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Multidimensional reactions to organizational change: Identifying employee responses to change and their underlying reasons

A case study of Tyréns' change initiative

by

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Abstract

Employee reactions to change is a key issue within change management, however they are frequently seen in a one-sided and limited way. Often research focuses on a dichotomous study of either resistance or commitment, and seldom examining more than one dimension. Therefore, this thesis aims at exploring a wider range of pro- and anti-change reactions to change by studying a more complex and finer-nuanced concept covering the behavioural, cognitive and affective dimensions. Additionally, the underlying causes for the found reactions are being uncovered. Unlike the majority of existing research, this research uses the design frame of a single case study, utilizing semi-structured interviews, and pursuing an abductive approach. The studied case are the project leaders at Tyréns South, a regional division of a Swedish consulting company, which is currently undergoing a work process change. The findings of this qualitative study indicate ambivalent and multi-faceted employee reactions caused by a multitude of factors, the most relevant being communication, participation, change content, organizational environment, trust, perceived outcome, fairness, and individual features. This study's knowledge serves as a starting point for Tyréns' management to improve their change project by gaining an enhanced understanding of their employees' reactions and by highlighting areas of improvement.

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Introduction

1.1 Background

In the following I will describe how I developed the idea for this research project, provide general background information on the studied change initiative, and explain why reactions to change are an important issue for managing change.

My interest for this study came from two sides simultaneously. I kept on coming across the topic of change management in my master program's courses in very different contexts and the theme kept recurring in the literature I read. How employees react to change and why they do so made me curious and sparked my interest. Hence, I wanted to learn more about this topic and understand reactions and the underlying reasons in relation to the topic of management.

At the same time I heard that Tyréns AB, a Swedish consulting firm, was looking for a master student to conduct research on a recently implemented change process and their employee reactions to it. The regional manager Christian Lindfors, responsible for Tyréns' region South with its headquarters in Malmö, together with Pål Hansson, Chief of Staff and Development for the region South, started implementing an organizational change process in the spring of 2015 which will in the future be implemented throughout the whole company. The change project consists of a new work process using "tollgates" to structure and formalize the way in which consulting projects are executed and controlled (henceforth called tollgate system). The process consists of two parts: first the offering or bidding phase for a new project, and second the actual project work for the client. During both phases the project leader has to fill out several documents with a number of questions about the project with the aim of showing critical or important issues that have to be thought through and known before a project can pass through a tollgate. The project leader is also supposed to have regular meetings with a supervisor discussing these issues. According to the management, the motive for why Tyréns is implementing this change project is that the company is currently facing a changing environment and clients who want complete solutions to their problems, offered and handled from beginning to end by just one firm. Additional drivers for the change came from a need to synchronize work processes within the company, making the project phases leaner, and raising the overall efficiency and profitability of their consulting work. Tyréns South' (as one of five

regions within the company) change initiative was using a top-down and planned approach (Burnes, 2004), initiated by the top-management. The change process being implemented at Tyréns can be characterized as an incremental adjustment (Senior, 2002), which means a distinct change adjusting work processes has taken place, and as a pro-active change regarding its origin (Pardo del Val et al., 2012).

Before giving reasons for why reactions to change processes within a company is a relevant issue for change management, I would like to define the term. According to Moran and Brightman (2001: 111) change management is “the process of continually renewing an organization’s direction, structure, and capabilities to serve the ever-changing needs of external and internal customers”.

When employees are going through a change process, resistance and other kinds of reactions are natural because it is an unknown situation which interrupts the established patterns in a company (Bovey & Hede, 2001b; Ford, Ford & D’Amelio, 2008). The individuals have to perform in a new way, understand and cope with the situation. As Burnes (2004) has shown, change often affects people significantly by requiring of them to change their behavior and attitudes. Depending on the particular change process (i.e. the type of change, the context and how it is managed), it might affect people in different ways and for different reasons. Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine the different ways (cognitive, behavioral, affective; ranging from strongly supportive to strongly resistant) employees at Tyréns South are reacting to the above stated change project and investigate the reasons for these reactions.

In the literature on reactions to change, resistance appears to be the most common factor studied (for example Bovey & Hede, 2001a,b; Lewis, 2006; Lines, 2004; Oreg, 2006). Also, in the majority of literature resistance is seen as a problematic state that has to be overcome, and only recently a more positive approach to employee resistance has been taken (Waddell & Sohal, 1998; Mabin et al. 2001).

This majoritarian negative perspective also shows in management practice. Top-management often views resistance simply as bad behavior of the employees. Thus, instead of an objective description of employee reactions, labelling reaction “resistance” is a self-serving or self-fulfilling interpretation by the change agents and a way of blaming employees for unsuccessful change projects. The debate on resistance is very one-sided by often seeing resistant behavior as a sudden response to change initiatives, independent from the change agent’s actions and the

relationship between the recipient and the agent. This also leads to discharging valid objections and feedback from employees (Ford, Ford & D'Amelio, 2008; Smollan, 2011). But assuming that in general and all kinds of resistance are counterproductive for change management, the change agent misses the opportunities these employee reactions can bring, such as highlighting what could be improved.

Change is not only an ever-present part of any organization but also the pace of change has been increasing in recent years (By, 2005; Burnes, 2004). Thus, the successful management of change processes seems more significant than ever, although effective organizational change is the exception. Research reveals that only one-third of organizational change efforts were considered successful by their leaders (Meaney & Pung, 2008; Beer & Nohria, 2000; Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979; Smollan, 2011). Authors are agreeing that how employees react to a change is essential for the management and the success (or failure) of change projects (e.g. Strebler, 1994; Maurer, 1996; Bovey & Hede, 2001a; Piderit, 2000; Erwin & Garman, 2010). For instance, Waldersee and Griffiths (1997) found in their longitudinal research project of 500 organizations that resistance is the key issue in the implementation of change. But in contrast to that, in managerial practice of organizational change there is often a strong focus on the quantifiable and technical dimensions e.g. using profitability as a measurement for the success of a change project (Bovey & Hede, 2001b). However, it can be argued that taking into consideration the human side is equally as important but often neglected by companies, for example by them not investing into employee related activities such as training or follow-up sessions (Schneider & Goldwasser, 1998). Every organization consists of individual people and so their reactions to the change are relevant in the successful change process of a company.

In the following I will present a concise summary of existing research on reactions to change, in *Chapter 3.1* past research will be discussed in more detail. People's reactions can cover a wide array from highly positive to strongly negative including indifference, and all the facets in between (Lines, 2005). However, academic research on reactions to change can be divided into two opposing schools or views. Researchers either study the concept of resistance or commitment to change, as two opposing, unrelated constructs. There is no agreement about to what extent these constructs are theoretically connected and they are often seen as the two sides of a coin. After reviewing existing research of employee reactions I observed that the literature shows a disintegrated and incoherent picture because researchers (of both perspectives) conceptualize and operationalize in many different ways. As shown later in more detail, there

is a disagreement over what is meant by the constructs and what they entail. Thus, different researchers use diverse definitions and dimensions to conceptualize resistance or commitment (Coetsee, 1999; Piderit, 2000; van Dam et al., 2008; Smollan, 2011; Oreg et al., 2011). For instance, what the construct of “resistance” means to one researcher and how it is correspondingly defined and operationalized can differ largely to another researcher also studying resistance. The reviewed literature showed that this problem (disagreement and incoherence within the definitions and operationalization of key terms) also applies to the causing factors which are being studied, e.g. trust in leadership or perceived benefits. Consequently, it is difficult to compare and integrate findings.

Furthermore, few authors (Mabin et al., 2001; Lines, 2004; Oreg, 2006; Piderit, 2000) go beyond the dominating view that resistance is uniformly negative and has to be overcome, and show that resistance can also be a productive response by indicating shortcomings or flaws in the change project (Erwin & Garman, 2010). But lately researchers (e.g. Waddell & Sohal, 1998) are starting to argue that if the nature of reactions such as resistance can be understood and the underlying causes are being examined there can be potential utility for researchers and practitioners in it. However, theoretical frameworks incorporating the idea of utility are missing (Waddell & Sohal, 1998).

I identified two main reasons why it is relevant and valuable to research employee reactions to change. On the one hand, negative attitudes towards change can have undesirable or harmful consequences such as intentions to turnover or job dissatisfaction (Wanberg & Banas, 2000). On the other hand, there is also a missed potential for a knowledge gain. Reactions can be understood as symptoms of underlying causes and can therefore indicate for example which elements of the change project could be altered, are inappropriate or not thought through (Bovey & Hede, 2001b; Burnes, 2004). Even from different forms of negative reactions (e.g. anger, resentment, opposition) a company can obtain relevant knowledge about potential problems in the organization. A better understanding of the diverse reactions and their roots can help improving a change management plan by for instance showing which factors (e.g. trust in management) or action plans (e.g. communication strategies) are already working well and which are not (Piderit, 2000).

Consequently, this thesis project takes a more recent perspective on employee reactions to change, seeing them as phenomena containing valuable knowledge, indicating potential underlying problems. Reactions have to be understood in their complexity, instead of focusing

solely on resistance as a phenomena that has to be eliminated (e.g. Waddell & Sohal, 1998; Mabin et al., 2001). The objectives of this study are to obtain a deep understanding of what is going on inside Tyréns regarding how people are reacting to the new tollgate process, including the surrounding implementation. The goal is to explore the nuances of the different reactions instead pursuing a dichotomous view (commitment vs. resistance) and to study a more complex and multi-dimensional picture of employee reactions. Moreover, the objective is to look beneath the surface of these reactions and find out what causes them.

The two research questions I am aiming at answering with this study are the following:

1. Which employee reactions (cognitive, behavioral, and affective) to the change process can be observed?
2. What are the underlying reasons influencing or causing these reactions?

1.2 Research Purpose

In the following I will answer the questions “What is this research for?” or “Why are you doing it?” (Thomas, 2013; Mason, 2002).

If someone was to ask me that and I had to answer in one sentence, I would reply: The main purpose is to help Tyréns manage their change process more successfully by studying how their employees reacted to the change and what the causes for these reactions could be.

Tyréns South assigned me to give them insights into their employees’ reactions to their implemented change project. Therefore, the main purpose is to examine Tyréns’ practice in detail and provide them with a systematic overview of their employees’ reactions to the change project. The purpose is also to give a case and situation specific description and analysis of the causes of the observed attitudes so Tyréns management can potentially utilize this information to improve their change process practice. This knowledge is of particular importance for Tyréns because they are planning to implement the tollgate system company-wide in the future. Therefore, any insights they gain e.g. about possible shortcomings or strengths of their current change process practice could be used by them to improve their change initiative before rolling it out company wide and for a larger amount of projects.

Furthermore, this research project also has a theoretical exploratory purpose (Saunders et al., 2009), which is to extend the debate on reactions to change beyond the concept of resistance, and obtain a more complex view on it. As explained in the introduction, there is a strong focus on resistance in the literature, neglecting other types of reactions. Hence, the purpose of this study is to find out more about the different kinds of reactions to organizational change, describing and analyzing these. Thus, by going deeper into a specific case and exploring a wider range, the complexity and different nuances of reactions, practitioners and researchers could obtain a deeper understanding of employee reactions. Also, as pointed out by other authors (see for example By, 2007; Piderit, 2000; Erwin & Garman, 2010), qualitative research approaches such as case studies are missing from the literature on change reactions. Why I chose Tyréns to fulfill this theoretical, more general research purpose is explained in *Chapter 2.2 Research Design*.

Moreover, there is also a personal purpose. I would like to achieve a deeper knowledge of change management and important (practical) issues and implications with the aim of pursuing a career in change management.

1.3 Outline of the Thesis

In order to answer my research questions, this paper will examine the case study of Tyréns' work process change. The organization of this thesis is as follows. In the first part, I will describe the used methods in this research project, including the research approach, research design, data collection and data analyses. I will conclude the methodology chapter with an assessment of the quality of this study and limitations. Next, I will review the available literature on reactions to change. This serves as a base for my analysis of the reactions of Tyréns' employees. I will describe and discuss the emerging reaction patterns found in the collected interview data. In the following chapter, causes for these reactions will be analyzed and emergent themes constructed. Furthermore, the findings will be related to existing research. In the final section, I will highlight areas of future research and come to a conclusion.

2 Methodology

2.1 Research Approach

I want to start this chapter by talking about my research philosophy or in other words, what do I see as adequate knowledge and how do I view social entities.

People's interpretation and understanding of the social world they are in is regarded as data by me. Knowledge is "not simply out there" (Thomas, 2013: 108) but socially constructed by people in interaction with the environment. For my study this way of viewing the world means that the employees' social and organizational setting (i.e. Tyréns with its people, politics, norms etc.) matters. I am interested in people's individual, subjective perceptions (feelings, thoughts and behavior) of the change situation at Tyréns, and aiming to gain an "interpretive understanding" (Bryman & Bell, 2015: 29) of people's reactions. Everyone constructs the world differently and gives different meaning to events or phenomenon, I will try to understand and explore these multiple realities and constructions. Therefore, a deeper and situation specific understanding of the person and his/her reactions is what I am trying to explore and what counts as valid data for me. This also includes recognizing that the data is generated through interaction between interviewee and interviewer and I, as the researcher, am part of the research process. It is important to possess critical awareness of this issue throughout the research process (Mason, 2002; Bryman & Bell, 2015; Thomas, 2013; Saunders et al., 2009).

Based on the described research philosophy I have chosen a research approach, i.e. the relationship between theory and collected data, which can be described with the terms abductive and inductive, as I am using elements of both approaches. However, because it is possible to combine approaches (Bryman & Bell, 2015) and labelling can be "potentially misleading and of no real practical value" (Saunders et al., 2009: 124), I will in the following simply describe and explain how I designed my research and why.

The first step in my research is the collection of empirical data from Tyréns employees through semi-structured interviewing (see *Chapter 2.4*), with the goal to find emerging themes of people's reactions and the underlying causes. In the following "themes" are defined as patterns

constructed from the data associated with reactions (e.g. positive beliefs) or causes (e.g. communication issues).

According to Saunders et al. (2009), how you approach your research depends on your research emphasis. My emphasis is determined by my research purpose and questions. I want to obtain a more complex picture of employee reactions at Tyréns. I am trying to understand what is going on in the organization (concerning the reactions and causes) and gain in-depth knowledge. To achieve these things it is better to have a flexible structure and enter the data collection process (see *Chapters 2.3* and *2.4*) with openness towards a variety of different findings. Testing a specific theory would not allow me to change the research focus or explore specific themes more closely. Moreover, because my purpose is to provide Tyréns with insights into their employees' reactions, starting with a clearly defined theoretic framework and then testing hypotheses would probably not be that helpful for them because it is very to pick the "right" theory in this case (Saunders et al., 2009). At the same time approaching this project completely inductively could be risky too (what if no patterns emerge or the data I receive does not lead to findings), especially when considering how tight the time schedule is for this project.

Although, the aim of the data collection is not to test hypotheses, I did look into theory and did a literature review before designing the interview questions. I used the literature to receive an overview of the current available knowledge and theories concerning the topic because I did not have prior knowledge of this research area. I extracted themes from the literature, which helped me to structure my questions. That way I made sure I covered a wider range of topics and did this in a balanced way (more about this in *Chapter 2.3*). If I would not have done that the consequence could have been that I let my own prior assumptions or biases direct the interviewing process. The tools we are using determine what we can measure (Bryman & Bell, 2015), thus, by using the "wrong" (i.e. non-relevant) kind of questions (e.g. based on what I want to hear or a specific but not applicable theory) I might measure a construct or concept I was not aiming at measuring. Consequently, structuring my questions based on the literature also helped with seeing the research questions and the possible reactions and causes from different perspectives, instead of e.g. only the dominating resistance view or my own assumptions of what is important to ask (Saunders et al., 2009; Thomas, 2013). Furthermore, I am not aiming to generate a generalizable theory out of the empirical findings. The goal is to explain and interpret the collected data by going back into the literature and using the available

theories to understand the social reality (i.e. reactions and causes) I described and constructed (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

2.2 Research Design

The design frame used in this study is a single case study. This research design is able to address the research questions in the best way possible because my questions are about *how* and *why* people are reacting (Yin, 2003; Bryman & Bell, 2015). As explained above I am not interested in testing a specific theory and gain generalizable knowledge but in receiving an in-depth understanding of the employees.

A case study consists of two parts: a subject (the project leaders at Tyréns) and an object (the reactions to the tollgate change project and the roots for the reactions). A case is not being researched for the sake of studying it but “[...] to illuminate a theoretical point; it has to be the case *of something*.” (Thomas, 2009: 150). Thus, my case is the study *of the reactions and their underlying reasons* to the tollgate change project at Tyréns South exemplified by studying the project leaders.

This leads me to why I selected this particular research subject. I decided on Tyréns’ change project because they assigned me to investigate their recently implemented change initiative, and because of the access I was given to Tyréns’ employees and top management. As I am planning to use interviews as the data collection method, the opportunity (to speak to the employees) with which Tyréns provided me is crucial for answering my research questions. Also, a single case study and not a multiple-case study design was the best option since a comparison of cases and at the same time going deep into the cases would have been impossible for this research project because of the time constraints we faced. The purpose of the study is to help Tyréns, thus a close and detailed examination of their employees’ reactions and the particular context is necessary. The aim is to gain an insider perspective of what is happening at Tyréns, hence focusing on one case allows me to do that in the most effective way possible. A case study also allows me to explore the social setting the employees are in and understand the context (Yin, 2003), which as explained earlier is important for me to construct knowledge because I recognize the interplay between people and their social environment.

At the same time, the studied change project within Tyréns South was selected because it is a relevant case for the more general purpose of gaining a complex knowledge about reactions to change. The change project within Tyréns is a reasonable option because it is a rather typical case (Bryman & Bell, 2015), a planned process change within a medium-sized company. The case is not extreme or out of the ordinary compared to cases studied by others (see for example Oreg et al., 2011 for an overview of studies on reactions to change in the past 60 years) which makes it possible to transfer or generalize findings (Saunders et al., 2009).

2.3 Searching for and Reviewing the Literature

I have already given a concise summary of the available literature on the topic of employee reactions to change in the *Introduction* and will discuss it in more detail in *Chapter 3*. In the following I want to discuss why I reviewed existing research for my thesis, how I searched for it and how I assessed its quality.

Before I planned and executed my primary data collection, I reviewed the available literature. This study aims at exploring people's reactions to the change process as unbiased and thoroughly as possible. But even when approaching the research process partly inductively this approach "[...] cannot be taken without a competent knowledge of your subject area" (Saunders et al., 2009: 61). The reason why I did a literature review was to get an overview of the existing research, without focusing on a specific theoretical framework, so I have a collection of topics regarding reactions and causes. These topics helped me to structure my interviews enabling me to potentially observe a wider range of themes instead of for instance focusing on only behavioral resistance (more details about interview structure in *Chapter 2.4.3*). Moreover, this allowed me to not let my prior assumptions or intrinsic biases guide me when conducting the interviews. I probably already had ideas in my head of what I thought potential findings of the data collection could be, therefore doing a rather broad (instead of deep) first literature review before starting the data collection helped me to avoid seeing the situation through my own biased filter. Instead, I tried to see it through different perspectives which I received from existing theoretical and empirical literature. I am aware that I cannot be one hundred per cent unbiased and the researcher will always be part of the data generation (this is acknowledged in my research philosophy). Furthermore, other purposes of my literature review were to make sure I do not repeat someone else's work completely, and it was also interesting for refining my

research questions. During the data analysis and discussion phase of my research I went back into the literature to support my findings and come to conclusions by linking my emerging patterns with the ones in the existing research. Moreover, the literature helped me to contrast my findings with different existing theoretical and empirical data (Saunders et al., 2009; Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Regarding my search strategy, this is how I proceeded. I started with books for an overview, then went on to more specific journal articles. I also found review articles to be a very valuable source, they helped me getting an overview of existing literature and positions in the field, served as a starting point and facilitated the quality assessment of the literature.

I identified certain subject keywords and searched for those in online data bases (e.g. Emerald, JSTOR, Web of Science), the google scholar search engine, the Lund University library search etc. I used the following keywords, with them standing alone and or with different combinations and link terms (“AND”, “OR”), including different spellings and synonyms (Bryman & Bell, 2015): Change Management, Managing Change, Change Process, Organizational Change, Employee Reactions, Reactions to Change, Attitudes toward Change, Resistance to Change, Commitment to Change, Willingness to Change, Readiness to Change.

While progressing with my literature search I not only continually refined the search terms but also discovered more specific journals in which I could specifically look for literature on my topic. The most relevant research journals for my study included: Journal of Managerial Psychology, Journal of Change Management, Journal of Applied Psychology, Personnel Psychology, Journal of Organizational Change Management, Academy of Management Review, Harvard Business Review, Management Decision, Journal of Management & Organization, The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, Leadership & Organization Development Journal.

Also, if I found a very relevant article I looked at the related articles category (in the online data bases) and the reference lists to examine which other articles or books could be of interest.

Through the above described research I found a large amount of literature. So how did I evaluate the literature in terms of quality and select the most relevant sources? Also, how did I know when I have read enough relevant literature? Regarding the latter, as discussed in the *Introduction* the literature on reactions to change is very fragmented and extensive. Therefore, it was challenging to determine when I had read a sufficient amount of literature. What helped

me was to group the literature into the different perspectives they took e.g. for the causes I focused predominantly on literature investigating the themes I established from my data collection and analysis. When I kept on noticing that further articles were mostly referencing back to literature I had already examined or I was not gaining additional knowledge I finished my search. Literature review articles were very helpful as well by giving a summary about what is out there and by providing an “expert” assessment of what is relevant and qualitative high research in the field. Moreover, I made sure the quality of the literature (I used) is high by focusing on articles in academic journals because other researchers or experts in the field have then peer-reviewed the article and gave feedback before it was published which normally (unfortunately not always) indicates quality. I also critically examined the individual pieces of literature based on methodology, applying the quality criteria discussed in *Chapter 2.6*. To further narrow down my search for relevant literature I took into consideration the number of citations, meaning by how many others is the article or book cited (e.g. using the information on Google Scholar), this is especially important for older research. Concerning the publication period, I did not limit it but focused on the past 20 years and the most up-to-date research (Thomas, 2013; Saunders et al., 2009).

2.4 Data Collection Method

In the following I will explain how I decided on a data collection method, how I sampled my research participants and how I proceeded. The general information about the change management process and the implemented new system came from internal documents, and several informal conversations and interviews between February and May 2016 with the responsible change agents: Christian Lindfors, regional manager South, and Pål Hansson, Chief of Staff and Development for the region South.

2.4.1 Reasons for Choosing Interviews

Concerning the data collection method for employee reactions and reasons, I decided to use semi-structured interviews. Other potential methods could have been (but are not limited to) observation, structured interviews or questionnaires. Why I decided to use semi-structured interviews, discounted the other methods, and around what I structured the interviews will be discussed in the following. I will also describe how I planned and implemented the interviews.

The most significant reason why I chose interviews for the data collection was that it is the most effective tool to answer my research questions and serves the objective, namely gaining a complex understanding of individual reactions and causes. A survey would have not allowed me to thoroughly examine the context or ask for further details when I do not understand something. I am trying to expand existing research by finding out more about the complexity or nuances in the reactions which cannot be done through questionnaires. Moreover, because many topics needed to be covered the time a respondent would have needed to finish the questionnaire might have led to people not completing it or a lower response rate in general (Saunders et al., 2009).

I then selected semi-structured interviewing. For participants to open up about a topic especially when the information can be a bit sensitive or personal, e.g. how they feel about how their superiors involved them in the change management process, it is important to create trust between the interviewer and the interviewee which an informal setting is more likely to achieve (Bryman & Bell, 2015). I am aiming to generate data by listening and having an interactional dialogue with the interviewees in order to understand how people construct their social reality (Mason, 2002). Thus, in line with the epistemological position (interpretivist) taken in this study, I am interested in the employees' perception of the change, the reactions and underlying reasons. My goal was to create a natural dialogue with an emphasis on depth in the explanations, to "dig deep" and find the underlying reasons. I am interested in the processes that are going on under the surface. Therefore, structured interviews would have been too inflexible and potentially superficial.

The inductive research approach includes that I did not have a fixed list of topics from the beginning which I wanted to ask about. The objective is to explore a variety of potential reactions and causes. Semi-structured interviewing is a good choice because it gives me the opportunity to discuss a topic that was not considered before and find out more about it. The nature of what I was trying to find out is rather complex requiring many open-ended question, changing the order of the questions and asking probing questions when it was necessary that respondents explain or elaborate on an issue. All this would have been impossible with structured interviews or questionnaires (Mason, 2002; Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Observation would have been a useful complementation for this research project but due to practical issues such as time constraints, language barrier, access to people it was not possible to use this method. Furthermore, I am also interested in events that happened in the past such

as how they behaved in the workshops last year. Observation does not allow to reconstruct events that happened in the past, therefore interviews are the most suitable method for this study (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Thomas, 2013).

Qualitative interviews are seen as a co-production or (re-)construction of knowledge by the interviewer and interviewee (Mason, 2002). Therefore, it is not only of significance that I as the interviewer ask the right questions but also that I am aware that I will have some kind of influence on the participant. It is unlikely that this can be totally controlled for but acknowledging this and being critical is important (Mason, 2002). I should carefully try to limit the introduction of unwanted influences or biases during the interviews. One of these is the experimenter-expectancy effect, through questions or non-verbal communication the researcher could convey his/her expectations and the participant could be led in a certain direction that way. I carefully and thoroughly designed the data collection process e.g. by practicing and testing my questions during two piloting interviews, by using my interview guide in which I had prepared questions that are phrased in an unbiased way, and by improving my interviewing skills over time by reflecting upon each interview afterwards through re-listening to the audio-recordings.

2.4.2 Sampling

The interviewees are the change recipients, meaning the project leaders of Tyréns South. The original plan was to only interview people who have already worked with the new process system. The top management set out a monetary minimum (2.5 million SEK or 0.5 million SEK for fixed price) for projects in which the new process should be implemented first. According to the management this should have applied to a larger number of projects since the start date last year but during my first outreach via e-mail to project leaders I found out that many had not worked with the new system at all. This made it harder for me to find participants and I had to include a few who have not actively worked with it yet, this issue will be discussed in more detail in 2.6 *Limitations*. However, I used a strategy called “sampling strategically” (Mason, 2005: 123) and took a sample of 16 project leaders, and within those trying to have as many

people as possible who have worked with the system already or are familiar with it¹. My sample is not representative of the total population or taken at random but it assured I was on the one hand receiving a big enough picture and a relevant range of reactions to draw conclusions from it, and on the other hand this subset is big enough to ensure that the likelihood of getting a distorted picture is as low as possible. Thus, the number of participants was not set in stone from the start but while moving along with the interviews this number presented a “meaningful range” (Mason, 2005: 124), and when I reached 16 participants I saw that the likelihood of completely new themes emerging was getting very low. My sampling strategy is therefore in line with my research questions and how I will analyze the data (i.e. according to different themes, see *Chapter 2.4*).

I included three different hierarchy levels: business managers, department managers and project managers. Although managers are not what is normally associated with the word “employees”, nevertheless they are the change recipients, they are the ones affected by change. As Smollan (2011), in her study about how employees from different hierarchical levels react to change, has investigated managers do resist change too and their reactions are influenced by the same potential causes as employees at other levels. The participants’ age range is from 35 to 63 years. Most respondents have been working for Tyréns for several years, one person joined the company less than a year ago. If these or any other personal features had any potential influence on the observed reactions will be discussed in *Chapter 3* (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Thomas, 2013).

2.4.3 Procedure and Interview Structure

The interviews were conducted face-to-face at the Tyréns office building in Malmö. In two cases this was not possible due to time constraints of the participants and the interviewing was

¹ Defined as, having taken part in the workshops and should be working with it when they receive a project that is big enough. The nine participants who have worked with it is almost the whole population of “employees who have worked with the new system”.

conducted via Skype. The participants were used to having conversations on Skype because of work and I did not notice any difference to the face-to-face interviews.

Prior to the interviews I conducted a piloting of the questions and then revised and refined the questions. The questions consisted of open-ended and closed questions (see interview guide appendix A).

Concerning the structure of the interviews, they were structured around my research questions and the wide range of possible reactions and causes I gathered from the literature review. I chose a topic-centered approach, meaning I had several themes or key issues prepared which I wanted to cover during the interviews (Mason, 2002). These topics I identified from the literature (books and peer-reviewed journal articles) about change management, reactions to change and causes which I had reviewed. This overview of available knowledge (theoretical and empirical) helped me to make sure that on the one hand I cover a wide range of potential factors, and on the other hand have a balanced and unbiased (as far as possible) pool of questions and issues to investigate during my data collection (Thomas, 2013). While planning the interviews I designed an interview schedule (see Appendix A), a guide with a list of topics I wanted to cover and possible follow-up questions. I also included a number of probes that helped me as a reminder to really explore people's reactions and encourage people to explain more or give examples whenever necessary. The topics from the literature also served as a starting point for the dialogue and as an "aide-memoire" (Thomas, 2006: 198) for areas I wanted to make sure I cover in case they did not come up naturally. The fluid and flexible properties of a semi-structured interview also gave me the opportunity to discuss topics that unexpectedly came up or that seemed of special interest (Mason, 2002; Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Concerning the style for asking questions I tried to keep in mind to avoid the introduction of biases. I used a method Seale et al. (2004: 20) call "gently nudging" to encourage participants, especially the more reserved ones, to speak their minds about relevant topics. I tried to stay neutral but show interest especially when asking probes (Mason, 2002; Bryman & Bell, 2015). Each interview lasted between 60 minutes and 120 minutes. The data is documented through audio-recordings and notes I took during the interviews.

2.5 Methods for Data Analysis and Interpretation

2.5.1 Data Analysis Method

Next, I will describe on what grounds I based my data interpretation and how I proceeded when analyzing my data. This is done to demonstrate how my way of generating and analyzing the data is of high quality e.g. thorough, convincing, accurate, transparent, coherent etc. (Thomas, 2002).

My approach is a thematic analysis of the interviews in which I proceeded as follows. During the interviews I audio-recorded them and took notes. Afterwards I listened to the recordings and wrote summaries of each interview. I then read through my notes and the summaries several times and wrote down key words in the categories of the two research question (reactions and influencing factors). Next, I grouped the key words I have written down into different topics or themes based on the patterns I saw emerging in the data. Then, I kept going back to my data and continually revised my themes into more refined categories with the help of existing literature. I also tried to find connections and overlapping between themes. I continued by writing fragments (details, quotes, descriptions etc.) from each interview to the themes and integrate connected information until I was certain I had a thorough understanding and categorization of the data. As a next step, I mapped my themes to find relationships between the themes and to structure them to provide a better understanding (Thomas, 2013). Finally, I went back into the literature (details about this below) to connect and relate my themes to the literature (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Saunders et al., 2009).

As explained earlier one of the reasons for conducting a literature review was to have it as a starting point to which to go back once the data is collected and has to be analyzed. The theoretical concepts and empirical knowledge from the literature helped me with data interpretation in three ways. Firstly, as a base for the thematic analysis. I was able to compare the topics that emerged from my data with the ones I identified in the literature which helped me structure my own findings in a clearer way and analyze it more thoroughly. Secondly, they illuminated my findings by being a source for theoretical explanations which I could connect to my findings to make sense and improve my understanding of them. For instance, when I observed a specific factor such as a lack of participation which was linked to negative emotions in my data I could use a journal article that discussed that issue to help me understand how or why this happens. I am aware that this is not always possible and explanations from the

literature cannot always be transferred to my own findings. Moreover, the literature assisted the interpretation process by giving me the option to compare and relate my findings to existing knowledge, that way the existing research served as scientific endorsement or support for my own findings (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

When using the literature for the data interpretation I involved a variety of different theoretical frameworks, this is called theory triangulation (Thomas, 2013; Beoije, 2010). My reason for doing this was to look at the phenomenon from several perspectives because my research purpose was to explore a range of different reactions and causes. If I would have chosen one specific theory to interpret the data I could have limited the potential multi-faceted character of the themes. Moreover, I do not think one theory would be sufficient to explain the employee reactions to the change project at Tyréns, and multiple standpoints would help me to understand what causes the reactions more thoroughly. Finally, theory triangulation strengthens the validity of my findings and analysis by helping me to overcome biases and produce a more balanced view of the employee reaction and causes.

Taking into consideration the interpretivist view this project is taking, it has to be acknowledged that I as the researcher am inevitably part of the generation of knowledge. I am trying to support my arguments with the literature and be transparent in the way and methods I use to analyze and interpret the data, but nevertheless it is an interpretative and not objective analysis. The themes I came up with were not simply “out there” but constructed by me based on my collected data (Mason, 2002). Moreover, the data I generated is a result of the specific situation in which the data was collected, for instance the trust between the interviewees and me, the language we communicated in and other characteristic of the interview process which I describe in more detail in *Chapter 2.5.2*.

Consequently, I had to make sure I use a data collection method that enables me to analyze the data in the described way and is logically connected to my research purpose (Mason, 2002). The objective of the data collection was to examine the complexity and nuances of employee reactions in connection with the causes for them. I achieved this by gathering my data through in-depth interviews of project leaders affected by the change and asking many probing and follow-up questions to observe the finer nuances and to link reactions to causes. Which in turn enabled me to arrive at a variety of themes and show correlations. In contrast, if I would have chosen self-completing written questionnaires I might not have been able to distinguish between different kinds of reactions or link them to their causes. This shows that my research

purpose is connected to my research questions, the data collection method and also the chosen data analysis.

2.5.2 Interview Assessment

Additionally to the described data analysis and interpretation method I also reviewed the interviews (by listening to the audio-recordings and reading my notes) to assess if there are any major occurrences that could have influenced the trustworthiness (which is one of my quality criteria see *Chapter 2.6*) of the collected data. I will do this in a more general manner here, more specific cases are directly discussed when I analyze my findings.

I noticed that every interview was different because of the used semi-structured technique. I was aiming at creating a natural dialogue with the interviewees and not simply ask them all the questions I had prepared in my interview guide in that exact order. However, all participants had a phase in the beginning of the interview where they were more reserved. But due to the opening questions that were comfortable to answer (see interview guide Appendix A) and the creation of a relaxed and trusting atmosphere most participants overcame this initial shyness rather quickly. From then on each interview had its individual sequence. I started with asking them open-ended, rather broad questions about the tollgate system and from then on the majority of interviewees talked and shared their opinions and feelings freely. I mostly used my interview guide for follow-up or prompting questions and to keep the dialogue alive. The interviews developed a natural flow discussing the change process but because no interview was like the other it was more difficult to compare answers. The in the end presented individual reactions and causes were constructed from the different answers and stories in each interview. Rarely did I ask a question and I got presented an all-encompassing response, what mostly took place is that we talked about a specific topic or issue e.g. leadership for a longer time and had a dialogue about it, and from all that I constructed and interpreted the findings.

One occurrence I noticed is that about one quarter of the interviewees was more reserved and less talkative than the remaining interviewees, instead of them freely talking about different topics I had to ask them my prepared questions to which they only answered very cautiously. It is difficult to now assess why this happened. The language barrier (discussed in more detail in *Chapter 2.7*) could have been a reason. Another explanation could be that they did not feel comfortable in the interview situation for example because they did not like me or they were afraid that the content of what they said would not be kept confidential and either published or

communicated to their supervisors (I assured them several times anonymity and confidentiality). A further reason could have been that they just had no motivation to put effort in the interviews but felt obligated to participate. Despite my best efforts during the interviews to overcome this it was not completely possible. Therefore, some of the interviews provided less information than others and I also assessed their trustworthiness as lower, and they had a smaller weight when interpreting the data.

Furthermore, I noticed a tendency of many interviewees to focus on talking more about the technical details of their work in general and the tollgate system, especially in the beginning of the interviews. Which on the one hand gave me good insights in their reactions to the change process content, on the other hand there was a risk for them not talking about other issues because they were so enthusiastically talking about their work. This is partly due to the open interview structure but based on the knowledge I gained from the interviews it is also a peculiarity of the interview participants and their professional background. Most participants are engineers and described themselves as, despite handling managerial and operational tasks in their position as project leaders, more technical oriented and interested in specialist part of their work. Thus, they tended to talk more about the change project's content which does not necessarily mean they did not have reactions towards other topics or that only the change content is an important theme. But it was a bigger challenge for me to encourage them to share their opinions, behavioral intentions and emotions towards other parts of the change process such as implementation. I also got the impression that talking about the technical side was more comfortable and familiar to them. My semi-structured interview set up helped to overcome this issue by engaging in a dialogue and using the prepared questions to explore issues that the interviewees were more reluctant to talk about in the beginning of the conversation.

A further challenge is connected to the issue that the ideas, feelings, intentions and opinions respondents expressed during the interviews are the social constructions of how they assessed and made sense of the situation. This is taken into account by the chosen research philosophy but also entails risks which I will address in the following. As explained in *Chapter 2.1*, my constructivist and interpretivist positions include that I am aiming at gaining knowledge, i.e. reactions and underlying causes, which is subjective, individual and constructed by the participants. One risk is that because I am (as the interviewer) part of the construction and had some influence on the interviewees e.g. by the way I asked questions. I was not able to avoid this in all cases. I noticed that I sometimes asked probing and follow-up questions in a

potentially leading or directive way. For instance I asked one participant “What made you insecure in this situation?” and then also gave him several answer options as examples. By doing that I might have led him into a certain direction. This happened in a situation where a dialogue did not develop as naturally and I subconsciously felt as I would have to support him. But I mostly did notice it immediately and subsequently was more aware of it and avoided repeating this mistake. After listening to the recordings I am confident the impact on their answers was not very strong. I could have also introduced a bias by my mere presence as an external and unfamiliar person asking them about their work. For example their sympathy or dislike for me could have led them to give me different answer than their actual “truth”. I tried to be as neutral as possible, to create a trusting situation and to avoid biasing them. This was done through, as previously explained, the way I designed and conducted the interviews. However, in accordance with my research philosophy I am always part of the knowledge construction and will have some influence but I am aware of these potential effects and critically question them when working with, interpreting and analyzing the data (Thomas, 2013; Bryman & Bell, 2015; Saunders et al., 2009).

A final risk is that interviewees did not express the truth i.e. their subjective truth, and it cannot be trusted what they said. Either because the participant unintentionally expressed something “untrue” or because he/she willingly decided to do so. Regarding the former, the collected data depends on the capacity of the respondent to verbalize, be aware of, or remember things. The interviews were conducted in a foreign language which limited people’s capacity to express themselves and I might have received slightly different, maybe less detailed, articulate or differentiated, answers. However, I am confident that this effect is minimal. In my opinion, that respondents might not be aware or cannot recall memories is a more important issue. For example, if an individual experienced affective reactions which he/she is not aware of when asked or sees his/her past (supportive or resistant) behavior not as it was actually acted out in reality. I was trying to overcome this by requesting examples or asking about their reactions from different angles but the risk remains.

Regarding the risk that the interviewees intentionally communicated untrue things, this could have happened for a variety of reasons. It could be because of the aforementioned interviewer-effect, or they mistrusted the interview situation by being concerned about confidentiality, or they did not want to support the top-management in their effort to improve the change process etc. However, only what the interviewees expressed verbally (if we neglect non-verbal

information such as gestures here) and decided to share with the interviewer can be used as data. Therefore, if the participants did not tell me their honest opinions and feelings, or even gave me false reasons it is my responsibility as the researcher to distinguish this from the truth. This is obviously a very demanding task, in particular because it is part of my research purpose and approach to seek constructed, highly subjective and not independent, objective information. In order to distinguish between the real, honest truth and fabricated reactions and causes I interviewed a larger number of employees and compared findings. I also acknowledged this risk and tried to remain critical when analyzing and interpreting the data, and paid attention to in what context something was said or how they said it.

To further address the above discussed risks an alternative data collection method, such as participant observation, could have been a valuable form of methods triangulation, adding quality and potentially new insights to the existing research (Boeije, 2010; Bryman & Bell, 2015). Different reactions, e.g. how feelings about the change are expressed towards colleagues or what kind of behaviors are shown without the employee being aware of it, could help our understanding of what is going on without having the data filtered through the research subject. Observation allows us to see through the employees' eyes without depending on how well and honestly they can verbalize or remember it (Mason, 2002). Due to practical issues such as time constraints, language barrier, access to people etc. this form of triangulation was not possible for me to use but could be interesting for future research.

2.6 Quality Assessment

The most influential criteria, reliability, generalizability and validity, which are usually used to measure quality of research derived from natural sciences and are more useful in the context of quantitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Some researchers even argue that they are irrelevant for qualitative research but according to Mason (2002) these key principles are still applicable. The idea behind them is not problematic but the concepts need to be applied and adapted to a qualitative research approach. In the following it will be discussed how the quality of this research can be assessed using on the one hand the concepts of validity, generalizability and reliability, and on the other hand alternative criteria of trustworthiness and authenticity.

Construct or instrument-based validity refers to whether the data collection method really measures the theoretical concept that it is supposed to measure (Thomas, 2013). The concepts

I am trying to measure are reactions by employees to a specific change project and the factors causing these reactions. I made sure internal validity is high by structuring my semi-structured interviews around some key issues that I identified in the available literature and translating the theoretical concepts into interview questions. To make sure I collect relevant data the questions covered a balanced and wide range of factors addressed in the literature.

Related to this is internal validity, meaning “whether or not there is a good match between researcher’s observations and the theoretical ideas they develop” (Bryman & Bell, 2015: 400). This research projects achieves this by using in-depth interviews with over 15 members of the organization to really understand the social reality at the organization and to make sure the observed causal relationships are correct. Theoretical ideas are then constructed by going back into the literature during the analyses of the collected data, reading some more specific literature on the different topics found in the observations. This knowledge is then used to improve the understanding and interpretation of the research findings.

A criterion for trustworthiness which parallels internal validity is credibility (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This includes that the results of this study are credible in the eyes of the members of the social environment that was studied. I used the technique of respondent validation (Bryman & Bell, 2015), giving several research participants short summaries of some of the data and findings, and asked for feedback to make sure I really understood their perspective. As a result I sometimes altered some of the descriptions. Due to time constraints of this research project I was only able to do this in certain cases but during the interviews I already double-checked with the participants many times if I understood them correctly and e.g. asked them to explain it to me with an example.

External validity, also called generalizability, means the “degree to which findings can be generalized across social settings” (Bryman & Bell, 2015: 400). This can be very difficult to achieve in qualitative research, especially when using a case study, such as I do, because the findings are highly case- and context-dependent and the case is not representative (Yin, 2003; Boeije, 2010). However, because this study is taking an interpretivist research approach, according to Thomas (2013), generalization is not expected. But as Saunders et al. (2009) point out, if the findings of a research project can be related to existing theory and therefore are significant on a broader theoretical level, this counts as a form of generalizability in qualitative research. I am doing this by connecting and contrasting the findings (the different types of observed reactions and causes) to existing literature.

An alternative criterion to assess quality, which corresponds with external validity, is transferability (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This entails that if in a qualitative research project the research subject is studied in depth and a detailed description of the situational and research context is given, others are given the opportunity to transfer the findings to other social contexts. This is being done in this paper by thoroughly describing and categorizing the reactions and their causes, and by linking the findings to each other i.e. which factor is potentially causing which reaction. Furthermore, the introduction and methodology chapter are giving a detailed description about the chosen case study, for example details about the change project and the company. This way it is possible for other researchers or practitioners to judge if the findings or conclusions can be transferred to a different setting. The situation and therefore the specific findings about the employee reactions and causes might differ, but some of the general characteristics, e.g. did people have a negative emotional reaction when they did not trust the change agent, can be transferred to a different organizational setting (Saunders et al., 2009)

Reliability as a quality assessment means that the study, in particular the measurements, are consistent or can be replicated (Bryman & Bell, 2015). According to Bryman and Bell (2015) reliability is very difficult to achieve in qualitative research, Mason (2013) argues it is an irrelevant criterion. If another researcher would try to replicate my study at a later point in time by using the same data collection methods, i.e. conducting interviews with employees at Tyréns using the same questions, the outcome might be different. This is because the situation would have changed e.g. people's attitudes towards the change initiative might have changed, employees might not work there anymore or the reasons that led to a specific response might have changed. Therefore, no researcher will be able to repeat it in the way it is implied in a strict definition of reliability and produce the same results (see for example Bryman & Bell, 2015; Thomas, 2013), which would in turn mean the reliability is low. However, my study, as most qualitative studies, is set in a social environment (the organization Tyréns), thus the setting and its circumstances cannot not be static. The taken research approach of this research project takes this into account, there is not one absolute truth and not only one social reality. This makes it impossible to replicate this study and the criterion of reliability irrelevant.

Furthermore, different forms of bias when using interviews as a data collection method, such as interviewer or response bias, can negatively influence the quality of a study (Saunders et al. 2009). In previous chapters I described how I planned and conducted my interviews to achieve a high quality in my data collection methods and which risks and difficulties I had to overcome.

Moreover, an alternative criterion to evaluate qualitative research is authenticity (Bryman & Bell, 2015), I used different kinds of authenticity, which supports the quality of my research. For example this research projects sheds light on different perspectives of members of the social environment and aims at explaining why people have certain reactions (educative authenticity). The study also points out in which practical ways the organization could improve and how people can engage in action (tactical authenticity).

2.7 Limitations

Several methodological and practical limitations of this research project should be noted and will be discussed. Following Thomas' (2013: 124) guidance, "Be doubtful. Be skeptical. Be critical", I am aiming to be critical aware of the shortcomings of this study and also of the different ways my observation can be interpreted. This leads me to my first limitation.

As mentioned before the generalizability of this research is limited because of the used design frame (case study). In accordance with the purpose of this study the findings possess theoretical value and practical significance for Tyréns but further research could improve the generalizability by for example doing multiple case studies only on work process changes. By narrowing it down to a more specific type of the findings might still not be more generalizable to all social contexts but they could be transferred more easily to situations involving the change of a work process.

A rather unexpected limitation of this study is that only very few employees have actually worked with the new process already, which reduces the total population of which I could take a sample. I only found out about this when I first contacted potential interview participants but in the end I managed to interview nine people who had already worked with it. Through the interviews I learned about why less project leaders than planned by the management were working with the new tollgate system and also why the management was not aware of that fact. These reasons (i.e. communication, coordination etc.) are intertwined with the employee reactions to change and therefore, will be discussed in *Chapter 3*. Not having actively worked with it could impact how a people might react to the change and reduces the validity. However, I argue that this limitation is not very strong and the gained findings are still valid because all interviewees have already been exposed to the change (i.e. the new work process), through

either working with it or at least participating in the workshops where it was introduced and fine-tuned. But this limitation should be kept in mind when interpreting the data.

Moreover, the research was conducted early in the change process, i.e. no employee has completed all tollgates of the new process yet (because the projects where it is currently being used last over a period of several years), the change project is still being implemented and not finished. Therefore, when reading the conclusions one should be aware that the observed reactions could still change over time. It could be criticized that this limits the scientific value of this study but I argue that it also has two interesting implications. It is important for Tyréns that they receive insights into their employees' reactions to the change before rolling it out on a larger scale company-wide soon. Tyréns South asked me to conduct a research project on their change management now because they are interested in the findings of this study as early as possible, so they can improve or alter things. This is supported by Lines (2005), people form their attitudes towards change rather early and after the attitude formation took place it is difficult to change. Therefore, any interventions to influence the reactions should be done early in the process which emphasizes the significance this study has for Tyréns. Moreover, that the reactions might be different depending on what point in time they are being studied has to be kept in mind.

Language is also a limitation of this study. I do not speak Swedish, therefore the interviews had to be conducted in English which is not the interviewees' native language. The interviewees spoke English fluently but sometimes I noticed a small language barrier with some (two) participants. They were not as confident expressing their thoughts in English which made them a bit reserved and the dialogue more difficult. Compared to other interviewees whose English was more proficient I noticed that they were less talkative and shared less with me which limits the knowledge I received from them. I tried to create a trusting and comfortable situation and adapted the phrasing of the questions to simpler English but I was not able to completely overcome this issue.

By acknowledging these limitations and being aware of them throughout the research project it hopefully reduces the extent to what they negatively influence this study's quality.

3 Analysis and Discussion

In the following the findings deriving from the data will be analyzed and discussed. First, I will present a literature review on reactions to change and use the existing research as a base to structure my findings regarding how employees reacted to Tyréns' change project. Next, the findings concerning the underlying causes will be analyzed and related to existing research on the topic. The final subchapter will discuss the conclusions I developed from the data analysis.

3.1 Employee Reactions to Change

3.1.1 Literature Review

In the following I will give a review about existing research on reactions to change. Grounded on a constructivist and interpretivist view, I argue that how researchers see and define reactions determines how they are able to measure the phenomenon and hence, which reactions they are going to find. Therefore, I will compare and discuss the different approaches and concepts other authors have used when investigating reactions to change and also demonstrate how I used this knowledge as a starting point for my data analysis.

The literature is extensive and shows a large variety of conceptualizations and operationalization on change recipients' reactions to organizational changes but little agreement (Smollan, 2011). Because very different perspectives on the phenomenon employee reactions to change have been taken, it "has led to a disintegrated and convoluted picture of the field" (Oreg et al., 2011: 462). Oreg et al. (2011) propose that this issue is due to the jingle-jangle fallacies which entail that two or more different concepts are given the same label by different researchers and identical constructs are labelled differently. This problem will also become evident in the following outline of used theories and constructs regarding reactions to change in existing research. There is too little consistency in the terms used, measurements and definitions of constructs (e.g. resistance or support). As Erwin and Garman (2010: 50) put it, the existing research is "[...] more divergent than convergent". Thus, the current state of the

field makes it difficult to compare findings and reach an integrative review of reactions to change.

The most commonly studied dimension is behavior, meaning how individuals act in response to change. This also includes intentions (Erwin & Garman, 2010). By an "intention" it is not meant that a person tries to achieve a goal, an intention is an individual resolution to act in the future (Piderit, 2000). For instance, Bovey and Hede (2001b: 537) use behavioral intentions as a change reaction and define it as "intentions to engage in either supportive or resistant behaviour towards organizational change" including reactions such as to oppose or undermine. Another very broad definition of resistance is given by Pardo del Val and Martínez Fuentes (2003: 148), "[...] any conduct that tries to keep the status quo", they equate resistance with inertia. Similarly, Giangreco and Peccei (2005) who define resistance to change as a "form of dissent" and anti-change behaviors. Lines (2004: 198) categorizes resistance as "behaviors that are acted out by change recipients to slow down or terminate an intended organizational change". Whereas some researchers use the concept of "change commitment", defining it as intentions to engage in behaviors that support the change (Herold et al., 2007; Hornung & Rousseau, 2007).

Hultman (2006) divides behavioral reactions into active and passive forms. Active resistance includes ridiculing, lying, accusing people, sabotaging situations, arguing, intimidating or manipulating colleagues, or arguing. Passive resistance entails not implementing change, procrastinating, withholding information, by standing etc. Bovey and Hede (2001a,b) go one step further and offer a distinction between passive and active, covert (concealed behavior) and overt (openly expressive behavior), and supportive and resistant behaviors. They created a matrix of reactions, consisting of overt and covert behavior on one axis, and active and passive behavior on the other axis. Each quadrant also includes several forms of resistant and supportive behaviors. Passive, overt, resistant behaviors are for example not actively engaging in the change process by only doing the minimum or not transferring information to others. Whereas, overt, active resistant behaviors include openly opposing the change or obstructing it. Supportive behaviors can also come in many forms, including embracing and initiating change, co-operating, agreeing, accepting, and complying (Bovey & Hede, 2001a, 2001b; Giangreco & Peccei, 2005).

Coetsee (1999) takes a similar approach but sees behaviors as a continuum, ranging from enthusiastic support, over apathy or indifference to resistance. Resistance consists of several

forms: passive resistance (e.g. expressing divergent standpoints), active resistance (e.g. articulating strong opposing opinions, peaceful strikes) and aggressive resistance (e.g. spreading damaging stories, violent strikes, rebellion, disruption). To make it even more complex, Smollan (2011) further discusses the dimensions conscious vs. unconscious and rational vs. irrational behaviors. Whereas, Lines (2005) distinguishes between strong and weak behaviors. Consequently there are weak positive behaviors (compliance, lip service, organizational silence), strong positive behaviors (organizational citizenship, taking charge, pro change behaviors, persistence, focus, effort), strong negative behaviors (exit, resistance, sabotage, whistle blowing), and weak negative behaviors (compliance, foot-dragging, organizational silence).

Existing studies strongly focus on the behavioral dimension in their definitions, maybe because it is more visible, while beliefs and emotions are more difficult to detect (Smollan, 2011). Some researchers use concepts which include more than just the behavioral dimension. For example Jaffe et al. (1994) propose a framework including four reactions employees experience during the change process: denial (refusing to believe the change will be executed), resistance (trying to avoid the change), exploration (experimenting with new behaviors), and commitment (submit to the change). But despite them broadening the topic of reactions to four different kinds it is still not very differentiated. They again define resistance as something just behavioral (not participating or attempting to avoid implementation) whereas their other negative reaction category (denial) is a specific cognitive reaction. This is a very limited perspective on reactions, however, other studies show a wider range of cognitive reactions.

The cognitive dimension is what change recipients think or believe regarding the change. For instance, Oreg (2006) studies general cognitive responses, such as people's belief that the change was necessary or makes the organization better. A more specific definition is provided by Lines (2004) who examines individuals' organizational commitment, which he defines through three characteristics: (1) belief in and acceptance of organizational goals and values; (2) willingness to exert effort toward organizational goal accomplishment; and (3) strong desire to maintain organizational membership. Similarly, Bernerth et al. (2007) who also use the concept of change commitment, defined as the belief that the proposed change is a correct and beneficial decision. Wanberg and Banas (2000) research employee openness to change, consisting of two different outcome variables: change acceptance (the willingness to support the change) and positive view of change consequences (belief that change is beneficial for the

company and its clients). A more specific cognitive effect is studied by Allen et al. (2007), they researched strategic, implementation and job-related uncertainty.

A final reoccurring dimension is how people feel about the change, called the affective dimension. According to Lines (2005) the two aspects characterizing emotional reactions are pleasantness (affectivity) and activation. Pleasantness has two distinct poles, a negative one e.g. anger or sadness, and a positive one e.g. excitement. Activation is a continuum of the intensity or strength of the emotion. Other researchers conceptualize this dimension as a normative commitment to change, i.e. a feeling of duty to support the change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). And yet others investigate general affective responses such as a bad or good feeling towards change; feeling overwhelmed, angry, resentful, frustrated, mistrusting (Oreg, 2003; Oreg, 2006; Fugate et al., 2002), stressed (Bordia et al., 2006; Amiot et al., 2006; Martin et al., 2005), or anxious, worrisome and concerned (Paterson & Cary, 2002).

Despite this being a very concise review of existing reactions to change and while I was trying to highlight the variety and complexity of reactions, the majority of research focuses on resistance or commitment (e.g. Oreg, 2006; Mabin et al., 2001; Lewis, 2006; Lines, 2004; Pardo del Val & Martinez Fuentes, 2003; Bovey & Hede, 2001a,b). However, various perspectives are taken, which becomes evident in the way the constructs are understood, defined and in turn operationalized. There are large differences in which reactions are entailed in the term resistance and how it is measured depending on the study. There is a lack of a precise, theoretical framework for reactions to change (Erwin & Garman, 2010). Therefore, more attention to the meaning and theoretical underpinnings of the different constructs is needed (Piderit, 2000).

But the literature review also showed the multifaceted nature and complexity of possible responses which go beyond a behavioral view of resistance, and entail a wide range of reactions. Despite the very diverse approaches and perspectives to reactions to change we can conclude that when studying reactions all three dimensions should be considered: behavioral, affective and cognitive (Szabla, 2007). Although, as seen, researchers do not always include all three dimensions, depending on how they defined and operationalized the phenomena. Only very few studies have used all three dimensions in distinct constructs for measuring reactions to change (Oreg et al., 2011; Piderit, 2000; Oreg, 2006; Lines, 2005, Smollan, 2011). Moreover, Piderit (2000) does not only argue that reactions have a tri-dimensional character but also that people react in all of these dimensions simultaneously. Oreg (2006) adds to this discussion the idea

that there is an interplay among cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. This configuration is supported by psychoanalytic studies, showing that humans go through the different processes (thinking, emoting and moving) simultaneously and not in isolation (Bovey & Hede, 2001). It is further substantiated by the “tripartite view” of attitude studies (Piderit, 2000: 786) which argues that attitudes can be structured along the cognitive, behavioral and affective dimensions.

When assessing the reviewed literature several issues became visible. Most researchers are using quantitative methods and relying on self-report surveys (for example Giangreco & Peccei, 2005; Lewis 2006; Wanberg & Banas, 2000; Bovey & Hede, 2001b; Lines 2004). Despite collecting individual reactions the data is aggregated and a macro-level (i.e. organizational) approach is taken (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). Further research should therefore be done with a focus on the individual level, using qualitative data collection methods such as interviews (Aktouf, 1992; Erwin & Garman, 2010; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). More about this area for future research in *Chapter 4.1*.

Furthermore, the inconsistency and disagreement in how key concepts such as resistance are being understood, defined and operationalized by different researchers results in fragmentation and convolution in the research of reactions to change. Many define the dependent variable so broadly that it entails any kind of negative reaction that hinders or supports change. Moreover, transparency in the used measurements is missing. Most of the above described studies are not transparent with how they subsequently operationalized the concepts they were trying to measure. Most papers only provide selective sample items instead of publishing a complete list of questions or items used in their self-report questionnaires. These shortcomings not only reduce the reliability, validity and generalizability of the existing research but are also not helpful when trying to obtain a more complex and accurate picture of reactions to change. Which could in turn enable us to find the underlying causes.

According to Piderit (2000) all three dimensions have advantages and embody important elements of reactions. Thus, it should be aimed at integrating all three dimensions into a more comprehensive framework of reactions to change (Smollan, 2011). Using a multidimensional approach to reactions to change allows researchers and practitioners to have a more diverse and complex view on the ways in which employees react. Moreover, by seeing each dimension as a separate continuum, each consisting of a variety of pro- and anti-change reactions, a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of reactions to change becomes possible. This also

enables the examination of a person's potential ambivalent reactions, i.e. two alternative or even contrasting behaviors are experienced. Either within the different dimensions (e.g. support of the change content and rejection of the implementation) or between the dimensions (e.g. engaging behavior as well as frustration).

Although not being the objective of this study, many other researchers not only focused on change reaction but also investigated change consequences (see for example Amiot et al., 2006; Schweiger & DeNisi, 1991; Fried et al., 1996). These can be work-related consequences (such as job satisfaction, intentions to quit, absenteeism, work performance) and personal consequences (e.g. depression, health complaints, psychological well-being) (Oreg et al., 2011). From reviewing the literature it becomes evident that often a theoretical and conceptual distinction between reactions and post-change consequences is missing, and both are seen as equivalent outcomes of the change. A more specific distinction in the research design to study how individual reactions differ from change consequences is needed (Oreg et al., 2011).

The above literature review also serves as a starting point for the in the next subchapter following data analysis. However, integrating all of the reviewed dimensions into a new framework for reactions is beyond the scope of this thesis. Based on the existing research I decided to structure the following data analysis around the three dimensions: cognition, emotion and behavior. However, when I actually started the analysis of the gathered data it became clear that the dimensions are intertwined and the reactions are ambivalent. Therefore, it was more logical and helpful for our understanding to structure the analysis around pro-change and anti-change reactions. This avoids a normative judgement, such as some reactions are "bad" and some are "good", and is based on a conceptualization proposed by Piderit (2000) who characterizes employee reactions as positive (pro-change) or negative (anti-change). Within these two categories I will then further distinguish between the three dimensions (cognition, behavior, affection), showing the finer nuances of different reactions. This structure enables me to come to a more complex and differentiated understanding when discussing the data. It allows me to describe the findings in a complex and detailed manner.

3.1.2 Tyréns' Employees' Reactions to the Tollgate System

In the following I will discuss the findings regarding how Tyréns' employees reacted to the change project and highlight the most relevant reactions within the three dimensions: cognition, emotion, and behavior. The reactions are strongly connected to their causes and the social

context. Hence, I acknowledge that there will be some repetitions and overlap between this chapter and the following. This was unavoidable in order to gain a deeper understanding and is done so the reactions will not be “ripped” out of their context. To obtain a more complex picture it is of importance not to view the reactions in isolation from their roots, the context and situation.

The employees did not engage in any form of actively destructive behavior however this finding has to be interpreted cautiously. The behavioral dimension was very difficult to construct because the data, collected through the method of semi-structured interviews, depends on what participants are willing and capable of revealing. As explained in prior chapters, analyzing past behaviors includes risks, and participant observation would have been a relevant method to gain further knowledge and affirm what was expressed during the interviews. Just because I was not able not find any active anti-change behaviors does not mean I can be one hundred per cent certain there were none, for example employees could have actively discouraged co-workers from using the new system but were not aware of this or refrained from telling me. Moreover, observation would have been a useful method to confirm the following finding. The participants who have already worked with the new process were indicating they did not resist and used the process as intended by the change agent. But what we do not know is how the objective quality of their performance was, i.e. how dedicated and engaged they were when searching for information to answer all the questions in each tollgate phase, or how thoroughly they filled out the documents etc. These behaviors could also indicate resistance.

The behavioral intentions showed some ambivalent features. All participants stated the intention to follow through with the new tollgate system, i.e. they plan on using it when they have a consulting project in the corresponding monetary size. They were also saying that they support the implementation and believe people should be working with the new system. However, in the same context, many people also showed anti-change intentional behavior by expressing that they are either not going to use the included documents at all or only under certain circumstances (e.g. the parts they consider most useful, when time permits etc.), therefore showing the passive resistant behavior of disengagement. They gave several reasons for that (which will be discussed in more detail in *Chapter 3.2*), for example some people felt stressed by additional work and time the new process requires (answering each question in a

written format and finding information to answer them²). Others stated that they believe in general the change is necessary and positive but they personally do not think it will be necessary for them to strictly use it as intended, e.g. fill out the documents thoroughly. This behavioral intention was more visible in established members of Tyréns, the strongest in the ones that have been working for Tyréns their whole life.

The cognitive reactions to the change project are divided, and range from strongly supportive to strongly negative and dismissive reactions, depending on which element of the change project they refer to (for example implementation, content, purpose). In general people expressed a strong support for the idea behind the change and agreed to the by the top-management stated purpose for why a changed work process would be necessary. Everyone agreed that a more efficient work process is needed. They were hopeful and enthusiastic about the improvements the change will bring for the company (e.g. profitability, avoidance of repeating mistakes). However, most interviewees also showed negative cognitive reactions such as concern, frustration, irritation, and disappointment which were mainly directed towards the change project's implementation process; the design of the work process was also seen critically.

Many participants expressed emotional indifference towards the change project. As explained before they support parts of it and show a positive reaction in the cognitive dimension but this does not reflect in their affectivity. Few employees showed joy and hopefulness, mainly the members which are higher in the organizational hierarchy. Several employees were saying that they were initially, when the change was first introduced to them, feeling hopeful, enthusiastic and liked it but these feelings faded away with time. However, currently the majority of

² The new work process consists largely of certain checklists the project leader has to fill out. These documents contain critical questions about the current state of the project that will help with the assessment of it. The project leader is then to answer these questions and discuss them with a supervisor before passing the tollgate and moving on to the next phase of the project

participants expressed rather distant and apathetic emotions. Although I did not find any strong anti-change emotions such as anger or fear, in my opinion the observed indifference still belongs to the negative category because it shows that Tyréns' employees are lacking enthusiasm or devotion for the change. The participants also conveyed disappointment, concern and discontent towards some parts of the change project, mainly connected to the implementation.

I noticed that people were more reluctant to show anti-change emotions than anti-change beliefs, thus it was more challenging for me as the researcher to find out what the interviewees were feeling. Even when asked directly they often avoided talking about their feelings and tended to describe what they think. This might not be unusual but it made it more difficult for me to observe emotions. Consequently, I also considered non-verbal cues I received such as body language or tone of voice to help me construct the affective dimension.

Subsequently, I can conclude that Tyréns' employees showed a wide, multi-dimensional range of different supportive and resistant reactions. People's attitudes are ambivalent within each of the three studied dimensions as well as between them. This ambivalence is due to the fact that the employees did not view the change project as one item but their attitudes depended on the specific element of the change project they were reacting to. With elements I mean the individual parts of the change, for example the content of the tollgate system, the implementation or other context factors. Nevertheless, we can infer an overall tendency out of the above analyzed different anti- and pro-change reactions of the employees at Tyréns South. People are predominantly supportive of the tollgate system especially in the cognitive dimension, i.e. they think it is a favorable change, the behavioral intentions are contradictory, and the affective reactions are mainly apathetic or indifferent, lacking strong positive emotions as well as severe resistance towards the change. However, it is difficult to summarize the reactions and narrow it down to either majoritarian negative or positive attitudes due to the fact that Tyréns' employees showed ambivalent and multi-faceted reactions. Displaying the employee reactions in an aggregated and dichotomous manner (i.e. supportive vs. resistant) would lead to losing information and knowledge. Therefore, viewing and depicting reactions not as dichotomous but as multi-faceted improves our understanding in three ways. First, it allows us to understand the exact nature of a person's reactions. It makes our observation more precise instead of covering everything under "buzzwords" such as resistance which could entail any kind of behavior depending on how a researcher defines it. It helps us to see a more detailed

and complex picture of how the different individuals in a company reacted to the change. Secondly, a multi-faceted approach makes it possible to study ambivalent reactions. For example, if we are able to observe that employees have a strongly positive reaction in the dimension of emotion but do have negative behavioral intentions we obtain a deeper understanding of the situation. Lastly, it enables us to link a cause more precisely to its particular reaction. Instead of coming to conclusions such as “employee participation led to a high change acceptance”, we are now able to pinpoint “employee participation led to enthusiasm for the project but did not have any influence on people’s behavior”. Consequently, our understanding and picture of reactions becomes more distinct and precise, which could not only open up new areas for future research but also enable us to gain utility out of this knowledge by for example enabling an organization to implement more specific measures to improve.

Finally, what became evident is that our understanding of the reactions is directly linked to their causes and the context they occurred in and cannot be seen in isolation. The above analysis showed how employees at Tyréns reacted to the change project but the actual knowledge gain comes through *why* they reacted as they did. Therefore, in the following chapter I will connect the reactions with their underlying causes and relate them to existing research on this topic to answer my second research question.

3.2 Underlying Causes

Causes or antecedents of reactions to change are often studied together with the reactions, hence the majority of existing research also uses quantitative studies and self-report surveys, other methods such as interviews or observation are lacking. The literature is very varied and studies a large amount of different explanatory factors but is incomprehensive. Most studies only examine just one or a limited number of causes, for example they only measured the influence of communication instead of using a more complex framework of possible causes (e.g. Oreg et al., 2011; Piderit, 2000). Due to the variability in and the extensiveness of the existing research, I will not be giving a complete literature review here but only focus on the discussion of the factors which emerged from my data as the most relevant underlying causes and underpin them with existing research.

3.2.1 Individual Factors

Theory

Personality or psychological variables do have an influence on people's reaction to change. These variables include different life experiences, self-esteem, or optimism (Karten, 2009; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Employees differ in their reactions to change because of their individual abilities and willingness to cope with it, some try to maintain their current state while others adapt rather quickly and move to a supportive commitment of the change project (Bovey & Hede, 2001b).

Oreg (2003) examined which personality traits strengthen resistance to change. The explaining factors he found are seeking routines, a short-term focus, and a rigid or dogmatic point of view. Similarly, Wanberg and Banas (2000) who identified what they term "personal resilience", a combination of self-esteem, optimism, and perceived control, has a positive influence on people's change acceptance.

Judge et al. (1999) found that self-concept and risk tolerance correlate with an individual's success in coping with change. Self-concept is comprised of internal locus of control, positive affectivity, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. Risk tolerance entails higher openness to experience, lower risk aversion, and higher tolerance for ambiguity. Especially positive affectivity, meaning how a person experiences positive emotions, is a very strong indicator of how a person copes with change. If the positive affectivity is high in a person he/she is generally more joyful, enthusiastic, excited etc. Pessimistic thinking on the other hand made people assess a change situation more negatively (Fugate et al., 2002). Similar observations were made by Bovey and Hede (2001a). They investigated how employees with higher tendencies to blame others, to be inert and passive, to avoid life's difficulties, and to not take control of their own destinies also resist change more frequently.

Bovey and Hede (2001b) studied two kinds of defense mechanisms individuals use, often unconsciously, to cope when confronted with a change. Individuals who tend to use maladaptive defense mechanisms (denial, dissociation, isolation of affect, projection, and acting out) are more likely to resist organizational change (resistance is here defined as behavioral intention to resist), while those who tend to use adaptive defense mechanisms (humor, anticipation) are less likely. Especially individuals who use humor to deal with a change develop less negative feelings towards it because they are able to view the situation

from a different perspective. Seeing the humorous, ironic or amusing parts of a change is a constructive coping mechanisms for coping with a stressful situation.

Findings and discussion

Observing and analyzing personality differences is very challenging, with most researchers using established psychological personality tests. According to the literature review optimism and self-esteem seem to be very important traits but determining those within the interviewed employees goes beyond what is doable in this study. Factors such as risk tolerance are very difficult to construct from semi-structured interviews and a different data collection method e.g. surveys of a larger sample size of employees would have been helpful. This does not necessarily mean that these psychological factors did not have an influence on Tyréns' employees' reactions but the collected data does not allow me to come to valid and reliable findings.

Nevertheless, I aimed at examining individual differences. The interviewees were for example asked about past and non work-related experiences with change. In this context, some people were indicating that they in general like changes, variety and changing situations, and are very open to new circumstances. But two other were saying that they have been experiencing so many changing situations, including major ones e.g. mergers and acquisitions, that they have a tendency to be indifferent about changes and wait and sit back until they can judge the circumstances. The participants who belonged to the latter group showed a more passive behavior regarding the new tollgate system and judged the change situation a bit more cautiously. They were not more against it or afraid but kept an emotional distance and did not want to support it actively. One employee said: "At work I've gone through so many little and big changes. And normally I just wait for other people to test it and I see what happens first before I decide to get involved or support it. That is just me."

One of the most relevant individual differences found among the interviewed Tyréns' employees is tenure. How long a person has been working for the company proved to be an important influencing factor on a person's attitude towards the change project. There was a trend noticeable in the employees who have worked longer (compared to their colleagues) at Tyréns, these employees were in general more positive about the change (content and implementation process). I could not observe any behavioral differences but their cognitive responses were more positive. Whereas their less established colleagues described their

opinions about the situation with more critical words, such as “I am not sure it will have the wanted outcome”, “I wish they would have done this differently”, “I don’t think it is good that we were not part of the development”. In contrast with these findings is a study by Van Dam et al. (2008). They found a positive correlation between organizational tenure and employees opposing change. They give two possible explanations. Individuals who have been working for an organization for a longer time stay because they are content at the firm or unsatisfied with alternative work options. Thus, they are show stronger negative reactions towards changes of their work situation. The other reason is that employees increase their investments (e.g. specialization of skills) during their tenure and changes could endanger these. However, I could also see a different theoretical correlation between tenure and resistance potentially explaining my findings. Employees who have been working for Tyréns longer could have a stronger organizational commitment, in the form of loyalty or support for the company, and therefore accept changes more easily.

Having a deeper knowledge about these individual differences could be valuable for Tyréns when designing for instance persuasion campaigns directly targeting employees who are more at risk to show resistant behaviors.

3.2.2 Communication and Information

Theory

Existing research shows a strong relationship between the change information given and the support for change, however the *quality* of the information is the determining factor here (Allen at al., 2007). Lewis (2006) proved that the higher the perceived quality of the information provided, the less resistant reactions were shown by employees. Communicating information about the specific changes, e.g. how they affect the organization or how specific work demands for employees change, is necessary for improving attitudes towards the change and can reduce negative feelings such as uncertainty or anxiety (Wanberg & Banas, 2000; Axtell et al., 2002, Van Dam et al., 2008). Schweiger and DeNisi (1991) showed employees receiving detailed information about a merger had a more positive view of the company than the control group. However, a study by Oreg (2006) exemplified that additional information could also lead to resistance, depending on the communicated content and how it is communicated.

While many authors focus on studying the general tendency of how change-related communication influences reactions, most do not focus on examining which kind of communication (channels, point in time etc.) is most successful. An exception are Allen et al. (2007), who studied the role different sources of communication (e.g. colleagues, supervisors, external contacts) play in predicting employee uncertainty.

Another relevant issue regarding communication is the understanding of the change project. Washington and Hacker (2005) asked over 200 managers to rate themselves on how well they understood an implemented organizational change process. They found the managers who understood the change better were more excited about it and had a more positive attitude towards its success.

It is also important to have consistency between actions and communication. Larson and Tompkins' (2005) researched the connection between what the management is communicating and their corresponding actions at an aerospace company, and found that the management contradicted itself. The managers communicated a new emphasis on cost reduction and efficiency but did not change the reward system which incentivizes technical quality.

Findings and discussion

Regarding the received information, the employees which attended both workshops said they were well-informed about the tollgate system's content and how to use it. All employees stated they understand the content of the tollgate process, i.e. what they have to do and what each of the questions in the documents exactly means. People also revealed that the understanding of why the change is happening (i.e. its purpose) is of very high importance to them. The information about the purpose had a positive influence on their affective reactions. When talking about the purpose people were relatively enthusiastic and committed towards the change project. One employee responded in a way that is representative of what many others told me:

“If I understand why we have to do something, I feel more motivated to do it. For example if I know why it is important to investigate the information to answer certain questions in the documents and I feel as they make sense, I gladly invest the time to fill it out.”

That they can understand the purpose or reason behind why certain parts of the new work process have to be done it increases their likelihood for more positive behavioral intentions.

However, I also found that several employees showed negative reactions. For instance in the form of disappointment and disillusion due to the inconsistency between what was communicated by the change agents at the first workshop for the department managers and how they acted afterwards. This issue also concerns how people perceived the fairness of the process, hence I will go more into detail in *Chapter 3.2.4*. Furthermore, the missing dialogue between the management and the employees apart from the workshops had a strong influence on people's reactions. Most interviewees reported a lack of communication between the change agents and them, since the last workshop in autumn of 2015 no communication has happened. This led to several negative responses. People were showing disengagement and distanced themselves from the project because they felt as if the process change is not important to the management anymore. They also compared their current beliefs to how they felt right after the workshops and showed clear signs that their initial support for the change decreased. In contrast, the employees who (said that they) communicated more with the change agents, either informally (because of a personal or closer professional relationship with the change agents) or formally (the business managers have weekly meetings with the change agents), still showed more positive emotional reactions such as eagerness and enthusiasm. To compare how the employees reacted in the past with how they feel now is a very difficult because I rely on people's ability and willingness to remember and assess. Therefore, I cannot be certain that people's positive affection for the change project decreased but because I heard similar descriptions from several employees I believe that there was a tendency of people's emotional engagement to decrease over time. The following statement highlights this:

“It is not that I am opposing the project, I still think it is a good idea and we need a change to get better. I remember when we had the first workshop everyone discussed what we can do to improve Christian's draft and I would have liked to try it in one of my projects. But I have not heard anything about it since then.”

There also is an interconnection between communication and trust. Especially for the older and more established organizational members the strong trust in the change agents (concerning their general management and the change-specific capabilities) influenced their assessment of how much information about the change process they perceived as necessary. When asked if the past communication was sufficient these employees agreed, showing that they trust the management to implement and plan it. This is illustrated by an employee's response:

“Yes, there has not been any official information about the change project but that does not really matter for me. Even if I don’t hear anything I know Christian and Pål know what they are doing and I trust them that they handle it.”

Although all employees received (approximately³) equal information and options to participate in the change process for younger, more recently joined employees the low amount of communication and involvement opportunities led to stronger negative reactions. They were unsatisfied with the fact that they were not being informed about how the implementation of the new system is progressing and displayed negative emotions such as frustration and irritation about the limited information. They also did not express that trust was an important issue in this context. These findings are supported by Allen et al. (2007), they showed that trust in the management led employees to a more positive appraisal of the received information.

3.2.3 Participation

Theory

Giving employees the opportunity to contribute or have a say in the decision making process of a proposed change has a positive effect on their acceptance of the change, and reduces their resistance. The involvement of the change recipients makes it possible for the change agents to explain the change and give arguments for the change in an interactive way by giving the employees possibilities to ask follow-up questions and discuss counter-arguments. It also provides a form of direct influence on decisions concerning the change content (Wanberg & Banas, 2000; Giangreco & Peccei, 2005).

³ Officially and from what I can conclude from the interviews everyone received the same information, could participate in both workshops etc. However, I cannot say with certainty that they received more opportunities and information through other channels.

Similar findings were made by Lines (2004), studying a strategic change in a communications company. There is a strong connection between employee participation in the change process and less resistance, higher organizational commitment and goal achievement. Participation is defined as involving lower level employees in change development and implementation phases, including the opportunity to veto decisions. The psychological background for this is that people have a need for control which is a strong motivation. Participation gives people this perceived sense of control (Lines, 2004). Msweli-Mbanga and Potwana's (2006) study further investigated this negative relationship between participation and resistance. Their study examined the positive outcomes if employees have access to participation. This participation has to be meaningful e.g. the possibility to express their opinion and be involved in the decision making process.

Findings and discussion

Participation emerged to be an important factor in several ways. First of all, the involvement of the majority of project leaders was very limited. The business managers were naturally more involved due to regular meetings⁴ with the change agents during the development and implementation phase of the change project where they discussed and partly developed it. These employees did in general indicate a stronger positive assessment of the change project. This was expressed again and again throughout the interviews, not only by what they said (they supportive cognitive beliefs) but also how they said it. They showed more emotions, talked more enthusiastically and eagerly about it. This is in sharp contrast with the department managers and their affective responses. The department managers participated in two workshops in 2015 but since then no activities to involve them took place. They indicated a lack of enthusiasm and interest towards the change project, they talked about the change project

⁴ These meetings were not held with the change project as the objective but were part of the regular management work within Tyréns.

more reserved and almost emotionless. Many reported that they felt more excitement about the change in the beginning when they worked with their colleagues in the workshops but it “faded away” and “got lost”. Since they talked with me about feelings they had several months to a year ago there is a risk that they remember it more positively than it actually happened. However, the interviewees seemed very reflective and almost surprised to realize themselves when they talked about it that their past affectionate support has faded.

The employees also wished for more future opportunities to participate, e.g. provide feedback, learn from colleagues about how they handled certain issues within the projects etc. They have an interest in engaging in the situation and exchange thoughts. When I talked to the change agents they told me that one of the main reasons why they are changing the work process is to systematically learn from people’s mistakes and not only within the same department but also from co-workers you would normally not have the option to exchange information with. However, the change agents did not provide the employees with mechanisms to participate and discuss potential learnings from their project work. This lack of participation led to indifference and despite the fact that I did not observe strong negative reactions in this context, people are unsatisfied and have the need to be more involved in the implementation process which could be an indicator for where to start actions to lead people from indifference to supportive reactions.

Furthermore, the employees have a need for testing the new work process. The employees who were working in projects too small to be involved in the first roll-out of the tollgate process all stated they regret they were not involved more. Despite them indicating that they are aware of the fact that it might be unpractical to use the new system in its full extent for shorter projects (more about this issue in 3.2.7) they all expressed the desire to test it.

“If it is an issue that concerns me I want to be involved. I think all department managers should have been asked to test it at least once this year so we can then discuss it afterwards.”

Several interviewees also stated similar opinions. They were unhappy about not being given the opportunity to give their feedback and have an impact on the change project.

3.2.4 Perceived Fairness

Theory

A factor closely related to participation is procedural justice. According to Lines (2004, 2005) perceived fairness is determined by three characteristics: (1) the chance of employees to have influence on rules, policies or strategies preceding a change, (2) the inclusion of intra-organizational groups with different values, needs, and norms in the decision-making process, and (3) systems of recourse. Bernerth et al. (2007) showed that there is a negative correlation between different forms of justice (including procedural and interactional) and anti-change reactions such as cynicism.

It is important for people's perception of fairness that they are not only getting formally involved but to really have an impact. Decision makers or change agents have to actually consider the change recipients contributions. If people perceive a change process to be fair their organizational commitment increases because they feel as their interests are being valued and protected (Lines 2004, 2005).

Findings and discussion

Some participants felt, despite given the chance to have influence on the tollgate process' design during the first workshop, that fairness was missing. People were given the chance to participate in the designing (e.g. content of the questions) of the tollgate process by giving feedback on the change agents' first draft, discuss the topic with colleagues, suggest improvements etc. However, in the second workshop it showed that their input has not been sufficiently considered. People perceived that as an unfair situation and it disappointed them that they did not have a genuine influence on the design of the project. Some employees had strong affective responses by feeling as they have been lied to and their opinion is not being valued. One employee expressed her feelings the following way:

“I really liked the first workshop and I remember how we proposed several changes to the layout of the questions but at the second workshop they just presented the final version and said “That is how it is now”, they added a few things we said but I felt like they did not really take seriously what we suggested. I was very disappointed by that because what was then the reason for the first workshop?”

When asked if they would still participate in future workshops they were hesitant and felt discouraged. This shows that the lack of procedural justice had a negative influence on employees' intentional behavior as well as emotions.

This topic has to be seen with caution because it is about an event that took part in the past and most interviewees were unsure and admitted they it is difficult to remember what has actually happened. Also, it is just the subjective assessment of the unfairness of the process. Maybe some of their ideas were incorporated without them being aware of it or they were disregarded for justifiable reasons. However, I think what is important here is that the situation left a negative impression on some employees, even if this impression is not grounded on facts. Reality is that some employees feel discouraged and cynical now because they felt it was unjust. This might also be very dependent on the specific person. I noticed that two interviewees stated that they were very engaged in the first workshop because they are personally interested in making the work process better. Consequently, they indicated bigger disappointment and perceived it as less fair.

3.2.5 Nature of Relationship with Change Agent

Theory

Van Dam et al. (2008) showed that a high quality supervisor-employee relationship reduces employee resistance. One important element in the relationship of an employee with the change agent is trust. Oreg's (2006) survey found that when employees do not trust the management it increases negative reactions in all three dimensions. It leads to feelings such as anxiety, destructive actions and a negative assessment of the change project. Zand (1997) highlights five conditions creating trust in a manager: positive intentions for the company and its employees, sharing relevant information, work competence, supportiveness of employees, and a win-win reward system.

This is further supported by Furst and Cable (2008) who investigated that a strong employee-supervisor relationship can cause less resistance to change because managerial actions (such as the implementation of a change) are interpreted in a way that strengthens the already present opinion. Not only a general managerial trust in the responsible change agents but also a positive perceptions of their change competence and effectiveness reduces the likelihood of employee resistance (Amiot et al., 2006; Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). According to Stanley et al. (2005),

employees showed to be more skeptical and cynical if they doubted the ability of managers to achieve a successful change.

Findings and discussion

The interviews showed that the employees trust the change agent's management capabilities as well as their change competencies. Both factors are strong at Tyréns as indicated by the research participants in several different contexts throughout the interviews. As seen in the chapter about communication, employees who trusted the change agents more did not assess the lack of communication as severely. Overall, all employees pointed out that they trust the top-management. Even though I could not find any indication that this trust overshadowed the more negative reactions and points of criticisms towards different elements of the change project, a lack of trust could have had worsened the situation. Some employees expressed on several occasions that despite some uncertainty and dislike of parts of the change, they think that the end-result of the change projects will be positive and the change agents have the competencies to manage it. However, one more specific finding is that one employee who had an above-average trust transferred this trust to a highly positive assessment of all the change agents' managerial actions when handling the change project, even to those that have caused negative reactions in most interviewees. The following quote demonstrates this:

“I have known Pål for a long time and I trust him. I think that is why I have no doubt that the tollgate process is going well and support him in that.”

As seen this strong, trusting relationship between the employee and the supervisor led to a general positive belief about the tollgate system and how it is being implemented.

3.2.6 Perceived Consequences and Need for Change

Theory

Researchers also studied how employees' perception of the outcomes of a change project and how they will benefit or be harmed by the change determines their positive or negative reactions to the change (for example Piderit, 2000; Giangreco & Peccei, 2005). Studies showed that if employees perceived a negative outcome, for instance an increase in workload or downsizing

of workforce, they felt more stressed and withdrew from the situation (Fried et al., 1996; Axtell et al., 2002). Other research studied how the anticipation of different favorable outcomes, such as personal development or more interesting work, positively impacted the individual's change commitment and readiness (Bartunek et al., 2006). Oreg (2006) researched how concerns about specific consequences of a change impacted employee resistance. He uncovered that fears about job security, intrinsic rewards, and power and prestige, increased the likelihood of resistant emotional and cognitive reactions. Moreover, the reactions depend on the employees' judgement whether the outcome of the change project will differ from the one communicated by the management. If there is a divergence between the two it leads to doubt of the value of the change (Waddell & Sohal, 1998).

Furthermore, a need for change, defined as whether employees perceive that there are legitimate or convincing reasons for the planned change project, is a researched factor. For instance, Holt et al. (2007), in their study of over 900 public and private sector employees, found a connection between a belief that the change is needed and an increased readiness for change. It is also argued that a sense of urgency improves people's change commitment (Garvin & Roberto, 2005; Kotter, 1995).

Findings and discussion

People were ambivalent in their reactions caused by the perceived consequences. Most interviewees reported a strong belief that the change will have a positive impact on Tyréns and on the success of their own projects. They also showed that they strongly perceive a need for the change, for instance: "I think the change was necessary, we often do so much work for a bidding process and then realize too late that we don't have the skills or resources to actually do it and then we wasted all that time. I think the questions in the tollgate process could really help us to improve."

Despite this general positive outlook, they were skeptical about the expected workload. It is difficult to come to an objective measurement how much additional time will be necessary to perform the new process in a thorough manner compared to before. But the perceived additional time needed regarding shorter projects led to negative reactions. In the larger projects the tollgate system is currently used in, workload was not a dominant issue, with some people saying it will increase their workload but not significantly, hence their expressed reactions were

neither positive nor negative. However, concerning these shorter projects employees showed concern. A few additional hours for each project e.g. to fill out documents or have additional meetings between supervisor and project leader to discuss the status quo might have a bigger impact on smaller projects which are sometimes just a week long because time is a very limited resource. People also expressed the wish for a leaner version, where it is easier and quicker to pass the tollgates because they believe in the general purpose of the project but are skeptical about its user-friendliness (more about this issue in the following chapter). This concern over the workload and perceived hindrance for smaller projects was very well exemplified in this department manager's response:

“In my department we don't have projects that big. I would like to use it for my projects because I think it would be beneficial for all of us if we more carefully thought about if we should actually do a bid or not. But as it is at the moment the tollgate system is just not possible for me to use, it is unpractical. You know, in my department we handle so many smaller projects simultaneously [...]. If I had to do it for all of my projects I would not have any time to do my normal work.”

3.2.7 Change Content

Theory

According to Oreg et al. (2011) there are very few studies investigating the influence of the actual change content on reactions. Some researchers investigated various situations before and after the change but the impact of the change project's content (and its individual elements) on reactions is, compared to other possible causes, underdeveloped in existing research.

Lines (2004) discusses that if a change initiative's content is not aligned with the existing values and norms in the company the likelihood of resistance is greater. For instance if new work rules contain stricter control of the employees but the dominating norms in the company encourage autonomy people feel more negative towards the change.

A further predictor connected to content is change related self-efficacy, studied by several authors (Armenakis et al., 1993; Conner, 1992; Wanberg & Banas, 2000; Holt et al., 2007). This means how an employee perceives his/her own ability to handle a change successfully. If a person is concerned about how a change which is directly affecting their work, e.g. procedures

or a new technology, will influence their performance or accomplishment of a task, the person's change acceptance will be lower. Important to notice is here, that it refers to a person's own confidence in or judgement of their competencies and not an objective assessment. This is supported by Chreim (2006) who interviewed 46 bank employees faced with two change projects and found that they were more supportive of the changes if their estimation of the change requirements match their existing abilities and skills.

Findings and discussion

The tollgate system's content is a very important factor, causing positive as well as negative reactions. However, people's attitudes were determined not by the tollgate system's content in general but by very specific elements of it.

In general a strong support for the content was noticeable. All participants showed very positive cognitive reactions towards the objective behind the change and expressed that they agree that a more structured work process is necessary. A connection between their general cognitive pro-change attitude and the content was observable. They all agreed that the documents' questions match with what ideally should be included in the project leader's work process. Especially experienced employees stated they strongly support the tollgate system's content because it entails what they have been doing all along (in a less formal way). They believe that other project leaders should use the same questions⁵ to make the work process more thorough and avoid mistakes. But in contrast to that, the same employees showed negative behavioral intentions by revealing that because they perceive a strong match between their current way to work and what the new system is demanding that they feel no need to strictly follow what is

⁵ The "questions" refer to the different items within each tollgate segment that need to be examined and answered in written format and discussed with the supervisor.

demanding by the tollgate system. This is a good example for ambivalence between two dimensions, one employee expressed it in the following way:

“I don’t think the new process is anything new. I have been answering the exact same questions quickly in my head for years already, I just don’t write it down. I think everyone should be answering these questions but I don’t really need it.”

This issue has to be carefully assessed though. We cannot be absolutely certain that the employees, even though they said it, are actually already using similar questions to what is provided in the new work process. If there is a discrepancy then their lacking commitment to use the new process thoroughly (because in their opinion their way of working is identical) could be a critical issue that has to be kept in mind by Tyréns management.

However, overall there seems to be a good match between the existing way of working and the planned work process (tollgate system). Many interviewees indicated that they are very pleased with the tollgate system’s content because it matches how everyone should ideally be working. Thus, it can be concluded that the general process content is one of the factors causing very supportive, cognitive reactions. The more recently joined employees also stated that they noticed a very established work culture at Tyréns which takes some time to get accustomed to, therefore a more formalized work process could be especially beneficial for new employees.

At the same time there were also negative reactions caused by the design of the tollgate process. People did not like that the questions within each tollgate do not build upon on each other and were not logically connected. They also criticized the technical layout. Many stated they would be more likely to use it if there was an electronic version of it so they could fill it out on a computer and could easier go from one question to the next follow up question. Even more importantly, all interviewed employees stated the opinion that the tollgate process, as it is currently designed, is too complicated and time intensive for smaller (i.e. shorter) projects. According to the change agents, the implementation process was started at projects over a certain monetary limit because it is more practical in these projects. However, the employees revealed that exactly because they have a general support for the idea behind the tollgate process that they would like a leaner version of it so it could be used in smaller projects where time is a more critical factor. They criticized that the current design is too extensive and they would approve a revised version that focuses on the most relevant questions. A representative statement of people’s belief was the following:

“I would really like to use the new process, I think it’s a great idea [...]. But at the moment it is way too complicated for small projects, many questions are not necessary. If there was a smaller version that is easy to use I would definitely like to try it in one of my projects. It needs to be more flexible”

These points of criticism caused negative cognitive reactions within the employees, for instance skepticism and uncertainty.

Furthermore, the participants felt confident to handle what is demanded by the change and showed cognitive support towards it. It also reflected in their behavioral intentions which were positive. A critical issue in this context is the above mentioned workload, some people worried that they will not have the additional time that is demanded. They also expressed that this might cause some more difficulties in the beginning, when they still have to get used to working with it and they are concerned that their other work performances will suffer because of that. Also, the project leaders on the project management level did not take part in the workshops and their department managers are responsible for introducing the tollgate system to them. One department manager said it like this:

“It is not the questions that are hard to understand, they are self-explanatory. But I think it is very important for my project leaders to understand why we are using the tollgate system now and I would need some time to explain it to them.“

The department managers reported they felt confident to handle the task of introducing it to their employees but because it takes time away from their daily work demands they would appreciate additional time allocated to them for this specific purpose.

3.2.8 Context Factors

As context factors I define all influences in the environment of the change project i.e. the external and internal circumstances in which it happened. The two most relevant factors I found are the following.

The new tollgate system is not being coordinated with other changes and processes at Tyréns. The quality management system called Tyra overlaps with the tollgate process. Its content is similar (its purpose and structure are different though) and it also has to be used by filling out a document (in the intranet). Thus, many employees felt annoyed with this redundancy and

expressed a strong wish for both systems to be integrated. People also reported that this makes them less likely to use both systems with equal engagement, indicating a negative behavioral intention. For example one participant said: “I don’t understand why we have two similar systems now. I think one has to be integrated in the other. If I have to I will of course work with both but I really don’t like it.”

Connected to that is the issue who initiated the change. The change project was created and pushed forward by the management of Tyréns South, instead of the headquarters in Stockholm, and only Tyréns South is working with it so far. Approximately half of the participants indicated a negative attitude towards this fact. They would have liked it to come from Stockholm, showing a stronger interest by the top management and making coordination issues (e.g. working on intra-regional projects with offices which do not sue the work process) easier. In contrast to that, the other half reported they liked that it was coming out of the region South because that way they did not have to wait for a more formal, company-wide change. They also connected this to trust by saying that because they know the change agents better and trust them it made it easier to accept the change, whereas if it came from the headquarters they would have felt more skeptical.

3.3 Key Findings and Practical Implications

The objective was not to give a clear cause-effect relationship between the reactions and the reasons but to closely examine what influences these reactions. There is a correlation between the influencing factors and the reactions but I am not claiming to have found a causation in the strict definition of this scientific term. To study the direct causation could be an area for future research. I am confident that the found causes and reactions are relevant and significant and also a very specific construction of the current situation at Tyréns. Nevertheless, due to the multitude of reactions and causes it is not possible for me to assess in this study to what extent one factor causes a reaction or what the interplay between them is. It is very difficult to come to those conclusions without a control group. For example, it is not certain if the more supportive reactions of the business managers are due to higher participation or more access to communication or even an unknown factor.

Based on my analysis I conclude that strongest influence on employees’ pro-change reactions had the following three causes:

Information about purpose: Enough information, to understand and comprehend why the change initiative (in general and in particular the new work tasks they have to perform) is necessary, was provided.

Trust: Strong trust in the change agents, regarding their general management abilities and change-related competencies.

Change Content: The overall idea (i.e. content of questions, a more formalized work process) behind the tollgate system.

The strongest influence on employees' anti-change reactions had the following three causes:

Communication: Lack of consistent communication and on-going dialogue between the change agents and change recipients.

Participation: Lack of fair participation opportunities in the past and lack of future activities, which provide the chance for involvement.

Change Content: Practical execution such as no leaner version for smaller projects available, weak interrelationships between questions, no electronic version available.

There might be factors, additional to the ones I analyzed, that could have caused the reactions but were not found through the data I collected. As explained in the limitations this could be due to several reasons, including the chosen data collection method and research approach.

My analysis also showed that some factors have interrelationships and certain factors seem to outweigh or compensate for others. For instance, as discussed in *Chapter 3.2.2*, the communication and information limitations were moderated by the "trust in management" item which positively influenced some employees' opinions. There is very little research being done about these relationships, and more theoretical frameworks as well as empirical studies would help our understanding (Oreg et al., 2011).

The reactions in isolation of their roots have only limited utility, thus to find the areas that need to be addressed for improvement we first need to understand the underlying causes (Mabin et al., 2001; Waddell & Sohal, 1998). At Tyréns South communication, participation and the tollgate system's content are the most relevant sources of resistance regarding the here studied change project. Since it goes beyond the scope of this thesis to revise the design of the tollgate system I will focus on providing three practical recommendations concerning communication and participation (based on the practical activities proposed in Garvin & Roberto, 2005 as well as Burnes, 2004).

Not only is participation one of the factors which led to the most severe negative reactions in Tyréns' employees but according to Pardo del Val et al. (2012) exactly because participation can have such a strong impact it can also be considered a tool to uncover potential weaknesses and areas within the change project (including the change management) which need improvement. Considering the size of Tyréns, especially when the tollgate system will be used company-wide, resource-efficient (in terms of time and money) ways to involve more employees (i.e. project leaders) have to be found. One arrangement could be the, by the interviewees requested, follow-up workshops. These could take place in regular, e.g. semiannual, intervals providing an opportunity for employees⁶ of different hierarchies to engage in a meaningful dialogue with each other, give feedback and receive up-to-date information about learnings and success stories from other projects. These workshops could also be used to create employee support for other changes currently or prospectively happening, and to integrate change management approaches for various changes at Tyréns. This would cater to people's need for more participation and more regular and consistent information. Hearing first hand from colleagues and supervisors would also raise people's awareness of the need and purpose behind the change, which showed to cause positive reactions in the interviewed employees. According to Burnes (2004) it is important to sustain the momentum so employees actively commit to the change and do not return to disengaged or resistant reactions. These regular events could increase people's emotional engagement and "keep the energy up".

Many employees also suggested to integrate a learning opportunity in the existing internal project leader education which Tyréns is already providing for its employees. This way it would not just be the department managers who were responsible for introducing the tollgate system to their subordinate project leaders but it would also come from a more centralized channel and

⁶ For practical reasons (i.e. number of employees, available resources) these workshops would of course have to be geographically or subject-specific divided.

directly from the top management, which could strengthen people's perceived importance of the change. Integrating it into already established company activities would be one way to offer an easily implementable participation opportunity. Especially for recently joined organizational members this could be a valuable option to internalize the expected way of working at Tyréns South while already being in an educational environment.

A further point for improvement could be to consider who is communicating the information. Allen et al. (2007) showed that employees prefer to receive change-related information from their direct supervisors, compared to other sources. So despite it being important for employees to trust the change agents and see that the top-management stands behind the change initiative, it can be more effective if the direct superiors function as change agents and communicate important information to their employees. This is supported by what the department managers said, they are confident that they are able to pass the information on and explain the purpose of the change etc. but they need some support. As Alvesson & Sveningsson (2015) repeatedly highlight in their book, it is of highest relevance to pass on the excitement and support for the change from the top of the organization down to all employees. The analysis showed that overall the employees which are formally or informally closer to the top-management and thus received more information and participation, reacted more positively towards the change. Therefore, to create a change environment where the middle management acts as change agents too could increase positive reactions towards the change. The department managers can use their position to actively provide more change-related information to their subordinates and act as a link between the existing change agents and the employees. Moreover, this is an opportunity to transform the general lack of active support (e.g. excitement and engagement) to enthusiasm and commitment towards the change.

As shown in the analysis many respondents stated that they were more emotionally engaged during the workshops last year but the energy diminished over time. The elements within the change project that caused negative cognitive reactions, such as the less useful parts of the change content or missing alignment with other systems at Tyréns, can be addressed by the change agents in a more straightforward manner by for example revising the tollgate system's design. But it also became evident that many resistant reactions came in the form of missing active engagement and emotional indifference, which is more difficult to transform to supportive reactions. However, the above outlined practical communication and participation

measures in combination with the understanding gained from the analysis could help Tyréns' to improve its change management and in turn increase the success of the change project.

4 Summary and Conclusions

4.1 Future Research

Additionally to the future research topics discussed in *Chapter 2.3 Limitations* the following are considered to be of the highest relevance.

This research project studied the influence of different elements on employee reactions to a change project at Tyréns South. The purpose was not to test or prove a definite causality between specific causes and reactions. However, future research could investigate the causal relationship between individual causes and a more complex set of cognitive, affective and behavioral reactions. For instance, instead of researching if a factor causes resistance or organizational commitment it could be researched if a factor leads to a more specific kind of reaction e.g. fear, anger, lower work quality etc. This would not only have theoretical implications by improving the understanding about the causal mechanisms but also practical ones by making it easier to target certain kinds of reactions and their causes.

As seen in my analysis, there are several interrelationship between the causes and more theoretical as well as empirical research on the causal relations is needed. The interplay between different influencing factors, e.g. which factors might serve (also) as moderator variables, if some causes have a stronger combined affect or which ones are reinforcing each other, would be a research topic improving our knowledge (Oreg et al., 2011).

As explained in my research limitations this study only observed employee reactions at one point in time. Further research could use a longitudinal study examining several points in time during the change process and exploring how reactions evolve over time, including how reactions might differ at the beginning of the implementation process to later (Erwin & Garman, 2010). These insights could be especially valuable for practitioners, it is for example possible that cognitive beliefs towards a change can be positively influenced through information given by the management highlighting the positive outcomes but the emotional reactions of people might be lacking behind and have to be influenced through other means to become more positive (Piderit, 2000).

As pointed out earlier, my study's validity would benefit from using observation as a method triangulation. But also in general for the research field of reactions to change, a larger diversity of the used methods (e.g. action research, observations, clinical inquiry) would improve the quality and allow for a more perspectives on the topic (Erwin & Garman, 2010). Currently, most researchers are using self-report surveys (e.g. Lewis, 2006; Lines, 2004; Washington & Hader, 2005; Stanley et al., 2005).

Furthermore, as shown in the literature review and supported by authors such as Erwin & Garman (2010) there is no agreement on how key concepts such as resistance or participation are understood and defined. This results in not very clear-cut conceptualizations of what is being examined and different researchers might actually not be measuring the same concept. This could be of particular importance in quantitative studies relying on self-report questionnaires. In self-report surveys participants might interpret a question differently than intended by the researcher because their social construction of what a concept means differs (Smollan, 2011). This difference in the understanding of concepts can happen in semi-structured interviews too and is acknowledged by my taken research philosophy but this data collection method allows the researcher to ask probing questions to clarify and interviewees can elaborate more easily or provide examples. For instance, Wanberg and Banas (2000: 135) ask their participants to rate themselves on how much they agree with certain items e.g. "I am somewhat resistant to the changes". The findings depend on the way people see and understand "resistant" in this survey item, e.g. a person might strongly disagree with this question because she/he associates resistance with a direct action to hinder the change whereas the researchers might think of resistance also as a negative opinion towards the change. Which means that researchers might measure what they aimed to measure because of too broad or lacking definitions of concepts. Therefore, the quality of future studies of reactions to change would benefit from more precise and clear-cut concepts and definitions of the examined variables (reactions and causes), and a more specific operationalization.

4.2 Research Questions and Purpose

In the following I will conclude how I answered my research questions and to what extent my research purpose was fulfilled.

The earlier discussed findings allow me to answer my research questions. Firstly, which employee reactions to the change process can be observed? Tyréns' employees show a range of pro- and anti-change reactions, covering all three dimensions (cognitive, affective, and behavioral), with ambivalence between and within the dimensions. Overall I can conclude that there is a cognitive support for the change project, in particular for the purpose behind the change, despite some concern and disappointment. At the same time, the behavioral intentions are ambivalent and contradictory, and the affective dimension shows apathy and a lack of active, committed support.

Secondly, what are the underlying reasons influencing or causing these reactions? This study found a variety of different causes which could be grouped into eight categories. The strongest influence on pro-change reactions had the content of the tollgate system, the trust in the change agents, and the agreement and understanding of the purpose behind the change. The most relevant sources of anti-change reactions were the lack of dialogue between change agents and recipients, missing opportunities for participation, and the design and execution of the tollgate system.

Both the practical and the theoretical purpose have been achieved. The purpose of providing the management of Tyréns with a better understanding of their employees' reactions and which factors caused these reactions has been fulfilled. This study's findings and analysis can serve as a starting point for Tyréns to improve their change project. Moreover, my theoretical purpose of this research project has been fulfilled. This study contributed to the exploration of a more nuanced view on reactions by showing that employee reactions to change are indeed more complex than the majority of existing research is suggesting. Tyréns' employees displayed a plurality of reactions across all three dimensions. It also became evident how relevant it is to connect the reactions to their sources and the situational context to really obtain knowledge from the observed reactions. Examining a change in a manner that makes it possible to uncover a wider and finer nuanced range of reactions and a more comprehensive picture of underlying causes, could subsequently enable practitioners and researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon employee reactions to change.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide for semi-structured interviews with Tyréns South's project leaders

Before the interview/warm-up:

- Make first contact, small talk, weather, journey etc.
- My background
- Explain thesis/purpose and define key terms
- Explain interview: Re-asking permission to record
Explain confidentiality and anonymity
Explain what is important to me: no right/wrong answers, interested in your opinions and feelings, how you perceived it...

“Please ask me if you do not understand a question!”

“Do you have any questions before we start?”

Personal background:

How old are you?

What is your educational background?

For how long have you been working at Tyréns?

Where did you work before?

Please tell me about your current position at Tyréns: responsibilities, for how long have you had this position etc.

Previous exposure and response to change:

Have you experienced a change project before? If Yes: this company or a different, please explain!

Tell me about a private experience with change

General questions about implementation:

In what form did you learn about the new process? E.g. email, workshop, meeting etc.

Did you take part in the 2 workshops? What is your opinion?

- Apart from the workshops, was there any informal or formal opportunity to be involved e.g. to give feedback?

How was the communication after the workshops until now? Channels?

- Overall, was the information you received useful/adequate? Did it answer your questions about the changes? Would you have wanted or needed more resources to understand process?

Do you know who to approach if you need more information? Were you able to ask questions?

Do you fully understand how you are supposed to use it, what the purpose is etc.?

- Did you receive any instructions for how to introduce it to your employees/project team members?

Did you feel you had any control or influence over/were you involved in the design/development of the new system? If you wanted to, could you influence future similar changes?

If interviewee is a business manager: You were involved in the development. Can you please tell me more about it! (E.g. when; how much influence; did the management change things because of your or somebody else's feedback?)

Why are you doing this change? Did you feel that there was a reason for this change?

- Official reasons? Believe them? Legitimate reasons communicated?
- Do they differ to your personal opinion?
- Do you trust your superiors that this change is necessary?

Do you feel like the new process fits into Tyréns' work culture? Is it compatible with how you normally handle projects or is it a mismatch?

The process was introduced by the management of the region South and did not come from headquarters, so it is not a central system yet. What is your opinion on this? Is this an advantage or a problem?

Experience with new process and details about new process:

Have you worked with the new system already? Yes/no

No:

- Why have you not?
- Will or do you want to in the future?
- What are your expectations? E.g. Looking forward to it because it will improve work or rather keep it as it is? Why? Impact on your work
- Do you feel prepared to work with it?
- How will the change impact you, your team, clients etc.?

Yes: Tell me about your experience when working with it!

- How many times? All phases/tollgates?
- Do you understand it?
- What impact does it have on your work? (e.g. How much effort did it take you to adjust to new process? How much extra work to adopt new processes? Do you feel like you can handle the changes?)
- What are the differences to how you worked before?
- Influence on your team?
- Influence on clients?
- Is it make the consulting work better? (e.g. more efficient, save time/money etc.)
- Now that you have worked with the new system, was it different than what you expected? Was there anything that was promised/agreed on or communicated before and then broken?

Wrap-up:

What is your opinion on other changes that are currently happening at Tyréns/in your department?

Do you see any problems/difficulties/challenges with the new process?

Is anyone available to listen to your concerns about it?

Do you understand it? Do you like it? Any concerns or complaints?

Is there anything you wish that would have come about differently? How would you like to have done it differently? Solution?

Anything else you would like to say?

THANK YOU!

Notes to myself:

Try to create a natural dialogue and follow the natural flow

Be critical especially with inconsistencies in what interviewees said, ask for clarification

Ask why and ask for examples

Ask probes: How? Describe! Explain! Why? How did that make you feel? Any concerns? What was going through your head? What did you do then? How did you react to that? How would you have done it differently?