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MASTER THESIS

THE HUMAN SIDE OF LARGE-SCALE CHANGES IN PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANIZATIONS

A Study of the Police Force in Southern Sweden

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Declaration of Authorship

We hereby declare that we have written the presented thesiswithout undue help from a second person and without using such tools other than those specified.

Where we have used thoughts from external sources, directly or indirectly, published or unpublished, this is always clearly attributed. In the selection and evaluation of research materials, we have received support services from the following individuals or institutions: Iva Josefsson, working at Lund's School of Economics and Management.

Moreover, we certify that this master thesis or any part of it has not been previously submitted for a degree or any other qualification at the Lund University any other institution in Sweden or abroad.

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The process of organizational change will inevitably have an impact on the employees within when converting from its status quo to a hoped-for future state. Strategic goals are often coming to the fore while creating a workforce that helps evolve the change is easily forgotten or deprioritized. Moreover, the frequency of change tends to aggravate feelings of fatigue or organizational change cynicism that may obstruct the effectiveness of reforms. The purpose of this study is to highlight the human experience in large-scale changes in public sector organizations. Therefore, the central question is how individual perceptions can determine the effectiveness of public management reforms as they are assumed to evolve into a favorable or negative attitude towards change. Using the example case of the Swedish police force, we thus intend to illuminate how employee perception of change and management impact reform outcomes and attitudes towards coming changes. Based on seven in-depth interviews we gathered at Lund's precinct, this thesis used grounded theory as a method for analysis. It furthermore relies on prior studies that addressed the topics of change management, employee engagement, communication, and public sector management.

Some of the main conclusions of the study are: If the work environment is characterized by information sharing in decision-making, it creates the impression of active employee involvement and thus will be less associated with high levels of organizational change cynicism (OCC). The absence of respective resources to make the involvement possible reversely increases levels of OCC. Employees who perceive themselves as having received higher levels of organizational inducements, as opposed to those who perceive having received lower levels, exhibit a more positive perception of the change, which, in turn, seems to lead them to be more committed to change. Employee support accordingly seems to increase with positive perceptions of past change experience. Past experience of management's efforts during a change implementation appears to shape the perception and attitude towards coming changes. Observing perceptions comes across as pivotal for planning future reforms as they indicate the level of willingness for active participation or potential change fatigue. If the majority displays considerable levels of OCC or fatigue, they are likely to infect the organizational climate, reversely impacting structural outcomes. It follows that employee perception will inevitably determine the success of structural outcomes as it imbues the organizational climate.

Keywords: Public Change Management, Southern Swedish Police Force, Grounded Theory, Human Perception, Organizational Change Cynicism, Governmental Sector

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List of Abbreviations

ADKAR	Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, Reinforcement
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CGT	Constructivist Grounded Theory
COR	Conservation of Resources
IT	Information Technology
OCC	Organizational Change Cynicism
PUST	Polisens Utredningsstöd

Remarks

Due to the current spread of the COVID-19 virus, we were not able to conduct the amount of interviews we originally planned for. This study makes no claim to be exhaustive or representative.

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It's far too common that a management decision is made and then it's believed that the organizational change is completed. But, at that point it has hardly started.

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2020

Change is so very much about people that it's easy to forget them. They become just arrows and boxes in plans and strategies.

STEFAN SVENINGSSON
2020

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING EMPLOYEE PERCEPTIONS

There is nothing as constant as change. This particularly holds for organizations, as they are exposed to an increasingly fast-paced environment that necessitates constant adjustment to external events. Regardless of whether it concerns the private or public sector, change is an inevitable part of organizational development and many will experience some sort of change during their professional life. The goal is generally to go from situation A (how the organization operates now) to situation B (the new way of operating the organization), though the process of how to introduce and implement reforms may differ.

Throughout the past decades, the topic of change management has continued to attract the attention of many scholars and consultants alike, often with a strong focus on how we can control and become the masters of change. However, in this endeavor, many managers and organizations have had to realize that invasive changes of organizational structures turn out to be much more complex than originally believed. The reality is that many structural changes will fail in the end. According to various studies, two out of three transformation projects remain unsuccessful (Sirkin, Keenan, and Jackson 2005). The most common conclusion in these instances is that the more organizations strive towards change, the more they stay the same (Kuepers 2014). Based on that rationale, change would cement the status quo, rather than transform it into the desired end-goal. The reasons behind such phenomena are most commonly associated with an ill-defined execution and planning process of larger structural changes. Bolman and Deal (2017), for example, argue that planning and implementing a big structural change without broad-based participation that can give voice to possible enemies of the change is prone to resulting in strong resistance and dissatisfaction down the road. While such analyses enjoyed a lot of attention in private sector organizations, the knowledge available on change management processes in the public sector seems to be less extensive.

However, with few exceptions (*e.g.* Robertson and Seneviratne 1995), the literature barely makes a difference between change management processes in private and public sector organizations (*e.g.*, Stewart and Kringas 2003; Brudney and Wright 2002; Bryson and Anderson 2000; Chackerian and Mavima 2000; Hood and Peters 2004; Mani 1995; L. Wise 2002). The literature rather agrees that change is a multi-level and multi-faceted phenomenon, holding relevant implications across sectors. Despite that common denominator, it is often argued that the hierarchical structure in public sector organizations plays a significant part in complicating and protracting change management processes.

This gives rise to the question of whether change in public sector organizations must account for different factors than in the private sector. More importantly, it begs the questions of how success of the desired end state can be quantifiably measured and determined. This would echo several research interests solely focusing on the structural side of change management. However, what this debate is missing, is a more concentrated focus on the individual employees ultimately driving change. More recently, Stefan Sveningsson and Nadja Sörgärde, two researchers in the field of change management, pointed out the common trap of forgetting the people inside the change and what effect they can have on the success of the change initiative (Sveningsson and Sörgärde 2020).

Yet, studies about the human experience and perception of change still represent a minority in comparison to research based on generic change strategies (*e.g.*, Kotter 1995; Kotter 1996). One key term that has enjoyed widespread recognition in this regard is "organizational change cynicism" (OCC) (*e.g.*, Abraham 2000; Barton and Ambrosini 2013; P. Fleming and Spicer 2003; Brown and Cregan 2008). The term essentially describes the employee's perception that the organization's management lacks honesty, justice, and/or transparency, which may lead to displays of dissatisfaction or change fatigue (Abraham 2000; Durrah, Chaudhary, and Gharib 2019). OCC is often defined as a negative attitude towards the organization (Dean, Brandes, and Dharwadkar 1998). The perception of the employees is here seen as an important aspect that can impede or evolve a change process (Shin, M. Taylor, and Seo 2012; Burnes 1996; Brown and Cregan 2008), because it is assumed to mirror a human's individual reality, shaping its behavior and attitude toward its surrounding environment. How the change process unfolds would thus be highly contingent on employee perception.

By contrast, operational and managerial perspectives often show change as a linear process that can be mapped out and finished. Hence, the measurement of successful change tends to be connected to quantifiable results, as if the organization becomes more efficient and/or effective. The human aspect is much harder to measure. Its importance should not be understated, as the change does not only happen to an organization, but also to the people that reside within. Losing that perspective can be harmful, to the people, to management, and to the change process itself. The effect of not having a plan for how to implement the human perspective, i.e. instigating a constant top-down dialogue, may well be a declining willingness for proactive commitment to the change at hand. This is crucial to note since unchecked resistance, ambiguity, or distrust can affect the process negatively on both a structural and cultural basis, often regardless of how involved and communicative the organization's employees are (Bolman and Deal 2017); (Burnes 1996).

When it comes to public sector organizations, big decisions are made at the top level of society, the government and parliament. The resulting top-down effect can be the desired process, although research shows that both efficiency and effectiveness of the change process can suffer from a lack of commitment on part of the employees (Burnes 1996). Accordingly, the public sector organization tends to fall into the troubling configuration of the stagnant bureaucracy and red tape, exhibiting rigid styles in management where employees tend to feel left out or ignored (Fernandez and H. G. Rainey 2006).

Despite such patterns, structural reforms can usually be achieved, but it remains questionable whether its implementation is successful in the long-term. After all, the frequency of changes increases as organizations have to face up to the reality of continuously changing times, *e.g.* new technologies, ideologies, and politics. The resulting volatility and uncertainty thus raise the question as to how stable such change processes turn out to be. Or even more: whether governmental organizations with strict hierarchical structures can adapt to the demands of changing environments at all. If so, how does the individual perspective fit into this process?

1.1. Research Aim and Questions

For this study, we chose the recent reorganization of the Swedish police force as an exemplary case. The overarching purpose is to examine how large-scale structural changes may shape employee perceptions that conversely may trigger an adverse or change-supporting organizational climate. For the sake of clarity, the case shall be briefly summarized:

The reform sought to centralize the former 21 national districts in order to meet the growing demands for a more effective and efficient police service. It was officially implemented from 2015 to 2016 and kindled a major controversy about efforts to reinvent, transform, or reform government security agencies. Following up on this change, the police force is currently planning for the next upcoming reform in 2024. The details of the reforms' intentions, processes, and outcomes as well as regarding the police force as an organization will be provided in a separate chapter (Chap. 3).

The case serves as our argumentative foundation to expand the concept of successful change management by specifically focusing on the people within the police force and their perception of the change. Contrary to previous research, we thereby seek to step away from the notion of the goal-oriented attitude within the change management field. This gives us the possibility to narrow our research down to the following questions:

(1) *What common themes can we find within our research context?*

(2) *What can these themes tell us about the perception of the change?*

(3) *Do these perceptions have a significant impact on possible success or failure? If so, how do they shape the outcome of the change?*

So far, the literature presents a vast body of journals focusing on general management and organization theory that abounds with complexities, and to some extent, conflicting theories and perspectives. This presents a major challenge to public administrators and public administration researchers alike. Hence, it raises the need to identify points of consensus among researchers on what is commonly perceived as conducive to organizational transformations across sectors. To this end, this study will particularly draw on knowledge providing in-depth insights into employee perception during initiatives involving large-scale, planned, strategic, and administrative change (*e.g.*, Abramson and Lawrence 2001, Bruhn, Zajac, and Al-Kazemi 2001; Kotter 1995). Meanwhile,

it will take into account the structural challenges and pitfalls specific to governmental organizations and apply this knowledge to our selected case. The findings will thus concentrate on the lack of detail on change processes and outcomes, partly stemming from a paucity of research in this domain.

1.2. Study Set-Up

Based on a grounded theory approach, this study aims to gauge the different parameters and dimensions of the human experience and its impact on the success of systemic reform implementation in the Swedish police force as a representative of a public organization. For this purpose, we have conducted intensive interviews (Charmaz 2006)[1] in Lund's precinct in order to shed light on the rationale and perception behind employee inclination to partake in change projects of usually highly hierarchical and rigid organizations.

The main objective of our analysis is to examine potential linkages between human perceptions, organizational patterns, and final structural outcomes. Eventually, this will allow us to draw conclusions regarding their potential impacts on both the systemic change strategy itself and the organizational climate presumably influencing the structural process and outcome in turn. However, since we consider these perceptions as personally constructed realities, our analysis rests on the constructivist version of grounded theory.

The analysis and data coding scheme will encompass a coherent set of factors enabling an in-depth understanding of their mutual relations and catalytic effects on employee perception and resulting personal degree of involvement. We thereby assume that both structural and cultural impacts on performance outcomes are somewhat determined by how much value the individual sees in the overall change. The obtained categorization of data will then serve as testable propositions for our analysis to examine how employee perceptions can impact the process of change. This way, we aim to draw together major considerations for leaders of change initiatives in public organizations.

Although a few academic works can be found that share this thesis' research approach, it has not been explored in detail up until this point. The range of such projects is still relatively limited and those published are only conducted to a manageable extent. Selected examples include, among others, Andersson and Bateman (1997), Abraham (2000), Fleming and Spicer (2003), Brown and Cregan (2008), Barton and Ambrosini (2013), or more recently Durrah, Chaudhary and Gharib (2019).

With the police force being a representative of larger public sector organizations, we hope to gain additional insights into the public change methods in general. The discussion will therefore further address the question of transferability to public service organizations as to grant practitioners

[1] This method allows for a semi-structured approach as it utilizes open-ended questions to encourage the participants to elaborate on their experiences more freely while the researcher still "directs" the conversation (*see* Charmaz 2006).

relevant points of reference to design and devise future change strategies. In the end, decision-makers in public service organizations operate at the top of the hierarchy and usually hold political functions. The police force is just one example where leading decision-makers have been appointed from outside and with no prior internal experience.

As the deconstruction of the human perception and its impact on performance outcome requires a fundamental comprehension of basic organizational change patterns, the following chapter will first outline the most prominent and widely disseminated approaches to public reform management. It is intended to elucidate the logic of processual change mechanisms and potentially emerging resistance or cynicism, respectively. In this manner, the broader relevance attached to the human-centered view shall be underpinned, as their understanding is crucial with regard to the methodological conception.

After an extensive analysis, the last chapter will be assigned to a critical reflection on the key findings and implications for public change management. It distills the most noteworthy difficulties, provides suggestions on how to overcome them and draws together subsequent questions for further research activities. At this point, the following chapter will now dive into the best available knowledge on organizational change patterns.

CHAPTER 2

DECONSTRUCTING PATTERNS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

The objective of this chapter is to investigate the most relevant concepts and cases that deal with organizational change processes. Based on this knowledge, we seek to link their outcome to the assumed impact of employee experiences. The discussion aims to identify key factors affecting interventionist outcomes and understand their assumed linkages to effective change implementation in public sector settings. For purposes of clarity, we define public change management reforms as a continuous process, influencing the potential dependencies between assumed key success factors and change initiatives outcomes (Sect. 2.1).

After having clarified our main underlying assumptions, all predominant factors supposedly related to successful change implementations will be grouped in subsections on the impacts of (i) employee reactions to change and turnover (Sect. 2.2.1), (ii) cultural aspects (Sect. 2.2.2), (iii) resource-based employee involvement with a particular focus on information sharing and employee training (Sect. 2.2.3), (iv) the external support and political alliances (Sect. 2.2.4), and lastly (v) on their main implications on the role of leadership within change processes (Sect. 2.2.5).

The chapter will conclude by drawing together the most noteworthy implications for the upcoming analysis and categorization of data, assessing whether the individual perception and attitude towards organizational changes impact outcomes and performance. Before outlining the key success factors, we will first start by devoting closer attention to what we define as change management in public sector organizations and delineate our main underlying assumptions for the study.

2.1. Defining Change Management

From a strategic standpoint, "managing change" primarily refers to making changes in a planned, managed and/or systematic fashion (Bolman and Deal 2017). While these are mostly geared towards internal improvements in efficiency, one can conclude that external events may just as well necessitate organizational change. This, one could argue, is particularly the case in the public sector, as the interplay between several players draws up a highly political landscape that demands a constant mapping of external surroundings. This leads to another implicit meaning of managing change: it is the capability to respond to changes effectively when faced with external forces over which an organization can exercise little or no control (*e.g.* civil unrest, new legislation, a rapid rise in the price of oil, devaluation of the national currency, etc.) (Sveningsson and Sörgärde 2020).

Those recognizing the need for timely adjustments are most likely to develop and improve their organizational capability of continuous adaptation to the changing external environment, a concept also framed as the "learning organization" (Sveningsson and Sörgärde 2020).

The increasing learning progress documented in the literature generated a considerable body of knowledge, mainly drawing on the key lessons learned in the private sector. While the literature abounds with models for change management, advising managing directors and chief executive officers (CEOs) on how to best implement and facilitate planned changes, this study forgoes an extensive treatment of every model deemed meaningful in the literature. For the sake of future comparability, it is yet useful to devote brief attention to the three main types of change based on which researchers argue for certain courses of action.

(1) ***Top-down change management:*** The approach is mainly based on the assumption that change can be executed smoothly provided that upper and middle management draw up a coherent plan to follow. The main sources of resistance are assumed to come from employees. Therefore, the primary focus usually lies on changing the cultural settings upholding the organization from inside, though it may be accompanied by concomitant structural adjustments (*e.g.*, Heyden et al. 2016; Ryan et al. 2008; Smeds, Haho, and Alvesalo 2003; Sommer 2016).

(2) ***Transformational change management:*** As the name suggests, this approach relies on transformational leaders setting a personal example. With the overall aim of establishing a stable and environment, it challenges people to actively drive innovation, restructure priorities and reframe team dialogue, thus reinventing organizational collaboration for change (*e.g.*; Ashkenas 2015; Eisenbach, Watson, and Pillai 1999; Kochan and Dyer 2006; Kuntz and Gomas 2012; Porras and Silvers 1991; Riley et al. 2010).

(3) ***Strategic change management:*** Where large-scale projects and high degrees of complexity are involved, the strategic approach is the most commonly applied concept. In contrast to the top-down model, it aims to successively introduce new structures, and by extension, behaviors at work. This, in turn, allows people to witness the benefit for the organization and thus increases the chances that changes will be internalized in the long-term (*e.g.*, Kotter and Schlesinger 2008; Kitsios and Kamariotou 2017; Kotter 1996; Sujovga and Rajnoha 2012).

As the centralization was a large-scale project and required close cooperation for merging the previous 21 districts, we consider this approach to be the most suitable for further analysis. Therefore, the following explanations build on the presumption that any structural transformation was based on strategic decisions.

While each of the above approaches can be effective, their success is highly dependent on the situation, *i.e.* the context in which the specific organization is placed. However, the first category has proven to be the least productive (*e.g.*, Ewenstein, W. Smith, and Sologar 2015; Lister 2003; Heyden et al. 2016; Sirkin, Keenan, and Jackson 2005). This notwithstanding, all approaches

highlight the importance of leadership, communication, and employee engagement in the change process, all of which need to be considered. In essence, these factors inherently build on what other studies already found to be the dominating perception of the main drivers of change and therefore demonstrate the need to place the emphasis on the individual human experience.

That said, it is important to draw attention to the boundaries of what this thesis is addressing: The intent is not to provide a compass or toolkit for managing organizational change in the public sector, but to establish which factors most likely have a significant impact on successful change. These factors must be understood as grounded on what the majority of employees report on their experiences and perceptions of organizational changes. The focus hereby lies on planned changes given the strategic nature in the case at hand. However, this thesis acknowledges that change is imminent in its nature, regardless of whether or not it is planned, imposed, or stimulated in other fashions such as by a crisis. The implicit assumption is that organizational change management is always a continuous process, sometimes even chaotic, granting the opportunity for constant adjustments of practices and strategies if current plans prove futile. In this sense, this framework aims to distill organizational patterns that either cause roadblocks or are conducive to long-term realization. Either way, they are assumed to affect broad-scale changes in public sector organizations as the mere process may impact individual experiences, thus shaping its orientation towards participation.

2.1.1. Systemic Public Change Management

With the police force being a public organization, one could argue for the term organizational change being more suitable in the specific context. The term indicates that certain systems are in place that need to be restructured systematically, thus lending the concept "systemic change management" its characteristic name. In governmental agencies, such as the police force, these are further embedded in political and societal systems, affecting the stage of national development. Accordingly, governmental agencies need to adapt to changing conditions, opportunities, and demands as defined by these systems. The concomitant revisions of administrative changes that organizations engage in are also summarized under the umbrella term "public management reform".

The previous section already briefly touched on the implications of planned systemic change. Nonetheless, for current purposes, it is useful to delineate the concept in more detail as to understand the complexities and underlying patterns defining the context of public management reforms. As previously indicated, systemic change is geared towards transforming or redesigning a whole or parts of a system (Reiser and Dempsey 2007) in order to institute a sustainable (and usually large-scale) reform (B. Taylor 2016). Following up on these characteristic, Abercrombie et al. (Abercrombie, Harries, and Wharton 2015, p. 9) similarly refer to systems change as

> "[...] an intentional process designed to alter the status quo by shifting the function or structure of an identified system with purposeful interventions... Systems change aims to bring about lasting change by altering underlying structures and supporting mechanisms which make

> the system operate in a particular way. These can include policies, routines, relationships, resources, power structures, and values."

Hence, these types of interventions are primarily implemented because previous efforts aiming to change one aspect have failed to fix the problem and therefore justify the necessity to transform a system on a larger scale. As a result, the revisions affect the functions of the whole system. Examples can be gradual organizational reforms seeking to transform the fundamental qualities and principles of the system itself (Reiser and Dempsey 2007). Their outcome is, however, essentially predefined since these processes were meticulously mapped and planned in advance (Schmidt, Groeneveld, and Van de Valle 2017).

This would dovetail neatly with popular conceptions of public management reforms, defining them as "deliberate attempts to change the structures, processes, and/or cultures of public sector organizations with the objective of getting them (in some sense) to run better" (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2017, p. 2). Changing processes may hereby refer to redesigning a system such that it implements certain quality standards in a more efficient manner.

Changing structures, by contrast, specifically aims at creating a new scaffold to support improved coordination or encourage specialization (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2017). This may, for instance, include mergers or dissolving entire public sector organizations or internal departments. Perry and Kraemer (Perry and Kraemer 1983) summarize these actions as merging "the normative orientation of traditional public administration and the instrumental orientation of general management" (p. 10). At this point, it should however be pointed out that public management reforms have proven ineffective in several cases (*e.g.*, Fernandez and H. G. Rainey 2006, Golembiewski 1985; Meyers and Dillon 1999). In some instances, the outcome was in fact worse than before.

Mapping the external environment is indispensable before initiating the next steps to refine new operating procedures. Besides providing in-depth training of staff, this involves a redefinition of roles and the implementation of appropriate rewards and appraisal systems. Both are instrumental to reduce the "anxiety all these novelties have probably caused, both among users and staff" (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004, pp. 6-7). Hence, the necessary resources need to be available in order to circumvent adverse repercussions, *e.g.* in the form of lacking cross-level commitment or even resistance.

Before deconstructing their underlying patterns and effects on organizational change implementation, the surrounding processual nature of transformation, however, needs to be understood as to pinpoint the complexities involved when attempting to discern specific factors and their influence on individual perception and resulting process effectiveness.

2.1.2. The Processual Nature of Change

According to widely disseminated views, organizational change processes are portrayed as an episodic, linear progression through successive stages or steps (*e.g.*,Armenakis, Harris, and Feild 1999; Greiner 1967; Kotter 1995; Lewin 1958; Crawford 2014; Lines, Sullivan, and Smithwick

2015). But since such advents rarely unfold in a linear fashion (Amis, Slack, and Hinings 2004; Van de Ven 1993), this paper makes a few adjustments as regards the nature of the change process. For the following purposes, we assume that the change is understood as a continuous, transformative, and, last but not least, as an *uncertain* process that imbues all levels of organizations, albeit to varying extents. Yet, especially the latter point is likely to affect the individual perception to a considerable extent (Brown and Cregan 2008). This view is also consistent with Hornstein's findings (Hornstein 2015), noting that a project's course is inevitably dependent on change and therewith on the active involvement of every employee, as most organizational decisions are made on the microlevel (Boud et al. 2006). The active involvement, in turn, would require the individual employee to uphold a positive view on change in general. The principal characteristics of strategic interventions are therefore multilevel and -authored operations, whose success is significantly determined by cross-level engagement and a general understanding of the change's goals and benefits to pre-empt potential resistance (Dawnson 1993).

It follows that every employee must adapt a change in behavior in order to realize daily changes on the micro-level (Pettigrew 1990; Pettigrew, Woodman, and Cameron 2001). This also means that organizational change is not so much bound to a top-down effect, but is rather *driven by bottom-up efforts* (Burnes 1996). Put differently, lacking commitment from staff can cause both efficiency and effectiveness of the change to suffer. This is particularly the case if the varying backgrounds between upper management, hence those instigating the change, and lower-level staff, *i.e.* those producing the actual change, are not properly taken into consideration. The implications are even more serious if external actors are put in charge as the consulting and executing change agents since their work practices rest on deviating values, norms, narratives (Veenswijk, Marrewijk, and Boersma 2010) or divergent notions of temporality (Dille and Söderlund 2011). The discrepancies in the latter may result in "temporal misfits" (Dille and Söderlund 2011), which, in turn, is exacerbated by the degree to which the participating agents are dependent on each other. In other words, with higher inter-organizational dependency, the negative effects on temporal misfits increase and thus have a detrimental impact on available task forces and change implementation. As a result, change is an intermittent, open-ended, and system-bound process of adaptation to adjusting internal conditions and circumstances (Van Marrewijk, Veenswijk, and Clegg 2014).

Provided that the always-changing organizational context is taken into account, it can thus be better understood how engagement and adjustments to changing conditions are directed towards organizational goals. Bearing this in mind, the next sections will place special focus on the dependencies between cross-level competences and commitment, available resources, and ramifications of frustration as observable patterns of change. While each of these determinants has been usually regarded as having additive effects on successful implementation, the following analysis rather treats each factor as potentially contributing to or facilitating the implementation by adding to the effects of the other factors.

2.2. Key Success Factors for Organizational Change in the Public Sector

The variety of theoretical perspectives on organizational change provides broad insights into typical patterns of reforms, and in particular, the causes of change and the ability of managers to direct its processes. While there are conflicting views about whether or not the managerial capacities are causal for success or failure, the debate somewhat indicates that managers do play a central role in bringing about change. Nonetheless, the mere statement that managers can affect change tells little about whether an intended change actually occurs. Likewise, it does not provide any clues about the best strategies or the impact it can have on employees experiencing the change. Fortunately, there exists a stream of extensive research that developed various models and frameworks, many of which lean on Lewin's three phases of change (Lewin 1947). These studies concentrate on the process of implementing change within organizations (or in public sector organizations) and further point to factors contributing to success (*e.g.*, Armenakis, Harris, and Feild 1999; Bingham and C. Wise 1996; Burke and Litwin 1992; Greiner 1967; Kotter 1995, 1996; G. W. Rainey and H. G. Rainey 1986; Thompson and Fulla 2001). Despite some differences in these models and frameworks, this body of research exhibits a striking consensus about what leaders and change participants should focus on when venturing into large-scale change endeavors.

This debate, however, often tends to either overemphasize the hard structural or soft cultural side to change management. Both cases neglect the leverage that the individual perception of past changes can exert on coming changes or the organizational climate in general. We previously referred to this phenomenon as organizational change cynicism. Many scholars ascribe that attitude to the uncertainty, fear, and stress that employees can experience during a bigger organizational change, eventually leading to cynicism, resentment, or even resistance (Bolman and Deal 2017; Lies 2012; Platen 2006; Smollan 2015; Torppa and K. Smith 2011). These internal reactions to bigger changes have often been connected to management's ability to communicate and advocate the change, but also their ability to understand what reactions such transitions may trigger in the individual. The following sections on cultural aspects and information sharing will address such issues of organizational change cynicism in more detail in order to demonstrate its potential to undermine the process and success of change programs.

The disparities between the focus on generic processual change strategies and individual inclination toward active employee involvement further imply that the definition of success differs. When focusing on strategy, success is predominantly determined by whether or not the change yields the benefits envisioned prior to its execution. This may, for example, include overall organizational performance (Hayes 2007), timely completion within-budget, agility to internal and external demands and needs, as well as noticeable increases in employee skills and readiness to handle future changes. Generally, these factors are considered to enable higher readiness for emerging challenges (Weiner 2009; Neves 2009). Most importantly, however, the change will hinge on the final implementation, *i.e.* integration into the organizational structure (*see* Lewin 1958; Kotter 1996). This is, in turn,

contingent on the leaders' managerial capacities and skills (Senior 2002). However, these areas are chronically under-researched and therefore lack a comprehensive understanding of the leaders' skills to effectively manage wide-ranging projects (Armenakis and Harris 2002). When focusing on the cultural and human aspects, the achievement of a successful change is usually construed as more difficult. Most studies place a high emphasis on the strategic aspect when discussing effectiveness and efficiency, but neglect aspects of human emotion and perspective that similarly play into the reform advances. The focus is therefore highly one-dimensional and lacks the crucial human part to the execution of planned changes (Hiatt and Creasey 2003).

It should further be mentioned that any change management process is always subject to specific circumstances. Hence, there is no strategic blueprint. This also means that insights from the literature can not be applied to the case one-to-one. Rather, a reasonable and project-tailored choice of strategy is assumed to pre-empt futile efforts and at best increase the chances of success (Self and Schraeder 2009). Therefore, all time factors need to be taken into consideration, as any efforts have to adjust to continuously and dynamically changing environments and organizational complexity (Zeffane 1996) (*see* Sect. 2.2.1). The level of complexity naturally rises due to the nonlinear nature of changes. Meanwhile, effective change pervades the organization both top-down and bottom-up since it depends on multiple *cross-functional* actions and monitoring.

That said, the following now attempts to outline the most commonly mentioned factors that are credited with having a substantial effect on employee involvement and sustainable implementation.

2.2.1. Employee Reactions to Change and Turnover

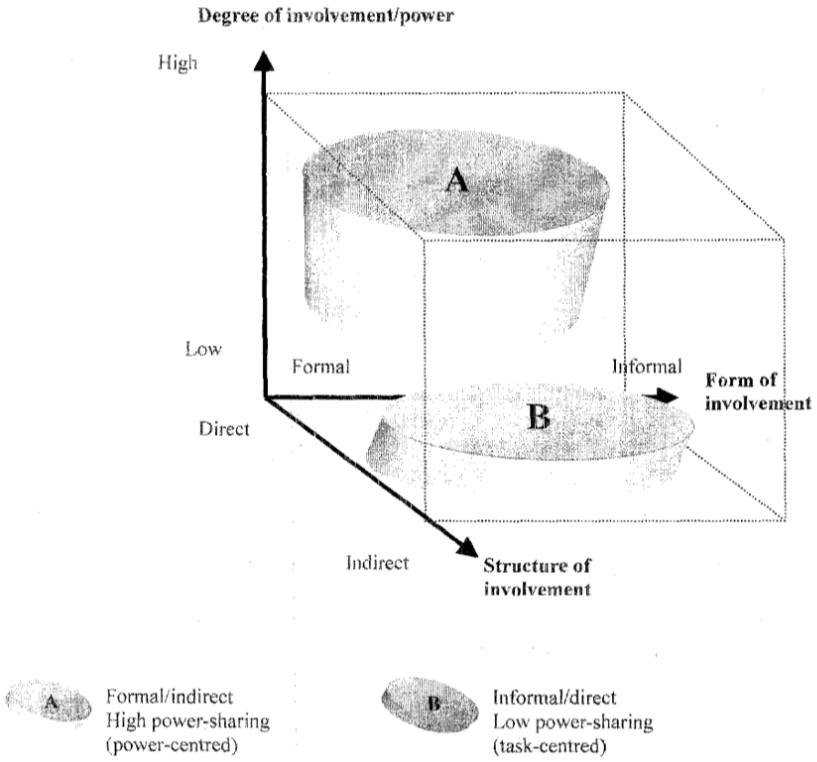
Before we focus on contributing factors to shaping employee perception and change outcome, we want to address some main observations that need to be taken into consideration when dealing with employee involvement as a means of favorable outcomes. This specifically concerns the different terminologies used that essentially describe the same idea: terms such as "employee involvement", "participation", and "empowerment" harbor a range of overlapping meanings. This vagueness permits a broad scope of conceptualization and managerial approaches. For instance, Lawler (1988, 1994) construes involvement as an equivalent to participation and thereby distinguishes four elements: power, information, knowledge, and rewards. Other researchers extend these properties to *e.g.* influence sharing, participative decision-making, the degree of employee involvement, empowerment, participation, or consultation (for reviews, *see e.g.*, Glew et al. 1995; Cotton et al. 1988; Black and Gregersen 1997; also *see* Wagner 1994). Many of these terms yet exhibit considerable ambiguities or are downright ill-defined (Cotton et al. 1988). Therefore, the remainder of this section attempts to provide a comprehensive overview of conceptual issues related to employee engagement and their linkages to successful change implementation.

According to Black and Gregersen (1997), the key elements of involvement rest on the distribution of power and scope of decision-making. Both are heavily intertwined since, with a lack of power or authority, the scope of decision-making can be stretched to its limits. Nonetheless, there is no direct or linear relationship between these elements (Morgan and Zeffane 2003, p. 60).

While the democratic rationale has been widely disseminated in the European, especially in the

Nordic context, and resulted in structural participation through formal power-sharing, experience shows that it does not necessarily lead to higher informal power-sharing or desired performance outcomes (*e.g.* Marchington et al. 1994). Contrarily, efficiency-driven managerial notions of empowerment seek to rely on informal patterns of involvement, thus adopting a wide scope of decision-making. Hence, the democratic and efficiency rationale differ in the dimensions of structure and form where the resulting power differential can be traced back to the degree of involvement. Each of these dimensions, *i.e.* structure (direct/indirect), form (formal/informal), and degree of involvement (high/low), can be plotted in Euclidean space as depicted in Fig. 2.1.

Figure 2.1.: The Conceptual Space of *Ideal* Employee Involvement



Source: Morgan and Zeffane 2003, p. 61.

Accordingly, the degree of involvement increases with adherence to formal structures and higher power-sharing, *i.e.* relying on bottom-up participatory elements. Buttressing these results, Thompson's and Sanders' (Thompson and Sanders 1997) similarly argue that such bottom-up structures may help the individual to support the change and thus pave the way to final success. More extensively, this may take the form of delegating decision-making to middle management and granting frontline workers greater discretion to implement changes. However, the reservation must be made that such power distributions may not be utilized at the expense of enfeebling the role of top management. It rather remains crucial to encourage and reward innovation, thereby expressing support for the change on its part (Thompson and Sanders 1997; *see* Sect. 2.2.5). Hence, successful organizational change would most likely unfold under a hybrid between lower-level participation and top-down direction. While participation should be widespread and span over all phases of the

change process, managerial leaders must commit time and effort to nurture the support, providing the respective resources, and properly navigating their employees through the reforms (*e.g.* Bruhn, Zajac, and Al-Kazemi 2001). Therefore, it could be argued that power-sharing enables higher employee involvement, which in turn creates a higher level of commitment as the individual adopts a supportive perception of change.

This would also resonate with psychological studies, assuming that an employee's normative and affective commitment to change is related to three outcome variables: their (i) behavioral and (ii) creative support for change, as well as their (iii) withdrawal from their organization. Following their line of argumentation, these factors are likely to influence the success of the changes' process since it inclines the individual to become behaviorally engaged in the operative implementation (*e.g.*, Heifetz and Laurie 2001; Herscovitch and Meyer 2002; Kotter and Cohen 2002; Shin, M. Taylor, and Seo 2012). The conjecture could thus be made that such reactions are likely to be linked to a positive perception on part of the employee that effectively supports the change. As a result, involvement levels would increase.

Both behavioral and creative are presumed to display differing consequences of an employee's involvement in change. Whereas behavioral support for change is understood as an active demonstration of support, *e.g.* by adhering to formal requirements or going through extraordinary lengths to make the change successful (Herscovitch and Meyer 2002), creative support is meant to cover the extent to which employees develop innovative ideas that align with the spirit of the change (we will refer to them as friends of change) (*see* Heifetz and Laurie 2001). Against this backdrop, employees who were normatively and affectively committed to change were found to translate their feelings of obligation to back up any efforts. In the same vein, they translated their personal confidence in the merits of change into "concrete supportive behaviors" (Shin, M. Taylor, and Seo 2012, p. 733). By the same token, strong normative commitments to change, both on the top and low staff levels, were found to be strong incentives to invest time and cognitive resources in order to generate and suggest ideas. This, in turn, would increase the level of change effectiveness (*see* Eisenberger, Fasolo, and Davis-LaMastro 1990). Accordingly, these results lend support to the initial assumption that normative and affective commitment are predictors for behavioral and creative support for change. Yet, neither of them entirely preempts organizational resistance (Shareef 1994).

With rising levels of frustration and lacking involvement, the inclination to withdraw from the organization altogether increases. Hence, ill-performed change efforts can exhibit higher employee turnovers than those succeeding in getting the majority of employees to pull together. Indeed, several studies confirm that concomitant radical changes or alterations in work routines and systems may cause employees to consider resigning from their jobs or transferring to other organizations, perceiving the change as something threatening (Fugate, Kinicki, and Prussia 2008; Lee et al. 1996). Then again, employees who display a strong sense of obligation, *i.e.* normative commitment, can be less prone to leaving, regardless of whether or not they experience uncertainty, anxiety, or additional workload caused by the change (Shin, M. Taylor, and Seo 2012). The same applies to

those who see themselves reaping the long-term benefits upon affective commitment. As a result, obligations feeding on both normative and affective behavior are assumed to be negatively related to organizational exit (Shin, M. Taylor, and Seo 2012). With this as a foundation, we will now shift focus to cultural dynamics similarly setting the tone for resistance and the human experience with change.

2.2.2. Cultural Aspects, Resistance, and the Human Experience

Modifying organizational (sub-)systems has been found to be contributing to implementing a participative organizational culture and shaping the pace of change (Shareef, 1994). Most coalitions and roadmaps are beset with high structural complexities and cultural challenges. Both exert a significant impact on the outcome of change (*e.g.*, Zeffane 1996, Bolman and Deal 2017).

Due to the strict hierarchical structure of public sector organizations, organizational culture tends to be mainly based on command, duty, and departmental task forces. As a result, the staff enjoys little incentives to leave a personal imprint on the system's design and administration. Meanwhile, the inherent subsystems spawn the development of varying subcultures and communities. Hence, there is no one-size-fits-all-approach to managing organizational change, as all reforms must be directed at a *network* of subsystems containing individuals with different views of the organization and reality. Therefore, capacity development for change similarly needs to pay attention to aspects of organizational (sub)culture and the humans reciting within. After all, these factors are often decisive determinants of internal interactions, cohesion, and the ultimate outcome of change (Adelman and L. Taylor 2007; Reinholz and Apkarian 2018).

Accordingly, corporate culture is gauged through the social dimension of the personnel's compacts (*e.g.*, Strebel 1996; Senior and J. Fleming 2006), affecting everyone regardless of level, subsystem, or location. This would also mean that these cross-level social interactions endow said corporate cohesion (Reinholz and Apkarian 2018) while maximizing the potential for overall commitment if the change is communicated and executed properly.

Within this context, many researchers have studied the concepts of resistance and cynicism. How an employee greets a change usually comes down to how it is perceived: is the change done *by* me or *to* me? (Kanter 1985). This can clearly show what change usually becomes about the humans experiencing it themselves. Studies show that people's reaction to change can usually be predicted, traits such as self-esteem, risk tolerance, and need to achieve usually play a big part in the individual's reaction (Oreg 2006). Furthermore, initial insecurity and fear that is not picked up by management can quickly lead to fierce resistance (Dent and Goldberg 1999). Some researchers, like Peter Flemning and André Spicer (2003) further dive into the human perspective and describe how poorly managed change can psychologically affect an organization's staff and culture. They state that human subjectivity cannot be separated from the organization and the concept of power. People's views cannot be controlled by management, but their thoughts of the organization can be influenced by culture management, even though this may have the opposite effect and lead people to be cynical. These employees can have a disenchanted effect on the entire workplace culture and invoke resistance or indifference towards any change endeavor.

Therefore, it is pivotal to evolve language and methodology for change that is generally consistent with norms, values, and underlying beliefs that form the interactions and therewith culture of the organization. Otherwise, any transformation efforts will likely be subject to regression (Kotter 1996) as they turn out to be incompatible with present (sub)systems. Beer et al. (Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector 1990) further indicate that this especially holds for longer running change processes since a direct confrontation with the respective organization and context-specific behavior is necessary to sustain the change in the long-term. The better the performance of leadership and human resources interventions, the higher the probability for sustainable success (Jashapara 2004). The reason is simple: once the change is enrooted in the organizational culture, the effective implementation can hopefully bestow credibility onto the key agents. As a result, higher acceptance for further adjustments in internal systems, structures, and policies increase overall engagement and shorten the period for project realization.

From the lens of public management reforms, it thus follows that organizations must build a deeper understanding of (sub)system cultures and their interconnections while updating their strategy to become better at managing change. This requires a constant conceptualization of organizational transformation as a relatively normal phenomenon and, as a continuous process, instead of approaching reforms with trepidation. To this end, other factors such as training and development can assist in managing knowledge more effectively in order to change into a learning organization that constantly enhances its understanding of change and system congruence and allegiance. Based upon this knowledge, capacities to internalize reforms can be increased and thus enable the adoption of a continuous change process through communication and integration of social and cultural issues (Clarke and Garside 1997). Implicit in such an integrative approach is the assumption the role of information sharing and involvement in decision-making would be ways to increase change effectiveness while lessening negative perception. The next sections therefore seek to provide more detailed knowledge about whether this holds.

2.2.3. Resource-Based Employee Commitment to Change

According to several researchers, managers' purposeful actions are often impeded by resource constraints that limit the capacity to invoke the planned changes. Especially public sector organizations are often perceived as slowly adapting to or even resisting change. Although many public organizations seek increased capacity, *i.e.* the ability to get things done, change is not usually regarded as the means to the end to achieve it. Hence, it follows that sufficient resources to support the process are necessary preconditions for successful change. Conversely, failure to provide sufficient resources in support of planned changes often results in higher levels of stress for those affected by the change, or even neglect of core organizational activities and functions (Fernandez and H. G. Rainey 2006). Resources are here considered as "those objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued in their own right or that are valued because they act as conduits to the achievement or protection of valued resources" (Hobfoll 2001, p. 339). While many organizational assets could be recognized as "resources", this thesis places particular focus

on (i) information sharing and (ii) training and development as the main system-relevant capacities. Therefore, we have subdivided this section into two separate paragraphs, each highlighting their respective importance for this case.

2.2.3.1. Information Sharing

One important factor many researchers claim can help prevent negative attitudes or even resistance during change is a constant top-down dialogue and information sharing. Several researchers have noted the importance of not only planning the change but also the communication around it (Fairhurst 1993; J. Ford and L. Ford 1995; Dixon 1998; Simonsson 2006). The need for employees to make sense of and understand the change can easily be forgotten in a top management view of communication, even though many studies show that "grassroots" campaigns can create a stronger and more solid vision for the entire change process. The precondition for this vision to justify the change endeavor is however to give it a meaning that employees understand and support. If it does not translate into real actions, it merely remains a lip service (Platen 2006) and the individual interpretation and perception of the communicated changes fail to induce a supportive attitude.

This is especially true for large-scale systemic changes affecting the daily work routines (Svenningsson and Sörgärde 2020). In contrast to minor changes, extensive reforms can cause increased levels of stress when a lack of information and transparency exposes employees to personal job insecurity. Against this background, the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll 2001) suggests that the scope of resource capacity (in this case information) tends to shape an individual's reactions to and perception of organizational changes. In the face of a potential or actual loss, individuals are more prone to experiencing stress. As a result, previous patterns of bolstering and retaining the (remaining) resource are likely to be amplified. Seeing the world as innately threatening, employees thus resort to utilizing their set of personal strengths and social attachments in order to survive in the midst of changes (Hobfoll 2001).

Other studies *e.g.* by Smollan (2015) show a clear nexus between the employees' perceived stress levels and in which phase of a change the organization is at the moment. The implementation phase is shown as being much more stressful than the planning phase and the aftermath. In the study, employees cited a fear of losing their position, job, or an increased workload as reasons for their stress (*see* also Hobfoll 2001; Hiatt 2006). These types of fears can be closely linked to potential change fatigue, frustration or even resistance that are likely to impede the organizational ability to regulate stress in the absence of certain resources such as information (Abraham 2000; Brown and Cregan 2008; Hobfoll 2001; Wheaton 1983).

Viewing an organization in this light increases the pressure on functioning communication. Therefore, top management needs the lower hierarchy staff on their side for a smooth implementation and change process. One often-used term, in this context, is the *change agent*. In a study conducted by Antoniou, Ioannidis, and Varsakelis (2019), the statistics clearly show the benefit of planned communication through change agents, with a result of a possible acceleration of adoption of change by 80 %, compared to no planning or little planning. The study also shows that change

agents do not need to be managers. Instead, it underscores that effective change agents can be found lower down the hierarchy, usually being more approachable.

This leads to the final point of internal communication in change processes. It does not only concern what is being said, but also where and how. The channel where the information can be found is important, as well as when the communication happens (Platen 2006). Effective information can be spread through e-mail and intranets. However, researchers such as Platen also point out that these methods cannot stand alone. Platen (2006) argues that employees can become passive and stop reading the information sent to them. Communication regarding bigger changes needs to be understood and discussed, preferably in meetings (Platen 2006). The overall willingness for participation during the planning and execution stages was furthermore found to be higher if leadership relies on feedback loops that are more likely to promote enthusiasm and understanding among employees (Lewis 2003). The combination of employee understanding for the change purpose, the right leadership skills, as well as a comprehensively designed and communicated plan thus increase the likelihood of employees being more perceptible to the change. As a result, it would decrease risks of OCC or resistance (Torppa and K. Smith 2011). The same is assumed to be the case for promoting employee skills through training initiatives that may similarly bestow legitimacy onto organizational leadership. For now, the next section will place the main emphasis on the value of training and development for encouraging behavioral support for change. The discussion on how leadership figures into this will be resumed at a later stage.

2.2.3.2. Training and Development

Acquiring and retaining new expertise and understanding across all levels are key factors to tackle newly emerging challenges effectively and make the changes last (e.g Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector 1990). As training should be a part of organizational development, these measures are commonly understood to support successful change management strategies. In order to secure the same or at least a similar level of knowledge, these services[2] need to be accessible to all employees. Otherwise, asymmetric distribution of competences may cause social rifts, jealous sentiment and, in the end, inefficient coordination (Jashapara 2004). As such surroundings significantly shape employment experiences, this would in turn determine the employee's evaluative judgment stemming from the personal perception of management's effort towards equal knowledge building. Accordingly, levels of OCC would increase and employees would revert to old working patterns. As a result, they fail to utilize newly acquired skills (Armenakis, Self, and Schraeder 2007; Kanter 1985; Reinholz and Apkarian 2018).

Especially when new operative, *e.g.* computerized systems are sought to be established, comprehensive training is usually regarded as indispensable regardless of increased costs. Incurred costs should rather be seen as an investment allowing people to benefit from the systems in place. This, in

[2]Service in this sense can be equally regarded as a resource. In turn, training as an intangible resource itself requires additional supportive resources for its realization.

turn, can show a positive effect on both internal efficiency and effectiveness (Jarrar, Al-Mudimigh, and Zairi 2000). While such investments need to be implemented with a sense of proportion, they can yet bridge the gap between knowledge, skills, and responses (*see* Hiatt's ADKAR model,[3] 2006). Carter (2008) argued along similar lines, positing that skill development is one of the key success factors for any change process.

As part of active participation strategies, such training has been found to be most effective in streamlining processes, but also in communicating the main purpose as it appeals to the individual's sense of obligation and responsibility (Hom et al. 2009; Kotter and Cohen 2002; Shin, M. Taylor, and Seo 2012). These strategies essentially capitalize on self-discovery when promoting, for instance, enactive mastery (build-up of skills and knowledge), vicarious learning (observation and learning), or active decision-making (Armenakis and Harris 2002). The most fruitful programs hereby build on self-managed learning, *e.g.* via internal e-learning platforms that provide mutual assistance among employees (Reid and Barrington 2000). Besides showing favorable effects on employee learning, they are highly cost-efficient and mass-reaching strategies, facilitating change management plans. To secure that these will be followed through, it is further advisable to make career planning processes conditional upon maximizing organizational performance and continuous learning. Although such measures are not a silver bullet for success, they may increase participation rates, as it offers the prospect of improving the personal resource capital (*see* Sect. 2.2.3). By contrast, in the absence of such incentives, readiness, and acceptance for change are likely to suffer, thus taking a toll on overall change effectiveness (Self and Schraeder 2009).

2.2.4. External Support and Political Alliances

Scientific evidence is replete with prescriptive models that advise executing consultants and CEOs on how to approach successful organizational change management. The previous discussion has shown that all of them are essentially related to internal processes, structures, resources, employee involvement, and leadership. Each of them is assumed to have an effect on overall effectiveness and efficiency in change processes in organizations. And while these presumptions make a reasonable case, they yet neglect the importance of external support forces financing respective resources, that streamline internal processes and enable top-management alignment.

More importantly, changes in the public sector hinge on the degree of support from political overseers and other key external stakeholders coalescing around the perceived *need* for change. This also figures prominently into successful change efforts (Abramson and Lawrence 2001; R. B.

[3] The acronym stands for (i) *awareness* of the need for change, (ii) *desire* to participate, (iii) *knowledge* on how to change, (iv) the *ability* to integrate skills and knowledge, and (v) reinforcement to sustain the change. Accordingly, the model mainly focuses on the organization's ability to implement and direct the required skills and behavior. Apart from physical capabilities, this includes the availability of resources and removal of potential roadblocks to enable the individuals to embrace the change. In short, individual commitment is a critical part of any change process (Jaros 2010). As Jashapara (2004) points out, this is particularly important for knowledge and service-based organizations, as they heavily rely on individual willingness to achieve superior performance.

Denhardt and J. V. Denhardt 1999; Harokopus 2001; Mazmanian and Sabatier 1989; Rossotti 2005; Wallin 1997). Their impact on final outcomes depends in part on their ability to control the flow of said resources to public organizations and convey a comprehensive plan that explains the need for change. However, as these are usually created under the aegis of highly powerful political stakeholders, planned projects run a higher risk of representing a "political fix", solely reflecting the interest of first-tier management. In such instances, genuine commitment is likely to decrease, thus risking the failure of the change effort. For this reason, change initiatives depend on powerful guiding coalitions that provide endogenous support, focus on power relations, and optimize the dynamics of the organizational landscape. In doing so, they act as drivers or facilitators of organizational reforms. They similarly would bestow legitimacy onto the effort of top-management while mobilizing the resources and emotional support necessary to incline organizational members to subscribe to the transformation (Carnall 1995; Kets de Vries and Balazs 1999; Kotter 1995; Yukl 2002).

Many scholars therefore posit that organizational politics and commitment to change are significantly correlated to each other (*e.g.*, Bolman and Deal 2017; Bouckenooghe 2012). Especially in the public sector, this factor may heavily influence perceptions, internal social systems, and the feasibility of final implementation. The latter is thereby highly contingent on whether leading political appointees are in office who have sufficient knowledge and skills required for managing the transformation. On the other hand, failures occur because of significant deficits in political skills among executing change agents (*e.g.*, Jashapara 2004; Fernandez and H. G. Rainey 2006). The result may be a widespread resistance among employees and other stakeholders. Prudent senior executives are therefore advised to form dominant coalitions that can exert a powerful leverage on disgruntled staff and induce overall conformity (Bolman and Deal 2017). The level of OCC may thus decrease if constant cooperation between top-level career civil servants and appointed executives is in place that appeases potential cynic sentiment.

The political context in which public organizations operate, however, constrains the opportunities of attaining support from governmental authorities and political actors, and hence confronts leading managers with serious challenges (Golembiewski 1985 cited in Fernandez and H. G. Rainey 2006). Most public organizations experience regular administration turnovers or have multiple political masters in office, who may not always pursue the same objectives or possess the right expertise. Moreover, politically appointed executives tend to maintain very weak relationships with career civil servants. Despite these difficulties, public managers must demonstrate skill in obtaining support from powerful external actors in order to smoothen the process and implement the changes in the long-term.

However, internal alliances and coalitions do not yet offer a magic bullet for overcoming resistance and instituting changes successfully if *e.g.* shortages of key players, the wrong mix of expertise, lacking leadership, or adverse reputations of allies make both purpose and efforts ring hollow. Buchanan et al. (1999) further note that the intensity of political dynamics is likely to increase with more radical, complex, and wide-ranging changes. In light of such considerations,

sound management and leadership skills become all the more important to guiding coalitions (*see* Kotter 1996). By contrast, large egos and recalcitrant players tend to damage trust, sow resentments and impede any advances. Conversely, powerful coalitions were found to act as enablers of the change process, or, in a weaker form, as system-supporting addendums that do not show any indication of actively blocking change (Fernandez and H. G. Rainey 2006). Provided these are in place, it increases the leeway for public organizations to increase both performance and current capacities (Fernandez and H. G. Rainey 2006).

The interplay between leadership, systems, services, and stakeholders must thereby be seen in the wider organizational context in order to discern entrenched interests and decisive determinants for consensus-building within the different subsystems. This is particularly important with regards to managing oppositions to change, as it requires a combination of incentives that facilitate processes and enable different interest groups to see their own benefits within their "milieu" (*see* Fernandez and H. G. Rainey 2006). These may be financial, carrying with them the associated risks that organizations can buy the substance but not the vision of change. Nonmonetary incentives, on the other hand, are often more powerful, including learning opportunities, merit-based systems that reward performance or creative working environments (*see* Sect. 2.2.3.2).

Upon utilization of such incentives, employees were found to show a higher inclination to exhibit a shift in attitude and perceptions of reforms (*see* Abraham 2000; Brown and Cregan 2008). As a result, this increased overall organizational performance (Fernandez and H. G. Rainey 2006). However, in public sector organizations, implementing such incentives can get somewhat fuzzy since governmental organizations oftentimes struggle with defining and measuring their targets. In the interest of maximizing utility, guiding coalitions are therefore increasingly tasked with strengthening local capacities for visioning, planning, and definition of results when assessing the political landscape.

2.2.5. The Role of Leadership

The last sections have highlighted power-sharing as an essential prerequisite to increase levels of involvement, however, the question remains what this requires top management to do throughout such processes apart from having sufficient expertise in the field. This final section therefore draws together the main implications for the role and tasks of top management.

Following Black and Gregersen (1997), the structured dimension sets the goals and purpose according to which task forces need to be directed in enterprises. If these structures are not sufficiently executed, resistance is likely to penetrate the organizational system. Any occurrence of such kind is defined through constant interactions (2009). The structural nature of organizations therefore extends to a social system (Nastase, Giuclea, and Bold 2012) in which both parties, *i.e.* employees and employers, are mutually dependent on each other (Bolman and Deal 2017). Since organizational changes exert a considerable impact on both, it is important to understand the degree to which top and middle management are affected in order to manage the process effectively and raise the change readiness level (Neves 2009; Porras and Silvers 1991). This would also resonate

with critiques issued by *e.g.* Hiatt and Creasey (2003), arguing that the focus needs to be extended such that it includes both a business *and* a people dimension.

Doing so, yet requires members across levels to incorporate the new policies into their daily routines (Burke and Litwin 1992; Carnall 1995; Greiner 1967; Johnson and Leavitt 2001; Kotter 1995; D. A. Nadler and M. B. Nadler 1998; Yukl 2002). While some scholars have emphasized that behaviors of disparate actors can be coordinated by leveraging close personal ties and pursuing informal communication influence (Bardach 1977; O'Toole 1989), others have stressed the need to have a guiding coalition to back up the change (*see* Sect. 2.2.4).

In public sector organizations, both actions usually involve a cooperation between top-level career civil servants and appointed executives. If continued throughout the process, this cooperation can induce new patterns of behavior, thus displacing old ones over the long haul (Edmondson, Bohmer, and Pisano 2001; Greiner 1967; Kotter 1995; Lewin 1947). Nevertheless, the practicability of such approaches may be subject to considerable obstacles, *e.g.* if communication lags or structures, processes, and human resource management practices are poorly aligned (*see* Armenakis, Harris, and Feild 1999).

To avert such roadblocks, Judson (1991), advises a constant data collection and monitoring of the implementation process to keep managers informed about the extent to which organizational members have adopted the change. These activities should continue even after the transformation is fully adopted to prevent that organizational members relapse into old patterns of behavior. Likewise, this requires managerial leaders to verify and communicate the need for subsystem congruence while offering a clear direction (Abramson and Lawrence 2001; Armenakis, Harris, and Feild 1999; Burke and Litwin 1992; Harokopus 2001; Kotter 1995; Lambright 2001; Laurent 2003; Rossotti 2005). At the same time, set goals on both the subsystem and system-level increase the ability to implement officials to change policy objectives and provide a standard of accountability. The worse the execution or communication of purpose, the more negative the emotional perception can become (Kotter and Schlesinger 2008). As a result, the desired transformation may disintegrate into a set of unrelated and diffuse directives and activities (Fernandez and H. G. Rainey 2006).

Due to the complexities involved when monitoring the entire organization, many scholars argue that an integrative, comprehensive approach meant to achieve subsystem congruence and allegiance might be the more reasonable strategy to induce a fundamental change in behavior (*e.g.*; Adelman and L. Taylor 2007; Reiser and Dempsey 2007; Hom et al. 2009; Kotter and Cohen 2002; Kuipers et al. 2014; Pettigrew, Woodman, and Cameron 2001; Reinholz and Apkarian 2018; Senge 1990; B. Taylor 2016). Referring back to the initial typologies of change (*see* Sect. 2.1), managerial leaders must therefore also make strategic systemic changes in the subsystems within the organization. The probability to generate a successful outcome naturally rises with the totality of subsystems, adapting the reforms and thereby providing sufficient force to bring about organizational transformation. By contrast, a lack of understanding of the structure and nature of the interconnections among subsystems can cause additional costs and a longer implementation period than anticipated as the momentum for building a broader array of changes declines (Hannan, Polos, and Carroll 2003).

Therefore, Robertson, Roberts, and Porras (Robertson, Roberts, and Porras 1993) emphasize that any change should begin with systematic changes in the work setting in order to "ensure that the various work setting changes are congruent with each other, sending consistent signals to organization members about the new behaviors desired" (p. 629).

According to Robertson and Seneviratne (Robertson and Seneviratne 1995), these dynamics may be further aggravated, as change agents in the public sector exercise less discretion than their private sector counterparts and therefore complicate the achievement of subsystem allegiance. Moreover, the usual lack of leadership continuity and stability raises additional challenges given the frequent and rapid executive turnover in governmental agencies compared to business executives.

2.2.6. Summary

To conclude this chapter, the box below summarizes the most relevant implications we deduce from our prior discussions on public change management reforms. As this knowledge is not solely restricted to public sector organizations, these conclusions may just as well apply to general change management in private sector counterparts.

(1) ***(Public) change management is not entirely understood:*** The issue of change demonstrates a relatively light treatment in practical reform situations. Consequently, there is little grasp of the issue, oftentimes leading to an insufficient understanding of the constraints embedded in bureaucratic systems, organizational culture, and the structure of human interactions. Each of these factors can be a stumbling block to change management processes. Especially the strict organizational structures characteristic of public sector organizations inhibit top-down communication or grasp for how employees experience their surroundings during changes. As a result, the provision of the right resources is essentially founded on weak ground, unless these are accompanied by organizational inducements such as training, mentoring, or leadership development. While "soft" organizational aspects, such as culture, remain a paramount determinant of the real direction of change, those skill-building efforts hold a greater value to clarify structural roles and get stakeholders on board with planned interventions. For this reason, it is all the more important to define a clear vision/plan for change initiatives to maximize the understanding of how it impacts the larger development goals. These structural issues will be referred to as "hard" factors of change management.

(2) ***(Public) change management must recognize employee perception:*** Most employees are never completely passive to changes in that it always happens with employees, but to varying degrees. Successful outcomes can be maximized if management is dedicated to inducing widespread behavioral support. Therefore, employee perception of change needs to be addressed early to prevent cynicism, stress, and resistance. Managers can rely on constant dialogue, inclusion strategies, and an understatement of the organizational culture. While it gets employees to work with the change, it further enables a general understanding of how the individual can impact the effectiveness of "hard" structural outcomes.

(3) ***(Public) change management is dependent on alliances**:* Organizational change is difficult to conceptualize for public sector organizations as much as it is difficult to apply. Therefore, the codification of empirical knowledge to guide the operational manager becomes a considerable boon to this process, as it grants leaders better opportunities to engage in "a great venture of exploration, risk, discovery, and change, without any comprehensive maps for guidance" (Senge 1990). Beyond the mapping of the process's steps, constant consultation with main agents, partners, and beneficiaries is key to ensure that support is widely disseminated and effective. In short, guiding the change step-by-step is critical to its success, with internal (human) resources playing the primary role to facilitate the process.

(4) ***(Public) change management results are unpredictable**:* Due to the rapidly changing environment (*e.g.* digitally and politically), organizations must learn to move quicker. However, it is often difficult for leaders and managers to persevere with both the focus and outcome of change initiatives. Most of them lack an adequate understanding and know-how of managing change in large-scale organizations. Especially in the public sector, change management endeavors hold widely unpredictable developments as opinions tend to converge on several causes that may derail change efforts (*e.g.* Pascale 1999). Shifting roles and capacities of different actors similarly induce a shift in the existing bases of power. Hence, incorporating risk assessments and anticipating an initial instability is a necessary precondition of organizational change strategies. These must aim to keep the boundaries of said initial instability in check through managing expectations and concerns. Also in this regard, it is pivotal to exercise regular and open stakeholder consultations that offer the opportunity for constant feedback and learning mechanisms to identify possibly adverse perceptions early on and enable a better adaptation during the course of the change process.

(5) ***(Public) change management usually remains unsupported**:* If leadership and middle management lack motivation and commitment, change processes often tend to unravel and disable the sustainability of implementation. Rather, it requires a *cross-departmental response* that hinges on the buy-in of all subsystems. An early identification of potential sources of resistance is a must. Leadership must face up to the reality that change produces winners and losers. Since organizations are also social systems, this similarly involves addressing the values, norms, and cultural aspects of relevant stakeholders both inside and outside the organization.

CHAPTER 3

THE CASE

> *"The reorganization has in many aspects been much more complex than we anticipated beforehand."* – The Swedish Agency for Public Management (2016)

The described patterns and linkages between structural effectiveness and personal perception will now be investigated based on a sample of employees working in the Swedish police force. While the introduction has briefly mapped out the case at hand, we would like to provide the reader with a more detailed description of the specific change project and characteristic organizational patterns.

The Swedish police force is a national public service organization with roughly 30 500 employees. Before 2015 the police were organized into 21 districts, all of which were connected to the Swedish counties. The districts responsible for their county were led by a county police commissioner and answered to the national level as well as to the parliament. The latter also appointed the management positions, such as the county police commissioners (Polisorganisationskommittén 2012). This falls much in line with the strict hierarchical organization presented in the knowledge framework commonly found in the public sector (Adelman and L. Taylor 2007; Reinholz and Apkarian 2018). When reviewing the change presented below, it is evident that it also closely conforms to the assumption that change in public organizations hinges on the degree of support from political overseers and other key external stakeholders (Abramson and Lawrence 2001).

From 2015 to 2016 the Swedish police force underwent a major organizational change nationwide. The 21 districts disappeared and the whole organization became centralized in order to streamline management and administrative processes. Therefore, the project attempted to address the long-standing criticism that the police were ineffective and lacked sufficient competencies in solving cases (Stiernstedt 2012; Holgersson 2017). By facilitating the collaboration between districts, the government thus aimed to make the police force more efficient. This matter particularly gained in importance after the Engla murder case in 2008 where the competencies and communication within the police were criticized by the victim's family. Their claim was however denied (Svea hovrätt judgment No. T 3967-13).

Following a document provided by the Swedish Agency for Public Management (Statskontoret), the reform followed a very clear structure and plan for implementation. It was categorized into three phases: (1) planning and formulation of the starting points, (2) preparations, and operationalization (3) implementation. The phases were introduced in a timeline stretching from 2010 until 2016. For better reference, please refer to Chart 3.1.

The 21 districts were eventually replaced by seven bigger regions instead, though losing their autonomy they held before. Since then, the police is working under the new name "The Police Authority". To reach its efficiency goal, the organization further went through a major digitization initiative called PUST (*Polisens Utredningsstöd*) that was taken on simultaneously.

For this study, we visited Lund's police station which is a part of Region South. The region stretches from Kalmar to Ystad. Presently, the next change project is planned for 2024, envisaging to recruit 10 000 additional police officers to the authority in order to maximize organizational capacity. According to the Motion, this upgrade in personnel is necessary since Sweden records considerably fewer police officers per resident than many other countries (Motion 2019/20).

This specific case is especially interesting since it is viewed as a very drastic and quick change when looking at the scope of the change and the number of people that are affected. We want to integrate the employees' stories and experiences to draw conclusions about the effects that grand organizational changes had on employees. The next chapter will shed further light on the specific research context of the case selection while introducing our methodological approach.

Figure 3.1.: Chart (NR.) of the reorganization in the Swedish Police force

Phase	Time	Event
Phase 1 planning and formulation of the starting points	July 2010	The government appoints the police organization committee
	March 2012	The police organization committee proposes that the police should be reorganized
	December	Parliament decides that the police will be reorganized on 1 Jan 2015. The government appoints the implementation committee - the police coordination team
Phase 2 Operationalization and Preparation	October 2013	The Police coordination team makes decisions regarding the overall organization and management
	May 2014	Parliament makes necessary changes in the law The police coordination makes decisions regarding details in the organization
	June 2014	The police coordination gives the newly appointed management the responsibility to oversee the implementation in their region/department
	December	The police coordination decides on a common management model
Phase 3 Implementation	January 2015	The police authority is formed (called new situation 1)
	October 2015	Region Stockholm gets reorganized according to the police coordination's suggestion (called new situation 2)
	January 2016	Region West in new situation 2
	April	Region South in new situation 2
	May 2016	Region North in new situation 2
	September	Region East in new situation 2
	November	Region center in new situation 2
	December	Region Bergslagen in new situation 2

Source: The Swedish Agency for Public Management (2016)

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

In this chapter, we introduce our methodological framework for conducting this research. For this purpose, both philosophical and methodological considerations were taken into account. The objective of the following chapter is to review and justify these considerations while explaining our use of an abductive approach. In this context, we will present the primary assumptions of an interpretivism and social constructionism paradigm, on which the ensuing data analysis is based. Moreover, it will delineate the main data coding schemes and benefits provided by a grounded theory approach and thus aims to give the reader a basic understanding of how the guiding categories used for the data analysis are derived. The chapter will then conclude with some closing remarks on the study's limitations along with relevant considerations on issues reflexivity, transferability, and ethical issues. Before we start delving into our epistemological underpinnings, the introductory section first seeks to describe the basic research context and our reasons for the specific case selection.

4.1. Case Selection

The in-depth single case of the Southern Swedish police force was selected for several reasons; firstly to investigate whether individual employee perception can impact the outcome of large-scale public sector changes. Using a grounded theory approach, this should eventually enable us to draw relevant connections between the different layers in the organization with the individual placed as the central connecting point. In conjunction with intensive interviews, this method enabled us to gauge potential interrelations between human experiences and emerging biases towards changes and reform outcomes while providing conjectures about organizational dynamics during public change processes. More importantly, we sought to develop a thorough scholarly understanding of the processes of invasive change implementations. This also included the role of management in the reconfiguration of the organization's top-down communication channels and resource base (Easterby-Smith, Li, and Bartunek 2009).

The case approach further facilitated the use of rich observational material (Locke 2008) to extract relevant data and appraise the extent to which the process has been implemented. By doing so, we could identify the key variables and relationships between them, and thus explore to which degree the recommended strategic roadmaps are transferable to this specific case (Eisenhardt 1989).

However, the limited scope of this research (seven interviews) restricts us in aiming for general representativeness and should therefore be primarily considered as an inductive, qualitative, single case study.

4.2. Research Philosophy and Design

Our research grounded in the ontological perspective of social constructionism. Therefore, we work under the assumption that "[...] social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors" (Bryman 2012, p. 33). Applying this perspective, we see the concept of change as much too complex a phenomenon to be measured objectively (Wilson 2014). Instead of using a positivist epistemology perspective, we will work with an interpretive perspective, holding the assumption of contextual multiple realities (Harrison et al. 2017).

Using this approach allows us to try to understand the employees, and appreciate their experiences and realities, even if they differ from one another. By interviewing them and listening to their stories, we seek to understand how organizational change can affect people inside the organization and their perceptions toward coming changes. These perceptions are assumed to eventually determine willingness for participation and thus shape employee attitude towards the past and upcoming reform.

As the focus lies heavily on examining the participants' social views, the study closely follows the interpretive perspective.

4.3. Data Collection

Based on this research approach, the data collection relied on intensive interviewing as it provides the opportunity for higher flexibility during the research process. By granting room for unplanned, yet context-relevant backgrounds (Charmaz 2014), we aimed at getting a rich insight into the employees' understandings of the reform that the police in Sweden underwent from 2015 until recently. It further allowed us to understand what makes change successful from the perspectives of the employees. Generally, qualitative methods seek to explore subjective experiences while being concerned with an interpretive openness. By connecting this approach to the method of grounded theory (Charmaz 2006), we thus allow for unexpected findings to emerge and integrate into our data analysis (Bryman 2012). More concrete explanations on the benefits of qualitative research will be provided under Sect. 4.5 linking it to the methodological implications.

4.3.1. Intensive Interviews

Given our research interest, it is inherently important to let the employees speak about their own reality at their own pace and without too much guidance. For this reason, we used the qualitative method of intensive interviews (Charmaz 2006). Intensive interviews rely on flexible and open-ended questions to let the participant answer from their own point of view. Accordingly, it allows for a semi-structured approach that elicits more open responses from the participants. This method specifically serves the interest of focusing on the individual perspective rather than the collective notion of organizational change.

In total, we conducted seven (30-40 min each) with employees at the police department in southern Sweden. Our selection of the sample of participants should be seen in connection to our research aims (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). As we are trying to capture different perceptions and trace their correspondence to potential future change inclination across organizational levels, we conducted intensive interviews with employees filling different hierarchical positions at the South Sweden police department. These ranged from precinct, investigation or team leaders to patrolling officers and administrative staff. This should give the opportunity to explore whether there was a difference between experiences, based on hierarchy level.

Table 4.1.: Overview of Interviewees

Interviewee	**Hierarchy Level**
Sam	Precinct Leader
Alex	Patrolling Officer
Kim	Administrative Staff
Elliot	Investigation Leader
Taylor	Administrative Staff
Jamie	Team Leader
Drew	Team Leader

Note: In order to protect our interviewees' identities we purposefully do not disclose their gender here.

The interviews were spread over two days with a month in between, giving us time to reflect on the interviews, their structure, and questions. A minimum of 15 minutes in-between every interview gave us the ability to discuss the content and our initial take on the previous interview. This was done in order to identify whether we picked up on common themes to which we both attached high importance. It also allowed us to come up with additional questions for upcoming interviews and thus tailor our questionnaire to possibly relevant issues that had not been covered before. During these reflections, we similarly discussed our observations of the participants' nonverbal reactions, which shed additional light on the potential importance of recurring themes. We occasionally noticed a disconnect between the interviewees' answer and their reactions, something we consider important. For instance, sometimes the participant told us everything was fine but laughed sarcastically at the same time. As also outlined by Charmaz (2006), this form of nonverbal cues could indicate more about the experience of that participant than their actual statements.

Before the interviews, we designed a questionnaire, a guide for us as interviewers to follow. The use of open-ended questions should hereby ensure that we did not color the study too much with our biases. Rather, it should encourage personal descriptions and stories provided by each employee partaking in the study and therefore serves the interpretive, constructivist approach.

Moreover, all questions were categorized by theme in order to facilitate a coherent dialogue or jump in-between questions during the interviews if the context allowed it. To retrace their respective line of argumentation, all interviews were taped and subsequently transcribed. This was crucial for the later categorization and analysis of the answers.

4.3.2. Document Analysis

To complement the individual statements, we further analyzed documents regarding the specific organizational change. Brochures, informational emails, posters, and media coverage could be categorized with the help of grounded theory. As Bowen (2009) states, we see documents as providing rich historical insights to the change project from when it occurred.

All documents came from the top managerial level or external media and are written to the staff or the general public. The formal documents all aim to explain and inform about the strategic plan of the change and its implementation and the articles from newspapers sought to understand and sometimes criticize the change. This serves as a comparison against our interviewees' statements, given they are the receivers of this information. The documents can further assist in understanding the reasoning behind the change and what the practical goal was for its realization.

4.4. Grounded Theory Approach

Many aspects of qualitative research tend to contest the notion of what well-supported research is and what lacks methodological validity. Despite broad epistemological variations, ranging from positivistic to interpretive approaches, qualitative research has grown in the application and use as debates concerning the methodological paradigms between approaches, and questions about the broader practical use of qualitative research continue (Bansal et al. 2012; Denyer and Tranfield 2009). Against this background, grounded theory can be classified as a qualitative research method that responds to the epistemological challenges in obtaining knowledge of the surrounding reality and determining how it has been acquired. The methodology aims to review the collected data and tag recurring concepts with *codes* to extract relevant theoretical concepts. The more often the process of reviewing and coding data is repeated, the more codes can be grouped into concepts and categories. Based on these categories, a theory may be formed. As a result, the ideas developed in the discussion usually do not draw on already established concepts, but seek to discern whether our suggested model reflects the phenomenon under study (Allan 2003). The main distinctive epistemological feature of this approach is therefore the use of inductive reasoning in order to generate an interpretive theory. Moreover, since this research's epistemology is chiefly determined by the primacy of subjectivity over objectivity as the preferred path to knowledge-making, this approach further supports the social constructivist paradigm if we assume that society harbors both an objective and subjective reality (Charmaz 2008). However, since human experience and perception is the focal point for this study, it is subjective by nature. Therefore, we can make no

claim of incorporating objective realities into our analysis. Besides, this would also require us to pinpoint what "objective" exactly is within our research project. We therefore take a relativist position that is not compatible with classical grounded theory since we argue that any theory is always the result of a biased and personal construction. This would build on the epistemological foundation of the constructivist grounded theory (CGT) methods as defined by Charmaz (2008).

Her revised version of classical grounded theory asserts that data and the analytical results are always co-constructed by researcher and participants as a result of their interactions (Charmaz 2000). There would hence be no theory to be discovered if the results are always colored by the researcher's perspectives, preconceptions, interactions, etc. However, we argue that technically no theory is entirely free from those biases. Therefore, we purport that we still produce a theory that is grounded in the obtained data and our interpretations. While we acknowledge that our approach may not comply with the classic way to use grounded theory as suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967), it is still just as valid in contributing to knowledge and developing our understanding of the human perspective of change. After all, a qualitative research approach necessitates the need to account for subjectivities, which is why we argue more in line with Charmaz's view. To broaden the scope for evaluation, the data analysis may further draw on a literature review that consequently allows for multiple perspectives on the assumed realities (Thornberg 2012).

4.4.1. Process of Analysis

The general approach of coding and categorizing our data permits us to find common anchors for our participant's stories. Consistent with the constructionist approach, this does not serve to seek a common truth, but simply aims to conceptualize the gathered data. As the method requires the researcher to start the data collection without a clear hypothesis, the process is inductive in nature and subsequently provides space for the abduction of ideas (Charmaz 2006). The conceptualization and coding of data is thereby guided by our initial research question. Accordingly, we seek to (i) uncover the employee's perception of change and how those perceptions can affect the change itself, or any other future change initiatives, and (ii) explain how we arrived at our conclusions.

Following this dual focus enables both the application and adaptation of various perspectives and methods. As such, it allows us to see the bigger picture in the context setting while applying the results to the broader research agenda of both extant and emerging theory.

The derived categories were based on the most common themes of perceptions among the interviewees. Our main focus maintained on the individuals and their perceptions. We saw it as important to analyze their relationships with others, the organization, and their surrounding. By analyzing the data with a broader scope in mind, we were allowed to postulate possible theories regarding change management. However, this study does not have the resources to investigate whether our theories or assumptions hold. Yet, this possibility will be considered throughout our analysis when we deal with the potential linkages between past experience, current perception, and likely future attitude presumably shaping the outcomes of coming changes.

4.4.2. Data Coding Scheme

Based on Creswell's spiral technique (2013), the raw interview data were analyzed[4] and organized into a preliminary category system and coded protocols to pinpoint recurring themes. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), coding can be understood as the process of conceptualizing data to identify patterns, meanings, and themes from the transcribed data body (*see* also Glaser 1978; Glaser 1992; Berg and Lune 2012). More specifically, we define coding as categorizing segments of data with a short headline that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data. By doing so, the codes should show how to select, separate, and sort data to begin an analytical accounting of them. During its process, the main aim is to develop custom approaches by revisiting preliminary results before moving to the next phase in a circular pattern. As the theoretical sampling constantly draws on the collected data, coding is thus a highly iterative process (*see* Fig. 4.1).

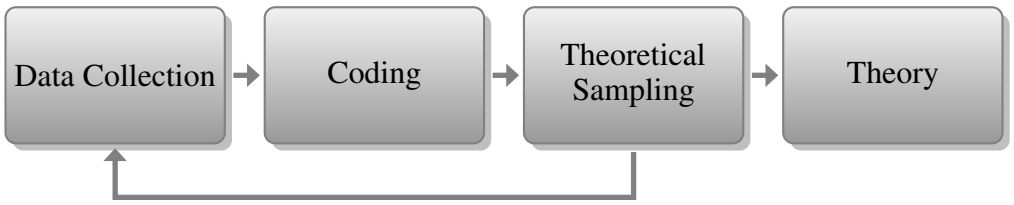


Figure 4.1.: Cyclical Process of Analysis

While there is no ideal or uniform approach to coding, there exists a broad scale of interpretation as to which phases should be included. Research has labeled each stage differently and therefore does not provide a clear-cut roadmap to follow. Charmaz (2014), for instance, defines these stages as initial, focused, axial, and theoretical coding. Adhering to these steps, this research relied on an open, axial, and selective approach as depicted in Tab. 4.2.

After having obtained and transcribed the first set of interview data, the corpus was scanned line by line for recurring words or key phrases throughout the stage of open coding (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). The highlighted terms and key phrases were subsequently categorized to identify reference clusters or topics that became apparent regarding the participants' perception of change and its effect on either the surrounding environment or personal involvement. Based on these observations, marked keywords or phrases were first grouped in separate tables as we looked for similarities and redundancies between identified themes. This charting of topics further allowed for cross-referencing between both participants and questions asked during the interviews. The resulting initial codes were merely provisional since they were derived by following an open approach.

The focused coding phase therefore served as a means using the most significant and most frequent preliminary codes to sift through the set of data and determine central themes (Strauss and Corbin 1998). While linking selected themes or codes together, it helped to conceptualize observed phenomena, specific properties, and their potential interconnections (Charmaz 2014), thus leading to the next phase.

[4] also using memos

Table 4.2.: Coding Phases According to Charmaz (2014)

Phase	**Description**	**Memo Writing**
Transcription	Dialogue transcription of the interviews	√
Initial coding	Collecting recurring concepts by going through phrase-by-phrase	√
Focused coding	Categorization of initial codes to develop focused categories.	√
Axial coding	Specifying properties and dimensions of the categories and identifying conditions, actions, and consequences/outcomes	√
Theoretical coding	Identifying relationships between categories and linking them to existing theories	√

During the axial coding, the specific dimensions and subcategories of each category were then identified and related to one another. These connections were primarily determined by following Strauss' and Corbin's division into condition, action and outcomes (1998, p. 125), *i.e.*: (i) under which conditions certain circumstances emerged,[5] (ii) which actions the participants observed,[6] and (iii) how this shaped the final outcome or individual perception[7] (Strauss and Corbin 1998). As the identification of patterns became clearer with repeated highlighting and cross-referencing, it allowed for a more specific organization and sub-clustering of data. Building on the similarities and themes that emerged during the open coding stage, this process sought to determine potential key success factors relating to the participants' reflective experiences, insights, and observations. This eventually enabled us to reduce the set of data to a manageable amount of remaining clusters while linking categories to subcategories in order to see a coherent picture (Charmaz 2014).

Finally, the sorted and coded work was then used to isolate meaningful patterns that relate to previous public change management research and existing applicable theories in successful reform implementation.

The most recurrent themes that emerged from the coding of observations and interviews fall under five main categories, including (i) *organizational inducements and access to resources*, (ii) *leadership development*, (iii) *perceived personal involvement*, and (iv) *engagement barriers*. The specific properties of each of these categories are indicated in Tab. 4.3, which will serve as the departing and reference point for further analysis in the data section.

[5] *i.e.* questions of why, where, how come, and when while focusing on the situations or circumstances that established the surrounding structure of the change/institution.

[6] *i.e.* questions of how, or to which extent necessary conditions were fulfilled

[7] *i.e.* what happens on account of these actions

4.5. Methodological Implications

Before we continue with a thorough discussion of our findings, a few notes on the study's benefits and limitations are in order. The main aspects we want to shed light on essentially fall into three different categories, including (i) *transferability*, (ii) *reflexivity*, (iii) *validity* and *reliability*, as well as (iii) general *ethical considerations*. All issues shall be delineated in more detail in the following three sections and related to what Tracy (2003) coined the "eight 'big-tent'-criteria for excellent qualitative research". Based on that conceptualization, the main key markers quality in qualitative research should include a (1) worthy topic, (2) rich rigor, (3) sincerity, (4) credibility, (5) resonance, (6) significant contribution, (7) ethics, and (8) meaningful coherence. In the following, we will outline how these markers are covered by our research purpose.

4.5.1. Transferability

The objective of qualitative analysis is a detailed analysis of the case at hand, thus allowing for a broader scope for managing data without destroying its complexity or content. By opening the research to several perspectives, we automatically broadened the scope of complexity to reach a higher theoretical and analytical saturation. The study thereby relies on various theoretical concepts and a thorough data analysis and seeks to underscore its relevance for practitioners while using a sufficient, appropriate, and complex analysis process. The research accordingly builds its ideas on the criteria of what Tracy (2003) phrased rich rigor and a worthy topic. We would argue that since change can be a huge undertaking holding considerable implications for managers and organizations alike, this thesis complies with that criteria.

Moreover, we acknowledge that qualitative approaches to corpus analysis do not allow for an extensive application to wider populations beyond the focus group we selected. However, as this is a case, our analysis is merely geared towards showing a "snippet" of the specific organizational context in the Southern Swedish police force, that at any time could be extended to include a bigger data corpus. Doing so, would of course allow for better empirical ground for transferable findings, yet by underpinning our concept with established and significant research findings, we aim to evince its potential for coherent transferability and meaningful resonance with available knowledge. Consequently, the analysis is not exhaustive but leaves ample opportunities for further research. In light of this reality, we argue that our research opens the door for multiple new research opportunities, not only in a broader scope of police districts locally, nationally, or even internationally, but also within other public service organizations and even the private sector.

4.5.2. Reflexivity

The qualitative research method provides the researcher with ample opportunity to reflect upon her own part within the research. Self-reflexivity not only helps the researcher understand her research strengths and weaknesses but can also strengthen the arguments used. Rather than following

the rules of objectivity, the merits of qualitative research specifically rely on the researchers' subjectivity and self-reflexivity (Tracy 2003).

Regardless of the project, researchers are always obliged to remain aware of the biases and preconceptions they bring into the analysis as the authors. Both researcher and research subject are hence in a continuous cyclical relationship mutually affecting the respective other (Rossman and Rallis 2012). This becomes particularly crucial in quantitative research since the epistemological position of positivism calls for objectivity. However, in qualitative research, subjectivity is instead the preferred state as it allows novel insights to come to light (Bryman 2012). This similarly requires a high degree of reflexivity in order to raise the researchers' appreciation for their constant personal involvement in the research process (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2009).

This does not only require us to reflect on how we are engaging with the subject at hand, but also on how our own experiences as researchers contributed to the interview process and data analysis (Haynes 2012). As a result, we essentially operate within our own reality based on which we try to capture the interviewees' concept of reality. We acknowledge that our personal interpretations may have skewed the interviewees' answers. We are both masters of management students who have studied change as a subject this past year, which definitely can make us view change in a certain way, and criticize it. One of us is Swedish and has read about the change in our case which naturally will form her perception.

Yet, we argue that using an in-depth but loose construction of the interviews granted us the opportunity to have some control of the data we were able to collect. Naturally, the same weakness and strength can be found in the coding phase since we as the researchers were the ones deciding on which concepts or anchors to focus on in our analysis. Our subjectivity therefore automatically played a part in what hypothesis the data supports. The study can thus be seen as characterized by a high degree of self-reflexivity about subjective values, biases, and inclinations of the researchers while remaining transparent about applied methods and challenges. These subjective values or biases could, among others, come from our differing academic backgrounds (communication and international relations), nationalities (Swedish and German), or our considerably younger age (26 and 24) in comparison to most of our participants. Especially older team leaders or managers frequently used the term "in my generation" or "over the past decades", clearly implying that there is an age difference, not just compared to us but also other colleagues. This suggests that they saw us (and younger colleagues) as belonging to a different social group, potentially indicating presumptions about different worldviews due to their rich experiences. However, it is impossible to determine in what way and to what extent this influenced our interactions with them. As mentioned previously, we tried to counterbalance potential inhibitions to an open discussion by being transparent about our backgrounds and the purpose of this research. Moreover, this included being transparent and honest to ourselves when discussing how we as researchers impacted the interaction and study results. Therefore, we claim to meet Tracy's third criterion of sincerity (*see* Tracy 2003).

4.5.3. Reliability and Validity

Judging the significance of a study's contribution inevitably raises the question of reliability and validity. On that note, we shift the focus to Tracy's sixth criterion. The significance of a study's contribution in *e.g.* a conceptual, methodological, or theoretical sense as advocated by Tracy is, however, in our opinion inherently intertwined with the criterion of credibility. After all, a study's significance highly depends on whether the research is marked by *e.g.* a multidimensional consideration of the subject at hand, thick model descriptions, or concrete explications of tacit (non-textual) knowledge. This links back to the issues of reliability and validity, given their fulfillment is sufficient in order for credibility, and by extension, the significance of contribution to be satisfied. While the necessity and definition of validity and reliability are considerably contested (*e.g.* Golfashani 2003), it is yet worth exploring how they contribute to the quality of this study.

Per definition, reliability is concerned with the trustworthiness of the research and the researcher. By contrast, validity is a question of the soundness or cogency of the research's specific context being observed. Therefore, it is pivotal for an interpretative perspective as applied in this project. As also emphasized by Golafshani (2003), one could hence argue that the validity of research is ensured once both credibility and quality can be demonstrated. The triangulation of our data collection, encompassing observations, interview data, and final documentation seeks to establish that credibility and is consistent with our constructionist paradigm. As previously stated, this process was mainly marked by constant discussion and reflection on observation and data findings. Eventually, this served our intention of gaining an in-depth understanding of the observed realities while questioning our interpretations through thorough discussion (Patton 2002; Tracy 2003). Doing so, similarly enhanced the reflexive process, thus allowing for a deeper and more concise analysis of data. The reliability of data was furthermore supported by interview recordings, with the consent of the participants. While serving the purpose of facilitating the transcription, this should ensure precise reproduction of statements in order to maximize the credibility of used citations and follow-up arguments.

4.5.4. Ethical Considerations

Finally, we would like to add a last remark on ethical considerations, as it is also a key marker of qualitative research (*see* Tracy's seventh criterion in Tracy 2003). Every participant gave both their verbal and written consent before we conducted the interviews. They were handed an agreement form, giving the participants general information about how their information was going to be processed and their rights to their data. As part of our obligation to treat the data confidential, this consent form included a confidentiality clause, stating that their identities will not be disclosed. As an introduction in every interview, a thorough explanation of the study was furthermore given to each participant along with an explanation of their role in the study. By guaranteeing their anonymity, we hoped to mitigate potential concerns and encourage honest answers. To uphold our end of the contract, all participants will therefore be quoted under a unisex alias in the following data section.

Table 4.3.: Categorization of Data

	Organizational Inducements & Access to Resources	**Leadership Development**	**Personal Involvement**	**Engagement Barriers**
Condition	• Educational training in digital systems • Information channels between districts • Availability of suitable experts • Time	• Centralized power of decision-making • Leadership support, skill, and facilitation • Management-staff dialogue • Influence on internal collaboration • Alliance-building	• Transparent provision of information • Learning opportunities • Job security • Leadership guidance • Inclusion in decision-making • Structural consistency	• Lack of management support • Person-job mismatches • Lack of job security • Intransparency
Action	• Usage of communication & digital filing platforms • Exchange of knowledge • Continuous distribution of information • Teambuilding • Intradepartmental collaboration	• Informal and formal meetings • Restructuring whole departments • Replacing managers & departmental leaders • Relocating employees • Limited alliance-building	• Participation in pre-planning and implementation • Limited active learning • Limited management-staff dialogue • Limited staff feedback to leadership	• Insufficient use of communication channels • Poor conflict management practices • Avoidance behaviors • Absent guidance throughout the change
Outcomes	• Subsystem congruence • Increased understanding of urgency for change • ***Supportive participation and climate***	• Early retirements & Leadership turnover • Structural inconsistencies • ***Negative perception of change process/OCC?***	• Personal frustration • Slow adjustment to change process • ***Negative perception of change process and climate/OCC?***	• Lack of trust in management • Decreasing subsystem allegiance • ***Negative perception of change process and climate/ OCC?***

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS

The previous methodological framework briefly introduced the general data coding scheme, based on which this chapter presents the focused categories and their respective relations to one another that emerged during the data analysis. With regard to the initial research question, the derived categories will be used to examine the influencing factors for success and failure during the centralization change. The analysis will thereby draw on the employee perspectives on which preconditions per category were satisfied, how this was reflected in the actions observed during the centralization, and to which extent these actions presumably affected the outcomes (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Eventually, this will allow us to evaluate which perceived organizational actions contributed to a successful implementation of systemic changes in a public sector organization. However, due to the limited interviews we collected, the result should be viewed with the knowledge that they derive from statements of a small number of participants. We can therefore not necessarily draw conclusions about the whole organization. This does, however, not limit us to support our arguments with the data collected, see possible connections, and draw plausible conclusions for the effect change can have on employees.

5.1. Conceptualization of Data

The objective of this section is twofold. First, it aims at explaining the reasoning behind the categorization obtained from the data analysis while presenting the role of the political context. The conceptualization of data depicted in Tab. 4.3 thereby serves as the basis for the discussion. Secondly, it attempts to delineate how the respective categories are linked to the following subsections to grant the reader a comprehensive understanding of the ensuing line of argumentation. For this purpose, the following data analysis will be further supplemented by frequent visual aids and illustrative modelings, summarizing the assumed connections between categories at a glance. As it can be inferred from Tab. 4.3, the analysis is based on four main categories.

Bear in mind that the presented conception only allows for a cursory treatment of possible outcomes, not for an extensive assessment of organizational effects on the individual perception due to the limited amount of data. The model's scope can therefore only conjecture about large-scale organizational mechanisms that individuals across levels were exposed to and could have possibly impacted their general negative or positive sentiment towards change, *e.g.* employee or leadership fluctuation rates, performance measurements, promotional campaigns, etc.

As mentioned before, the subcategories under their respective main headline were organized based on Strauss' and Corbin's three-part division (1998) into condition, action, and outcome (*see* Fig. 5.1). More specifically, we first defined what employees identified as intervening *conditions* that shape, facilitate, or constrain the strategies that they observed during the implementation process. Subsequently, the second tier defines which of these conditions could be translated into possible *actions* to give way to support successful change. At the same time, it further unravels possibly necessary actions that can be overlooked altogether in order to arrive at favorable *outcomes*. Accordingly, the latter pins down the results of observed actions under the respective category that potentially contributed to a positive or negative perception of change.

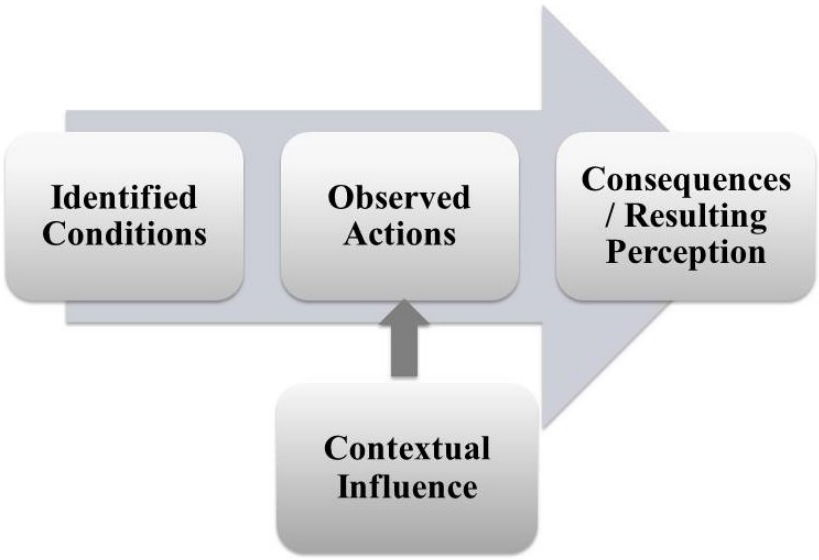


Figure 5.1.: Theory (process)-based model

On that note, we would also like to make the reader aware of the general political context of this case that potentially shaped the interviewees' answers in the first place. It must be taken into account that the police force is subject to highly political constraints and influences that oblige employees to abide by certain rules of political correctness. No participant harshly criticized managerial shortcomings or internal organizational flaws which could be a result of participants not wanting to bad-mouth their organization. If they voiced criticism, it was always cautiously packaged and only expressed in small doses.

To this end, the analysis is structured as follows. In keeping with the study's purpose, Sect. 5.2 and 5.3 investigate the factors that specifically contributed to the success and failures of the centralization. It thereby aims to reveal the most influential actions and patterns that contributed to either perceived system-supportive or unfavorable outcomes. In doing so, the data analysis gathers important insights in order to assess whether the project was actually perceived as a success and to which extent the employee experiences could possibly impact the coming change in 2024.

Based on the most predominantly cited actions during the interviews, we will specifically focus on issues of (i) organizational collaboration, (ii) top-management leadership and politics, and (iii)

communication and resources as issues exerting a high influence on change-supportive attitudes. In the same vein, these issues played part in perceived processual failures. Accordingly, some issues will be taken up twice, but viewed from a different angle in order to evaluate the flip side to the actions observed by our participants. These dynamics will be devoted special attention under Sect. 5.3.1 and 5.3.2, scrutinizing how the perceived negligence of above mentioned factors showed adverse impacts on the individuals. With these factors in mind, the final subsection (Sect. 5.3.3) synthesizes the results by gathering all actions that erected significant engagement barriers and thereby contributed to unfavorable perceptions of the change process itself. The last section thus specifically relates to the fourth category. For any other subsection, it will be specifically mentioned to which category the analysis is referring at the outset of each discussion.

5.2. Perspectives on Influencing Factors in Managing Successful Change

This section will mainly focus on the aspects of the centralization and overall change process that many viewed positively, and could therefore be understood as successful. It will focus on the factors that led to the change actually being carried out but also problematize the definition of *successful change* and *successful change communication*. Thus, the section specifically draws on the categories "organizational inducements" and "leadership development" derived in Tab. 4.3 in order to argue for what important factors managers need to take into account when planning and executing a bigger change within their company.

5.2.1. Organizational Dynamics and Communication

One way to evaluate whether change is effective is if it was successfully implemented. In the case of the national police force, the simple answer could be that the change's purpose of transitioning from a decentralized to a one-unit force succeeded. Today, the police authority is a centralized unit that many of our interviewees viewed as more efficient and more easily managed. Indeed, a majority of our participants admitted to having welcomed the change when it was announced. Jamie, a police officer, expressed relief in being able to track suspects in different districts, something the police have not been able to do before.

One crucial aspect seems to be the extensive planning that was a part of the change project. Police officers with a higher ranking often underlined the clear pathway that was constructed during phase 1 (Fig. 3.1). This could be interpreted as demonstrating clear communication. However, just as a change needs an implementation strategy, it will benefit from a communication plan that focuses on the adoption of the change rather than an informational campaign (Antoniou, Ioannidis, and Varsakelis 2019).

All of the interviewees working at the police during the planning and implementation phases remember the information campaign that underwent from the start of the change. Many can recall

the different phases of the change and all of the interviewees can reproduce the reasons for the changes told to them by management. Previous studies have shown that prioritizing that personnel is not only informed but sees the worth of a planned change leads to a staff that is more receptive to the change and therefore less resistant (Torppa and K. Smith 2011).

However, while speaking to the employees at the precinct, a general sense of not being a participating member during the change was common. Many voiced criticism that the change rather happened around them and thus did not see it as something they concerned themselves with. Many put it like they just needed to keep their heads down and wait for the process to be over.

> "A lot of things happened at once. I remember me feeling a little frustrated, but I just felt that I needed to get along with the process." (Drew)

This could show the difference of informing about a change and vision rather than creating a vision and actively trying to win people over to become agents for the change. The practice to give out continuous information does not have to be negative at all. On the contrary, many studies underscore the importance of being transparent during a bigger change, whereas just sending out information can lead to a passive audience (Platen 2006). Indeed, one of the interviewees stated that they had received plenty of information in meetings and on the intranet. Yet, most interviewees could also see how it would be hard to retain the vast amount of instructions for lower-ranking officers and administrative personnel. Many of the interviewees do remember that information was spread by email, posters, and brochures that "were plastered all over the place" (Alex). But research has shown that overwhelming employees with information will rarely gain the desired results. Meetings and forums, where all employees can voice their concerns and ideas are equally, if not more important (Dixon 1998). One interviewee confirmed this by stating:

> "We have a communicator. Info came via e-mail to the group leaders, but after a while, people stopped reading it." (Jamie)

Employee cynicism towards change is not unique for this case (Kanter 1985). Some gave accounts on their own frustration, citing the change processes as cumbersome, drawn-out, and ineffective. Others reflected more on why they could see why some people could consider the change as frustrating.

> "People were scared, and in some aspects people were right. Fewer people are doing more work, I feel." (Drew)

However, many underlined that even though the process was drawn out, which would also align with The Swedish Agency for Public Management statement of the change being prolonged, they still see the benefits reaped afterward. Many of the interviewees did not see the change in itself as positive, even though everyone who participated in the interviews saw many positives in the centralization and the digitization effort after their implementations.

> "We are more proactive, and more effective. Many got more independent." (Alex)

Many of the interviewees described a less administrative workload, with fewer lines and more proactive work, rather than reactive. One participant went into detail and described that more autonomy was allowed after the change, giving officers the incentive to do their own problem-solving. Connected to this phenomenon it can, therefore, be interesting to ponder why the change is perceived unfavorably for many of the interviewees today.

According to multiple interviewees, the police authority in Sweden makes changes in waves, which does not make it uncommon for several different changes to occur at once. One of the participants especially framed the change in a different light, stating that the real change happened in the police's digitization effort. This habit of doing several big changes at once does not seem to be uncommon either. Another interviewee stated:

> "Everyone does not see the need for a change. Right now, it feels that they are doing changes just for the sake of doing changes. Problems are getting pushed to the next change year. It is a great management shield." (Alex)

When asked about the upcoming change year of 2024, several of the interviewees said they did not see the change and its goals as plausible.

> "2024 is the next year for change. We are going to be more police officers; 10 000 or more. This is impossible." (Alex)

This is notable since the reasoning behind the change can be very different compared to the centralization. The urgency is very much there, as stated in the motion from the Parliament "Sweden has, in contrast to its population, an understaffed police force than several other countries. Moreover, we are experiencing an extremely severe situation with gang violence, murder, and increasingly more areas where the police have lost the grip on development" (Motion 2019/20, p. 2349). The animosity felt towards the upcoming change is discussed in a different manner than the centralization, even though both of them could be easily viewed as not only necessary but vital to the organization. Given the frequency of reform, a shift of feelings towards a rather negative view on changes was notable. The remarks could be viewed as surprising since all of the interviewees saw a multitude of useful outcomes in the last round of changes. However, there seems to be a discrepancy in the effect of the change and the change itself for many of the interviewees.

A stipulation of why this occurs could be that stress and anxiety before and under the change implementation creates negative memories, thus tarnishing the improvements that the change created. Stress during bigger changes has been studied and proven to rise before, during, and after the process (Smollan 2015). Several of the interviewees pointed to rumors and poor communication as big factors for the overall feeling of insecurity that was felt during the time of the change. While conducting the interviews, there was a difference in the security felt between police officers and administrative staff, which could show the importance of not accidentally leaving one group of employees behind. Another group that stood out was the employees that were on leave during the initial implementation. Two interviewees described coming back to a completely new structure. One of them described specifically that the lack of training when returning to work made it difficult.

> "We had to follow the flow (laughs nervously), but we can't really do anything about it." (Kim)

However, several other participants stated that they were often invited and participated in meetings regarding the change, but it was clear that they were viewed as merely informational by the employees, rather than as an invitation for active engagement.

It should be noted that with any change, resistance can be expected in a time of stress for employees, change management often has to deal with *soft factors* during a change (Antoniou, Ioannidis, and Varsakelis 2019). Employees will often do a subjective assessment of their own position, and worries like losing their job or their position can take over and decrease efficiency. This is primarily contingent on how transparent communication channels regarding the course of change and required access to resources are (*e.g.*, Platen 2006; Antoniou, Ioannidis, and Varsakelis 2019; Kotter 1995). Following previous theoretical evidence, this would also support the assumption that change creates winners and losers, depending on how much access the individual employee and departments were granted. One interviewee specifically underscored that argument by stating:

> "We were the winners. We got more resources while other people got less, but we won." (Alex)

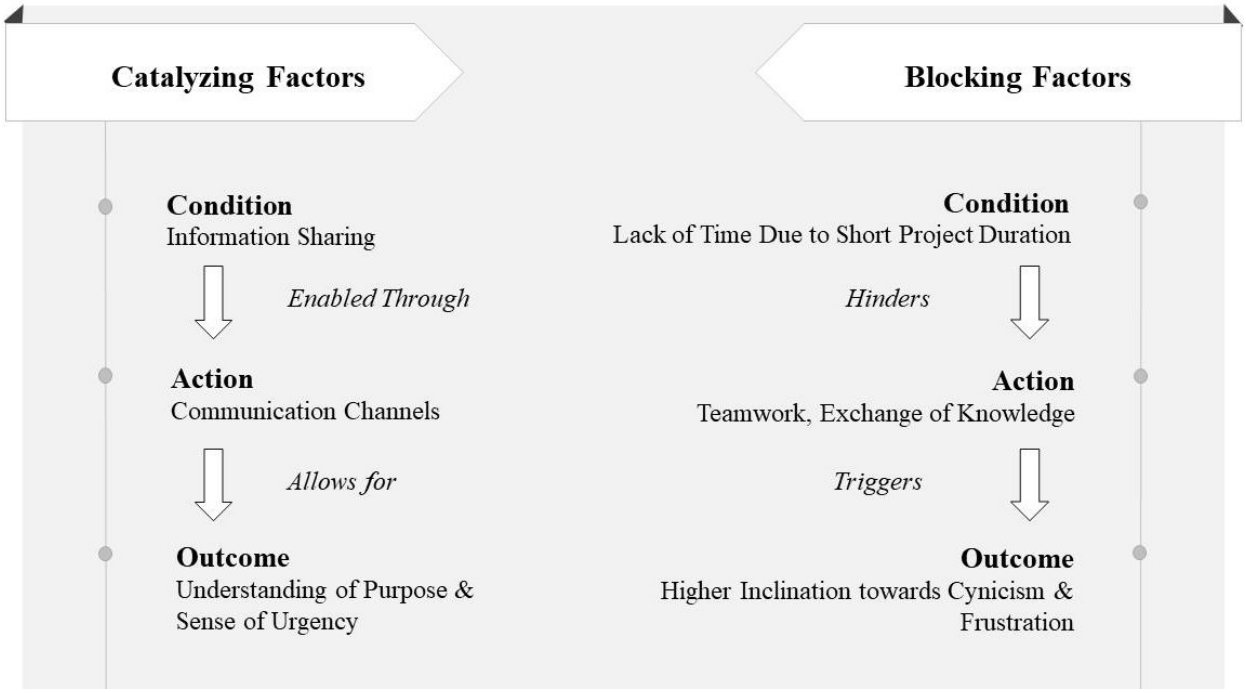
Yet, this fact did not sway the participant's opinion towards a more positive view on change. Based on his line of argumentation, the reason for his negative perception rather seemed to be related to a disastrous coordination of geographical and administrative change that resulted in a feeling of aggravation among staff towards management. Ergo, employee perception and access to resources are presumably intertwined and may eventually determine cross-departmental buy-in as well as the course of change. It can be argued that the case of the centralization in the police force is a good example of this. More specifically, when asked about the general stress level in the office during the change, the answer varied. Interestingly, depending on how much "in the know" the interviewee was about the change, the calmer they described the situation. Overall, participants who felt they did not receive enough information described a much more worried and insecure experience. One interviewee further explained that some positions suddenly disappeared, and even if people still had jobs, they could now find their former colleagues as their boss. According to the interviewee, this stated created an uncomfortable situation for everyone involved.

> "It was awkward and weird. They did not want to be there at all. But there were ways for them to find new paths within the organization." (Jamie)

After reviewing the organizational dynamics one could argue that the police force partly fulfilled the subcategory organizational inducements and access to resources by constantly informing employees of the change and its phases. They also seemed to have successfully created an understanding or of the urgency of the issue that would be solved with the proposed changes. Where the police authority plausibly failed to fulfill the above mentioned subcategory could be narrowed down to time given to the project. Without this condition, the action of teamwork and exchange of knowledge decreases. Making employees active participants of not only the implementation but also possibly the planning phase is very time consuming, and without that resource the subcategory becomes unfulfilled and

desired outcomes may not be achieved. Although the structural goal was achieved in the end, many statements show a critical and almost cynic undertone that could indicate a lack of active involvement on part of management. The reasons that the participants often employed to explain their frustration usually concerned that rigid structure as it obliged them to follow suit. At the same time, it seemed to have prevented them from active participation. They just fulfilled orders as it is characteristic of public organizations such as the police force (*see* Chap. 2)). The analysis therefore warrants a closer inspection of the situational context and leadership style that may have shaped employee perception and cynicism.

Figure 5.2.: Preliminary Summary of Organizational Inducements and Access to Resources



5.2.2. Top-Management Leadership and Politics

One aspect that is needed to put into consideration is that the police authority in Sweden is a public service with high-tier politicians sitting at the top of the hierarchy instead of police officers. This was mentioned on several occasions during the interviews as a reason for why the employees could not be involved in the change process.

> "It was instigated by the government, so it was going to be implemented one way or the other. It was above our heads." (Taylor)

In the official investigations regarding this national change clear goals, and reasons, why this change is needed, are stated. The report does, however, admit that communication during the change was lacking.

> "Many people who we have interviewed have given us the impression that there has been a gap between the change communication, which primarily focused on creating a picture of the new

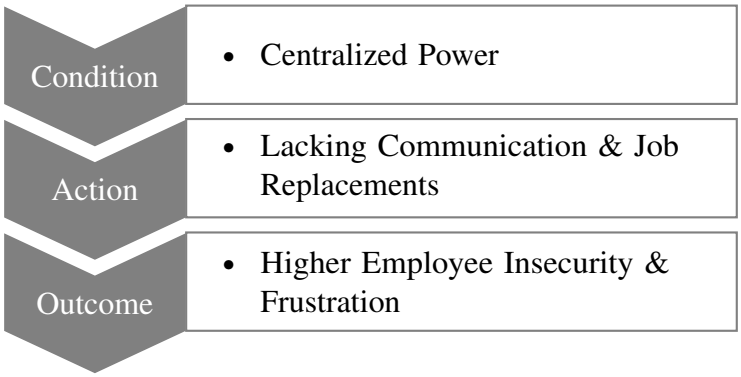
> Police authority after the change and the need for guidance in how to reach those goals." – The Swedish Agency for Public Management

One reason for this gap is the slow process when hiring new chief officers that when they gained their new position did not feel comfortable with acting as change agents. This is one plausible reason for any type of gap in change communication. Change agents have long been studied and have shown to be very important for a smooth change process. However, research has also pointed out that high position officials do not always necessarily make the best and most effective change agents, which can be seen in the findings in the paper "*Change agents and internal communications in organizational networks*" (Antoniou, Ioannidis, and Varsakelis 2019). Moreover, they suggest that hierarchy is not the most significant factor in a change agent but rather someone closer to the staff can be preferable. This phenomenon can be interpreted as verified in the data when comparing the different testimonies.

> "This was a very welcomed change. Now the process is much faster, as decisions can go faster top to bottom." (Sam)
>
> "It was not a big thing. You felt that something big was about to happen. But there were many advocates for the change." (Jamie)
>
> "People said that it was not going to work, especially since some positions just disappeared. Who would do their job now? Their tasks?" (Drew)

This could suggest that there were in fact informal change agents. Arguably, this shows that the inclusion of these types of leaders could decrease frustration and animosity towards changes in the future.

Figure 5.3.: Blocking Factors in Leadership Development



5.3. How Past Experience May Shape Future Perception

This section attempts to underscore what frustrated the individual and potentially led to personal and systemic inefficiencies during or after the change. To this end, the discussion similarly draws on applicable categories derived from Tab. 4.3 in order to evince significant managerial implications for future change projects. These mainly include "personal involvement" and "engagement barriers".

In conjunction with the previously outlined concepts and guidelines that were found to be relevant for managerial change decisions, this section discusses (i) the perspectives of those experiencing troubles to align with the changing structures, either during or after the change, and (ii) managerial shortcomings restricting the decision scope of lower staff. The last section finally draws together main managerial implications on how to overcome resulting engagement barriers.

5.3.1. Employee Reports on Adverse Change Impacts

Interestingly, the interviewees presented similar approaches to cope with the change. As outlined before, all interviewees stated there was continuous communication before and during the implementation. Yet, critical voices also mentioned that the personal degree of involvement and feeling of adjustment was significantly constrained by the duty to follow top-down commands by default.

As regards the point of communication and its relation to personal perception, the previous findings strikingly demonstrated that mere communication does not lead to a higher inclination towards active engagement. The perception of communicative issues rather shifted to the negative as most employees saw it linked to leadership decision-making that maintained control anyway. This reflects what prior studies outlined as the crucial discrepancy between employees and their representatives traditionally favoring involvement in decision-making, and management who has typically expressed a preference for the retention of managerial control through information-sharing approaches (Collom 2003; Brown and Cregan 2008).

All participants affirmed that they felt addressed and informed about the centralization project. They could also comprehensively explain what the change was about and why it was important. However, when they were asked to state whether they felt *personally* involved and motivated to play an active part, the majority of participants indicated that they just reacted passively as they were expected to follow instructions from above. The change "happened around [them]" (Alex and Taylor) without any specific training that could help them adjust to the new work environment. This also resonates with other interviewees' statements:

> "Locally, we had some say into the change, but in the bigger picture, there was not much leeway to have a lot of say. It was instigated by the government, so it was going to be implemented one way or the other. It was above our heads." (Elliot)
>
> "It is difficult to make things national and not listen to the smaller police districts and locals. Making decisions before involving those affected has caused more anger and resentment." (Taylor)
>
> "It was a little chaotic; a lot of people tried to retire, quit, or changed jobs. People were uncomfortable, but we to follow the flow anyway." (Kim)

It could be argued that all statements highlight an underlying frustration that seems to be the result of a rigid hierarchical structure. As shown in the literature (Brown and Cregan 2008), this is highly common for public sector organizations and the police force does not demonstrate an exception. While some participants seemed rather content with being frustrated, others already seemed to have

internalized their dissatisfaction. The resulting view could therefore be interpreted as rather negative on the upcoming change. These perceived shortcomings mainly concerned the lack of training, especially in digital systems that were implemented alongside the systemic change. Accordingly, this could relate to the resource-based view of change management (Sect. 2.2.3) and thus suggests that a positive perception of change is considerably determined by how easy leadership made the individual's experience and adaptation to the transition by granting access to the right resources (Barton and Ambrosini 2013). Following the interviewees' statements, comprehensive training, particularly in digital systems, could have simplified alignment and coordination between districts. However, as one participant stated, the opposite happened: "We tried to make it better, it should be easy to contact us. But I feel we lost the local contact and info we had about smaller towns" (Kim)

Another interviewee higher up the hierarchy argued along similar lines. As an investigation leader in criminal affairs, the participant had direct insights into which leading roles were replaced by external workers lacking the expertise required in upper managerial jobs. The result was an increasing turnover rate and people quitting their jobs if they were unwilling to follow suit.

> "In the bigger picture, there were a lot of bosses who lost their position. The general idea was that the administration will choose bosses they knew and will therefore benefit from the change. In that process, it has rather been decided to put only those in leading key positions who say "yes" to everything. More experienced people were brushed aside while less experienced, but yes-sayers were brought up." (Elliot)

The interviewee stated that this eventually led those affected to look for other jobs. Some even retired, which is not uncommon as job security is one of the main stress factors during organizational changes for staff (Smollan, 2015). However, to put things into perspective, the participant also added that the refugee boom was looming over the political landscape at that time. This unpredicted, external force, the interviewee meant, further complicated the coordination inside the police force and may have contributed to increasing retirement rates. Meanwhile, the interviewee also stated that quite a few also came back, but cut their workload back again after resuming their work. This was presumably due to the lacking expertise of newly appointed leaders and the disregard of formerly important key agents. However, "there were certainly those who did see the opportunity to leave early" (Elliot). According to another interviewee, there was no indication of significant employee turnover or retirement rates, "but they stick to the old way of doing things longer than they should because they don't have accepted the new systems yet. Therefore, it takes longer to make the changes more effective" (Taylor). Regardless of whether turnover or retirement rates increased, both statements point to a lack of systemic agility and adjustment, not only on part of lower staff, but also on part of leadership and management.

Based on these findings, this would suggest that personal involvement is indeed linked to the provision of training, leadership, and resources as advocated by mentioned theoretical concepts (*e.g.*, Black and Gregersen 1997; Jashapara 2004; Hiatt 2006; Hiatt and Creasey 2003; Hobfoll 2001). This in turn could show an impact on personal perception and attitude toward change overall (*see e.g.*, Barton and Ambrosini 2013; P. Fleming and Spicer 2003; Brown and Cregan

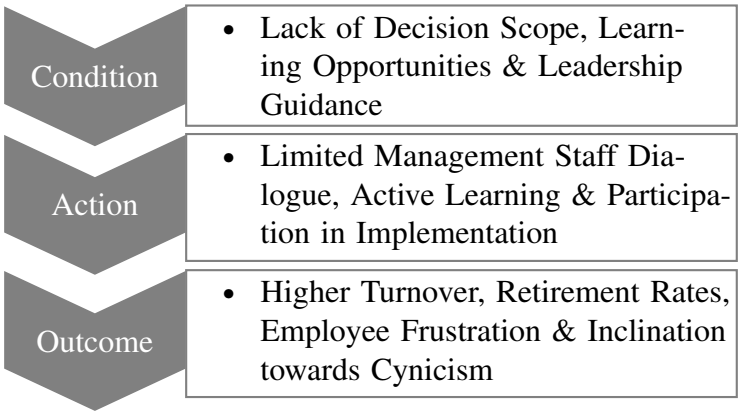
2008). Nonetheless, we could not find any indication that this has caused any sort of resistant sentiment inside the police force. Merely one employee directly mentioned that a general "anger and resentment" was noticeable during the change, as the lower staff did not feel included in relevant decision processes. It is therefore questionable whether there was or is indeed a high level of cynicism involved that could potentially negatively impact employee attitude towards the coming reform.

While a broad body of literature would expect this to block change progress in private enterprises, we assume the strict hierarchical structure of the police force is the underlying reason for why even those employees taking a rather skeptical stance passively supported the change. Beyond structural reasons, the broad amount of understanding for the need of change furthermore suggests that it was comprehensively communicated across departments when it came to the *purpose* of the change itself. However, when asked whether they felt guided through the process by being provided with sufficient information, a lot of employees negated the question.

> "We did not really know what was going to happen to us. What will change with our jobs?" (Kim)
>
> "There were campaigns and people talked a lot about the change, but in an abstract way. We did not really understand it until we had to re-apply for our own jobs." (Drew)
>
> "They [management] could have been more open. The dialogue between the separate districts lacked. It felt like everything came from Stockholm without the officers being privy to a lot of information. Things just happened. People would have probably been more inclined to follow suit if upper management had listened to the concerns of lower staff." (Taylor)

As a result, the main conditions linking the degree of personal involvement to adverse outcomes or feelings of displacement seemed to be related to a *lack of learning opportunities*, *limited decision-scope*, or *disappointed expectations of leadership skills*. *Person-job mismatches* also seem to have lowered the engagement, given the fact that they appeared to have replaced former internal police staff with employees or external talent that “fit the bill” (Elliot).

Figure 5.4.: Blocking Factors for Personal Involvement



The initial core concepts of *leadership skills*, (type of) *attitude* (passive participation in this case), (amount of) *understanding*, and *time and resources* could therefore be understood as conditions that influenced both managerial and employee actions during the change. A considerable share of interviewees displayed nervous laughter at some point during the interview, mostly when they were asked to explain how they perceived management's guidance in the process and whether they felt informed or included at every step. Although general information was made readily available according to the majority of employees, this could hint at a misalignment between what the interviewees said and what they actually felt. Potentially, this could be a factor contributing to increasing cynicism at a later point.

These are arguably important implications for both the structural and cultural outcome, seeing as almost all employees stated that they see the change as an *ongoing process* without being specifically asked about it. Lending credence to our underlying assumption outlined in Sect. 2.1.1, the participants' statements ranged from " I don't know if they are done with the change" (Alex), to "It's always a process. Nothing is ever finished" (Elliot). The former could possibly reveal that the employees perceive that there is still a huge amount of uncertainty in what the change actually entails. When asked whether the change process was well-executed, five out of seven employees answered the question with "no", for example:

> "The change process itself was not well done. Putting aside experienced personnel was a reason for its inefficiency. Hiring people from within the police and with insufficient knowledge was more of an update of the change status of what was happening at the moment. While there were seminars where we were able to discuss the process, this was more of a show. Meanwhile, decisions had been taken elsewhere, for good and for bad. However, not everyone can be involved because it would slow down those making the decisions. There was, after all, a need for a firm stance on where the police wanted to go. Eventually, this affected the change negatively during the process. But it has improved afterward." (Elliot)

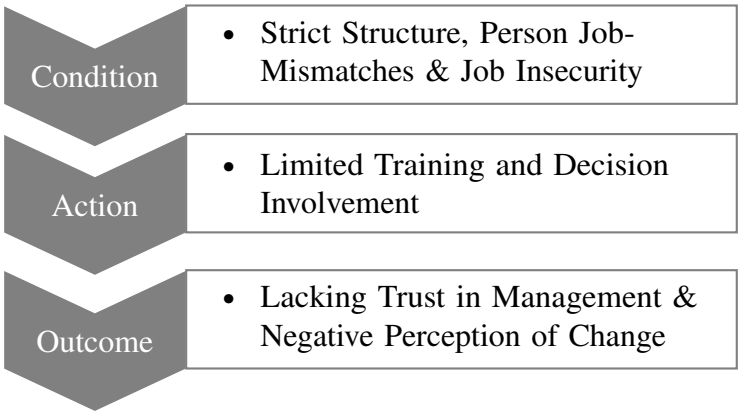
> "There are a lot of groups within the institution, so it took me a long time to get to know other people, especially because I shifted sections every six weeks. For the most part, I did not have a lot of knowledge of what happened in a lot of cases.[8] So I moved to another section to learn what they are doing. The work in the different sections was not always transparent. There was a lot of miscommunication and misinformation between these sections, leaving the people to feel further down or up the hierarchy." (Taylor)

While the quotes confirm a rather adverse impact of structure-heavy implementation on organizational climate, they also put the challenges experienced on part of management into perspective. Elliot essentially observed that firm decisions are necessary to make processes more efficient and expedient. Although involving everyone is an important task for managers, it is yet also extremely time-consuming. A suggestion would be to see the term "involvement" not as being included

[8]The original term used here was "errands". However, given the misuse in context, it was changed to "cases". For reasons of transparency, note that every instance that uses the word 'case[s]' in the transcription was originally stated as 'errand[s]' by the interviewee.

in every decision about a structural change. Rather it could be viewed as letting the employees be a part of the cultural transformation that comes along with the instigated structural shift. As explained previously, this requires everyone to change their mindset from "it was better before" to an active willingness to constantly strive towards an improved working environment (Platen 2006). The probability of a successful cultural shift is thus likely to decrease if relevant conditions, such as time, resources, and, in this case, training in information technology (IT) systems were not fulfilled. Based on the previous data analysis, the lacking knowledge in this regard led to personal frustration, both for those apt at using digital systems as well as those lacking it. In the broadest sense, comprehensive continuous training was therefore an action that was absent, but necessary to achieve the end goal and build trust in management. Therefore, it could have promoted emerging feelings of frustration or even cynicism.

Figure 5.5.: Contributing Factors for Engagement Barriers



5.3.2. Effects of Managerial Shortcomings

The previous findings suggest that broad-scale involvement is highly conditional upon top-down support, skill, and guidance through every step of the process. It hence follows that in the absence of these conditions, employee involvement is likely to wane, thus obstructing a long-term structural and cultural shift. Based on the subcategories identified in Tab. 4.3, these conditions were further extended to a (i) centralized power of decision-making, (ii) management-staff communication, (iii) influence on internal collaboration, and therefore (iv) the creation of alliances, all of which pertain to the main category of leadership development.

At this junction, it is worth mentioning, that this thesis does not make a clear-cut separation between management and leadership, as both terms were used interchangeably by the interviewees themselves and therefore suggests that leadership is perceived as being executed by management and consequently converges with managerial remits. In that sense, our analysis follows Mintzberg's approach (2009), assuming that management and leadership are mutually dependent and executed activities when investigating the participants' responses.

The general perception of management and leadership performance was found to be highly structure-based and always related to a personal feeling of uncertainty and insecurity as regards

job retention or relocation. In accordance with Hobfoll's COR model (2001), one participant specifically voiced that "people merely care about what affects them personally" (Jamie). This also resonates well with other statements we collected during our interviews.

> "During these years, there were a lot of deficits within the process. A lot of people had concerns, as they did not know where they will end up eventually. So there was a considerable lack of knowledge of what is going to happen. [...] Most of the concerns were related to the individual. Where is the individual going to end up?" (Elliot)
>
> "People had a lot of questions and they felt unsure. What is this new organization? Am I going to keep my job? Will I be relocated?" (Kim)

The implicit criticism therefore seems to be referring to a lacking cross-departmental collaboration and communication channels, although participants confirmed they have been informed about the *purpose* and *process* of the change. Despite the fulfillment of these requirements, it has yet led to perceived job insecurity and frustration. As a result, it can be deduced that the personal dimension to approaching the targets and beneficiaries of change, *i.e.* the employees, were not sufficiently acknowledged and incorporated into the transformation strategy. The lack of inclusion thus caused several challenges and misalignment between staff and management:

> "No, we are not heard by management, which is a challenge. Everyone does not see the need for a change. Right now it feels that they are doing changes just for the sake of doing changes." (Alex)

Although this statement indicates a lack of sufficient information and inclusion in major decision processes on part of upper management, the blame cannot solely be put on the top, as employees as receivers of change are also obliged to feed back personal concerns in order for management to know what to adjust or clarify. However, according to one participant that was not the case, stating that there was no sufficient information from the top that could have brought more transparency to key issues such as relocation and job retainment. Yet, the participant also added that people were not really inclined to ask questions either.

> "They rather resorted to people they know further down the hierarchy instead of reaching out to those with the expertise. I think people tend to ask those they know instead of people who know what to do." (Taylor)

In this light, the problem of lacking inclusion and insecurity seemed to be *mutually* enforced on part of management *and* staff. The main underlying assumption that employees want to be involved in decision-making during reforms can be questioned. According to Brown and Cregan (2008), this is however not uncommon for a public sector organization. Eventually, this could have been a reason for why the organizational climate seemingly aggravated throughout the change, though this is subject to speculation. Notwithstanding this, it suggests a structure-heavy perception of managerial duties. In other words, employees seem to attach highly administrative obligations to managerial or leading tasks that, if not fulfilled to the individual satisfaction, cloud the perception

of the people put in these positions. As a result, this could increase tendencies towards OCC and therefore decrease management's potential to rely on positive attitudes towards coming changes.

However, the interviewed project leader stated the exact opposite. According to the project leader, there was no indication whatsoever that people felt unheard or excluded from the processes. On the contrary, "people were happy" and had a say on local levels. He further argued that management fulfilled its duty of providing sufficient information, and therefore enabled employee participation. Looking at the previous employee statements, it could yet also be argued that exactly this perception demonstrates a significant lack of understanding for employee concerns. Rather than solely clarifying the purpose of change, this primarily seems to demand a provision of information as to which extent the individual will be impacted by the upcoming changes. Though the former has been satisfied, the latter was entirely absent. Interestingly, the perceived lack of information sharing or provision of personal job security does not seem to adversely interfere with the perception of the benefits of the final structural outcome.

Instead, the participants' stances on managerial performance regarding process and outcome exhibit a relatively strict separation between deficits during the implementation and still successful systemic change. Almost all employees confirm that processing chains are much faster after the centralization since implemented digital systems have facilitated and expedited decision-processes from top to bottom. Despite some initial obstacles, mainly due to a digitization initiative called PUST (*Polisens Utredningsstöd*), the majority of employees felt like the centralization now allows for a much quicker attendance of tasks and broad-scale collaboration and therefore holds important benefits to the organizational structure.

> "The change was exclusively focused on the matter of centralization. Cases don't lie around while being forgotten; also due to the computerized system in place. We now have a higher staff turnover with 10 out of 15 changing their position every 6 months. So it is very dynamic and work gets done quickly. The quick attendance to tasks is not only positive for the police, but also for crime victims. [...] Some cases, however, need to be dispatched to other local police partners; some are put right off. Those involving harder crimes are being passed on as well because of the complexity of the cases. Otherwise, continuing to work with these cases would steal time away from other cases." (Elliot)

> "But it has become easier to talk to each other, between precincts. People understand different precincts better since we now talk to each other. [...] I don't feel restricted. We can try things out now and we have a better possibility to make an impact. For example, getting new supplies was very hard before. Usually, your request was denied because no one would make a decision. Now I can take responsibility to get the supply, give the receipt to the right person and make a decision to buy in bulk. It is much more efficient." (Drew)

> "Now, it is easier to connect with the other regions, making it easier for citizens to inquire about a report regardless of their district residence. While we had a much more cumbersome system before where each police station was pretty much self-sufficient and rather narrow, the centralization streamlined all our processes and it made it easier to see the bigger picture." (Taylor)

> "Now there is a chain of command and a clearer hierarchy. A lot of administration tasks could be cut out and centralized." (Sam)
>
> "I have seen a dip in the work, but now things are better. We can work more proactively, and not just put out fires" (Jamie)

Only one interviewee voiced open criticism as he stated that the centralization has not really brought a significant change to the system. "I don't see it as a big change. We are still 21 forces in my opinion; nothing has really changed. [...] We still do things our way, and Stockholm their way" (Alex). Though the view differs with regard to the outcome, it figures well into other statements regarding the process of decision-making on organizational structures. In this respect, especially the issue of leadership expertise and skill became a focal point of criticism primarily concerning the management of geographical coordination of district responsibilities:

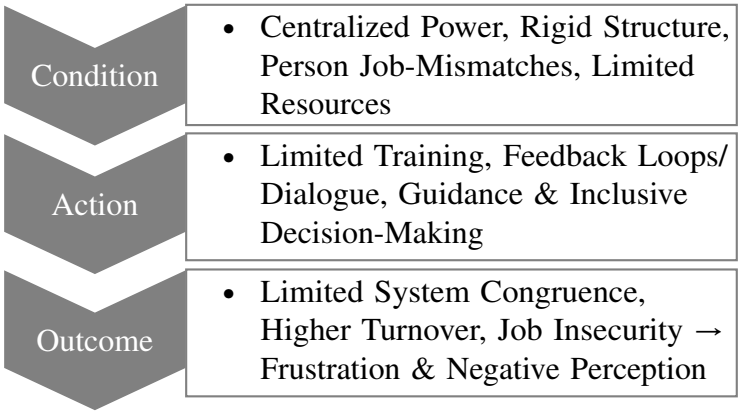
> "We had a police chief who was entirely unsuitable for the job, as she had no knowledge of the police at all and had no connection to the personnel. This affected both our trust and efficiency. It was obvious to most officers that Eslöv was disconnected from Lund's responsibility, which was the wrong way to go. After problems arose, it was made a part of Lund's district again. The lacking experience and knowledge significantly interfered with the efficiency of the police force in Southern Sweden." (Elliot)
>
> "The geographical change was a disaster. Lawyers redid districts without asking us who knows how things should be done." (Alex)

It can therefore be argued that the subcategories pertaining to conditions for leadership development were perceived to meet the needs of those we spoke with. Thus, this led to actions that encouraged adverse dynamics during the process of implementation. Conversely, this exacerbated a negative individual perception of personal inclusion or acknowledgment of opinion by management. As a result, levels of OCC seem to have increased, though not to a worrying extent (it should however be reminded here that the sample size cannot be representative and must not necessarily reflect the majority's stance). The claims of lack in expertise, combined with broad-scale dissatisfaction with managerial decisions, supposedly led to higher leadership turnover and retirement rates. Although this possibly had an impact on organizational culture, it still generated the exact structural outcome that was initially intended. This could possibly show that leadership performance and actions during the process must not necessarily yield a detrimental structural result. Hence, leadership development only shows a limited influence on the final implementation result, provided that other sufficient conditions such as the provision of resources are satisfied.

5.3.3. Overcoming Engagement Barriers

Continuous access to change-relevant resources must be given in order for management to overcome engagement barriers on part of lower staff levels (Goggin et al. 1990). This leads to the final focused category deducing the key lessons learned and implications for upcoming changes in the police force.

Figure 5.6.: Effects of Leadership on Personal Involvement and Perception



Despite the on average critical stance on *how* management has implemented the change, it was interesting to observe that almost all interviewees, with the exception of one, either stated that they welcomed the change, or at least described themselves as a friend of change in general. The absence of resources, limited access to training, or perceived deficits in managerial performance thus did not necessarily impair their attitude towards change, at least not in the beginning. A generally positive attitude towards change may have contributed to employees remaining relatively supportive throughout the process. For instance, when asked about their initial reception of the change after its first announcement, the great majority of participants indicated they endorsed the reform and also recognized this attitude in fellow colleagues:

> "Personally, I did not see any opposition. Iit was overall a very welcomed change. [...] People had a say, but it was not a big issue. It could not have happened quickly enough. People were happy about it. Really, all changes were positive." (Sam)
>
> "It was not a big thing. You felt that something big was about to happen. But there were many advocates for the change. No one knows how this will go, but it will be good. Things will go slower for a while, but that is okay. I was not worried at all. Me personally, I thought I would be fine. [...] Somehow you need to trust that people know what they are doing." (Jamie)
>
> "It was the right way to go. In a big country like Sweden, it should be as equal as possible." (Elliot)
>
> "I had a positive attitude towards the change. But I am also positive towards change in general, especially when it comes to digitalization. The changes implemented were very slow. In my opinion, tey should have done this earlier. Especially when it comes to digital improvements, changes were long overdue." (Taylor)

These statements could suggest that general trust in management and the process existed at the start, especially since the majority saw a *factually justified reason* for the planned changes. Existing theories as outlined in Chap. 2 support this idea (*see e.g.*, Kotter 1995, Kotter 2001; Black and Gregersen 1997; Abramson and Lawrence 2001; Young 2001). This should have created a favorable ground for further managerial steps to recruit cross-departmental advocates for the transformation,

not only before but *during* the process. However, following the previous data analysis, this was the crux of the matter: many employees stated that they lost trust in management along the process, among others because training for concomitant digital changes was only provided to a limited extent to the older generation who was simply not equipped enough to adapt to newly arising circumstances in the workplace.

> "There is no dialogue and no education regarding digitalization. The main problems arise because older people are not used to the systems. However, with newly hired staff, new people need to be educated properly to make them go along with the system." (Taylor)

As a result, the perception seems to have shifted more negatively as the change progressed. Instead of shifting the mindset, to develop new routines, people stuck "to the old way of doing things longer than they should, because they don't have accepted the new systems yet" (Taylor). Still, the degree of personal involvement seemed extremely limited, as the transition was instigated from the government, and employees were therefore forced to follow suit, regardless of personal attitudes. However, this is not to say that the participants did not acknowledge management's attempts for alignment and provision of resources altogether. The main point of criticism was merely that more information and education platforms could circumvent arising problems. On a broader district level, some interviewees pointed out similar structural problems that have not been taken care of yet. This especially concerns the amount of patrolling workforce and lacking expertise in leading managerial positions.

> "There are still some police districts that are more unsatisfied than others. The journey for these districts or cities is therefore longer. Every city should have the same amount of officers, but the police do not seem to be there yet. I don't have the figures, but considering the Northern part of the country, it is evident that there is still a lot of work to do." (Elliot)

> "All chefs should be police officers, not lawyers from outside. They just don't know what is important to consider in the different districts." (Alex)

In conjunction with missing digital skills, these criticisms mainly seemed to serve as arguments for what to do differently in the upcoming change 2024. In general, a better digital infrastructure is necessary to level with other organizations and have a better connection within the police force. This would enable them to have a better overall understanding of what the other parts are doing (*see* Taylor). The benefits and necessary conditions for 2024 are therefore more concentrated on the potential progress digital changes would hold. Within that process, it will be vital to keep in mind that most workers are not accustomed to the advanced use of computers, as the police force is not as digitized as other organizations. But if enough educational opportunities are provided, it might be easier for those affected, and by extension for the organization as a whole, to facilitate broad-scale systemic or administrative changes.

> "It is a safer way to work if you know the system. The system will vice versa be safer with more competence among the workers running the system." (Taylor)

Hence, the resources are overall there, but it is the human capital that lacks sufficient competence or willingness to adjust to instigated transitions from the top. This may have also been a reason for why previous digital initiatives such as PUST ended up as a failure. It should, however, be noted that several of the interviewees stated that PUST was a failure due to the lack of research into the software before purchase.

Digitalization, coupled with new structure *and* new management levels, simply seems to have been too overwhelming for a strict system to take since deeply ingrained structural and cultural forces have determined organizational dynamics over decades. Changing all key system characteristics at once could have been a key factor that contributed to a perceived chaos. As discussed in the theoretical framework, this however does not need to be the case. On the contrary, there can be significant benefits to having multiple changes being implemented at once, but the different changes require large amounts of similar resources (for example, time for training and dialogue could in this case seem to be lacking). Otherwise, implementation efforts will suffer (Chackerian and Mavima 2000). As stated previously, public service organizations are rather stability-driven and can therefore exhibit significant difficulties when it comes to broad-scale alignment and adaptation to new environments in the workplace (Adelman and L. Taylor 2007; Brown and Cregan 2008; Reinholz and Apkarian 2018). Seen in this context, critical views on 2024 or the previous centralization should not sound surprising.

Despite the overall positive view on change in general, not everyone saw the need for a change. As noted by one employee, it rather feels like management is doing changes just for the sake of doing changes. In effect, problems that emerged during the centralization are pushed back to the next year. In the participant's words, this strategy thus acts as a "great management shield" (see Alex, p. 45) where it can be expected that the exact same patterns of the last years will emerge in the future.

This would relate to our initial assumption, postulating that the likelihood of achieving successful changes decreases the more reforms are repeated over time as the resulting fatigue blocks organizational agility. Put differently, past experience would determine future attitude and orientation towards supportive commitment. The mixed experience taken from the centralization project may hence skew a general openness towards further changes, thus affecting subsystem congruence or allegiance. Moreover, it impacts employee trust in managerial suitability to meet the conditions for broad-scale alignment and individual buy-in. As a result, the conditions listed under the category of engagement barriers seem to have been met and encouraged actions that, in conjunction with previously mentioned shortcomings, have been found to bring about a decreasing subsystem allegiance. Although the interviewees each represent a different "subsystem" as they held varying positions in the internal hierarchy, they are yet too small a group to make a definite statement on this issue.

The following implications on how to overcome these barriers build on assumptions deduced from a limited set of knowledge. Nonetheless, it provides ample opportunities to link the conditions and actions collected under the main categories to what the data could tell needs to be done in future change efforts in order for engagement barriers to not obstruct personal involvement, cultural

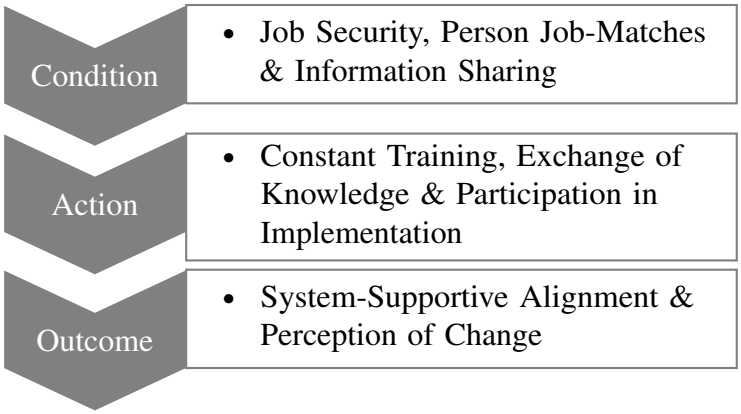
togetherness, or subsystem allegiances. The data can be analyzed and interpreted as showing that the (i) insufficient provision of information and training *throughout* the process (note: not before), (ii) the limited inclusion in decision-making processes, as well as the (iii) perceived person-job mismatches in leading positions were the most often mentioned shortcomings that caused widespread insecurity and frustration.

The previous section has already discussed the main remedies employees mentioned when asked about project failures at length. Based on the unsatisfied conditions, these particularly include sufficient training in digital systems to grant employees broader knowledge and opportunities to adapt to the new system. In turn, this is likely to generate a higher inclination to subsystem congruence if the majority of workers know how to use system-relevant software.

Another remedy concerns person-job mismatches. Especially when it comes to leading positions that require the appointed leaders to have a significantly broad knowledge about how the police system works and how the workers are likely to respond to change, it is pivotal to appoint officers from inside the police force. Having high-ranked, but outside lawyers assume these jobs did not only undermine effective structural functions, simply because these appointees lacked job-relevant expertise, but also triggered adverse cultural dynamics as frustration with managerial decisions and resentful sentiment increased. Similarly, it supposedly led to higher employee turnover and retirement rates as experienced staff was brushed aside.

These deficits appear to be the main underlying reason behind critical stances on the change itself. Adding to these shortcomings, the possibly insufficient communication channels in place during the process could have led to a heightened sense of insecurity. It is plausible that the employees may have felt more secure and in accord with the changes if they had been addressed as individuals, *i.e.* if they had received specific information on what kind of implications the change entails for *their* jobs. In effect, this also seems to have affected the perceived level of personal involvement, which overall has been found to be extremely low. Though this must not necessarily mean that this will obstruct the envisaged change, contrary to theoretical findings, it yet can reveal a seemingly detrimental impact on the relationship between management and lower staff and, by extension, the organizational culture.

Figure 5.7.: Main Factors to Lower Engagement Barriers



The provision of both information and resources could be the key to help employees cope with personal changes they experience on the job and thus may incline them to adjust to new daily routines. The result would be a system-supportive alignment and potentially favorable organizational culture, as levels of OCC could regress while the feeling of togetherness may be encouraged by the actions described above.

5.4. Discussion: Managing Large-Scale Systemic Changes

When discussing success and failure of systemic changes, it needs to be taken into account that the interpretations of the words vary. As discussed in Chap. 2, researchers have not seldom viewed strategic goals like the organization's performance, structure, and budget as key success factors in systemic changes. It could, however, be argued that most of this research focuses on the organization in itself and forgets the individuals within. The planning and implementation of big structural transformations as in the Swedish police force most often tend to solely focus on the strategic goals, vaulting the mere processual level into the organizational spotlight while the individual human perspective recedes into the background. Contrary to this notion, we would like to challenge this rather one-sided view on successful change and make it somewhat more complex.

One of the most fascinating trends found in the data was the shift in emotions directed towards the change. As stated in the analysis, almost all interviewees saw themselves as friends of change *before* the change process began. This is of course an advantageous place to initiate any change process and many studies argue that this is common for organizations to experience (*e.g.*, Armenakis, Harris, and Feild 1999; Adelman and L. Taylor 2007; Kotter 2001, Lewin 1947). Nonetheless, when the implementation began, many of the interviewees indicated that the change had elicited frustration, anxiety, and insecurities among the staff and themselves throughout the implementation phase. This was primarily down to a lack of information as to what the change would mean for their individual jobs, thus causing high insecurity that further exacerbated a negative view on managerial shortcomings, *e.g.* regarding leadership expertise, provision of training opportunities or participation in decision-making. Overall, it can therefore be summarized that these conditions were not continuously satisfied throughout the process.

However, the word "process" and its inherent implication of a *continuous* nature underscore that exactly these conditions must be present at *every* step of the way, not just at the beginning which seemed to have been the case. The absence of this conditional context caused an overall negative perception of the strategy devised to arrive at the structural outcome. Interestingly though, the outcome itself was commonly perceived as something positive and effective in that it was aligned with the initial purpose of the reform. Despite the positive result, the high frustration levels yet suggest that management lacked a sufficient acknowledgment of soft factors in order to pre-empt personal insecurities, frustration, and an ultimate jaundiced view of the change practices. Admittedly, this is not a unique occurrence, seeing as stress is often an intervening factor when dealing with change (Smollan 2015; *see* also Hobfoll 2001 in Chap. 2). By the same token, it had

a significant effect on the degree of personal involvement and thus the tendency to refrain from active engagement.

As discussed in the data analysis, many felt that they were never an actual part of the change but rather surrounded *by* the change. When the change implementation was completed, several of the interviewees could see vast improvements in their day-to-day work life. Yet, many still view the change process itself, *i.e.* the actions taken, as poorly executed. Furthermore, many seemed less friendly to change overall. When asked about the upcoming change, few saw the change in a positive light – in contrast to their perception at the start of the previous change. Many thought that the goals and vision of the 2024 change of increasing the force with 10 000 police officers were naive and unattainable. The friends of change could thus be viewed as having become less inclined to be in favor of changes. Of course, it could also be connected to this specific project. However, the need for employees viewing changes in an optimistic light still applies, and feelings like doubt can still be harmful to the upcoming change process.

This is notable, as it could potentially show the huge cultural impact triggered by significant systemic transformations. Arguably, a successful change could therefore also be measured based on the *attitude towards the changes* within the organization before and after a significant reform has been enacted. This is a measurement of said soft factors and would lend credence to other studies focusing on the individual's perspective of changes.

Moreover, this perspective would also underscore that a successful implementation of structural changes can benefit from a continuous demonstration of employee understanding, a sense of job security, and involvement of employees in management decision-making. This should even be implemented beyond generic, yet important key success factors such as an organization's performance, structure, and budget. The incorporation of such factors may further circumvent adverse cultural dynamics while providing the individual with the necessary security and guidance they require at every step of the envisaged reforms. Hence, a system and change-supportive organizational culture is likely to follow once conditions for both soft and hard factors are sufficiently satisfied to meet the planned structural goals, given that soft factors alone cannot directly influence the change outcome. These "hard" factors specifically include, among others, the duration of the process, performance integrity, top-down commitment, knowledge of the software, etc. (Sirkin, Keenan, and Jackson 2005) and similarly shape the perception of the surrounding environment and effectiveness of the respective transition. Conversely, without finding the balance between soft and hard aspects, management is prone to creating an unfavorable culture that is resistant to change. The resulting negative experiences would then likely trigger gloomy biases and thus obstruct any new change endeavor.

According to this argument, the individual, *i.e.* both its perception and resulting attitude towards change, would be the central driving force behind structure and culture, enforcing a transformative, collective mindset that supports strategic plans for structural reforms. This thought can be better comprehended when deconstructing the organizational dynamics on three different levels as depicted in the figure below (Fig. 5.8).

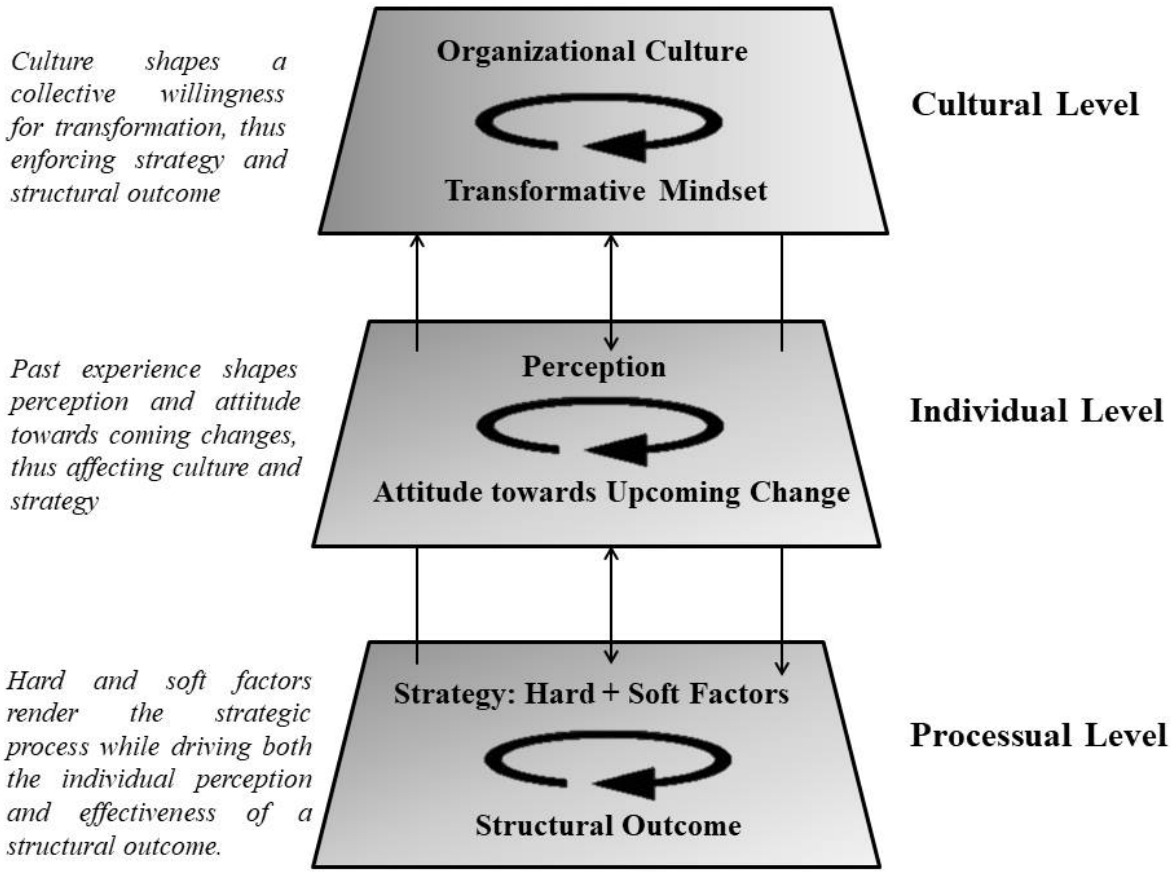


Figure 5.8.: Driving Forces in Systemic Changes

The model illustrates the assumed interrelations between the main driving forces which we identified to be evolving on three layers, namely (i) a *processual*, (ii) an *individual*, and (iii) a *cultural* level. Observe that the individual is placed between the cultural and processual layer, each of which enforces its respective dynamics based on which the individual will form its opinion. Alluding to the soft and hard side of management, the processual level is primarily driven by strategy, which on its part is geared towards attaining a concrete, desired structural end goal. However, as established, managing soft aspects alone is insufficient to implement transformation projects, as the effectiveness of structural outcomes similarly hinges on the organizational climate catalyzing a supportive mindset. For example, while visionary leadership may be imperative for most transformation projects, it must not necessarily be the key driving force *per se*; in particular, if the willingness for change does not spark over to the majority of employees. The same can be said about communication and engagement with employees.

The reason why these conditions may not be sufficiently fulfilled in this case is a seemingly weak top-down relationship shaping the climate in-between the organizational network. Indeed, changing the nature of these relationships amid highly structural and hierarchy-based changes is a tough nut to crack considering such structures are deeply ingrained in organizations and therefore tend to bias people's perception of change in general or management's intentions, often even

before the transition even started. This also gives rise to the assumption that attitudes towards upcoming changes are considerably framed through the experiences that employees recall and ultimately transfer in an almost template-like manner to what they expect to be replicated. In effect, this echoes our previous conjecture that experience will shape the general notion of change, bearing either higher or lower inclination to participation or commitment. The level of inclination, according to our model, would further determine organizational culture and aptitude to develop a transformative mindset, that on its part will support the strategic framework. Again, this leads back to the initial point that the balance of hard and soft factors is most likely to bear fruit if they show a strong appeal to numerous individuals, thus fueling a collectively supportive mindset on the cultural level. These mutual interrelations are illustrated in the figure by the outer arrows, linking the cultural and processual layer to one another.

For purposes of illustration, assume the past experience of change was a positive one, then it will bias the individual's perception to take a favorable view on the coming reform beforehand, which in turn will show a beneficial impact on both process and climate. Both the upper and lower layer subsequently enforce a (collective) transformative mindset and the effectiveness of a structural outcome, that mutually drive the attainment of the respective other. As outlined before, this is naturally contingent on several subfactors, which in this case were particularly centered on communication channels, access to training in IT systems, or leadership expertise. On the other side, common hard factors, such as duration, did not seem to play a significant role for the interviewees' perceptions. Upon fulfillment of said conditions, perception may have been shaped positively, thus rendering the cultural and structural dynamics to the reform positively as the inclination towards participation or supportive attitude increases.

Of course, these interrelations only hold true if this perception is similarly reciprocated by several other individuals. The relations presented in the figure therefore only apply if the intermediate individual level exhibits similar dynamics among a considerably huge share of employees. Unfortunately, this study lacks a sufficiently large data set to support this assumption.

This notwithstanding, the model contains valid implications for the Swedish police force specifically and public sector organizations in general, as it approaches the success of change management efforts from a heavily under-researched human experience-based view. The specifics of these implications will be left to the concluding discussion in order to avoid repetitive statements. It can, however, be anticipated that changes, congruent with other research findings, tend to be less successful, the more employees are exposed to reforms and thus grow to consider them in a more negative light. Hence, they are less predisposed to support reforms with increasing change repetition. Our conclusion is therefore that reforms, contrary to their purpose, make the organization less agile but fixate ingrained structures. It was already the French novelist Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr who coined the phrase "*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*".[9] As a matter of fact, several research findings support this idea, arguing that constant changes yield less desirable outcomes, as organizational routines are constantly disrupted and thus decrease production levels (*e.g.*, Pollitt

[9] in English: "*The more it changes, the more it's the same thing*."

and Bouckaert 2017; Ha 2014). Assuming this was true, it is certainly worth considering to which extent the individual layer, in fact, impacts the surrounding hard and soft factors on the processual and cultural level, respectively, *precisely because* the human perception may be the cause for why iterative reforms stop transforming organizations eventually.

The implicit indication is that change is never finished but a constant process. Buttressing our previous assumption, this was also repeatedly stressed by many of our interviewees, usually colored with a good amount of prejudice and a pejorative or cynic undertone. We therefore conclude that change efforts cannot solely pursue decidedly hard-headed, structural strategies but must first and foremost focus on the target group they aim to benefit. In effect, this means walking the tightrope between accommodating critiques and teasing participatory attitudes out of the lot of employees to make reforms succeed. What this entails specifically will be subject to the final discussion.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: MANAGE PERCEPTIONS, ACCOMPLISH CHANGE

Based on the example case of the Swedish police force, this study sought to establish a better scholarly understanding of the possible impact the human experience and perception exerts on the success of broad-scale structural reforms implemented in public organizations. To this end, we conducted intensive interviews and applied grounded theory in order to analyze potential linkages between personal perception and success of structural outcomes. In doing so, the categories obtained in Tab. 4.3 similarly offered additional insights into the cultural aspect intervening in the implementation of structural changes, though the findings we proposed are only conjectures. The model we thereby derived from the available data set thus attempts to capture the mutual dependencies between the main three layers of structure, culture, and individual where we assume the latter to be the central driving force mediating the success and reciprocal effects between structure and culture. In short, our findings can be summarized as follows:

6.1. Managing the Human Side of Systemic Changes

(1) *If the work environment is characterized by information sharing in decision-making, it can create the impression of active employee involvement and thus will be less associated with high levels of OCC.*

(2) *The absence of resources to make the involvement possible reversely increase levels of OCC.*

(3) *Active orientation was found to be low due to rigid hierarchical structures. Hence, its moderating effect on the relationship between an information-sharing climate and OCC was impeded. Both information sharing and resource provision can thus presumably only show mitigating effects on OCC under conditions of high active orientation compared to low active orientation. In this case, this condition was not sufficiently fulfilled.*

(4) *Employees who perceive themselves as having received higher levels of organizational inducements, as opposed to those who perceive having received lower levels, exhibit a more positive perception of the change, which, in turn, seems to lead them to be more committed to change. The behavioral support accordingly seems to increase with positive perceptions of past change experience.*

(5) *Past experience of management's efforts during a change implementation therefore appears to shape the perception and attitude towards coming changes.*

(6) *Observing perceptions is pivotal for planning future reforms, as they indicate the level of willingness for active participation or potential change fatigue. If the majority displays considerable levels of OCC or fatigue, they are likely to infect the organizational climate, reversely impacting structural outcomes. Hence, it follows that employee perception will inevitably determine the success of structural outcomes as it imbues the organizational climate.*

More extensively, we arrived at the conclusion that any change strategy needs to account for how the human experience with past changes will shape the employees' attitudes towards organizational change in general. Though the initial collective employee attitude should not be seen as a reliable forecast for how the change will evolve, it can yet provide valid indications for potential roadblocks that may emerge on both the processual and cultural level.

An overemphasis on the structure will ultimately lose an understanding for the individual and sense for organizational climate, whereas the converse case is prone to generate an inefficient structural alignment (Ha 2014).

The interview data point to an underemphasis of soft factors and therefore indicate room for improvement as regards the issues of leadership expertise, communication channels between upper management and staff, or providing training in new information systems for employees. Especially the latter plays a significantly important role in light of running digital changes, as it allows knowledge workers and administrative staff to increase efficiency levels and moreover creates the impression of being a valid asset for the success of the implementation.

Following our analysis, the categorization of data indicated that all of these factors affected the perception of both the process and outcome of the change. Hence, it is imperative for management to be both *adaptive* and *receptive* to ideas and employee input throughout the entire implementation process since it demonstrates a willingness to incorporate staff knowledge into final decisions. It sets the foundation to involve departments and employees in decisions as it was criticized by many of our participants. In other words, management must learn how to enable their staff to become a community of learners and allow for constant feedback loops. The main problem therefore does root in the "soft" side to management. At the core, communicative features can be understood as the linking pin between any other necessary condition, regardless of whether it resides on the soft or hard side to change management. Once these conditions are met, the perception may likely shift towards a more positive notion for the coming reform, although the already existent fatigue or even cynicism also needs to be taken into account as factors potentially hindering a smooth process ab initio.

Moreover, the analysis has demonstrated that management needs to recognize the possibility that successful change outcomes can be obstructed if reform is overly frequent. This would also mean that resistance does not necessarily have to emerge as a parallel side effect of the change

effort itself, but as the *result* of its implementation impairing future reforms (*see* also Schmidt, Groeneveld, and Van de Valle 2017). Conversely, the same naturally applies to support for change. Transition efforts should therefore never be implemented just for the sake of making changes, but only if external or internal conditions demand a systemic shift.

Managers must thereby not neglect the impact of the organizational size which naturally determines the length and complexity of communication pipelines and decision-making processes. The larger the organization and hierarchical network, the lower the possibilities for active involvement. Eventually, this may nurture resistant or cynic sentiment. However, the obligation to order and command and usual willingness for job preservation are likely to nip resistance in the bud. On the other hand, it may also encourage organizational change cynicism that may potentially undercut the success of systemic change or culture. Nevertheless, whether this is in fact the case, remains subject to further research.

We suggest that organizational cynicism or even inertia is best addressed by complementary approaches such as identifying "winners", shuffling part of the workforce, nominating change agents among workers, or starting with kick-off events. Essentially, the key responsibility in any of these actions would be to make employees see how *they* can reap the benefits from coming changes. Moreover, in the case of a rather sluggish and cumbersome public organizational structure, change should be implemented incrementally if a slow pace is less straining for employees. According to our interview analysis, the rather long duration was never subject to criticism. On the contrary, we assume that a hasty and wrenching change would have sown widespread concern and insecurity and thus exacerbated a negative perception. Therefore, we suggest loosening the reins on structural reinforcement as to enable an active orientation towards involvement as a moderator in reducing employee reports of inertia or cynicism.

6.2. Study Limitations and Future Research

The factors and propositions offered here indicate the need to move beyond the literature's casual, additive acknowledgment of the relationship between human experiences and change outcomes. The previous discussions harbored a quite varied and challenging agenda for future research. This should devote further attention to the interactive effects of soft and hard factors on the different organizational levels and in different public management settings. Especially useful could be the employment of multivariate statistical techniques and large-sample data sets of human perception before and after reforms and at different departmental levels. This would allow for a more precise measurement and identification of potential linkages and key success factors. Likewise, it can be further extended to both planned and unplanned changes in order to have a point of reference if cynicism and frustration, in fact, increase amid planned systemic transformation projects.

In that context, it is furthermore worth investigating if the rigid structures present in public settings catalyze negative perceptions and subsequently undermine both the processual and cultural level. Interestingly, this case has not shown any indication that the process has suffered because

of a quite straightforward application of hard factors. It was rather the organizational climate that had to foot the bill for an under-emphasis of necessary soft factors. However, due to the assumed interrelation between structure and culture, it may still be the case that cultural repercussions impair the success on a processual level. As this warrants a more detailed investigation, future research needs to refine the general propositions discussed here, synthesizing the various theories underlying them, and testing rival propositions. Within that process, scholars and practicing consultants must also confront the challenge of analyzing the relationship between the content and process of change and performance outcomes.

While the designs are likely to be challenging and expensive, the results will hold relevant implications for how reforms can be initiated and executed, using the knowledge on how to balance soft and hard factors. Doing so will specifically target employee needs and orientation toward involvement. Particularly in the face of a rapidly changing digital environment that demands a constant adaptation to new trends, this is likely to be the crucial prerequisite for long-term successful organizational projects. By the same token, human-centered perspectives are important for both practice and theory building and are long overdue.

CHAPTER A

APPENDIX

A.1. Consent To Take Part in Research

- I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for the researchers only
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

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Signature of participant **Date**

Signature of researcher **Date**

A.2. Interview Questions

Remark: The list below is a summary of those questions we planned to ask before we conducted the interviews. However, since we applied open-ended questions, additional topics emerged during the conversations that were not originally planned for. These topics are not included here.

Basic Questions

1. How long have you been working for the police?
2. What is your background?
3. Can you tell us about the big change that occurred when the police became more centralized?

Specific Change (Centralization)

1. If they were present during the change: How was the change announced?
2. If they were not present: How was the centralization introduced?
3. How did you feel about the change? (Friend or foe of change?)
4. Do you agree that centralization restricts you in your ability to do your job?
5. In your opinion, which problems are the most pressing or are left unaddressed?
6. From your perspective, do the local districts provide you with better opportunities to do your job?

Personal Reflection

1. How has the change affected you professionally?
2. How has the change affected you personally?
3. Do you feel that you were involved in the change?
4. Were you asked about your thoughts regarding the change?
5. What have you liked about the change?
6. What have you not liked?
7. Did you ever feel restricted by the expectations of the change process?

Culture

1. What is organizational culture for you?
2. How did the change affect the organizational climate in your opinion?
3. What kind of cultural or structural change would you like to see happening in the future?

Relationships

1. How have you and your colleagues discussed changes?
    a) Did your colleagues work to make the change successfully?
    b) Did the department want to see the change succeed?
2. Did you notice a change in behavior on part of your colleagues?
3. Did it have an impact on your personal and the division's job performance?
4. Which relations do you have to supervising/subordinate officers?
5. Do you celebrate success in your office/regionally/nationally?

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