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Employee Readiness to Transformational Change in a Merger of Divergent Organizational Cultures

by

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Abstract

When organizations encounter major changes, it is largely expected that employees are prepared to make such change. In this analysis of transformational organizational change, I focus on the interpretive repertoires of individual employees as they attempt to make sense of the change interventions. This research sets out to understand and explore how a merger integration experience affects the way members of a legacy sister company identify and engage with the new post-merger organisation, in order to enhance the merger integration process. In doing so, I aim to understand how and why individuals' readiness for change differ and what underpins these differences. The organization has a long history of transformational change and reacting to the rapid-pace changes in the telecommunications industry. An abductive approach was employed in order to explore the topic with an open mind. The analysis shows that there are four interpretive repertoires associated with the change, categorized as embracers, resisters, compliers and those showing indifference. Implications and areas for future research are discussed.

Key words: organizational change, readiness for change, interpretive repertoires

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1 Introduction

"It is not the strongest or the most intelligent who will survive but those who can best manage change."

--Charles Darwin

Titles like *"The Only Constant is Change"* and *'Change or Die,'* on books and popular press articles, while catchy, hyperbolic or even threatening-sounding, underscore the idea that organizations face increased uncertainty or 'change' in their operating environments and must understand the global and organizational contexts in which they operate, quickly adapting in order to guarantee long-term survival and growth, or face the possibility to 'Die' (see Kotter, 2012; Burk, 2019; Deutschman and Keeler, 2007; Attong and Metz, 2012). Moreover, organizations reside in an environment characterized by accelerating complexity (De Meuse, Dai, & Hallenbeck, 2010) and the world is in a state of constant change brought about by digitalization, globalization, and transformed markets, shaping the economic world and creating new challenges for enterprises. The current Covid-19 public health crisis and associated rapid pace of change we find ourselves in further highlights the interconnectedness of our modern world and the need to constantly adapt to new situations. In this thesis, I will define organizational change as the alterations of structures, strategies, procedures, or cultures of organizations (Quattrone and Hopper, 2001).

Following arguments that change is a 'must' for organizations to survive and thrive, studies have shown that successful change management, and more specifically planning and leadership and direction-oriented change management practices are strong determinants for competitive advantage (May and Stahl, 2017). Moreover, business thinkers such as Reeves and Deimler predominantly view adaptability as the new competitive advantage as well as being a strong determinant of an organization's performance (Reeves and Deimler, 2011). In particular, established corporations, many of which have built their operations around scale and efficiency, which are dependent upon a fundamentally stable environment, are becoming increasingly challenged. According to Tushman (1997), mature organizations are shackled by their structures, systems and bureaucracies, in turn causing 'structural inertia.' Furthermore, because the need for change is often unpredictable, it tends to be reactive and ad hoc. If not

managed, it can lead to situations of organizational crisis. Therefore, the challenge lies in organizations creating environments that encourage knowledge flow, autonomy, sharing and flexibility - all upon which adaptation prospers. As a result, according to Reeves and Deimler (2011), contrary to traditional strategic thinking, strategy comes after organization in adaptive companies.

Can we create organizations that are built-to-change? A study by Burns and Stalker (1961) distinguished between rigid and beauracatic vs. flexible or agile management systems, arguing that the rigid and beauracatic organizations perform well in stable environments, while flexible or agile systems performed better during turbulent times. Furthermore, Worley and Lawler (2006) maintain that many businesses are organized in ways that discourage change, which is inconsistent with the recent need for agility and adaptation. Examples of traditional organization design principles that are used at many businesses are job descriptions that detail specific responsibilities, hiring people with the capabilities for the job which they have applied, and hierarchical structures.

On the other hand, built-to-change organization design principles would be goal-setting reviews to identify what individuals and teams should achieve in the near future, hiring people with initiative who like change, who are quick learners and want development, and process-based cross-functional network structures (Worley and Lawler, 2006). While most organizations are built-to-last, with structures and management practices designed to minimize variability and instability, the ultimate challenge then is to design organizations that are built-to-change, which are flexible in responding to environmental developments. According to later research by Worley and Lawler (2010), organizations with consistently high performance had more features of the built-to-change organization. However, any organization has the capacity to develop increased agility, defined as an "*evolving change and design capability, a leadership challenge that is never finished, only approached over time, but which yields consistently high levels of sustainable effectiveness*" (Worley and Lawler, 2010, p. 2).

Moreover, organizations vary in their baseline receptiveness or readiness for change. Readiness for change can be diagnosed through asking two overarching questions. First, is the organization as a whole receptive to change and secondly, are those who will be affected ready for these changes? According to Eccles, organizational readiness depends on a number

of conditions, including if there is pressure for change (1), a shared vision of the goals, benefits and direction (2), an effective liaison and trust between those concerned (3), the will and power to act (4), enough people with sufficient resources (5), suitable rewards and accountability for actions (6), defined actionable first steps (7), and an organization with the capacity to learn and adapt (8) (Eccles, 1984). Thereby, if an organization answers yes to these questions, organizational receptiveness is high, and resistance is likely to be limited. In many working contexts, it is understood that organizational readiness is a critical precursor to successful change. In addition, when organizational readiness is high, there is a greater likelihood that organizational members will initiate change, exert greater effort, show greater persistence, and display more cooperative behavior (Budhiraja, 2019). Therefore, it is important to further understand how organizations go about preparing for change and how it is done in practice.

Another important, and often overlooked element that contributes to organizational receptiveness is individual readiness for change. Rafferty et al. (2013) define change readiness as an individual attitude, consisting of both cognitive and emotional dimensions. An individual's change readiness is underpinned by these five beliefs: that change is needed, that the proposed change is an appropriate response, a perceived capability to implement the change, the belief that the organization (management, peers) will provide necessary resources and information, and an individual cost/benefit analysis that sees at least some benefits. Individual readiness to change is a critical success factor because organizations can only change and act through its members.

Even the most collective activities that occur in organizations are the result of some combination of the activities of individual organizational members (Vakola, 2014). In this way, organizational readiness to change is by and large a function of the readiness to change of individual staff members. When individual staff members are ready and willing to take responsibility for making changes, the likelihood of successful organization change is greater. It is often the case that organizations emphasize organizational determinants and overlook individual-level determinants and the challenge is for organizations (management, peers) to establish employee readiness for change. Therefore, this research aims to develop a model of how organizations can go about understanding the various individual meaning systems associated with change and approaching the challenge of establishing individual readiness to change.

1.1 Problematizing Readiness for Change

Based on my empirical observations, grounded in my experience as an insider, it was evident that there were quite different perspectives and attitudes towards change that underpin readiness. One perspective is captured in the following quotation by Ida:

"Looking back and that we've gone through these many transformation projects and we have seen so many skilled colleagues leaving the company, and we have seen that all things turn out quite well. I mean everybody gets new jobs and so going through those transformation project has also made every individual a little bit calmer, because we know that even though we are affected, we know that we are not left completely without support and we have seen looking at the previous rounds that things are sorted out and everybody get an opportunity somewhere else."

This quote captures the feeling that it will all turn out okay in the end, and that in the big scheme of things, the worst case scenario of an organizational change is being made redundant, in which case you will receive the support and time you need to find your next step. Individual employees in the organization can attain a sense of calm or acceptance with the transformation, according to Ida, by knowing that the organization will support them in the event that they themselves are made redundant. In short, this portrays an attitude of being in support of, showing an openness towards, and commitment to the changes. This is contrasted with the view of Monica, who shared that:

"We have said from HR that 'there will be no changes and don't expect any changes; everything will be as it has been previously when you've been a Moon Mobile employee, but I believe that it's not really. I mean a lot of the things, yes, they are the same, but many things are not the same. And also that it's only positive - to say that everything will be as is - because when I've been speaking to a lot of managers and employees, they really want something different. So, I wish that we had been focusing a bit more on the cultural aspect and the identity and the belonging and the value making and the soft parts."

This quote captures Monica's view that readiness for change is about creating a shared understanding of the 'soft' cultural aspects to be addressed and ensuring that the feeling of the managers and employees is reflected in the way in which change is done. In short, this

portrays an attitude towards the change process as being highly controlled but lacking a connection to the needs of the people within the organization and a strong belief in the deep need for cultural integration as well.

The literature on readiness for change gives normative advice in the form of questions the organization can ask itself or tick-box exercises and yet, doesn't explain why different actors see the change in different ways. Therefore, this research seeks to understand why attitudes to change vary. Furthermore, mergers as a topic of change are somewhat unique in that they add to the complexity of change through the issue of organizational culture. Research suggests that changes related to the integration of a merger often result in challenges for employees, including integrating the two organizational cultures, which can lead to detrimental outcomes for individuals (Febriani and Yancey, 2019). In addition, researchers maintain that M&A failures are frequently the result of a poor cultural fit between the two companies (Cartwright and Cooper, 1993) and that while HRM is most often not considered in the planning and preparedness stage of the merger, it is critical to the success of the merger process (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2019). Hence, mergers have their own characteristics and need to be considered as a special case for theorizing.

1.2 Aims and Research Questions

As organizations increasingly need to develop their receptivity to change in order to stay competitive and survive, it is interesting to study how transformational changes from a merger integration experience inform individual organizational members' mental thought processes and meaning systems of readiness for change as they engage with the new post-merger organization. Furthermore, I will draw upon the concept of interpretive repertoires as a means to emphasize that the tick-box approach to change is inadequate, and we need to understand how stakeholders see the world in much more depth. Thus, this study will contribute to the knowledge of how to best manage and enhance individual readiness for change in a merger integration process. In doing so, I aim to understand how individuals' readiness for change differ and what underpins these differences. In order to reach my aims, the following research questions have been formulated:

- *How do individuals' readiness for change differ and what underpins these differences?*
- *Why do attitudes towards change, as expressed by Ida and Monica, vary?*

These research questions are ultimately interesting to address for the value they can bring to Moonstone and its employees. My findings, including the model of archetypes of interpretive repertoires and the implications thereof, can serve to inform future organizational change within Moonstone, so that future organizational change can reflect the needs of managers and employees, take less time, cause less stress, and in turn, create a more engaged workforce. Furthermore, findings would also be relevant to other organizations going through transformational organizational change in the form of a merger.

1.3 Outline of the Thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. First, I guided the reader through the introduction of the research problem as well as presented the aim and research questions that will guide the study. Secondly, Chapter 2 will provide the theoretical context for the study. In particular, I will address theories and models of organizational change, take a deep dive on the topic of readiness to change, and argue for the use of interpretive repertoires in order to better understand readiness to change. Thirdly, Chapter 3 will outline my methodological approach and research design by elaborating on the paradigm through which I see my research, a description of the focal case as well as an explanation of how I have collected and analyzed the empirical data. I end the chapter by critically reflecting upon the quality and credibility of the study. In Chapter 4 I will present my interpretations of the empirical data, supported by excerpts from the interviews I conducted. Chapter 4 is broken up into three sections, where I start by illustrating the current situation at my focal organization, followed by my analysis of the main themes identified in the empirical data. Chapter 5 elaborates on this analysis by discussing the proposed findings in relation to the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2. Finally, I connect the discussion back to my proposed aim and research questions in Chapter 6, addressing limitations, implications for practice and areas for future research.

2 Literature Review

This chapter presents the literature review of this study. It is divided into three main sections which are "Transformational Organizational Change," "Individual and Organizational Readiness to Change," and "Understanding Individual Readiness using Interpretive Repertoires." The chapter begins with an outline of the need for transformational organizational change and an outline of the various models that can be used to carry out such change. The following section explains how individual and organizational readiness to change are essential aspects of carrying out change and approaches on how it can be managed. In the last section, I will discuss how the concept of interpretive repertoires is useful for more easily understanding and capturing individual responses to change in this context.

2.1 Transformational Organizational Change

In the current global economy, organizations are reliant upon the satisfaction of a number of stakeholders, including customers, employees, investors, suppliers, governmental agencies, unions, and the community from which the business draws its resources. As a result, organizations need to initiate changes to improve organizational effectiveness, profitability, sustainability or some combination thereof. In addition, transformational changes are seen as necessary for organizations to survive in extremely competitive business environments with a myriad of external and internal pressures (Terry et al., 2012). Such transformational changes can often be explained by the need to *"build capacity to respond to, and to shape, external pressures and demands"* (Palmer et al., 2017, p. 62).

The field of research on organizational change is extensive and broad. Linear models of planned change, like Lewin's 3-step unfreezing - changing - refreezing (1951) or Kotter's 8-step model (1996) provide logical and sequential prescriptions for change and attempt to simplify the process in a planned sequence of stages. However, while these models give the manager an overview of what needs to be addressed and the employees an idea of what to expect, they mostly fail to say how to go about each step, which can lead to much frustration

for change managers. According to Paton and McCalman (2008), the difficulty is that most organizations view the concept of change as a programmed process, starting with a problem to be solved, which can then be broken down by analyzing possible alternatives, selecting the preferred solution, and applying that. However, this approach fails to change the organization's underlying nature and therefore problems can persist.

In other words, there is an over-emphasis on the rational, thus overlooking the complexity, ambiguity and paradox which is recognized as an integral feature of organizational transformation. Furthermore, such theories of change assume that all stakeholders are willing and interested in implementing change, and that a common agreement can be reached. This presumption is criticized for ignoring organizational politics and conflict, and for assuming that politics and conflict can easily be acknowledged and resolved (Buchanan and Badham, 2008). In brief, most mainstream approaches that dominate the literature approach focus on a step-by-step process with a clear beginning, middle and end, which is by and large choreographed or controlled from the top of the organization.

On the other hand, the emergent theory of change starts from the premise that change is not a linear process or an isolated event, but is rather a continuous, unpredictable process of aligning and re-aligning an organization to its changing environment. According to Weick, emergent change consists of "*ongoing accommodations, adaptations, and alterations that produce fundamental change without a priori intentions to do so. It occurs when people re-accomplish routines and when they deal with contingencies, breakdowns, and opportunities...*" (Weick, 2000, p. 237). Hodges (2018) lends the metaphor of a jazz band to this scenario, whereby the members do not decide in advance exactly what notes each is going to play but wait until the performance begins. Yet, the performance works well due to the fact that all members are playing within the same rhythmic structure and have a shared understanding of the rules of the musical genre (Hodges, 2018). In this approach to change, models are important, but not as blueprints to be rolled out from the top down, but as tools for animating dialogue about change amongst stakeholders.

Another theory, contingency theory presupposes that the structure and performance of an organization are dependent upon the situational variables it faces. Since no two organizations are alike, these situational variables will consistently differ. Advocates of this view maintain that the environment determines the type of change required, and the organization is in

constant interaction with its environment, which consists of 'actors' or 'networks' (Duncan, 1979). In this way, the environment constrains the choices of an organization as to how it structures itself. The aim, then, is to attain an alignment or fit between the environmental situation and the organization. Another related approach was proposed by Balogun and Hailey (2008) with the 'change kaleidoscope,' which notates eight contextual features, including the necessary speed of change, the scope of the change agenda, the need for continuity on some dimensions, the breadth of attitudes and values among those affected, individual change capabilities, organizational capacity for change, readiness for change and the power of the change agent. In total, these contextual features then influence the starting point and road map towards change, the implementation style and the nature of change roles (top down, bottom up, dispersed). In this way, this approach argues against a best practice prescriptive approach and instead argues for change management based on situation and context.

The contingency approach to change is in line with my own views and will be used to address the research questions and aims of this study. Furthermore, it aligns with the interpreter image of change management, which maintains that resistance is likely a result of people not fully understanding what is happening, where the change is taking the organization, and the impact that it will have on all involved (Palmer et al., 2017). Therefore, the image of change from which I draw inspiration in this thesis is the interpreter image, which argues that making sense of the change, clarifying what it means, and connecting individual identity with the process and expected outcomes of the change can go a long way to managing the fundamental problems that caused the resistance.

While there are a number of types of organizational change, the focus of this study is transformational organizational change in the form of a merger integration. Transformational change is necessary when the change cannot be accomplished gradually or comfortably, as in incremental change, which focuses on fine-tuning processes and systems. In these cases, transformational change aims to "*redefine an organization's strategic direction, cultural assumptions and identity*" (Hodges, 2018, p. 52). Due to the much larger impact they have, transformations are much more disruptive to people's way of working and are often a reflection of deep shifts in the environment as well as inside the organization. Hence, in order to successfully realize the required degree of change, transformations demand huge amounts of energy and are likely to be hotly contested.

In addition, a merger poses unique challenges. An organizational merger means that a new identity is imposed on employees and workers involved in a business merger often exhibit strong ingroup/outgroup biases that can cause challenges to the merger's success (Haunschild et al., 1994). In such instances, people from different groups must learn to work together to achieve common goals. It is well established that organizational change can result in job insecurity and threats to individual self-esteem, well-being and psychological health (Callan et al., 1995). Additionally, these potential outcomes are particularly marked in response to an organizational merger and the merged members can often experience negative reactions, including stress, productivity losses, and even illness (Edwards et al., 2017; Oreg et al., 2011; Matteson and Ivancevich, 1990). Furthermore, previous research has shown that the negative effects of mergers are most marked for employees of the low-status premerger organization (Terry et al., 2001).

On top of this, fewer than half of all mergers between organizations are regarded as successful (Marks and Mirvis, 1986; Kelly et al., 1999). Despite this, when organizational change is perceived as a positive challenge, change events may have a positive impact on psychological health (Avey et al., 2008). Nevertheless, 'people' are often ignored or dismissed as being a "*soft or mushy issue by those who initiate or guide the merger decision*" (Cartwright and Cooper, 1996, p.2). Yet, as one of the most prominent business strategies, the number of M&A transactions globally in 2015 was a record 44,000 (Brownstein, 2016). Given the prevalence of such mergers in business today and the large number of individuals that are impacted, as well as the risks for those involved, it is essential to further understand the underlying conditions in which mergers take place and how these can be managed to produce more successful outcomes for all involved.

2.2 Readiness for Change

There is a plethora of factors that contribute to the degree of success in implementing organizational change. However, attempts to implement transformational change often fail due to a lack of sufficient individual, and thereby organizational, readiness for change. Failures of organizational change are aplenty, from well-known and extreme instances in the way of intelligence failures that led to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 (Garicano and Posner, 2005) or the loss of the Challenger space shuttle (Vaughan, 1996) to the more mundane failures of implementing new IT frameworks into organizations (Chen et al., 2009).

Readiness can briefly be defined as the degree of acceptance of or resistance to change. Rafferty et al. (2013) define change readiness as an individual attitude, consisting of both cognitive and emotional dimensions. As previously mentioned, readiness is underpinned by these five beliefs: that change is needed, that the proposed change is an appropriate response, a perceived capability to implement the change, the belief that the organization (management, peers) will provide necessary resources and information, and an individual cost/benefit analysis that sees at least some benefits. When individual readiness is high, change can be straightforward, but if readiness is low, it will most likely lead to resistance. Therefore, some key actions are often needed to increase levels of readiness among those who are going to be affected. Creating readiness for organizational change involves "*proactive attempts by a change agent to influence the beliefs, attitudes, intentions and ultimately the behavior of a change target*" (Armenakis et al., 1993, p. 683). In terms of increasing readiness, research indicates that internal enablers can wield particular power (Palmer et al., 2017).

Readiness for change is created through changing individual cognitions and emotions amongst employees. Armenakis (1993) maintains that this can be achieved through the message (transmitted via the strategies), interpersonal and social dynamics, influence strategies, change agent attributes (credibility, trustworthiness, sincerity and expertise), and assessing the system's readiness. However, the more commonly used mainstream approaches to change that apply a tick-box method are inadequate, as these mainly focus on assessing the system's readiness and/or the message, failing to create a plan for how to address the other critical factors or taking on a nuanced understanding of the interpersonal and social dynamics of the organizational members. Therefore, another approach is needed that accounts for these important issues, giving more weight and depth to the individual ways in which employees see change.

There are varying mental models that help us to make sense of and simplify the world in which we live. Weick (1995) notes that individuals within the context of change make varying sense of what is happening around them. Jonassen and Land (2014) also allow that there are individual differences surrounding sensemaking, maintaining that conflicting meaning systems are often present within groups of stakeholders. In addition, Balogun and Johnson (2005) importantly illustrate that individuals in organizations are not merely 'sense-takers' but are 'sense makers' and play a big role in determining outcomes of strategic change initiatives. Sensemaking also ties in with the concept of storytelling, which can be a very

powerful tool for interpreting the meaning of change for others, or as asserted by Stephen Denning (2004), a well-told story can often be more inspiring and motivating than a detailed analytical approach. For instance, viewing the organization as a cultural system, including values and the 'way things are done around here' is one mental model (Reger et al., 1994). As such, this research aims to further understand the different meaning systems present among a group of stakeholders that consists of employees who have recently been transferred to a new company and those directly involved in the change process. With a foundational understanding of meaning systems among stakeholders, change managers can then take practical - and low-cost - steps towards increasing the likeliness of a change initiative being welcomed and successful.

2.3 Understanding Individual Readiness using Interpretive Repertoires

Given that the tick-box approach recommended by mainstream literature is insufficient and that we need a way to understand how stakeholders see the world in much more depth, interpretive repertoires are a good means by which this can be accomplished. The concept of interpretive repertoires originated in the field of social psychology, proposing a discursive approach to understanding human actions, emotions, and cognitive processes (Potter, 2012). It is rooted in the idea that individuals come up with different, and context-specific, discursive constructions to give meaning to the social world, grounding their everyday actions. This is done using language that is shared and internally coherent. The concept of interpretive repertoires fits into and aligns with a broader context of change seen in the interpreter image of change management, which maintains that resistance is likely a result of people not fully understanding what is happening, where the change is taking the organization, and the impact that it will have on all involved (Palmer et al., 2017).

These interpretive repertoires can be viewed as the building blocks that speakers use to construct versions of an action, idea, or other phenomenon from a rather restricted range of expressions (Wetherell and Potter, 1988). In this way, the repertoires offer a lexicon of terms and metaphors that help us to characterize and evaluate the world in which we live (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Edley (2001, p. 198) explains them as "*books on the shelves of a public library, permanently available for borrowing,*" a range of linguistic resources that enable mutual understanding in multi-faceted social situations.

The interpretive repertoire approach has been useful, for instance, in understanding discourse both within the press and in response to it (Singer and Broersma, 2020), how psychologists defend their own ideas and criticize the opinions of others, all within academic convention (McKinlay and Potter, 1987) or how journalists tap into multiple interpretive repertoires in articulating the ways in which they believe themselves to be different from public relations practitioners (Francoeur, 2016). To date however, the concept of interpretive repertoires as linguistic building blocks in the context of organizational change has, to the author's knowledge, not been used and it is therefore my aim to use it as a way in which one can gain insights into what people think and how they feel through what they say.

Using interpretive repertoires to analyze individual perceptions of organizational change can contribute to our understanding in a number of ways. Namely, one can start to see patterns emerge in the types of language used, and what meaning systems generally underlie those patterns. From the perspective of the recently transferred employee into the new organization, how do they see the changes, what does "readiness to change" look like, and what underpins these differences? In short, the existence of different repertoires lends itself to the question of why such differences arise and answering this, in turn, provides additional insights into the complexity of the change process that is not always possible through applying the mainstream models.

2.4 Chapter Summary

In the preceding chapter, I have presented the theoretical underpinning for this thesis based on my aims and research questions. I started by guiding the reader through the concept of organizational change and mergers, which is relevant to this study as such changes are an underlying dimension to the thesis. Thereafter, I introduced how the concept of readiness to change is of particular importance to address when undergoing such transformational organizational change. I also discussed factors that can increase the mentioned readiness to change. Subsequently, I introduced the concept of interpretive repertoires as an important concept for understanding how employees relate to the change process.

3 Methodology

This chapter will inform the reader about the methodological approach I have used in this study. I hope to clarify the research process and how I have reached my conclusions. In the first part of this chapter, I will outline the chosen research approach that has guided my work. Subsequently, I describe my research design by elaborating on how I have collected the empirical data and conducted the analysis. Finally, I critically reflect upon the quality, credibility, and reflexivity of my study.

3.1 Research Approach

The aim of my study is to gain a deeper understanding of how transformational changes from a merger integration experience inform individual organizational members' mental thought processes and meaning systems of readiness for change as they engage with the new post-merger organization. To answer this aim, I have adopted an exploratory approach to gain an understanding of the relationship between the consequences of transformational changes and meaning systems around readiness for change. The paradigm through which I have gathered inspiration is an interpretive one. Within the interpretive tradition, one objective reality does not exist. Instead, reality is thought of as socially constructed through interaction (Prasad, 2018; Merriam, 2002).

My research approach is thus premised in the idea that much of the world with which we deal is essentially socially constructed (Weick, 1969/1979). Studying social construction processes implies a greater focus on the means by which organizational members go about constructing and understanding their experience and less on the number or frequency of measurable occurrences. This aligns with the dialogic view of organizational development, which treats reality as subjective or inter-subjective, so that the priority in intervening in an organization is to identify and acknowledge different stakeholders' interpretations of what for them is reality. In other words, there is more focus on shared beliefs of the reality and meanings of that reality.

The concept of sensemaking is also relevant to understand my research approach. In expounding on the meaning of this concept, Weick argues that "*people concerned with identity in the social context of other actors engage ongoing events from which they extract cues and make plausible sense retrospectively while enacting more or less order into those ongoing events*" (Weick, 2001). In other words, sensemaking is social and retrospective, as well as being grounded in narrative and identity. Within the sensemaking approach, the view is that change occurs over time through interpretive activities that facilitate organizational members creating new meanings about their organizations and about the ways in which they can operate differently going forward.

This connects with the view of change as an interpreter, whereby employees need management to provide meaning and to help them understand what is happening. In change, those who are affected need to understand the significance of their roles, what needs to happen and why, and where the organization is heading. In this view of change, managers must help to make sense of the challenges the organization faces, in this case a merger. Management should thus engage in sense giving practices and the management of meaning throughout the change process, giving clarity and contributing to individual identity as well as to organizational commitment (Palmer et al., 2017; Huzzard et al., 2014).

3.2 Research Design

The aim of my study is to gain a deeper understanding of how transformational changes from a merger integration experience inform the interpretive repertoires of readiness for change of individual organizational members as they engage with the new post-merger organization. As such, to answer this aim I have chosen to conduct a single case study focusing on the organization Moon Mobile, and subsequently Moonstone. Next, I will describe the focal organization, with a focus on the changes that they have experienced over the last decade. It is also worth noting that I fill a dual role, in that I was an employee of Moon Mobile and selected as one of the employees to transfer over to the new organization, Moonstone, as well as being a researcher. This unique dynamic afforded me some advantages and can also be argued to be a limitation, which I have discussed in Chapter 6 of the thesis.

3.2.1 Case of Moon Mobile and Moonstone

In order to answer my research questions, I have chosen to conduct a single case study. By studying a single case study, it allows me, the researcher, to emphasize the relationships between important factors that characterize a phenomenon. Within the context of this single case study, it is my hope to gain a deeper understanding for the way in which change processes play out in large organizations, and how individual members perceive those changes. The data provided to me during the interviews, coupled with my innumerable opportunities to engage with the participants, allowed me to gain rich insights about the context in which this study is situated.

The organization in question has a long history of transformational change and reacting to the rapid-pace changes in the telecommunications industry. Furthermore, they have recently undergone a major transformation, in which the former company has been merged into a sister company, and redundancies took place. Those individuals who were transferred over to the new organization, and not those made redundant, were the individuals I targeted in recruitment of interviewees. The reason for discluding individuals who were made redundant is that given their status of not moving over to the new organization, it would not have been fitting. Additionally, I believe it would have skewed the results in a different direction than intended.

Furthermore, there were different groupings in the company, whereby some organizations were more impacted than others. The so-called hosted functions, who by and large kept the same reporting lines to Asia as before, have been impacted more in an indirect sense in the way that they receive support from the supporting functions such as HR and Finance. However, the supporting functions themselves have been more impacted by the changes, whereby many have been integrated into new teams. Therefore, I selected people who were most impacted by the merger integration, namely those working in support functions. In short, I chose the participants in an ex-ante fashion.

The case study site was the business support functions of a mobile phone company, Moon Mobile, implementing strategic change initiated by senior managers in response to financial shortfalls. However, the story of Moon Mobile goes back to when the company was founded in 2001 as a joint venture between Moon and Light and the journey of Moon and Light

began. In March 2012 Moon and Light became fully owned by Moon and changed the name to Moon Mobile.

The fierce competition within the industry resulted in the decision to consolidate Moon Mobile with its sister company, Moonstone. The strategy adopted by Moon Mobile was to emphasize cost control and operational efficiency rather than market aggressiveness or growth. To adapt to mounting competitive pressures, Moon Mobile would have to become leaner and streamline the use of support function resources with Moonstone. The formal divide of the old company's Sales and Marketing division merging into this sister company, Moonstone, marked the start of implementation in April 2019.

3.2.2 Collection of Empirical Material

For the collection of empirical data, my primary source has been semi-structured interviews conducted with employees at Moon Mobile and Moonstone. The choice to conduct semi-structured interviews was based on their advantages for carrying out qualitative research. Access was granted to the organization as a function of being an employee who was a part of the legacy company and would be transferred over to the sister company. This access was given in return for feedback from the researcher to managers and colleagues on the change process. One-on-one interviews were used as the primary data collection mechanism, since interviews provide an in-depth account of a situation from the interviewee's perspective. In all, 10 employees were recruited as interviewees. The interviews allowed the researcher to probe for information about the change process and to gain information on the varying perspectives of the interviewees. Documentation such as copies of communications and workshop documents were also reviewed as background material. In order to increase the level of trustworthiness and further reduce the risk of response bias, I explained that the interviewee's answers and the focal organization would be anonymized (Saunders et al., 2011). This anonymization has been done by changing the name of the interviewees and the organizations.

The purpose of the radical restructuring at Moon Mobile was to drive down OPEX (operating expenditure) costs by 50% while maintaining quality and service levels. Moon Mobile transferred 80% of its employees over to its sister company, who were subsequently reappointed to the new structure, or accepted exit terms. The remaining roughly 20% of Moon Mobile employees were made redundant and offered an exit package. Finally, Moon

Mobile ceased to exist as an independent legal entity. The overall vision was for Moonstone to take on the products in Moon Mobile's portfolio to expand their offering. For each staff member, there were briefing meetings with details of how they would be impacted, and in some cases, details of the different positions staff could apply for. Employees continued to do the work they used to, while gradually taking up their new responsibilities.

Since the research focus was on individual organizational members and how they make sense of change events, the research was carried out from the interpretive perspective of inquiry from the inside (Brown, 1994). Each interview sought to elicit responses on the themes of change management, organizational culture, and individual responses to the change. I conducted 10 semi-structured interviews with full-time employees of Moon Mobile and Moonstone. A complete list of interviewees and their number of years in the company can be found in table 3.1 "*List of Interviewees.*"

Table 3.1: List of interviewees

Interviewee	Gender	Years in Company
1. Alexandra	Female	3
2. Donna	Female	18
3. Alyssa	Female	20
4. Ida	Female	20
5. Monica	Female	12
6. Susanna	Female	20
7. Mari	Female	14
8. Peter	Male	8
9. Alina	Female	12
10. Malin	Female	7

3.2.3 Analysis of Data

Following the data collection, one needs to start preparing for the data analysis, which is an important step towards understanding the empirical material (Saunders et al., 2011). Due to the data in this research being qualitative, it can be said to be extensive, non-standardized and generally complex. Due to the breadth of data collected and the limited time frame of this thesis, I was not able to analyze all of the empirical material (Rennstam and Wästerfors, 2018). As a result, it was necessary to reduce the material to a manageable data set.

In order to prepare the data, I used the web application Otter.ai to transcribe the audio-recordings. However, I had to double-check the accuracy of the transcriptions, and therefore did my own round of fine-tuning and editing the transcriptions, where Otter.ai had failed to catch a phrase or expression.

To begin reducing the data, I started by going through the transcriptions of the participants and looking for recurring answers from the participants. The first step in beginning to understand the collected empirical material was to summarize what I had understood and interpreted the participants to have said, section by section. By giving the transcriptions another read through, and commenting on it throughout, I began to see what potential reoccurring themes were. The second step in reducing my data was to categorize the summaries of my interpretations into different second order themes. These themes were created in line with the actual expressed vocabulary used by the interviewees as well as terms derived from my own comments. This process gave me a structured framework and made the data go from overwhelming to manageable.

The aforementioned framework was created in a web-based program called 'Asana' that let me order my second-order themes on a board, which I then filled with different chunks of data from the interviews, ranging from a few words to longer excerpts. This allowed me to get a more comprehensive view of the data. The next step was to further reduce the data again, this time to aggregate dimensions. In order to do this, I identified the second-order themes that had the most chunks of data and created a new board with these four aggregate dimensions (Gioia et al., 2013). The four aggregate dimensions coincide with the four interpretive repertoires of embracers, resisters, compliers and those showing indifference.

Two dominant dimensions came to light which seemed to link to how the respondents saw the change process - their proximity to the change process and their length of time in the company. Length of time in the company was obtained by asking how long the individual had been in the company, which is displayed in Table 3.1. Proximity to the change process was obtained by asking for their job title as well as the individual expressly saying that they worked as a part of the change management project team in some capacity. This information has not been included in the table in order to protect the anonymity of the individuals, or at least avoid easier detection.

3.3 Critical Reflection

Given that qualitative studies are reliant upon the subjective understanding of the data by the researcher, it is important to address the need to take on a reflexive mindset when conducting such research. Every researcher brings with them their own backpack of pre-understandings and mindsets when conducting research, and these pre-understandings naturally influence how the data is interpreted. Ergo, my own pre-understandings, knowledge, and background will have affected the way in which I interpreted the data and made sense of the empirical material in this study. I have two years of experience in the focal organization, which can arguably be a negative aspect in the sense that my previous subjective experience in the organization influenced how I view the organization and see the organizational changes at large, which in turn mean my interpretations could be unduly influenced by dominant cultural norms in the organization.

At times, I felt it was much harder for me to establish a distance with the thoughts that came from the interviewees and in some situations I felt obliged to make a comment of agreement towards their open and honest feelings about how they viewed the change, and the challenges thereof. Nevertheless, I tried to remain impartial and step outside of the role I play as a colleague into the role as a researcher, asking follow-up questions when needed. In particular, when I asked how their perceptions of what the organization should do correspond to what they do and how they act, it could come off as somewhat confrontational. However, my participants took it in stride, and I believe our open and honest discussion even gave a chance for a few individuals to reflect on their own thought processes and/or actions a bit more or at least consider the possibility that alternative change approaches do exist. Furthermore, given that I was the only one interpreting the data, I will never know if, had I done the project with another, I would have been challenged as to the way in which I labeled, sorted, and ultimately interpreted the data.

However, on the other hand, I was able to ask follow-up questions and obtain deep elaboration on points that I am not sure would have been achievable to the same degree had it been conducted by someone who had not developed that trust first, especially given the socio-cultural context. All in all, I believe that my role as an insider, while it makes my interpretations more subject to scrutiny, also afforded me some advantages.

4 Empirical Findings

Led by my aim, research questions, literature review and methodological approach, this chapter of the thesis sets out to present my empirical data. I will start by providing a more detailed background of the telecommunications industry, the consumer electronics industry and the conditions that led to the reorganization. Together, my aim is to clarify the context in which the case company operates, thereby facilitating understanding of the analysis. Then, I will present my empirical data which is structured into three main parts: The first part 'Perceptions of Cultural Difference' presents material about the apparent divergence when it comes to the organizational cultures of Moon Mobile and Moonstone and how that has impacted the change process itself. Subsequently, in 'Readiness for Change,' I will present material about the company's aim of transferring employees from the legacy sister company Moon Mobile to Moonstone. Finally, in 'Individual Reactions to the Change Process,' I will highlight the different meaning systems around the change process and what has to be done in order to reach the company's aim to fully integrate. I then go about identifying four different interpretive repertoires associated with the change, namely: embracers, resisters, compliers and those showing indifference. The chapter will end with a summary.

4.1 Case context

In order to better understand the context of Moon Mobile, I will offer a brief summary of the telecommunications industry to help the reader gain a better understanding of the history and backdrop to the transformation. The telecommunications industry is an established global industry, with the enabling technology for mobile phones being developed in the 1940's, although they did not become widely available until the mid 1980's. Moon & Light was established in 2001 after the merger of Moon Corporation and Light Telecommunication Company. Moon was a powerhouse for consumer electronics based in Asia, and Light Telecommunication Company was a Sweden-based market leader in making mobile communication devices. The two companies were performing well separately but realized they could perform even better by merging. Light was a mobile company that focused more on software while Moon mainly dealt with consumer electronics and by forming a joint

venture, Moon & Light aimed to be the best mobile solution provider. The first Moon & Light smartphone was created in 2002. In the early 2000's, as much as 9% of the global mobile phone market was owned by the Moon & Light joint venture. With the advent of modern smartphones in 2007 by Apple, Moon & Light continued to ride their popularity and entered the Android world, launching several notable smartphone models. In 2012, Moon acquired Light's stake in the joint venture and the resulting division known as Moon Mobile reached close to 5% global smartphone market share at its peak in 2013.

However, Android users had a wide variety of smartphones to choose from and sales successively fell a few years in a row. In August 2012, the company announced heavy cuts of their workforce in Sweden. The then CEO said that the goal was to "*play to our strengths - the premium brand that Moon stands for.*" In 2015, the company went through another reorganization project, with approximately 1000 - about half of its employees in Sweden - being made redundant. Despite fierce cost-cutting, their market share continued to decline. In that regard, Peter mentioned, "*the mobile segment is in a very tough, competitive market with Samsung and all the Chinese handset chips, which are strong.*" As a result of changes in the market, something needed to be done to rectify the situation. Ida commented that:

"Everybody in the company was aware that we weren't doing well...the sales weren't looking good. And it's human nature that people start to speculate what will happen. 'Will the company cease to exist; will I lose my job?' I think that everyone, regardless if you're involved in the [change] project or not, or if you're a manager or individual contributor, I think everyone was wondering what the future would look like - would Moon still exist in Sweden, for instance - that was one of the big talks. And we lost a lot of good people because they weren't willing to sit around and see what would happen."

This quote illustrates the atmosphere in the company prior to the announcement that another change project was on the horizon, which would involve redundancies and the closure of Moon Mobile altogether. In order to address these losses, the decision was taken to combine Moon Mobile into its existing sister company, Moonstone. The overall vision was for Moonstone to take on the products in Moon Mobile's portfolio to expand their offering. Ida described the lead up to the decision this way:

"We had manager meetings on a regular basis where we discussed the financial side - and sitting around and doing nothing doesn't calm people down. They [employees] want to see actions taken and want to know what the management is going to do about these figures and how we will turn it around."

This sentiment demonstrates the strong pressure that management felt to take specific actions to try to remedy the financial situation, above all else.

Moonstone operates in the consumer electronics industry, with its various components including TV & video, audio, digital cameras, game & network services, and its most recent additions, smartphones and internet. Comparing the financial situation of Moonstone to Moon Mobile, Ida had this to say: *"Moonstone have gone through transformation projects as well, they've had their challenges with the business before, but they haven't had those cuts that we have had in Moon Mobile, so they haven't had financial constraint in the same way."* Peter commented on this, saying *"I think Moonstone has the right recipe when it comes to financial success, which is proven."* In explaining the decision to combine the two companies, Peter said that *"when they join together, it will be an even bigger offer, which makes a huge difference. And also cost-wise it will be much better because we will use the same resources across different products and there will be expanding expectations."* In combination, these quotes show that there was a strong belief in the financial prowess of Moonstone, and that there was a feeling that Moon Mobile was lucky to have its big sister around to rescue it from financial devastation.

4.2 Perceptions of Cultural Difference

When discussing the move from one company into another, it served to highlight the perceived differences in culture between both. In sharing these insights, Alexandra said that:

"we've [Moon Mobile] had more freedom to decide on things in Sweden before and now there are a lot more stakeholders closer to us. Before we aligned with Asia and just started but now there are a lot more stakeholders closer in Europe, so we need to adopt to the European way of working."

This sense of freedom in Moon Mobile was contrasted with the perception of Moonstone as a more hierarchical organization. This was evident, for instance, when Susanna commented that Moonstone is *"much more hierarchical and I get the impression that it's very clear who within the organization does what. So for them, they'll say, 'Oh no, you must turn to so and so for this.' So it's very compartmentalised."* The concept of hierarchy was also closely associated with a sense that Moonstone tended to be more bureaucratic. For instance, Alina commented that:

"Moonstone is working more with management by fear, where they want to escalate things and think that that would scare us a lot, but I think for us here, we are not coming from that at all. So when when they try to bring those things up and try to escalate, we don't really react in the same way that the rest of Europe do, because we don't get scared like, 'Oh, if you would raise this with that manager.' We don't have the experience of being afraid of the top management."

This quotation illustrates the wide gap in how those in Sweden have been used to working versus what they have encountered with the transition to the new organization, working in a larger cultural context with stakeholders across Europe. These perceived differences in culture between the two companies also had an impact on the change process itself and the speed at which things took place. Ida stated that:

"The most challenging about these differences is that in Moon Mobile, we talk with people on all levels openly and so if I need to talk to with someone some levels up, I don't have the feeling that I can't contact that person. So we meet up and discuss and resolve things. But on the Moonstone side, it's more hierarchy. I've been told several times throughout the project, 'You can't contact that person, it needs to go through this person.' That has been like, 'Okay, are you kidding?' because that's a bottleneck...which means that things take longer."

This view was echoed by Alina, who shared that: *"I think the Moonstone way is more boxing things in to different areas where you cannot touch a working task that officially is within someone else's scope and then you just stop doing things until that person has picked up certain tasks - so they have much slower processes."* This was summed up as a protectiveness

for one's area, as Ida stated: *"It's like this protectiveness of, 'This is my area of responsibility and you need to talk to me to get through to talk to my manager.'"*

Discussing the ramifications of not having worked on issues of cultural integration prior to the transfer, Alina shared that: *"I think there has been resistance as long as people have been aware of this, which impacts the change process. The change takes more time because there is some resistance. After a few years, it's just the normal ways of doing things."*

These quotations illustrate a disparate organizational culture from Moon Mobile to Moonstone and the difficulties and frustrations encountered by Moon Mobile employees as they move from a flat organization with few impediments to implementing new projects to a work landscape in which individuals are protective, even defensive of their work areas and rely on tactics of fear to keep people in line.

4.3 Readiness for Change

By the time of this transformation project to merge with Moonstone, Moon Mobile was not a stranger to changes. Mari commented that:

"This is not a completely new feeling and experience, but still it has been the biggest challenge so far. We did the first challenge or transition when we [Light] became Moon & Light and then Moon and then Moon Mobile, and now to Moonstone. So that was quite a big change from Moon to Moon Mobile. And this one, it feels like the biggest change due to that we are no longer having the feeling of being the headquarter anymore, which was probably the biggest change mentally for everyone."

As evidenced by this quote, there have been a number of different change projects in Sweden during the last several years. Up until 2012, the headquarter was located in Sweden, and was therefore the location from which a lot of the bigger decisions were made. This particular loss felt quite profound, as much of the decision-making power, and position of being the headquarter, moved to Asia. The idea of this most recent change project being the biggest, however, was echoed by Alina, who said:

"Throughout the years, we've had redundancy phases quite a lot. This was a bigger project than the previous ones since this time we are completely working on closing down Moon Mobile, but in many ways the process itself has been quite familiar. The difference now is that I am moved into a new Moon company and now we're getting to understand their way of working."

The official date of the transfer from Moon Mobile to Moonstone was March 1, 2020. However, the integration was broken up into two separate parts - or waves - with the first representing the Sales & Marketing function to be completed by April 1, 2019 and the second representing all other functions, to be completed by March 1, 2020. In combination, both waves were referred to as the Gemini Project. In both waves, preparations for the change process started long beforehand. As Ida attested:

"I was assigned to the project long before it was communicated out to the staff members. In wave one, all the things that were going on were in the background, which was super challenging. Everybody involved in the project had to signed NDA's so another requirement was to keep track of who was involved in the project and who I could speak to and trying to police when you hear things from people like, 'that information shouldn't be with that person. So where is that coming from?' So, I would say that probably a year before it was communicated out to the employees, it was a secret project."

This shows that quite a long time before the employees were made aware of the transformation, preparations began in a tight-knit group of change managers. However, the strategy of secrecy for the first wave differed strongly with the second wave, as described by Ida:

"In wave two, things were more open and communicated to the employees, so they were aware of what was happening, and it wasn't this sort of whispering in the corridors. Obviously, it's been much easier when the message was sent out, it was a big relief, and when it finally was communicated to the employees and you're able to speak openly about the changes, not in detail, but you didn't have that feeling that you had a secret agenda with what you spent your day on."

The contrast in approach from wave one to wave two had an impact not only on those who were subject to the change itself, but on the change managers, who felt relieved to not have to hide information about what they were working on. In discussing the decision to close down Moon Mobile and merge parts to Moonstone as well as the resulting preparations to be made, Donna had this to say:

"In big companies you have direction, which can be 'cut the cost by the end of this time frame' - and that's a clear direction. That's the management decision that was taken by HQ in Asia. And then you think about how you can achieve this because it's impacting people, changing the organizational ways of working, and it will completely impact the way I approach my customers. So you have a one sentence direction from management, then a big gap because you don't know how. This big gap is just bringing you big difficulty because you don't know if you can have a specific budget, which can be used for the extra consultancy of employees, for example...so it's a dilemma that you have a direction versus what you as a manager think is the best for your people, so sometimes you should go back and push back that this is not realistic."

This back and forth dynamic with upper management serve to highlight a sense of tension or conflict. This was elaborated on as such:

"The timelines were very high level and that was the pressure I felt from my colleagues and yet there was no clarity on the scope because we didn't know if it is 200 or 600 people, 10 departments 20 departments that the business would like to transfer. And they said and by the way, we have to finish it by end of February. I felt that that was the pressure. I was personally not really happy to start the project with such unrealistic demands."

In this way, the experiences of what was challenging in leading the change project differed. In terms of the change project itself, the setup of the transformation project was described by Ida in this way:

"It started with a smaller group of people involved in the project, with expertise in the different areas that are impacted and then you need to take it step by step and add on more people as you go along when needed, but really trying to keep it tight because the

information leakage is the risk. Once you say something to the employees, the media knows about it five minutes later so the financial impact of having it known externally could be very damaging. So it's this looking at it from a financial aspect of the company and the damage it can bring, and also the more human side of taking care of the employees inside the company and having them feel involved because having people feel involved in a change is a big success factor. But it's just a matter of when you can start to involve [them]."

From this quote, it is clear that Ida recognizes the value in having employees involved in the change process, but that there is an understanding that making the majority of employees aware of the changes too early will be too big of a risk and protecting the financials of the company takes precedence. Donna also had qualms with the communication strategy early in the transformation, regarding the timing of when it should be communicated to employees that there was an ongoing transformation that was affecting the entire organization (wave two):

"I think personally that the communication around the change could be better. There was a delay between day one which was to transfer the Sales and Marketing organization in April 2019 and then the communication to the rest of the organization, who were in limbo. Questions such as 'Does this mean that the transformation will continue, impacting the rest of the organization?' and 'What does this mean for me?' came up. So I think the communication could be earlier. But I'm not sure that our management was ready to listen to different scenarios."

Here, Donna paints a picture of a somewhat controlling management who is not open to hearing about alternative solutions or ways of going about the communication. She mentions the transfer of employees in Sales and Marketing to Moonstone (Wave 1), which left question marks for some still wondering what would happen to them and their departments. These questions grew with time, as it took months before the communication came out that the rest of the organization would also be transferred. Ida elaborated on the nature of the first communication to employees, saying:

"What was communicated for wave one is that this was just for the Sales and Marketing organization; something to improve efficiencies across the two companies. And it was sort of easy to connect because of our performance from a sales perspective, that we needed some extra boost and teaming up with the other other companies to be able to bundle products and equate efficiency for that."

These quotations show that the initial communication to employees portrayed the change as something very specific to the Sales and Marketing Department, when that was in fact just wave one of the project. Another wave was on the horizon, and some individuals suspected it, but nothing concrete was communicated until much later about the fate of the rest of the organization. In sharing an overview of the steps involved in the change process, Donna shared that:

"First, we aligned with the management what we need to deliver and what is the best way. You can either find your usual channels or you build something from scratch. We had the head of HR for Moonstone in Sweden, who presented who he was, what Moonstone is - that was a completely new type of communication for impacted people. Then we involved the next layer - managers - through the usual bi-weekly managers meeting and then the communication was activated. So we asked them to be messengers for their teams and we fed them with the important information when it comes to the systems, the key dates, what is the impact, how it will be organized, what type of newsletters will be produced, how the Information Systems will be built...we use them as more relevant messengers because they asked questions that were important for the team."

This quote illustrates a somewhat methodical and analytical perception of the change process - of activating the communication into further layers. Donna also elaborated more on the elements that went into the change process itself, saying:

"We were aligned with the management one hundred percent; Sven (CEO of Moon Mobile) joined our weekly meeting so he was very familiar with the progress and was always a part of the decision making. So he was the one who advised what might be the good next action. And then I think that the execution is through the newsletters, the bi-weekly managers meeting, an extra effort to introduce Moonstone plus the Hypercare

(short-term on-site transformation support) that we were physically visible. It was not a virtual team, it was a physical face to face set up. That all helped that people could see this transfer as important for Moonstone, that we paid attention even on small problems that were not directly connected with the transfer itself. And building this Transfer Europe mailbox also gave them a chance to ask questions directly or to gather further information from the intranet."

This quote illustrates that there was a sense of strong alignment between the change management project and the upper management of the site; that the change management team derived ideas about next steps in the process from the CEO. Furthermore, it shows that the communication channels were multifaceted, from written newsletters and a newly created transfer mailbox to in-person manager meetings, and on-site support for all employees in the first week of the transition. Overall, there is a sense that the communication was very thorough and satisfactory. However, the change project setup and how communication was handled garnered some varied opinions, like Susanna who said this:

"I think the project setup was not optimal. But in other projects that I've been involved in, the communication plan has quite often driven the decision making within the project, because you've looked at the time points when and where things have to be communicated. And you plan the communications and then you say by this date we need to communicate this by this state and in this communication, we need to have decided this, this and this. So, by its nature, I think working with communication, you have an effect on driving or forcing decisions in the project or forcing the timing. You force a decision to be made because you have to be able to say something about it, at this time point. In Gemini project, I don't think we had control of the communication; we were recipients of content that had to be communicated. So I don't think that was a satisfactory way."

This quote illustrates a sense of powerlessness towards the communication aspects of the project and the change project at large. However, Susanna did convey that the timing of other concurrent internal change initiatives was a reason why the process felt so hectic:

"It wasn't just the Gemini project going on, there were all the other tools changes, the Office 365 and all sorts of other things going on at the same time, which makes it

difficult I think to look at the transformation project in isolation. We had the new intranet, Infodoc, all sorts of things happening that we would have had to have done regardless of whether we have the transformation project or not. So it was quite a tough situation all around. I think the problem is that we didn't have control over the timing. If you looked with other projects I've been involved in when you're discussing timing, you would have said, 'Oh, we can't do this now because of this.' And we didn't have the control. It was out of our control, the timing of all these things was out of control. Just had to make the best of it."

This quotation illustrates the sense of someone who wanted to engage with and play an active part in the change, but due to so many changes happening simultaneously, felt overwhelmed by the sheer volume of changes. However, instead of trying to fight to gain some semblance of control back, the attitude taken is that not much can be done about it, so better to just let it go and carry on.

4.4 Individual Reactions to the Change Process

Throughout the empirical data it became apparent that there were several different meaning systems around the change process and how individuals perceived and interacted with the change process, which make up four different interpretive repertoires. The first pattern that emerged was from individuals who had been with the company for a longer period of time (over 10 years) and were further away from the change process itself. The interpretive repertoire that came about can be categorized as **indifference**. These individuals had a passive approach to change, in which change is viewed as something that happens around us and is part of the environment. Change in this view is mostly uncontrollable, so these individuals felt that they would keep doing their work in the best way possible, because they could not control what happens around them. Alyssa expressed her indifference in the following way:

"We found out that we were going to go over to Moonstone, but we didn't really know what it meant, but we don't worry about that so much. Just get on with things. I think what happens is that the people who are still here are incredibly resilient. And I'm very resilient as well. Just like everybody else who's been here, but you just get your head down, you just get on with the stuff, as long as you're getting enough information. You

just get your head down and just carry on basically until someone tells you not to carry on."

This sense of indifference was echoed by Malin who shared how the history of the changes in the company had impacted her own mentality as well as those around her:

"If we look back to when all the changes started, I think people get worried when changes come. We have gone from a really big downsizing in 2012 when hardware was completely removed from Sweden. Going from Moon & Light to Moon Mobile, that was when people started to feel uncomfortable - that it's not so easy to work with our colleagues in Asia so closely. And then along the way we became fully owned by Moon and people started to feel a bit low and getting used to these changes. I think that a lack of enthusiasm sort of always has been a characteristic for our site, with the will to survive. It's still there. But I think during all of this change, it's sort of set in the walls. I think that most people that are still around settle down to feeling 'Okay, this might change tomorrow.' We are not so concerned anymore."

While Malin initially framed the response in terms of it relating to how others in the organization felt, it became clear that she also grouped herself in with these individuals who are able to deal with the ambiguity of not really knowing when the next change will come and whether it will affect them personally or not. So, her approach entailed a loss of enthusiasm and energy, with the aim to not really think about or dwell on the previous downsizing or any potential future consequences that could come her way.

Another distinct pattern that emerged from the data was a subset of individuals who had a lot of experience with the company and with change processes in particular, as well as a close proximity to the change process itself. These individuals showed support for, openness toward, and commitment to the change. This subset of individuals makes up the interpretive repertoire of **embracers**. This was expressed by Ida this way:

"This was the fifth or sixth transformation project that I've supported. I was assigned to the project in September 2018. Looking back and that we've gone through these many transformation projects and we have seen so many skilled colleagues leaving the company, and we have seen that all things turn out quite well. Everybody gets new jobs

and so going through those transformation project has also made every individual a little bit calmer, because we know that even though we are affected, we are not left completely without support and we have seen looking at the previous rounds that things are sorted out and everybody gets an opportunity somewhere else. So, I felt very positive towards the change. [Being part of the transformation project gave me] the chance to expand my network across the entire Moonstone company and learn more about other product groups that we hadn't worked with before. I felt that the change was quite inspiring and exciting going forward...belonging to a bigger context and with a wider range, it opens up for other opportunities."

This interviewee seemed to express a positivity not only in terms of agreement with the business decision itself, but in terms of identifying with the new organization more and more. They expressed their optimism in the potential possibilities that the new organization could afford them. Peter formulated his view in these terms: *"The decision was extremely right from my standpoint and I am glad they did it, finally. Better late than never."*

During the change process, there was an information session about Moonstone, the company employees would be transferring over to, before they were to sign legal documentation that they would be employed by this new legal entity. In explaining the rationale behind this session, Peter expanded on their point of view:

"The idea was for someone coming from Sweden to explain how things are in Moonstone, with the huge benefits, the products, the culture, and the slight challenge in the way of working, but the opportunities are so big that it definitely works to really jump on board."

There was a further subset of individuals who by and large perceived the change to be a wise business decision but shared their resistance to the way in which the change process itself was carried out and what organizational actions would be needed. These individuals make up the interpretive repertoire categorized as **resisters**. These individuals tended to be closer to the change process itself and had fewer years of experience in the company on average than those who were indifferent or embracing of the change. The theme that emerged was an image of the change process as highly structured and process-oriented but lacking a human touch that understood the deep need for cultural integration as well. This was captured by

Alexandra who said that *"it [the transfer] has been very much focused on systems and processes and not that much on people's preparedness or the culture part of the integration."* This sentiment was mirrored in the views of Monica, who felt similarly that there was a lack of focus on culture during the change process:

"I wish that we had been focusing more on the actual change management work in regard to the cultural change that it means for the employees. Because we really are like a different company with a different background, with a different mindset and sort of different values even though we come from the same family...there is still time to work on those things going forward, but if we don't work on the cultural aspects and the values, I believe that there will be many smaller new cultures created."

The reasoning as to why there was less focus on cultural integration was offered by Alexandra, who said that:

"It's very easy to talk about systems and tools - it's very obvious what needs to be done and it's black and white. The culture thing is not that easy. It's more of a long-term work. And you have to also be very clear on your own culture and what kind of culture you want to drive."

Ultimately, the resistance interpretive repertoire was exemplified by Alexandra, who argued that *"you need to understand your stakeholders and who is doing what and having the courage to challenge and not just accept everything because I believe that we do have an opportunity to improve and develop and have an impact on things."*

Finally, the last subset of individuals tended to be further from the change process and had less experience in the company than the resisters or indifference groups. This group makes up the interpretive repertoire referred to as **compliers**. Mari expressed this view, saying:

"I think that what made this change such a big change is that it felt like we just need to do; we are going into this huge other Moon company and we just need to align with them, but still taking on how they work. So less being able to have an impact, so much was over our heads, so to speak."

This quote illustrates a realization that this change process would be impacting the current ways of working for the worse, but that there is a sense of inability or powerlessness to counter it, as it is coming from high up in the organization. So, in order to cope it is just about going along with the Moonstone way of working. Susanna expressed a similar view, sharing that:

"For us joining, being part of a new organizational culture, we've got to learn how it works and accept it. Be a little bit humble and not hark back to 'it was better the way we did it or it was better before.' I think we need to be a bit more minded to understand how things work."

These four divergent interpretive repertoires that emerged from the data showed strong relationships with levels of experience in the company and with change processes more specifically, as well as the degree of proximity to the change process itself. The trends showed that with more experience, people tended to fall into the categories of embracers or those showing indifference, with those who were closer to the change process being more embracing and those further exhibiting strong signs of indifference. Furthermore, those with less experience in the company tended to exemplify the interpretive repertoires associated with resisters or compliers, with those who were closer to the change process more likely exhibiting resistance and those further away more likely exhibiting compliance.

4.5 Recap of Empirical Findings

Despite the empirical material and insights from Moon Mobile and Moonstone being somewhat fragmented and complex, I was able to group the findings into four categories. Throughout the analysis it became clear that the only way for Moon Mobile to survive was to join forces with its sister company, Moonstone. As a result, there was a broad consensus on the need for change. However, there was a dissensus regarding the implications of the change and the required organizational actions. More specifically, it was unclear whether the individuals in the organization would attempt to re-establish a flat and informal working environment with flexible work processes and have the organizational tools to support this, move over to the Moonstone ways of working completely, or attempt to work together to find mutually agreeable organizational ways of working and incorporate cultural elements from

both. Through my analysis, I could identify four different types of actors in a change process (resisters, compliers, embracers, and those showing indifference).

5 Discussion

This chapter is based upon the analysis of my empirical findings presented above. The analysis of the empirical material presented in the previous chapter has explored my research questions by firstly demonstrating how individuals' perceptions of their readiness for change differ, and secondly, by exploring what underpins these differences. As this thesis aims to develop a deeper understanding of why individuals' readiness for change differ, I will propose a model for understanding the different types of responses to change and discuss my empirical findings together with my literature review.

5.1 Model for understanding types of response to change

As was made evident throughout the interviews, a set of patterns in the attitudes towards the change emerged, which I will refer to as interpretive repertoires. Overall, it is clear that the transformational organizational change has impacted employees' attitudes towards, and actions within, the organization. The transformational organizational change that was initiated by top management, and the subsequent merger from Moon Mobile to Moonstone has created a feeling of uncertainty and ambiguity for some individuals, and opportunity and optimism for others. The factors which most clearly differentiated these individuals' attitudes from one another were the dimensions of proximity to the change process (on the X axis) and experience in the company generally, and experience with change processes specifically (on the Y axis). These are graphically represented in the figure below.

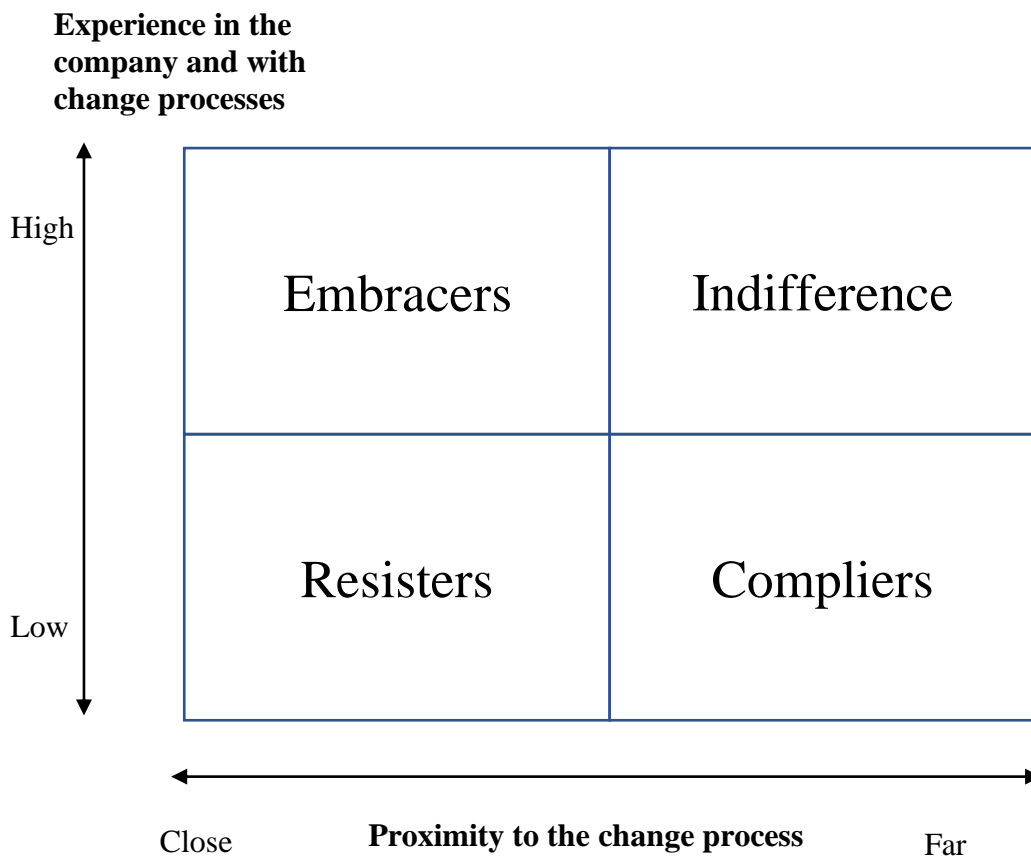


Figure 1: The four responses to change, as a function of proximity to the change process and level of experience within the company, and with change processes specifically.

5.1.1 Resisters and Embracers

On the X axis is proximity to the change process itself. Based on my findings, it was clear that with increased closeness to the change process itself came more intense or salient feelings and thoughts about the change, either strongly in-favor of most aspects (embracers) or strongly against some of the aspects (resisters). Proximity to change was judged both by a function of the role that the individual played in the company (e.g. Project Manager, HR Manager) as well as their overt agreement that they perceived themselves to be active change agents involved in the change management project work versus perceived themselves more on the periphery or as recipients of the change. It was evident that overall, increased engagement in and contribution to the change project gave people a window into what the path to transformation looked like. This was a standout factor which differentiated the respondents, and was stronger than other potential factors, such as gender, age, or nationality.

Resisters were characterized as presenting strong arguments against the need for change, or in support of the existing processes. This was made evident by those who pointed out the positive aspects of the Moon Mobile ways of working, and that things would ultimately change for the worse, at least to some extent. This could also be associated with attempts to convince others not to make radical changes, or to put off adapting to the new way.

In some cases, individuals tried to minimize the problem in an attempt to maintain the status quo. While most of these individuals did see some form of change as inevitable, they also proposed slight adjustments in the hope of achieving a compromise that still allows them to maintain the core of the current processes and avoid major changes. In short, individuals who evoked a semblance of resistance seemed to do so because they either did not fully understand what is happening, where the change will take the organization, and/or the nature of the impact it will have on those involved. This is consistent with the research around the interpreter image for change which maintains that individuals in organizations are not merely 'sense-takers' who absorb the information given to them by others but are 'sense makers' and play a big role in determining outcomes of strategic change initiatives (Palmer et al., 2017; Balogun and Johnson, 2005).

These individuals often had a strong sense of ownership for existing practices and processes and may have had strong emotional ties to it. It seemed as if, either they were the architect behind the process or more likely had links to the values embedded into the practice. Moreover, it is possible that because they have used these practices and achieved success with them, they believe it makes their life easier to continue using them. In other words, these individuals were heavily invested into the existing processes and show forms of attachment to them. This is consistent with previous research which views the organization as a cultural system, whereby change proposals are viewed through the lenses of their beliefs about the organization's identity (Reger, 1994).

On the other hand, embracers were characterized by their extreme positivity for the change in most aspects. These individuals not only saw a strong need for change but felt near universal positivity towards the organizational actions taken to achieve the transfer. These individuals often had a more 'helicopter' view of the organization and discussed the big picture issues more frequently, such as the impact of the transfer on improving the business portfolio of the future merger integration. In some cases, this resonated as an undying faith in the

organization and a sense that there is more opportunity and success awaiting those who will just look up and grab it.

Furthermore, the views of embracers and in particular those who were in charge of the change management project, showed that the setup of the change process was very much in line with mainstream change research. Paton and McCalman (2008), who claim that most organizations view the concept of change as a programmed process, starting with a problem to be solved, which can then be broken down by analyzing possible alternatives, selecting and applying the preferred solution, was in line with the view of embracers. As became clear, the embracers viewed the change in a clear-cut way, as "*something to improve efficiencies across the two companies.*" In addition, it is clear from the language choice to get a sense for how the change process was viewed, such that it was described in concrete steps - that "*first, we aligned with the management and...then we involved the next layer - managers...*" This shows that there was a vision of a change process with a clear beginning, middle and end. In short, the language used by embracers conveyed a view of change that is very much consistent with the mainstream tick-box approaches. However, as Paton and McCalman (2008) note, this approach fails to change the organization's underlying nature and therefore problems can persist.

In contrast, it was more difficult to find language to indicate that the preparations leading up to the merger had much to do with changing or influencing individual cognitions and emotions amongst employees, in line with Armenakis' (1993) examination of readiness for change. While the change process involved transmitting messages about the overall strategy of the company, it didn't appear to have any focus on changing or influencing the mindset of individuals. Furthermore, there was little emphasis put on the role of the change agents themselves and any intentions to build up credibility, trustworthiness, sincerity and expertise, which can be seen as an important method for conveying the importance of the change to individual employees and thereby creating readiness for change, in line with Armenakis' (1993) theory. Instead, it seemed to be much more about the readiness of systems.

5.1.2 Compliers and those Showing Indifference

On the Y axis is the level of experience in the company and with change processes. What most strongly differentiated the resisters from the embracers and the compliers from those showing indifference was their level of experience in the company generally and with change

processes more specifically. It was clear that those who were further away from the change process had less salient views of the change itself. Again, distance from the change process was obtained by understanding their actual role as well as their self-reported perception of being an active change agent versus a recipient of the change process. These individuals with less salient views thus aligned well with the interpretive repertoire of compliers or those showing indifference.

This information was obtained through self-reported years in the company as well as further explanation for some individuals as to their extensive experiences with various change processes in the company throughout the years. This emerged as a salient factor, whereby increased years in the company, on average, lended itself to individuals identifying more as an embracer or one showing indifference. On the other hand, less time in the company tended to be associated with the resisters and the compliers.

Compliers can be characterized as feeling the need to adhere to the directives set upon them, in large part because these directives are perceived as above them. Their approach was often to allow things to "take their time" and that with time things will end up as they should. Or that we should focus on what can be done to improve our situation as a whole but not to focus too much on the past and trying to keep what was. These individuals, while they may in theory see the benefit of openly resisting the change, in practice want to pursue the path of least resistance and avoid confrontation or challenges.

Those showing indifference were universally highly experienced in the company and were characterized by a sense of lack of concern. These individuals shared that they themselves and the company had been through so many changes that they were "*sick to the back teeth.*" As a result of this, they expressed the need to suppress the feelings that before may have led them to discomfort or uneasiness. This appears to be a defense mechanism to not get too emotionally involved or engaged with the change and to disconnect or disengage completely. As a result, they most often merely wanted to get on with their immediate work tasks and not be bothered with anything else.

5.2 Business Decision versus Implications Thereof

Throughout the interviews, it was clear that most participants felt strongly that the business decision to combine the two companies was the right one. Mari succinctly put it: "*Business wise, this is what needs to be done to be able to survive, which is good.*" Ida echoed that sentiment, saying:

"Even though some decisions and actions that are taken are difficult, I think that people really understood that we need to do something. And so having the understanding of the situation where the company is, I think was more beneficial and it helped us in this situation, because it was obvious that we couldn't go about as we had always done."

As a result, there was a broad consensus on the need for change. However, there was a dissensus regarding the implications of the change and the required organizational actions. More specifically, it was unclear whether the individuals in the organization would attempt to re-establish a flat and informal working environment with flexible work processes and have the organizational tools to support this, move over to the Moonstone ways of working completely, attempt to work together to find mutually agreeable organizational ways of working and incorporate cultural elements from both, or find a new way of working together that incorporates some elements of both, as well as new elements that don't come from or aren't directly connected with either organization.

In addition, it was clear that the merger aspect added an additional complexity to the change process, and that some individuals, particularly resisters, had struggled or were struggling to find their identity in the new organization. This is consistent with research on mergers, which has found that employees tend to show strong ingroup/outgroup biases, which in turn can cause impediments to the success of a merger (Haunschild et al., 1994). In contrast, embracers, because of their viewpoint which perceived the change as a positive challenge, had a more positive impact on their framing of the changes and the language used, which leads me to believe it had a more positive impact on psychological health, in line with previous research (Avey et al., 2008).

All in all, my findings confirm and extend previous research on organizational readiness to change, confirming the literature regarding the various attitudes towards change and further

extending it by providing a framework that recognizes the complexity of the change process for individual organizational members.

6 Conclusion

This thesis investigated how transformational changes from a merger integration experience inform individual organizational members' mental thought processes and meaning systems of readiness for change as they engage with the new post-merger organization. In order to answer my first research question of how to explain the different and individual levels of readiness to change, as well as any associated actions, I have developed four archetypes of interpretive repertoires, based on the differing degrees of response to change. In doing so, my contribution is to share a practical view of how organizations might engender engagement with organizational change within their operational and strategic practices.

Implications of the study include the need to consider that there will be different degrees of readiness across individuals. Furthermore, it is important to consider readiness factors prior to the implementation of change and the importance of fostering readiness throughout all organizational levels. Overall, organizational renewal demands mastering the dynamics of organizational change. In particular, it is important for managers in general and change managers more specifically to understand the dynamics of organizational change more deeply and it is my hope that this thesis has offered that very thing.

6.1 Limitations

Qualitative interviews are open to ambiguities and are based on human interaction, meaning that they depend highly on the analyst's perceptions and interpretations, which in turn play a large role in the analysis of interview material. Given that I, as an internal employee of the organization in question, was a part of the culture which I am analyzing, it puts into question the degree to which my perceptions and interpretations were impartial or neutral. I believe that my status as an employee served both as a benefit and a drawback in this process.

Namely, it gave me an intimate knowledge of the organization itself and given that I already had developed trusting working relationships with those interviewed, I was able to get more

in-depth answers and understand more easily and deeply the various terminology that came up. In addition, knowing the organizational setup and the people on a more personal level gave me better insight into the social dynamics of the organization.

However, the structure of this thesis assignment is set up so that two individuals bring their own viewpoints, strengths and weaknesses to the table, sharing their perspectives on how the research could be approached, designed, carried out and interpreted. In short, I believe that my study could have benefited from having another outsider point of view, who could have confirmed or denied my view of the reality inside the organization.

6.2 Implications for Practice

There are a number of takeaways from this study which I believe can be put to use in practice. For companies to further develop towards becoming built-to-change and adaptable long-term, it is key to signal a commitment to developing this change capability by providing training opportunities, and more specifically, training that focuses on the acquisition of change-related skills. Furthermore, acquisition of such skills should be rewarded and/or recognized more.

In addition, it is essential to develop supportive organizational structures, in line with the previously mentioned design principles of a built-to-change organization. For example, this could include instituting goal-setting reviews to identify what individuals and teams should achieve in the near future, rather than reinforcing job descriptions that detail specific responsibilities consistent with what can be seen in job advertisements. Finally, focus on hiring individuals that have a growth mentality and change capability rather than individuals who have a more fixed mindset. These types of individuals can be identified by asking certain key questions during an interview, such as 'Could you tell me about your biggest failures?' or 'Do you have an example of a time when you felt you were not good at something at work?' These efforts can inch the organization - and those in it - ever closer to becoming more comfortable with change.

Implications for practice can also be in terms of how to enhance the approach to future change processes in order to address the aforementioned perceived shortcomings. This could include, for instance, managers acting as interpreters and giving more effort towards building

up how the organizational change is portrayed, providing legitimate argumentation for why the actions taken are the most fitting for the situation the organization is in. This could also include making use of a well-told story which can re-inspire and reengage employees to want to be active participants in the journey towards the new shared reality of the future.

Another idea could be conducting a 'World Cafe' meeting of the departmental members, in which members are scheduled to explore possible futures and identify actionable ideas for Moonstone. The idea would be to have a meeting which is quite different from the highly structured norm of everyone sitting around one large table. Instead, members would be seated at small round tables. Then, the host would have different rounds of questions that are aimed at kicking off a good discussion, such as 'What could Moonstone be like in five years?' and '*We're now five years into the future and have achieved those goals. What did we do to get here?*' (Jorgenson and Steler, 2013, p. 396). Such techniques have shown that results are produced "*with greater speed and increased commitment and greatly reduced resistance by the rest of the organization*" (Axelrod, 1992, p. 507), enhancing "*innovation, adaptation, and learning*" (Axelrod, 2001, p. 22).

6.3 Future Research

This research opens up new questions which should be tackled in the future. Organizational change has repeatedly been associated with adverse effects on employee health (Oreg et al., 2011). Large-scale organizational changes, such as company restructuring, downsizing and outsourcing have been linked to somatic and mental health complaints, presenteeism and long-term sick leave (Kivimaki, 2003; Bamberger et al., 2012). However, there is little understanding for which organizational members are most at-risk for deleterious health effects. Therefore, future research could investigate interactions between the archetypes of interpretive repertoires and those that suffer from adverse effects of repeated organizational change, such as long-term sick leave. Understanding what type of mental thought patterns associated with the organizational change that could lead to adverse health effects is one step in facilitating healthy, successful change. In addition, further research could focus on extending the outcomes of this study by looking at how applicable these interpretive repertoires are to other Knowledge-Intensive firms (KIFs) or professional firms.

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