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**Work Engagement and Organizational Changes: Relationship
and Facilitating Factors**

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Abstract

Working life is continuously changing and there is a greater responsibility on the individual to be able to adapt to change. For employees to be able to take on this responsibility and to be high performers, organizations need their employees to have high work engagement. This study therefore investigated the relationship between work engagement, organizational change, and employees' perception of change; and factors that can facilitate work engagement. A convergent parallel mixed method was used which contained a survey and semi-structured interviews, and the participants was the white-collar workers ($n = 63$) within one organization that has and are going through episodic changes. The result showed no statistically significant relationship between perception of change scores and work engagement scores, however a connection was found in the thematic analysis of the interviews. The result from the survey and the interviews indicated that work engagement can be high in an organization that is characterized by change. The interviews moreover revealed that organizational changes can affect work engagement, and several factors that can facilitate work engagement were identified on an organizational- and job level.

Keywords: Work engagement; organizational change; perception of change; episodic change; mixed method approach.

Organizational changes are common in today's society (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008), as organizations need to improve their effectiveness and stay competitive due to factors such as globalization, new technologies, political changes, the economy (Cawsey, Deszca, & Ingols, 2012), and threats to environmental sustainability (Kieselbach & Triomphe, 2010). Considering the changing factors in society some organizations will have to struggle to remain in business, and may not be able to focus on the health impact of changes (ibid.). In this new working life there is greater responsibility on the individual to be able to continuously adapt to change (Allvin, Aronsson, Hagström, Johansson, & Lundberg, 2011), and employees play an important role in making organizational change happen (Cawsey et al. 2012). For employees to be able to take on this responsibility and to be high performers, they need to have high work engagement (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008), and high work engagement might be even more important when an organization and employees are facing challenges (George, 2010). Even though organizational changes occur frequently and work engagement is an important factor for organizations and individuals, there is still much to learn about the relationship between the two phenomena. This study consequently aims to investigate work engagement and the perception of change among employees in an organization that is going through changes, using a mixed methods approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena of interest.

Theoretical Background

The theoretical background will concern organizational change, where factors for success and employees' perception of change will be reviewed; work engagement, where the job demand-resources model (JD-R model), outcomes and interventions will be covered; and the connection between engagement and organizational change.

Organizational changes

Changes in organizations can be both continuous and episodic. The process of a continuous change is cyclical and without end. An episodic change is often triggered by external factors that disturb the equilibrium; involves planning; and has a focus on or short-term adaption (Weick & Quinn, 1999).

Factors for success. It is generally argued that to succeed an organization should; value the influence of a vision; create a sense of urgency; implement change within the organizational culture; have good leadership (Kotter, 2012; Yukl, 2013); assist employees with stress and difficulties that they might experience (Yukl, 2013); and structure a clear process (Kotter, 2012). Additional vital factors in change are participation, information (van Dam, Oreg, & Schyns, 2008), and clear communication (Johansson & Heide, 2008; Yukl, 2013). Through participation the acceptance of a change can increase (Sagie & Koslowski, 1996), such as the employees understand why the change is happening, and have a feeling of control and ownership of the process (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993).

Communication. Insufficient or an absence in communication can lead to increased resistance due to misunderstandings. Hence, information should handle the reasons for the change (Elving, 2005.); go through different communication-channels (Klein, 1996); preferably be face-to-face to reach a common understanding through dialogues and discussions (Weick, 1995); be continuous ((van Dam et al., 2008); be honest and open; and contain positive and negative aspects to alleviate concerns and negative reactions (Lewis, Schmisser, Stephens, & Wier, 2006). To make employees more ready towards change a communication plan can be developed (Torppa & Smith, 2011), which would clarify where the organization is today, the goal of the change, and how to bridge the gap in between (Armenakis, Harris, & Feild, 1999).

The role of the employees. The success of an organizational change is moreover depended on employees, and leaders often underestimate their role (Armenakis et al., 1993; George & Jones, 2001; Lau & Woodman, 1995). Employees need to take individual responsibility for change by adjusting their behaviour on the job with regard to the aim of the change (Meyer, Srinivas, Lal, & Topolnytsky, 2007; Weeks, Roberts, Chonko, & Jones, 2004); participating actively in changing organizational processes and work roles (Morrison & Phelps, 1999); and taking personal initiative (Crant, 2000). The management can increase the role of the employees by investigating their perception of (Weber & Manning, 2001), and attitude towards organizational changes (Choi, 2011). This should preferably be on several levels (Bouckenooghe, 2010) as individuals make sense of changes through interactions with change agents, the surroundings and co-workers (Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008).

Employees' perception of change. Essential factors for employees' perception of change in different contexts and organizations are planning, frequency and impact of change, and psychological uncertainty (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). This notion is built on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress and coping, which "views the person and the environment in a dynamic, mutually reciprocal, bidirectional relationship" (p. 293). Cognitive appraisal is moreover vital in the transactional model, and psychological uncertainty is therefore regarded as a vital part of employees' perception of change (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). Planned change is defined as an employee's perception that implementation of change has occurred after preparation and discussion by the management or department. It is more manageable for employees to predict change if it is thoroughly planned and communicated, and the feeling of novelty of the change can be reduced. Frequency of change concern the perception of how often change occurs in an organization (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). If employees perceive that change occurs often they are more likely to believe that change is unpredictable (Glick, Huber, Miller, Harold, & Sutcliffe, 1995). Impact of change is referred to as transformational change, and can be considered as how an individual experience that an organizational change has altered essential systems such as structures, values, ways of working and strategies (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). Psychological uncertainty is defined as a psychological state of doubt (DiFonzo, Bordia, & Rosnow, 1994) and it "is assumed to be an important mediator of human responses in situations with unknown outcomes" (Windschitl & Wells, 1996, p. 343). Several studies have indicated that psychological uncertainty can be the main cause of stress in organizational changes (Kieselbach & Triomphe, 2010; Nelson, Cooper, & Jackson, 1995).

Work engagement

Within research on work engagement there are two major theoretical perspectives. On the one hand work engagement is considered as the opposite of burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 2008), and on the other hand work engagement refers to strong identification with one's work and can be defined as "...a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá & Bakker, 2002, p. 74). In this study the latter theoretical perspective will be employed. Vigour represents an individual's eagerness to devote effort in his/her work; perseverance when facing obstacles; and mental resilience and levels of energy while working. Dedication is characterized by an individual's

involvement in his/her work and experience of inspiration, challenge, enthusiasm, significance, and pride. Absorption refers to when an individual is happily engrossed and completely focused in his/her work, whereby time flies and when it can be a challenge for the individual to detach him/herself from work (ibid.).

Maslach and Leiter (2008) argue that a focus merely on work engagement may not motivate individuals to alter their behavior as a negative challenge might be critical for action. Managers might moreover be positive towards highly engaged employees if they perform more than they are expected to and work overtime. These individuals consequently become valuable for the profit of the organization. That does not however presuppose that work engagement leads to employee happiness (ibid.). In an interview research study employed by Schaufeli et al. (2001, as cited in Hallberg, Johansson, & Schaufeli, 2007) the result showed that employees who had high work engagement were also likely to take on extra roles, which in turn could increase the likelihood for exhaustion and burnout, if resources were not sufficient. Pines (1993) confirm this notion and state that burnout can occur for employees who have high work engagement. Nonetheless, work engagement can be empirically distinguished from workaholism that is connected to feelings of unwell-being, instead of well-being that is connected to work engagement (Shimazu & Schaufeli, 2009).

The Job Demand-Resources model. The JD-R model is a widely-used theoretical framework for studying work engagement, developed by Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, and Schaufeli (2001). In the model, job demands are conditions in a job that necessitates effort and involve psychological and physiological costs for the individual. Job resources are organizational, social, physical or psychological conditions in a job that can reduce job demands (Demerouti et al., 2001), and facilitate work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008).

The JD-R model presupposes that job demands and resources can trigger a motivational and an energetic process. In the motivational process job resources enable motivation, and benefit organizational commitment and work engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004a). In this process, work engagement is an intervening effect between job resources and organizational outcomes (Korunka, Kubiceka, Schaufeli, & Hoonakker, 2009). In the energetic process job demands can decrease an individual's physical and psychological resources and can result in unwell-being and burnout (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004a).

Outcomes. Several studies have found a direct relationship between work engagement and performance (e.g. Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Kim, Kolb and Kim, 2013; Salanova, Agut, & Peiró, 2005), and work engagement can, through performance, affect financial returns (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009). Employees who have high work engagement perform better, since they can create their own personal resources, experience positive emotions and high feelings of health (Bakker, 2009). Further studies have shown that work engagement is contagious (Bakker, 2009) and found a relationship between work engagement and low employee retention (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004a), high organizational citizenship behaviour (Bakker, Demerouti, & Verbeke, 2004), and personal characteristics (Kim, Hyun Shin, & Swanger, 2009; Langelaan, Bakker, van Doornen, & Schaufeli, 2006).

Interventions. Work engagement is considered important for an organization to encourage (Salanova et al., 2005). There are however few tested interventions that facilitate work engagement in an organization (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011). Interventions should aim at individual-, job- and organizational level and it is important for the management group to value and recognize work engagement as a central part of the organization (Bakker, Albrecht, Leiter, 2011). Work engagement can be increased through strategies for HRM (Human Resources Management) concerning leadership, development, job (re)design, assessments and evaluations (Schaufeli & Salanova, 2008), and it should be founded in a commitment towards a common vision, interest and purpose (Bakker et al., 2011). The development of interventions for work engagement should include the participation of employees (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2008), and social support, autonomy, and feedback (Bakker et al., 2011).

Engagement and organizational change

Previous research using the definition on work engagement employed in this study has not focused on work engagement in relationship to organizational change. Nonetheless, other studies have investigated the connection between different definitions of employee engagement and changes, mergers, and acquisitions. Previous studies have shown that employee engagement can be high in organizational changes (Gibson, 2011; Wu, 2013), and in mergers (Bhola, 2010); and that employee engagement can be affected by an organization's climate and culture (Kular, Gatenby, Rees, Soane, & Truss, 2008). In addition, Bhola (2010) found no significant

relationship between employee engagement and experience of change. Employee engagement was however affected in mergers by the development and communication of a vision, and the creation of a sense of urgency. Gibson (2011) have identified some important factors for employee engagement such as a joint effort from everyone in the organization during changes, a feeling of being valuable to the organization, and a commitment to provide good service.

Aim of the Study

Past studies on work engagement have typically focused on the concept in itself, outcomes, and interventions. Previous research has additionally focused on the relationship between employee engagement and organizational change. However, little is known about work engagement, as defined in this paper, in relation to organizational changes and in combination with employees' perception of change. Consequently, knowledge is scarce about what factors can facilitate work engagement in an organization that is going through change. The purpose of this paper is therefore to investigate the relationship between work engagement and organizational change.

Several studies of work engagement have used a quantitative approach, which can produce hard and reliable data, and few studies have used a qualitative approach, which can produce rich and deep data with focus on meaning (Bryman, 2012). To explore this new area of work engagement and organizational change a mixed methods approach will be conducted to gain a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the phenomena of interest. The quantitative approach will enable statistical comparisons between work engagement and perception of change in different groups, and be a foundation for screening participants to interviews. The qualitative approach will enable an investigation of the phenomena more thoroughly in interviews. As a result, this research can contribute to a better understanding of work engagement, the meaning that employees in one organization put into the phenomenon, and what factors that facilitate work engagement in organizational changes.

Against the background outlined above, the aim of the present study is to investigate how work engagement is related to organizational change and which factors facilitate work engagement according to the employees in one organization. In addition, the following sub-questions will be answered; (a) how do the employees perceive work engagement? and (b) is there a statistical association between perception of change scores and work engagement scores?

Method

Study Design

A convergent parallel mixed method (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2014) was used to be able to answer the research question and to get a more comprehensive description of work engagement in relation to organizational change. In this study, data were collected within the same timeframe. However, data from a survey was collected first, followed by data from interviews. The data were then analysed separately but presented together and the results were compared, related, and interpreted as integrated parts. To enable a better comparison data for the quantitative and qualitative approaches were based on the same sample and the participants for the interview were selected based on the survey result. In addition, the interviews could provide an understanding of the context and reveal the participants' views and feelings, while the survey could explore statistical associations among variables.

It may be noted that this study is founded on the assumptions of pragmatism (Creswell, 2014; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Yardley & Bishop 2008), as quantitative and qualitative approaches were incorporated and the different kinds of data provided richer and more comprehensive results. In pragmatism one or multiple realities are acknowledged and the epistemological viewpoint is that of practicality. Additionally, as in line with pragmatism, this research is oriented towards practices in the real world, problem-centered and pluralistic. Pragmatism, according to Yardley and Bishop (2008), specify "that all human inquiry involves imagination and interpretation, intentions and values but must also necessarily be grounded in empirical, embodied experience" (p. 8).

Situational Setting

This study was conducted at a large international concern, and more specifically at one of their production sites in southern Sweden. The concern is the leading concern in their area in Europe and has approximately 7'000 employees, where 180 employees work in Sweden at the production site, except for some employees that are working within sales and have their main office in Stockholm. The production plant in Sweden is one of 18 plants around the world. At the

organization there are 76 blue-collar workers who work with production, and 104 white-collar workers. Among the white-collar workers 45 are working within operations, and 59 within sales. In operations employees perform work tasks that are related to the production, ranging from administration to development of products. In sales employees perform work tasks that are related to sales, such as customer service, and selling the products. Focus of this study was on all white-collar workers within the organization.

To clarify the organization's history and present situation, a meeting with a representative from the HR department was held. The meeting disclosed that there have been five larger organizational changes the last five years that have included downsizing and has mostly affected employees working in operations. In these changes both the management team at the site in Sweden and the global management team for the concern has been involved in planning. The latest large organizational change in operations in 2013 was due to drastic decrease in incoming orders which resulted in downsizing and a change of the organizational structure. The company has not yet completely recovered even if there are more orders coming in. The information about this change was communicated early in the year but negotiations dragged on and the downsizing was not clarified until after the summer, which resulted in that several white-collar workers in operations had to leave the company. The outcome of the downsizing was that it became difficult to handle peaks which resulted in that the organization hired the old personnel again on temporary contracts, especially blue-collar workers and white-collar workers in the Research and Development department.

This spring, 2014, there is an organizational change affecting the sales division. A new CEO at the concern was recently recruited, who wants to merge two companies that are already working together. The aim is to get synergy effects between companies and countries, to reduce costs and to be more effective. This change is carried out by directives from the concern and affects sales for all companies and countries within the concern. It is notable that this is the first large organizational change in the latest years that have affected the sales division in Sweden. All employees who would be affected were gathered in February to receive information about the change that would be implemented in May. This study was conducted in between.

Participants in the Survey

All white-collar workers ($n = 104$) within the organization were considered the population. At first 87 individuals received the survey via e-mail and 53 chose to participate. Due to missed e-mail addresses additionally 17 individuals received the survey in a second round and 10 chose to participate. In total 61 % of the population ($n = 63$) participated in the study. See Table 1 and 2 for the characteristics of the participants.

Procedure for the Survey

All white-collar workers received a survey via e-mail since they all had access to their own computer, it was easy to administer (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister, & Zechmeister, 2012; Spector, 2001), and it was convenient for the participants to fill in (Mesch, 2012). The e-mail contained information, in line with Bourque and Fielder (2003), and Oldendick (2012), about the study and me; what it meant to participate (answer a survey and maybe be contacted for interviews); that it was voluntary; how long it would take to complete the questionnaire; that the answers would be handled with confidentiality by my supervisor and me; that the results would be reported group-wise so that individual responses could not be identified; and that an aggregation would be sent out to everyone when the study was completed. The individuals got the choice to click on a link to get to the questionnaire. In the beginning of the survey there was additional information which explained that the participants could terminate their participation whenever they wanted to; that their answers were an important contribution; that there were no right and wrong answers; and by starting the survey they confirmed this information and wished to participate in the study. Additionally, to increase response rate (Manzo & Burke, 2012), every e-mail was addressed specifically to every individual and started with "Hi [name]", and one reminder was sent out to those who had not participated.

Measures

Work engagement

Work engagement was assessed using the Swedish version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale with 9 items (UWES-9), developed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004b). The scale measures three aspects; (a) vigour (e.g. “At my work, I feel bursting with energy”), (b) dedication (e.g. “I am enthusiastic about my job”) and (c) absorption (e.g. “I feel happy when I am working intensely”), on a scale from 0 (never) to 6 (always). The UWES-9 was analysed as a one-dimensional scale as the focus in this study was on work engagement as a concept (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004b). Hallberg and Schaufeli (2006) have demonstrated the reliability and factorial validity of the Swedish version and they found good internal consistency for the one-dimensional approach, as Cronbach’s α was .93. In this study Cronbach’s α was .91, and a sum of the scores was used, with a range from 0 to 54, where a high score indicated high work engagement.

Supplementary questions. Three open-ended questions were used to assess the participants’ view on work engagement. These included “give up to three examples on (a) circumstances that you consider affect your work engagement; (b) what you consider that the organization could do to increase your work engagement; and (c) what you consider that you could do to increase your work engagement”.

Perception of change

Perception of change was measured with a 13-item scale, developed by Rafferty and Griffin (2006), which assessed four aspects of change. (a) Planned change (e.g. “to what degree have change involved prior preparation and planning by your manager or unit?”), and (b) transformational change (e.g. “to what degree have you experienced that changes has affected the values of your work unit?”) were responded to on a Likert scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (a great deal). (c) Frequency of change (e.g. “change frequently occurs in my unit”), and (d) psychological uncertainty (e.g. “I am often uncertain about how to respond to change”) were responded to on a Likert scale from 1 (disagree) to 7 (agree). The perception of change scale has previously been found to be reliable for assessing characteristics of change that influenced employees’ attitudes in an Australian public sector organization (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). In

this study, the 13 items were translated into Swedish and measured separately with a Cronbach's α for planned change = .87, transformational change = .84, frequency of change = .68, and psychological uncertainty = .82. Additionally, a sum of the scores was used, with a range from 3 to 21, on planned, transformational, and frequency of change which contained 3 items each. High scores indicated that changes had been planned, altered values and structures, and occurred and occurs frequently. Psychological uncertainty contained 4 items and had a range from 3 to 28, where high scores indicated a high feeling of uncertainty.

Demographic variables

To collect background information about the participants a number of single-items questions were posed. These were sex; age; which department the participants belonged to (sales or operation); type of employment (permanent, temporary or other); years within the organization (in integer, more than 6 months = 1); working hours per week; self-rated health; work ability; and general life satisfaction. Self-rated health was measured with one item from the SF-36 (Fayers & Sprangers, 2002) which were translated into Swedish, ("In general, would you say your health is...") with ratings from 1 (excellent) to 5 (poor). Work ability was measured with three items from a Swedish version of the Work Ability Index (Ilmarinen, 2007). These were "is your work; psychologically demanding; physically demanding; or physically and psychologically demanding?", "How do you rate your current work ability with respect to (a) the physical demands of your work; and (b) the mental demands of your work?". The two last questions were responded to on a Likert scale from 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good). General life satisfaction was measured with two items from a test developed by Grawitch, Maloney, Barber, and Mooshegian (2013), which were translated into Swedish. The items "I am satisfied with my (a) non-work life, and (b) work life", were responded to on a Likert scale from 1 (disagree) to 7 (agree).

Participants in the Interviews

The survey was used as a screening tool to enable purposive sampling of participants to interviews (Bryman, 2012; Teddlie & Yu, 2007). To be able to identify the individuals from the survey every individual received a personal code that they entered in the questionnaire. The codes were used so that the surveys would be anonymous for everyone except my supervisor and me.

The individuals in the second round of the survey were not a part of the screening for interviews. Hence, 53 employees were included in the screening. Distinct inclusion criteria were developed to be in the interview sample (Bryman, 2012), which were that the participants should; (a) have a mean score of 4.0 or higher on the UWES-9 (i.e. the participants reported that they experienced work engagement at least once a week); (b) have worked at least half a year within the organization; and (c) have a permanent employment.

The group that met the inclusion criteria consisted of 42 individuals, and 11 individuals were randomly selected to participate in the interviews. The randomization was done in Microsoft Excel using the randomization commando (RAND) which placed a randomized number next to every participant. The rows were then sorted after the randomized numbers which created a randomized order of the participants. Nine individuals chose to participate and two did not answer. Since the first two interviews turned out to be rather short more participants were drawn. Consequently, six more individuals were randomly chosen from the group that met the inclusion criteria in two different rounds. Three individuals wanted to participate, two declined and one did not answer. In total 17 individuals were invited and 12 agreed to participate. See Table 1 and 2 for the characteristics of the participants.

Table 1. *Background characteristics for participants in the survey and the interviews*

	Surveys, <i>n</i> = 63				Interviews, <i>n</i> = 12			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
Age (in years)	46.54	7.75	28	63	44.75	9.62	28	61
Working hours/week	44.71	8.36	20	70	43.75	7.26	34	60
Years in the organization	11.81	11.56	0 ^a	38	8.08	9.80	1	32
Health	4.17	.93	1	5	4.50	.52	4	5
Work ability	8.75	1.41	6	10	9.36	1.01	7	10
Life satisfaction	10.90	1.95	5	14	12	1.54	9	14

Note. The range of scores for; health is 1-5; work ability is 2-10; and life satisfaction is 2-14.

^a 0 = less than 6 months.

Table 2. *Background characteristics for participants in the survey and the interviews*

	<i>n</i>	Sex		Department		Employment	
		Female	Male	Sales	Operations	Permanent	Other
Participants survey	63	24	39	34	29	61	2
Participants interviews	12	3	9	6	6	9	0

To check for regression towards the mean, the interview participants were asked to fill in the UWES-9 once more after the interviews had been held. Nine participants answered and their results were for the first assessment ($M = 5.38$, $SD = .54$), and second assessment ($M = 5.27$, $SD = .49$). Thus, there was only a very slight regression towards the mean, which suggests that the interview participants still fulfilled the inclusion criteria.

Procedure for the Interviews

The randomly selected participants were asked if they wanted to take part in an interview about work engagement and organizational change. The aim of the interview was stated so that the participants would be able to prepare themselves and consider the topics beforehand.

Interview guide

Semi-structured interviews were held and an interview guide was developed to enable flexibility, allow for follow-up questions, and allow for the participants' answers and perceptions to guide the interview (Bryman, 2012; Gillham, 2008). The guide consisted of three main themes to be covered in the interview; general work engagement, positive factors, and work engagement in connection to organizational changes. Background, main questions and follow-up questions were included to ensure consistency in every interview (Gillham, 2008). Five main questions were asked to all participants in Swedish, here translated into English; (a) what does work engagement mean to you?; (b) what does it mean for you to be engaged in your work at [name of the organization] today?; (c) what would you consider affect your work engagement positively?; (d) do you experience that your work engagement is affected by organizational changes? If yes, in what way?; and (e) is there something that you would like to add?

Information and setting

Before an interview the participant received information about the study and me; that the interviews would be handled with confidentiality by my supervisor and me; and the participants were asked for their consent about recording the interview. Ten of the interviews were held at the work site and due to practical reasons, two over telephone. At the work site the interviews were held either in the participants' personal offices or in a meeting room. The length of the interviews varied from 20 to 40 minutes.

Transcriptions

A recording machine was used to enable me to be more attentive during the interviews to the participants' answers and body-language, and to be able to transcribe the interviews for complete analysis (Bryman, 2012). All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and for others to be able to follow the transcriptions clear indicators were made for who said what, when there was material that was not transcribed due to that it could not be heard, and when there was a pause or other sound such as coughing (Gillham, 2008). A more detailed description of the steps in the transcriptions has been kept to make it easier for others to follow.

The participants got the option to read their transcripts to check that they were a correct representation of the interview (Bryman, 2012). Hence, the transcriptions were translated in a way so that the participants would understand it and not be concerned of the way in which they talked (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Nine participants chose to read their transcripts. Seven participants responded that they confirmed with the content and had no comments. However, one participant wanted to add one aspect that he/she felt was not clear enough.

Analysis

Statistical analysis

All statistical analyses were carried out in IBM SPSS 21. Preliminary analyses were performed to check for assumption of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. A Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated a violation of the assumption of normality for the work engagement scale (kurtosis = 2.114, skewness = 1.376), and the frequency of change scale (kurtosis = -.249, skewness = -.792). Therefore, the statistical analyses were carried out with non-parametric tests. P-values below .05

were regarded as statistically significant. Spearman's Rho was used to investigate correlations between work engagement and perception of change. A Mann-Whitney U Test was used to investigate whether there were statistical differences between the distribution of scores for work engagement and perception of change for employees in different departments. The effect size was calculated as $r = z / \text{square root of } N$, where N is total number of participants (Pallant, 2010).

Content analysis

The open-ended questions in the survey were analysed through content analysis, which means that the factors mentioned by the participants were categorized and counted to be able to determine the frequency of each factor (Marks & Yardley, 2004). However, the frequencies were not used in a statistical analysis, just in a categorisation to be able to investigate which categories were mentioned most frequently.

Thematic analysis

The transcribed interviews were examined with thematic analysis as it is a flexible coding instrument and because it can unravel complex, thorough and rich data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Phase 1 included familiarizing with the data, and the first time the transcripts were read, notes were taken on initial ideas that emerged (Willig, 2013). A short description was made of each transcription to capture the essence of every interview and to be able to compare participants' answers (Flick, 2009). In phase 2 codes were generated by reading the transcripts several times and highlighting different words and phrasings. Meanings could then be identified and codes were written based on the meaning in the interview (Willig, 2013). Phase 3 included a search for patterns within the codes to be able to combine them in themes. The criteria for developing a theme were that it should be relevant for the research question. Phase 4 included a revision of the themes to make sure that the themes had been identified consistently, and to investigate if some of them could be put together or removed. This phase meant to continually re-read the transcripts and the codes to make sure that the themes reflected the meaning in the interviews as a whole. Two overall themes were developed; (1) employees' perception of work engagement and change, and (2) facilitating factors for work engagement in organizational changes on an (a) organizational-, and (b) job level. See Table 3, for an example of how the themes were developed (the original excerpts in Swedish are found in Table 1A in the Appendix).

Table 3. *An example of the thematic analysis of transcribed data from the interviews*

<i>Interview excerpt</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>Subtheme</i>	<i>Theme</i>
"Even if one maybe not have any new information but... continuous information and it is enough with maybe two sentences... it's enough only there is coming something. Eh and that minimizes all the questions that people get and own speculations and thoughts and corridor-talk."	Important with information and continuous information, it can decrease questions and rumors.	Communication and information	Organizational level
"Here are many who are dedicated in what they do... and that affects a lot, positively of course... Then there are others who don't have the same dedication and then we might choose not to be so affected by that, so I think it is very much about, then what you choose also. Mm how you take on different things"	Many has high work engagement, is affected positively or negatively by others depending on their attitude, can choose what to be affected by	Co-workers Personal attitude	Employees' perception of work engagement and change

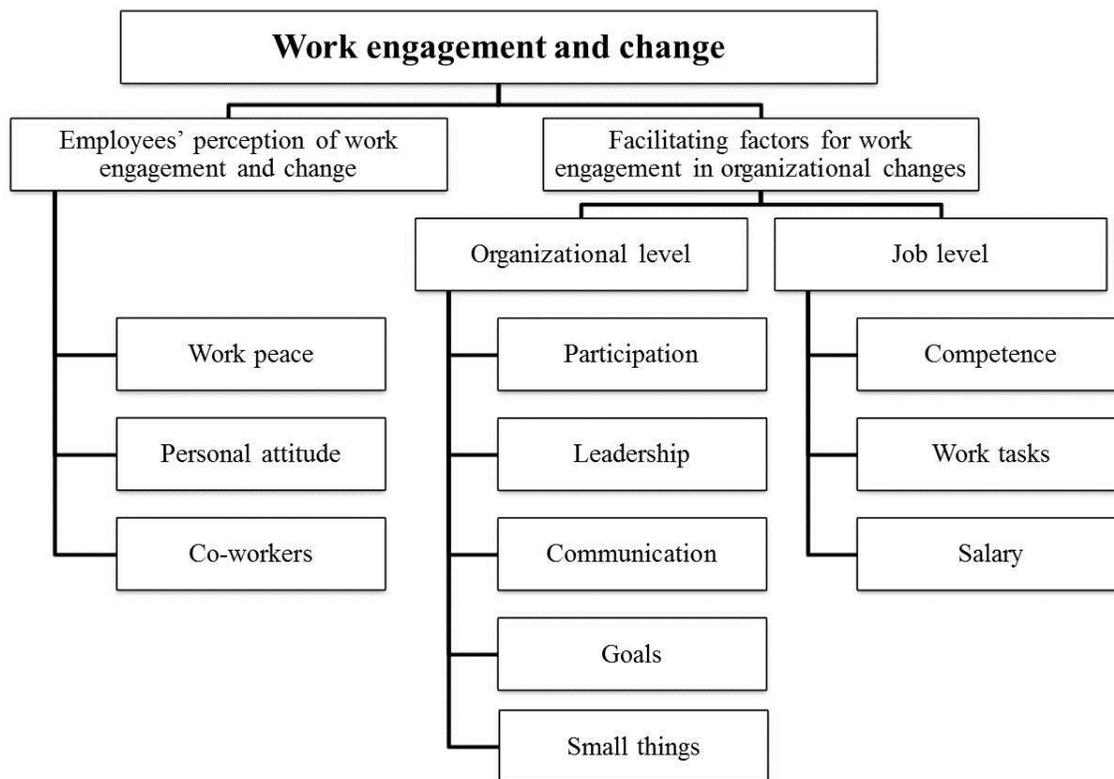
Ethical Considerations

To comply with ethical considerations (e.g. Creswell, 2014; Gillham, 2008; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) the following aspects were acknowledged in this study. Confidentiality was kept as the participants were anonymous for everyone except my supervisor and me. The material was handled with care, the transcriptions were not named, and words that could identify the participants in the transcripts were re-coded. The aim was that it should be impossible for individuals within the organization to be able to identify the participants. Informed consent was asked from every participant and they got information about the study and me before they filled in the questionnaire and before the interview. The study was furthermore considered not to have any possible harm for the participants. In addition, permission from the organization and the participants were obtained; the interviews were held at the convenience of the participants; all participants got as equal treatment as possible with regard to that two interviews were held over telephone; and records of all phases of the research were kept.

Results

Two overall themes were developed which were (1) employees' perception of work engagement and change; and (2) facilitating factors for work engagement in organizational changes on an (a) organizational-, and (b) job level. An overview of the themes can be found in Figure 2. Theme 1 will be presented first, where interview excerpts that strengthen the result are found in Table 2A in the Appendix, followed by results from the statistical analysis. Theme 2 will then be presented, where interview excerpts are found in Table 3A in the Appendix.

Figure 2. Overview of the themes and sub-themes that were identified in the interviews



The factors mentioned by the participants in the supplementary questions that were most reoccurring, i.e. mentioned at least five times by different participants, were grouped together in themes. A comparison between the thematic analysis of the interviews and the content analysis of the supplementary questions revealed similar themes in connection to work engagement and organizational change. The result from the content analysis and the thematic analysis will therefore be presented together in the following section and be referred to as results from the

interviews. Additionally, the themes that were identified in the content analysis and the thematic analysis have not been given any numerical values and have not been analyzed statistically. The themes have only been analyzed qualitatively.

Employees' Perception of Work Engagement and Change

Employees' perception of work engagement

The most occurring interpretations of work engagement in the interviews were; being passionate, dedicated to and caring for what one does; a drive; trustworthiness; to says one's opinion; a giving and taking between the employees and the organization; to feel needed; a will and trying to contribute to the well-being of the company and being part of something bigger; the result of one's work tasks; when work is rewarding, and when one personally succeeds; and when the organization enable the right resources to facilitate work tasks. The interview participants further stated that in order to do something good there has to be some sort of engagement and that work engagement contributed to more effort in one's work tasks. However, work engagement could not be high every day of the year, according to several interview participants, nonetheless it should be high the majority of the time. Every interview participant moreover declared that they were engaged in their work, however one of them were only moderately engaged. See Table 4 for the mean and median scores on work engagement for the entire sample and for the participants in the interviews. The interview participants' work engagement was closely related to what they worked with and most of them were more engaged in their job than in the specific organization.

According to the interview participants positive factors such as having fun at and to enjoy work could increase work engagement. Nevertheless, one participant questioned what the Swedish organization actually could do to make the employees enjoy going to work as they were part of a global concern. Work engagement was furthermore increased if the interview participants faced setbacks or when negative things occurred, for example when a customer called and said that a competitor had a higher price or when something did not work as it should.

Importance of work engagement. Overall, the interview participants considered it important with work engagement for them in order to have the energy to go to work. More than a few stated that they would switch jobs if they did not feel engaged. Work engagement was

additionally acknowledged as the driving force of the organization which made it develop and perform, and could in turn improve the end result. However, the interview participants also stated that low work engagement could result in increased turnover and affect the quality of the products. One interview participant questioned the organization and stated that they probably knew the importance of work engagement, but wondered if they thought actively of how to increase it. In addition, work engagement was regarded important in different degrees depending on position and works tasks, specifically that leaders and those with customer relations were generally expected to have higher work engagement than other employees.

The employees' perception of change

In general, the participants who worked within operations brought up the subject of change themselves and talked more about changes in general, past experiences, and they were more likely to feel that changes occurred frequently. The participants who worked within sales conceptualized change more around the current change. The mean and median scores on perception of change for the entire sample, and for employees in operations and sales, are presented in Table 4. Most of the interview participants were positive towards changes, found changes exciting even if it in the end was the same things that had to be done. Several negative aspects were nonetheless mentioned, such as even though the change was intended to contribute to something good it was difficult to see that sometimes, and the first reaction to a change was often negative if the change was negative (e.g. down-sizing). Some interview participants referred to the bigger picture that the company was in, that many changes had been due to changes in the market and external demands from the owner and the concern.

Employees' perception of work engagement and change

All together, the interview participants perceived that work engagement was affected by changes and how much it affected depended on the type and size of the change. For example, the interview participants in sales stated that the current change had affected their work engagement negatively, as a lot of time and energy had been put into the change instead of carrying out work tasks. In relation to work engagement and change the interview participants discussed (a) work peace, (b) personal attitude, and (c) co-workers.

Table 4. Mean, Standard Deviation and Median scores on work engagement and perception of change for all the participants in the sample

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Median</i>	Percentile 25	Percentile 75
Total, <i>n</i> = 63					
Work engagement	43.78	8.18	46	40	49
Perception of change					
Frequency	14.37	4.3	15	12	18
Planned	12.13	4.27	12	9	16
Transformational	12.22	4.37	12	9	15
Psychological uncertainty	13.38	5.28	13	10	17
Operations, <i>n</i> = 29					
Work engagement	41.90	8.16	43	37	48
Perception of change					
Frequency	16.17	2.32	17	15	18
Planned	12.69	4.3	12	9.5	16
Transformational	13.59	4.39	14	10	18
Psychological uncertainty	13.14	3.94	13	11	15.5
Sales, <i>n</i> = 33					
Work engagement	45.24	8.05	47	42	50.50
Perception of change					
Frequency	12.58	4.84	13	8	17
Planned	11.91	4.03	13	9	15
Transformational	10.94	4.07	11	7.5	14
Psychological uncertainty	13.15	5.80	12	8	17
Interviews, <i>n</i> = 12 ^a					
Work engagement	47.42	4.89	48.50	42.25	51.75
Perception of change					
Frequency	13.83	4.11	14	9.75	17.75
Planned	12.08	4.34	12	8.5	16
Transformational	12.33	4.72	10.50	9	16.75
Psychological uncertainty	12.25	4.11	14	8.5	14.75

Note. The range of scores for; work engagement is 0-54; planned, transformational, and frequency of change is 3-12; and psychological uncertainty is 3-28.

^aThe participants in the interviews were identified through the personal codes and analyzed as a group.

Work peace. The importance of work peace was mainly discussed by interview participants who worked in operations and who stated that they had experienced several changes within the organization. Due to continuous changes they felt that they never had a stable foundation to work from and no time for recovery and reflection, which affected their work engagement negatively. These participants were not negative towards changes per se; however they wanted some work peace to be able to carry out their work tasks well.

Personal attitude. The interview participants considered a personal attitude to be very important for work engagement, which also could affect how an individual handled changes. Several interview participants discussed a positive attitude in terms of seeing solutions and possibilities instead of problems, and that it was up to the individual to decide how she/he wanted to view things that happened. In changes, many interview participants tried not to think about the change too much if they did not have the right information, and they thought that they just had to accept the situation. The participants further believed that it was easier for individuals to face changes if they were self-confident, and accepted that they could not affect external factors.

Co-workers. Several interview participants explained that they were depending on others, for example due to deadlines or when working in teams, and that everyone in the organization was connected and affected each other. In changes it was considered even more important to be able to work with different departments; to create an understanding that everyone was part of the whole; and to have respect for each other. According to the interview participants co-workers could affect an individual's work engagement positively if they could laugh together; they were engaged and passionate about their work; the collaboration worked; and if they could trust each other. Co-workers could furthermore affect the interview participants' work engagement positively or negatively depending on their personal attitude. Additionally, one interview participant thought that it was easier for individuals to be negative, instead of positive, if they wanted to get the rest of the group on their side.

Statistical Analysis of Work Engagement and Change

Correlations between scores for work engagement and change

The relationship between work engagement and perception of change was investigated using Spearman's rho. There were no statistically significant relationship between work engagement, and frequency of change ($\rho = -.03, n = 63, p = .810$), planned change ($\rho = .01, n = 63, p = .972$), transformational change ($\rho = -.05, n = 63, p = .718$), and psychological uncertainty ($\rho = -.18, n = 63, p = .155$). However, there was a positive relationship between psychological uncertainty and frequency of change ($\rho = .34, n = 63, p = .007$), between transformational change and planned change ($\rho = .48, n = 63, p < .01$), and between transformational change and frequency of change ($\rho = .27, n = 63, p = .033$).

Group comparisons on scores for work engagement and change

A Mann-Whitney U Test was conducted to compare the distribution of scores for work engagement and perception of change for employees within operations and sales. The test revealed a significant difference on frequency of change between operations ($Md = 17, n = 29$) and sales ($Md = 13, n = 33$), $U = 277.5, z = -2.85, p = .004$, corresponding to an effect size of $r = .36$. A significant difference was moreover found on transformational change between operations ($Md = 14, n = 29$) and sales ($Md = 11, n = 33$), $U = 321.5, z = -2.22, p = .026$, corresponding to an effect size of $r = .28$.

Facilitating Factors for Work Engagement in Organizational Changes

Several factors that can facilitate work engagement emerged in the interviews, which has been combined in sub-themes and then divided in two main themes on the basis of how the sub-themes were connected. The two main themes, organizational-, and job level, will be covered in the following section, where interview excerpts can be found in Table 3A in the Appendix.

Organizational level

The organizational level include sub-themes that concern and can be changed on an organizational level. The sub-themes are (a) participation, (b) leadership, (c) communication, (d) goals, and (e) small things.

Participation. Most interview participants found participation stimulating and important for both work engagement and in organizational changes. In changes it was especially important to enable a sense of ownership of the change and a motivation to take care of one's specific work tasks. By participation the interview participants meant to; be part of or influence decision-making; be able to change and affect one's work role and the department's situation; be seen and listened to; be trusted and get responsibility; and be able to ask questions.

Leadership. To maintain and increase work engagement leaders should, according to the interview participants; inspire, motivate, and encourage engagement; have a clear and honest dialogue with the employees; give feedback and encouragement; be perceptive and see the employees' needs and competencies; be present but also give freedom to solve work tasks; invest in the employees; push towards goals; get the team together; and be driven and sympathetic. These factors are relevant in changes as well, and one interview participant stressed that more is needed of leaders during organizational changes, such as to see things, give extra encouragement and to be available for questions and concerns.

Communication. To improve work engagement and especially to enable a successful organizational change the interview participants suggested that the organization should improve their communication in general. The participants suggested that the organization should; be honest and give explicit information; motivate why and how something needed to improve; give the same information to everyone that would be affected by a change; and inform continuously even though there was nothing special or new to inform. The interview participants further stated that before informing about a change the process should be clear, and key persons who could influence others should be motivated in order to spread positive information among other employees. However, the interview participants thought that if the information was unclear or inadequate, questions would arise and anxiety increase.

Goals. The interview participants believed that it was important with personal and organizational goals and strategies to improve work engagement. The strategies would for example include a clear distribution of customers, explicit policies, and common goals towards suppliers. In organizational changes it was considered important as well to have a clear goal of the change process to know what the organization wanted to achieve and how to reach that goal. The overall benefit of having clear goals was that everyone would move in the same direction and would feel that they were an important part in reaching the common goal.

Small things. The interview participants repeatedly stated that often only small things were needed to increase work engagement, and these things were also accentuated as important in times of change. The small things could be improved by everyone in the organization, according to the interview participants, and one participant questioned if leaders and employees realized the valuable outcome of these small things. The importance of positive and constructive appreciation, feedback and support from leaders, co-workers and customer were most reoccurring. Further examples on small things were a pat on the shoulder when one had done something good; a bowl of fruit; a smile or a thank you which could spread positive feelings; and common activities.

Job level

The job level includes sub-themes that can be changed by the organization, however they concern a specific job or position. The sub-themes are (a) competence, (b) work tasks, and (c) salary.

Competence. Education, competence development and personal development were considered important for work engagement by the interview participants. Competence development was considered as an acknowledgement that the organization believed in their employees and that they got the opportunity to follow the trends in the market. The feeling of learning something new and being able to explain to others was highly valued. The participants experienced that, through education, it was possible to take steps forward, get more variety in one's job, and test new things. The interview participants further accentuated the importance to feel that one had the right competence for one's job tasks, that the competence was valued, and that employees got the opportunity to use their competence.

Work tasks. Interesting, fun and variation in work tasks were important for work engagement according to the interview participants. They wanted the organization and their leaders to have confidence in their ability to carry out their work tasks and to give them space to do so. In what degree work engagement was facilitated through work tasks were depended on which job the interview participants had, for example some participants' work engagement was increased when they got to develop something, sell products or be able to answer customers' questions. The interview participants however explained that work engagement could decrease if the work load was too high and when they did not have time to do their regular work tasks.

Salary. Several interview participants claimed that salary was not important, and stated that going to work to get an income was not the same as being engaged. Several participants moreover mentioned that working, in the end, was all about putting food on the table at home. Nonetheless, some participants were motivated by salary and said that it could affect their work engagement positively, even if it was only for a short period of time. One interview participant discussed if it would be possible to buy work engagement or if it was just gratitude that made employees appear to be more engaged.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate how work engagement was related to organizational change and which factors that could facilitate work engagement according to the employees in one organization. Two sub-questions were posed regarding how the employees perceived work engagement and if there was a statistical association between scores for work engagement and perception of change. In short the results revealed; no statistical connection between work engagement and change; that the entire sample group had high work engagement in changes; that a positive personal attitude was important; and different facilitating factors for work engagement. The findings will be discussed in the following sections; (a) employees' perception of work engagement and change, (b) statistical and qualitative connection between work engagement and change, (c) facilitating factors for work engagement in organizational change, (d) methodological considerations, and (e) suggestions for future studies.

Employees' Perception of Work Engagement and Change

The interview participants' perception of work engagement was fairly similar to the definition employed in this study (Schaufeli et al., 2002). This correspondence enabled a better comparison between the data from the survey and the interviews. Similarities are found in for example identification with the job; engagement and involvement with work tasks; work engagement as a positive and work-related concept; feelings of energy and drive; and perseverance in negative events. However, the interview participants might have been influenced by the questionnaire since they filled in the survey before they took part in the interviews, which means that they came in contact with the definition of work engagement through the items in the UWES-9. Careful considerations must moreover be made as the interview participants perceived work engagement differently and variations can hence exist between their conceptualizations.

The changes that have occurred in the specific organization, and especially the last two changes, are episodic changes that were due to external factors. The changes have moreover disturbed the equilibrium, which is reflected in the employees wish for work peace.

The mean score for psychological uncertainty in the entire sample group was neither very low nor high, which indicated that the employees are not so uncertain about changes. The employees overall might have gotten habituated to frequent episodic changes and therefore are not so uncertain about changes in general. However, statistical analysis indicated that if employees experienced that change occurred frequently, they might also have higher feelings of psychological uncertainty.

The result from the survey and the interviews moreover indicated that there is a difference on the perception of change between employees in operations and sales. The employees in operations discussed changes more in the interviews, which could be due to the fact that they have experienced more changes and have been forced to deal with their implications and outcomes. This interpretation is somewhat supported by the results from the statistical analysis, where employees in operations experienced that change occurred more frequently than employees in sales, and that the employees in operations experienced in a higher degree that changes had affected the values, goals and structure at their department.

Statistical and Qualitative Connection between Work Engagement and Change

The statistical analysis showed that there was no statistically significant connection between work engagement and employees' perception of change. Bhola (2010) similarly found no significant relationship between employee engagement and experience of organizational change. The interview participants did not directly discuss the importance of work engagement in change, nonetheless they believed that changes could affect their work engagement. An interpretation may be that work engagement is not more important in changes, as suggested by George (2010), but that it is always important for employee and organizational outcomes. However, there is a discrepancy between the statistical result and the interview participants' perception of the connection between work engagement and change. This could be explained by the small sample size, the small range of scores for work engagement and the negatively skewed distribution for work engagement and frequency of change. The discrepancy might also be explained by the fact that the individuals could express themselves more freely in the interviews and hence enable a more thorough investigation of a possible connection through thematic analysis. In addition, the scale for perception of change might be more restricted in what it measured in comparison to what the interview participants had the opportunity to discuss in the interviews.

Work engagement was furthermore confirmed to be high in an organization that is characterized by episodic changes, as shown by the high mean score on work engagement for the entire group; the interview participants mean score on work engagement above 4.0; and the interview participants' experience of work engagement. These results are supported by the findings by Bhola (2010), Gibson (2011), and Wu (2013). An explanation for the high mean score on work engagement in this study could be that previous downsizing have been selective on individuals and consequently employees with low work engagement have been laid offed, keeping highly engaged employees within the organization. The employees that have endured and have experienced many changes might have been tempered and even improved their work engagement in the different changes. This is supported by the interview participants who got more engaged by negative events, and they might experience changes more like a positive challenge than a negative threat. The latter is connected to the role of personal attitude which is discussed further down. In addition, it is questionable how much work engagement can be improved in the organization or if work engagement is measure-wise on a top level.

Another interpretation for the high mean score on work engagement, even though the organization is characterized by changes, could be that the interview participants connected work engagement more to their specific job than to the organization as a whole. Hence, their work engagement might not be as affected by changes in the organization if they got to perform their preferred work tasks.

Taking a theoretical perspective, work engagement should be increased through job resources to trigger the motivational process and to achieve positive organizational outcomes in the JD-R model (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004a; Korunka et al., 2009). Since work engagement is high among the participants, the organization probably already provides some resources. Still, the interview participants suggested several factors which the organization could improve. Due to the frequent changes however, the organization might not have had the time, energy or resources to prioritize or improve work engagement. The organization should nonetheless increase the relevant resources even though work engagement is already high. The specific factors will be further discussed in the section facilitating factors for work engagement in organizational change.

The notion of work peace was relevant for several interview participants in operations who had experienced many changes. The lack of work peace is a concrete example of how organizational changes can affect work engagement, since for example the interview participants might not have the possibility to be as engaged as they might want to since they do not have a stable foundation to work from. It is moreover questionable if work peace is something that the specific organization can affect as they are forced by external demands to change often. However, if they cannot affect the amount and sizes of the changes they might still increase other resources in order to establish a stable foundation. Because, if the organization cannot provide the right resources to enable work peace in the future, some individuals with high work engagement now might experience high demands which could lead to burnout, in accordance with Pines (1993) and Schaufeli et al. (2001, as cited in Hallberg et al., 2007).

A positive personal attitude was important for the interview participants to be able to handle organizational changes and external demands, which in turn could affect their work engagement. A positive attitude may be a way of taking responsibility, since that is needed in the new working life (Allvin et al., 2011). Maybe the understanding that the employees could not affect external demands contributed to a more accepting attitude towards change, and maybe the positive attitude could be considered as a form of coping with external demands. There might

however be a possible risk that the organization can do pretty much anything and the employees will have to stay positive in order to cope with the demands and even to keep their jobs in downsizing. Nonetheless, if the organization enables the right resources the employees might cope with demands even better, have higher work engagement, and hence perform better. Then the possible pressure on employees to cope with the demands themselves may decrease, which might give them more time and energy to focus on their job tasks.

Facilitating Factors for Work Engagement in Organizational Change

Several factors are in line with the proposed interventions for work engagement (e.g. Bakker et al., 2011; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2008), and for successful changes (e.g. Kotter, 2012; Yukl, 2013), such as participation, leadership, communication, goals, competence, and small things in form support. Work tasks and salary were additional interesting findings that can be considered resources that the organization can invest in according to the JD-R model. Goals, personal attitude, and small things appear to be equally important for work engagement and in organizational changes. However, participation, leadership, and communication appear to be even more important in times of change, whereas competence is most important for only work engagement. Others factors such as work tasks and salary appear to be more important for work engagement due to that there have been many changes within the organization. The organization can hence, in accordance with this division, select which factors that are the most vital ones to work with considering the organization's circumstances.

Participation is important in changes and the interview participants found it stimulating for work engagement as well. One participant strengthened the assumption by Armenakis et al. (1993), that participation leads to feeling of control and ownership and hence should be increased. Leadership was mostly discussed in form of desirable traits by the interview participants. Supportive leadership has been found to be important in organizational changes (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006), which also is in line with the interview participants wish for simple gestures such as support, feedback, and appreciation. The result from the interviews furthermore indicated that effortless and straightforward small things, which co-workers and leaders could do, can be improved. However, there might be a climate or culture that hinders this kind of behavior, perhaps that it is easier to use negative statements if one wants to be in the in-group, as suggested

by one participant. If there is a climate or culture that hinders this kind of appreciation and feedback then the organization needs to actively work with changing that by for example including key persons and letting leaders show by example.

Communication and information is another resource that can be improved, which should according to the interview participants and previous studies be open, honest, include the reasons for the change and be provided continuously (e.g. Elving, 2005; Klein, 1996). In this organization a lack of communication strategy seems to have created questions and anxiety. The latter would be a valid incentive for the organization to improve communication. In addition, psychological uncertainty and stress might be reduced through communication, since it is easier for employees to predict change if it is thoroughly planned and communicated (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). The interview participants moreover believed that there was a lack of goals and strategies within the organization and especially in the last and the current change. The statistical analysis revealed that if an individual experienced changes as frequent and/or thoroughly planned, they were also likely to experience that the change had affected the goals, structure and values of their department. At a next change it would hence be advantageous for the organization to develop a communication plan to clarify where the organization is standing, clarify the goals and aims for the change, and the gap in between.

Variation and fun work tasks were considered important for work engagement, which can be provided by the organization in form of different resources, such as new work tasks and job(re)design (e.g. Schaufeli & Salanova, 2008). Salary was moreover mentioned as a contributing factor for work engagement, even though it was not the most vital one. The motivation to work and earn money in order to put food on the table might be more apparent in times of change when employees face a more uncertain time and employment. In downsizing and restructuring the employees might then be more aware of the basic reasons for why they work and might not be as concerned with factors that increase work engagement. Ultimately, the result suggested that salary did not contribute to work engagement. Even though many participants mentioned salary, they put more focus on other factors that had emerged in the interviews, and only appear to consider salary as a baseline for working. As one participant argued, increased work engagement through salary or bonuses might simply be a form of gratitude.

Methodological Considerations

There are many methodological considerations that can be discussed, however, only the most significant for this study will be reviewed such as the convergent parallel mixed method approach; survey and response rate; transcriptions; the thematic analysis; and quality criteria for qualitative research.

In this study the convergent parallel mixed method approach enabled a thorough investigation and analysis of the phenomena of interest through a survey and interviews. The differences between a quantitative and a qualitative approach have been acknowledged during the process and the different procedures have been described in the method section, as suggested by Creswell (2014). The pragmatic viewpoint has enabled a practical and mixed method approach with focus on the real world in the specific organization, and the interpretations by me from the interviews has also been grounded in and connected to empirical data. However, this method has been time consuming and a disadvantage is the difficulty in handling two approaches in one study. Moreover, some authors argue that quantitative and qualitative approaches cannot be mixed as they are separate paradigms and it might be difficult to interpret conflicting results (see Bryman, 2012). The approaches has nonetheless been mixed in this study as both investigated the same phenomena and were compared, related, and interpreted as integrated parts. Additionally, a limitation of this study was that it could only comment on associations, not cause and effect relationships.

Even though there was an error in e-mails, every white-collar worker received the survey. The response rate at 61 % could be higher, however e-mails are easy to neglect (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister & Zechmeister, 2012; Spector, 2001), and the employees might not have had the time or interest to fill in the questionnaire. The HR department nonetheless sent out information about the survey which could have increased the response rate as the organization found the study important. In addition, the personal codes enabled control over that an individual only answered once, however it is problematic to know if it actually was that individual who filled in the questionnaire. Generalizability and replication of this study can be challenging since it was carried out in one specific organization. However, generalizability and replication to similar organizational settings and circumstances was increased by having a representative sample and a comprehensive description of the situational setting and the procedure (Bryman, 2012).

Since transcription can be seen as a form of translation (Gillham, 2008) this process was performed carefully. Even though I listened to the interviews twice and corrected some errors there is still a possibility that some words, expressions and other sounds have not been transcribed correctly. However, through repeated listening and respondent validation of the transcriptions, they were considered to provide an accurate account of the interview. It would however have been beneficial if notes were taken directly after the interviews to get a more comprehensive picture of the interview to use in the analysis.

The flexibility of the thematic analysis enabled me to move back and forth between the transcripts, the codes and the themes that were constructed. The themes have been identified and selected consistently and with connection to the research question. The size of the themes varied and not all of the themes were mentioned in every interview, which is in line with the guidelines provided by Braun and Clarke (2006). In the analysis I tried to be as open to the data as possible, with regard to that I had pre-knowledge about former studies in the area (for a discussion on reflexivity see Bryman, 2012). However, it would have been beneficial if other researchers had read and analyzed the transcripts in order to increase inter-rater reliability and to confirm the findings of this study.

To ensure the quality of the qualitative approach trustworthiness, which includes confirmability, dependability, credibility and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), has been carefully followed. Confirmability concerns how the researcher's values have influenced the study, which has been avoided as far as possible through conscious contemplation of my own values and expectations of the study, and with an aim to be as open as possible towards the data. Dependability is to what extent the results can be applied at other times and it has been achieved by keeping records of all the phases of the interview procedure. Credibility concerns the plausibility of results and has been increased through respondent validation of the transcripts; that the research has been carried out in good practice; that the mixed methods approach has increased the integrity of the results; and that the participants were able to read the final findings. Transferability is to what degree the result can be seen in other contexts, which has been achieved through a rich description of the situational setting and the participants. Additionally, Yardley (2000) highlight the importance of transparency, sensitivity to context and rigor, which has been achieved through clearly specified method and procedure, ethical considerations and a thorough data collection.

Suggestions for Future Studies

First of all, it would be interesting to further investigate the relationship between work engagement and organizational change. More specifically to compare organizations that are going through changes where employees have high work engagement in one and low work engagement in the other. A longitudinal study could enable a comparison between work engagement before, during, and after an episodic change. In addition, future studies could be performed with a larger population to get more responses and possibly a larger variation of scores on work engagement to enable a better comparison with scores on perception of change. Future studies could moreover investigate the role of personal attitude for work engagement in organizational changes, and how the facilitating factors identified in this study more practically can be used in organizations.

Conclusion

This study used a convergent parallel mixed method approach to investigate whether there is a connection between work engagement and change, and which factors that could facilitate work engagement. Even though no statistically significant relationship was found between work engagement and organizational change, the result from the interviews indicated that there was a relationship between the two phenomena. Several of the factors that were identified in the interviews can be concluded to be important for work engagement and in organizational changes. Additionally, a positive personal attitude was found to be important and a way to cope with external demands. The organization should not however solely rely on the attitude of their employees but provide the right resources so that the employees can cope and perform even better. This study moreover showed that work engagement can be high in an organization that is characterized by episodic change and that work engagement is important for positive organizational outcomes. Therefore work engagement should always be encouraged and by improving the facilitating factors that were identified in this study (participation, leadership, communication, goals, competence, small things, work tasks, and salary) an organization can create the right resources for work engagement.

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Appendix

Interview excerpts are here presented in their original format in Swedish in order to demonstrate the original language, as nuances can be lost in the translation to English. The excerpts in Table 2A and 3A are moreover translated to English to enable understanding and consistency in the paper.

Table 1A. *An example of the thematic analysis of transcribed data from the interviews*

<i>Interview excerpt</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>Subtheme</i>	<i>Theme</i>
“Även om man kanske inte har nån ny information men... kontinuerlig information och det räcker med kanske två rader... det räcker bara det kommer nånting. Eh och det minimerar alla de här frågetecknen som människor får och egna funderingar och tankar och korridorprat”	Important with information and continuous information, it can decrease questions and rumors.	Communication and information	Organizational level
”Här e väldigt många som brinner för det dom gör... och det påverkar ju hur mycket som helst, positivt då såklart... Sen finns det ju andra som inte alls har samma liksom glöd i det dom gör och då kan vi ju kanske välja att inte smittas så mycket av det så jag tror det handlar väldigt mycket om, asså vad man själv väljer också. Mm hur man tar åt sig av olika saker”	Many has high work engagement, is affected positively or negatively by others depending on their attitude, can choose what to be affected by	Co-workers Personal attitude	Employees’ perception of work engagement and change

Table 2A. *Interview excerpts on the employees’ perception of work engagement and change*

<i>Work engagement</i>
“Jag vill ju vara engagerad i det jag gör annars så så blir ju allting slentrianmässigt och tråkigt liksom. Jag kan inte tänka mig å gå till jobbet bara för att jag ska för då blir jag själv rätt deprimerad” ” <i>I want to be engaged in what I do otherwise everything will be like a routine and boring. I can’t imagine going to work just because I will, then I will get pretty depressed</i> ”
”Man får bättre resultat, bättre effektivitet från medarbetarna om engagemanget e större det får man definitivt. Mm om man tycker det är roligt att köra hit på morgonen och ser fram emot arbetsdan då då är det klart att då presterar man mycket bättre” ” <i>You get better result, better efficacy from the employees if the engagement is higher, that you will definitely get. Mm if you feel that it’s fun to drive here in the morning and look forward to the workday then it’s obvious that you perform much better</i> ”

Change

förändring e ju som jag ser det ofta till följd av att det är kanske omvärlden, hur marknaden förändras på något, företaget förändras lite, produkterna *skratt* och sånt va. Oftast tycker jag att det blir till något positivt va. Mm det blir som en lite ja ny, vad kan man säga, nytändning. För mig e det eh absolut positivt sen självklart beror det lite på vad förändringen e va”

*”Changes are the way I see it often a consequence of that it’s maybe the world around, how the market change in something, the company changes a little, the products *laughter* and stuff like that. Often I think it becomes something positive. Mm it gets like a, yes a new, what can you say, a new fresh start. For me it is eh absolutely positive, then of course it depends a little on what the change is”*

”[Förändringar är] både positivt och negativt. Ehm *paus* här dom senaste två åren så kanske det blir mer *paus* negativt... i den bilden att vi blir färre och färre va. Men jag har inte vatt med om att vi blir fler och fler och att det blir en ändring på det hållet *suck* det har oftast vatt eh liksom negativa ändringar eller konstrueringar. Eh men det får man ju liksom försöka hantera positivt och göra det bästa av situationen. Ehm *paus* att folk får sluta å eh man får skära ner på personal det eh det e liksom tufft”

*”[Changes are] both positive and negative. Ehm *pause* here the two last year then maybe it is more *pause* negative... in that sense that we become fewer and fewer. But I haven’t been experienced that we become more and more and that it is a change in that directions *sigh*, it has often been eh sort of negative changes or reconstructions. Eh but that you sort of have to try to handle positively and do the best out of the situations. Ehm *pause* that people have to quit and eh you have to cut down on personnel it eh it is like tough”*

Work engagement and change

”[Upplever du att ditt arbetsengagemang påverkas av förändringarna?] Eh ja det gör jag för när det blir för många och för stora [förändringar] samtidigt så e det svårt att kunna leverera bra kvalitét i ens arbete ju. Det blir för mycket och då kan man känna ibland att ’jaha nu ska jag ändra igen”

“[Do you experience that your work engagement is affected by the changes?] Eh yes I do because when there are too many or too large [changes] at the same time it is difficult to deliver good quality in ones work. It gets too much and then you can sometimes think that ‘all right now it is time to change again...’”

Work peace

”Här svänger både grunderna och här svängera topparna och här svänger ju allt ju men har man då vad ska man säg en stabil grund eh plattform som man utgår ifrån så gör det inget att det svänger i topparna för att då står du ju ganska stabilt ändå och då är det lättare å hantera en förändring... Eh och här har det ju vatt väldigt svängigt fram och tillbaka och det tär ju jättemycket på folk och man orkar helt enkelt inte å det e. eh så *suck* ibland kan jag känna att lite lite mer arbetsro, vad ska man säg, i grunden så man har liksom det att utgå ifrån, men inte så så att man lutar sig tillbaka och lägger armarna i kors [tre ord] utan man måste vara med här för att fixa det här”

*”Here both the foundations and the tops are swaying and here everything sways but if you then have, what do you say, a stable foundation eh platform in which one start from then it is ok if it sways in the top because then you can stand pretty stable anyways and then it is easier to handle a change... Eh and here there have been very swaying back and forth and that wears people out a lot and you simply do not manage and that is. Eh so *sigh* sometimes I can feel that a little, a little more work peace, what do you say, in the foundation, so that you have that to work from, but not so, so that you lean back and put your arms in a cross [three inaudible words] but you have to be alert to fix this”*

Personal attitude	<p>”Jag kan sprida min positiva anda asså försöka ha den med mig, eh (S:mm) och inte se problem som jobbigt utan löser dom”</p> <p><i>”I can spread my positive spirit, try to have it with me, eh and not see problems as though but solve them”</i></p> <p>”Eh ja då, vissa har jättesvårt för allt detta [förändringar]... Men det är där jag menar kommer man in litegrann som ambassadör för att vi tjänar ingenting att springa och älta saker här utan tvärtom, släpp det, gå vidare (S: mm) vi kan inte göra mycket åt det ändå. Det e liksom utanför vår kontroll att [land där koncernens huvudkontor är] beslutar nånting och vi ska bara precis, det e bara å kämpa på”</p> <p><i>”Eh well, some have a very hard time to all this [the changes]... But that is where I mean that you can come in sort of like an ambassador because we do not earn anything by running around and dwell on things here but the opposite, let it go, move on, we cannot do much about it anyways. It is sort of out of our control that [name of the land that the concern's main office is in] decides something and we shall just exactly, it is just to fight more.</i></p>
Co-workers	<p>”Hur man än vrider och vänder så är jag så beroende av andra så jag hoppas ju och tror att dom också blir engagerade och förstår att det, det vi sysslar med det (S: mm) påverkar oss alla, att det e jätteviktigt att dom också känner sig engagerade eller att dom e engagerade i sig”</p> <p><i>”How you even turn and twist then I am depended on others so I hope and think that they also get engaged and understand that, that what we do affects us all, that it is very important that they also feel engaged or that they are engaged in themselves.</i></p>

Table 3A. Interview excerpt concerning the factors that affect work engagement in relation to organizational changes

Organizational level

Participation	<p>”Att dom [medarbetarna] får känna att dom är delaktig, att det inte bara är nån som bestämmer något ovanför mitt huvud... och då känner man inte att man är en del av förändringen utan att man bara ska utföra deras [ledningens] kommando och då blir det oftast en negativ inställning... får man då vara med å bestämma så blir det ju oftast att, vad ska man säga, ens lilla skötebarn, då värnar man om att det ska bli bra... och då får man kanske ofta en annan inställning också... då får du ett annat engagemang från folket också ju”</p> <p><i>”That they [the employees] get to feel that they are involved, that it is just not someone who decides something above my head...and then you feel that you are not part of the change but that you just should perform their [the management] command and then there is often a negative attitude... if you get to be a part and decide then it is often that, what can you say, your own child, then you take care of that it should be good... then you maybe often also another attitude... then you get another engagement from the people also”</i></p>
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Leadership	<p>”En chef som låter folk, eh engagera sig, eh inte lägger sig i för mycket men inte för lite heller de ska liksom eh ha bra koll men inte peta i för mycket detaljer utan lita på det vi håller på med helt enkelt”</p> <p><i>”A leader that allows people, eh get engaged, eh do not interfere but not too little either they shall like eh have good check but not go into too much detail but simply trust what we’re doing”</i></p> <p>”Eh att man får uppmuntran och bekräftelse på att ja det här va bra grej jag gjorde liksom, att man får ett ”bra jobbat” av en chef, det räcker. Eh men även eh även kritik eller alltså konstruktiv kritik, att ”nä det här, det här kan du göra bättre, eh det här var inte så bra gjort så det här vill jag att du jobbar på igen”</p> <p><i>”Eh that you get encouragement and acknowledgement on that like yes this was a good thing that I did, that you get a ‘nice work’ from a boss, that’s enough. Eh but also, also critique or constructive critique, that ‘no you can do this better, eh what you did was not good so I want you to work on that’”</i></p>
Communication	<p>”Kommunikation e ju key i det ärendet för att inte göra medarbetarna oroliga att man har klara och tydliga besked på vad och hur, vad som ska göras inte bara en rubrik som säger att det här kommer hända, ”jojo men vad, när och hur? Hur påverkas vi av detta beslutet?”. Ehm det e nånting som [namn på företaget] och gruppen [koncernen] skulle kunna jobba med eh generellt i hela koncernen egentligen”</p> <p><i>”Communication is key in this case to not make the employees worried, that you have clear and articulated information on what and how, what shall be done not only a headline that states that this will happen, ‘yes but what, when and how? How are we affected by this decision?’. Ehm that is something that [name of the company] and the group [the concern] could work with eh more generally in the entire concern really.</i></p> <p>”Folk har så många frågor som ingen kan svara på. Det e nog där det.. skon klämmer absolut mest. För har nån bara ett svar ’såhär och såhär kommer det att se ut imorgon’ och så e det liksom fine... då har man nog tagit bort absolut största, vad ska man säga, källan till oro och irritation, för nu, nu blir det väldigt mycket tid till eh spekulera... då blir det.. ja mycket tid... ifrån vad vi ska syssla med om dagarna... och det kostar pengar”</p> <p><i>”People have so many questions that no one can answer. It is probably that... the shoe pins absolutely most. Because if someone just has an answer ‘it will look like this and this tomorrow’ then it is like fin... then you have probably removed the absolutely largest, what can you say, source for anxiety and irritation, because now, now there are a lot of time spent on speculations... then it is... well yes a lot of time... from what we should be doing during the days... and that costs money”</i></p>
Goals	<p>”E man inte engagerad å, å då vet man inte vad man gör.. asså att man har ett mål och vision i företaget, även att man tänker att ”det här ska jag göra för företaget det här e.. jag e en resurs för företaget och jag vill kunna bidra med det här och det här och det här”</p> <p><i>”If you are not engage and, and then you do not know what to do... like if you have a goal and a vision in the company, you think that ‘this is what I should do for the company... I am a resource for the company and I want to contribute with this and this and this’”</i></p>

	<p>“När man går in i den här fasen att det ska ske en förändring va och det här e, det här e vårt mål, det här ska vi uppnå sen.. det kanske inte är så lätt att säga att ”såhär kommer det att bli” va men att man har en, ett klart mål att det här är vårt mål va nu”</p> <p><i>”When you come into this phase that it is going to be a change, and this, this is our goals, this is what we will achieve... it might not be easy to say that 'it will be like this' but that you have a, a clear goal and that this is our goal now”</i></p>
Small things	<p>”En klapp på ryggen... små grejer egentligen, det handlar inte om att man ska få blommor och choklad när man har gjort nånting bra utan det räcker med ”ja bra fixat”... sånt e det ju egentligen generellt dåligt med i alla företag eller.. generellt har personer dålig kunskap eller dålig förståelse, skulle jag vilja säga att dom, att man inte förstår vad det egentligen ger i slutändan med å säga ”bra jobbat”... dom man ser upp till i slutändan, dom som ger en bra kritik eller konstruktiv kritik eller beröm.</p> <p><i>”A pat on the shoulder... small things really, it's not about that you should get flowers and chocolate when you have done something good but it is enough with 'yes good work' ... such things are actually generally bad in all companies or... generally people have poor knowledge or poor understanding, I would like to say that they, that they do not understand what it really brings in the end to say 'good work'... the ones that you look up t in the end, are those who give good critique or constructive critique and credit”</i></p>
Job level	
Competence	<p>“Jag tycker om liksom när jag lär, asså när jag ser liksom att jag har lärt mig nånting idag (S:mm) det är liksom roligt att känna liksom att ja nu fixar jag detta å nu kan jag liksom förmedla till andra”</p> <p><i>”I think that like when I learn, when I like see that I have learnt something new today, that is like fun to feel that now I can do this and now I can like convey it to others”</i></p> <p>“Kompetensutbildningar som kan höja en vidare och så, och det är också ett sätt att, vad ska man säga, en form av bekräftelse på att dom [organisationen] vill satsa på i en och att dom liksom tror på”</p> <p><i>”Competence training that can improve one and so on, and that is also a way to, what can you say, a form of acknowledgement that they [the organization] wants to put effort into you and that they believe in you”</i></p>
Work tasks	<p>“Genom att man låter folk göra nåt... som man trivs bra med, utför arbetsuppgifter som man trivs bra med så får man större engagemang på alla plan”</p> <p><i>”By letting people something... that they like, perform work tasks that they enjoy then you get a higher engagement on every level”</i></p>
Salary	<p>“Asså det här med, med asså det e ju det låter kanske tramsigt på nåt vis men det eh pengar och förmåner och eh tjäcka grejer och fräcka grejer och hela det här paketet. Asså det får säkert ens engagemang att, att gå upp en kort stund, men sen e det nog tillbaks till där det va, tror jag”</p> <p><i>”Like this with, this may sound ridiculous in some way but eh money and benefits and eh cool stuff and all the package. Like it probably get the engagement to go up, to go up for a short time, men then it is probably back to where it was, I think”</i></p> <p>”...men jag kan begära att du gör ditt bästa utifrån dina förutsättningar och gör du det, för att du ska kunna göra det så måste du vara engagerad i det du gör, du måste tycka</p>

om det på något vis. Det räcker inte att eh, att du går till jobbet och säger 'ja, jag ska bara se att jag får min månadslön'. Det räcker inte. Då e du inte engagerad"

"...but I can request that you do your best from your conditions and if you do that, to be able to do that you have to engaged in what you do, you have to like it in some sort of way. It's not enough to eh, that you go to work and say 'yes, I will only make sure that I get my month salary'. That is not enough. Then you're not engaged.
