

Course: SKOM12
Term: Spring 2021
Supervisor: Mats Heide
Examiner:

Listeners as sensemakers:

Exploring the role of strategic listening in contemporary organizations at IKEA and Tetra Pak

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Master's Thesis



Abstract

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Communication research has identified listening as a key skill in the sensemaking process. However, little is known about the practical implementation of listening by practitioners and about its strategic values to the organization. Based on a qualitative case study with practitioners in two Scandinavian contemporary organizations, this study analyses individual micro-practice of listening and its implications on the organizing process. The results revealed that the approaches of listening follow a similar pattern, namely noticing, interpreting, and action. Furthermore, listening is identified as a critical aspect integrated in the natural process of sensemaking that generates synergy and mutual benefits. It is concluded that strategic listening in the sensemaking process facilitates conscious implementation of decision-making and planning and contributes to a collective learning environment. Thus, supportive of the conception that strategic listeners are mindful sensemakers who through their conscious listening process cultivate and balance the macrostates of organizational life.

Keyword: strategic organizational listening, learning organization, sensemaking, mindful-organizing

Number of words: 19 371

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1. Introduction

From high-volume repetitive work in which quantity and routine is emphasized, organizations are experiencing a radical transition to innovative operations in which value-creating ideas and ingenuity have become vital sources of competitive advantage to growth and valuation (Alvesson, 2004). While the ability to innovate is rarely driven by individuals acting in an isolated capacity, fostering an interactive and learning environment for high teamwork quality remains a challenge in today's workplaces (Edmondson, 2018). Previous analysis verifies that individual talent is no longer sufficient to contribute to an organization's success. There need to be meaningful relations amongst individuals and teams for ideas to cross-fertilized (Argyri, 1984; Fleming & Marx, 2006). Inevitably, organizations are devoting greater attention to the value and eminence of communication to seed and cultivate versatile teams.

In spite of the significant communication efforts by most organizations, receiver-orientation is taken lightly and listening-related activities are scarce (Macnamara, 2016; Smeltzer, 1993). The failure to recognize listening as an integral part to effective communication leads to listening being perceived as a soft skill deserving of reflection by the individual organization members rather than the organization as a whole (Brownell, 1990; Haas & Arnold, 1995). This attempt to simplify a complex phenomenon is problematic stating the fact that listening is recognized as one of the preeminent skills in organizational settings (Cooper, 1997; Sypher et al., 1989). As persuasively captured by Rogers and Roethlisberger (1991)'s all-time classic, the "gateway" to good communication in the workplace is liberated through the efforts to efficiently listen. Simply put, for organizational members to respond productively, they must be able to first listen effectively (Nichols & Stevens, 1957).

Despite supporting research on listening as an essential skill linked to performance and productivity over the past century, many organizations continue to pay a costly price due to lack of an internal listening framework to contest the flow of complicated trends, situations, and circumstances (Flynn et al., 2008; Hall, 1996). For this reason, scholars have directed their attention toward listening as a process or practice linked to decision-making and planning in

which the content of what was heard spur new learning, insights, and innovative solutions essential to mitigate the ever-growing complex problems of modern organizations (Barbour, 2017; Brownell, 2008). On that premise, strategic listening can be defined as proactive, purposeful, and reflective listening that unlocks values and reaps direct and long-term development for organizations and their members (Brownell, 2016; Lewis, 2019).

Scholars have long been associating listening as central to communication activity and primary connection to how people make meaning and build relationships (Hirsch, 1986; Lewis & Reinsch, 1988; Lipari, 2014). Parallel to this, organizational psychologists claim that it is through the dynamic flow of communication processes enacted by organizational members that produce and reproduce the social system of an organization (Chia, 2000; Weick, 2012). On this premise, understanding employees' nature and quality of listening that influences the communication context, and the work of organizing is therefore fundamental (Bostrom & Waldhart, 1988; Cooper & Husband, 1993). Thus, I argue that it is relevant to investigate listening in the process of sensemaking to understand organizational members' thinking and doing as well as its role in maintaining the organizational life.

This study problematizes the lack of knowledge about how strategic listening is being practiced by employees in their sensemaking process and its role on both micro- and macro-level. While many have shed light on listening as an interpersonal skill and as an organizational characteristic (Gilchrist & Van Hoeven, 1994), the complexity of listening obscures its own potential value for organizations. Research is curbed by the lack of a unified operational definition of listening in the business context (Graham Bodie et al., 2008). Likewise, many empirical studies on listening are under-researched relying on anecdotes and intuition (Flynn et al., 2008). Few have empirically examined the strategic focused of internal listening necessary in the process of organizing for the modern organizations in which interactions between employees are organically and horizontally integrated. Ultimately, this study seeks to illuminate the quality of strategic listening performed by practitioners to consciously make sense and improvise through diverse sets of activities as they work and rework the process of becoming (Weick, 1998; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006).

This research study is based on qualitative interviews with practitioners from two Scandinavian organizations – IKEA and Tetra Pak. To achieve a practice-oriented approach while

offering the most theoretical depth, social constructionism is applied as a lens for this study. This lens permits to gain closure and reflect on the phenomenon, closest to its surrounding “reality” (Schön, 1983). As a result, this study firmly applies case-based research which will enrich the breadth and depth of the historical and complex link of organizational listening, in this particular case, the employees’ daily operations of strategic listening as meaning-making and relation-building activities that constitute the complex and mutual organizational social life.

1.1 Study aims and research questions

The aim of this study is twofold. First, this study is designed to identify the strategic practice of listening performed by employees in the micro-level activities. Second, it aims to investigate the role of internal strategic listening that contributes to a dynamic learning organization. Taken together, this study seeks to illuminate the role of listening as a strategy-in-practice requisite to the organizational life. As follows, the analysis forms a contribution to theory and practice of organizational listening in the research field of strategic communication.

To achieve the aims, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

RQ1. How do employees use strategic listening in their sensemaking process?

RQ2. How does strategic listening sustain a collective learning environment in an organization?

1.2 Delimitations

This study is based on large, integrated organizations in which local works are decentralized and interdependent. Hence, it is acknowledged that the perspectives may not give a full representation of every situation and circumstances and the results and conclusions drawn are not applicable to every organization, especially in the different organizational areas and sectors in which work is formal and clearly bounded. Be that as it may, the strategic focus of this study recognizes improvisation therefore encourages an interpretive and reflexive approach on the part of the readers to adjust and apply to their own particular needs.

1.3 Disposition

The study is organized in the following manner. Chapter two, the theoretical framework serves as a foundation in aligning and guiding the choice of research design and data analysis. This chapter includes academic reviews on the internal aspect of organizational listening in which the theory of sensemaking has been applied. Chapter three presents the research design which includes the philosophy of science, choice of methodology and data analysis. The participating organizations are exhibited in chapter four. Thereafter, the findings and discussion chapter explains and examines the primary findings to understand the phenomenon and its implications on the case study. Chapter six closes with conclusion as well as a research outlook.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter presents the theoretical foundation for this thesis while reviewing the literature that is proposing these most important concepts. The theoretical framework outlines the development of the internal aspect of organizational listening phenomena along with the concept of sensemaking as the theoretical basis. Taken together, the framework serves as a lens this study obtained to gain knowledge of the research problems.

Social psychologists have regarded the concept of sensemaking as a distinctive feature in organizational theory. Chia (2000) refers to organization as a social object in which its existence comes to motion through individuals' "discursively-shaped understanding". Thomas et al. (1993) refer to these reciprocal moments as "strategic" interactions between actors that comprise of scanning, interpreting and action, while emphasizing the relationships between cognition and behavior. Put another way, sensemaking in an organizational context happens as much in the internal cognition of thinking and interpreting as it does with the external cues of talking and action (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006). Collectively, the exchange of these cue interpretation then forms the socially distributed "cognitive coordination" or intelligence network of "wise action" between interdependent players (Taylor & Van Every, 1999). However, the sequence of receiving and comprehending, particularly listening that influences individuals thinking and action has often been overlooked (Lipetz et al., 2020; A. D. Wolvin, 2010). Taken with the fact that the identity is constantly evolving, and meaning is continuously constructed, it will be interesting to uncover the practice of strategic listening and its role in the diverse environment in which work life and experiences are dependent on individual actor's perceptual framework as well as the ever-changing wider social contexts.

2.1 Organizational listening: An overview

The cluster of concepts and definitions of listening has been agreed upon within academics and practitioners as varied. In the business context, notably, consistency of what constitutes effective listening somewhat persists to be marginalized and ambiguous (Lewis & Reinsch, 1988). Although the research on the field of listening is under-recognized (Flynn et al., 2008), existing

literature has supportively pointed in the same direction – that is, listening plays a central role in the determination of the functioning and organizing of organizations and their activities (Barbour, 2017; Cooper, 1997). Scholars have not only linked listening skills to employees’ commitment, performance, and productivity (Jonsdottir & Fridriksdottir, 2019; Sypher et al., 1989), they have also instituted listening as a characteristic of organizational culture (Gilchrist & Van Hoveen, 1994; Mignon, 1990). An organization that listens well is characterized by a culture of openness and belongingness. Moreover, a climate of open listening enhances employees’ identification and commitment wherein its members are supportive, open for input, and encourage upward influence (Helms & Haynes, 1992; Murray, 2004). Overall, researchers have conceptualized listening at two levels: individual and organizational construct (Barbour, 2017).

Equally, effective listening is agreed to be an active work that goes beyond natural processes and requires both mental and physical effort (Helms & Haynes, 1992; Jonsdottir & Fridriksdottir, 2019). As broadly defined, listening is a “process of attending, receiving, translating, and responding to messages presented verbally and nonverbally” (GD Bodie et al., 2008, p. 7). Simply put, listening in an organizational setting is an interrelated set of concepts comprising “attentiveness, verbal behavior, nonverbal behavior, attitudes, memory, and behavioral responses” (Lewis & Reinsch, 1988, p. 49).

2.1.1 The common approaches

The principles and assumptions of listening in the business context continue to be treated as a nice-to-have or a quick-fix skill of back-channeling responses (nod heading, interjection, co-narrating e.g.) that can readily be operationalized through “observable behaviors rather than on covert, mental processes” (Brownell, 1994b, p. 19). As a result, listening instructions and practices facilitated in the workplace are largely appearance-focused in which emotional labor orientation is emphasized (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). This dominant mindset to listening by organizations implies the oversimplified understanding of the role of listening, unfitting for the business world that is increasingly challenged by complexity, diversity, and ambiguity (Flynn et al., 2008). As a result, professionals reside with limited resources and unclear direction of practical implementation toward listening (Haas & Arnold, 1995).

Common display of listening behaviors adopted as a symbolic act include making eye-contact, expressing empathy, asking questions, paraphrasing, and refraining from talking over

(Gilbert, 1989; Wellmon, 1988). Although this portraying act of listening yields some indirect benefits such as better measures of performance, higher job satisfaction, increased morale, and trust-building (Bergeron & Laroche, 2009; Lipetz et al., 2020), little is known about a workable strategy of listening (A. D. Wolvin, 2010) that directly validate planning and decision-making through active listening.

The multiple definitions and understandings of what constitutes effective listening in organizations largely stems from the conceptualization of listening as a skill attached and inseparable from other forms of communication, speaking in particular (Brownell, 2010). Accordingly, more focus has been placed on speaking-related activities concealing the importance of receiver orientation, especially the roles of coworkers as listeners (Smeltzer, 1993). For instance, researchers long ago pointed out that employees assess each other's communication competence through two dimensions of encoding and decoding (Monge et al., 1982) whereas Papa and Tracy (1988) appealed that a single unit or linear dimension is employed by organizational members.

Most aural erroneous in organizations is commonly associated with the false assumption to listen for information acquisition, involving minimal mental activities of memorization and internalization (Bostrom, 1990). This linear approach for facts and accuracy perceptivity is agreed to stemmed from lecture-based listening (Cooper, 1997). In essence, listening for retention is highly discouraged by scholars as by nature, humans have a limited attention span and concentration, leading to next facts or words being incomplete or misinterpreted (Bostrom & Waldhart, 1988; Janusik, 2007). This means that listening to grasp facts is rather inefficient particularly, in work contexts that require ideation and content reconstruction to gain new insight and deeper meaning (Argyri, 1984; Nichols & Stevens, 1957). Subsequently, “science reticence” was termed by scholars to refer to organizational members who fear to make decisions without a complete set of supporting evidence (Lewis, 2019). According to Weick (1998), organizations that aim to be in control and keep order of organizational activities by aiming for perceptual accuracy cease the plausibility to generate conversation that evolves future actions and decisions.

Recurring organizational listening mishaps and conflicts are, in part, deep-rooted in organizations poor practices of listening such as feedback confusion, job burnout, detachment, dissent, and silence, decreased safety climate, reputational crises and so forth (Bisel & Adame, 2019; Brownell, 2008; Lipetz et al., 2020). These recurrent pitfalls implied that the development

makes only slow progress considering the importance of the skill necessary in today's fast-paced business environment (Flynn & Bodie, 2007). Thus, much work is needed in understanding why these ubiquitous issues of aural erroneousess continue to exist in many work environments.

2.1.2 Strengthening identifications

In the late 1980s, the pioneering work of communication professionals formed a view of listening in the organizational landscape as a nonlinear construct in which the process of hearing is an integrated set of cognitive, behavioral, and emotive concepts and asked for a more complex inclusive theory (Cooper & Husband, 1993; Rhodes, 1987). According to Hirsch (1986), listening comprises at a minimum ten different conceptual elements namely, “[...] assigning meaning, acting to the sound stimuli, selectively receiving the sound stimuli, remembering, purposefully attending to the sound stimuli, analyzing information presented, and using past experiences as a filter of the communicated information” (p.16). Studies suggest that “the louder, the more relevant, and the more novel the stimuli” the greater the listeners responsiveness will be (Barker, 1971, p. 31). The authors further underlined the relationship between listening and learning which can be modified and nurtured through social interactions. This implies that rather than a static reception for information retention, listening is an active process with layered factors of influences and components of filtration, selection, and construction among behaviors of interacting individuals (Halone et al., 1997; Jonsdottir & Fridriksdottir, 2019).

Listening as a complex human behavior refocuses the attention toward individual actors who possess “intentional symbolic behavior” (Husband et al., 1988). This means that listeners seek to satisfy simultaneous intentions as they listen in the communication context namely instrumental (i.e., learning), relational (i.e., relationship building), and cultural goals (i.e., normative) (Lewis, 2019). These goals organizational members listen for vary greatly on their “trusted framework” of stored knowledge (Weick, 1995) or “individual perceptual framework” in which listeners retrospectively recalls as they listen, think, and act to make sense of the new interpretations (Worthington & Bodie, 2020). During conversations, listeners assess the impact of the events by calculating their intention as well as the context and social implication simultaneously. In practice, these multiple levels of intentions are sensitively filtered by emotions that can “overstimulate” listeners’ ability to listen leading to fragmentation and distortion of the

original message (Nichols & Stevens, 1957). To avoid the overstimulation or heightened emotions (Rogers & Roethlisberger, 1991), individuals should withhold evaluation and differentiate between the immediate with the less immediate (prioritize). Similarly, Rogers (1975) suggests sensing the internal frame of others “as if one were the person, but without ever losing the ‘as if’ condition” (p.3).

The shift of listening from advocacy to inquiry highlights listening behavior and intentions as central to maintaining meaningful co-creation between speaker and listener (Barbour, 2017; Lipari, 2014; Rhodes, 1987). This transition emphasizes feedback as point of reference to the completeness of communication process (Barker, 1971). The highlight here is flexibility in views and embracing another’s needs (O’Reilly & Anderson, 1980). In line with this, early research points out skillful listening to comprise appropriateness and effectiveness. “Appropriateness” is referred to the ability to listen with understanding (Rogers & Roethlisberger, 1991) while complying to norms and rules (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Whereas “effectiveness” is linked to the capability to listen in linkage to achieve goals and plans (Cooley & Roach, 1984).

“Active listening” or listening with assertiveness and attentiveness is pertinent as the “key competence required for creating an environment that facilitates the implementation of strategic plans” (Brownell, 2008, p. 8) in which the effectiveness of listening influences the organizing process at three levels: individual, team, and organizational (Brownell, 1994a). These approaches emphasize the strategic focus of open dialogue, discussion, and constructive feedback in connection to organization long-term goals (Barge & Little, 2002). Likewise, organizational listening that is action and strategy focused for learning, self-critique, and reflexivity are conceived to embody “functional internal rationales” attribute (Lewis, 2019). For this reason, non-strategic listening is depicted as a random selection of attention, reaction, and implementation. Whereas strategic listening is linked to careful execution of course of action and decisional framework that are connected to assist organization “to get from here to there” (Bodie & Fitch-Hauser, 2010; Brownell, 2013; Lewis, 2019).

2.2 Organizational strategic listening: An integration

To date, the growing organizational listening literature by modern scholars shares one commonality: an adaptive framework of listening for critical thinking that generate direct and long-term outcomes (Barbour, 2017; Brownell, 2016; Cooper & Husband, 1993). This implies that

the listening skill is thoughtful, course-correcting, and result-oriented, thus integrating the impact of individual internalization (i.e., attitudes, values, experience) together with the external stimuli that serve as influencing factors on the outcome of the thinking and doing process. To capture listening across context, scholars present four principles of effective listening—listening as active construction of knowledge, multiple levels of cognition, co-creation, and participation (Worthington & Bodie, 2020, p. 266).

Parallel to this, Lewis (2019) defines strategic organizational listening as a “set of methodologies and structures designed and utilized to ensure that an organization’s attention is directed toward vital information and input to enable learning, questioning of key assumptions, interrogating decisions, and ensuring-critical analysis” (p. 13). The steps encourage strategic listeners to: First, collect unstructured and structured forms of information and input. Then make certain to question assumptions and challenge decisions. Third and last, course-correction for learning and quality decisions. Simply put, unconscious listening that mollify, silence, or dismiss are regarded as non-strategic and random. Thus, listening is a strategic practice that meaningfully and purposefully surface input upward and laterally among all layers of the organization.

Similarly, the all-time-classic listening researchers, Nichols and Stevens (1957) suggest four mental activities to be regularly practiced for good reception: First, the listeners anticipate and mentally prepare to join the conversation. Second, the listeners recheck the complexity of the content to measure the level of trustworthiness. Third, the listeners internalize and systematically summarize the points being made thus far. And lastly, the listeners calculate the unspoken words by listening for verbal behavior and bodily responses. This approach puts emphasis on direct attention and concentration of thought to the content being heard, leaving the least sidetracks or “mental excursion” that may distort the originality of the input.

Brownell (1994, 2008) suggests The HURIER” 6-stage for “skill-based listening” framework to adapt accordingly to individual’s course action and strategic plans: (1) hearing: concentration and attention on “the right thing” (2) understanding: comprehension of the literal meaning (3) remembering: recalling and recognizing stored memory of past events and situations (4) interpreting: sensitivity to the contextual and nonverbal dimension of the message (5) evaluation: logical assessment of the message without biases and reference from one’s own agendas (6) responding: answer with appropriateness to promote openness and further

dialogues. Entirely, listening as a strategic action emphasizes listening with adaptability, flexibility, and reflexivity in ways that appear to lead toward new learning for long-term goals.

2.2.1 Participative inquiry, dialogue, and discussion

One of the integral parts of strategic listening is the skill of question asking. Proactive questioning that is “genuine, curious, and direct” can affect the outcome of a conversation (Brooks & John, 2018; Edmondson, 2018). Questions are essential as it influences dialogue and discussion by “perspective taking, future talk, and reflecting conversation”, which is leading to an effective team learning and internal coordination between employees (Oliver & Barge, 2002). Listeners are suggested to consider four factors that affect the quality of queries: type, tone, sequence, and framing. This includes follow-up and open-ended questions (type), casual over formal approach (tone), interval of tough and sensitive questions (sequence), appropriate and proactive responses (framing). By the same token, the concept of “mindful listening” advises listeners to increase conversational engagement through asking questions that are topic-relevant as well as offering value-adding perspectives and personal experience (Worthington & Bodie, 2020). Likewise, questioning is not limited to asking others but also includes the listener to reflectively question the factuality of the external situation as well as to have self-reflection to the extent of critiquing or questioning one’s own framework as they exercise their mental activities during conversation (Klein et al., 2006; Nichols & Stevens, 1957). This is referred by Barker (1971) as “self-feedback”.

2.2.2 A communicative space

To ensure a climate and culture of balance and good flow of communication, scholars encourage to reserve a “communicative space” during conversations where “organizational hierarchy is temporarily suspended” allowing the speakers and listeners to “meet on equal terms as human beings” (Heide et al., 2018, p. 22). This concept resonates greatly to the ongoing challenge within organizations in which organization’s members limit their future cognitive projectivity due to lack of reflexivity to justify and reasons. These actions which marginalize or block creativity and knowledge flow are referred to as “functional stupidity” (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). With that said, to ensure an upward and across intelligence mobilization requires a strategic work of listening to eradicate the cognitive limitation for contemporary organizations to function effectively (Brownell, 2008). In a similar sense, a “strategic aperture” is defined as a

widening of gap to listen for input vital for the listener's planning and self-reflection (Lewis, 2019). An opening of hearing at the right amount which is not too wide or too narrowed for incomings but enough to calculate the situation.

Miller (2007) suggests concept of "compassionate communication" which emphasize the sub-processes of "noticing, feeling, and responding". The different stages highlight the balance between emotional and rational element to successfully communicate in an authentic way. Comparable concepts include active-empathic listening for inclusion and mutual equality (Bodie et al., 2013), as well as mindful listening as a metacognitive mechanism to actively and emphatically listen for a relational-orientation (Worthington & Bodie, 2020). Organizational members who lack self-control (Snyder, 1974) or are unaware of others "participation rights" are termed as "discourse managers" as they either consciously or unconsciously "manage, guide, select, and direct" discourse (Heritage & Clayman, 2010). As conclusively captured by Oliver and Barge (2002), listening as a communicative practice is "an approach to organizational development and management that emphasizes the positive care of organizational life" (p.126).

2.2.3 Reframing of work: A reinforcement

Klein et al. (2006)'s study emphasizes a constant reframing of the trusted framework for there to be learning. The research suggests assertiveness to look for information, questioning assumption, and comparing old and new perceptions to enrich sensemaking cycle. In a more practical approach, Edmondson (2018) as well advice for a reframing of the prior worldview or lens organizational members wear to see organizational "realities" by creating a "shared framework" that collectively reconnect individuals with mutual expectations and reasoning of work if common understanding and knowledge expanding is to be fostered. Throughout the different stages of reframing, active listening is required for there to be an open environment in which mistakes, errors, and failures are openly discuss, share, and analyzed to improve decision-making and execution of work. The process of productive reframing encourages organization to: (1) raise awareness of adaptability and flexibility to different situations (2) adopt a humble mindset and refrain from cognitive bias and (3) responding productively. Thus, reinforce an organizational culture that embraces mindful functioning to develop resilient, learning, and fast communication and adaptation (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007).

2.3 Organizational sensemaking

According to Weick et al. (2005), sensemaking as a meaning-making process “involves the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing” (p. 409). Similarly, Helms-Mills (2003) refers to sensemaking as a natural process of human behavior in which the “meanings materialized inform and constrain identity and action” (p.35). In the aggregate, sensemaking as a theoretical lens illuminates the ways in which organizational members actively “anticipate their own meaning-making activities and those of other organizational participants around them” (Jeong & Brower, 2008, p. 225).

Generally, organizational sensemaking begins with queries. In everyday life, organization members confront different tasks and activities, which will trigger them to ask: “what does this mean?”, “what is the story here?”, and “how should I deal with this?”. As these questions arise, individuals’ expectations rise, and they seek for comprehensions in hope that the discovered meaning would rationalize the uncertainty and restabilize their grounds (Weick, 1995). In between these flows of experiences, stories and meanings are painted into existence through an interplay of action that serves to construct and coordinate systems of decision, action, and identity (Helms-Mills, 2003). Accordingly, the current state of organizational life is in constant motion, evolving, and shifting as individuals talk and listen to one another. The process of sensemaking thereby, pinpoints the central feature of the listening process integrated in the meaning-making process as it unfolds the “quest for meaning in organizational life” (Gioia et al., 1994) in which some organization networks “produce ignorance, tunnel vision, and normalization” whilst some produce “novel insights, original synthesis, and unexpected diagnoses” (Weick, 2012, p. 53).

As Weick (1995) points out “to talk about sensemaking is to talk about reality as an ongoing accomplishment that takes form when people make retrospective sense of the situations” (p.15). This implies that in social situations neither meaning nor reality are fixed (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001). Therefore organization members must practice constant attentiveness, preparation, and consciousness toward incoming encounters as how each actor chooses to internalize and react on the situation destine the production of one’s reality (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006). That said, listening as a sensemaking process happens simultaneously as individual actors process the information and use their interpretation to respond back to situations. The process of sensemaking can be divided into three stages of scanning (enactment), interpreting (selection), and action (enhancement) from which will be explained in the following section to untangle

how listening assists individuals' attention and interpretation through the shifting phrases of cues (Jeong & Brower, 2008; Thomas et al., 1993; Weick, 2012).

2.3.1 Sensemaking process

Sensemaking can be viewed as a sequence of change-enactment-selection-retention. This happens when there is interaction between individuals through exchanging, selecting and remembering meanings of a situation (Weick et al., 2005). Scholars refer to "strategic sensemaking" as meaning-making process of "scanning, interpretation, and action" that concerns the direct effect of the process to the organizational outcomes (Thomas et al., 1993). Systematically, three coinciding stages that constitute the "conscious" organizing process include: noticing, interpretation, and action (Jeong & Brower, 2008). This study will use the Jeong and Brower (2008) naming convention of the three stages *noticing, interpretation, and action*.

In the noticing stage, the sensemakers' attention is triggered by the flux of events and the sensemaking process is started (Chia, 2000; Weick, 1995). During this stage individuals selectively direct their attention toward a stimulus and mentally categorize possible meanings to the question "what is the story here?". This stage plays a critical part as it points to which direction the sensemaker should be attentive or react to (Lipari, 2014; Thomas et al., 1993). This means that the better the selection, the more learning, which, in turn, will reinforce a rigorous individual's cognitive capacity (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006). The sensemaker then mentally draft their plan of action for the situation to make sense of the situation (Jeong & Brower, 2008). Since listening is constantly altering the sensemakers reality, it can be implied that listening causes ecological change to the listener and therefore commences the listener's sensemaking process.

The interpretation stage is the process of selection by construing meaning of the situation to make sense of what is going on (Weick, 2012). During the process, the sensemakers mentally reassess, revise, and develop their thinking and plan of action (Jeong & Brower, 2008). Chia (2000) refers to the labeling in the internal work as "functional deployment" in which the labeling on events serves to give meanings to the act of "managing, coordinating, and distributing" (Weick et al., 2005). This means that the interpretation of sensemakers influence their planning and decision-making. In this stage, the essence of retrospective or trusted framework is emphasized meaning the understanding and evaluation process of the cue is influenced by past experiences and identity (Weick, 2012). This implies that the coming to understanding is fulfilled as the sensemaker merge the old frame with the new (Weick et al., 2005). According

to Bettis and Prahalad (1995), sensemakers' "dominant logic" that filters different cues should be adaptive to increase stability and learning. To ensure an effective routine of information processing, a constant conscious update or logic reframing (Klein et al., 2006) to widen the receptive aperture (Lewis, 2019) of the trusted framework on "the right" information (Brownell, 2008) is deemed to be rewarding for the sensemaker (Weick, 1998). In this step, listening plays a key part in individuals data gathering and integration process (A. D. Wolvin, 2010).

In the action stage, sensemakers implement the ideas and sense that formed during the interpreting stage. That stabilizes the stream of experience while interrupting the next process of actions with further noticing, bracketing, and labeling thus, fostering a continuous loop of thinking and doing process (Halone et al., 1997; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). At this stage, the sensemakers answer the question "what do I do next?" by acting upon it. The product of the action becomes part of the sensemakers identity that constitutes the organization existence (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). Moreover, rather than a separate process, talking and action sequence simultaneously (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015; Weick, 1995). Subsequently, the completion of identity construction is identified as the sensemaker looks back at their actions once it has been completed which then reinforce the next interpretation of newer cues (Klein et al., 2006). Thus, the more purposeful or rational the action is, the better can the sensemaker reevaluate their thinking as they enact in a new sensemaking cycle (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001).

The sequence of noticing, interpreting, and action accounts can be organized in three concurrent contexts – ecological, institutional, and social relational. In the ecological context, the process of sensemaking is an enacting process in which the organizational members think and act on the unknown events which create and organize the symbolic realities of the external working situation. The institutional context describes the activities of sensemaking in a structuring process of reorganizing schemes by "updating the conceptual tools" in order to maintain the orderliness of their present state (Bettis & Prahalad, 1995; Jeong & Brower, 2008). This means that organizational members in their meaning-making process reorganize and negotiate their worldview and in doing so retrospectively reflect back on how they view themselves in that world (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). In the third context, the process of sensemaking is a relational and collective process of cognitions grounded in enactive and narrative in which shared meanings are constructed for meaningful consensus (Klein et al., 2006). This implies that the subjective worldviews of individuals are revealed, shared, and reconstructed with others to form a common world (Vogus et al., 2014; Weick et al., 2005). It is through these contexts

the phenomenon of sensemaking emerges and collective actions evolve to navigate through the dynamic flow of organizing (Vogus et al., 2014).

2.3.2 Identity, plausibility, and mindfulness

In today's work environment, organizational members are viewed as active facilitators who take part in enabling a participative and interactive environment (Jonsdottir & Fridriksdottir, 2019; Riecken, 1958). The repositioning of the organizational members as central to the communication process means that the interpretation of shared understanding depends to a great extent on "how the listener activates background knowledge and experiences the event" (Worthington & Bodie, 2020, p. 266). This means that the first step to understand the meaning-making process within organizations is to understand the functioning of individuals' perceptual filters that shape their values and perception (Klein et al., 2006). In line with this, the essence of identity construction in the organizing process focuses on the sensemakers' belief, action, and identification of the self in relation to the environment which, in turn, permit organizations appreciation of their own collective identity (Helms-Mills, 2003; Weick et al., 2005). For this reason, organizational sensemaking is anchored in how organizational members' identities are stabilizes and destabilizes as they enact with the ecological changes (Weick, 2012). Thus, sense-making as an organizing process is about appreciating the fact that "small structures and short moments can have large consequences" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 410). In other words, the relationships and development are a two-way street; each independent actions, big or small have impact (Klein et al., 2006).

Since identity is a "mutable continuity" in which image and identity is constantly evolving, this draws on the second property of sensemaking, plausibility (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). The concept of plausibility rejects the traditional believe of organizations in the pursuit of perceptual accuracy to "get things right" and determine outcome effectiveness (Falkheimer et al., 2016). According to Weick et al. (2005), sensemaking is driven by flexibility and improvisation to changes and assertiveness to learn from other different situations which together form the "actionable knowledge" (Bettis & Prahalad, 1995; Vogus et al., 2014). This shift refocuses on collective readiness, receptiveness, and adaptation in dealing with the state of ambiguity in the organizational reality (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001). Thus, to contest the constant motion of changes require conscious interactions as a mode of meaning construction leading to new plausibility that guides new learning and discoveries (Weick, 2015).

Mindfulness or the quality of organizational concentration has gained interest by scholars especially in the contemporary organizational life determined by impermanence which requires organizing, structuring, and learning, in short, the mind (Bettis & Prahalad, 1995; Brown & Ryan, 2003). In practice, mindful organizing is often attributed to the so-called high reliability organization (HRO) in which work is in a continuous loop of confronting risks, failures, and adversities that requires “collective behavioral capability” to detect and contest with ambiguous and complex environment. This includes being realistic, operationally focused, and resilient to failures while navigating collectively with pro-social mindset among individuals who are regarding their own actions as a meaningful contribution to others (Vogus et al., 2014; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001). Earlier research referred to mindfulness as appropriateness of interpretation and actions in which individual actors engage with “high sensitivity of perception and flexibility of behavior” (Levinthal & Rerup, 2006, p. 505). Thus, recentered the process of decoding as central as how individuals’ hear and make sense of the situation determine the outcome of the spoken words (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006). Weick and Sutcliffe (2006) extend the concept further by highlighting that individual actors' see a wider array of possibilities as soon as they detach from associative thinking and instead being present in the moment. That is, mindful action is about the concentration of the mind of not floating away but instead staying right in the moment of the here and now (Bodhi, 2011).

2.4 Reflection

At the heart of the relational perspective on organizing is the proposition that meanings and choices are continuously and jointly produced and exchanged, resulting in coworkers developing shared understanding and expectations as they learn with and from others (Vogus et al., 2014). Sensemaking is then, in its most confined and purest sense, a learning by doing process (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006). In this regard, it is therefore essential to first understand employees' continuous process of making sense and assigning meaning to organization activities and events to grasp how listening is practiced wherein guides coworker’s micro-operation, decision-making, and future direction. Thus, this study embraces sensemaking theory as an appropriate theoretical framework to understand organizational listening phenomenon taking place in such scenarios.

The following chapter presents the research design which includes the philosophy of science, choice of methodology and data analysis.

3. Methodology

As this study aims to understand how practitioners employ strategic listening in their sensemaking process in the micro-practice, a qualitative approach was applied to explore the particular phenomenon from a social constructionist viewpoint to untangle how and in what way organizational members listen as they perform task and make decision. The chapter begins with the epistemological perspective this study wears as lens follows by empirical material collection, data analysis, and reflections on the methodological construction process.

3.1 Social constructionism

In this thesis, the chosen epistemological approach is social constructionism as the study views: (1) the selected contemporary organizations, IKEA and Tetra Pak as an ongoing process of organizing and are continuously changing (Czarniawska, 2008), (2) participants' perceptions and interpretations of listening as subjective relational to the contexts and situations (Gergen, 2009) and (3) myself, the author as an inevitable co-creator who take an active role in the construction process. On the whole, this study takes a "reflexive turn" in order to discover new knowledge on listening as a social process, thereby all steps of collecting and reporting are the process of acting and thinking together between the participants and I, the researcher (Alvesson, 2004, 2011; Schön, 1983).

By positioning myself as a social constructionist, my approach to the research study thereby embraces the idea that different perspectives and orientations of reality are particularly enriching and useful as it adds depth and dimension both in theory and in practice (Alvesson & Deetz, 2006). In comparison to an absolute understanding of an objective truth, social constructionists respect the plurality and diversity of perspectives since in reality, the phenomenon being studied involves people and surroundings that are rather in constant motion thereby impossible to approach with linear and logical steps if new knowledge or perspective is to be gained (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Reciprocally equal to the processual perspective of sensemaking this study wears as a lens, which regards the production of knowledge and the representing

reality as “impermanence” and therefore are always changing and challenged with unforeseen events as people make sense of their work environment retrospectively (Weick et al., 2005).

In alignment to the research focus that seeks to capture coworkers’ usage of strategic listening both on the micro- and macro- levels, I believe social constructionism as social philosophy to be constructive to the study as it allows me to connect and critically reflect the adopted theory with realities (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 2010). This means that I am aware that all reality and knowledge produced and reproduced by coworkers are not fixed but rather relative and contextual and therefore meanings are in constant motions of “still coming into being” (Gergen, 2009, p. 46). Put simply, as humans behave and act, they “become the product of their own creation and often see themselves as such” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 55). With this in mind, the significance and implication of meaning the practitioners and I, as we converse come to a shared understanding is influenced by our beliefs and experiences. Thus, as we interact, meanings are culturally bonded and shifted depending on our perception, decision, motivation, and history (Burr & Dick, 2017).

All things considered, adopting a social constructionist perspective had some implication on my study as I proceeded through the different stages of data collection and analysis of the empirical work. This means that I must be aware and conscious of the abstraction and inference I make as I try to explain the relationships between the social reality and the theory being studied. Having said that, I agree with Alvesson et al. (2008) on the remark that the empirical material can be interpreted and perceived from multiple views and therefore the study is open for different interpretation and investigation in the use of meanings, beliefs, and understandings that may be varied and contradictive.

3.2 Case study

With objectives to identify the strategic listening actions performed by professionals in contemporary organizations, this study used a case study approach as an interpretative method (Bennett & Elman, 2006). By aiming to answer how and why questions, connecting research study to the context would be best to understand the phenomenon of listening in its most natural setting (Yin, 2003). In line with Patton (2002), this study’s choice of applying case analysis is to purposefully collect, organize, and analyze “comprehensive, systemic, and in-depth information about each case of interest” (p.447). Thus, I argue that a selective instrumental case

study is appropriate and fitting as it helps to reach closure and validation of the research questions through gaining deeper insights into the thoughts, feelings, and attitudes of organizational members bounded within a particular context (Stake, 2005) — practitioners' perceptions on listening actions in a Scandinavian contemporary organization in this case.

Based on Eisenhardt (1989), a single case-based study is appropriate in the new topic areas. In agreement to this statement, I argue that strategic listening as a phenomenon is still a young field that has surfaced not until recently along with the postmodern trend meaning its development is dependent on how the contemporary organizations are organized and systemically constructed. Therefore, it is necessary to bring the theory closer to reality in order to gain closeness to real-life situations (Flyvbjerg, 2006). With that said, I would like to make explicit that this case analysis is not a case on the knowledge-intensive organization as such, but rather about coworkers' perception and experiences of listening on multiple levels: individual, group, and organizational (Eisenhardt, 1989). For this reason, I argue that IKEA and Tetra Pak as a smaller case unit will advance the depth and richness of the study for a reason the case within itself contains unique and engaging knowledge to be interpreted, described, and magnified thereby, yield a richer material of how listening is being practiced and understood by coworkers in the contextual setting of modern organizations (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

3.2.1 Selection of case organization

As this qualitative inquiry focuses on specific samples, criterion sampling was selected as a technique to select an organization (Patton, 2002). According to the author, criterion sampling is purposive as it involves, “reviewing and studying all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance” (p.238). Accordingly, criteria of case selection are as follows: (1) Scandinavian setting (2) prestigious and distinguished (3) decentralized organizational structure (4) dynamic collaboration and small size team (5) cross-functional work and (6) self-managed. These requirements serve as a point of departure when in search of organizations for the case study to achieve an information-rich case tailored to serve the research purposes.

3.3 Qualitative interviews

Since the research questions ask how and why, a qualitative interview was selected as the data collection method to uncover the role of strategic listening performed by employees in the

workplace. To find out about how employees construe and practice listening as well as its implication, I conducted semi-structured interviews because open-ended questions are conversational based and allow for greater breadth of personal thought, belief, experience, and attitude to be elaborated and expressed in detail thereby, produce a rich source of knowledge of the employee's social life I was seeking to capture (Brinkmann, 2014). Simply put, the purpose of this approach is suiting to obtain questions in ways that the interviewees will enjoy answering. The approach then allows me to discover how they think, feel, and believe while seeing reasons that brought them toward those perceptions. Moreover, this open format gives me the chance to follow up on different aspects I might find to be important in that moment in time. It is also important to note that as qualitative interviews are dialogical and interactional between the interviewer and the interviewees, the conversations are thus a relational effort derived from descriptive and reflexive co-creation and interpretation of the listener and the listener-to (Worthington & Bodie, 2020).

3.4 Selection and criteria for interviewees

To conduct the interviews on the population, a purposive sampling method together with snowball sampling was adopted. Purposive sampling strategy means that the decisions on sampling population is determined by the researcher as seen appropriate and promising to gain understanding on the research problem and the phenomenon (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The application of snowball sampling was chosen to help support the purposive strategy by extending the boundaries of selections thereby, help to “identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich” (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 127). Together the sampling approaches increase the possibility to exemplify and decode data that is more particular and specific (Suri, 2011).

During the process of looking for interviewees, I gained access into the organizations through an established contact person. The selection of interviewees is based on four criteria: professionals whose work are (1) team-based (2) own areas of expertise, (3) multifunctional responsibility, and (4) at least one year length of employment. Criteria was given to the representatives who helped me made further contact. From there I started contacting the participants through email. Research interview invitation (see Appendix 1) and consent-to-participate form (see Appendix 2) was emailed to the participants. The consent form informs the participants

about the research purpose and procedure, confidentiality as well as their right to withdraw from the study when they see appropriate (Patton, 2002).

After each interview, I applied the snowball sampling to gain access to more informants. The reason for asking for recommendation after an interview is to make sure that the participants have a fuller view of the study and therefore have a more secure judgment as they assess for interviewees who could share useful insights to the research purpose (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Nonetheless, I understand that the recommendation given partly influences the decision of selections. For this reason, I would like to make explicit that all participants recommended were contacted after I have decided that they are valid for the sampling. My decisions are made after reviewing the participants' profile on LinkedIn. This serves as an extended outlet to make certain of the participants' attributes required for the study. All in all, different types of participants are secured within the requirements such as specific expertise, work is service-focused, and have a good level of teaming.

3.4.1 Participants

A total of 12 interviews were made of which 6 are from IKEA and 6 are from Tetra Pak. The participants represent the spread of company profiles ranging from project leader, consultant, analyst, designers, planner, and IT specialist from various departments including service, purchasing, packaging, engineer automation, and logistics. All participants have a mixed background including Swedish, Asian, Middle Eastern, and European with age range from 28 to 43. All participants have worked for the organizations from one year to ten years and are working in a group of 3-15 people.

Due to Covid-19, the interviews were conducted online over the course of seven weeks through Zoom meeting, a video communication platform that has been opted by many institutions and entities during the pandemic. Date and time for the interviews were arranged to the participants' convenience and consent to participate is secured orally at the beginning of the interview. Each of the one-on-one interviews were held in English and lasted approximately an hour (47-75 minutes). For transcription and documentation purposes, the online interviews were recorded using Zoom record.

3.5 Interview procedure

An interview guide was drafted to ensure variation of issues are explored and are adequately pursued (Patton, 2002). The interview contains three primary parts. The first part is an introduction in which I aim to set an inviting and comfortable setting by exchanging soft and forthcoming subjects to connect with the participants in such a short duration. I also aim to gather overview information about their work life as a natural extension from the conversation by asking them to share about their work routine. This part focuses on *project, role, teaming-level, activities, and atmosphere*. Broad range of the answers are marked in the protocol form (Appendix 4) which will help narrowed the scope of interview questions. The second part is the interview questions. In this part, I aim to secure the most detailed information about what they do and how they do it in order for me to best observe, reflect, and make sense on the statements (Alvesson, 2011; Creswell & Poth, 2016). The questions are divided into *perception, individual, group, institutional levels*. Clusters of questions are provided for each level aiming to capture their *approaches, goals, techniques, resources, problems, outcomes, and development*. The questions are provided as list of options of which I will choose accordingly to the scope of work introduced by the interviewees during the setting-the-stage part about their routine at work. To secure the purpose, the questions are drafted in an easy-to-follow manner in ways that allow me, the researcher, and the participants to explore and discuss further in detail manners in a generating way (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Finally, the interview ends with a closing. This part ensures add-on on the part of interviewees to insert on things they think might be overlooked then I express my gratitude for their time, accessibility, and valuable input. The complete interview guide can be found in Appendix 3.

Further, it is also worth noting that the interview guide is inspired by different research on listening and building psychological safety; Edmondson (2018); Lewis (2019); Nichols and Stevens (1957); Worthington and Bodie (2020) etc. whose work emphasize the importance to efficiently listen and to secure a comforting climate to increase interaction. I would like to make a claim that the interview guide and the protocol form are made with the intention to help support one another thus, should not be considered separately. Please refer to the next section (3.6 Interview reflection) for fuller explanation on the development of the interview guide.

In summation, my focus of the interview is to secure flexibility and open listening to meaningfully explore participants' experiences of listening within the scope of the subject. This means that I view each interviewee as different and so is my way of approaching. Therefore, the orders and phrasing as to how the questions are asked will be decided when talking directly

to the participants. From this view, listening and conversing is central to the inquiry process as I believe that my portrayal of openness and understanding reflect the intentionality of the study. Furthermore, an open dialogue creates a safe and secure space for the interviewees to share their stories and minimize the distance, self-defense as well as the tendency to self-promote that may occur during the interviewing process (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

3.6 Interview reflections

Throughout each interview, I have encountered some challenges and realizations to reflect upon and remark on which have not only helped me to strengthen my interview procedure but also naturally experienced the power of good listening as I adapted from the theories and improvise in real time and felt the changes from one interview to the next. These improvements were noticeable as there were changes in the patterns of the conversations, the contents shared, the knowledge gained beyond the boundary of the research scope, and the after feelings that were felt in the ending of each call. Although each interviews were different, these improvements can be felt and seen. On my part, I can confidently say that there were changes in the approaches of listening and the outcome yielded from quality listening. Still and all, I would have to say that the escalation would not be made possible without the interviewees who were the counterpart I built up the feeling with. From my observation, I believe I have gained a deeper understanding of sensemaking and the extended possibilities for value-adding conversation only by staying in the moment, questioning one's own presence, and internally makes sense as much as giving sense to others.

Initially, challenges I started to notice is that the participants may not always respond to the questions being asked in chronological order. For instance, interviewees may recall on the first question during the third question as the topic within itself is abstract and interlinked. Secondly, it is often that the interviewees take quite some time to go over each question since their work structure is quite complex. These challenges are rather normal and vital to gain meaningful answers as the interviewees recall, reflect, and internalize. To ease the challenges, aiming for natural conversation during the interview conduction was my top priority. From this instance, I find interview protocol form to be useful and practical to easily mark on the answer and navigate around answers, increasing my assertiveness and focus on the conversation (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

Different challenges I encountered also reflect my own mistakes. On my part as an interviewer, I at first find it challenging to avoid responding to interviewees' questions in ways that might be leading. I corrected this by responding with more questions so that the participants discover the answers themselves. I also try to be careful with my tone of voice, pace, and articulation to make sure that the conversation is clear. Moreover, I applied techniques such as dialogue of encouragement and candor (Creswell & Poth, 2016), everyday language application (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), and appreciative inquiry (Oliver & Barge, 2002). As a result, the interview questions are adjusted and refined to be more conversational based.

After the first interview, an interview protocol form (Appendix 4) was adopted to make the remaining interview session more practical and applicable to record the flow of information. The framework of the form is inquiry-based so that I am piloting while easily jotting down important key points (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The adjustments made include putting the layout into cells instead of a list of questions. Rows on the far left include keywords on the aspects I wish to capture as mentioned prior *approaches, goals, techniques, resources, problems, outcomes, and development*. Whereas top columns are levels and contexts of listening *individual, group, and institutional*. Overall, the protocol form helped to be more reflexive, retain eye contacts, and stay in the moment with the interviewees.

3.7 Analytical process

I used an abductive approach when coding the empirical material from the interviews. This means that the theoretical framework can be “explain, develop, and change before, during, or after the research process” (Yin, 2003, p. 29), thereby appropriate with the phenomenon being studied in which organizations and their activities are viewed as a dynamic entity produce and reproduce by communication (Weick et al., 2005). Thus, deemed organizational members and their interactions with the surrounding as central. Put another way, throughout the process of transcribing, the preliminary categories were constructed and reconstructed based on the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the applied theory (Patton, 2002). This stage of the study involves an interactive step of organizing, labeling, and assigning meaning on the findings to reach a formative evaluation (Dey, 2004), switching back-and-forth between theoretical viewpoint and social reality.

The analytic phrase follows a systematic approach which includes data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification reflecting. First, I “select, focus, simplify, and transform” while at the same time “emphasize, minimize, and set aside” input of the transcription I reasoned as appropriate to the purpose at the given time. Then, I organized, compressed, and categorized to re-assess and cross-check conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To specify, the coding process does not go in a fixed linear process but rather rotating back-and-forth as I listen, review and, continue to re-review the different transcripts to abstract and combine patterns into themes and subthemes (Spiggle, 1994). Moreover, the representation includes developing a significant statement into a meaning unit and structural descriptions of how the phenomenon was experienced (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The analytical generalization includes verbatim quotations, description, and reflection of the separate empirical phenomena into an integrated analytical construct (Halkier, 2011).

The coded descriptions are labeled into two different themes. The first theme introduces employees’ approaches to strategic listening: *a typical day in the work life* whilst the second focuses on the role of strategic listening: *economy of communication*. The themes are analyzed from the particular to the general with focuses to foreshadow employees’ multiple realities and experiences. The direct interpretations are situated from an interpretivist view thereby, remains mindfully open for “tentative, inconclusive, and questioning” investigation to develop knowledge further (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 154).

3.8 Ethical considerations

In the scope of this study, I as the researcher declare to work with consciousness and reflectivity (Miles & Huberman, 1994) continuously and thoroughly. Thus, my goal is to convey the participants’ feelings, thoughts, and attitudes obtained within their contexts in connection to the research framework and purposes. Furthermore, the study has no extended aim to control or calculate information for perfection or accuracy but rather to work on the seemingly important and concerning providing data.

The process of documenting and analyzing this study takes a sensitive consideration on the ethical issue of the analysis. As conductor, I am aware of my own background, history, and prior understanding that may influence the interpretation of the findings (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). With that said, all actions taken will be out in the open and explicitly stated to the

partakers while possible risks or harmful consequences on part of the participants will be protected and kept confidential (Hatch, 2000). Likewise, mistakes that may occur or arise would be my own fault. The study concurs with Creswell's and Poth's stance (2016), who says that the presentation of a qualitative study offers an initial direction to alternatives worldviews to bring forward values to a study as such, the study is open for modification and improvisation to better reflect and develop the research further.

Precisely, this chapter has carried out a philosophical discussion on the overall conduction, approaches, and procedures that serve as the foundation to produce a reflexive research study. In the following chapter, an overview of the selected case organizations will be presented.

4. The case organisations

This is a case-based study of two Scandinavian companies in the service sector—IKEA and Tetra Pak. The organizations portray an image of an innovative and progressive workplace where operational activities emphasize the internal dynamic collaboration and expanding tasks and responsibilities between coworkers. Hence, the participating organizations are an ideal environment to explore the research questions about the value of strategic listening activity. To gain a fuller understanding of the organizations within the scope of the study, an overview of the organizations is presented as follow:

4.1 About IKEA

IKEA is a world-wide furnishing company that designs and sells ready-to-assemble houseware for over 77 years. The company was founded by Ingvar Kamprad in 1943 in the small Swedish village of Älmhult, Småland where the design-headquarters are still located today. Due to the landscape of Småland that is stony and rugged, inhabitants need to do things as efficiently and cost-effective as possible with the smallest means and are said to be “thrifty and innovative with a no-nonsense approach to everyday problem solving”. This heritage continues to reside with IKEA’s culture in which work procedures are built upon “enthusiasm, togetherness, and a get-it-done attitude” (IKEA, 2018)

Today, the company operates in 42 countries in more than 50 markets with a total of 445 IKEA stores worldwide. The company’s vision of “creating a better everyday life for the many people” is not only customer-focused but also extends to their 217 000 “co-workers” around the globe of which 99 700 are in Europe. To adapt to changes and demands in the external marketplace, the company has expanded into many companies operating under the IKEA trademarks. IKEA’s organizational structure is divided into functional units which are responsible for different steps in the IKEA value chain focusing on development, production, and sales (IKEA, 2021).

4.2 About Tetra Pak

Tetra Pak is a Swedish multinational food packaging and processing company operating for over 78 years. Founded in 1943 in Lund by Dr. Ruben Rausing and built on an innovation by Erik Wallenberg who invented a tetrahedron-shaped milk carton in 1944. As of today, the company with the slogan “protect what’s good”, is the largest food packaging company in the world. Tetra Pak’s commitment to innovation has enabled “resources longevity, nutritional preservation, and waste reduction” that “save more than it costs” (TetraPak, 2021b)

Building on its heritage, the company offers end-to-end packaging systems and solutions, filling machines and processing solutions, and distribution tools for a wide range of food products made possible by a cold chain supply. The company unites 25 555 employees and operates in more than 170 countries with 53 factories, 29 market companies, and six R&D Centers. Tetra Pak’s portfolio is broad and includes carton packages, processing equipment, packaging equipment, distribution equipment, automation solutions, and services (TetraPak, 2021a).

In the following chapter, the findings and analysis of the empirical work will be presented.

5. Findings and discussion

This chapter presents the findings and discussion of employees' strategic practices of listening as a meaning and organizing process. The first theme presents a typical day in the worklife. This part identifies how employees listen strategically on the micro-level activities— that is, what do they do as they listen and for what purposes are they listening. The key findings for the first theme are that employees follow a similar pattern of listening structures namely *noticing*, *interpreting*, and *action*. Moreover, approaches to listening in the workplace extend beyond the scope of organizing encompassing variety of component as employees seek to satisfy simultaneous goals varying in contexts. These approaches to strategic listening are linked to the second theme *economy of communication* which marked the role of strategic listening in facilitating a collective learning environment. The findings indicate that listening in a sensemaking process enables *synergy* and *mutual benefits* among employees that enhances strategic conversation and action. Altogether, the analysis aims to illuminate the importance of listening that excel the traditional sense necessary in the contemporary business setting.

5.1 A typical day at work

When employees reflected on their daily routine at work, it became apparent that the application of listening is functionally and contextually bound. From the findings, employees' approaches of strategic listening conform to the following patterns:

5.1.1 Update to navigate

I usually have coffee breaks just to check-in with others. It is always good to stay updated, so I know what is going on and understand that it is not just what I do during my work time that matters.

The interviewee remarked on the importance of making certain to stay up-to-date or widening their apertures with current information to stay well informed by catching up and spending time with colleagues across units in between the day (Lewis, 2019). This implies the assertiveness

and focused attention by the employees to reach out for input that are enriching to performance by engaging in different events and include different social group of people (Riecken, 1958) to broaden and fill in new perspective (Klein et al., 2006; Thomas et al., 1993). Another interesting aspect to point out is the quality of active hearing for the right thing (Brownell, 2008) especially for new insights and unique perspectives on different issues through selecting and filtering from the breadth and depth of topics of conversation (Lewis, 2019). As for instance, another interviewee also emphasized the usage of “casual tone” question techniques: “*Hey, how are you? How is it going?*” to naturally hop on ongoing conversations unlocking different topics in relation to work and personal life to increase intimate bonding (Brooks & John, 2018) and meaning in work life (Vogus et al., 2014). Additionally, employees reflected on the significance to continuously practice being proactive and attentive to different situations to strengthen the habit of identifying and interrogating information (Helms & Haynes, 1992). One of the interviewee noted:

If you are intrigued [...], you will find out what is going on. But if you are not, then you [...] have [to pay] attention. And if you never practice [paying attention] there is no process and no flow [in grabbing] the information so you will continue to miss out on things.

The interviewee pointed out that the right focus of hearing, attending, concentrating on the vital cues or activities can be improved with practice (Bostrom & Waldhart, 1988; Hirsch, 1986). These kind of listening activities of scanning and filling in knowledge gap ensure that the sense-makers’ knowledge-base or “trusted framework” stays relevant, recent, and extended (Bettis & Prahalad, 1995; Weick, 1995). In accordance with Weick and Sutcliffe (2001), sensemakers enriched their “distinction making” through a more nuanced acknowledgment of the surrounding and way to cope with it as well as “identification of dimensions of contexts that improve foresight and current functioning” (p.42). In the processes of noticing, employees stressed the importance to keep oneself aligned to the momentary situations by taking time to hear out team members since their opinions, concerns, perspectives can be valuable to work process if confronted competently (Barker, 1971; Bodie & Crick, 2014). Here is one of the employee’s explanation:

I [need to] hear from people who actually know what the problem is because [real life doesn’t follow theory]. It is too detached if we [...] make an annual

plan without [...] reflecting on what is really happening. It is as if the burn is on the hands and we who act as the brain, put [the plaster] on the shoulder.

Rather than normalizing by conforming to standards and norms, the employee approaches changes and ambiguous events by making distinctions, questioning assumptions, and reflecting on the operational culture (Lewis, 2019). The employees show adaptability as they acknowledge the need for continuous awareness of the constant changes of the organizational processes (Weick, 2015). Moreover, the employee compassionate communication by noticing compassion and needs of others (Miller, 2007). By reaching out to their coworkers who are closest to the pain point, the employee considers the variation of needs and expectations of others before making implementation in ways that the outcome will be benefiting for the group that needs it the most (Vogus et al., 2014).

5.1.2 Think ahead & set agenda

There is listening happening all the time. [...] The question that arises is 'how can I be most productive and efficient about it': This means that I have to be strategic in how I position myself in a meeting to get [the] information I need [...]. I [...] prepare [...] how I am going to communicate and negotiate. So first, [...] I question [the present task] and ask for the purpose of the meeting, the agenda and the participants' relevance, making sure that there is a purpose for everyone.

The interviewee expressed the need to mentally prepare for upcoming conversations to ensure readiness, appropriateness, and effectiveness (Cooley & Roach, 1984; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984) by thinking ahead and anticipating the direction of the discourse (Nichols & Stevens, 1957). To ensure reception preparedness for information retaining and knowledge constructing as well as to respond constructively, the employees assess their personal impact and intentional goals of listening (instrumental, relational, norm) before entering a conversation (Worthington & Bodie, 2020). As the employee make assessment they, in part, activate their perceptual framework that determine the future interpretation process of the input events (Klein et al., 2006) so that the resources invested in listening will obtain maximum results during decision-making and planning (Thomas et al., 1993). The employees also highlighted reflexive thinking to ensure self-efficacy by making certain of their relevance as well as others (Alvesson & Spicer, 2017). This illustrates proactive quality of decision-making to make distinction and selection in a

nuanced context with maturity and integrity. The meaning-making process that is co-created by the employees depends largely on their consciousness and knowing their purpose and value, as well as their sensitivity to the social context and its implications (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006). On the contrary, employees also experience passive listening during work due to lack of purpose and goal which lessen the quality of assertiveness and focus (Jonsdottir & Fridriksdottir, 2019; Lewis, 2019). This is one of the employee's comment:

It happens often, that people are in the meeting not knowing the reason for being there. So, there is no interest from the beginning. [That] is natural because to actively listen and fully [be] awake takes energy. [...] So, it is important to make sure that you know why you are involved and how you can contribute.

According to the citation, setting requirements, agendas, and expectations ensure the effectiveness of information processing of attention thereby, better the processes of interpretation and concentration (Bostrom & Waldhart, 1988; Brownell, 1994b). Conversely, lack of effort can lead to mental excursions and getting sidetracked (Nichols & Stevens, 1957). As agreed by an interviewee that careful plans of actions that increase the readiness of the mind rather than random willingness of attention can lessen the tendency of communication malfunction: *"It is noticeable when people are not fully engaged, they would randomly shift back and forth as things pop up in their head when they speak instead of being specified from one point to the next"*. The employees also reflected that preparedness of attending (Brownell, 2008) helps ensure that there is space for others to speak up (Bodie et al., 2013). As reasoned by an interviewee: *"In my case, there would be no space to jump into each other's mouth to say something better when your purpose is clear. You would rather give opportunity to relevant people to give the answer"*. In this instance, the employees expressed an awareness of speakers' and listeners' participation rights (Heritage & Clayman, 2010). The employee give an attribute of a supportive listener who ensure that there is mutual benefits and understanding in between ongoing cues of interaction as such, cultivate a prosocial orientation (Bodie, 2011; Brownell, 1994a).

5.1.3 100% present

Listen, [...] not being distracted by anything else, to make sure you are following the same train of information. Because even if you are in a meeting for 30

minutes, [...] there's always a key takeaway based on which you need to perform a task or solve a problem.

Being present in the moment (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006) by giving full concentration on the content of what was heard has been one of the recurring features underlined by employees as essential for content and idea apprehension (Bostrom & Waldhart, 1988; Nichols & Stevens, 1957). Likewise, authentic listening for shared understanding is agreed by employees to enhance performance, trust-building, and self-efficacy (A. Wolvin, 2010). This is partly due to the fact that it increases concentration by refraining mental activities from floating thoughts, emotional prejudices, and error of judgment (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006). By being fully attentive on the speaker's thought, listeners achieve direct vision and greater vividness of the point of the information being discussed (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006) thereby, deepening their understanding on the literal meaning of the message (Brownell, 1994b). As such, the importance to mentally summarize and capture key ideas during interval of conversation is adopted among interviewees as it deemed to yield new insight and learning in light of what is heard (Lewis, 2019; Nichols & Stevens, 1957).

Regular internal analysis for self-reflection was mentioned by employees to ensure completion of the initial observation. That includes reviewing, remembering, summarizing as well as reflecting (Brownell, 2016). The employees also stressed the importance to listen without interruption by withholding evaluation until a message has been fully understood (Bostrom, 1990; Nichols & Stevens, 1957). Here is one of the interviewee's explanation:

I think it is similar to when you listen to a fable. You listen to the story until the end. Then you ask questions. Or else it distracts the person as well as the others [creating] and chances are that decisions are made without a clear vision.

The employees emphasized the need to first accumulate and actively process input before speaking up and interrupting the speaker. Inserting in the middle of a conversation can distract both speakers and listeners by leading off-topic or breaking the train of thought leading to distorted and fragmented interpretations of meanings and sabotaging the process of information acquisition and comprehension (Bodie & Crick, 2014; Rogers & Roethlisberger, 1991). Furthermore, the employees give prominence toward mutual gain from the input through

acknowledging the unique knowledge and contribution of their team members (O'Reilly & Anderson, 1980; Vogus et al., 2014).

5.1.4 Bouncing ideas, discussion, questions, more questions!

I have a lot of people that act as a discussion partner depending on kind of the issue. [...] Very often, we try to discuss and bounce ideas off each other to see what can be possible.

When asked about their operative routines to solve problems and perform tasks, the employees remark on the need for interactive transaction of information and knowledge sharing between and across individuals and teams. The strategic focus of reaching out for different forms of input with the intention to expand the own knowledge and creativity base (Brownell, 2008) is to answer the question “What should I do now?” through collective cognition and action (Sutcliffe, 2001). With that said, a strategic aperture of listening (Lewis, 2019) of an appropriate amount to let in the flow of input was activated as they seek for plausibilities rather than accurate perception to improve decision-making and plan implementation (Weick, 2015). Rather than listening for advocacy or for memorization (Lewis & Reinsch, 1988), active listening for future talk and perspective taking (Oliver & Barge, 2002) is applied to select, interpret, and construct meanings as well as to clarify and validate input into “actionable knowledge” (Bettis & Prahalad, 1995; Jeong & Brower, 2008). Likewise, the indication for a space for brainstorming highlights the notion of idea acquisition and transferability through dialogue and discussion or even bargaining and negotiation to ensure content integration that directly increases the chances of the desired results (Argyris, 2003; Barker, 1971).

The concept of productive disagreement or an open exchange of diverse, conflicting ideas for the purpose of reaching a comfortable consensus has also been noted by the employees (Bodie & Crick, 2014; A. Wolvin, 2010). As reflected by an interviewee: “*A lot of challenges are discussed to find a middle way and then we look into the design again then make adjustments and then discuss again*”. In essence, these critical conversations require different dimensions of listening in considering a range of cues as the employees listen to understand and determine the speaker’s intentions (Brownell, 2016; Rogers & Roethlisberger, 1991). This also include the employee retrospectively recalling past experiences to weigh out evidence (Bettis & Prahalad, 1995; Weick, 1995) while at the same time question assumptions and challenge

decisions before shared interpretation of what can be done are mutually agreed, yielding best decisions to deliver common goals (Vogus et al., 2014). The employees also possess listening practices that show sensitivity and flexibility to different communication contexts by valuing other contributions (Brownell, 1994a; Miller, 2007). Here is one of the employee's technique to solicit greater input by showing respect and empowerment to increase the speaker's willingness to be open:

I am making myself ought to be stupider than I am. Instead of [directly] telling people [my opinion], I would ask 'is this what you mean?'. Or try to phrase it in another way and see if they agree or not.

Through situational humility or humble mindset technique the employees increase a climate of openness and empowerment among teams by positioning themselves as approachable and accessible in order to develop a deep understanding on the issue, situations, or person before influencing or providing further feedback or explanation (Edmondson, 2018). In a sense, this approach is rather active and purpose driven as they are attentive to alternatives choices and possibilities for second thoughts and reservations of others that may be value-adding to the decision-making (Lewis, 2019; O'Reilly & Anderson, 1980). Other approaches of inquiry to ensure productive discussion mentioned by employees include asking open-ended and direct questions (Brooks & John, 2018). The employees also ensure to avoid aural failure by providing a space for reflection and confirmation after a discussion (Barge & Little, 2002; Heide et al., 2018). As elaborated by an employee:

I typically ask questions in order to confirm the situations because there are high chances that we may not interpret the same things in the same way. So I try to make sure that I'm having the right understanding that [I am taking] away [...] what I [should] focus on.

To ensure that the different interpretations of events amongst employees are aligned and that there is a shared understanding and clear expectations, the interviewee ask questions for clarification of their understanding of a point. The employees re-check, reassess, and reason to ensure that there is logical interpretation and assessment of listening (Brownell, 2016; Lewis, 2019). In another word, they perform a narrative reduction and enact this sense back with others

to see if what they try to make sense of, makes sense in ways that leads to new actions undertaken (Weick et al., 2005).

5.1.5 Listen between the line

Very often we don't hear direct feedback because [...] sometimes there is [a] history or hidden issues behind it that has been accumulating. So I try to be a bit more sympathetic and try to hear them from an observant point of view. It becomes much [clearer to see] what is going on [when I stay] more neutral [...] before asserting my opinion.

When asked employees about challenges they often encounter as they seek input from others, recurring answers involve ambiguous, indirectness, and vagueness in responses on the part of their partners. They specified that it is very often that the words made explicit by the speakers still lack the completeness of meanings (Rogers & Roethlisberger, 1991). Although different situational variables are beyond the listeners' control, the employees specify assertiveness to sustain the listening environment by empathically listening from multiple perspectives, giving attention to the wider social aspects created by other communicators (Bodie et al., 2013). Throughout the talk, the employees make logical evaluation to the contextual and non-verbal cues (facial expressions, tone of voice, gestures) to ensure authenticity, validity, and balance between the verbal and non-verbal responses in ways that a shared vision leads to a direction (Brownell, 1994a). As persuasively put by an employee: *"I think it is about giving other people the opportunity to say things from their perspective. So that what I see is the same thing with what another person sees"*. The employee listens with intention to understand by channeling into the speaker's point of view but without losing the "as if" condition (Rogers, 1975). This portrays the employee's intention to have the speaker clarify their thoughts by first listening attentively then reflect back those thoughts to ensure shared clarity of the situations .

The employees further elaborated that in such workforce diversity where different needs and expectations are varied, listening for feeling and viewpoint to secure authentic and trusting conversation as well as to enhance influences is important to accomplish work tasks. To remain neutral and fair, the employee remarked on listening for logical reasoning by decoding from an outsider perspective to better weigh evidence, emotional appeals, and other indications

(Brownell, 1994a; A. Wolvin, 2010). Here is a sample of the situation vividly depicted by an interviewee:

I encountered a lot in my daily work that two people are speaking to each other but they don't understand each other. Or they are not at all saying the same thing but they think they are. I feel like I hear it a lot. And then I try to step in and use a lot of questions.

The employee first observes the communication context, try to make sense of the situation, refrain from evaluation then approach with questions to provoke further thoughts with others. This implies that the employee is sensitive and reflexive not only to others internal references but as well aware of their own unique perceptual framework of prior references, predispositions, and intentions that may influence the outcomes of the meaning interpretation (Rogers, 1975; Weick et al., 2005). In a sense, the employees seek first to understand others rather than to first be understood, highlighting the interpreting process that combine emotional (empathy) and cognitive (perspective-taking) appeal (Miller, 2007). In another word, they recognize their own agendas, biases, and flaws that may affect the important choices (Bettis & Prahalad, 1995). For there to be a shared understanding, the listener retrospective attention must recognize different internal elements that may influence the outcome of the meanings in order to be able to effectively merge the trusted framework with new information (Klein et al., 2006). Thus, the employees listen with sensitivity and consideration to enhance communicative actions in ways that lead toward long-term goals.

5.1.6 Feedback & follow-up

To me, feedback is one of the best gifts you can give another person. I think it shows how much you have actually seen a person. And I really try to give it in a proper way, I mean, connecting it to situations, giving examples or suggestions so there is a way forward.

One of the recurring features in the interviews is feedback when asked about the importance of listening. From the citation, the employee related constructive responses as a way to reflect how much one sees or how well one understands the meaning of the message delivered from the speaker (Brownell, 2016). This means that the interviewee evaluates their identity, perceptions,

and understandings against other's impression of their behaviors and through their own responses to the situations (Halone et al., 1997; Helms-Mills, 2003). Moreover, the employee illustrates the importance of constructive feedback that is descriptive, appropriate, situational fits, and helpful rather than evaluative, opinionate, or directive to ensure that there is a continual loop of information sharing and open dialogue (Barge & Little, 2002; O'Reilly & Anderson, 1980). This as well implies their retrospective strength to remember, recall, and recognize past information that are appropriate and meaningful to apply in the present situation to form a new interpretation framework and make sense of the circumstances (Brownell, 1994b; Klein et al., 2006).

Furthermore, the interviewees identify feedback in numbers of forms ranging from opinions, challenges, suggestions, critiques, requests, and complaints of which could either be structured or unstructured. As a matter of fact, these types of feedback are regarded as valuable by the majority of the employees as most highlighted having a retrospective session at work in which teams gather together to look back and share experiences. As specified by an interviewee:

We have this drop-in session to see what the problems [were], what was good, and what could be done better. I think it is a good way to have everyone on the same page and [to] have that feeling of togetherness.

These sessions are not only agreed by most to increase learning experience from sharing with others the past mistakes and sharing stories but as well create a sense of belongingness and comfort feeling that they are all in this together (Helms & Haynes, 1992; O'Reilly & Anderson, 1980). Furthermore, the employees applied productive and appreciative inquiry techniques to set an inviting and open environment to encourage the circulation of feedback sharing (Barge & Little, 2002; Edmondson, 2018). As reflected by one of the employees: *"We usually begin with a light question: how do we feel about this? What led you to think so? And we do appreciate those that open up because that is usually how conversation develops"*. Such perspective-taking questions and respectful responses are well applied and deemed as simple but powerful (Brooks & John, 2018). The employees also added that it is rarely that anyone is giving a direct order or telling people what to do but rather put effort to influence by asking, persuading, and cross-checking which agreed to require higher need for comprehension and consideration (Brownell, 2016; Snyder, 1974). On the most observable level, most participants revealed that in order to be able to coordinate the differences in skill sets and prior knowledge, they need to be able to

level the language with other employees (Vogus et al., 2014). As one of the employee construe: *“It is always a challenge because everyone has a bit of an individual way of speaking. So I try to level with whoever I am speaking with and try to bring up examples so they can relate to”*. To be able to take part in a conversation meaningfully and unlock learning and internal bounding, the employee put in consideration to first listen to understand their counterparts and try to adjust accordingly (Klein et al., 2006; Rogers, 1975). Moreover, the employee use example and relatable situations to fill in the gaps with mutual understanding through enhancing positive and coherent narratives. Additionally, most interviewees agreed that it is necessary to be thankful and show awareness of other efforts (Vogus et al., 2014). This approaches of responding ensures a balance outcome of verbal action between rationality and emotion which help the employee to remain neutral and objective as one’s listen (Miller, 2007). Here is one of the employee’s explanation:

I really try to focus on what is good, what we are happy with as a way to re-energize and open up to each other in these meetings because [...] often [...] we forget to give good feedback to people for having spent their time and effort.

The interviewee explained further that through appreciative response, it helps encourage people to speak up and confidently take part as they deemed their contribution as valuable (Edmondson, 2018). Another primary feature noted among the interviewees is the need to elicit feedback and practice self-assessment and self-reflection to ensure there is action-taking, course-correction and learning that generate future actions from the events (Klein et al., 2006; Thomas et al., 1993). Here is one of the employee’s conclusion:

It is always good to know your contribution. Seeing your own success rate and what could be improved. What did we learn? What could be done differently next time? So, it helps us to reflect and invest better in the next project.

The employee reflects on the importance of taking measures of potential consequences and possibilities through re-assessing and rechecking one's own behaviors from others' perception to shape future action and identity (Brownell, 2008; Jeong & Brower, 2008). This stage of logical evaluation of one’s identity is rather essential in the sensemaking process when considering employees’ retention or memory preservation of what they evaluate, regard, and categorize as

meaningful or beneficial to preserve for future enacting and selecting that generate the next plausible story (Weick et al., 2005). Here is one of the employee's remarks:

Negative feedback makes you realize what are the gaps you need to fill whereas positive feedback gives you motivation. Both are important to make sure that you are in a good way that your compass is pointed in the right direction.

This quotation implies the interviewee's openness and consciousness to take in both the bad and the good of the presented reality with the intention to generate the inputs in ways that there is self-maintenance, enhancement, and improvement (Brown & Ryan, 2003). An interviewee illustrates the responding processes when receiving negative feedback: *"I try to take a deep breath and go like, how can I understand this before I decide if I want to change according to the comment?"*. This portrays a reflective listening in which the employee internally re-assesses and evaluates before making a decision by weighing out evidence and validity of the message (Lewis, 2019) Thus, the employee shows quality of attention and awareness to reflect, redraft, and reconstruct their identities by trying to understand and make sense of what their action means as they interact with others and hearing thoughts from different perspectives (Brownell, 2008; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). On the contrary, passive or unconscious listening which lack immediate results is deemed by employees as timely and a waste of effort.

Another technique mentioned by employees is to proactively solicit feedback by directly approaching and asking open-ended questions (Brooks & John, 2018). Here is one of the employee's responses as they reflect on the importance of follow-up and reach out for input: *"I find approaching to be the best way. Just go and ask. Are there any specific thoughts behind this? Do you think it could have been done better? Then I can see what they think and continue from there"*. This indicates a learning mindset to accept the impermanence of situations and problems that are not static and the only way to move forward is to make sense and solicit different perspectives in ways that accelerate toward general long-term goals (Klein et al., 2006; Weick, 2012). Thus, reinforcing an organizational culture with mindful functioning for resilience, learning, fast communication and adaptation through a continuous cycle of collective identity construction that generate the macrostates of the organizations mutually reciprocating (Weick, 1998; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006).

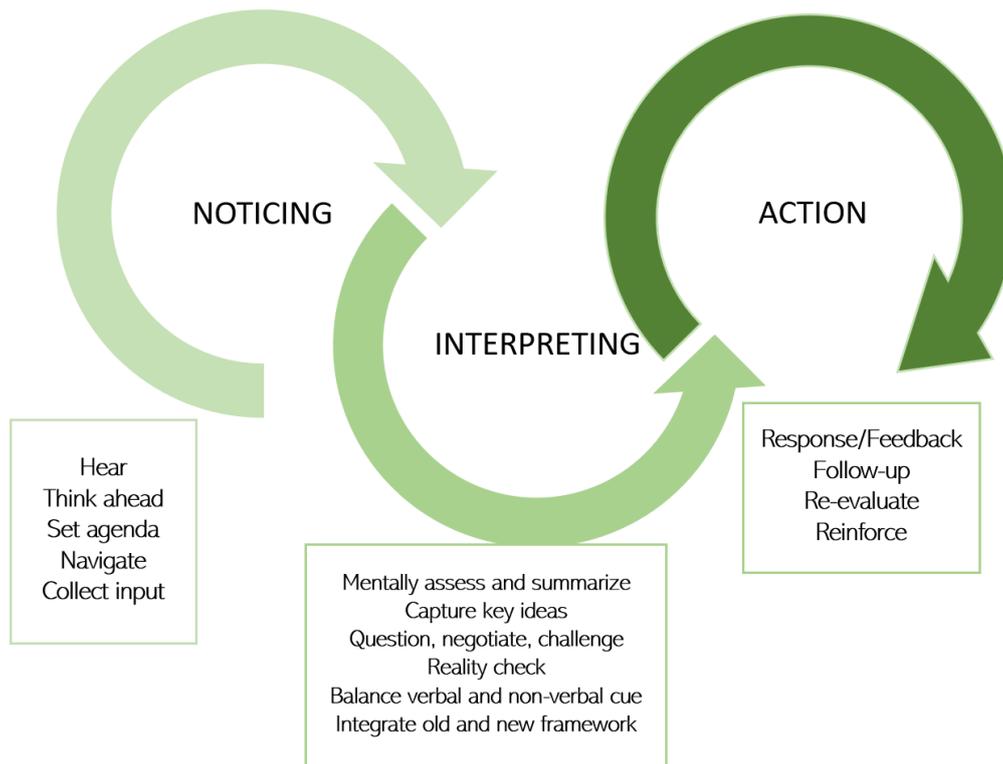


Figure 1: Illustration of the sensemaking process, noticing-interpreting-action. The textboxes show where interrelated listening components enter the sensemaking process. This figure integrates this studies findings with theories from Joeng & Brower (2008).

Figure 1 illustrates how the approaches of strategic listening by the employees are simultaneously integrated in the sensemaking process that constitutes the conscious organizing process namely noticing, interpretation, and action (Jeong & Brower, 2008). Through the different components of listening processes: hearing, understanding, remembering, interpreting, evaluating (Brownell, 2016), the employees make sense of the immediate working situations in the context of interactions to form a common view of the organization with their coworkers as they work toward common goals (Weick, 2012). To explicate, proactive act of hearing, updating, scanning, and preparing, of input increases the effectiveness in the stage of noticing. Thereafter, a purposeful act of understanding, recognizing, and evaluating enhances the quality in the stage of interpreting. Eventually, a reflective act of recalling and responding strengthens the implementation of action which then determines the future process of thinking and acting (Lewis, 2019; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006).

Regardless of the situation, it is essential to keep in mind that the context variables as well as employees' purposes and intentions impact and influence the listening environment (Brownell, 2016; Helms & Haynes, 1992). The listening practices by the employee accounts in three concurrent contexts as they enact the external working situation that forms the symbolic realities (ecological), structuring process of reorganizing (institutional), and collaborate for meaningful consensus (social relational) (Jeong & Brower, 2008). Thus, the more conscious and strategic the listening is the better the sensemaking cycle will be to operate the ongoing flow of events in ways that move toward organizational and individual actors long-term development—a virtuous reinforcement.

5.2 An economy of communication

It is important to do an everyday job because communication happens all the time. And what listening does is that it volume down our inner and outer voice so we can better align with others. Else whatever we decide to do is based on an unclear vision and that to me is a step backward.

Cohesively, the quote above recapitulates employees' main perception when asked about the role of listening in relation to performance and productivity. Despite varied answers from the interviews, the responses consistently point to the important role of listening in the communication process that contributes to a learning organizational environment. The findings reveal two recurring features: listening drives *synergy* and *mutual benefits*.

5.2.1 Synergy

Given that we work with concepts that are for the future, we generally involve groups of people to put down ideas and brainstorm. So I would say, it is always a team effort that comes together.

When asked about their work routine, it became apparent that the employees routines are rather unplanned and spontaneous as the employee spent most of their time jumping back-and-forth in meetings, workshops, coffee break, or engaging in activities with others. The quote above

suggests, that teaming up with experts or peers to exchange and integrate expertise through brainstorming, challenging discussion points, and exploring alternatives is crucial since work requires creativity and innovation to achieve a particular goal (Brownell, 2008; Riecken, 1958). The employees explained further that since work involves figuring things out along the ways to obtain a desired result, their understanding of others' tasks as well as the impact it has are crucial if progress is to be made (Vogus et al., 2014).

Interestingly, group work is described as flexible with little guideline or neither monitoring. Teams are supported by facilitators whose job is to help direct and facilitate to make sure teams have access to needed resources. Moreover, discussions are most of the time conversational, spontaneous, and straightforward, yet direct, clear, and genuine to ensure productive conversations are established in such a limited, rapid, and constantly changing environment (Argyri, 1984; Bodie et al., 2013). This highlights the importance of idea acquisition, information sharing, productive disagreement, and dynamic team interaction that drive synergy as agreed among employees that knowledge integration increases the rate of success by driving performance, productivity, and efficiency (Fleming & Marx, 2006; Weick, 2012). Throughout the interviews, the application of strategic listening is clearly indicated by employees to ensure conscious understanding of the situation and to create a condition for continued learning experience by proactively soliciting input, crafting messages, and assembling constructive feedback (Brownell, 2008; Lewis, 2019). The citation below from an employee illustrates the importance of listening in the work process to facilitate the sharing of plans and ideas:

I have to understand [...] different perspectives and integrate that to the business expectation. [...] First, I need to listen to experts since they are experienced in industrial knowledge. Then, I listen to the stakeholders to understand their pain points and wish lists. [...] Then [I] work with the teams to see what can be done.

The interviewee reflected on their step-by-step listening routine to perform a task. First, the employee listens to different sources as a way to update themselves with the right information (Brownell, 2008; Thomas et al., 1993). Next, the employee actively listens for deeper connotations, expectations, and needs of the stakeholders to align expectations and confirms future implementation by making sense of shared meanings (Brownell, 2016; Miller, 2007). As the employees discuss in teams, they aim to reflect and evaluate the message through

questioning, challenging assumptions, input validation, as well as self-critique to ensure reservation from agendas and biases (Rogers, 1975; Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2012). One of the employee elaborated on their interpretation process which contains elements of reflexivity and adaptability toward critiques and suggestions to ensure development:

I need to listen to [the users] to understand the challenge they have with the development. Then I need to look into my design to make adjustments. If [I get] a suggestion, then of course, it's also important for me to understand why they think their suggestion is better than my proposal. If it works better, then I definitely accept their suggestions.

The quote describes a continuous loop of interaction and knowledge transaction among team members that is strategic-focused, purposive, and sensitive to the communication context to understand the meaning from multiple points-of-view as they mitigate different issues and ensure improvement of the given tasks or problems (Brownell, 2016; Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2012). The interviewee's listening skill also portrays an element of mindfulness listening or open-mindedness to disconfirming and uncomfortable data as they listen to reframe the stored knowledge with new data which when make explicit with others, become a shared framework of mutual expectations and meanings (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Klein et al., 2006). Taken together, the employee listening activities highlight the important role of the skill as active and strategic-focused in maintaining a conscious organizing process as they consider to course-correct, re-connect with reasons, and learn through reflective interactions with others (Lewis, 2019; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006).

In a dynamic environment where daily operations require constant realignment of employees' diverse expectations and needs, strategic listening that enables synergy and strengthens a collective interpretation framework is critical for employees to seamlessly coordinate different ideas to effectively produce a greater whole (Miller, 2007; Vogus et al., 2014). This means that listening is interwoven throughout the employees interdependent actions with other coworkers in the organization's process to co-create beliefs and goals of collectivity (Jeong & Brower, 2008). That is especially apparant when they cope with value clashes, different knowledge backgrounds, and language barriers (Brownell, 2008) as well as their own

interpretations of their role in the organization's operation (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Helms-Mills, 2003). Here is one of the employee's reasoning:

It is not easy to understand everything because we work on very diverse topics dealing with different skills and personalities. There is a high possibility that we understand things differently. [...] So, I would say that listening goes hand-in-hand with everything we do here.

This implies that the individual differences that may hinder synergy are approached by employees through strategic listening. In other words, they listen to understand each other's differences and integrate that to form new insights to the situation (Klein et al., 2006). The employees negotiate agreements by hearing each other out, bridging unsettling differences, reorganizing their worldview, and maintaining mutual consensus to ensure orderliness of the external working situation (Brownell, 2008; Miller, 2007). The organizations also help adding the element of inclusiveness where everyone meet and communicate on equal term in this dimension (Heide et al., 2018). The employees make explicit their appreciation toward the organization's assertion to facilitate interactive and communicative climate and culture during work time such as setting up teams in small groups and across groups representing different functionality that share the extended goal to help and learn from one another (Brownell, 2008; Riecken, 1958). Likewise, the organizations provide external activities such as training and workshops in which employees across departments are conductors of the sessions who teach, learn, and share with each other.

5.2.2 Mutual benefit

The findings pointed out that the employees listen to satisfy multiple goals (instrumental, relational, cultural). One dominant outcomes reflected by the employees is that engaging in an effortful and focused listening drives mutual benefits in such way that the interactions or collaborations yield optimal results for everyone (Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2012; A. Wolvin, 2010). The quote below from an employee explains the role of listening in ensuring that the planned decisions will be mutually beneficial and satisfying to both parties (Heide et al., 2018):

I need to listen to make sure that what we are doing will [...] help the clusters. Otherwise, we would be planning [and working] on something [...] that is totally

different [...] from what everyone [...] needs. For me, it helps make sure that the effort put into doing things will mean something to everyone.

The employees described their current project situation in which they underlined listening as a key part in making sure that their interactions with others can broaden their understanding and expand option sets in order to make a meaningful implementation of plans that truly reflect the organization's reality (Klein et al., 2006; Vogus et al., 2014). Captivatingly, one interviewee metaphorically describe a plan of actions without putting in others consideration to be: *"It is as if the burn is on the hands and we who act as the brain, put [the plaster] on the shoulder"*. The citation reflects the employee's acknowledgement of mutual dependency of coordination for development. As work implementation is no longer based solely on independent actions of single actors, this implies the need to align and coordinate different expectations and needs for mutual understanding as vital part of the goal (Fleming & Marx, 2006). This is particularly important during discussions or negotiation to ensure that there is a productive exercise of conflicts and continuous flow of open-mindedness, supportive, and inclusive organizational climate (Bodie et al., 2013; Brownell, 2008).

In the aggregate, the employees view immediate and long-term success as a cooperative effort rather than a competitive, individual domain. This means that in today's interdependent realities, zero-sum-game mentality like 'I win, you lose' is a closing strategy in the long run. Instead, the employees contend for a 'we win' approach by seeking for overlapping interests to ensure a collective gain from their work interactions (Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2012). This implies individuals' quality of consciously acknowledging their own purpose, values, and commitments as well as the ideas and feelings of others (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006; A. Wolvin, 2010). That requires attentive and effortful listening to balance between courage and consideration (Bodie et al., 2013). Listening takes energy, time, and attention to ensure that the direct outcome is a reciprocal gain as employees work to achieve a particular goal (Bodie, 2011; Brownell, 2016). Hence, purposeful and reflexive listening is reflected among the employees as necessity to align with others in terms of productivity and performance (Lewis & Reinsch, 1988). Here is one of the employee's reflection:

I'm trying to [...] be soft and ask questions and [...] invite people [to come] up with thoughts and ideas so there will be alignment and understanding. [But

sometimes] I have to be clear and put my foot down [...] so that everyone can keep on moving.

The interviewees explained their listening technique applied during team discussions to ensure quality decisions are made. Although effortful and focused listening for mutual benefits involves simultaneous consideration of noticing, interpreting, and acting (Jeong & Brower, 2008), the above quote highlights the prominent stage of interpretation. Here, conscious processing of understanding, interpreting, and evaluating play a vital role to balance between the speaking up, toning down, and thought reconstruction (Brownell, 2013; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006). To illustrate, during the exchange of information, direct attention and awareness of the employee is given to the present moment along with the object that serves as part of stimulus (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Internally, the employees process, alter, differentiate, and introspect the incoming cues of which are made meaningful through selection and narrative reduction (Weick et al., 2005). As the employee makes sense of the equivocal inputs, they reflectively make sure to re-evaluate opinions, critiques, and dissents for justification to make sense of the actual problems that they can help solve (Lewis, 2019). This requires active hearings to merge the new interpretation (others input, needs, and feelings) with the trusted framework (own's identity, purpose, and experience) to stimulate a reflective conversation, surface underlying assumptions, and touch a deeper level of meaning (Klein et al., 2006). Further, the employee makes realistic calculations for future action to either ask questions to deepen their understanding or initiate for reconsideration or influence next steps of actions depending on the appropriateness to the situation (Weick, 1998). Thus, mutual success becomes a central feature of the work in which organizational members share realistic expectations of which listening plays a critical part to create a collective, supportive, and inclusive learning environment among organizational members (Bodie et al., 2013; Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2012).

5.3 Strategic listening in three contexts

Although the employees' practices of listening are varying depending on purpose and context, the findings reveal a consistent pattern of strategic listening that is proactive, purposeful, and reflective in ways that support the employees sensemaking process of noticing, interpreting, and action (Jeong & Brower, 2008; Lewis, 2019). Likewise, the findings also highlight the role of listening in the communication process that drives synergy and mutual benefit, forming a virtuous cycle of learning and communicative environment in the organizational contexts that

require a humanistic approach of both the heart and the mind (Brown & Ryan, 2003). This strategic approach of listening by employees, cueing interpretation consciously and mindfully, stabilizes social structures and routines being practiced in the organization which in turn constructs interdependent image and identity between the employees and their organizations (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006; Weick et al., 2005).

Taken together, employees' practices of strategic listening could be analyzed on three levels – individual, groups, and institutional (Brownell, 2016) which as well account in three concurrent contexts in the sequence of organizing – ecological, social relational, and institutional (Jeong & Brower, 2008). Thus, during employee's enactment with the ecological changes, employees strategically listen to create symbolic realities of the external working situation through constructing a relational process with other organizational members and re-organizing schemes to ensure orderliness (Weick, 2012). Figure 2 is summarizing, how strategic listening processes are part of the organization's core business levels. It addresses the outcome of employees' strategic listening practices in their sensemaking process at each of these three levels which in turn cultivate a learning and communicative organizational environment.

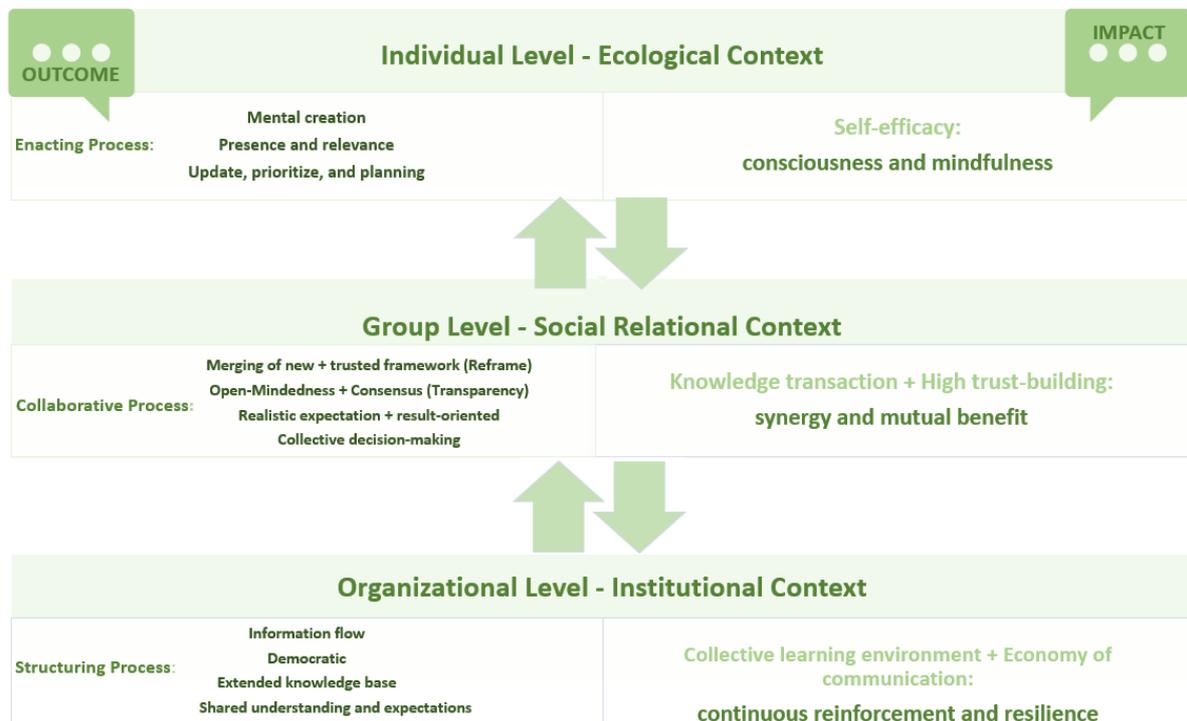


Figure 2: Role of strategic listening in three contextual levels. The left column lists the outcomes of employees as strategic listeners. The right column lists the impacts of these listening actions. This figure integrates this studies findings with theories from Brownell (2008) and Joeng & Brower (2008).

The final chapter closes with the conclusion of the research. The section emphasizes the contribution to the field of knowledge and practice as well as limitations and forward-looking implications.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this qualitative study was to magnify the strategic practices of listening as a meaning-making process as well as to determine its role in the internal work of contemporary organizations. This study problematized the need for greater knowledge on the phenomenon in the contextual setting by yielding a case-based study on how listening is perceived and performed by employees in the micro-level activities. The hypothesis made was that rather than trying to reduce listening to a symbolic act allocated in the soft power disciplines, listening as an organizational communication phenomenon should be complexified and adaptive to contend with today's fast-paced environment within organizations. The results revealed that employees follow a similar pattern of listening process namely noticing, interpreting, and action as they seek to make sense and satisfy simultaneous goals varying from contexts and levels. Further, the findings indicate the critical role of strategic listening in the sensemaking process that contributes to a collective learning environment. In all, the conclusions are supportive of the conception that strategic listeners are mindful sensemakers who through their conscious listening process cultivate and balance the macrostates of organizational life.

6.1 Contribution to research

In this study, based on research on Scandinavian contemporary organizations, my aim has been to provide a richer and more aggregate knowledge that is relative and contextual on the phenomenon of organizational strategic listening within the field of strategic communication. My study concerns how rigorous listening can and should be naturally integrated and rooted in organizations' structures in ways that directly establish and enrich values, results, and development for the organizations and their people. In sum, the analysis and its results shed light and helped unveil the employment of strategic listening as a strategy-in-practice by employees through investigating the relationship between the phenomenon and the social context that form a construction of reality.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to academic research in three dimensions. Foremost, the key findings consistently uphold with the existing research that

listening, as this study continually emphasized, is a prerequisite practice for an organization's operation, well-functioning, and existence. This suggests that listening is a process and practice-oriented skill (Brownell, 1994a; Cooper, 1997; Halone et al., 1998). Therefore, the result concurs with the notion that listening should clearly be complexified and be understood as abstract and multidimensional owing to its role and meaning in the complex organizational life in which organizational members and their communication are central (Barbour, 2017; Brownell, 2008). Although recent research on strategic listening is sparse and little, the analysis concisely reflects the taken-for-granted conception of listening as effortful, adaptive, and reflective practice (Brownell, 2016; Lewis, 2019). This assumption is given in the findings which evidence employees' usage of listening that is focused and result-oriented in ways that enrich their sense-making process. This means that their thinking (decision-making) and acting (planning) are consciously performed to guide learning, improvisation, and reinforcement as they enact over subsequent cues in their daily work (Weick et al., 2005).

These steady alignments of the findings that support the earlier researchers are linked to the second contribution in which a balance between linear transmission and ritual communication or in its frequent term, sensemaking perspective is called for if progress is to be made. Therefore, require active listening which is simultaneously integrated in how organizational members make-meanings (Hirsch, 1986; Nichols & Stevens, 1957). The results obtained from the empirical studies correspond with the concept of sensemaking or conscious organizing process in which organizations are made meaningful and understandable through social interaction between organizational members (Jeong & Brower, 2008; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006). The empirical investigation with the participating organizations validates this viewpoint when investigated employees' narrations and interpretations that evidence the critical role of a focused and result-oriented listening in enhancing their interpretation and meaning process as they perform tasks in the micro-level practices. Not only has strategic listening been recognized for increasing performance and goal-orientation but the result equally concretizes the communicative elements for mutual connection and actions coordination which is more necessary than ever in organizations with diverse and disparate needs, expectations, and capabilities among individuals.

Third and last, the findings evidence a pattern of listening actions in the local activities which overtime manifested identities of each employee that then affect the collective practices namely norms and values generating the macrostates of the organizations (Klein et al., 2006;

Vogus et al., 2014). The study found out that strategic listening plays a vital role in cultivating dynamic learning environments driven by self-efficacy, synergy and mutual benefits where people first innately develop their professional skills then interdependently and creatively generate collective flow of knowledge through mindful interactions that evolve value-adding actions with a foundation built upon high trusting-relationships. As a result, shape a listening organization that is open, supportive, and participative which afterward reinforces personal development and motivation, forming a greater whole.

6.2 Contribution to practice

As this study views the phenomenon of strategic listening as a newly field and considered its development to be highly interlinked to the way modern organizations are organized and systemically constructed, a selective case study on such a new topic areas was deemed to be insightful to gain a practical understanding about strategic listening performed by professionals in the contextual setting. A selection of organizations with relational-oriented management traits in which work is organically constructed and motivations and creativity are fertile has proven to be enriching and meaningful specially for the performance and existence of many organizations today.

This study contributes to practitioners and organizations in two folds: First, the findings of the data obtained by interviewing 12 professionals have shown a good level of awareness and understanding of the topic and as well project positive attitudes and appreciation of the effect of effortful listening on their work performance and its contribution in fostering a healthy and productive organization culture. Although the breadth and depth of the answers are varied depending upon multiple factors such as experience, routine, perception, and value, most agreed that listening is necessary now more than ever as their work is increasingly interactive and interdependent.

From a larger perspective, the findings from world-leading decentralized organizations' ambassadors whose work embodies consensus and down-to-earth mentality means that their practices of strategic listening in their sensemaking process as well as its role in cultivating a collective learning environment could serve as a point of reference for many organizations and practitioners to learn, improve, and adapt from. Developing a listening routine as analyzed in

the findings could be of great value as those practices create the kind of listening experience that produces and reproduces a rigorous sensemaking cycle.

From the observation, organizations should as well give attention to internal factors that may hinder employee's listening improvement such as over-reliance on accurate perception, standardization, rigid plan, and traditional mindset of individual actors to "do the right thing" rather than to "do things right" (Falkheimer et al., 2016). Another common listening barrier in the modern workplace organization often overlooked might also be an over adoption of technology and the usage of multiple channels in a wider context with hope that the approaches will produce a cure-all communication process, nonetheless, the findings revealed the opposite as the lack of balance can have dysfunctional effects and feelings of overwhelming and confusion among members.

6.3 Limitations and future implications

Despite the consistently supportive findings from the empirical material of the important tendencies of strategic listening for the internal work in organizations, greater research is needed to untangle the complexity of the phenomenon so as to permit a unified operational identification of listening in the organizational communication phenomena. With this in mind, the legitimacy and values of listening as a strategic activity demands reciprocated initiatives from researchers and practitioners to paint a richer and more nuanced knowledge of listening in order for its status to be materialized as an integral part of organizations and their operations.

In conforming to the findings, further development this study finds to hold potential encompass: Firstly, it would be appropriate to develop a larger sampling with a wider or even narrower context and target group for greater depth of the phenomenon as this study is based solely on a small empirical interview material. Second, instead of gaining direct data purely from interviews similar to this study, it would be interesting for prospective study to supplement the empirical material with close observation or shadowing approach to better reflect on the findings of what the organizational members say they do and what they really do— that is, to understand how the meaning of strategic listening is actually materialized in its natural setting. This is rather essential from a reflective and critical approach putting into consideration the interweaving acts between talk and action. Third, a before-after data analysis to measure the effect of listening could be a value-adding approach as the findings could directly and

concretely display the effect made by individual actors. This is specially needed since the listening competency that contributes to organization's development is often indirect and hard to measure. Fourth and last, I greatly encourage for creativity in designing the material of collection rather than following the routine of how the interview should be carried out as it plays a big part for authentic and interactive participation and also serve as the final remarks us researchers leave in such short but significant interactions. This implies that there is still room to create an interview structure that captivates and stimulates the interviewees' attention and expectations beyond the regular interviews pattern on the subject of listening. This could be as simple as, taken from this study, situation framing to help distance the interviewees' concentration on being interviewed and instead be in their elements as they retrospectively recall their listening experience.

6.4 Concluding thoughts

Throughout these five months of researching, I have had the chance to naturally sharpen and hone my listening habits that has led me to gain value-adding knowledge and practicality as I begin to listen better throughout the journey, and my greatest desire and hope is that the produced knowledge this study have touched upon would greater or less do the same for you. As mentioned before, I firmly believe that the future of strategic listening is radiant with many aspects to uncover and territories to cross if meaningful footsteps and sustainable development is to be made for organizations, individual actors, and the society at large. I would like to close this study with a quote by Remen (2021) I find to linger profoundly, "The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention. A loving silence often has far more power to heal and to connect than the most intentioned words".

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview invitation

Dear *IKEA/Tetra Pak*,

I am writing my master thesis at the Strategic Communication department of Lund University. The study focuses on the internal strategic listening in a learning and innovative organizational culture. In this manner, I am currently looking for employees in such companies to conduct interviews on.

The study aims to increase understanding on the role of strategic listening practiced by practitioners in the micro-level activities to perform tasks and make decisions. Strategic listening has gained attention by researchers and professionals in the recent year as a purposeful and reflexive framework to solicit and process input in ways that directly benefits the substance connected to plans, goals, and decision-making.

[Insert for IKEA: IKEA is a progressive democratic workplace and hence an ideal environment to research about individuals' learning and growth in which work and personal development is guided by the centrality of collective idea and ingenuity. For this reason, Ikea's members are in an ideal position to provide the study valuable firsthand insights.]

[Insert for Tetra Pak: As a world-leading food processing and packaging solutions company, Tetra Pak is a progressive democratic workplace and hence an ideal environment to research about individuals' learning and growth in which work and personal development is guided by the centrality of collective idea and ingenuity.] For this reason, *IKEA's/Tetra Pak's* members are in an ideal position to provide the study valuable firsthand insights.

The interview will be conducted online via Zoom, takes around 60 minutes and is open-ended. The questions are value, quality, and range of listening focused. I am simply trying to capture the practitioners perception and the everyday life at work. Responses to the questions will be kept confidential and anonymous.

The interview will not only add value to the research itself but also to the participants and the organization. Through the process of the interview, the content of the conversations will yield and provoke insights and reflections to the value-adding benefit of quality listening as a natural part of the organizational process in which performance and growth continuously recreate and reproduce.

On my part, the possible time frame for the interview is within March to April 2021. If you find this to be interesting and are willing to participate, any date within the time period is all to your convenience. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Jidapa.

Appendix 2: Consent-to-participate form

Organizational Strategic Listening: A Qualitative Case Study

Dear Participant,

The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time you find necessary or appropriate.

The purpose of this study is to understand the process of strategic listening on the part of professionals to perform micro-tasks and make decisions. The interview will be a single, holistic, and reflexive case design. Data collection includes video recording and transcription of the interviews to which both will remain confidential and for researcher use only.

Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before or during the time of participation. There are no known risks and/or discomforts associated with this study.

This information is provided for you to decide. Information will be restated before the interview session and your consent will be secure orally.

Appendix 3: Interview questionse/ /

Duration:

Date/Time:

Introduction

[Make conversation]

I'd like to thank you for participating in the interview for my study. The study seeks to understand how listening is incorporated in everyday work to perform task and make decision. Briefly, the main focus is to hear your experience and stories about your work activities and how listening takes part in the outcomes of each process.

[Review aspect of consent form]. May I have your permission to record our conversation?

Before we begin the interview, do you have any questions? [Discuss questions]

Background information

Please tell me a little bit about yourself: name, position, work duration

Setting the stage

Imagine that you are now at work, can you share with me your routine?

This part aims to capture: *(If needed to clarify, questions are as follow)*

Project: role, task, activities, resources | What project are you currently working on?

Teaming-level: interaction, participation | How many people are you working with internally?

Atmosphere: assertiveness, focused, creativity | How is the work situation currently?

Climate: learning, result-oriented, people-oriented, openness, transparency | Can you elaborate on your task? What do you do?

Culture: information flow (upward/downward/across ,focused/ dismissed/ neglected) |

Part 1: Perception and understanding of listening

How would you describe effective/ineffective listening in the internal work?

In your opinion, how important is listening for task accomplishment/decision-making?

Do you think listening require practice?

Part 2: Individual-level

Can you share with me of a time you felt that you have acheived a goal? What did you do?

When you are working at the office, do you usually engage in dialogue/discussion?

How often do you reach out for information? How are those input/suggestion collected?

Have you ever face difficulty when reaching out for information? How did you encounter that?

How do you usally make use of the data? What are your technique?

How do you usally response back to others after receiving the information?

Part 3: Group-level

How do team communicate with each other? How engaged do you feel with the team?

How do you and your team approach problem? How are the information analyzed?

How quickly are problems being solved?

How comfortable are you to give feedback/opinion? How is it delivered?

How often are needs/perspective collected?

Can you think of a time when inputs/idea has led to a change?

How do team show appreciation for failure/mistakers?

Part 4: Institutional-level

How would you explain the flow of communication within the company? (Direction/hierarchy)

Do you feel like your voice are valued? What make you think so?

How often are concerns/complaints collected? What are the result or specific measure to that?

How do you feel about the support of communication by organization? (Training/technology)

What do you think can be improved with the organization's current communication?

Wrapping up

Are you proud to be IKEA/Tetra Pak employee? How so?

What have you learned?

Do you feel like the organization's value align with your own?

How is working at the organization help in your personal development and well-being?

Where do see yourself in the closing time? Are there areas for improvement? (Vision/ mission/ attitude)

Closing

Before we conclude this interview, is there something that we have not yet had a chance to discuss or that you might want to add further?

Remark: Questions in part 1-4 will be opt as see fitting after the interviewees shared their daily work routine.

Appendix 4: Protocol form

Interviewee Info:	Individual/ Group/ Institutional	Perception	Personal Development
Project			
Role			
Task			
Goals: Instrumental Relational Social/Norm			
Activities			
Action-taken			
Resources/ Channel			
Techniques			
Atmosphere			
Problems			
Outcomes			
Measurement/ Satisfaction			
EXTRA			

