Experiences of Managing Change

- A case study of middle managers experiences of managing in a changing organization

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Master's Thesis

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Abstract

Title: Experiences of managing change: a case study of middle managers experiences of managing in a changing organization

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Keywords: Change management, organizational change, middle managers, consensus culture, pressure

Thesis purpose: The thesis aims to add knowledge concerning middle managers experiences of managing change.

Methodology: The researchers have conducted qualitative interviews with an interpretive stance.

Research Question: How do middle managers experience managing in a changing organization?

Basic Findings: The interviewees experienced much pressures from multiple directions when managing in a changing organization. This made them feel squeezed and that their managing attempts many times were pointless.

Conclusion: Middle managers experienced pressure and tension from top management 'over managing', wanting too much control and not communicating enough or clearly. They also experienced pressure and tension from a certain kind of 'consensus culture', which existed amongst colleagues, and from their employees, both directly from them and in wanting to be good managers through the change. All of these pressures caused the interviewees to feel squeezed and that they were sometimes managing in vain. They reacted to this experience in different ways, which were opting out, becoming cynical, playing along, and selectively opting in. However, selectively opting in seemed as the only reaction that changed their situation in any way, why middle managers in similar situations should consider this reaction.

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1. Introduction

In today's fast moving, competitive business environment organizations must have the ability to change. This affects organizations in different aspects, very much so the people within them, and in particular those who manage the change. The general consensus in management and organization scholarship is that it is necessary for firms to change, to respond to environmental pressures, often just in order to maintain their business (Palmer, Dunford & Akin, 2006). One industry in Sweden that has changed a great deal since the 1990s is the gambling industry. In Sweden the government owns the two acting gambling companies, both of which have different products in their portfolio. The one with the largest market share, Gambling Inc.[1] has been the main actor in this monopoly market. Due to the organization's long-standing rights, protected by the state, Gambling Inc. has been very secure for a long time. Yet Internet gambling has brought extensive competition, which has changed the external environment of the Swedish state owned gambling companies. A number of new companies have entered the market, which has threatened Gambling Inc.'s secure place, especially as Internet gambling means that customers have more possibilities such as gambling using tablet devices and smartphones. From this backdrop, we will now explore in more detail what lead us to do this research and what our focus will be.

The change process and managing has become of huge interest to both of us because of our educational background in business and the masters program *Managing People, Knowledge and Change*. Another reason is that we have worked in organizations that have undergone large organizational changes. When an organization is changing there are many ways of managing, but several factors can be of huge importance to the outcome of the change. Our study is curious about what happens to employees during change, and specifically middle managers in Gambling Inc.

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[1] The company name Gambling Inc. has been changed from something else, and is not the company's real name.

In part, we seek to address an organizational problem with this thesis. The context of the company is that their market situation is quite unique. They have gone from operating in a secure monopoly market, to gaining a huge amount of competition due to the opening up to an unregulated market. Due to this they have undergone a large amount of changes in only a couple of years, which is an extreme change from being in a secure environment and not *having* to change much. Practically, this change has ensured that middle managers have to manage in a very different way than before. The purpose of this study is to examine how the middle managers perceive managing in the change processes, by conducting qualitative interviews. We take an interpretive stance to explore the tension that middle managers have a very important role, but are not the ones making the final decisions. Our focus in this paper will be to answer the following research question:

How do middle managers' experience managing in a changing organization?

In answering this question we believe we can contribute to the specific context of Gambling Inc., and firms that find themselves in similar situations. We hope to give some insights to the role of the middle managers and give specific advice for how they could handle their position. Additionally we wish to contribute to research concerning the pressures on middle managers in change processes. According to literature in change management middle managers hold a crucial role in change processes (Guth & Macmillan, 1986), but handling their part can often be very challenging (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). We found that the pressures and tensions concerning middle managers in changing organizations have received little attention in research and literature (Fenton-O'Creevy, 1998; Balogun, 2003; Giangreco & Peccei, 2005). Too much research is focused on a top-down approach. With this said, we find this research important and believe it is crucial to understand in order to accustom well in a change process.

Following we want to prepare the reader for what is to expect when reading the paper. Next chapter, chapter two, will present our metatheoretical standpoint and methodological choices on our approach to the inquiry. This includes a closer insight to how we chose our study area, a look at our case, how we collected the empirical material, and how we analyzed it. Chapter 3 aims to give the reader an overview of

concepts and literature we found important for the study, including change management, and the middle managers' role in change. In chapter 4 we will present our findings through an analysis of the empirical material, which mainly are that middle managers feel squeezed and that they sometimes are managing in vain. The last chapter, chapter 5, will include a discussion of the analysis and show the implications of our research for both practical and scholarly audiences. Here we also give suggestions to further research.

2. Methodology

In this chapter we present our methodological choices of action during the research process. We start by giving the reader a picture of us, the researchers, and in particular the paradigm that guided our research. After explaining our approach to the study, we offer an in-depth explanation of the data collection and analysis process, and finally we discuss the sustainability of the study. Our aim with this chapter is to guide the reader through the research process, and explain how we found the answers to how middle managers in our case study experience managing in a changing organization. Thus, the readers have the opportunity to evaluate how we conducted the inquiry and reached our findings.

2.1 Metatheoretical starting point

We see it as important for the reader to understand our interpretive worldview, to gain a better understanding of how and why we have conducted this research. All social scientists make explicit or implicit assumptions according to the nature of the social world, and these assumptions influence how their subject is researched (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). The interpretive paradigm aims to understand and investigate the world from individual's subjective experiences.

Our initial viewpoint when it comes to the ontological nature, which is what "the essence of being" is, is that social reality is created in social interactions and is a product of personal cognition. Factors in our internalization process, such as background and upbringing, influence how the reality is perceived. We believe that there in social science is no objective truth. Instead we hold an anti-positivistic approach, which means that there are multiple realities that exist of different constructions and interpretations that also change over time (Merriam, 2002). This means that we believe that our interviewees interpret and understand reality differently, which is the reason why we have chosen to use qualitative methods to fulfil the purpose of the inquiry.

2.2 Qualitative method

Methodology in its original sense meant *"the path to the goal"* (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As we have stated, our belief is that reality is socially constructed, and individuals experience a different reality due to their own constructions and interpretations of the world. Therefore, when it came down to understanding perspectives and perceptions of middle managers in Gambling Inc., we knew that the way to reach our goal in the best way was by using qualitative methods. These are well connected to our paradigm. Wolcott (1994) states that qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive, which means that the data is interpreted by the scholar. With qualitative research it is possible to go in depth and find out the middle managers interpretations and understandings of their role.

2.3 Choice of research

In both our Master programs *Managing People, Knowledge and Change*, and in our bachelor programs, *Service Management* and *Strategic Management*, we learned how important it is for organizations to be able to adjust to the environment and change with it, in order to stay competitive. In both cases, change is seen as inevitable and something to strategically manage in order to achieve competitive advantages. Change was not our intended focus in the thesis when we started conducting the interviews. Nevertheless, it did not take long before we realized that change, and connected to this how middle managers perceive some of the cultural aspects and pressure from above and under, was a challenge for most of the middle managers we interviewed.

Managing change has been widely researched before (Kotter, Alvesson, Sveningsson, Senge, Beer, Nohria Jensen), but we realized that we had quite a particular organization to study. It is government owned and operates in a monopoly market, yet, is recently subject to increasing competition from Internet competitors. Overall, our case highlights a contextual moment regarding organizational change, as change here is largely unwelcome from a business perspective. This contributed to us choosing a different approach in the change management research. Another aspect is

that the organization has not had to change very much in the past, but over the last 5-10 years undergone vast changes.

2.4 Sources of Data

In this section we will outline the overall courses of action of the research project. Then follow more in-depth descriptive explanations of how the research has been conducted.

Our initial contact with Gambling Inc., which is not the company's real name, was through the HR department. Our contacts in the HR department explained that the middle managers have a demanding role in their organization. Therefore they wanted us to interview the middle managers, and examine how they felt about their role. While interviewing 10 middle managers we realized that the main common venture that the middle managers talked about as affecting them a lot was leading through change in the organization. Because of this we decided on the aim of the research, and specifically our research question concerning how middle managers experience managing in a changing organization. The 10 interviews are the foundation for our empirical material and analysis, and we will go more in-depth concerning the interviewees and interviews in the following data collection sector. First, a presentation of our case. The first part is about Gambling Inc., where we conducted our research, In the second part we will present some general information about our primary participants, ten middle managers, and their role in Gambling Inc.

2.4.1 Our case: Gambling Inc.

Gambling Inc. is government owned, and Sweden's largest gambling company. It stems from two large state owned gambling companies, that merged in 1997, one with headquarter in the Swedish capital Stockholm and one with headquarter in Gametown, a small town in southeast of Sweden. From start the two companies had quite different cultures, one more fast-paced, influenced by the fast city life of Stockholm, and the other with a more familial feeling, more laid-back and affected by the more tranquil life on the countryside. Today the company has grown significantly, with the headquarter in Gametown.

In Sweden, gambling is controlled by the government, and therefore the company acts on a physical monopoly market. If one gambled before in Sweden, they did so through Gambling Inc. However, this monopoly has not lasted. With the emergence of the Internet and the technological developments in our society they got more and more competition, from firms based outside of Sweden. What the government does not control is gambling through Internet, which is an unregulated market. This has been, and still is, the fastest growing gambling market the past decade; particularly with the rise of gambling on smartphones or tablet devices. Due to the changes on the market it was apparent to Gabling Inc. that change was necessary.

To change has been necessary for the company to stay strong in their industry and adjust to the competition, the technological changes and their clients' needs. Change seems to be a constant for this organization. In fact, every one of the middle managers we interviewed talked about how much organizational change the company has gone through the past 5-10 years. For example, between 2008 and 2011 they had 4 different CEOs. The different CEOs wanted to make their mark and change the organization to how they felt it should be structured. Now the organization has had the same CEO since 2011, who also has re-organized according to how he believes the organization should be structured. The organization has also gone from having a focus on sales and expansion in order to compete with the Internet companies, to today's objective of being a responsible gambling company with the customers' experiences in focus. This new focus is assigned by the owner, the Swedish state. The organization has undergone, and is still undergoing changes in reorganizing the company, keeping up with competition and the technological development, and to adjust to the new assignment. We look at the experience of middle managers because they are in "the middle", with access to top management and with practical knowledge. Also because the organization was curious about how to better develop the role of the middle manager.

The cultural context is also important for the reader to understand our case. A phenomenon that is reoccurring in Swedish societal culture and in organizational culture is consensus amongst the different individuals concerned. Harvard professor Steve Kelman (2013) argue that the consensus culture of Sweden is what makes the

Swedish society successful and contributes to competitive advantage. Management by consensus is seen as the typical Swedish way according to Olle Wästberg, director-general of the Swedish Institute (www.thelocal.se). To briefly explain what consensus is, according to Dressler (2006) it is as a cooperative process that involves all group members, where they together develop and agree to support the decisions that are the best for the group in whole. He also means that in consensus there is trust and good faith to address all group members concerns, and that everyone's input is carefully considered (Dressler, 2006). Following we present the role of our interviewees, the middle managers.

2.4.2 The role of the middle managers

There are about 50 middle managers at Gambling Inc. In the organizational chart they are two steps down from the top management. Most of them are managing one section each, and with a head of their department over them. The head of the department's manager in turn has someone from top management as manager.

The role of a middle manager includes a very operational responsibility in their respective sector. Their role also includes fulfilling a coaching leadership profile, where supporting employees is vital. According to the company's HR department their role is quite tough, since they have pressure coming both from managers and from employees. They all have a different number of employees in their section, with everything from 5 to 25 individuals to take responsibility for, lead and coach. All sections are or have been affected by organizational changes, some more than others. Further we want to show how we collected the empirical material.

2.5 Data collection

2.5.1 Individual interviews

We came in contact with the interviewees through Gambling Inc.'s HR department. In the organization there are about 50 middle managers, and they all received an email from the HR department proposing them on a voluntary basis to participate in an interview with us. In the email we were presented as masters students wanting to

interview them for our thesis project about the conditions and demands of middle managers in the organization. Ten people were willing to participate. We met seven of these people in face-to-face interviews in Gambling Inc.'s office in Stockholm, and three of them we conducted video-interviews with from the company's casino in Malmö, while the interviewees were in the headquarter in Gametown. To comment this, we wanted to perform all the interviews in the offices of the participants, their natural settings, to make them feel as comfortable as possible and get as good insight and overview as possible (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). In order to get an as nuanced overview as possible we wanted to interview an equal amount of men and women, but in the end we interviewed three women, who were the only ones that wanted to participate in the inquiry.

We conducted semi-structured interviews, supported by an interview guide. Since we were not sure of what we would find, we still wanted the possibility to go in depth into subjects we felt interesting, or ask other questions. Since the interviews were not totally structured we were able to conduct them more as normal conversations (May, 2001). The participants received the questions beforehand, which the HR department requested. Throughout the interviews we tried not to ask leading questions to the participants, which could affect their answers. Before the interviews we also asked them if we could record the conversations, and offered them contracts on that we would only use the material in our thesis project and never show any information that could identify them. We have chosen not to name the participants, only refer to them as middle managers, male or female. We believe it is not important for the study or for the reader to know names, and that this will make the reading easier.

2.5.2 Processing of empirical material

When we were conducting the interviews both of us started to identify certain patterns of recurrent themes. In many ways the analysis process started already there and then, which according to the methodology researchers Svend Brinkmann and Steinar Kvale (2009) is necessary in qualitative research. Our analysis process has been iterative and we have gone back and forth between the empirical material and analysis to research questions and problem statement.

We recorded the interviews, to not forget or miss out on important information or having to concentrate on taking notes. Immediately after each interview we also wrote down what we experienced as most important for the interviewees, and our general impression and sense of the person. As soon as possible after each interview we transcribed them, where we wrote down word by word what they said, together with the tone of their voice, for example if they were being sarcastic. Once transcribed, we started categorizing all the material by what we perceived as the most important themes. Simultaneously we also developed our final research question, depending on the empirical material and how we interpreted it. We had to do categorizing over again a couple of times, together and separately, and at the same time we had our research question in mind. We were not using different theoretical perspectives during the coding process, as we aimed for sense making and wanted to keep our minds as open as possible. Finally the categories matched the findings of our inquiry, and we could reduce our material (Ahrne & Svensson, 2011). After reducing the material we started the final steps of the analysis process, were we wanted to present and argue for our findings. We started with presenting the organization and the role of the managers, and continued with an analyse of our empirical material, to finish with a discussion and conclusion of our inquiry. The ambition was to fulfil the purpose of the study and also contribute with relevant information to Gambling Inc. and other organizations in similar situations.

The research is conducted abductively, which is a combination between an inductive and deductive approach, where the researcher is able to move freely between theory and empirics (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 1994). During the research process the empirical framework has been developed successively, and selected theories and literature have been adjusted and, depending on patterns and findings in empirics. An abductive approach is most suitable for this research since we neither want to validate or fail existing theory, nor is our initial standpoint to create any new. Our aim is to understand and interpret how middle managers perceive leading in change.

2.6 Reflexivity

Our aim is to generate a high level of trustworthiness and credibility in this study (Cresswell, 2003), therefore we have tried to explain the research process in this chapter as detailed as possible (Ahrne & Svensson, 2011). Together we have analysed how our background will affect the outcome of the research. We have also analysed our biases and assumptions, and tried to be critical to these and how they might affect the research process. In this sense we have tried to keep a high level of what Alvesson and Sköldberg (2010) calls reflexivity, to increase the quality of the study. Consequently, we will present some biases and assumptions that might have affected the research, and we also reflect on our role as researchers in the inquiry.

Some aspects concerning the interviewees might affect the research: First of all, they all knew that we were in contact with their HR department, which might cause them to "hold back" on their thoughts. This we tried to solve by offering them a contract, saying that we would not use anything that they said which could identify them, in contact with the organization. Another fact that may play a part in the outcome of the interviews is the fact that the interviewees could take part of the questions before the interviews. This might have made them very well prepared, so that they did not express what they really felt, and instead what they thought was "right". We felt as if they were being honest, but are aware of that this assumption might affect the validity of the inquiry. Something else that could impact the study is that we interviewed a larger amount of men than women. This could affect the outcome of the research as men and women might perceive being a middle manager differently, due to cultural and gender aspects. A bias we had before starting the research was that we perceived a government owned company as quite old fashioned and out-of-date, but this perception changed, as we met the people of the organization.

The fact that we are two scholars working on this project matters, since we have worked very closely in all aspects, and the outcomes therefore are a mix of both our approaches and interpretations. Our aim has been to throughout the research have a common understanding of what we are doing, and a common understanding of the meanings of our findings. We are also aware of that this is our interpretation of the empirical material, and that we filter the data through our personal lenses (Rossman &

Rallis, 1998. Both of us do have a lot of preconceptions around the subjects of organizational change and change management, as courses in our masters program have provided us with a vast knowledge concerning the investigated subject.

Following chapter describes the literature we believe is important for the reader to understand before reaching our analysis and discussion.

3. Literature Review

In this chapter we aim to give the reader an overview of the literature that informs our research. We start by presenting an overview of organizational change management, including different approaches to the topic, reasons for change, and the importance of change in organizations. Thereafter we will explore a bit of the existing literature on change management and the middle managers' role in change efforts.

3.1. Introduction to Organizational Change Management

Some argue that the change management literature has become richer the past decades, but that a growing, broader body of change knowledge is still a necessity. Research is repeating itself, not adding or developing frameworks, not giving any managerial advice with proof of success, nor improving or deepening empirical studies (Kelman, 2005). Even so, in this section we will give an overview of different perspectives such as literature that is critical to the overall organizational change management. This will be followed by some different views on why organizations change, how important it is to change, and existing organizational change literature. The purpose with it is to give the reader a broader understanding of organizational change management and the different views and aspects it consist of.

Technological development changes how we communicate, work, travel and live. In organizations key decisions are normally concentrated to a small group of people, but the majority of change efforts fail. Due to these factors it is salient for managers to learn how to manage continuously (Sturdy and Grey, 2003). Scholars highlighting the negative impacts of change receive limited attention compared to the proponents of change management. Stability and continuity is seen as problematic and not possible in today's fast-moving world. The authors are not arguing against change but against the one side nature of organizational change management and the image of change as an ideal. They further argue that the general literature gives constrained advice of what sort of change organizations must undergo, and more about how important it is to change (Sturdy & Grey, 2003). Leana and Barry (2000) also discuss stability in organizations, but in relation to the tension between stability and change, as they see

this as an inevitable part of organizational life. They argue for that a stable and skilled team of employees can provide an organization with competitive advantages, but that there are always forces that push organizations to pursue both stability and change. They view reasons for change due to adaptability to the external environment, to save costs, to gain control or to develop competitive advantages. On the other hand, despite all the literature discussing flexible organizations and change, they also discuss that organizations and people in them pursue stability (Leana & Barry, 2000). One of the reasons to this is due to intuitionalism, the fact that people have a tendency to do things the way they always have, and additionally a view on power structures to be self-perpetuating (Burt, 1992). Other factors that promote stability are predictability and uncertainty reduction, which aims at that even in the most flexible organizations there might still be a need or want for stability in employment relations and in work processes. Stability is even said to be enabling to change, and it is argued that flexibility becomes impossible to sustain in an environment of constant uncertainty (Leana & Rousseau, 2000). Therefore Leana and Barry (2000) argue for that organizations need to pursue both stability and change, that both of these are constantly present in organizations, and that they are necessary for organizations.

A view that agrees on Leana's and Barry's (2000) in some senses, but without the stability factors is presented by Beer and Nohira (2000). They present two different theories of why changes need to happen, economic value or organizational capability. The first theory, economic value, implies that keeping shareholders satisfied and increase their value is the only reason for change. An assumption made in this theory is that company's chances of survival in a competitive economy are based on their ability to make their shareholders satisfied. If current management fails to do so, shareholders can either move their capital or replace management. Spokesman of this view, Michael Jensen (2000), argue that other stakeholders, such as employees, would not be affected because of self-interested shareholders. Nor would a short-term perspective be more encouraged than long-term interests.

In contrast to the shareholder-view stands the theory of organizational capabilities, with proponents as Peter Senge (2000), director of the Centre for Organizational Learning at MIT Sloan School of Management. Firms in this view are described as complex and organic and to just maximize shareholders value is not enough to explain

change factors. The best way to maximize shareholders value in this view is to form an organization that is characterized by dynamic adaption for organizational learning. To maximize value is not often concentrated to one person. An organization constantly evolves, due to the environment, ingenuity and innovative members of the organization. Change is here seen to have the purpose to improve how organizations learn to adapt in a changing environment (Senge, 2000). This sort of argument stresses the importance of underlying values considering organizational change management (Sturdy & Grey, 2003).

Gambling, Inc., the firm we are investigating, is just exposed to competition to some extent, via Internet. They are also owned by the Swedish state. As the company does not have any pressure from their shareholder to achieve a return of investment is it impossible to analyse them from the shareholder perspective. What is more suiting is to analyse our case from the view of organizational capabilities. Following we will handle literature concerning the organizational capability perspective. The main focus will be on environmental pressures, which is one explanation to why firms change. Firms respond to environmental pressures and often have to change, in order to maintain their business (Palmer et al., 2006). This is line with our case, where the investigated firm has been exposed to such pressures. Professor in leadership and organizational management, John P. Kotter (1996), identifies one of these environmental pressures as technological pressure of change. It is a part of globalization, which is one driver of change all companies face. Organizations must face these challenges, not just to compete on the market, it is about their survival (Kotter, 1996).

The company we are investigating has in the past decade been exposed to something similar to hyper competition in the Internet market. A hyper competitive market is described by D'aveni and Gunther (1994) as extremely competitive and intense, where they argue that companies have to be on their toes in order to gain an advantage against their competitors. This creates an environment where companies operate in constant change. According to Heracleous (2003) a sustainable competitive advantage, in a high speed environment as described here can only be acquired by constant innovation and adaptability, as opposed to Leana and Barry (2000) whom argued for stability. Anyhow, it is also argued that in such markets firms are

competing for clients by developing the 'killer' product or service, which will secure their position on the market (Evans & Schmalense, 2002). An example for such a service is online gambling where the firm have spend resources on development due to Internet and an unregulated market, in order to stay competitive. The use of the Internet has also changed customers' preferences. Companies have to respond to the technological changes and are forced to deliver products and services quicker, more flexible and more customized (Palmer et al., 2006). Internet is not the only contributing factor to the current technological development. Innovation of new technological platforms like mobile computing leads to creation of new products (Tripas, 1997).

As long as any company is exposed to competition through the Internet market, and the technological development is continuing, it can be argued that the firm will be forced to evolve strategic thinking and planning. This is needed in a fast-moving world (Heracleous, 2003). One can also argue that for stability and order are necessary in this fast-moving world (Leana & Barry, 2000). There are many perspectives on change, why it occurs and how important is. We have here have tried to provide the reader with an insight to different perspectives and approaches to changes. The literature review will continue on with showing some existing research concerning how to manage the changes in general, and thereafter continue on by reviewing the middle managers role in change processes.

3.2. Change Management

When an organization is changing it is of high importance that the people are managed well, because well managed people manage change more efficiently (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2006). In the following paragraph we will mainly show some of the conclusions management guru and professor in leadership and change management, John P. Kotter (1995), has drawn from his experiences in witnessing over a hundred companies attempts to changing. According to Kotter (1995) these companies have had to change in order to adapt to more challenging market environments. Overall, change is now constantly present in organizational (Burnes, 2004), why some of Kotter's conclusions are very relevant to the organization we are studying, the reason to why we want to show these. We believe it is relevant for the

reader to have a sense of what seems to be important in managing organizational changes, as well as common mistakes made.

Kotter (1995; 1996) argues that a successful change processes will take time and that an organization should include certain parts in changing the organization. If the organization was to skip any of these parts of the organizational change process, it might create an image of speed, but the results will hardly ever be successful. An additional important overall learning he found though his research was that failure in any of the parts of the process can have huge negative impacts on the change process as a whole. Kotter (1996) presents different parts that should be included in the change process, which he believes top management should use. We will here present the main parts, which we believe is relevant for our specific case.

A change can for instance, as noted previously, become relevant due to a technological trend, or when the organization gets a new leader who sees need for changes. An incredibly important part in the beginning of a change process is to communicate why there is a need for the changes (Kotter, 1995). Communication is said to be the 'life blood' of the organization, and the 'oxygen' of change within it (Gill, 2002). Changes need to be communicated due to that many individuals will probably be involved, and these must be convinced and motivated, otherwise there is a risk that nothing will happen. Explanations for failure in this step could be that managers underestimate the importance of getting people on board and motivated to change, or difficulties of getting people out of their comfort zone. Additional sources to failure could be that there are too many managers instead of leaders, and good leaders are essential. If an organization was to attempt change when business is going well could also be a challenge as it is harder to motivate (Kotter 1995; 1996).

It is important for the people managing the change, in most cases the top management, to develop a clear vision of what separates the future from the past (Kotter, 1995). This is necessary to motivate people to work towards a common goal (Hooper & Potter, 2000). A clear vision should simplify hundreds and thousands of more detailed decisions, it also encourages people to take the steps in the right direction and it helps coordinating the people incorporated in the change process. Without a clear vision a change project can easily develop into a bunch of confusing

and incompatible projects that might lead the organization in the wrong direction, or nowhere at all (Kotter, 1995).

Part of managing the change process is about successful communication. It is therefore necessary for the top management to have communication skills (Woodward & Henry, 2004). According to Kotter (1995) every successful transformation needs a clear image of how the future will look like, and it should be easy to communicate. It is important that as many people as possible understand and accept the strategic process of the organizational change. Too little communication and inconsistency in the communication concerning the vision and strategy of the strategic process is very common and happens easily. A lack of vision can create confusion. When getting everybody to understand and accept the change processes it is extremely important that the leaders "walk the talk", because actions do speak louder than words and the top management and the leaders should become living examples and embody the changes they want to see (Kotter 1996). It is also known that repetition of a message via more than one channel increase peoples memory (Dansereau & Markham, 1987). Still it is common that management only communicate the message once or twice, and often just via a written communication channel. When employees later complain of absence of communication they are told "you received the information in the plant bulletin" (In 2014, corporate Intranet) It is also common that the receiver of the information is blamed for not understanding it, even though they did not receive nor understand the information (Klein, 1996:34).

3.3. Middle managers role in organizational change

Middle managers hold intermediate levels at organizations and what normally distinguishes their position is their functional and operational work and knowledge, combined with their access to top management (Wooldridge et al., 2008). Middle managers often become agents of change processes, but are often foci of change (Fenton-O'Creevy 1998, McConville, 2006). Their role in the process is often challenging and complex (Balogun, 2003, Balogun & Johnson, 2004), but can be of crucial importance to the success of the change. Their role can include a great responsibility and empowerment, with a challenging and very wide role. At the same time work intensity, ambiguity and demoralization of middle managers is a result of

broken psychological contracts during change processes is very common. Even if top management is dedicated to the change, if the middle managers are not, they can affect the outcomes in various negative ways (Guth & Macmillan, 1986). Change projects should be facilitated so that it creates coordinated and cooperative action. Important when implementing a change is therefore to understand and take in consideration the role of the middle managers, and their psychological processes (Wooldridge et al., 2008). For example how they understand and experience being a part of the changes.

Commitment to change is a distinct form of commitment from organizational commitment, and relates to how much middle managers understands, takes in and supports the changes in process and goals (Ford, Weissbein & Plamodon, 2003). Precursor to commitment to the changes is normally how middle managers perceive fairness of the organizational procedures during the change, for example involvement (Barton & Ambrosini, 2013). A higher level of commitment to the changes will result in a higher level of ownership of the decisions and changes. Commitment to the changes is related to how consistent people's behaviour is to the direction the organization is going (Noble & Mokwa, 1999). When one does not experience fairness and commitment, for example by lack of communication or not being able to participate it could lead to cynicism. Reichers, Wanous, and Austin (1997) states that a history of failed organizational changes, lack of communication and the feeling of being uninformed can lead to cynicism. In line with this, Beer and Eisenstat´s (2000) have conducted a study which study that 10 out of 12 studied companies had inferior communication from top to bottom when implementing a strategic change, and that this led to cynicism among employees.

With this we conclude our literature review, where we have shown an overview of organizational change, change management and the middle managers role in change. We will continue on with next chapter: the analysis of empirical material.

4. Analysis

4.1. Pressure from multiple directions

As previously noted, we conducted interviews with 10 middle managers. The primary finding to our research question "How do middle managers experience managing in a changing organization?" is that middle managers find themselves squeezed by pressure from multiple directions and that their managing attempts often feel futile. The squeeze they experience is due to pressure from top management over managing them, a lack of top-down communication, a culture of consensus amongst colleagues, and pressure from the middle managers themselves and their employees. From all 'sides': top, bottom, sideways and even from within, our middle managers feel pressures that often makes their managing attempts feel futile. This following analysis will cover these different pressures from the multiple directions, and show how our findings appear in practice.

4.2. Pressure from above

In this part of the analysis we will present our main findings considering how middle managers experience pressure from above. In order to give the reader a good understanding of the soon to be presented material will we here give a short summary of the main findings we will present in this section of the analysis. The middle managers are experiencing top management to 'over manage' them. This in the sense that they do not let them be leaders in the way that they want to be leaders, which we will illustrate further below. Together with lack of communication and clarity from top management to the middle managers this creates pressure on the middle managers when they try to lead in change. This is connected to how middle managers feel about participation in decision-making when the changes affect them, where some argue that top management is not capable of making change decisions that affects the middle managers operational work. The accumulated effect from this is that the middle managers feel pressure and tension from above and that their job becomes more difficult. Presented reactions to such pressures are opting out, playing along and cynicism.

Here we will show how middle managers experience their involvement and participation in organizational change decisions when it is up to top management. Most of the managers express that they want to be a part of making decisions when the outcome will affect them. We have also been told that the organization has changed a lot, and fast, in the past 10 years, from having been a quite tranquil company where changes did not happen fast or so often. Concerning this the middle managers express that top management and the HR department learned a lot in the change processes, and that they are much more effective and smooth nowadays compared to when the changes started occurring more often and fast. Even so, many of the middle managers feel as if they, and thereby their employees also, can not be as much involved as they want to, and yet they are still expected to practice 'as if' they were involved. We understood the general sense to be negative when some of the middle managers expressed that they felt as if the top management did not make an effort in trying to involve people. The following quote shows how a female middle manager feels about past change processes, where she reflects upon middle managers possibilities to participate in organizational changes.

> *We became involved in the process far too late. We were let in almost when all the boxes were put out, and then it's up to us to solve the problems. I'd much rather have seen that we had a dialogue before, discussed how we work and what processes we have, and then decided about where to place the boxes, instead of the opposite.*

Not feeling that there is possibility to participate meaningfully and be involved in changes creates tension and can have an impact on middle managers situation at work. The middle manager here explained that top management's approach many times complicates her work, because they make decisions without knowing how she and her section actually works in practice, and once the decisions are made it is up to her and her employees to "just make it work". When she told us this we got the sense that she was irritated and dissatisfied that she could not participate earlier. This puts her in an unfavourable position, since she cannot always affect her work situation, but has to fix issues that the decisions made by top management create.

Nevertheless, some of the middle managers argue that involving too many people is something problematic, and that everyone cannot always be part of decisions and influence how decisions are made. The following quote illustrates how some managers' experience that everyone should not participate in every decision as it slows down the work process, with exceptions though.

All middle managers want to participate, this is in order to influence your own work situation. I fully understand that this is unreasonable. I know, as a middle manager that everyone can't be involved all the time, if so you will never go forward. Sometimes you have to say "this is the way it's going to be". The problem is when someone says that"this is the way it's going to be", when that person is not capable to make those decisions.

This quote shows, not only, that some of the participants believe that everyone cannot be a part of every decision, as it is highly time consuming. It also stresses what a significant part of the participants return to, when the middle manager in the end of the quote refers to top management. He is telling us what many of the middle managers expressed, that they know how the practical work is done further down in the organization, better than top management, and many decisions that top management pushes down on them are not realistic in practice. The middle manager in the quote above expressed that there is a problem when someone who is not capable of making decisions, here referring to top management, has the mandate to make them. One interviewee even spoke about his manager in a favourable matter, but with irony in his voice, which we interpret as cynicism. The following quote is when he reflects about one of the newer managers.

We are a big group of people, almost 40, and the new manager has never had any employee responsibilities before. He is one of these 'coming stars', so this will be interesting...

During the interview with this manager was it clear that he was not satisfied with some of the new managers and the changes that the company had been through the recent years. He used irony frequently and answered many questions about top management with sarcasm. We believe this to be cynicism, and when we talked to

some of the other middle managers, they as well used irony and sarcasm when reflecting about changes. Many of the participants seemed tired of change.

As we have mentioned before, the middle managers are responsible to lead their section in organizational changes, after they receive directives from top management. This has been problematic in many cases as employees and middle managers do not experience that they have the authority to influence the changes. When the middle managers additionally do not understand the vision of the change initiative, it is difficult to lead and much tension is created. The next quote will highlight this issue and which consequences it creates, for middle managers, in order to manage in a changing organization. In addition how it could affect how their employees responds to change.

> *Neither the employees nor we* (middle managers) *were involved in some of the past changes. This creates problems for us, because if you don't know why the changes are done and don't have the possibility to affect them, or not even have the perception that you can have an impact, it is very difficult to embrace the changes. Especially the employees have been left outside, and in my belief they haven't always been treated in the best way.*

As the quote states, if one does not perceive that it is possible to have an impact or influence a change it is difficult to embrace it. This complicates the middle managers work to lead in change and creates tension because they are squeezed between top management and employees. Top management historically have pushed down change strategies to middle managers, which they do not feel as if they are a part of, nor fully understand. Their job is then to implement this strategy to employees, whom they do not believe feel committed to the changes as they lack understanding and feel left out from not participating in the change processes. Additionally the middle managers do not always understand the changes themselves, which creates even more tension. When we talked to this middle manager we sometimes saw cues of that he just wanted to pause, go and hide, and come back when the changes were over. We believe that he showed signs of opting out.

In this part we want to show aspects of how middle managers experience top management's communication towards them. This is because our findings about that the middle managers is experiencing a lot of pressures, in many ways are connected to communication, or the lack of it, from top management. So, top management expects to set the rules from the beginning, yet they wish for collaboration from middle managers – or at least to see them participating. However, they do not communicate well. Throughout change processes top management normally communicates through the middle managers and the company's intranet to spread information in the organization. Many of the middle managers feel as if the communication sometimes is incomplete, for example that there could be more of it. This is expressed by a male middle manager here:

> *You can never get enough communication and information, especially when it's*
> *messy. People always think it's too little anyways.*

This thought, that there can never be enough communication, is expressed by many of the middle managers. Regarding our research question, how the middle managers experience managing in a changing organization, they all express that they experience that managing becomes difficult when there is not enough information. Our perception is that poorly communicated and organizational changes with no involvement has happened too many times, in a few years in Gambling Inc. The middle managers are tired of organizational changes, especially the ones they do not understand or top management is clear about. This sort of failure can be dangerous for organizations as it could affect those in it negatively. For instance, Beer and Eisenstat´s (2000) study indicates that 10 out of 12 studied companies had inferior communication from top to bottom when implementing a strategic change, and that this led to cynicism among employees. This is also in line with what Reichers, Wanous, and Austin (1997), states concerning that a history of failed organizational changes, lack of communication and the feeling of being uninformed can lead to cynicism.

As we will see in the following part this sometimes creates an unstable climate in the organization, and makes the middle managers feel insecure. One aspect that sometimes seems to be absent is clarity of how the organizational changes will work

in practice. As we have illustrated above the middle managers experience tension and pressure from top management taking too much space and not letting them in, and sometimes communicating poorly. A consequence of this is what many of the middle managers express as a lack of clarity concerning integration and to how the changes actually will work in practice. This is expressed as a problem and as a stressful factor in the middle managers everyday work. Below one male middle manager tells us how he feels about this.

> *It sometimes feels like my manager presents the new organization and the different parts, and after that is it up to me to get it to work in practice. This is really difficult sometimes, when I don't understand how I will get it to work. "Am I supposed to do this?" - it is really hard and I don't know how to answer these questions…*

Partly what he here talks about is what we showed in the previous part of the analysis, involvement in decisions and what sometimes happens when middle managers are not a part of the decisions. Together with not being involved, they do not always gain a lot of information about how the changes are being made, as the middle manager here tells us. The top management has made decisions about organizational changes, and do not explain them enough to the middle managers. We understood the middle managers to feel confused and their job becoming harder to handle due to this. One of the difficult aspects of this is that when people do not know how the changes will affect them they become worried and insecure in their job role. Many of the middle managers told us about that once they and their employees find out that there will be new organizational changes they start to worry. This is normally because of lack of information, they do not know how the change will affect them. In following quote one female middle manager tells us about this.

> *One knows what you have at this moment, but it´s impossible to predict what the future will look like. People always get worried when it´s a bigger reorganization, since they feel insecure and don't know if they will fit in the new organization or not.*

So, when telling us this, she also explained that she believes it to be common for people to feel worried when they are insecure about their future. But the fact still remains that it makes the middle managers management more complex, because there are more dimensions to handle, with themselves being worried, as well as the people they are leading. Even if they do have a difficult time and are confused, they still have to act as leaders for their employees, and when she was talking about this she sounded concerned. In the following part we will show how the middle managers feel about their role in the communication process.

Absence of communication, why and how the organization is changing, from top management is not the only problem middle managers face. Some argue that role descriptions and responsibilities are not communicated clearly from top management and overlaps with other people. The lack of clarity here creates tension amongst their colleagues and makes their role more difficult to handle. This quote describes how one manager experiences the ambiguity of her role. We found it clear in her voice that she was irritated by it.

> *Right now we have a situation where I have just received my role description. But you see someone else's role description in another part of the organization, and it's like "but was not I supposed to do that!? It says the same thing on Carl's over here!". And then we* (middle managers) *have to solve it… But they should have thought about it before!*

Here she explains that there are often confusions around who has the responsibility for what. According to her the top management fail in some aspects to communicate and direct clearly and it is often up to the middle managers to solve the problems internally. This is an additional evidence for where the confusion amongst the middle managers comes from, which is lack of clarity. However, it is possible that this is a designed strategy by top management, with the intentions to make middle managers responsible for solving the operational problems amongst themselves. Intentional strategy or not, middle managers experience this to be problematic and stressful.

One of the male middle managers told us about the uncertainties he experienced in the organization. What was interesting with him was that we understood him to find the

ambiguities problematic, but he was still playing along with how the change process took place.

> *The current goals are quite ambiguous, except for profitability. It feels like I have been minding my own business with no interference from management the five past years. Which is for better and for worse, "the power of one". Haha!*

This quote shows the image of a middle manager as playing along and we believe his approach is a quite common reaction to the situation and the pressuring environment. Absence of advice and support from management did seem to bother him but it felt like he was pretending as if everything was okay. This might have to do with the strong consensus culture and that he felt support from other middle managers. We also interpreted the same reaction from other middle managers, when they were telling us that even if they believed there to be extremely much changes and they experienced much pressure from different directions in their managing efforts, they said that this is not unique for their organization. They were just to do their job in best way possible, while waiting for the calmer moments. In this sense they were accepting the situation as it was, with a smile on their face.

We will now give a brief summary of the pressures that the middle managers experienced from above, before continuing on to the next part of this analysis: the pressure from the side.

4.3. Summary of the pressures from above

In this part of the analysis we have illustrated the pressures and tension middle managers experience from above. It is mainly due to that they feel as if top management wants to 'over manage' and does not let them participate meaningfully, which combined with a lack of communication and clarity many times creates tension and puts pressure on the middle managers when they try to lead in change. Regarding this we have found that middle managers want to be involved in decision making when the outcomes of the decisions will affect them and their section. Not feeling included in changes, or having possibility to participate meaningfully could lead to cynicism (Reichers et al., 1997) which may be problematic for the organization. This

is one of the reactions to feeling squeezed by pressure that we believe to have seen amongst the middle managers. Other reactions we have seen are opting out and playing along.

Some of the middle managers feel as if they have not been able to participate enough in decision-making concerning changes, which creates problems and difficulties for them in terms of that they do not experience the decisions around the changes to really work in practice. Later they have to act as problem solvers and try to work out the more practical aspects of the changes. This is connected to another finding concerning top managements 'over management', which is that since top management sometimes do not discuss how things work in practice and how changes will affect the different sections daily work, the middle managers find that they are not fit to make the decisions without learning more first. Therefore middle managers feel as if they should be a part of the decision making in earlier stages.

Some of the middle managers experience that there sometimes is a lack of clarity in the roles and responsibilities of the middle managers and how the changes will work in practice. This might be an effect of top management not completely knowing how things work in practice, but still makes the decisions and pushes them down on the middle managers to solve. We have also found that the middle managers sometimes experience it being difficult to embrace the changes when they are not involved or receive enough information to understand the changes. In organizational changes the middle managers feel pressure from the confusion that occurs in the company amongst themselves and their employees because of ambiguity to what the outcomes of the changes will be.

We have here shown how the middle managers experience top management to manage too much when it comes to decision making and also to not communicate enough or very clearly. The effect from this is that the middle managers feel pressure and tension from above and that their job becomes more difficult. We found that they react by becoming cynical and opting out, but also by playing along with how it all works, even if they seemed dissatisfied. In the following part of the analysis we will illustrate how the culture of constant consensus affects the interviewees while leading in change.

4.4. Pressure from the side

This part of the analysis will show that Gambling Inc. has what we call a *consensus culture*. This culture is characterized by that there is a sense amongst colleagues that there is always need for consensus when decisions are being made. This is seen as positive in the sense that people feel as if they can be involved and participate in decision making with colleagues. Another aspect of this, that we believe was far more interesting and will show in this part of the analysis, is that the consensus culture often pressures middle managers and makes their job more difficult than necessary. Many times it also creates tension amongst colleagues. As noted in previous methodology chapter concerning our case the consensus culture is quite common in Swedish organizations, as well as the entire Swedish society (www.thelocal.se). In Gambling Inc. the phenomena is mainly occurring horizontally, between middle managers, but in some senses also vertically which we will show in following section. Many of the middle managers we interviewed expressed that they felt a lot of pressure from their colleagues, both that they should be a part of decision-making all the time, and that they could not make decisions on their own without discussing it with other middle managers first. We were also told that the consensus culture in some aspects affects the change processes. Concerning our finding, that middle managers feel squeezed when they are trying to manage in change, the consensus culture plays a vital part, which we here will explore further. The reactions from pressure and tension from the consensus culture manifested itself in different ways, some middle managers reacted to these pressures by selectively opting in, acting cynical and by choosing to 'play along'.

Some managers mention the consensus culture in a positive light, but the interviewees that talked about it still let us know that it in other ways can be negative. They explained to us that other people expected them to be a part of decision-making that they themselves felt as if they should not be a part of. This would often include meeting and discussing things, that they did not have anything to say about, did not know a lot about, and did not even want to be part of. One male manager explained to us that he often felt as if he had to focus on things that were not part of his work area, and that he did not feel was relevant for his part of the business.

> *I think that we hold a very high pace….but we do not do anything! Because we meet and work on the wrong things. We work on organizational questions, I mean.. I want to work on things that actually change our business, I want to work on our products. We do that too, but we keep an extremely high tempo and the calendars are full with meetings, week after week. And you sit there and think "should I really sit here and discuss this!?" when you really want to work on developing the business.*

In this quote he talks about that the middle managers always keep a high pace, but that the outcomes often are not comparable to the work and energy put in it. He, as some of the other middle managers expressed, feel like very much energy is being put on things that are not relevant. Many of them seemed frustrated and irritated by this, for example being called into meetings which does not handle their work area. This in some ways makes them feel inhibited to work on the aspects of the organizational change in their own area and they experience that they are not able to focus on managing this in the way that they want to. An aspect on this is that it might be seen as contradictory to the fact that the middle managers want to be more involved in other parts of decision-making, as we illustrated in the previous section.

Something which also seems to frustrate and pressure the middle managers is the fact that when they have a responsibility and mandate to make a decision, colleagues want to get involved. In following quote one male manager expresses what he feels about that other people want to be involved in every aspect of the business:

> *Many people want to be involved and come with inputs. Maybe someone else can formulate this better, but everyone wants to be involved everywhere. So, a lot of people "know better", no matter what they work with or what they are doing. If you work in Gambling Inc. you know how other people should do their job better. Not necessarily because you have any experience or have worked with it or have any education, you just know. It is this "I-know-everything"-thing. It is restrictive, limiting and not fun.*

During the interview he expressed a lot of frustration about the consensus culture, which according to him exists in the entire organization. We interpreted that he was cynical due to that he felt as if other people always thought that they knew better than

him at his job. Many other middle managers expressed that it is stressful that once you have the responsibility for something and mandate to make a decision, you do not always feel as if you can, because others will always interfere. This pressures the middle managers, since they do not feel as if they can make their own decisions concerning their section or areas of responsibility, as well as it creates tension amongst colleagues.

The consensus culture might be a heritage of Swedish culture, where people like to discuss and agree on things before making decisions (www.thelocal.se). But one female manager had been thinking about the consensus culture, and what might cause its' existence.

> *This involvement in everything, I think and I hear can sometimes translate to that there is no trust amongst each other. Do you understand? Because I do not have the mandate to make the decision, but have to involve 8 others before I can make it. Because if I would do it on my own I would get in trouble if someone somewhere else in the organization think they should have been involved. Therefore I think we should define areas, so that everyone knows. "You have nothing to do with this, you have yours over there and I have nothing to do with that", you know?*

Here she explains to us that she feels distrusted, and that other people believe there to be a lack of trust amongst the middle managers in the organization. Therefore people do not dare to make decisions on their own, without consulting with colleagues first, and people want to get involved in decisions because they do not trust the person that has the mandate to make the right decision. A couple of other people expressed the fear of deciding something on their own, which we understood as a consequence of the consensus culture. Still, we understood that she was playing along in this cultural phenomenon and acting in the same way that she did not actually like.

Another of the middle managers did not really seem to care about other people trusting him, he was more concerned about the time issue of always having to discuss, meet and agree about everything. He let us know that he as a person is really focused

and wants to get things done, which he also believes he should have the mandate to do within his sector and area of responsibility.

> *Me, personally, can make a decision and say that "I made this decision and this is how it will be", but there are always people who do not agree and think I am stupid. These people may have a difficult time with my decision and want to go another round, which in my world might mean that it takes another 2 months. I am quite focused, and many times I feel like "I want to do this, and it shouldn't take 2 more months". For me it is enough discussing something 7 times, and not a hundred.*

In this quote he was talking about the decision-making processes, which according to him often takes very much time. That the consensus culture was time consuming seemed to be the general point of view amongst the people we interviewed and most of them mentioned it in different ways. This pressures the middle managers, since they cannot manage and take responsibility for their section in the time frame that they believe is necessary or the best way. We experienced him to be irritated and frustrated by the restriction that he felt came with the consensus in decision-making.

Not all of the middle managers expressed this phenomenon in the sense of the "consensus culture", some of the interviewees talked about it in a more "soft" sense. We heard middle managers explain that there are always too many meetings to attend, and that it is important to be selective and not attend all of them. We believe that this is a sort of selectively opting in. If you are not selective you will never have time to do your actual job. One female manager told us that it is difficult to manage your job time wise, even if you are selective:

> *There is a huge frequency of meetings. And still, I am really good at saying "no", I constantly clear my calendar, but it is still pretty full. And this probably has to do with this participation, like 10 people in a room deciding about a small, insignificant thing.*

As she sais, that it is important to be selective, many of the other middle managers also experience this. They talk about prioritizing, how important it is in their job, and

that they have had to develop their prioritising skills. One other aspect of the consensus culture that the same female middle manager expressed to us is that the quality in decision making sometimes declines, as this quote explains:

The participation is very high in the company. So, in a "decision-triangle" with participation, quality and speed we are right in the corner of participation. This makes us lose speed and the quality in some senses degrades, since so many people interfere.

So, as she explains here the speed of decision making declines, and that she also experiences that the quality of the work gets affected in a negative way of "everyone" always being involved in "everything". Just as we see in her quote, some of the other managers also think that being involved in many things complicates your work, as well as having too many others involved in your work also complicates it. Still, nobody told us straight out how they would do to solve this quality and speed issue.

As we have illustrated, many of the middle managers experience the involvement of others in their responsibility areas to be frustrating, time consuming and pressuring. In the following quote one of the male middle managers talked about how the constant involvement complicates the change processes.

You put a lot of time on unnecessary work, so the change process become extremely complicated, takes a lot of time, and becomes difficult. Very much more difficult than it should have to be, if the people that had mandate in the decision actually could make the decision themselves.

Here he explains that the change processes takes excessive time and what other quotes before also explained, that it should be able to be easier to make a decision than it becomes when colleagues constantly want to agree on things, and the responsible middle manager cannot decide things on their own.

Another issue, that surprised us concerning the consensus culture, was that one of the middle managers told us that he believe it to also affects employees. In the sense that once the employees are delegated more responsibility they do not want to, or dare to,

make decisions, since they know that they will actually not be able to make the decision on their own, and other people will interfere. In the following quote he explains how he think it affects most of his employees:

You can connect it to that they for example feel like "I do my job, I take responsibility for it, but if I get more responsibility and mandate that I anyways actually do not have mandate for, then it all just becomes difficult". So some of them back down because of this, and are happy by just doing their job, and avoid all the fuss (...) You can get a whole lot of shit from colleagues, and the employees must see this. In the same way as they do not feel as they get the mandate they are responsible for, they see that the managers also do not get it. (...) A - you do not want to make decisions or B - you make the wrong decision. You can chose between these 2. And of course, as an employee you do not want it to be like this. In general I think we have few internal candidates for managerial positions.

So, according to him the consensus culture might even affect the internal recruitment, which was surprising to us to hear. When we talked about this topic he told us that he think that many of his employees do not want any additional responsibilities, and that the consensus culture affects their drive and motivation to work their way up and climb the career ladder in a negative way. For example by what he said about the alternatives when you make decisions, which never seemed to be positive. This was a very interesting perspective of the consensus culture's effect on different parts of the organization. We do not know if the other middle managers had reflected on this or not, since we first heard about it in the end of the interview process. In this sense the consensus culture does not only affect the middle managers and the organization horizontally, but also vertically. Their employees might also be affected. This perspective of the consensus culture affects the middle managers in the sense that it is their responsibility to develop the employees, which is difficult when they do not want more responsibility or be involved in decision-making. Especially when the organization is changing and there are more decisions to be made.

The cultural phenomena might affect the employees of the middle managers, which could put additional pressure on the middle managers since they have the

responsibility to work on the employees' development. But in other ways the employees also put pressure on the middle managers, which we will explore after the summary of the consensus culture, in the next part of the analysis.

4.5. Summary of Pressure from the side

In this part of the analysis we have illustrated how middle managers experience managing in a changing organization in relation to the consensus culture amongst their colleagues in the organization. We have found that they find the consensus culture to be very time consuming and that they feel as if they have to concentrate on things that they do not see as relevant in regards to their role. They also experience that they cannot make decisions on their own, because their colleagues always want to interfere, which might be an effect of lack of trust amongst colleagues. Moreover, some of them experiences the consensus culture as a negative impact on the quality of the work and affecting the change process in a negative way. The last finding is that the consensus culture might affect the internal recruitment, since the employees see the problems being responsible and have a mandate can bring.

All of these facts, which are depending of what we call the consensus culture, puts a lot of pressure and tension on the middle managers, and makes managing in a changing organization a lot more difficult. We interpreted them to in some ways react with cynicism and irritation here, but also by selectively opting in. Now we have showed one of the pressures coming from the consensus culture amongst middle managers, and we will continue on by showing the middle managers experienced pressure from employees.

4.6. Pressure from below and within

The third part of our overall finding, middle managers being squeezed from multiple directions, will focus on pressure from employees. To clarify, the biggest pressure considering employees comes from within the middle managers themselves, but additionally there is some pressure coming directly from the employees. Our interviews show that the middle managers care about their employees and want to be good managers. The pressure they experience when managing in a changing

organization involves being available to the employees and how to work with communicating organizational change to employees. Below we will cover these aspects, and analyse them in order to answer our research question - How do middle managers experience managing in a changing organization?

According to the middle managers we interviewed, when managing change, one very important aspect is being available to employees. The following section will highlight this factor and analyse how middle managers experience this perspective of managing in a changing organization. Most of the managers we interviewed believed being available for employees as essential during a change process. This quote by a male middle manager explains why he experiences it as important to be available for employees during a change process.

> *The role as a leader is much about developing others, lead the daily operation, and make sure the section accomplishes the goals. This applies particularly during a change process, as it's generally an insecure and messy environment since the daily processes do not always apply.*

He here explains that maintaining the daily work, as a leader, with everything it involves during a change process, can be difficult as the environment is promiscuous. Situations as such could be stressful since they are messy and the daily routines have been overthrown. We believe the implicit meaning of this quote states that the middle managers must be available for the employees in a change process to keep the everyday work going. This relates to our finding about middle managers feeling squeezed from pressure coming from different directions, because much more time and energy has to be focused on the employees and on being present, than normally. As most of the middle managers we interviewed mentioned availability to their employees as one of their most important tasks during a change process. The participants believe, in general, that to be available is salient since the staff needs support when the everyday work tasks and goals are not clear, as we showed in the previous part concerning pressures from above. The middle managers' role to lead the daily operations, develop their employees and get their department to accomplish their goals demands a higher level of availability when they are exposed to a change process.

We believe it is apparent that the middle managers feel quite much pressure concerning the time the extra availability to their employees takes. As we will show later in this part, the middle managers experience it to be important for their employees to understand, and have information about the changes, for the employees to be able to process the changes easier and deal with them better. This takes time, which the quote below expresses:

> *Now during a couple of weeks I have been sitting with each person once a week, depending on their need. For some the changes have been easy and gone great and they only need like 15 minutes, but others might have the need to speak for one hour or more. Then you have to rearrange, move and prioritize and do all the 'musts' later.*

This female middle manager tells us about that she feels that she has to be available to her employees, especially in a change process. She interprets that many of them feel the need to talk and "make sense" of the changes, why she takes extra time to meet with them. The time she takes to this she is borrowing from time to her other tasks, why she feels pressure and has to work many extra hours to be able to be an available manager to her employees. When we talked to her we got the sense that she was very tired of the changes and the extra energy they took.

Being unable to be available for the employees during an organizational change also creates pressure for the middle managers. A significant part of the interviewees believe time for employees and being visible as a manager are vital characteristics for managing change. One manager expressed this in a transparent manner:

> *When it comes to a change process, availability is really the alpha and omega. I try to take time for my employees, but it might not always be immediately, if I don't have time. If it is not an emergency it might wait until the next day. What I try to do is find time to listen and help them with their problems or if they don't understand something.*

It is clear during the interviews we have conducted that lack of time and a heavy workload, for middle managers, can have an impact on the time for their employees. When some of them spoke of this we felt worry in their voices. All of the interviewees experience the work rate to be generally high in the organization, which makes it impossible for them to always be available for their employees. Most of them argue that they try to put their staff in first hand but time pressure is a recurrent element. Following quote explains how many of the middle managers feel about time pressure, availability and employees.

> *I'm used to working a lot and I always try to be available to my staff, which you're supposed to be, you have to prioritize them. Unfortunately you don't always have time for that. Some things need to be put at side and you can't have time for everything.*

Many of the managers come back to that that they do not have time for all job assignments but need to prioritize the most important. Most believe, however, that time for employees sometimes are neglected because of other musts. The main content is that middle managers experience availability for the employees as salient in a change process. Here the ability to be available for employees is however limited by other work tasks and a general high time pressure. The main issue concerning this is that they feel pressure and tension due to that they do not feel as if they can be good enough managers, because they have to take time for other things too, and they feel as if the employees need and want more time with them in change processes.

Most of the middle managers experience their role in the communication process as important when it comes to taking in information from top management and inform and communicate it to their employees during a change process. Their role considering communication is used in the company as a communication channel to reach out to everyone in the organization. Pressure they experience considering employees and communication is that the employees expect them to inform them as much as possible concerning how and why they are changing. In the following quote a female middle manager expresses how she feels about her role in the communication process.

If you are re-organizing it is normally the employees that are affected, and sometimes it happens fast. Then of course there are some employees that do not understand or follow, and our role as a middle manager and communicator becomes extra important. We have a bit more information then the employees, as my manager have a bit more information than I do.

Here she tells us that she understands her role to be vital in the communication process, and in delivering information from top management to the employees. She understands it to be important to clarify the change efforts and make her employees understand and be able to follow when the organization is going through organizational changes. We also believe that an implicit meaning might be what we illustrated earlier in the analysis, which is that middle managers believe that it is important that their managers communicate enough concerning the changes, since they have more information. Another of the middle managers also expresses what he feels about his role concerning communication to the employees:

I am always open and honest with my employees concerning most things. And if I don't have an answer, then I tell them that I don't have an answer. People understand that, but in the same way they expect me, as a manager, to in some way get the answer. That is a part of the role.

Here he talks about it being a part of his role to be able to provide your employees with answers, as a middle manager, and in managing in a changing organization. We understood that he experiences pressure that he should be able to provide his employees with necessary information concerning the changes. Here some pressure is created due to what we explained previously in the analysis, that top management does not always communicate enough or clearly to the middle managers. Thus, the middle managers feel tension, since they cannot provide their employees with the information they want or need.

4.7. Summary of the Pressure from below and within

We found that middle managers experience pressure from wanting to manage their employees in a good way during change processes. This pressure might come from employees needing or demanding time and information from the managers, or from within the manager, in him/her just wanting to be as good of a leader as possible. In managing in a changing organization they believe time and availability for their employees to be vital, as well as communicating the why's and how's of the changes. Concerning availability the managers often find that they have to make extra time for their employees during the change processes, for them to make sense of the changes in their environment, and sometimes just to keep the daily work going. Many of them feel as if they have to be available much more during changes, which take much time that they should have spent on other things. Therefore the pressure also comes from their working days becoming longer, to have time for all the other things. When middle managers feel as if they need to do their 'musts' before they give the employees time it seems as if they feel very bad about it, because they think of the employees as very important. When it comes to communication in managing change most of the middle managers feel as they should act as communicators and inform and keep their employees updated concerning the changes. One manager also expressed explicitly that he feels pressure from having to have answers to employees' questions, and that it is part of his role as their manager to provide them with answers, even if he does not have them at the time.

The managers did not in any ways seem sarcastic, cynical or in other senses tired of their employees. Instead we heard a lot of care and sympathy in their voices when they were telling us about them. Thus we interpret that they understand that their employees need available and communicative, and feel for them. This, as opposed to their colleagues or top management, when they were talking about either of them, or the pressures connected to them that they sometimes had irony, sarcasm, or cynicism in their voices, or just seemed tired of them.

5. Discussion, Summary & Conclusions

The purpose of this study is to, with an interpretive stance, explore how middle managers in a changing organization experience managing. This has been investigated by conducting qualitative interviews with middle managers at Gambling Inc. The study purpose has been reached by answering following research question "How do middle managers experience managing in a changing organization?". Because of that middle managers have to act as problem solvers when the changes are not working, do not always feel clarity concerning their responsibilities and role, have to discuss and participate in too many aspects of their colleagues work, and not being able to make their own decisions, at the same time as they feel like they can never give their employees enough time and information without working over extensively, they experience that they are pressured from multiple directions and squeezed between all these different parts.

The pressures from the different directions makes the middle managers feel as if their managing attempts sometimes are futile. This is a conclusion we have drawn since they many times do not feel as if they can make any decisions on their own, and always need to involve colleagues. We have also drawn this conclusion since they in some senses feel that no matter what they do, other tasks have to suffer. Most of them want to be good managers for their employees in the change process, but at the same time if they take the extra time that they perceive that they need, other things suffer, for example organizational development. If they do not take the extra time for their employees they feel as if they are not managing them well, which all of them believe is very important, and especially in a change process.

When we conducted the interviews we found different, sometimes very subtle and other times more direct, signs of how the middle managers react to the feeling of being squeezed and conducting pointless managing. We found opting out, becoming cynical, playing along and selectively opting in as the main responses to feeling squeezed. The reactions are not something any of them told us straight out, but things we got the sense of by sitting with each of them for at least one hour. To go more in depth here we would need more time to research. Our interpretation from this is that

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opting out, being cynical and playing along do not change the pressures on the middle managers, or their futile managing attempts. Still these are common reactions from for example feeling uninformed, or not receiving enough respect or involvement from top management (Reichers et al., 1997). We believe that cynical middle managers can harm the organizational attempts to change. Consequences of it can be lower morals and motivation, which complicates the change process and commitment to the change, and to the organization overall, which is also shown in literature concerning this. Additionally, we believe that part of the pressure can be reduced by selectively opting in. In this we mean that if they feel the courage to choose not to attend the meetings which they believe are unnecessary, they should. As one of the female middle managers told us about in one of the quotes of the analysis, that it is very important to prioritize and select which meetings you want to attend. This is something we would recommend all the middle managers to do, and something people in organizations with similar issues concerning a consensus culture should do. They should chose what they want to be involved in, as long as they fulfill their responsibilities. It might make more people see that it is not necessary for everyone to be involved, and it might reduce the stress and pressure that comes from having to put energy on these issues. Then managing what they actually are supposed to most likely will become easier.

5.1. Pressure from above

As we have shown in the analysis middle managers experience the top management in some aspects are managing 'too much' and not letting them in when they feel as if they should be let in. Top management often seem not to want to delegate and involve them, instead they make most decisions on their own, over the middle managers' heads. They do not let the middle managers in on all of the information and communication that the middle managers feel as if they need. Middle managers experience this to be problematic due to inferior communication, absence of meaningful involvement in the change process, and insufficient information from top management. This results in pressure from above and in tension when the middle managers are expected to solve the operational problems that arise with the change.

What we found concerning that the interviewees want clear vision of the change is in line with Kotter's (1995) reasoning. He argues that it is of high importance that the top management develops a clear vision of the change, and what it will lead to and what the future will hold. This helps coordinate people in the change process and makes it easier to stay on the right track. Without it the changes can easily develop into something confusing and incomprehensive. We interpreted that the same issue was expressed in the interviews we conducted. When they and their employees do not know what will happen in the future some of them also expressed that it affects the atmosphere, since people become worried and feel insecure. We want to argue for that if the middle managers and the employees would receive a clear vision to strive for they would know what the future would look like, and the stress they experience during managing change would be massively reduced.

It became clear to us that the middle managers were committed to the organization in many ways, since most of them had worked there for many years and they felt pressure because they wanted to be good managers. On the other hand, many of the middle managers were not very committed to the organizational changes. We believe this to be due to that they had experienced changes before, which were managed badly and that this affected their perceptions of the present changes (Palmer et al., 2006). As some participants expressed – there had been too much change in a too short period of time. We believe that it is clear that the middle managers want to be involved earlier in the change process, and want to argue that this is fair, since they have the practical knowledge. This might be something that causes them not to be as committed to the changes as they could be. Another aspect of why we believe they experience pressure and less commitment is because they have to 'clean up' the mess made by top management's decision-making. Middle managers experience top management to make bad decisions concerning changes. They might also experience it as unfair, why the commitment to the change is reduced. Moreover, we believe that the trust in top management can decrease, which will mean lower credibility for the leaders. From our perspective the middle managers would embrace and commit to the changes a lot more, and faster, if they would experience more meaningful involvement, which is something top management should take in and learn from. If the divisions of roles and the responsibilities were always clear and well communicated we argue the middle managers management would become easier.

This could also be something top management In Gambling Inc. could use to help middle managers in their role. It could mean that they would not have to make time to discuss and act as problem solvers amongst each other, something that is connected to the consensus culture, we will discuss next.

5.2. Pressure from the side

The second pressure that affects middle managers in a change process and makes them feel squeezed is pressure from the side. With this we mean pressures and tension amongst colleagues, and the consensus culture that exists between them at Gambling Inc. The consensus culture has proven to have a great impact of how change is experienced and managed at the firm. This is also the main reason to why the middle managers feel as if they are conducting futile managing attempts. The participants believe it is hard to make decisions on their own without consulting the other middle managers, even if they do not want to. Consensus culture is described by Dressler (2006) as a cooperative process that involves all group members, where they together develop and agree to support the decisions that are the best for the group in whole. He also means that in consensus there is trust and good faith to address all group members concerns, and that everyone's input is carefully considered. Dressler (2006) also states that in consensus there is trust and good faith to address all group members concerns.

Our study shows something different, more that the interviewees are thinking of themselves and their sector, and that one of them believes the cultural phenomena exist due to lack of trust in the organization. Our findings concerning consensus shows something else, and shines a negative light on the consensus culture phenomena. Consensus in decision-making is generally the norm in Sweden, which both of us researchers also know and grew up with. We believe that our findings show that it might not be the best alternative for the fast-paced environment we live in today, even if it historically worked. This finding can contribute to organizations who have this type of culture, perhaps specifically in a Swedish context where people many times probably do not even reflect on that it is a cultural phenomena. We also believe that these findings can contribute to the scholarly society which mainly shows

the positive sides of consensus (Dressler, 2006; Arietta & Wallace, 2000; Bressen, 2007).

Another aspect of the negative views on the consensus culture is that we see that it might be contradictory to the fact that middle managers want to be more involved in decision-making with top management. They wish to be more involved and participate, but not with other middle managers. It might also just be a cause of them wanting to be involved in decision-making when it handles their area and the outcome will affect them.

Unfortunately we also believe that the trust issues and the consensus culture can become a vicious circle, if it not already is. With this we mean that even if middle managers feel as if they do not want to involve others in their responsibilities, they feel as if they should and do it because others might not trust them. Therefore other people receive invites to meetings and become involved in issues that they do not even want to be involved in, and feel stressed and irritated by this. At the same time they also feel as if they should involve other people when they make decisions, because of the same reason as the first person, hence a vicious circle. This might be something that could occur in organizations with similar cultural and environmental contexts.

It is clearly problematic that the consensus culture is so time consuming, extremely energy consuming, and that some of the middle managers experience it to reduce the quality in the decision-making, and the change processes. This as well, makes them experience much pressure, and it is clear that managing becomes more difficult. We want to argue that our findings, concerning that the consensus culture pressures the middle managers, additionally is a negative fact concerning consensus. This again goes against the positive view on consensus that normally exists in Sweden, where consensus is the norm. Since managing by consensus and consensus in decision-making is very common in Sweden, this might be an important finding that can help organizations understand that there may be other, better ways. It might also help top- and middle managers in similar contexts to understand why they feel pressure, or give insights to how this phenomenon could be managed.

5.3. Pressure from below and within

The third pressure that affects middle managers in a change process and makes them feel squeezed is pressure from below, from employees. The pressures concerning the employees partly come from the employees, and mainly from within the middle managers, who feel pressure from wanting to be a good manager. This is partly because the middle managers believe that the employees need a present manager and more time with them for sense making. It is also because the managers feel as if they have the responsibility to inform and communicate as much as possible to their employees, and they still cannot provide enough information sometimes. Due to all the different aspects of the change process that we have discussed, for example the time-consuming consensus culture, the middle managers have a great lack of time. The time aspect is also what affects the availability from the middle manager to the employees. This stresses them, and pressures them to work longer hours, or they feel as if they are not a good enough manager.

Another of these pressures is that the middle managers' role includes developing the employees. Because of the consensus culture that we discussed above, we interpret that this might be difficult. Since the employees can become discouraged from responsibilities and taking on higher positions, which is a part of development, and in some senses make the middle managers role to develop them much more difficult, hence the pressure. Due to this the middle managers cannot delegate more tasks or responsibilities to their employees, which is a big part of developing. If this is something many of the employees actually feel, we see this finding as something that can be very important for the organization, and crucial for the internal recruitment. They also experience pressure from the employees that they want more information and communication than the middle managers can give them. This might be the reason to why the middle managers want more communication from top management. Another aspect of it is that the lack of communication from top management results in middle managers not being able to give the employees all the information they want and need. The fact that the middle managers are not always sure of their responsibility might also make it more difficult to communicate to the employees, since they many times themselves are confused. This is something that top management in changing organizations should keep in mind. If they do they can easily create less pressure and

tension for middle managers, who we believe most occasions are the people in organizations that become squeezed between top management and employees.

5.4. Suggestions for further research

We believe these findings can contribute to how middle managers role in a change process is understood, and specifically concerning tensions and pressures that affect them. This information is useful for managerial scholars, organizations, and top management and middle managers as the presented findings gives an in depth image of how middle managers experience managing in a changing organization. Based on these findings, one can draw conclusions about which conditions middle managers need to manage change optimally.

This study and the findings that come with it are limited by several factors. Time is such a factor, the study have been carried out in a tight time schedule, which might have influenced the process or outcome. Due to the time issue we have not had a possibility to go in depth in all the ways we would want.

We believe that this research can contribute with the specific context that our case organization is in. They have gone from being in a secure, slow moving environment, to quite fast gaining a huge deal of competition, which is quite unusual. Further it would be interesting to research pressures and tensions of middle managers in organizations which have been in a more fast-moving environment for a longer time. Even if they were located in Sweden a consensus phenomena might not be a problem either. We believe that we can contribute to organizations in Sweden, many of whom operate with a similar cultural phenomena. They can learn from our findings, and it can help reducing pressure and tension on middle managers. To conduct research in other Swedish organizations, with cultures coloured by consensus would maybe give more insight to this phenomena in other organizations. Additionally our inquiry has left us wondering why the consensus culture has such a strong impact horizontally, and almost not seem to exist vertically. Our findings concerning the pressure from the consensus culture can be more developed, and further research could concern how it affects top management, employees or people in the organization vertically.

Moreover we believe that there is more research to be done concerning the reactions on pressures. We did not have the possibility to really explore this, because it would be a paper itself, but encourages other researchers to, since it could contribute to the emotional aspects of pressure and tension of middle managers in changing organizations. This paper is written to build on the literature on the pressures of the middle managers role in changing organizations, and specifically how managing in change it is experienced, and at the same time give insight to top managers and middle managers. We believe that scholars can build on our findings, and develop them even further. Our hope is that scholars, organizations, middle managers, and their managers can find it interesting as well as useful for further research or to use in practice.

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7. Appendix

Questioner used during interviews at Gambling Inc.

1. What is your job function/role at gambling Inc?

a. When did you become a middle manager?

b. How long have you worked as a middle manager?

c. Was this your first position at Gambling Inc?

d. If no, what did you do before?

e. What do you do on a day-to-day basis?

f. What does this mean in terms of duties and responsibilities?

2. How do you feel about the demands of your role?

a. In terms of the operational part?

b. In terms of the coaching part?

c. Do you receive all the support you need to handle the demands?

d. If yes - which kind of support is this? If no - which support would you like to
   have?

e. Are you satisfied with your situation at work?

f. If no – why not?

3. How would you improve your situation at work?

4. How do you perceive yourself as a leader?

a. How do you perceive yourself as a manager?

b. How do you think your employees perceive you?

c. How do you think your managers perceive you?

d. How do you believe that your employees perceive your situation?

5. What motivated you to become a manager/work your way up?

a. Which incentives were important?

b. Do you think your co-workers are motivated in the same way

c. Do you motivate/encourage your employees to work their way up?

d. Why do you think anyone would not want to become a manager at

e. Is it something that demotivates you from taking on more work or responsibilities?

6. How would you explain the culture at Gambling Inc?

a. Can you briefly describe a normal day?

b. Which type of challenges do you face?

c. Do you believe that you have time for all the different tasks you want to perform?

d. How do you perceive your managers situation?

e. Would you like to have their job one day?

f. If yes - why, if no – why not?