To be or not to be, a communicative leader?

A qualitative study of middle managers' communication within elderly care

by

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Abstract

The research field of middle management within elderly care in Sweden is fairly unexplored. Even more so, there is little to no research on communication or communicative leadership and its influence on middle management within elderly care. Therefore, this study aims to investigate managers perspective on communication by interviewing middle managers working with elderly care. Furthermore, the study aims to contribute with knowledge on the importance of communicative leadership in middle management.

Eight middle managers were interviewed, all working with elderly care for the municipal of Malmö, Sweden. The study is based on qualitative research and assumes the ontological approach of social constructivism. The empirical material has been coded and categorized and the key words detected have been anchored in theories within the fields of middle management, communication and communicative leadership.

The results of the study show that the way middle managers view and use communication is influenced by factors such as educational level of the employees, the size of the employee group and language proficiency. Furthermore, middle manager's perspective on communication is a gradation between transmission and sensemaking perspective on communication, and where on the scale the middle manager is depends to the situation and context. A communicative leadership can help ease the workload for middle managers within elderly care by providing a tool for initiating structure, facilitating work, managing relational dynamics and representing. The study contributes with new knowledge within the practices of management and communication as well as offering middle managers working with elderly care a framework for how to reflect on their use of communication.

Keywords: Communicative leadership, middle management, communication perspectives, transmission, sensemaking, communication channels & elderly care.

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1. Introduction

Henry Mintzberg is one of the leading researchers within the field of management and has published many recognized books and studies on the subject. He argues that management can not exist without communication and that good communication skills are essential for successful management (Mintzberg, 2001). Other prominent researchers, such as Kotter (1999), also point to the importance of communication in management focusing more on the value of informal communication. In average managers spend 60 percent of their time in informal conversations and that 13 out of 14 verbal contacts that managers have happen ad hoc (Mintzberg, 1980). Due to the complexity of the middle manager role a successful manager must find a balance between informal and formal communication (Kotter, 1999). Communication is commonly divided into two different perspectives; the transmission and sensemaking, where the main difference between the two is the focus on how a message should be communicated and interpreted by sender and receiver (Fiske & Jenkins, 2010). These perspectives are used by scholars to classify and understand the way people view and use communication (von Platen, 2006; Fiske & Jenkins, 2010; Shannon & Weaver, 1949). There is a growing interest to study communication in management and in the last decades a new term, *communicative leadership,* has emerged. The concept was first coined by the Swedish company, the Volvo Group to internally develop communication and leadership skills (Hamrefors, 2010). Johansson and Hamrin (2013) describe a communicative leader as someone who manages by using dialogue, openness and feedback, and the term has become especially popular with managers in Sweden.

Middle managers are very common within large organizations because they serve an important mediating function in the otherwise complex working environment (Bolman & Deal, 2005). The complexity and importance of middle management lies in the manager's gatekeeping function within the organization. Their role requires them to communicate goals and strategies set by top management to their employees while also relaying the employees' feedback and opinions upwards (Farrell, 2014). There is a strong interest with scholars to research the middle managers role in public sector organizations (Savič & Robida, 2013; Béliveau, 2013), and research has found that middle management place a vital role in influencing organizational performance, perhaps even more than top management ((Dopson & Stewart 1990; Floyd & Wooldridge 2000; Currie & Procter 2005). This study examines middle managers working within the public sector with elderly care for the municipal of Malmö. We as researchers, aim to understand how they view and use communication in their daily work. Communication constitutes a

considerable part of the middle management role and therefore, we found it interesting to connect the two fields of communication and middle management in this study.

1.1 Problem definition

This study explores middle management within the public sector, a rarely researched and little understood role within human service organizations (Thompson, 1994). Scholars have focused their research on middle management in health and hospital care (Savič & Robida, 2013; Béliveau, 2013), however, there is a lack of studies concerning middle management within elderly care. Meissner & Radford (2015) investigate the importance of managerial skills of middle managers in elderly care, although the communicative perspective of management is lacking in their study. There is a wide agreement that middle managers play an important role in organizations as they make significant contributions through performing a variety of tasks. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that middle management heavily influence organizational performance, even more than top management (Dopson & Stewart, 1990; Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000; Currie & Procter, 2005). Research has established the middle managers need for clinical competencies and skills (Lindholm, Sivberg & Udén, 2000; Boucher 2005; Abdelrazek, Skytt & Aly, 2010) with a special focus on technical competence, supervision, communicating effectively and following procedures (Kubica, 2008). However, no research have solely focused on the communicative perspective of middle management within elderly care. Moreover, no research has identified how middle managers perspective on communication influence their managerial work, as we intend to do. Additionally, there is a predominant focus on researching nurse unit managers (Savage & Scott, 2004; Paliadelis, 2008; Shirey, McDaniel, Ebright, Fischer & Doebbeling, 2010; Fennimore & Wolf, 2011; Moran, Duffield, Donoghue, Stasa & Blay, 2011). Consequently, no research has independently examined the communicative perspective that exists of middle management in elderly care.

Many scholars have stressed the relation and importance of communication and leadership (Tourish & Jackson, 2008; Fairhurst, 2011; Barge, 1994). There is also a plethora of studies discussing what managers and leaders do at work, which illustrates that communicating constitutes between 80-90 per cent of their everyday (Tengblad, 2006). In relation to previous studies, the concept of communicative leadership becomes relevant to explore as it connects the research fields of both management and communication and thereby contributes to a deeper understanding of communication within management. According to Högström (1999) the concept of communicative leadership emerged as a response to a changing and more complex business environment. Today, the definition is of growing popularity and widely researched and used in organizations, especially in Sweden (Johansson, Miller & Solange, 2014).

However, there is a lack of research concerning communicative leadership and middle managers within elderly care. In fact, we found no such research. Thereby, this study contributes to the limited research by highlighting how communicative leadership can facilitate the work for middle managers and help solve some of the challenges associated with the role. Some scholars question the concept of communicative leadership, as leading and managing without communication seems impossible (Johansson et al., 2014). However, the concept evokes connotations that indicates being "communicative" comprises more than communicating, instead it connotes to being a "good communicator". By this, a competence aspect arise with managers that implies a communication competence can be developed (Johansson et al., 2014). Hamrefors (2010) points to a narrow use of communicative leadership in the scientific literature with a main focus on the role of communication departments in organizations and how communication professionals participate in leadership. In contrast, we focus on how communicative leadership is of importance in the middle manager's daily work. Finally, this study is relevant for middle managers who wish to advance in their management practice through developing an understanding and awareness of their perspective on communication. Additionally, as communicative leadership consolidates management and communication, we found it highly interesting to examine since we have an academic backgrounds in strategic communication and management studies.

1.2 Purpose and research questions

This study aims to investigate managers perspective on communication by interviewing middle managers working with elderly care. Furthermore, the study aims to contribute with knowledge on the importance of communicative leadership in middle management. To meet the aim of the study we intend to answer the following research questions:

- What perspectives do middle managers within elderly care have on communication?
- How do the different perspectives on communication align with the theory of communicative leadership?
- How is communicative leadership important in the middle management role?

To answer these questions a qualitative study of middle managers' communication within public elderly care will be performed through interviews.

1.3 Limitations

This study is conducted within the primary fields of management and communication. Consequently, other fields that could provide essential knowledge and insight to the research purpose are excluded. Research fields of social psychology and business administration may provide a different point of view to the empirical material and thereby result in alternative findings on the subject. Moreover, the study is limited to results achievable through a qualitative interview method. Using a different research method, such as observations, might highlight different aspects of communication within management. Additionally, a comparative study between other areas of the public or private sector can provide more generalizable conclusions. The empirical material is limited to interviews with middle managers and their perspective on management and communication. Interviews with employees of these managers can provide a more nuanced picture of the communication in management.

1.4 Disposition

To help the reader navigate through the different parts of the thesis, this section aims to provide an overview and clear structure of the layout. The thesis is composed of six chapters that covers the theory, method, findings, conclusions and discussion. In chapter one, the problem definition, research purpose and limitations are presented. Chapter two consists of a literature review and theoretical framework from which the analysis is based upon together with the empirical material. Chapter three introduces the method and the course of action for collecting, sorting and categorizing the empirical material. Moreover, this section describes the analysis method that subsequently leads up to the analysis chapter, which constitute chapter four. In this chapter the empirical material is analysed and theories from the theoretical framework are applied. The following chapters, chapter five and six, contain the conclusion and discussion based on the findings from the analysis and also seek to answer the research questions and purpose of the study. The concluding section of the study presentes suggestions future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

In the following section, relevant theories on middle management, communication and communicative leadership are introduced and will later be applied in the analysis.

2.1 Management

Brunsson (2007) describes how many studies today are labeled as "management studies" but rarely contain any actual content about managing. Since the publishing of Peter Drucker's the *Practice of management* in 1954, management has been pushed out of the spotlight in favour of leadership (Mintzberg, 2009). Mintzberg (2009) describes how our understanding of the nature of managerial work has not changed during the last 100 years even though we seem to be obsessed with both management and leadership. The literature still shares the same understanding of management as presented by Henri Fayol in 1916 (1949, english translation), which includes planning, organizing, coordinating and controlling. With this study we seek to contribute with a modern understanding of management, and in particular middle management. Nowadays, it has become popular to distinguish management from leadership and even more fashionable to become a leader rather than a manager (Mintzberg, 2009; Kotter, 1990). Kotter (1990) claims a significant difference between the two terms; managers handle stability whereas leaders cope with change. According to Kotter (1990) the volatile work environment of today is driven by change, making leadership skills, such as motivating, aligning and inspiring people more important. On the contrary, Mintzberg (2009) argues the opposite and believes management and leadership cannot be separated in practice and additionally does not see the need for a distinction. Instead, Mintzberg (2009) encourages us to consider managers as leaders. Our thesis supports Mintzberg's argument of management and leadership as inseparable in practice and consequently we use the word *management* to refer to both terms.

2.1.1 Middle management

When we discuss middle management we support the same argument as presented above where we consider middle management to incorporate both leadership and managerial skills and traits. Middle managers are important mediators in organizations and according to previous research, the role as middle

manager is characterized by high complexity (Gabel, 2002; Farrell, 2014). Through our literature research on middle management and from our master's programme, we became interested with this complexity of management, which will guide us throughout the thesis. Middle managers operate on intermediate levels of the organization, receiving tasks from top management and overseeing lower level staff. Their position between the management level and the frontline level means that the position is often distinguished by functional and operational work and extensive knowledge (Wooldridge, Torsten & Floyd, 2008). One of the main challenges for the middle manager is maintaining a balanced relationship with executives and employees, and making decisions that are inline with both parties needs. On one hand they have insight into goals and strategies set by top management, while on the other hand having an extensive understanding for the organization's or unit's operational work (Farrell, 2014). Although the intermediate position can be challenging, the comprehensive knowledge that follows is also an asset, which enables the middle manager to influence stakeholders and the organization as a whole (Farrell, 2014).

In order to meet the purpose of this study (see section 1.2) we will focus on the relationship middle managers have with their employees. According to Zhang, Tsui, Song, Li, & Jia (2008), it is important that middle managers develop a relationship with their employees in order to increase engagement and commitment to the organization. This can be done by creating trust, offering benefits or investing in the employees careers. The middle manager should also convey general goals to the unit which they manage (Farrell, 2014). Creating a viable relationship with employees can be difficult. Scholars have argued that communication is a key factor in the role as middle manager and the influence they have on their surroundings (Drakenberg, 1997; Farrell, 2014). A central part of middle management is communicating what is expected of them to the units and what their role in the organization is. It is also important that the middle manager shows transparency towards the employees by clearly communicating different decision-making processes within the organization, helping to build trust. Communication is also an important tool for conflict management or delivering decisions that may be received as negative (Farrell, 2014). This is often a challenge for middle managers and Ahltorp (2003) explains that in situations of conflict or intense emotion, communication is often failing. Middle managers are expected to relay decisions taken by top management and that effect frontline staff, regardless of whether the middle manager agrees with this decision or not. In these types of situations, it is important that the middle manager strategically adapts the communication so that it is received in the best possible way by the employees (Farrell, 2014). As theory and previous research show, communication is a main part in the everyday work of a middle manager. Thereby, to study the work of middle managers without concentrating on communication becomes pointless. In order to contribute with a more modern

understanding of middle management, as we seek to do, presenting the two dominating perspectives on communication becomes important as they naturally divide the communication practice into two fields.

2.2.1 Perspectives on communication

Communication is commonly divided into two different traditions or perspectives. This division is mainly made to clarify the contrasts between communication as sensemaking or as a transmission of messages (Fuglestad, 1999). The later is generally referred to as a transmission view where communication is considered a one-way process or monologue. By this, information is transferred from one part to another with the purpose of convincing the other to assimilate the message (Fiske & Jenkins, 2010). The most famous and recognized model to describe this process was presented by Shannon and Weaver (1949) in the Mathematical Theory of Communication. In their model, communication is described as a linear process with a sender, receiver and a message. At the core of the transmission perspective lies an understanding of communication as sent, transmitted, filtered and received. Moreover, the perspective is characterized by a desire to increase both speed and effect of messages. Most importantly, the perspective highlights the importance of the receiver understanding the information "correctly", meaning that the information is perceived as the sender intended (Fiske & Jenkins, 2010).

The sensemaking view on communication is presented by both Fiske (1982) and Fuglestad (1999) whom both consider communication as sensemaking and co-creating. In contrast to the linear transmission perspective, the sensemaking perspective views communication as a dialogue and exchange of communication between two parts. By this, communication is treated as an active process and Linell (2009) and Säljö (2000) further explain how everything in society has a communicative function. Fiske & Jenkins (2010) stress how communication, from a sensemaking perspective, is the creation and exchange of meaning and information is not considered "failed" if misinterpreted by the receiver. In fact, communication can never fail as the interpretation of a message is the core of this perspective (Fiske & Jenkins, 2010).

As mentioned in section 2.1.1, communication constitutes an important tool for middle managers (Farrell, 2014). By presenting these perspectives on communication we highlight the two dominating ways to view and work with communication for middle managers. Moreover, we want to contribute with an understanding of how middle managers' perspective on communication can affect their communication practice.

2.3 Communication in middle management

There has been a shift in the management and leadership literature, which now emphasizes the involvement of employees and the importance of generating engagement as a way to benefit the organization as a whole (Sandberg & Targama, 1998). Sandberg and Targama (1998), argue that a manager will always have traditional management tasks, however, as organizations increasingly demand agile and quick decision making, the new management paradigm puts focus on the communicative tasks. One of these tasks is creating a framework for interpretation for the employees and acting as a guide for the sense making process (Sandberg & Targama, 1998; Simonsson, 2002). This is in line with the sensemaking perspective on communication presented by Fiske (1982) and means that a manager can strategically use their language, (word choice, metaphors, stories and myths) to shape the employees interpretations of the organization and their work within it (Deetz, Tracy & Simpson, 2000; Kowalski, 2000).

Managers spend the majority of their day communicating. In Mintzberg's *The Nature of Managerial Work* (1980), he refers to a study that found that middle and upper management spend an average of 60 percent of their time in informal conversation. This result has been further verified in studies by Mintzberg (1980). Managers often work with specific and unstandardised tasks which makes them inclined to favor quick and relevant information and forms of communication (Mintzberg, 1980). Mintzberg (1980), found that 13 out of the 14 verbal contacts that a manager has happens ad hoc. Information in the form of speculation, gossip or rumors is often used by managers due to the easy and quick access, despite the risks associated with trusting this form of information. According to Mintzberg's (1980) results, a manager's output of productivity can mainly be measured by the verbal communication efforts and the main mediums of communication used by managers such as; telephone, travel, and formal and informal meetings. The different communication mediums that managers use can be labelled as sensemaking or transmission oriented due to their characteristics of speed and room for dialogue. Meetings are the medium that was proven to be most time consuming, yet the most important due to the valuable exchange of information that occurs during these occasions. The different forms of communication mediums will be discussed further in section 2.3.1 below.

Drouillard & Kleiner (1996), have identified several characteristics that "good" leaders have. One of these characteristic is communication. Just as Farell (2014) describes how communication is a central part of middle management, Drouillard & Kleiner (1996) pinpoint that it is essential to have the ability to exercise good and clear communication. The authors' emphasize the value of listening as part of good

communication, and how it should be used as a tool to affirm the speaker's worth as a contributor. It is important that the manager encourages employees to share important and relevant information that could potentially help the organization achieve its goals. The manager must also consider the way they themselves communicate with their employees. By recognizing the transmission and sensemaking perspective on communication presented in 2.2.1, a manager's way of communicating can be analyzed based on the two dominating perspectives on communication. According Drouillard and Kleiner (1996), good leadership communication has the ability to; "articulate ideas and vision, inspire, provide feedback, espouse particular philosophies and values" (p.31) . Successful managers understand both the importance of formal communication as well as the importance of informal communication (Kotter, 1999). Packard (1996), introduced the term "management by walking around" as a way to refer to the management style where managers informally communicate with their employees by walking around the workplace in an unstructured manner. In a study conducted by Kotter (1999), the time managers spend discussing various work topics with people they meet in the corridor or during coffee breaks was more efficient and valuable than formal occasions such as meetings. In today's complex business environment, this more informal way of communicating could be the key to creating a working environment for employees that fosters sustainable competitive advantages and lowers the risk for burnout among managers (Kotter, 1999). However, it is important to acknowledge the asymmetrical power relationship between managers and their employees. Although there is two-way communication, as in the example of "walking around management", the manager is still in the position of power and can therefore influence and leverage the outcome of the communication (Yukl, 1981). Because of this imbalance it is important that the environment in which the manager and employees operate is characterized with trust. In order to achieve this, the successful manager must communicate through transparency and honesty to avoid an hidden agenda (Kumle & Kelly, 2000).

2.3.1 Communication mediums in management

Already in 1973, Mintzberg concluded that the work of a manager consists of a variety of brief tasks and that managers preferred oral communication to gather information. This was later confirmed by an additional study made by Kurke and Aldrich in 1983. Interpersonal communication is according to many, the most important medium for communication in an organization. Due to the complex business environment of today, the interpersonal communication plays an important role in creating a communicative environment in the organization (Kotter, 1999). This medium enables feedback and the opportunity to ensure that there is mutual understanding between participants. Furthermore, information is

shared face-to-face, which allows the message to be more easily adapted to the needs and interest of the participant of the communication process (Daft & Huber,1984). However, today we live in a digital landscape where internet has shaped the management practice in a different way than before. With the internet, new mediums of communication were introduced where email constitute the most dramatic change of transmission of information concerning speed (Mintzberg, 2009). Emailing has become a big part of the daily management practice, however, there are surprisingly few studies concerning how emailing has changed management (Mintzberg, 2000). As Mintzberg (2009) concludes, the internet may actually reinforce the fundamental parts of management, such as communication. However, other scholars have critiqued the overuse of written mediums as the main form of communication for managers (Heide, 2002). There is a preconception that websites, email and intranet are the solution to improving the organization's communication (Daft, Bettenhausen & Tyler, 1995). On the contrary, studies have shown that employees tend to be less engaged and motivated by written documents. Written mediums are not as rich as interpersonal communication which make them better for communicating clear and well defined topics and less suited for communicating feedback (Daft et al., 1995). When comparing this knowledge to the perspectives on communication, we can draw the conclusion that written mediums are most often linked with the transmission perspective due to their lack of feedback. Written forms of communication or other mass communication mediums, such as large meetings, are optimal for providing employees with quick and relevant material and information about e.g. new goals or strategies for the organization (von Platen, 2006).

The nature of the different mediums of communication, i.e written or interpersonal communication, makes the difference between information and communication more apparent. Information is a social artefact, and it must be refined and adapted in order to be useful. Communication on the other hand is a human process, and is a prerequisite for the processing of information (Hård af Segerstad, 2002). Through the sharing and listening of people's ideas a mutual understanding emerges, and the communication process helps create new frameworks for the way employees and managers think and act (Dixon, 1998). As mentioned in section 2.3 above, meetings are the prefered form of interpersonal communication used by managers and is an important medium for receiving information of value. Yet, meetings are also situations where status, power, trust, roles and other social mechanisms are at play and they influence how unprecedented the communication is. The effectiveness of meetings as a medium relies heavily on the ability of the manager to lead the meeting. Many times the ambiguity of a topic increases due to the lack of order and clearity during the meeting, even if the purpose of the meeting was to clarify. This can be due to the managers insufficient ability to listen, explain, receive criticism, create trust or clearly answer questions (von Platen, 2006). All these reasons can be linked to communicative

skills, which Drouillard et al. (1996) describe as an important characteristic for "good" leadership. With our background in strategic communication, we agree with Drouillard et al. (1996) and thereby consider it important to discuss communication in management.

2.3.2 Communicative leadership

Middle management and communication is connected in this final section of the theoretical framework as we present the concept of communicative leadership, a concept of growing popularity according to Simonsson (2002). Communicative leadership was originally established by the Volvo group as a means to label efforts to develop communication and leadership skills internally (Hamrefors, 2010). Johansson & Hamrin (2013) have conducted a three year long qualitative study with the purpose of defining the essence of communicative leadership that resulted in the following definition:

> *"A communicative leader engages co-workers in dialogue, gives and seeks feedback, involves coworkers in decision making, and is perceived as open and present."*
> *(Johansson & Hamrin, 2013, p.2) translated from Swedish*

This definition is also supported by Eriksen (1998) who characterizes communicative leadership with openness, dialogue and motivation. The results from Johansson and Hamrin's (2013) study further show that there are different dimensions to the concept depending on the nationality of the respondents. However, the presented definition matched well with the Swedish participants view on communicative leadership (Johansson & Hamrin, 2013). Based on this, we will adopt Johansson and Hamrin's (2013) definition of communicative leadership as our respondents are also Swedish speaking and thereby the definition is relevant for our analysis. Moreover, the concept has a positive connotation according to recent studies and is enacted through several communicative behaviours (Hamrin, 2016). The results from Johansson and Hamrin's (2013) study showed that communicative leadership is a recognized and easily relatable term for both managers and employees. This made it a suitable concept for our study since it increases the possibility that the interviewed managers would be able to express their opinion on the topic.

Communicative leadership can be divided into four main categories of communication behaviours; initiating structure, facilitating work, managing relational dynamics and representing. Initiating structure includes clarifying goals, sense making and planning assignments. Facilitating work includes more pure leadership qualities such as coaching, giving feedback and encouragement. The third behaviour, managing relational dynamics, incorporates creating openness, solving problems and being supportive. Finally, the category of representing refers to the representation of the organization and

actively networking (Hamrin, 2016). With communicative leadership, there is a focus on communication improvements to enhance the manager's ability to create a communicative environment and engage the employees in decision making (Hamin, 2016). This aligns with Drouillard et al.´s (2016) research that identified communication as an important characteristic in leadership to engage employees. The communication behaviours of communicative leadership result in effective leadership that highlights the importance to create employee participation in organizational and group performance (Johansson et al., 2014).

There are great similarities between considering managers as co-creators and communicative leadership (Simonsson, 2002). According to Eriksen (1998), communicative leadership is based on linguistic methods, such as praising and argumentations to motivate the employees. A communicative leader also follows up on initiatives and implements actions to improve the working environment, in comparison to a strategic leader who focuses more on external means to motivate (von Platen, 2006). The communicative environment can both ease and limit the flow of information and the interpretation of messages (Johansson & Hamrin, 2013). A manager who works in a less communicative environment can be negatively affected in their communication (Johansson & Hamrin, 2013). The communicative environment is closely related to the culture of an organization and can differ between different units and groups. Employees perception of the communicative environment affects their view of the leader, which implies that the context in which a manager and employee operate can influence how they perceive communicative leadership (Johansson & Hamrin, 2013).

3. Method

This section presents a description of the qualitative method of this study by initially defining the scientific approach, followed by a description of the applied analysis method. Finally, a method discussion concludes the chapter where we argue for the scientific quality of the study.

3.1 Research approach

According to Thomas (2013), the research approach should present an extensive description of the chosen method and a clarification and motivation of the scientific approach. With certainty, there are many ways to describe the framework of a study, which contributed to the selected relevant aspects in this presentation of the research. This study is executed and written within the framework of management and communication. The study assumes the ontological approach of social constructivism that guides our handling process of the empirical material, which is based on the presumption that reality is subjectively perceived by individuals (Giddens, 2007). This perspective further implies that our results can not be viewed as an objective truth. Instead, it is to be considered an indication of how we as researchers see the relation between the empirical material and reality and how the results reflect a social reality (Cuadra, 2012). In this study we aim to understand the work of middle managers within elderly care of the public sector by interviewing section managers in a public elderly care organization, thus using a qualitative research method. As the study aims to answer research questions of *how*, Bryman (2016) states that the qualitative method is to be preferred. Qualitative research focuses on people and the meaning they bring to the studied reality, that further justifies our chosen method (Schutz, 1962).

In contrast to the more common linear inductive approach within qualitative studies, the research process of our study has been circular, thereby resulting in an abductive approach. A theory was conducted prior to the study and then tested multiple times during the research by deconstructing and comparing it to the study's theoretical framework, using an abductive research method. Furthermore, this approach is relevant to our study as it emphasizes the construction of theories based on everyday activities, including meetings and language (Ong, 2012).

3.1.1.Selection and delimitations

In order to meet the purpose of the study we chose a sample of middle managers within the public sector to interview so to gain an insight into their view on communication. The managers all work with elderly care, for the municipal of Malmö. The sample size consists of 8 interviews, and is based on the suggestion from Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) who recommend a minimum sample size range of four to twelve. The interviewees were chosen based on their position as middle managers within the organization, where the main criteria was having responsibility for a staff of people. We got access to the interviewees by contacting the health and care regional manager in district borough west whom kindly provided us with a list of twelve middle managers. From our contact with the twelve middle managers, we got ten responses, where eight positively confirmed an interview and two declined due to time constraints. The study is limited to middle managers working in Malmö, Sweden, based on accessibility and ability for us to conduct face-to-face interviews. The method of selecting our empirical material using sampling was chosen in order to overcome challenges such as time and resource constraints. With the method of sampling, more accurate results can be achieved as opposed to using a census, this is because it frees up more time for the presentation of data and the analysis (Barnett, 2002). When conducting qualitative interviews, as in the case of this study, it is common to use the non-probability sampling method since it enables the focus to be on elaborating common attributes from the input of a homogenous target group (Saunders, Lewis & Thronhill, 2009). The choice to interview employees within the municipal of Malmö was an active decision and means that not all organizations had the same chance of being chosen for the study. The same can be said for the choice to only interview employees with the same position as section managers within elderly care. This implies that the results of the study do not represent the population as a whole and can not be generalized (Merriam, 1994). However, since the research approach of this study follows the qualitative research method and aims to create an understanding rather than generalizable results, this is not seen as problematic for the outcome of the study.

3.2 Choice of method - interviews

Interviews are an appropriate research method when trying to understand the world from another person's perspective and to capture reflections and personal thoughts as part of the empirical material (Eksell & Thelander, 2014; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). Thus, interviews contributes with depth, understanding and details, which is considered the strengths of the method (von Platen & Young, 2014). As previously mentioned, this study departs from a social constructionist perspective aiming to investigate middle

manager's perspective on communication and its implications for communicative leadership. Therefore, we found interviews to be the most appropriate method as we intend to develop a deep understanding for communication and management practices from a managers perspective. To gather this information, we needed to question managers about their everyday work, thier perspectives on communication and management and how they motivate their managerial practices. Because of this, other methods such as observations and surveys were excluded as they could not contribute with the reasoning, depth and understanding necessary to answer our research questions. However, we do not regard the interview method as without flaws. Young and von Platen (2014) describe how some scholars consider interviews misleading and arbitrary since social interactions and interpretations can affect the outcome. The authors further argue that interviews with managers can be even more misleading as they can feel obligated towards the organization. Prior to the interviews, we explored the critique towards interviewing as a method in order to develop an awareness of the pitfalls and thereby hopefully avoid them.

3.2.1 Execution of method

The empirical material is made up of semi-structured interviews with eight middle managers, each approximately 60 minutes in length, in the public sector of Malmö City. Initial contact with the interviewees was conducted through email in order to arrange time and location as we desired to carry out face-to-face interviews. According to Shuy (2002) it is important with face-to-face contact since it encourages a "natural" encounter and generates rich qualitative data. As a starting point for the direction of the interviews we prepared an interview guide (see app. 1 & 2) with questions partly based on the presented theory and questions that adds relevance in order to create a flow during the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). To a large extent, we followed the recommendations of Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) in the creation of the questions. In the beginning of the interview, we asked many "what" and "how" questions since these questions encourage spontaneous and personal descriptions in comparison to more pressuring "why"- questions. Thereby, the few "why" questions were placed at the end of the interview, in accordance with the recommendation by Kvale and Brinkmann (2014). The interviews began with an introduction of the study and an outline of the interview categories, as suggested by Kvale and Brinkmann (2014). However, the introduction was kept short to avoid revealing the purpose of the study and thereby influencing the direction of the interview.

In order to ease understanding and encourage participation in the interview, we avoid using dense and difficult vocabulary that can be confusing for those unfamiliar with the subjects (Prasad, 2005). Instead, we focused on a more every-day language and shorter questions, which makes the participation easier (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). Furthermore, the authors pinpoint how questions like "*How do you*

interpret" and "*How do you experience*" gives the interviewees the opportunity to present their individual experiences and opinions. Thereby, our questions were constructed as open-ended to enable this elaboration from the interviewees. The questions were divided into five categories designed to help answer the research questions of this study. The following categories were included; background information, perspective on management, communication efforts and about the organization. In accordance to Trost (2010) the order in which the categories and questions were asked depended on the answers of the respondent to create a red thread and maintain a flow throughout the interview. Additionally, it enabled us as interviewers to follow the thoughts and ideas of the respondent. To confirm or dementate our own interpretations we used supplementary questions as a means to demonstrate sensitivity and openness. Olsson and Sörensen (2011) state this as essential in order to develop a correct understanding and clarify statements from the interviewee. Moreover, the interviews were conducted at the interviewees place of work in quiet meeting rooms. This was decided in order for us to give full attention to the interviewee and also to record the conversation. The recording was made in order to facilitate the data collection process and the analysis, and was done with consent of each interviewee.

Prior to the real interviews, two pilot interviews were conducted with the purpose to test the feasibility of the study based on the theoretical framework. By conducting pilot interviews, we were able to adjust the interview guide and test if the assigned time would be sufficient to improve the outcome in the following interviews. The process supported our understanding of necessary adjustments and indicated an accurate direction of the findings. Doody and Doody (2015) explains how the results of the pilot interview can serve as a warning sign or indicator for changes prior to future research. Through our pilot interviews we concluded the time slot of one hour to be sufficient, although some changes were made in regards to the questions to create a better flow in the interview.

After the interviews were conducted we transcribed the recordings with the purpose of generating a readable story to facilitate the coding and categorization for the analysis. Moreover, this enabled us to put emphasis on their answers and stories more than making a linguistic analysis. Thereby, we did not write pauses and emotional expressions. Finally, sections of the interview which we did not believe to be of relevance for this study were left out.

3.2.2 Presentation of interviewees

All interviewees have the same work title as section manager within elderly care of Malmö Stad. They are of different ages and gender and have a variety of experience from previous management positions. A common feature is their desire to develop their managerial mindsets, skills and knowledge. Therefore,

they showed great interest in our study and were open and generous with their thoughts and experiences during the interviews.

Interviewee 1. Female, age 48

Interviewee 2. Female, age 42

Interviewee 3. Male, age 46

Interviewee 4. Female, age 34

Interviewee 5. Female age 49

Interviewee 6. Female, age 52

Interviewee 7. Male, age 50

Interviewee 8. Female, age 39

3.3 Qualitative analysis method

The social constructionist approach of the thesis affects the analysis method as it emphasizes the idea of reality as socially constructed among the participants in our study, which according to Eksell and Thelander (2014) is important for social research. The empirical material was analyzed using an abductive approach, allowing us to add or deduct theory from the theoretical framework during the analysis process (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008). The hermeneutic interpretation of meaning was chosen as an analysis method of the empirical material, which implies that we applied three different contexts of interpretation; self-understanding, the critical understanding of common sense and the theoretical understanding.

To make sense of the empirical data we choose to code and categorize the empirical data to detected themes. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2014), coding is a process that allows the researcher to break out segments of the data and connect it to key words based on the theory. The key words detected in the coding and thematization have been anchored in the study's theoretical framework.

3.3.1 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics has a long tradition within the field of humanities and the study and interpretation of texts. More recently, hermeneutics has become a popular analysis method in relation to social interactions and non-documentary phenomena (Bryman, 2016). Within this context, the term "text" is not only limited to written forms but also encompasses discourses and actions (Kvale, 2007). In this case, the interpreter or researcher, aims to go beyond the obviously stated and detect structures and connections that are not apparent within the text at first glance (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). The emphasis is on the multiplicity

present in the text and on the foreknowledge the interpreter has about the subject (Kvale, 2007). The conversation and discourses during the interviews will be the "text" that we as researchers aim to interpret. Hermeneutics thereby becomes an important tool for the analysis of the text. First, it helps shed light on the dialogue that is to be interpreted and then it serves as a guide for the process through which the interview texts are analysed. This process can be seen as a new, reflexive, dialogue with the text which helps uncover structures within the text. It is important to mention that during interviews the "text" is produced by both the interviewees and the interviewers who have the power to influence and negotiate the interpretation of the text (Kvale, 2007). In this study, three different contexts of interpretation are used in the analysis process; self-understanding, the critical understanding of common sense and the theoretical understanding. Through the first context of self-understanding, we as researchers are limited to our own self-understanding of the interviewees answers that were given during the interview. Thereafter, our interpretations can assume a wider framework using the context of critical understanding of common sense (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). Here it is important to question previous interpretations and to be critical towards the data collected during the interviews. In the third context, the theoretical framework is applied to the data in order to gain a deeper understanding (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). Since this study departs from a social constructionist perspective and aims to understand how middle managers view their own communication with their employees, hermeneutics allowed us to assume a wider framework for interpreting and critically examining the empirical data collected from the interviews.

3.3.2 Coding and categorization

When conducting a qualitative study, such as this one, the data relevant for the analysis is typically in an unstructured form (Bryman, 2016). Therefore, to understand the empirical material we chose to code the empirical data to detect themes. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2014), coding is a process that allows the researcher to break out segments of the data and connect it to key words based on the theory. As observed by Bryman and Cramer (2011), there are three basic principles to keep in mind when coding. First, the categories detected must not overlap. Secondly, the categories must be able to cover all aspects of the data collected so that all of it can be coded. Lastly, the coding should follow clear rules and criterion to assure trustworthiness. This study has met all three of these principles by choosing categories that cover both the field of communication as well as management by creating a clear 'coding frame'. This method of sorting the collected data have advantages and disadvantages as it facilitates a way of structuring the material using categories, but also implies that the data used in the analysis is limited by the researcher's ability to detect relevant and significant categories (Eksell & Thelander, 2014). Another common criticism of this method is the risk of losing the context of the answers in the interviews when

breaking out segments of the data (Bryman, 2016). The categories and keywords detected in the coding and thematization of this study have been anchored in the theoretical framework as an effort to ensure that the analysis is of relevance and significance for the purpose of the study (Bryman, 2016).

Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) describe that the coding and categorization process reduces the responses from the interviewees into different categories with the advantage of providing an overview to the large amount of data. When sorting and analyzing the interviews, six categories initially emerged that we considered covered all areas discussed in the interviews. These categories were; dialogue driven, active communication process, open communication climate, closed communication climate, linear communication process and information driven. These six categories were identified by coding the empirical material based on words or phrases that reflect a view, use or perspective on communication such as, feedback, relationship building and written communication. We anchored the codes in this study's theoretical framework. According to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015) the coding means that we labelled the data to define the content and categories. We chose to conduct a focused coding where the most prominent codes defined a large amount of data. From this process, two main categories emerged; transmission perspective and sense-making perspective on communication. However, we noted that some patterns and commonalities in the interviews did not correspond to the purpose and research questions of this study, and thereby we decided not to include them in the study. In the same way, we decided to include codes we did not anticipate and discover at first, which supports our abductive approach (see 3.1). The codes we finally decided to build our analysis upon are presented in table 2 section 4.1.

3.4 Method reflection

Qualitative research has long been criticized for its unstructured and subjective nature and the fact that the empirical data is dependent on the interpretations of the researchers. Scholars have also questioned the relevance of using reliability and validity as assessment criteria within qualitative research, since they fail to take into consideration the exploratory element of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Taking this critique into consideration we have chosen to adhere to the four alternative assessment criteria for trustworthiness presented by Lincoln and Guba (1985); credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The criterion of credibility is met by our collection of a rich empirical material through multiple in-depth interviews. Transferability is a challenging criterion for this study since we have social constructivist perspective which emphasizes interpretations and individual experience (Heide & Simonsson, 2014). As a way to overcome this challenge we have provided an in-depth description of the data collection process and attached the interview guide, as suggested by Heide and Simonsson (2014).

Dependability and confirmability was met by allowing the participant of the study to take part of the empirical material, analysis and conclusion to secure the we as researchers have understood the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

We as researchers, have throughout the data collection process, been aware of the ethical aspects of interviews as a research method and the limitations of the study. During interviews, the researchers can influence the interviewees direction of answers depending on the questions asked, the questions not asked, and the manner in which questions were asked by the interviewers (Weick, 1995; Eksell & Thelander, 2014). We are also aware that our own gender, age and ethnicity may affect the outcome of the interviews (Eksell & Thelander, 2014). Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) state that the researchers should work to obtain consent and confidentiality during the interview process. In order to meet these requirements we made and distributed consent forms for the interviewees to sign (see appendix 3). We did this after explaining the purpose of the study and asking if they agreed to be recorded. We also offered the option for each interviewee to be anonymous if they wished. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted in the mother tongue of the interviewees - Swedish. This choice was made to ensure that the interviewees felt comfortable during the interview to encourage more fruitful dialogue. The interviewees' responses were then translated into English. The risk with this is that the original meaning of the text, as intended by the interviewee, might be lost in translation. To overcome this, we as researchers have taken into consideration both the literal translation and the implied meaning of the texts when we translated.

4. Findings

This section will present the findings from our research. The chapter is divided into three steps in order to answer the presented research questions in section 1.2. The first steps identifies managers' perspective on communication. The second step employes the concepts of communicative leadership to further discuss perspectives of communication based on the empirical material. Finally, an analysis of why communicative leadership is important for the complex role of middle manager.

4.1 Middle managers' perspective on communication

In the following section we will present our findings, highlighting what perspectives middle managers working with elderly care have on communication. We will use the theories of transmission and sensemaking communication, found in section 2.2.1 and in the method chapter in section 3.4.2, to analyze the empirical material. A focus will be put on the the managers' use of different communication tools, the relationship with employees and their individual understanding of communication. As we have conducted qualitative research, our aim is to shed light on possible interpretations of the empirical material. It is therefore important to recognize that a clear division of the two communication perspectives has been made in the interest of this study and in reality the division is much more nuanced and dependent on context and situation. The findings are also specific for middle managers within elderly care in Sweden and do not reflect all middle managers.

The empirical material consists of eight 60 minute interviews, all with section managers working with elderly care within the municipal of Malmö. The interviewees have been selected based on their position as middle managers within the organization. In *table 1* below an overview of the interviewees is presented. The managers have been kept anonymous upon request.

Table 1 - Presentation of interviewees

	Age	Gender	Professional experience	Education	Work title	Number of employees
Interviewee 1	48	Female	Logistics manager, nurse	4-year technical gymnasium, nursing degree	Section manager	46
Interviewee 2	42	Female	Assistant nurse, section manager	BSc in Social Services MSc in Social services	Section manager	50
Interviewee 3	46	Male	Assistant nurse, DJ, entrepreneur	BSc in Human Research	Section manager	29
Interviewee 4	34	Female	Physiotherapist, sport store manager, manager within elderly care	Leg. Physiotherapist	Section manager	17
Interviewee 5	49	Female	Assistant nurse, management support	Assistant nursing, elderly educator*	Section Manager	45
Interviewee 6	52	Female	Sadler, elderly educator*	Elderly educator, leadership courses	Section manager	47
Interviewee 7	50	Male	Assistant nurse, logistics manager	BSc in transport management,	Section manager	37
Interviewee 8	39	Male	Nurse, management support	Nursing degree	Section manager	19

Source: By authors

When sorting and analyzing the empirical material, six subcategories emerged highlighting the managers perception on communication. These were identified using codes in the interviews that correspond to a way of viewing or referring to communication. Further analysis revealed that the subcategories can be divided into two main categories; the transmission and the sensemaking perspective on communication (*see table 2*). The analysis method of hermeneutics was used to help interpret the dialog in the interviews and then it served as a guide for the process through which the interview texts were analysed to uncover structures and patterns within the text. A more comprehensive explanation on how we handled the empirical material can be found the the method chapter.

Table 2 - Coding and categorization

Categories	Subcategories	Codes
Sensemaking perspective on communication	Dialogue driven Active communication process Open communication climate	Feedback Fact-to-face communication Trust between sender and receiver Involving employees Continuous communication Focus on relationship building
Transmission perspective on communication	Information driven Linear communication process Closed communication climate	Perception of communication as "failed" Focus on speed and effect of message Resending of original message Functional and operational Extensive written communication Over-reliance on the importance of "clear" communication

Source: By authors

4.1.1 Sensemaking perspective on communication

Open communication climate

From the interviews, three subcategories of the sensemaking perspective on communication emerged; dialogue driven, active communication process and open communication climate. Some of the interviewees made it clear that they actively work towards building an open communication climate for their employees. *Interviewee 4* pointed out that she is very transparent in her communication, making sure that the employees know how she feels about the message she is communicating and quickly communicating new information to them in order to constantly keep them in the loop. She mentions that she does not believe in trying to hide her personal opinion about decisions taken by top management to her employees, "I think that the employees can see through that, it does not turn out well if you pretend and it is not truthful to the employees". She goes on to describe her relationship with her employees as "simple and relaxed, open and honest". Through these answers we can see that *interviewee 4* strives to create an environment where her employees feel safe to share information and where it is clear that there is no hidden agenda in her communication with them. This is in contrast to *interviewee 7* who believes it is important to not portray himself as weak through agreeing and being friends with the employees. Kumle and Kelly (2000) pointed out that there is an imbalance in power between a manager and their employees, making it important for the manager to create an environment that is characterized by trust. This trust is established through transparent and honest communication. By being honest and transparent in her communication, *interviewee 4* has created an open communication climate which enables the sharing of ideas and perspectives. This in turn is a sign of a sensemaking perspective on communication.

Interviewee 5 mentions several times how she wants to have an open communication with her employees, "To have an open communication and that the employees can come and talk when they'd like is the most important thing. I made it clear from day one that they should come to me if the have a concern, otherwise I won't know". She goes on to talk about how she always keeps her door open when she is in the office, that way she is always available to her employees. She has also found that the employees are more inclined to come and talk to her if they know they don't need to book a meeting first. Not booking meetings allows for a more informal communication between the manager and the employee, something that is very important for a successful employee-management relationship (Kotter, 1999). *Interviewee 7* describes how he also wants to be available to his employees, however he does not believe in not booking meetings, "when I have my door open, the employees come and go with questions all the time which obstructs my work". The effectiveness of a meeting depends on the manager's ability to lead the conversation, and there is a risk that meetings hinder spontaneous dialogue if not structured well (von Platen, 2006). *Interviewee 5* creates an environment that encourages sharing of information and spontaneous ideas by giving her employees the option to talk outside a meeting room. This indicates an open communication climate that fosters the sensemaking process. On the other hand, options to talk outside meetings can be time consuming for the manager and add to the already complex and stressed work.

Many of the managers interviewed also mention doing rounds in the workplace as a way to talk to employees and pick up on the informal conversations. *Interviewee 6* says that being in the workplace and maybe grabbing a coffee with her employees is a big part of her everyday routine. *Interviewee 2* sees being available in the workplace as a way to spread important information that can't wait till the next scheduled meeting and *Interviewee 5* answered "I'm out in the workplace at least once per day, I walk around, talk and check-in with the employees". This method of communicating with employees, referred to as "management by walking around", has proven to be an effective source of relevant and valuable information (Packard, 1996; Kotter, 1999). Once again this informal way of conversation that these managers have chosen creates an open communication environment for the employees. The face-to-face contact also helps the manager adapt their message to the needs and interest of the individual and vice versa (Daft & Huber, 1984), which can make it easier to exchange ideas and co-create meaning. Although, information gained in an open communication climate and through "management by walking around" can be gossip and unreliable as well, something to be aware of as a manager (Mintzberg, 1980).

Active Communication Process

Working with active communication processes was another subcategory of the sensemaking perspective on communication that emerged from the interviews. This subcategory highlights the constant exchange of information between manager and employee and sees communication as something that continuously happens. *Interviewee 3* says that he believes a good manager "leads through dialog, involvement and clarity". Several other of the managers take up involvement as an important part of management. *Interviewee 5* mentions that she likes to involve her employees and let them be a part in creating the working environment that they prefer. This helps the employees feel more welcomed and engaged with their job and each other. According to *interviewee 6* involvement is very important when implementing new routines or communicating the organization's goals and strategies, it is important to "let the employees make suggestions and create a team feeling. Everyone should be involved.".

Involving the employees to encourage engagement benefits the organization and is in line with what many scholars argue is the new way of management (Sandberg & Targama, 1998). By involving the employees they have a chance to provide valuable insights about operative processes that the management is not in direct contact with. Within elderly care the employees also have direct contact with the clients and their families, which are some of the organization's most important stakeholders. From these insights the manager can together with the employees work to shape and adapt the goals and strategies to fit the operative work. Creating involvement also allows the manager to act as a guide for the sense making process by providing input and a framework for understanding the organization and how to benefit it (Sandberg & Targama, 1998; Simonsson, 2002;).

On the contrary, involving the employees too much can create difficulties for the managers, especially during decisions that need quick action. *Interviewee 7* mentions that "the employees have a lot of opinions, it is hard to please everyone. I have a better understanding of what is needed for the unit and prefer to make the decisions quick and easy by myself". Middle managers are often expected to implement strategies and processes set by top management (Farrell, 2014). In such a situation there might be little room for changes or improvements and involving the employees may only add to the workload and time constraint of the manager. If the middle manager expects that the decision will be received as negative by the employees it is important the he/she shows transparency towards the employees by clearly communicating different decision-making processes within the organization (Farrell, 2014). This can be a less time consuming alternative to involving the employees in the decision making process.

Dialogue

Dialogue is the foundation for the sensemaking perspective on communication. It opens up for a two-way exchange between the parties and allows the message to be changed and shaped by the individuals different perspectives. Many of the managers, *interviewee 1, 3, 4, 5 & 6* that showed signs of valuing an open communication climate in the workplace also point to the importance of dialogue. However, that fact that some managers did not pinpoint the importance of dialogue can be because they do not consider it as important or that they believe it to be implicit. Many managers mention listening as a key to dialogue and effective communication. *Interviewee 4* says that a good manager should be empathetic, a good listener and that communication for her is about "an exchange between two or more individuals. It's how I says things but also how you interpret it.". *Interviewee 5* mentioned that she works daily with "talking, sharing, listening and understanding" while *interviewee 6* says the for her the most important part about communication is "that you listen actively. It is important that it is not just coming from one direction.". By listening to their employees the managers contribute to the building of trust and the strengthening of that relationship. When the employees feel listened to it affirms their worth as a contributor and can encourage them to share thoughts and ideas that can help the manager and the organization as a whole (Drouillard et al., 1996). When these ideas are taken seriously and allowed to influence or shape the original message the manager has created an environment that encourages co-creation and reflects a sensemaking perspective on communication.

Interpersonal communication is a prerequisite for meaningful dialogue (Kotter, 1999). Body language, word choice and feedback are all factors that contribute to the direction of the dialogue. Good leadership communication should be able to articulate ideas and visions, inspire and provide feedback (Drouillard et al., 1996). Most of the managers that highlighted the importance of dialogue, conversation and listening, also mentioned how they prefer face-to-face communication and how they are aware of their role in the conversation. On the contrary, *interviewee 7* describes how he prefers digital communication as it is faster and more effective than face-to-face communication, "I like face-to-face communication with my employees, but at the same time it takes a lot of my time to engage in these conversations, just emailing or texting me is better for my work flow". *Interviewee 5* prefers face-to-face communication and says "my most important communication with my employees is through direct contact with them where we can have a conversation". *Interviewee 4* explains how she prefers face-to-face communication in order to avoid misunderstandings, "I guess that's why I like oral communication, because in written communication there is risk for misunderstandings. I always like to discuss important things face-to-face because then I can spot nuances". She goes on to say that communication is "a dialogue between me and my employees, not just what I say but also my body

language, and word choice of course". Managers in general prefer oral communication to gather information (Mintzberg, 1973), it is a medium that enables feedback and allows the managers to make sure that there is a mutual understanding (Daft & Huber, 1984). One of the interviewed managers described how he struggles with creating the desired face-to-face communication as his employees work out of office. This makes him more inclined to use digital communication tools such as emails and text messages to reach his employees and to establish a dialogue with them. The majority of the interviewed managers (*interviewee 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8*) all state that one of the challenges with communicating with employees is the risk for misunderstandings.

Risk for misunderstandings in communication can be due to a difference in education levels. *Interviewee 5* describes that "My communication to the employees is dependent on the education or on the role the employee has". This indicates that the middle manager adjusts her communication to different employees based on education level. She further states that "The communication must be much more pedagogical with employees that might not have any higher educational background, in those cases it is very important with personal contact and feedback so that I understand that the employees have understood and that we are on the same level". By this, there is an understanding that the manager finds it easier and less time consuming to communicate to employees with a higher education. When there is a large need for personal contact and feedback, the efficiency and speed of the communication can be lost, although, on the other hand, it creates a more personal relationship and allows for more sensemaking in the communication process. Thereby, middle managers have to consider how to adapt the messages according to the aim of the communication, which for example could be speed, understanding or involvement. There are different tactics for trying to avoid these misunderstandings. The managers that in the examples above favor face-to-face dialogue and actively think about the way they communicate, not just in words but also body language, are working to minimize this misunderstanding through co-creation. Seeing the person they are talking to increases the amount of information that the manager can take in and the risk for misunderstanding decreases.

4.1.2 Transmission perspective

Information driven

Through the interviews three subcategories of the transmission perspective on communication emerged; information driven, linear communication process and closed communication climate. An indication of information driven communication was found with every middle manager, with some showcasing more signs of transmission perspective than others. *Interviewee 2* describes how meetings are the fastest way to present information since her employees do not read their emails to the extent in which she would like.

She further points to how she emails them but does not trust them to read it quickly enough, instead she directly follows up by walking around the workplace to remind everyone to read their email. She displays a focus on speed and effect and puts the main focus on spreading information rather than focusing on the exchange of ideas. By pushing fast and effective communication in the organization the managers limit the opportunity for the employees to interpret the information and create meaning based on the communication. Furthermore, this does not allow for a sensemaking process with the receivers of the communication, which is an essential process for creating dialogue and to ease the understanding of information (Fiske & Jenkins, 2010). *Interviewee 3, 4 & 6* also express a concern with how the employees do not read their emails as fast as desired which they all consider a challenge when communicating. *Interviewee 2* is clear about what she expects from her employees, "It is your task, it is a part of your employment to read your emails, at least once a day when at work". The lack of engagement with emails from employees may be down to the simple fact that the employees are more comfortable using traditional communication mediums. Educating the employees in digital communication platforms, such as email, by offering courses could solve the frustration that the middle managers are experiencing and make the communication mediums more efficient. If the managers could trust that emails can be used to communicate effectively with employees then face-to-face communication channels, such as meetings, could focus more on inspiring, motivating and aligning the employees.

Instead, the focus on quickly spreading information and limiting the opportunity for interpretation can be seen as a reflection of the transmission perspective on communication. From the transmission point of view, communication is perceived as "failed" when the receiver does not interpret the message as intended by the sender (Fiske & Jenkins, 2010) and the solution is often to re-send the message until it is interpreted correctly. This can lead to misinterpretations in the organization and frustration from both managers and employees as the communication climate is experienced as closed. *Interviewee 2* says that "It's just to talk and talk and talk and email and talk and bring it up again. Eventually it sticks. You want the employees that gets it straight away". Furthermore, she describes how the biggest communicative challenge is that her employees misinterpret her information.This statement further emphasizes the transmission perspective on communication. This manager seems to believe in effective information where there is no room for misunderstandings. It is possible that *interviewee 2*'s information driven approach to communication is causing the misinterpretations with the employees.

However, *interviewee 2's* transmission perspective on communication may not be the sole reason for misunderstandings. Misinterpretations are also present with managers that display strong signs of transmission perspective. *Interviewee 1 and 5* both have a strong focus on dialogue and open communication with their employees yet, they mentions that their biggest communication challenge is

misunderstandings with employees. *Interviewee 4* states that it is a challenge to pass on information in a big group, a challenge that *interviewee 2* and *1* also expressed. It is likely that if a manager has a large employee group then the chances that there will be misunderstandings are bigger since the number of possible interpretations increase. We can see that the middle managers that expressed a strong concern with misunderstandings also have an employee group that is larger than 25 people. From that we draw the conclusion that communication becomes more difficult as the number of people that receives the communication grows.

Linear communication process

Some of the interviewed managers show signs of having a linear communication process when they communicate with their employees, this in turn can indicate a transmission perspective on communication. As mentioned in section 4.1.1, *interviewee 3* explicitly stated that he is more inclined to use digital communication tools as his employees are working out of office, creating a barrier to dialogue and face-to-face communication. This notion does not mean that the manager has a transmission perspective on communication, instead he is forced to use linear communication tools as the working environment hinders a sensemaking process of communication. *Interviewee 1, 2, 3, 7* all expressed how emails and text messages are their preferred communication channels due to the speed and effectiveness. These communication channels are most often categorized as linear as they naturally do not open up for dialogue and sensemaking. However, interestingly enough the same managers describe how emails are their biggest communication challenge as the employees do not read, understand or process the information found in the emails. In fact, all interviewees point out that there are challenges with using emails as a communication medium. *Interviewee 3* expressed that "Emails are the best, then I reach everyone fast (...) Everyone does not read their emails". This shows that emails, as a linear communication channel is the most preferred but also the most challenging, which is something managers need to consider when they wish to communicate with their employees in a fast, effective and substantive way.

As mentioned in section 2.3.1 there is a preconception that written communication mediums, such as emails and text messages, is the solution to all communication problems in organizations. The findings from our interviews seem to support the counter argument that employees tend to become less motivated by written documents as they do not read them in the desired extent. Yet, we as researchers also recognize that the digital landscape in which organizations of today are a part of, shape the communication climate. The digital communication, and especially emails have become a larger part of the communication mediums used by organizations. This is mainly due to the new technology in society which enables global

communication in a fast way. What our findings show is that some managers prefer these one-way and linear communication mediums. However, they do not allow for interpretation and sensemaking, both of which are necessary for a communicative organization. The overuse of digital, one-way communication is proof of a transmission perspective on communication. Daft et al. (1995) define how written mediums lack the interpersonal communication suited for communicating feedback. When mainly using linear communication mediums, as the interviewees describe, they do not enable feedback and dialogue with the employees and thereby misunderstandings can arise. *Interviewee 2* says she uses communication to inform and to reach the employees with information. Sandberg and Targama (1998) describe how organizations today need to be more agile and thereby there is a bigger focus on communicative tasks with the managers. By defining communication as information, such as i*nterviewee 2* does, one of these managerial communication tasks, to create a framework for interpretations, goes missing. When managers create a framework for interpretations they strategically use their language to shape the employees interpretation of information (Deetz, Tracy & Simpson, 2000; Kowalski, 2000). When using linear communication mediums, the strategic use of language disappears, creating a transmission of communication rather than a dialogue. On the other hand, linear communication tools enable fast communication from a sender to a receiver at increased speed. Moreover, the receiver is also able to reply at the same speed, which can make linear communication preferable in situation that requires effectiveness.

Closed communication climate

From the empirical material collected we see evidence that some managers have a closed communication climate. A closed communication climate is one that limits the sensemaking process and the receivers opportunity for interpretation and feedback. *Interviewee 3* describes how he dislikes his employees running in and out of his office, instead he prefers emails when they have questions. *Interviewee 7* describes a similar desire where he also dislikes having an open door, explaining that he likes to work undisturbed. Through these answers we can see that these two managers do not strive to create an open communication climate where dialogue with the employees is encouraged and instead display signs of a transmission perspective on communication. The prevailing power imbalance between managers and employees makes it important for the manager to create a trusting environment (Kumle & Kelly, 2000). However, interviewee 3 and 7 signals a closed communication climate by preferring closed doors to their offices and thereby makes it difficult to build a relationship with the employees that creates trust.

On the other hand, creating an open communication climate is very difficult. In the examples above where the two managers prefer to have their doors closed, it might be a necessary measure taken by

the managers in an attempt to make their workday more efficient. One of the main challenges with the role as middle manager is the lack of time and to meet this challenge a closed communication climate might be the quickest solution. Different managers have different working conditions that influence and guide the way they communicate. *Interviewee 4* says that "My unit of employees are comfortable and have worked with this a long time and therefore I always have the door open because there are not so many disruptions". She goes on to say that because she has such a small number of employees (17 people) and they each other well, they tend to confer with each other if they have questions before coming to her. This working condition makes it easier to create an open communication climate without increasing the workload of the manager, in the contrary to *interviewee 3* and *7* that have larger employee groups and more possible interruptions.

4.2 Communicative leadership and perspectives on communication

When collecting and analysing our empirical material we found that many of the codes and subcategories identified from the interviewees had similarities with the theory on communicative leadership. None of the managers had any prior knowledge of the concept of communicative leadership, however, when asked to define communicative leadership they all saw it as a positive term that is synonymous with successful management. *Interviewee 4* defined it as "To be strategic, and that you think about what you want to communicate. It is someone who is a good leader, I think a big part of being a leader is being communicative.". *Interviewee 2* associated it more with the language of the leader, "It is someone that is very selective with the words they choose to communicate. A communicative leader can adapt their speech to fit the person they are talking to.". We can see from these answers that all the interviewed managers believe that a good manager should be communicative, and when asked if they themselves are communicative leaders they all expressed that it is something that they are working towards. The changing landscape of organizations demands quicker decision making and more agile working methods and as a way to adapt to the new pressures, managers shift focus from the traditional management tasks to more communicative tasks (Sandberg & Targama, 1998). This means that communicative leadership becomes more important for successful management. Even more so, managers are facing new challenges regarding an increased lack of Swedish language proficiency, which significantly hinders effective communication between the manager and the employee. *Interviewee 3* says "We have a lot of people who have recently immigrated to Sweden that want to work here. That can be a problem or a challenge. It requires that I always think about the person I am talking to, that I don't babble on and think about what words I use". *Interviewee 5* also mentions that she works with people with different languages and that

this makes it harder to find the most effective solutions to possible problems. This new language obstacle increases the need for effective and planned communication and makes it even more relevant to apply communicative leadership.

Although all the managers expressed a desire to be communicative leaders, we can see that their view on communication does not always align with this desire. According to the definition by Johansson and Hamrin (2013), "A communicative leader engages co-workers in dialogue, gives and seeks feedback, involves coworkers in decision making, and is perceived as open and present". In section 4.1.2 above, we have presented evidence that some of the interviewed managers gravitate more towards having a transmission perspective on communication. These managers are information driven, have a linear communication process and do not actively work towards creating an open communication climate. They focus on distributing information as quickly and as effectively as possible, leaving little room for feedback or dialogue. We can also see that these managers prefer to have a more distanced relationship with their employees. *Interviewee 2* says "It is important to have distance and a professional tone with the employees. I don't allow nicknames and I don't like discussing private matters. It makes it easier to make tough decisions and say no.". *Interviewee 7* also expresses that he likes a professional relationship with his employees "I want them to respect me as their boss and that I respect them as employees". This distance between manager and employee can hinder the building of trust, which in turn can make it harder for the manager to motivate and engage the employees. It is also likely that this makes spontaneously praising good work harder. From this analysis we can draw the conclusion that the transmission perspective on communication does not align with the definition of a communicative leader. Furthermore, even though the managers think they are working towards being communicative leaders, their transmission view on communication hinders that development.

On the contrary to the transmission perspective, some of the interviewed managers are leaning more towards a sensemaking perspective on communication. They are dialogue driven, have an active communication process and create an open communication climate for their employees. For them, the exchange of ideas with the employees is more important than the actual information and the employees are viewed as co-creators of the message. There are great similarities between seeing the importance of co-creators and communicative leadership (Simonsson, 2002). As mentioned in the findings section of 4.1.1 above, many of the managers involve their employees in the decision making process and let them be a part of creating their work environment. Dialogue is highly valued and *interviewees 5, 6, 8* all favor informal communication by walking around the workplace or leaving the door to the office open. These efforts are all included in the definition of communicative leadership. The managers identified as having a sensemaking perspective on communication also seem to have a more personal relationship with their

employees, something that managers with a transmission perspective lack. *Interviewee 4* describes the relationship with her employees as "A work-relationship that is personal but not private. It is an easy, relaxed, open and honest relationship", while *interviewees 6 and 8* say that they have a strong relationship where the employees see them as part of the team. It is likely that this strong, more personal, relationship make the managers more inclined to favor informal communication which fosters a climate that encourages feedback, and motivates employees through praise, and is the basis for a communicative leader (Eriksen, 1998). From this we can conclude that a sensemaking perspective on communication is very much in line with the definition of communicative leadership, as a manager who engages co-workers in dialogue, gives and seeks feedback and is perceived as open, and that the managers that show signs of having this perspective are already on the way to becoming communicative leaders.

4.3 Importance of communicative leadership

Managerial challenges

When analysing the gathered empirical material it became clear that all interviewees express similar challenges with the middle management profession. We have identified the following categories of challenges from the interviews; time constraints, language barriers, communicating to big groups of employees, employee misunderstandings and gaining support from the employees. These challenges are either caused by a lack of communication or can be solved by strategically using communication. When discussing the challenge of gaining support from the employees, *interviewee 5* expressed the following, "To get everyone on the same course, that is the biggest challenge. To get the employees aboard I focus on talking, telling, listening and trying to capture the environment in the organization". *Interviewee 2* also says that "The hardest part is to get the employees aboard". One of the most important jobs of the middle manager is to align the employees and get them abroad with decisions taken by top management (Farrell, 2014). Communication becomes an important tool in order to motivate and engage the employees to gain their support in the decision making process. Communicative leadership can through the use of linguistic methods, such as praising and argumenting, help motivate the employees and follow up on initiatives to improve the working environment and thereby gain support (von Platen, 2006; Eriksen, 1998).

Other challenges that are closely linked and can be solved by communicative leadership is communicating to big groups and employee misunderstandings. *Interviewee 3* and *4* express that it is difficult to present information to a big group of employees and tricky to avoid misunderstandings. This is due to the variety of languages and backgrounds in the team that increase the possible number of interpretations of the communication. The size of the teams vary from 17 up to 50 people and *interviewee*

3 describes that, "The size of the group of employees affects how you communicate, a small group is easier to communicate to, if it is a big group it's easy that the communication becomes a monologue". Large groups of employees can, as interviewee 3 describes, affect and change the communication of a manager depending on size and language competence of the group. This places high demands on a manager's communicative skills. To facilitate communication to large groups of people with different nationalities the manager can use communicative leadership as a tool through initiating structure and managing relational dynamics. By this, the manager is able to clarify the goals of the communication and thereby minimize the risk for misunderstandings.

The last identified challenge is time constraints. This is present in all aspects of the managers work as the middle management role is characterized by high complexity and an obligation to both top management and their employees. The time constraints can lead to misunderstandings when communication is not prioritized. Therefore, in order to ease the workload of middle managers and free out more time, the communication behaviours of a communicative leader are important tools. These will be discussed further below. From our findings we can draw the conclusion that communication plays an important role in middle management and also plays a central part in the identified challenges. Based on the identified challenges of middle management we believe that communicative leadership can serve as a platform to facilitate and help managers handle challenges in their everyday work.

Communication behaviours

A communicative leader focuses on engaging employees through communication, which can help to enhance a manager's ability to create a communicative environment (Hamrin, 2016). As mentioned in section 2.3.2 communicative leadership as a concept can be divided into four categories of communicative behaviours; initiating structure, facilitating work, managing relational dynamics and representing. Communicative leadership thereby becomes important for middle managers as they can become more effective leaders through using the behaviors (Johansson et al., 2014). Through these behaviours, the middle manager is able to create engagement and openness in the team and in turn create a communicative environment. These factors all facilitate the managers operational and strategic work. We argue that the challenges identified by the middle managers could be solved through communicative leadership. Misunderstandings in the communication can be minimized through facilitating work. Time constraints can be less stressful by initiating structure. Creating more engagement with the employees can be established through managing relational dynamics and finally the challenge of communicating to large groups of employees can be facilitated through all the communication behaviours.

We, as researchers, argue that the majority of the challenges middle managers face can be eased through communicative leadership. Management is situational which requires a variation of managerial skills, mind-sets and knowledge. However, from our analysis of the empirical material we can confidently state that developing a communicative leadership plays an important role in middle management as it can reduce managerial and communicative challenges facing the practitioners. *Interviewee 4* describes how she organizes planning days together with the employees. *Interviewees 1, 5,* and *8* describe how they discuss team and organizational goals in large group meetings called APT. These are evident indications of communicative leadership as the managers initiate structure to clarify goals and engages everyone in the planning process. *Interviewee 1 and 5* describe how they think it is highly important with feedback, and especially positive feedback, to encourage the employees and display their presents as managers. This signals a communicative leadership by facilitating work through giving feedback and coaching. *Interviewee 4* describes her relationship with her employees as "Simple and relaxed, open and honest" and *interviewee 1* mentions that "Everybody knows I'm the manager, they should understand why we do things and get the tools to manage different situations, and at these times, I am there to support them". These are signs of the communicative behaviour of managing relational dynamics and indicates a communicative leadership as they support the employees and work towards creating openness.

All in all, if the manager successfully incorporates all of these communication behaviours into their operative work, then they display a communicative leadership. This communicative leadership is important in a complex role such as middle management and can be used to facilitate managerial challenges.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding for how middle managers within elderly care view communication, and provide knowledge on how communicative leadership can be of importance to middle management. This was done by conducting interviews with middle managers working with elderly care for the municipal of Malmö. By coding the collected empirical data, we were able to identify the two main categories of communication perspectives; transmission and sensemaking. The results were then analysed with the research questions in mind and with the help of the theoretical framework. Through this process we are able to draw several interesting conclusions about communication and the role of middle managers within elderly care, all of which will be presented below.

Management as communication

The results of the study supports the notion that communication is a central part of the work as a middle manager within elderly care, which is inline with Mintzberg's (2001) argument that management *is* communication. All of the interviewed managers describe how the majority of their work is about conveying or receiving information, either from top management or their employees. This is also reflected in the middle managers answers to the question "What is the most challenging thing about your role?", where the common challenges were; time constraints, language barriers, communicating to big groups of employees, employee misunderstandings and gaining support from the employees. All of these challenges can in some way be linked to or solved with communication efforts. A number of researchers (Gabel, 2002; Farrell, 2014; Wooldridge et al., 2008) are in agreement that middle managers are the gateway through which all of the organization's information passes through, and that most of the operative work is centered around distributing, collecting and interpreting information. Furthermore, the results of this study strengthen the notion presented by scholars such as Sandberg and Targama (1998), that there has been a shift in the management paradigm which now focuses more on the importance of communicative tasks in the operative work. The responses from the interviewed managers all indicate that successful management is perceived to be directly linked to good communication skills. However, here it is important to point out that the connotations of "successful management" and "good communication" are subjective to each individual manager, and that the topic and purpose of this study may have influenced the responses of the managers.

Factors that affect the communication

From the analysis of the empirical material we can see that the majority of the interviewed middle managers displayed signs of a sensemaking perspective on communication. This means that when we coded their answers, they contained a higher number of codes that could be linked to the sensemaking perspective as opposed to the transmission perspective. One possible explanation for this can be that the managers are influenced by the nature of the industry, which is generally characterized by caregiving. Johansson and Hamrin (2013), argue that the environment in which the manager works also affects their communication. It is likely that working in the environment characterized by the elderly care industry makes the managers more inclined to use communication channels associated with the sensemaking perspective, i.e. meetings and workshops, because it encourages relationship building through human contact. We find that it would be of interest for the field of management to conduct further research on this topic by studying the communication perspectives of managers working in other industries.

Another factor that influenced how middle managers within elderly care communicate, is the educational level of the employees. The managers explained that when conveying information to employees with a lower education (in this case, lower education refers to the lack of a university degree or other forms of higher education) it increased the need for face-to-face communication and constant follow up to ensure that the employees understand what is communicated. This can be very time consuming and add to the complicity of the practice. This can also be a further explanation for the findings that that the majority of the interviewed middle managers displayed signs of a sensemaking perspective on communication, which we presented above. Managers who favor face-to-face contact and informal communication with employees create a more open communication climate which facilitates co-creation and sensemaking, and helps minimize misunderstandings. The fact that the managers favor face-to-face communication can therefore be due to that most of the frontline employees within elderly care lack a higher education and this in turn increases the need for mediums that reduce misunderstandings. With this conclusion, it is also interesting to reflect over the fact that it might not be the lack of higher education that makes communicating with employees harder, but rather the difference in educational background. What would happen if the employees had a higher educational background than the managers? Would the managers find communicating with them easier or harder?

The influence of situation and context

Even though the managers in general had a positive approach to face-to-face communication and saw it as an important tool to reduce misunderstandings, the results also showed that many of the managers resorted to the use digital communication channels (i.e. email or sms). They see it as their first and foremost tool for communicating information to their employees. The managers expressed several benefits with this medium; information travels fast, can be saved and reaches a large audience. However, digital platforms often use written forms of communication, which can make it difficult for feedback and to motivate the employees (Daft et al., 1995). Because of this restriction the middle manager can struggle to display a communicative leadership. We recognize that many times, digital communication channels may be the necessary or only option for the manager due to e.g. geographical location, time restraint or large employee teams etc. In fact, from the results we can see that all the managers who answered that they dominantly used digital communication channels to communicate information also had the largest employee groups, (with the exception for *interviewee 3* who has a smaller team that works out of office). Furthermore, these managers also showed signs of a transmission perspective on communication, focusing on quick information and leaving little room for feedback.

The conclusion can be drawn that the size of the employee group can affect the managers perspective on communication. Larger groups make it harder for face-to-face communication and dialogue because of the increased time constraints. Management is very dependent on the conditions the manager work in. The managers that displayed more signs of a transmission perspective on communication may have this view on communication because of the context or situation. We can see that even the managers with smaller groups used digital communication channels because of their effectiveness in delivering information, however, these managers often had the extra time to follow up with face-to-face communication if needed and their context enables them to display more signs of a sensemaking perspective. All in all, the middle manager's perspective on communication is more like a gradation between transmission and sensemaking. Where on the scale the middle manager is depends to the situation and the conditions they are dealt.

Communicative leadership as a vital tool

How middle managers view and use communication in their daily work might be dependent on the situation, yet we would still like to stress that an awareness for the importance of communication and working towards a communicative leadership can help ease the workload for middle managers within elderly care. The majority of their operative and strategic work is centred around

communication, and as mentioned above, most of the challenges that the middle managers face are either caused by lack of communication or can be solved with strategic communication. Striving to have a communicative leadership can provide the middle managers with tools for initiating structure, facilitating work, managing relational dynamics and representing. One of the newer and growing challenges that middle managers within elderly care face is the lack of language proficiency with the employees. This challenge has increased significantly with the growing population of immigrants in Sweden and the growing language barriers lead to frequent misunderstandings. This increases the need for a higher communicative ability among the managers which be believe can be met by focusing more on developing the middle managers communicative leadership. Middle managers who have a distanced and more formal relationship with their employees have a harder time being communicative leaders. This is because it becomes harder to build trust and thereby give constructive feedback and engage employees in dialogue and decision making.

6. Discussion

This study provides valuable insights on how middle managers working with elderly care in Sweden view and use communication in their work and in their relationship with employees. The results can be useful not only for the research fields of management and communication, but also as a more practical framework for middle managers in the elderly care industry and the public sector in Sweden. Scholars have long argued for the complexity and pressures of the middle manager role, something that this study further validates. We find that many of the obstacles that middle managers within elderly care face today are linked to external factors and shifts in the society that influence the prerequisites of the job.

One way to meet the new demands is by focusing more on developing the communicative leadership with the middle managers. To a certain extent, this can be done by the middle managers own effort to create a communicative environment that allows for more feedback and exchange with the employees. Yet, in order to really meet the new demands and survive in the ever changing societal landscape, efforts also need to come from the organization's top management. Here, communication needs to be acknowledge as one of the most important tool for the middle managers and the organization needs to provide the proper resources for the middle managers to deal with the communicative challenges that they are facing.

One of the major concerns for middle managers working with elderly care in today's Sweden is language. In the last few years Sweden has seen an overwhelming increase in the number of immigrants coming to Sweden. This has entailed that Sweden has a new workforce which does not have Swedish as their mother tongue. Many of the people new to Sweden end up working with health care and elderly care. Middle managers within the elderly care practice have been forced to adapt the working environment to accommodate the new workforce. More time is put on communicating with the new employees, which adds to the pressure of the work that is already time constrained. We see that middle managers within the elderly care need more support from top management to handle the new demands that middle managers face. We believe that this support could be in the form of more language education programs, digital language resources, culture and communication workshops for the managers etc.

Educating the employees, not just in language, is another effort that we see would improve the working conditions for the managers and allow for a smoother communication between managers and employees. The findings show that it is easier and and less demanding for the managers to communicate with employees that have a higher education or education more similar to their own. This is because the managers express that the employees with higher education tend to need less explaining and often ask

each other rather than the manager when they have questions. The managers also felt more confident using digital communication channels with these employees because they said that they could be sure that the information was interpreted correctly. In this sense, the employees with higher education ease the workload for the managers and free up time which they would otherwise spend repeating and adapting the information for the employees.

We argue that education provides a critical perspective, confidence and personal growth. This can make it easier for the manager to create a communication climate that is open and where employees question and give feedback to the manager. If the organization wants to encourage a communicative leadership, then top management should invest in educating their employees on all levels. This can be in the form of online courses, subsidized education or workshops within different topics. We also see that there is a need to invest in the middle managers and educate them in communication, since this is such an important part of their job. Better communicative leaders will significantly increase the organization's efficiency and create a working environment that encourages co-creation and the involvement of employees. This can be beneficial not only for the middle manager, but also for the organizational culture and in turn the employer brand.

6.1 Suggestion for further research

The results of this study reveals areas which could benefit from further research. This study has focus on the the communication of middle managers working with elderly care meaning that the results are limited to this industry. Research on the communication of middle managers working in other fields would contribute with a broader understanding of how middle managers use communication and if it is dependent on the industry. It could also be of interest to do a comparative study of middle managers working for private sector organizations and/or other countries.

Throughout the course of this study we have reflected on how other research methods might provide other interpretations of the empirical material. This study has focused solely on the middle managers perspective on communication and how they believe they communicate with employees. Alternative research could depart from the employee perspective by investigating how they perceive the manager's communication.

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Appendix 1

Intervjufrågor:

Om personen

- Vilka tidigare tjänster kommer du närmast från?
- Vilken utbildning har du?
- Tror du att din utbildning och tidigare tjänster påverkat din roll idag?
- Har du alltid sett dig själv som chef? Varför, varför inte?
- Vilka är dina styrkor och svagheter i ledarrollen?

Synen på ledarskap

- Vad tycker du ingår i rollen som mellanchef?
- Hur anser du att en bra manager är?
- Vilka är de största utmaningarna med din roll?
- Hur förankrar du organisationens mål/strategier hos din personal?
- Hur skulle du vilja beskriva din relation till din personal?
- Hur tror du din personal ser på dig som ledare?

Kommunikationsinsatser

- Hur kommunicerar du med dina medarbetare?
- Hur ser du på kommunikation i ditt dagliga arbete som chef?
- När använder du vilka kanaler, i vilka situationer?
- Hur definierar du kommunikation?
- Varför tycker du kommunikation är viktigt i rollen som chef?
- Vilka är de största kommunikativa utmaningarna som chef?
- Hur skulle du beskriva en kommunikativ ledare?

Om organisationen

- Beskriv hur du upplever kulturen inom organisationen?
- Vilka kommunikations/informationsflöden är tillgängliga inom organisationen?
- Anser du att organisationen är kommunikativ?

Avslutningsvis

- Hur har din kommunikation i rollen som manager förändrats över tid?
- Vad tror du kommer krävas av en manager i framtiden?

Appendix 2

Interview questions (translated verison):

Background information

- What is your previous work experience
- What education do you have?
- How do you think your educational background and work experience have influenced your role?
- Have you always seen yourself as a manager? Why, why not?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses in your management role?

View on management

- What responsibilities are included in your role as a manager?
- How would you describe a successful manager?
- What are the biggest challenges in your role as a manager?
- How do you anchor the goals and strategies of the organization with your employees?
- How would you describe your relationship with your employees?
- How do you think your employees view you as a manager?

Communication efforts

- How do you communicate with your employees?
- How do you view communication in your daily work?
- What channels of communication do you use and in what situation?
- How do you define communication?
- Why do you think communication is important in your role as a manager?
- What are the biggest communicative challenges as a manager?
- How would you describe a communicative leader?

About the organization

- Describe how you experience the culture within the organization?
- What communication channels are available as a resource?
- Do you think the organization is communicative?

Finally

- How has your communication in your role as a manager changed over time?
- What do you think will be required of a manager in the future?

Appendix 3

Consent form

Samtyckesformulär- Intervju

Intervjun kommer att spelas in och vi som intervjuare kommer att ta anteckningar. Både anteckningarna och inspelningarna kommer vara konfidentiella. Vi är medvetna om att intervjuerna kan medföra risker då intervjuerna behandlar känslig information. Dessa risker kommer att begränsas genom att det sparade materialet endast är tillgängligt för oss forskare.

Din personliga information kommer att förbli anonym. Namnet på Malmö Stad kommer att anges i rapporten om inte Ni önskar annat. All information vi samlar in under detta intervjutillfälle kommer bidra till studien som mynnar ut i en skriftlig masteruppsats.

Samtycke

Härmed godkänner jag deltagande i studien baserat på ovanstående villkor. Mitt deltagande i studien är frivilligt och jag har rätten att dra tillbaka mitt samtycke och deltagande närsomhelst.

……………………………………………
Signatur av deltagare

……………………………………………
Datum

Härmed godkänner jag inspelning av mitt deltagande i studien

……………………………………………
Signatur av deltagare

……………………………………………
Datum

Vid frågor eller funderingar, kontakta Emma Holmberg eller Melinda Holm.
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