - that; 'this is where we're going - bam! Now it will be as follows; I will not have any further discussion about where we are going - however, I want every idea on how to get there'. (...) This is not a democracy, but it is my work to make sure that the decision is sufficiently grounded, by listening to everything - the market, the customer, the business environment or whatever it may be. At some point you need to decide where we're going, because everyone keeps asking where we're going and we can't have a vote every time someone has an opinion"

CEO, Blutex

A first organized step in order to reach 'Vision 2020' was to implement a change program referred to as 'Solution Selling'. It is believed that 'Solution Selling' as a change program will change the mindset (i.e. the perceptions) and behavior of the salesforce. In order to remain profitable and competitive, and to reach the intended outcome of the change process, top management states that Blutex's salesforce must become more proactive:

"It's proactivity that guarantees that we're one step ahead of our customers and continues to keep our competitors behind our back. And it's also proactivity that identifies the opportunities leading to new projects and customers."

Teaching material 2013, Blutex

This is where 'Solution Selling' comes in to the picture. In order to become more proactive, it is believed that the salesforce first needs to change the fairly traditional mindset and thereafter the way of selling Blutex's products and services. 'Solution Selling' is believed to be the program that will change the mindset culturally and the manner in which people do their daily work. It is the biggest educative program ever initiated within Blutex and is described by the top management as a highly prioritized program. The intended outcome is even promoted as being critical for Blutex's survival. In conclusion, the company has invested a lot of resources, prestige and hope in 'Vision 2020' and 'Solution Selling'. Blutex defines the concept of 'Solution Selling' as follows:

> *"'Solution Selling' - combine products and services into communication solutions that adds value to our customer's needs"*
>
> Teaching material 2013, Blutex

'Solution Selling' as a program is planned to be implemented over a two-year period and was officially introduced in September 2012, during a big sales conference. Prior to this, the salespeople had been informed more or less unofficially that a new sales program was to be launched during the autumn of 2012. During the conference the top management presented the purpose, motives and objectives of 'Solution Selling' to the audience. The introduction itself was described by the organizational members as grandiose and inspiring. Just as 'Vision 2020', 'Solution Selling' was also implemented top-down where the change initiative came from the top management.

The traditional graphical production which has been the main part of Blutex's business, is decreasingly demanded which is described as the biggest reason for changing the business focus by a majority of the organizational members. This view is shared by the top management, but they also state that organizations in general need to change on a regular basis. Changing for the sake of the change is therefore viewed as an additional reason for Blutex's change. The organizational change process is in this sense viewed as a possibility to educate people and to balance different organizational pressures and trends. A third reason why Blutex is implementing 'Solution Selling' is described as a response to the trend of promoting solutions and value creation, rather than products. Selling solutions is according to the top management regarded as something modern and a bit more business orientated than selling products from a price-index. This reason is at the same time aligned with the strategic goal of increasing revenues for the customers rather than cutting their costs. To sum up, 'Solution Selling' is viewed as a substantial strategic step in the progress of stimulating Blutex into changing their organizational culture and working method towards 'Vision 2020'.

Before presenting the top management's problematization, we would like to present the context of Blutex in terms of its organizational culture. This is in order to gain a deeper understanding of the context and thus the challenges which are faced in this case. In the next section, we will therefore describe Blutex's organizational culture, communication climate and thereafter describe the salespeople's and middle managers' perceptions about 'Vision 2020' and 'Solution Selling'.

4.1.2. Organizational Culture

The organizational culture at Blutex is both promoted officially, and described by organizational members as warm, loyal and caring where people look after each other and work in teams to help each other achieve goals. According to organizational members on all hierarchical levels, the culture is very much colored by the production orientated tradition and by a strong loyalty within the workforce, as well as a passion for stretching the performance and fulfilling the targets in an efficient way. One middle manager stated that:

> *"When [the direction/decisions] come, you try to inform but it's not like you can influence them. But we try to explain and there... they are very loyal - the staff is unbelievably loyal at Blutex. So they comply with the decisions which are taken."*
>
> Middle manager, Blutex

The quote above does not only depict the strong loyalty but also the top-down management style. The top-down aspect of the culture is described as one of the most characterizing features of the organizational culture.

> *"It is a very top-down organization with quite authoritarian leadership"*
>
> Middle manager, Blutex

> *"The culture is top-down I must say. The tradition is top-down (...) back in the days, you called the top manager and asked; 'Can we buy this machine, yes or no?' and then you had a decision and took it from there."*
>
> Middle manager, Blutex

In some cases, the top-down management style results in a fairly uncritical compliance towards both the decision itself and the manner in which it is implemented.

> Q: What do you think about the way the change process is implemented - that it is rolled out top-down?
>
> *" *silence* Well, yeah... But the question is if there is any other way to implement it. I mean, the top management has told us that this is the change program we shall attend, and of course we have to accept that.*
>
> Middle manager, Blutex

This is an essential aspect of Blutex's organizational culture and an aspect which is relevant for our thesis due to its connection to the internal communication at Blutex. The top-down management style is deeply rooted in the culture and the perceived lack of influence has resulted in an organizational insecurity when it comes to employee participation in decision-making.

> *"I have tried to get people to participate in bottom-up initiatives but that leads to insecurity in the organization, when I for example share a thought and expect a dialogue. Then they think; 'that's unclear, I didn't understand what he meant' (...) People have become very insecure when I have tried to get participation in an idea."*
>
> Middle manager, Blutex

Top managers experience this insecurity through, what they refer to as "upwards delegation", meaning that organizational members are afraid to make decisions without getting permission from a higher hierarchical position. Issues are, in other words constantly delegated upwards in the hierarchy.

In contrast to this the salespeople perceive a lack of influence and feel that they are left out of the decision-making and that there is limited transparency within the hierarchy. When asked about influence, the answers varied. Some organizational members felt that it worked perfectly and that they do not want to, and perhaps should not have a bigger part in the decision-making, but the majority perceived a lack of influence over processes and decisions. Most organizational members also described a substantial lack of top-down feedback on ideas and opinions. Even though meetings are organized by Blutex where discussion is allowed, several organizational members perceived that they did not have a forum to discuss ideas and opinions.

We have noticed during our interviews that middle managers serve as a filter in the internal communication and that it is up to their judgment to evaluate whether an idea is worth proceeding with or not. This leads to a situation where ideas and suggestions which are not connected to the result, seldom are brought to the attention of the top management:

> *"If it doesn't benefit the business it only brings a lot of extra work that leads nowhere. With that I think we [as managers] have gotten pretty far. We're good at making judgments and interpret what should be invested in and not. (...) You have to look at 'Ok, who is this benefitting?' and once again to look at the client's need and then you base the decision on that. Because if it doesn't generate money in the end then... 'nice-to-have' is nothing to put effort and time on."*
>
> Middle manager, Blutex

Having described the context of our case study company, we now move on to describing the top management's problematization.

4.1.3. Top management's problematization

> *"The culture at Blutex today is very much built upon a 'price index-mentality', rather than adding value to the customer (...). Looking from the business culture perspective, this change of mindset is a giant leap for most people working at Blutex"*
>
> Top manager, Blutex

Top management states in their problematization that resistance to change is rather common among organizational members of the salesforce. It is believed that these members, who are described as usually a bit older, who have been in the company for a long time, either will not or cannot change - or in worst case scenario, both. Top management emphasizes the value of having employees with a positive attitude, especially in times of change:

> *"You need to find people that have an open mind, people who are ready on a daily basis to challenge the way how one does the work. (...) So step by step, we need to add more of these people who are open for change."*
>
> Top manager, Blutex

In conclusion, we have in our interviews with managers depicted two opposite descriptions of salespeople's characteristics. On the one hand, the older employee who is described in terms of resistance and negativity, and on the other hand, the more attractive open-minded employee who is positive, compliant and 'open for change'. In our interviews the organizational members of Blutex have shared their social realities, which we have analyzed through sensemaking theory in order to get an understanding of what is perceived as resistance by the top management.

4.2. Perceptions and Behavior

In this section, we will present the perceptions of the organizational members regarding 'Vision 2020', 'Solution Selling' and how those have affected their behavior.

4.2.1. Perceptions

Our empirical material lead us to believe that there is a common understanding of 'Vision 2020'; not only in terms of its definition and meaning but also in terms of a collective positive response.

In other words, middle managers and salespeople were positive to the formulation of 'Vision 2020', both affectively and cognitively:

> *"Let me put it this way; finally - something happens! (...) I'm not interested in striking bargains, Blutex was in that position ten years ago. We're supposed to turn this ship around, to become a more professional communication company. (...) Lately, I've had that feeling of; 'wow, things are really happening now'."*

Sales person, Blutex

Organizational members agree that Blutex needs to change and that 'Vision 2020' is an appropriate goal. 'Vision 2020' is however still only a vision and has not yet been specified and developed into a strategy. A top manager explains:

> *"We have a general strategy nowadays, we call it vision 2020. It's more a kind of visionary statement; where we want to be. Now we have started to work it through and I believe that during this year we will step by step create a clear strategy from it. (...) [Today] it is not formulated in a way that I recognize a strategy. But that has been a bit of Blutex's culture and [management] style as well; strategy isn't communicated as clearly as other companies do it."*

Top manager, Blutex

'Vision 2020' is mainly promoted in financial figures and strategic visions. The change is communicated in terms of how the business model of Blutex needs to change, rather than how the salespeople need to change their behavior. So far, the top management has communicated where Blutex is headed but not how the organizational members should change in order to get there. The change is thereby described vaguely both because of the organizational culture and that there at this point is no formulated strategy to communicate.

Altogether, the general opinion of 'Vision 2020' is positive, both cognitively and affectively. Considering the top management's problematization, we had expected a less positive attitude towards the strategic change. Even more surprisingly from this aspect was the overall positive attitude towards the concept of 'Solution Selling'.

> *"'Solution Selling' is what we should be doing - it's totally the right thing to do!"*

Sales person, Blutex

Organizational members agree that 'Solution Selling' is a good selling method and an appropriate initiative. Furthermore, there has been no experienced confusion on the individual level in terms of ambiguities or uncertainties regarding the concept:

> *"I understand the concept, what Blutex wants and I think it's very good. (...) and what's most important is that the top management has shared its vision, its strategy and its goals and really has tried to communicate it to every single employee. That, I think is extraordinary! Because that's what you want as an employee; to have clear visions, strategies and goals."*
>
> Sales person, Blutex

In contrast to the top management's problematization, the change is thereby not perceived as a "giant leap". Instead, the general opinion seems to be that the concept of 'Solution Selling' is rather self-explanatory and that they do not perceive this as something new. Most interviewees however mention that 'Solution Selling' might be a bigger change for other salespersons than themselves. This perception made us interested in how the change program came to change their behavior.

4.2.2. Behavior

When talking about how 'Solution Selling' affects the organizational members' behavior, salespeople are quite unanimous. They claim that selling solutions is not something new and that most of them even claim to have been working like this ever since they started working at Blutex. In order words, it is 'business as usual'. The aim of the program is therefore perceived, not as a way of changing behavior, but rather to give some kind of collective framework for the whole organization and thereby get the organization moving in the same direction:

> *"[Top management] told us about this program when we had a conference and I find it rather peculiar when they during the conference tell us to go from selling products to selling services, considering that most of the salespeople - at least the relatively new ones - always have been working with selling services and never within product sales. You get a bit confused."*
>
> Sales person, Blutex

The interpretation that the top management has implemented a large and grandiose change program where most of the participants do not need to change, has led to that the salespeople come to their own conclusions. Some state that the top management simply do not know why they are implementing it, whilst others saw it as a collective program with the goal to implement a common selling method. We asked a top manager whether a majority of the salespeople are already selling according to 'Solution Selling' or not:

"No, they are not in real life. (...) That's how we are built as a human, especially if you look at the traditional salesperson. They have high self-confidence, they are very competitive, very talkative and normally have good communication skills. These people normally want to feel that 'I've done this all the time'. That is protecting their personality as well. I'm more interested in the people who are saying; 'Well this is interesting - let's see where this leads'. (...) [When people say 'this is already what we do'] for me it means that these people are difficult to get onboard. (...) [But] I am happy that we have more and more of these people who come with curiosity."

Top manager, Blutex

What we soon discovered however was that the actual definition of 'Solution Selling' fluctuated a lot between individuals at Blutex. We were confused, both regarding the change program's actual definition but also over the fragmented understanding of the one and same concept.

4.3. What is 'Solution Selling'?

The interpretations of 'Solution Selling' were fragmented. Several organizational members interpreted it literally, whilst others defined it as getting closer to the clients, being proactive and building relations. Some organizational members defined it as a kind of upselling, i.e. selling something additional or more expensive, in order to make a more profitable sale. One middle manager focused very much on the internal routines, where 'Solution Selling' would increase managerial control through technical control mechanisms by increasing the usage of the new CRM systems and feedback processes. In conclusion, most organizational members seemed to focus on the first part of the official definition; that it is the combination of products and services that makes a solution:

"'Solution Selling' - combine products and services into communication solutions that adds value to our customer's needs"

Teaching material 2013, Blutex

However, our last interview shed light on the matter from a different angle. The middle manager we interviewed had already been educated in the original American 'Solution Selling' program with a previous employer. For the first time, an interviewee focused solely on the latter part of the definition; to add value to the customer's needs:

> *"You could sell sand with the 'Solution Selling' technique. In that case it would be more like; 'What is the sand for? What is it a solution for?' and then talk about the value of what you do with the sand instead of just selling a pile of sand. That is what 'Solution Selling' is about, in my opinion."*
>
> Middle manager, Blutex

So the intended definition of 'Solution Selling' seemed to be, not to literally sell solutions but a method of describing the value of a solution and pricing it accordingly - regardless if the solution consists of products or services. We find it remarkable that it is possible to have such a diversity of interpretations and definitions of what 'Solution Selling' is in the same organization. Our last interviewee continues to explain:

> *"The thing is, the salespeople have only had [the first training session] and what you have in this education as well is this movement of becoming a communication solution company. And because of this, the focus has been on cultural change really, and I would argue that within [the program] they haven't dealt with what 'Solution Selling' is. It has been touched upon, but not to an extent where it has affected how we sell"*
>
> Middle manager, Blutex

The fact that the implementation process is not yet finished may serve as a simple answer to why people have interpreted the concept of 'Solution Selling' differently. However, we are interested in analyzing how and why people come to conclusions at this early stage since it affects their behavior and their future interpretations in the change process. How is it, that some perceive 'Solution Selling' as a control system tool whilst others perceive it as selling combinations of different services rather than products - and that everyone regardless of definition are certain about their interpretations at this early stage of the implementation?

4.4. Summary

To sum up, all the organizational members agree on the change process' importance and approve of 'Vision 2020' and they also believe that 'Solution Selling' is an appropriate method for selling the new product portfolio. Salespeople and middle managers are excited over the top management's change initiative, to move from the old mindset to a more trendy sales method.

One of our most critical finding was that hardly anyone within the salesforce viewed 'Solution Selling' as something new. Organizational members had the perception that they were selling according to 'Solution Selling' and have been doing so for a long period of time. Therefore the behavior of the salesforce was bound not to change, people thought however that others than themselves probably needed to change.

This raises the question whether it is the described diversity of interpretations that the top management perceives as resistance to change. It also takes us back to our initial research question how consensus could exist at the same time as the organizational members have such a diversity of interpretation of a common event. Regardless of which, we have in addition identified a perceived ‘gap’ between the salespeople and the top management, based on a mutual skepticism. This gap will be analyzed with the theory of sensemaking in the next chapter; what it really consists of, how and why it has been created and what consequences it might bring.

5. Analysis

In this chapter we will use the theoretical framework presented in chapter 3 to explain and analyze our empirical material. The chapter is divided into three parts, where we in the first part analyze the sensemaking process chronologically on the three hierarchical levels. In the second part, we discuss the factors which have contributed to the way the organizational members made sense from a holistic perspective. At last, we sum up the results of our analysis in the third and final part. Our goal is to depict the complex relationship between communication and change, as a way of showing how communication is more than a 'vehicle for information' in a change process.

5.1. Making Sense of Solution Selling

How come that the organizational members of Blutex have interpreted 'Solution Selling' so differently? How is it possible to have consensus in a change process when the interpretations differ among the organizational members? In the following sections we will step by step interpret Blutex's sensemaking process by applying our theoretical model from chapter 3; how cues are connected to frames. In other words, we will illustrate how some of the interviewees have made sense of the communicated change process on a micro level. We start by analyzing the top management's sensegiving of 'Solution Selling'.

5.1.1. Top Managers Gave Sense

The introduction of 'Solution Selling' during a big sales conference in September 2012 is one of the most critical events of Blutex's collective sensemaking process. It was during this event that the top management for the first time gave sense officially of 'Solution Selling' at an organizational level. It was also during this event that several organizational members made an initial interpretation of the concept. However, due to the fact that the top management not only included the 'Solution Selling' education in the change program, but also a cultural change initiative along with a new CRM system, the cues for 'Solution Selling' were mixed with other cues.

We argue that this also has affected the sensemaking of Blutex's organizational members. We believe that it becomes more difficult to discern from where mixed cues originate if they are communicated vaguely. Two cues can become equivocal if believed to have the same origin. To exemplify; if a cue regarding the cultural change is mistaken for a cue regarding 'Solution Selling', that cue might contradict connections previously made regarding 'Solution Selling'. This contradiction may then cause the sensemaker to break the previous connections and instead try to make sense of the cues in another way. In Blutex's case, mixing cues made sensemaking within the salesforce problematic as the top management was vague in its communication (i.e. ambiguous). We will in the next sections analyze two examples of top management ambiguity by looking at the equivocalities regarding the encouragement of feedback and the view on proactivity.

Before we continue our analysis we would like to stress that we have not taken any standpoint regarding the strategic aspects of Blutex. We have for instance not analyzed whether Blutex' should be proactive or not. We simply have depicted the causes and consequences for sending out ambiguous cues in a context like Blutex's.

The first cues to be analyzed regard how critical thinking and feedback are on the one hand described as crucial, but on the other hand systematically discouraged in some parts of the organization. Blutex's CEO states that bottom-up feedback is wanted, but according to our analysis negative feedback or feedback that does not necessarily lead to increased revenue is to a large extent neglected within Blutex. Organizational members experience a low level of transparency and influence. Still, to be more entrepreneurial and to constantly develop Blutex as an organization is encouraged and is described as desirable in the process of becoming more professional. Top management states for instance that Blutex needs open-minded people who are 'open for change' and who are ready to "challenge the way how one does the work" in order to change. In practice however, the organizational culture and structures hinder a lot of the internal bottom-up feedback.

We have for instance seen in the empirical material how the organizational culture is described as being "a very top-down organization with quite authoritarian leadership" where most people feel that they do not have a forum for sharing opinions or criticizing existing working methods. According to Johansson and Heide (2008b) managers often accept positive feedback and embrace it without hesitation but are often surprised and displeased when receiving negative feedback. Even though allowing criticism and getting the opinions of the employees are regarded as important when implementing change, this is generally something perceived as unpleasant for managers. Tourish (2005) states that criticism upwards in organizations is seldom encouraged in change processes, even though employees are able to contribute to the change process itself. The importance of an open communication climate is thus often stated as important by top managers, but is neglected just as often in practice (Johansson and Heide, 2008b). We will discuss Blutex's internal communication climate and its implications further in chapter 5.2.2.

Our second example of equivocal cues is the encouragement of becoming more proactive. Part of the top management's problematization is that the salesforce at Blutex need to become more proactive in their mindset and daily work. The proactivity is often promoted as being one of the most essential parts of the new working methods and the culture. However, we would argue that the top management's attitude towards 'being proactive' is equivocal and even contradictory since (a) the individual definitions of proactivity among the top managers differ, not only from each other but also from the concept's common definition, (b) the salesforce have no incentives in practice for being proactive and are even told to be reactive by the managers, and (c) the top management does not think that Blutex is, or even should be proactive from a strategic point of view. The way of promoting proactivity as a core value and then actively discourage proactive initiatives ought to be counter-productive if the goal actually is to change the culture and identity towards being more proactive.

Let us start by deciphering the concept of being proactive. Oxford dictionary defines a proactive person or action as; “creating or controlling a situation rather than just responding to it after it has happened” (oxforddictionaries.com, 2013) whereas reactive is defined as; “acting in response to a situation rather than creating or controlling it” (oxforddictionaries.com, 2013). In other words, as a proactive company, manager or salesperson you ought to take the initiative and drive the change and development forward rather than acting upon others’ demands or wishes. Blutex defines proactivity as:

> *“Constantly developing the business relationship with the customer and creating the most competitive communication”*

Teaching material 2013, Blutex

Focus is on constant development and creativity and at first glance the Blutex definition seems to align with the common definition. However, when ‘being proactive’ is translated into the context specific work process it becomes equivocal:

> *“The Work Process of Proactivity – ‘I work efficiently and deliver quality’”*

Teaching material 2013, Blutex

We would argue that working ‘efficiently and deliver quality’ is quite different from being creative, and even contradictory when it comes to allowing mistakes and risk-taking. In an internal promotion text for ‘Vision 2020’ proactivity and its context is formulated as follows:

> *“In a business where change is constant and constantly accelerating, proactivity is the key to success. It goes without saying that for us as a company as well as for you and me as employees, we must never lose our entrepreneurial spirit. It means that we’re never totally satisfied – what is good can always be better. Regardless of [your position] never stop questioning the way things have been done.*

Teaching material 2013, Blutex

Once again, we would like to point out that working ‘efficiently and deliver quality’ is difficult if you at the same time should have a proactive ‘entrepreneurial spirit’ where you are encouraged to stretch the limits of what is possible today by trying new things in a new way. In addition, top managers are not very encouraging to being entrepreneurial and pushing the limits:

> *"I wouldn't bet my money on that [that Blutex should be in a front-end position, defining the industry] (...) Our nature, organization culture is not like that. We are more 'doers' than 'thinkers' or 'visionaries'."*
>
> Top manager, Blutex

Top managers describe how Blutex traditionally has stretched the limits too far in terms of providing unique solutions for every customer. The strategy of today is more about providing modified rather than unique solutions and by doing so also gain economies of scale. Top managers stress the importance of listening and adapting to the customers' needs rather than suggesting solutions which risk not being sold. The CEO at Blutex sees this as a crucial part of the sales process; to be proactive by doing research of the customers' needs. The CEO compares it to how the top management at Blutex reacts as a customer when a supplier approaches Blutex with a new service that is not needed.

> *"They [the supplier] haven't adapted. They haven't done their homework, and when we become like that; 'this is Blutex's concept and this is our solution', and the customer says; 'well, we don't need that'. I mean, we simply can never get in that situation, not as long as I'm here, because if we do - then we're screwed long-term, so to speak."*
>
> Q: But isn't that proactivity? I mean, proactivity is defined by the fact that you try to push the development forward, to try to find new stuff that the customer didn't know of - and as a part of that risk a 'no thank you'?
>
> *"But I think that has to do with different starting-points. (...) We will never be a research company. We will never be the ones who present a brand new IT-solution or a cloud solution. We are not the ones capable of doing that kind of stuff. What we need to do is to use existing technique in different ways. (...) We are not a pharmaceutical company who are involved in basic research or anything like that - we will never be. Others can do that."*
>
> CEO, Blutex

Here the context specific view on proactivity is defined by the CEO. Being proactive in Blutex is not the same as being proactive in a pharmaceutical company. Focus is more on listening to the customers' needs and in most cases where new solutions are developed they are done so in collaboration with a customer.

We would also argue that the view on proactivity within the top management group is ambiguous. Not only do the definitions differ but also whether Blutex is, or even should be proactive:

"I would say [Blutex's change process] is reactive. I know there will be disagreement, and mostly from the CEO, but my view is that we are reactive – we are not proactive. We believe, and we would like to be proactive, and in many cases we want to believe that we are, but in real life [we are not]. (...) We are a fairly traditional company and we do proactive things inside what we already know, and what's already developed and already exist – there we are fairly proactive. But are we a company that really creates something totally new or leads the industry to new fields? No, we are not such a company – and I'm not sure if we should be such a company."

Top manager, Blutex

It seems as if the top management agrees upon what kind of company Blutex has been traditionally and what kind of strategy is most appropriate today and in the future. What differs is the way the individual top managers define proactivity compared to the promoted 'official' definition, thus resulting in the depicted ambiguity in terms of contradictory cues. An interesting part of this is that the top managers did not share the benefits of being proactive, the way it is defined by the printed teaching material. Rather they referred to the organizational benefits in terms of being reactive; an organizational strength that is grounded in the company's tradition, core values and identity.

Larson and Tompkins (2005) state that top managers who are not entirely convinced of a change process' benefits, tend to look at the traditional values in a change process. This could have substantial consequences, especially in a top-down implementation. The authors conclude that top managers may, directly or indirectly sabotage their own change initiatives by communicating ambiguous messages. Co-workers quickly notice this ambiguity whereby they become skeptic towards the change.

In the case of Blutex we have seen how the ambiguous messages have created skepticism, but not because the organizational members have noticed the ambiguity. Rather, the salespeople's skepticism in the case of Blutex is foremost grounded in the perception that top managers do not know how the salespeople are working; a perception which we see as a result of top managers' ambiguous communication. This type of skepticism among the salesforce contributes to what the top management perceives as resistance, hence Larson and Tompkins' conclusions do not serve as an explanation for the 'mystery' of the positive consensus among the organizational members at Blutex.

Altogether, the limitations of being proactive and stretching the limits within Blutex are quite narrow. This leads us into the next problematic aspect of Blutex's promoted proactivity; the lack of the incentives and encouragement for being proactive. A majority of the salesforce concluded that their biggest priority is to be reliable; to be able to deliver what you have promised in a flawless manner. In other words, to "work efficiently and deliver quality". Some managers said that they try to encourage their staff to be more proactive by allowing mistakes to a certain extent. Others did not have any tolerance for situations where the salesperson stretched the limits 'too far' in terms of promising a solution that they may not be able to deliver. In addition, there are no particular incentives for being proactive or to try new ideas, concepts, or methods. Instead, the only described incentive was the commission-based salary. A salesperson describes how this affects his/her choices in terms of pushing the limits, being efficient, and deliver quality:

> *"I know I have a budget, which I know I have to reach. Then I have to focus on that, on the right things. I shouldn't invest a lot of time and energy in stuff where I get nothing back. The customer gets really happy, but what do I get? Nothing. I sell services that we are able to deliver. If I invest my time in that, then I reach my budget and everyone gets happy. We [Blutex] get the result we want. So even if we have a 'Solution Selling' mindset, you got to focus on investing your time in the right stuff.*
>
> Sales person, Blutex

The incentive system is aligned with the instructions of working proactively - "efficiently and deliver quality" - and also with the top management strategic goal of gaining economies of scale. We would however argue that the incentive system counteracts the ambition to become more proactive - if proactivity is defined as Blutex's official definition; "[To] constantly develop the business relationship with the customer and create the most competitive communication". In the next section we will have a closer look at the sensemaking process of the middle managers.

5.1.2. Middle Managers Made Sense

We find the hierarchical group of middle managers interesting to study, since they are both sensemakers and sensegivers. We are interested in how the top management's sensegiving has affected the middle managers' sensemaking and how they have given sense of the change process to the salespeople. According to our analysis, the middle managers all made sense in different ways. Their interpretations were fragmented and they had different views on what it is to work according to 'Solution Selling'. We will now continue by analyzing how and why this happened for each of the middle managers we interviewed.

5.1.2.1. Middle Manager 1

Middle manager 1 is the middle manager mentioned in section 4.3. He/she had previously attended a 'Solution Selling' education and had an idea of what 'Solution Selling' was from the start. In other words; middle manager 1 had already built up a solid frame for 'Solution Selling' during the previous occasion. Now when the rather sparse and vague information about 'Solution Selling' came to him/her from the top management at Blutex, it was sufficient for middle manager 1 to connect it to his/her pre-existing frame. And since the connection was made immediately middle manager 1 never started the sensemaking process. Noteworthy is that middle manager 1 also distinguished that the 'Solution Selling' program at Blutex included more than just the 'Solution Selling' concept. Because middle manager 1 had a very clear picture of what 'Solution Selling' was at the time he/she received the cues, he/she was also able to see that some of the cues for Blutex's 'Solution Selling' program did not fit with his/her pre-existing frame. He/she thus noticed the mixed cues mentioned in section 5.1.1.. Middle manager 1 described how the program also includes elements such as setting individual goals for salespersons, goals for the whole organization and do follow-up by reporting into the new CRM-system, as well as to get a mutual understanding of the sales process in Blutex.

Middle manager 1 stated that some people in the organization perhaps never will understand what 'Solution Selling' really is and he/she exemplified this by saying that some organizational members may interpret 'Solution Selling' as 'wining and dining' and building relationships with clients. But, he/she continued to explain that those things are 'relationship management' which is an important precondition to selling solutions, but it is not 'Solution Selling'. Tragicomically enough, this is the connection and interpretation that middle manager 2 made.

5.1.2.2. Middle Manager 2

> *"For me, Solution Selling is actually about starting to listen to the customer even more. I believe it is about having salespeople out with the clients and learn the business; to keep or to create new customer relations".*
>
> Middle manager 2, Blutex

Middle manager 2 has, as presumed by middle manager 1, made the interpretation that the program is about building relations and working closer to the clients. Middle manager 2 was convinced that his/her group of salespeople have been working with 'Solution Selling' for many years, i.e. finding out what the customer needs and combining services and products into solutions that fit the specific customer. We believe that this interpretation has been made due to middle manager 2 connecting the 'Solution Selling' cues to a pre-existing frame. As the cue was vague, there were no obvious frame for it and perhaps there were many plausible frames that it could be connected to. In addition, as new cues were coming slowly, it was easier to just connect 'Solution Selling' cues to an already pre-existing frame. As we stated in our theoretical framework, people want to understand things they are affected by as quickly as possible and because of this there is an emotional pressure on the individual to connect the cue to a frame (Weick, 1995). People might then instead connect the cues to the frame that makes sense the most and is most affectively comfortable (i.e. the frame that feels best). For middle manager 2 the frame that felt best was apparently one that implied that 'Solution Selling' is close to what they are already doing and that the improvement can be accomplished by doing what they are already doing, just a little more; i.e. "listening to the customer even more". This is an emotionally convenient way to interpret 'Solution Selling'. According to Törestad and Nystedt (1994) individuals interpret situations from what they hope will happen. And because the cues were vague and came at a low frequency, this interpretation was not contradicted before it was already reinforced; a phenomenon we will refer to as 'cementing a connection'.

Cementing is not described in detail in the sensemaking literature. Mumby's (1988) quote, stating that "communication is the process through which meaning is created and, over time, sedimented" (1988:15) would however suggest that meaning (i.e. connections) are somehow cemented. The following quote from Weick (1995) would also suggest that when an initial connection has been made, future sensemaking is hampered: "The feeling of order, clarity and rationality is an important goal of sensemaking, which means that once this feeling is achieved, further retrospective processing [sensemaking] stops" (Weick, 1995:29).

We would like to suggest that after the individual has made sense, he/she does not enter the sensemaking process again until a new cue diverges significantly from the frame that the other cues have been connected to. Instead, the new cues are being instantly connected to the same frame as the other cues, thereby reinforcing the connection and thus the interpretation. This may further lead to contradicting cues being disregarded as the cemented connection is a base for new expectations, which in turn serve as strong filter of inputs (Weick, 1995). We believe that the more cemented a connection is, the harder it is to break that connection and connect the cues to another frame. The main reason for this is that the sensemaker is also forced to question his/her social reality.

5.1.2.3. Middle Manager 3

Middle manager 3 was an interesting interview because we were given a very detailed portrayal of how he/she made sense during the various phases of the change process. Middle manager 3 described how he/she at first did not understand the cue, and did not directly make a connection either:

> *"At first, I had no idea what Solution Selling was."*
>
> Middle manager 3, Blutex

Middle manager 3 continues by explaining the first hours of introduction:

> *"I [was asked] a question after a couple of hours; 'What is this?' [to which I responded]; 'Well, it's a bit early for me to say (...). Let's keep going for a couple of hours and we'll see where it lands' because in that moment I had a certain picture of it, but then it started to be presented in another way which made me go; 'All right! This is what they mean'"*
>
> Middle manager 3, Blutex

Here we can see that middle manager 3 still had the cue hanging, in other words, the connection had not yet been made. Middle manager 3 was at the 'categorization phase' in the framework we presented in section 3.3.9. still waiting for further cues in order to get a better picture of what frame to connect them to or if he/she needed to use them to build a whole new frame. What kind of emotions middle manager 3 had at this point is difficult to analyze from our interview, but since he/she was waiting patiently, not making hasty presumptions or fast connections, we argue that this indicates that middle manager 3 was keen on making the 'correct' interpretation as he later is to mediate this to his/her subordinates. Middle manager 3 mentioned that he/she "had a certain picture" which implies that middle manager 3 had made some kind idea of a preliminary connection. When it then "started to be presented in another way" those subsequent cues were contradicting that connection whereby middle manager 3 instead found a better connection and finally implied that he/she had made sense. But let us dwell upon this phase before moving on. Middle manager 3 went into further detail about his/her interpretations at another time in the interview:

> *"My mindset from the beginning was that ['Solution Selling'] was probably just about looking at solution based selling, and I thought; 'Haven't we been doing that for ten years? There is nothing new about that'. (...) It was first when they started to present it in a [way directly addressed to the salesforce]; to follow up with consequences; 'this is what is expected of you as middle managers, because this is what we expect from the salespeople'. Then you started to realize: 'Ah, it is not a way to approach customers, but a way how to manage sales internally at Blutex". And this happened the first day."*
>
> Middle manager 3, Blutex

Something worth noting is that middle manager 3 had just as the salespeople come to the initial conclusion that "this is what we already do". He did however not stop at that interpretation as opposed to the salespeople. We believe this is due to the pressure from the top management as well as his/her own expectations. As implied by Mailloux (1990); power and political interests play an important part in determining what frame you connect a cue to. Middle manager 3 is supposed to be a change agent for his/her subordinates and the top management wants to see change. We therefore believe that middle manager 3 expected more from the education and was looking for something concrete to implement at his/her group of salespeople. It was first when the program's direct effects on the salesforce were described to middle manager 2 that he/she made a connection. This triggered an emotion of relief, because the cues could finally be connected to a frame and be interpreted. So instead of the previous presumption that 'Solution Selling' was literally about selling solutions, which made no sense to middle manager 3 (since it did not result in any change to present to the top management), he/she instead grasped the internal management elements full heartedly. Middle manager 3 elaborates:

"['Solution Selling'] is actually more about a mindset; what kind of requirements you have, which gives you possibilities to process the market effectively, but also process my colleagues - by doing follow up"

Middle manager 3, Blutex

Middle manager 3 has made the interpretation that 'Solution Selling' is about changing the mindset of the salesforce and for him/her to monitor the operations by doing follow up, using the CRM-system. This is a case of plausibility; one out of Weick's (1995) seven properties. The point Weick makes is that it does not matter whether the connection is the correct one or not, because it might be. Weick (1995) uses a quote from Garfinkel (1967) when he/she explains the idea that plausibility is more important than accuracy in sensemaking: "If the interpretation makes good sense, then that's what happened" (Garfinkel, 1967:106).

The next quote illustrates how a weak connection (i.e. a new one) is cemented when further cues do not disconfirm it. To cement a connection new cues do not need to confirm the connection, it is simply enough that they do not disconfirm it. For middle manager 3 this happened during the second implementation phase.

"Now, in phase 2 last week it all became crystal clear what it is all about; a method and a way of processing the market in an effective manner where we can follow up, and help the salespeople to work more organized and structured"

Middle manager 3, Blutex

Even though middle manager 3 has interpreted 'Solution Selling' differently than the top management intended, he/she finds the connection being confirmed even though it most probably is a case of non-disconfirmation. We argue that when new cues do not disconfirm a connection, the cementation of the connection instead creates a feeling of confirmation. We will now move on to the analysis of how the salesforce made sense of the given cues.

5.1.3. Salespeople Made Sense

The salespeople made sense in very similar ways and their interpretations of 'Solution Selling' ended up in basically the same conclusion; that 'Solution Selling' is what they, as individuals already do:

"I believe that I already have a 'Solution Selling' methodology (...) What they [the top managers] are trying to do now, is to make everyone think and act alike"

Salesperson, Blutex

We argue that most of the salespeople have not really done any sensemaking. Instead, they have connected the new cues directly to pre-existing frames. Rather than waiting for further cues, they have made connections hastily which have led to a simplified and almost literal interpretation of 'Solution Selling':

> *"['Solution Selling'] is much about, well as the name implies; finding solutions for our clients instead of products more or less. Using our range of products to find the optimal solution for the clients, moving away from the old way of thinking in terms of products."*
>
> Salesperson, Blutex

What has happened here is that the salespeople have been interrupted in their daily work by the new cues from 'Solution Selling'. This triggers emotion. As stated in our theoretical framework the emotion is at first bound to be negative since this interruption complicates their daily activities as it takes up time and focus (Weick, 1995). And this emotion affects the connections they make later. Most salespeople jumped to conclusions relatively fast instead of waiting for further cues. We therefore argue that the emotional level among the salespeople was high since negative emotion causes pressure on the individual to connect the cues to a frame as quickly as possible, in order to circumvent or get rid of the interruption (Weick, 1995).

In this case we mean that the interruption was circumvented by making the interpretation that 'this is already what we do'. What becomes apparent is that, if everyone shares this point of view then no one will actually change behaviorally, even though everybody agrees cognitively that 'Solution Selling' is the way to go. We believe that this serves as another explanation for the perceived resistance which is described in the top management's problematization.

When the salespeople were asked in retrospect if there had been any confusion to begin with regarding the program or the concept, most people would not agree:

> *"Confusion is a strong word I would say, but sure. Before we had the first [education] opportunity you didn't really know what it was, what it would include, and so on. But I wouldn't say confusion."*
>
> Q: From the time when they started to talk about ['Solution Selling'] and explain what it was, have you experienced any ambiguities then?
>
> *"No... No, I wouldn't say that. Solution Selling kind of speaks for itself, I think."*
>
> Q: Sure.
>
> *"Right? It's enormous, it could be anything as well. Ehm..."*

> Q: That's what I'm thinking, it's a pretty wide concept.
>
> *"Yeah, sure but I think it makes sense now after we had the first [education] opportunity... the first lectures."*
>
> Salesperson, Blutex

Confusion seems to be a word that the salesperson is unwilling to use when describing his/her personal sensemaking. We imagine that this is first and foremost because they have not actually done any sensemaking since they made interpretations rather hastily. Secondly, confusion may be viewed as a negatively loaded word which implies that you have not understood the communicated message. This in particular when all your colleagues seem to have understood it from the start.

Another interesting part here is the last but one line where the salesperson contradicts him-/herself by saying that on the one hand there were no confusion, but on the other hand 'Solution Selling' could be "anything as well". When this is pointed out to him/her the salesperson simply shrugs it off. As the salesperson starts giving sense to him-/herself, the salesperson also starts to realize that it might be more to 'Solution Selling' than just the literal meaning. However as we stated before; having been able to connect the cues to a frame is emotionally relieving. If this act of sensegiving would have continued the salesperson might have come to new conclusions and therefore had to detach those cues that were previously connected to the 'wrong' frame. We suggest that this is an example of how people actively may want to avoid making sense in order to preserve their social reality, by avoiding giving sense and perhaps even disregarding cues that do not fit with the pre-existing frame.

The quote above is also an example of how sensegiving completes Gioia and Chittipeddi's (1991) loop of the sensemaking process, as it initiates another. In other words, the salesperson is approached by a new uncategorized cue ("it could be anything as well"), that was created by him-/herself when the salesperson tried to make sense of the old cue ("Solution Selling speaks for itself").

5.2. Analytical Discussion

The sensemaking process of 'Solution Selling' has been built on vague cues and equivocal formulations according to our analysis. What is interesting is that most of the communicated cues have been perceived by the organizational members as both comprehensible and strategically appropriate. Few of our interviewees have experienced confusion, but as we have seen in the empirical material the understandings and interpretations are diverse and hardly anyone has interpreted 'Solution Selling' as intended by the top management. We believe that this encapsulates the paradoxical effects of being ambiguous; that unclear cues may result in a perceived consensus. We will elaborate this paradox in the next section, whereas the latter part of this chapter will discuss the implications of Blutex's lack of collective frames and its communication climate.

5.2.1. Strategic Ambiguity

We would argue that the level of clarity is not necessarily connected to the communication competences of the top management. In fact, it may very well be the opposite. Some scholars (Eisenberg, 1984; Weick and Browning, 1986) argue that communicating vaguely or unclear could be used as a strategy for reaching consensus in a change process. This strategy is referred to as 'strategic ambiguity'. The purpose of being strategically ambiguous is to allow flexibility and creativity on an individual level within a common organizational change process. Eisenberg (1984) for instance see it as a way of managing Kant's classical goal of "maximum individuality within maximum community" (1984:233). The strategic ambiguity thus aims to guard the organizational members from accepting one organizational reality. Eisenberg further states that "clarity is only a measure of communicative competence if the individual has as his or her goal to be clear" (1984:231) and that strategic ambiguity very well could lead to a state of "unified diversity". Weick and Browning (1986) conclude that maintained ambiguity is helpful in change processes since "people are able to retain their differences of opinion under the guise of consensus" (1986:254). Instead of concretizing organizational goals, missions and plans, the strategic ambiguity allows different groups to apply different interpretations to common organizational symbols. In the case of Blutex, we have seen how a unified diversity has been created through the diverse interpretations of 'Solution Selling'. The grandiose 'Vision 2020' could in this sense be viewed as a common symbol which affectively creates consensus and at the same time allows different cognitive interpretations of 'Solution Selling'.

In the case of 'Vision 2020' and 'Solution Selling' we have identified insecurity among top managers over what traditional values to keep and what to change in Blutex's new culture, identity, and strategy. We believe that the ambiguous cues given by the top management mainly derives from this insecurity. We also believe that the insecurity is transferred to the salesforce by arbitrary internal promotion such as: "Proactivity makes work much more fun!" (Teaching material 2013, Blutex). Promoting words are chosen because they are positively loaded rather than strategically aligned; entrepreneurial spirit sounds better than bureaucracy, proactivity sounds better than reactivity, participation and dialogue sounds better than authoritarian leadership and so on and so forth. We have seen how the top management's equivocal reasoning whether Blutex is, or even should be proactive leads to equivocality. The equivocality expresses itself quite clearly during our interviews when the interviewees gave sense of the promoted strategy:

> *"My view is that [organizational changes] have come through customers; 'Could you please help us with this?' and then those good customer relations you have, well... Then you do that change and like... now we do this change because the market is changing.*
>
> Q: Would you describe this change as reactive then?
>
> *"No."*

Q: But, more as proactive?

"Yes."

Q: In what way?

*"Ehm... *silence*... No, but that was interesting... Why do I say that...?"*

Q: Well, you did say it was because the market is changing.

*"Which means it is... Then it is reactive. *Laugh* But that is not... It is because... now we will sell communication solutions which encapsulate a lot and many new services and... *laugh* new values for customers, while earlier it has been more product oriented."*

Middle manager, Blutex

This type of sensegiving might lead to Larson and Tompkins' (2005) conclusion that employees quickly become skeptical to the change when they notice the ambiguity among the top management. Furthermore, we believe that middle managers as a group are faced with a different pressure to make sense than salespeople. Middle managers are not only expected to deliver a satisfactory result, but also to implement the new working methods within their divisions. The responsibility for how to reach 'Vision 2020' in practice is transmitted to the middle managers, thus putting extra pressure in making sense of the change process 'correctly'. We see this pressure as highly influential in the middle managers' sensemaking process:

"There are different interpretations of what 'Vision 2020' means, and I'm not sure that I've interpreted it correctly, I have interpreted it in my way. (...) But it is a bit... kind of empty, nothing is really clear. And in order to proceed [the organization] tries to fill it locally."

Middle manager, Blutex

Furthermore we would argue the dignity, purpose and concept of 'Solution Selling' is communicated ambiguously by the middle managers. To change the salesforce's behavior according to 'Solution Selling', is promoted as crucial for the company's survival by the top management and as an essential step towards reaching 'Vision 2020'. According to our findings however, there is a common understanding within the salesforce that a satisfactory result is more important than selling accordingly to the concept of 'Solution Selling':

*"Let me tell you what - as long as they [the sales people] deliver, *laugh* they can do whatever the hell they want "*

Middle manager, Blutex

This attitude is a great example of an equivocal cue given by the middle managers. On the one hand, the new common working methods to which its survival is depending on, are promoted strongly and in a grandiose manner. On the other hand, middle managers do not really care whether the salesperson changes his/her behavior or not, as long as the salesperson deliver a satisfactory result. Thus, the new method is promoted internally as crucial, but is managed only as something preferable in the daily work.

Nevertheless, we believe that most salespeople at Blutex are 'open for change' – as long as the change is clearly connected to the sales results. Several of our interviewees state that by the end of the day, their only task is so sell solutions according to (and preferably more than) the budget. When a cultural change is communicated to them, they will listen and interpret the cues, but as long as the change is not directly concerning how to enhance their selling method, they have no reason to change simply because the salespeople perceive their current behavior as profit-maximizing and thus 'correct'. Once again, people see what they want to see in order for the cue to fit in with their identity needs (Coopey et al., 1997).

To sum up, the top management's sensegiving has in the first implementation phase focused on 'Vision 2020' and the cultural changes but not on the actual concept of 'Solution Selling'. As a result, salespeople and middle managers have been given both vague and equivocal cues, resulting in a fragmented understanding of the purpose and concept of 'Solution Selling' as well as other strategic core values. The low level of transparency combined with ambiguous formulations, are important aspects of the top management's sensegiving process. In the next section, we will discuss the consequences of Blutex's organizational sensemaking, where a collective frame for 'Solution Selling' was lacking.

5.2.2. No Collective Frame

As previously stated, individual frames are created through lived experiences. This is also the case in organizational sensemaking. Organizational sensemaking therefore demands a collective frame, which is based on previous collective experiences. As stated in our theoretical framework, individuals are forced to use their own ways of making sense when organizational routines and scripts (i.e. collective frames) are unavailable. As we have seen in the case of Blutex, there were no obvious collective frames for 'Solution Selling'. Instead, people tended to connect the cues to frames that made most sense on an individual level, both cognitively (what rationally seems right) and affectively (what emotionally feels right).

The creation of collective frames is therefore something that is inevitable within a change process like this. The collective experiences will create new, or develop old organizational routines and scripts regardless of the change process' content and outcome, thus creating a new collective frame. This insight brings us back to the question whether sensemaking is manageable. We have concluded that the creation of a collective frame is inevitable and that the individual sensemaking process "cannot be deliberately controlled" according to Weick's (1995) fifth property. However, the possibility to influence the sensemaking process lies within the given cues. The person or persons giving sense have a large influence over the cues' level of clarity which in turn has a large influence on the prerequisites of the sensemaking process. Generally within an organization, the members' many different individual frames create a large amount of lived experiences and thus many different frames. The common frame of reference is lost when organizational members interpret common events differently which according to Barr and Huff (1997) undermines the coordinated activity. Seen from the top management's point of view, the risk of diverse interpretations is obviously bigger in cases where collective frames do not exist due to the large variety of frames which thus "cannot be deliberately controlled". However, this is only 'true' if one view a diversity of interpretation as unwanted. As previously stated the purpose of being strategically ambiguous is to encourage diverse interpretations and by doing so also encourage flexibility and creativity.

We have seen how a diversity of interpretations was created at Blutex but at the same time, we are confident in saying that the creation of a collective frame will be made during the continued implementation of 'Solution Selling'. What most likely will happen is that the diverse interpretations will be problematized, discussed and thereafter united into one common understanding. This is how a collective frame is created - through the bumpy road of making sense collectively. The collective sensemaking process thus aims to create Barr and Huff's (1997) 'common frame of reference' but it also undermines the purpose of strategic ambiguity; "to retain [people's] differences of opinions under the guise of consensus" (Weick and Browning, 1986:254).

Let us now move on to analyzing the given cues rather than the lack of collective frame. In the next section, we will discuss why the given cues contributed to the described diversity of interpretations from a more holistic level perspective. We will in other words analyze why the organizational members interpreted the concept of 'Solution Selling' with such diversity by looking at the internal communication climate at Blutex and how communication is viewed.

5.2.3. Top-Down Communication Climate

> *"Sometimes I feel that; we are a communication company and we work with communication but we are so damn bad at communicating internally."*
>
> Sales person, Blutex

There is internal communication within Blutex and a lot of it. The only problematic aspect of it is that it is often used as a 'vehicle for information' starting at the top and is then pushed down through the organization, either through the intranet or through middle managers. In other words, the internal communication is not viewed as a socially constructed process, as; "the very process by which the notion of organizing comes to acquire consensual meaning" (Mumby, 1988:15). The only case we have found, where communication is used as a process for constructing social reality was the manner in which the middle managers were introduced to 'Solution Selling' in comparison to the salespeople.

The way the top management gave sense to the middle managers in our case study is similar to the events of the case study done by Alvesson (2002) where the structures of a similar information meeting are analyzed. As in the case of Blutex, middle managers in Alvesson's study were also informed prior to the other employees (represented by salespeople in the case of Blutex), where the procedure and management style was similar to a military discourse. Alvesson argues that this procedure could be viewed as a symbolic reward; to strengthen the managers' sense of responsibility and to reinforce their position as 'chosen'. The content of the communicated message is the same for the middle managers and the employees. However, it is the manner in which the employees receive the message in a much larger group that creates a feeling of importance among the middle managers. In the case of Blutex, we see this as an important aspect of the middle managers' compliance in the top-down organization of Blutex. Whether these different views on communication are intentional or not is difficult to tell from our empirical material, and will thus remain unanswered.

Another influential aspect of Blutex's communication climate is the lack of transparency between the different hierarchical levels. According to our analysis, the lack of transparency perceived by the salesforce has had a large influence over the diverse interpretations, in particular the program's upcoming training sessions. The salespeople or middle managers seemed to have little or no knowledge of the next implementation phases, which complicated the sensemaking of the change program's context. As we have seen in the empirical material, the first training session did focus on the cultural changes instead of the actual instructional parts. Because of this, 'Solution Selling' has not been interpreted as an educational program. This in turn contributed to that the salespeople concluded that they do not need to change their behavior. The result from a holistic point of view is that 'Solution Selling' often is perceived by the organizational members as a mysterious journey which they cannot influence nor overlook.

Furthermore, we have seen in our empirical material how communicative disagreements with top managers are perceived as problematic and difficult for several salespeople. Johansson and Heide (2008b) state this as another reason for why the internal communication seldom works bottom-up. In order to get influence in an organization, employees with lower status must to a great extent agree with those with a higher status. According to our analysis, this leads to two important implications. First of all, managers risk making decisions on insufficient basis of information due to the distorted overly positive feedback. Second of all, employees that do not criticize are perceived as compliant and positive employee who is 'open for change' and gain therefore influence and credibility, as opposed to those who propose critical feedback:

> *"I believe that you [as a Blutex salesperson] should be forward and open for new suggestions (...) and not stare yourself blind on how it used to be back in the days, but to adapt to a new working method and (...) to actually see the positive side of it and so on. That, I believe is an extremely important qualification. Everyone doesn't have it, which you have to deal with. Some question it a bit more like; 'Is this a good working method?' and then you have to motivate these people."*
>
> Middle manager, Blutex

We would argue that the sensemaking process generally is facilitated by an open communication climate. This is also a precondition for a healthy centralized decision-making since an open communication climate provides the decision-makers with sufficient basis of information.

An important part of the communication climate is how organizational members give sense. As we have seen, most salespeople and middle managers did not give sense simply because they chose to interpret 'Solution Selling' through an already existing frame; 'business as usual', 'relationship management', or 'CRM'. From a holistic perspective, we would argue that lack of sensegiving is also a result of the dominating rationalistic view on communication as a 'vehicle for information' within Blutex as it does not encourage sensegiving. To push down information top-down and then ask the organizational members; 'have everyone understood?' creates consensus and reinforces the diversity of interpretations. Affirmative answers may be honest, but we believe that the organizational members' perceptions are built upon an insufficient sensemaking process. Hence, it is the lack of sensemaking that facilitates the purpose of being strategically ambiguous; to create consensus and reinforce the diversity of interpretations.

We believe that this serves as a complementary explanation to Beer's et al. (1990) conclusions on why top-down change processes led by corporate groups such as human resources is "too risky as a deliberate strategy" (1990:159). As mentioned in our theoretical background, the most successful top managers from the study done by Beer et al. (1990) were those who limited their own power and created a climate for change, rather than insisting on specific solutions, and thus creating a trade-off between allowing uncertainty and creating resistance. We would also argue that this is aligned with the statement of Balogun and Johnson (2005). The authors state that managers should encourage employees to make and give sense in their presence, and thereby control the contexts of sensemaking rather than trying to control the sensemaking process itself.

5.3. Summary

Due to the top management's ambiguity and the view on communication as a 'vehicle for information', the cues regarding 'Solution Selling' have been interpreted differently by many inside the organization. All interviewees were positive to the change program and we argue that the reason why no one has opposed the 'Solution Selling' program perceptively is because there has been no collective frame. When there is no collective frame and the cues are ambiguous the individuals are forced to make sense from their own set of frames whereby they make their own separate interpretations. These interpretations are based on several individual factors such as identity, expectations, emotions and pressure (Mailloux, 1990). And as seen in this chapter, the result of this is that people see what they want to see and interpret the program as something they know how to relate to by connecting the new vague cues to pre-existing frames.

Salespeople interpret 'Solution Selling' as something they already do, whereby no one takes the view that they personally need to change any particular actions and thus behavior. The middle managers however are in another situation and cannot simply come to the conclusion that "this is something we already do". They are under pressure to make sense of this change process 'correctly' as the top management expects them to help drive the change as change agents. The middle managers must be able to mediate the change process to their subordinates and do this by concretizing what the change entails for the salespeople. This suggests that it is important for the middle managers to find a way of describing the practical changes for their subordinates and to be able to answer questions. We further highlight that middle managers would want to implement change in a way so that the results are visible for top management and in the best case even measurable.

This is striking for Blutex, as the focus on measurable results and that the evaluation of every thing's importance and relevance is done from the perspective of 'how does this benefit to the revenue of Blutex'. The revenue issue is highly influential in Blutex as it (a) filters what feedback is brought to the attention of the top management, thereby undermining the internal communication, and (b) counteracts the change process as there are no incentives to change when the salespeople 'can do whatever they want as long as they deliver'. We argue that this is another consequence of the top management's strategic ambiguity. However in our analysis we have noticed that Blutex was being strategically ambiguous in order to reach consensus within the top management and not to preserve individuals' different social realities, which raises the question whether it has been chosen as a strategy or not. If it has not been chosen actively it is fair to question whether the ambiguity really is 'strategic'. In the next chapter, we will discuss our findings presented in this chapter and come to conclusions by analyzing our findings from a more holistic perspective in order to answer our initial research questions.

6. Conclusions

In this chapter we will view our theoretical framework and analysis from a holistic perspective in order to increase the understanding how the organizational members' sensemaking affects Blutex's change process. We will first discuss the top management's problematization, the causes and consequences of our results, and thereafter present our conclusions by answering our initial research questions. The chapter is summed up with an academic reflection where we provide new reference points of the thesis' conclusions.

6.1. Discussion

We would like to start this concluding discussion by reflecting upon the top management's problematization. As stated in section 4.1.3. the top management perceived resistance in terms of salespeople not changing their behavior according to the concept of 'Solution Selling'. We have in our analysis seen how the process of making sense of 'Solution Selling' among the salesforce has affected their unchanged behavior. Salespeople simply interpreted 'Solution Selling' as a selling method which they already had adopted and been working according to for several years. Needless to say, when every salesperson believed that they, as individuals did not need to change, little or no change of behavior occurred, despite the positive consensus regarding the concept of 'Solution Selling'. This in turn created a mutual skepticism between the hierarchical levels, where the top management on the one hand perceived resistance to change, whereas the salespeople on the other hand perceived a lack of participation, transparency and internal communication. We believe that this skepticism derives from the top management's ambiguous communication.

According to our analysis, Blutex often viewed communication only as a 'vehicle for information' rather than a socially constructed process. We see the ambiguous communication as a method of creating consensus among the organizational members, what we refer to as 'strategic ambiguity'. However, we became confused once we distinguished the strategic ambiguity, due to Blutex's conflicting purpose of being strategically ambiguous.

As stated in section 5.1.4. the conventional purpose of being strategically ambiguous is, according to Eisenberg (1984) to allow flexibility and creativity on an individual level within a common organizational change process and at the same time to create consensus. Focus is to "guard against the acceptance of one standard way of viewing organizational reality" (1984:236). Blutex for instance created a positive consensus towards 'Solution Selling' and at the same time diverse interpretations of the concept. However, top managers seemed frustrated over, what they perceived as 'misinterpretations' of 'Solution Selling' and the lack of changed behavior among the salesforce. This, together with other similar empirical findings, such as the rationalistic view on communication, and a low level of transparency and influence, indicate a rather low tolerance among managers towards allowing and encouraging creativity, flexibility and different social realities. So why would top managers be strategically ambiguous at Blutex if a diversity of interpretations is unwanted?

We concluded in our analysis that top managers seem to fall back on traditional cultural values when the benefits of the new organizational culture and identity cannot be articulated. During our interviews and the time spent at Blutex, we have noticed insecurity among top managers over what to keep in the 'old' culture and identity, and what to change for the future. This insecurity manifested itself through communicating equivocal and contradictory messages and by doing so also transferring the responsibility to middle managers of how to give sense to the vague vision and translate it into practice. From this perspective, the top management's reasons for being ambiguous is similar to how Weick and Browning (1986) view vagueness within strategic ambiguity:

> *"Vagueness is a source of power, a form of slack, and a means of building consensus"*
>
> Weick and Browning, 1986:254

However, whether the transfer of responsibility actually was an intentional strategy in order to maintain the centralized power or an unintentional effect of the insecurity is difficult to tell from our empirical material, and will thus remain unanswered.

We believe that another important reason for why top managers are insecure of what should be changed is that none of our interviewees felt that the change was initiated voluntarily by Blutex. Rather, the organizational members' perception is that Blutex was forced to change due to changes in the market. If the change would have come from inside Blutex in a proactive rather than a reactive manner, we believe that it would have been easier to be more self-critical towards the culture and identity, and thus easier to decide what to change and what to keep.

In order to sum up this discussion, we would like to connect this discussion to the trade-off mentioned in chapter 5. As we have seen, a consequence of being strategically ambiguous is the creation of diverse interpretations, which in the case of Blutex was viewed as 'misinterpretations'. The creations of these 'misinterpretations' becomes in this sense an unwanted effect of being vague which takes us back to the trade-off between allowing uncertainty (thus allowing diversity of interpretations) and creating resistance (thus counteracting consensus). Our conclusion is that Blutex have been strategically ambiguous in order to reach consensus among the organizational members, but have not found a way of managing the diversity of interpretations. As stated in our theoretical framework, Beer et al. (1990) concluded that senior managers often understand the necessity for change, but "misunderstand what it takes to bring it about" (1990:158).

6.2. Conclusions

We will now return to our initial research questions to see how these have been answered in the thesis.

> *"1. What does the sensemaking process look like on an individual level from the perspective of cues and frames and how does it explain organizational members' perceptions and behavior in a change process?"*

In chapter 3 we presented a visualization of how we see the sensemaking process on a detailed level in the terms of cues and frames. This framework was used in chapter 5 where we used our framework to get an understanding of what the sensemaking has looked like in the change process of Blutex. According to our analysis the individual's sensemaking process is highly influential in change processes because when collective frames are missing the individual is left to make sense of what is going on based on his/her pre-existing individual frames (i.e. previous experiences). This may result in a wide variety of interpretations of the same organizational event, which in turn leads to diverse behavior from the employees. To sum up, we have seen how the concept of cues and frames is undertheorized in sensemaking but have the potential to further increase the understanding of change processes. For instance, we showed in our case study how organizational members actively avoided making sense by avoiding giving sense and perhaps even disregarding cues that did not fit with the pre-existing frames; this in order to preserve their social reality.

> *"2. How is it that organizational members can have diverse interpretations of a change process and at the same time (a) have consensus of the change as being something positive and (b) be sure that their individual interpretation of the change is 'correct'?"*

Having different perceptions of something but still agreeing on it would seem to be a paradox. This is however possible if what the parties agree on is so loosely defined that it fits all parites' perceptions. In turn, they are able to preserve their different social realities and all feel that their specific reality is 'true'. This is the idea of 'strategic ambiguity'. In Blutex the top management was strategically ambiguous in order to create consensus in the initiated change process. However, we identified that this was perhaps not an active choice from the top managers, but instead a way to manage the insecurity within the top management group concerning the new organizational culture and identity that external changes in the market has imposed on the company.

Blutex is a hierarchical top-down organization where communication has traditionally been viewed as a 'vehicle for information' and changes have been implemented top-down in a fairly enclosed communication climate. Top managers have stated that there is a strong need for consensus within the top management group before making any decisions. Once the decision has been made, the change is communicated under a guise of consensus through vague formulations which in the case of 'Solution Selling' has resulted in a low level of resistance towards the message itself, but a diversity of interpretations of what the message is all about.

What has been ignored (and unaddressed) in the top management is that the conventional purpose of strategic ambiguity is not only to create consensus but to also avoid for organizational members to create one common organizational reality. This creates a clash with Blutex's purpose as the ideal for its management style would be that everyone had the same organizational reality. Now, organizational members have created their own interpretations (in line with the 'conventional' purpose of strategic ambiguity) which in this sense is viewed as an unwanted consequence by the top management. Top managers do not want to surrender the power to make strategic judgments to subordinates. However, they have transferred the responsibility to turn the vision into practice to middle managers - a vision which the middle managers have not participated in formulating.

6.3. Concluding Remarks

In the next three sections, we will reflect upon our thesis in general and our conclusions in particular, from an academic perspective. The purpose of academic reflexivity is according to Alvesson et al. (2008:497); "to encourage insights about the nature of social science" by providing new reference points of the thesis' conclusions and contributions to academia. As a continuation to this, we will also suggest how our thesis might underpin future research within the field of organizational sensemaking.

6.3.1. Academic Reflexivity

We have in our analysis, according to the reflexivity framework conducted by Alvesson et al. (2008) tried to both deconstruct and reconstruct our findings in order to "question the chosen elements of the logic of the research project and its outcomes" (2008:494) and to "open up new avenues, paths, and lines of interpretation to produce 'better' research ethically, politically, empirically, and theoretically" (2008:495). In other words, we have questioned our orthodox understandings and assumptions through deconstruction, and at the same time tried to create and introduce new assumptions through reconstruction. Our purpose of this thesis has been to provide new understandings of socially constructed realities through a philosophical sophistication of our empirical material and analysis. In this sense, we share Alvesson and Sköldberg's (2007) view on philosophical sophistication as not being the principal task of social research, yet essential in order to ensure the quality of the actual research. We also share Alvesson's (2002) standpoint that social researchers can, and should contribute to people's liberation from unnecessarily restrictive traditions, assumptions and power relations.

Our conclusions are therefore a result of creative analysis of our empirical findings and philosophical reflexivity. In other words, we have questioned both established 'truths' at Blutex and existing theory within social research. In the case of Blutex, we have critically analyzed the mutual skepticism and the sensemaking process between the hierarchical levels. As for the existing theory, we have developed an initial framework for what we see as the core of sensemaking; how cues and frames are connected. However, we do realize that our main purpose of the explanatory model in chapter 3 is not to contribute to the theory of sensemaking, but to simply give sense to the way we have analyzed the empirical material. In this sense, the model serves as more persuasive than academically guiding. Our hope is nevertheless that our framework will underpin future research by enhancing Weick's sensemaking theory.

Before moving on to the next section, we would like to reflect upon our method. In our inductive approach, we gathered a wide variety of empirical material with many different interesting angles, which turned out to be quite demanding creatively and analytically. However, the most difficult problem to handle for us, was David Hume's famous philosophical problem of induction; that the search for other disparate examples could go on forever, as the next finding may shed new light on the research. We have chosen to deal with this problem according to Sjöberg and Västerfors' (2008) recommendations, namely to be humble to our interpretations of the limited empirical data, and by encouraging the continuation and improvement of our interpretations as well as our theoretical framework. In the next section, we will provide our thoughts on possible continuations and improvements for future research.

6.3.2. Contributions to Academia and Future Research

In this thesis, we have explored cues, frames, and the mutual relation between them by using sensemaking as the primary body of theory for analysis. We have tried to enhance the sensemaking theory, which according to Helms Mills et al. (2010) is not yet widely recognized as a method of analysis. We developed a framework in order to illustrate how we see the sensemaking process from this perspective, and by doing so also provide empirical material and analysis to an undertheorized gap in the organizational sensemaking literature. Interestingly enough, we found new undertheorized gaps within this perspective, for instance the phenomenon which we refer to as 'cementing'. We believe that the process of cementing a connection is essential when interpreting the perspective of cues and frames. More empirical research is needed in how social aspects as 'prestige' and 'pride' affect the willingness and capability to break an existing connection and instead make a new one, thus reinterpreting one's social reality. For instance, what affects the judgment of disregarding relevant cues due to already cemented connections? We have not been able to find any literature or research within organizational sensemaking regarding this matter and we encourage more research within this field of sensemaking.

Furthermore, we have provided additional empirical material regarding how strategic ambiguity affects a top-down change process. We have for instance showed how the perspective of cues and frames can increase the understanding of why organizational members are reluctant to reinterpret their social realities. Our hope is also that the thesis has sophisticated the aspects of being strategically ambiguous through our empirical material and analysis, and by doing so increase the understanding of organizational change processes from another angle.

To sum up, we would like to reflect upon our empirical findings regarding strategic ambiguity. In 2006, Eisenberg reflected upon his work from 1984 by writing; "I paid little attention to other dynamics, such as how ambiguity can mask and sustain abuses of power. Looking back, I am also unsure about my relational definition of strategic ambiguity; it seemed to make sense at the time, but has proven difficult to study" (2006:3). We would argue that our analytical findings confirms Eisenberg's theory of how ambiguity contributes to consensus and diverse social realities, but also reinforce Eisenberg's problematization from 2006. As mentioned in our conclusions, we have not been able to conclude whether the purpose of Blutex's strategic ambiguity was in order to maintain the centralized power or not. In this sense, we share Eisenberg's conclusion that it is difficult to study strategic ambiguity when it come to these kinds of underlying motives. However, we encourage social researchers to continue to investigate this mystery as it is a complex phenomenon which if solved would contribute to the understanding of organizational change processes.

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