Change Processes in the Eyes of the Public

A qualitative & quantitative study investigating change management in a public organization faced with external disturbances

By
Anna Fältström & Lioba Frings

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Supervisor: Ola Mattisson

Examiner: Anna Thomasson

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Anna Fältström & Lioba Frings.

Abstract

This mixed method study has investigated how a change process can be carried out in a public organization when faced with external disturbances. Also, it has been investigated what factors could explain or decide how employees of a public organization view a change process and what implications that might have for management. A recently finished major change process in Malmö Stad has been used for this case study, which by the combination of both qualitative and quantitative empirical data and internal documentation has culminated in four themes; *communication and culture, leadership and management, involvement and adoption to external disturbances.* By conducting six qualitative interviews and surveying 120 people through a quantitative questionnaire within a public organization who has recently gone through a major change process, it has become clear that there are certain key factors that can either complicate, or ease a larger change process. These key factors are using communication as a strategic tool to foster a sense of belonging and ensuring transparency, involve employees throughout the entire process, make leadership visible and take ownership of decisions and lastly, making sure that every change to the change is motivated and clearly communicated. This study shows that as change processes in public organizations often are more lengthy than those in the private sector, there is a high demand for rich communication, clear direction and letting employees be a part of the process. Lastly, this study indicates that when changes are made to the process, whether enforced or decided, it has to be fully anchored in every affected part of the organization.

Key words: Change Management, Public Management, Change Process, Public Administration, Crisis, Communication, Mixed Methods. Case Study

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1 Introduction

Change is scary, some might even call it terrifying. Managers, regardless of the organization, often face resistance to change from employees (Bareli, 2013), but sometimes change is inevitable. If leadership is about change (Moss Kanter, 2012), mastering the correct tools for carrying out a successful change process is vital. To better understand what tools are the best to keep in the toolbox, we have in this thesis set out to investigate how change management manifests itself in the real world, more specifically in a public organization.

1.1 Background

As changes can take the form of almost anything – so can its solutions and ways of dealing with them. Leaders of change are best off by understanding the predictable, universal reasons of resistance to be able to strategize and manage them (Moss Kanter, 2012). Research is united on some universal, and very common, reasons of reluctance – loss of control, excess uncertainty, the element of surprise, the fear of more work, ripple effects, past resentments, and perhaps most importantly, different views and commitments to the change process (Moss Kanter, 2012; Strebel, 1996; Bailey & Raelin, 2015). As our modern world makes it nearly impossible to avoid change, the world is in many ways becoming more and more volatile and complex.

Over the last decade, the term *VUCA* has gained popularity as a term used to describe the increasing inability to grasp the complexities of the dynamic world we live in, as well as to deal with what happens around us. VUCA, an acronym of *volatility, uncertainty, complexity,* and *ambiguity*, refers to the world as continuously changing, uncertain, complex, and on the verge of insane (Glaeser, 2020; Kraaijenbrink, 2018). The complexity of a VUCA-world suggests that the world consists of many complex systems in which different parties, stakeholders, and systems are tightly interconnected and affect each other, both directly and indirectly (Glaeser, 2020; Kraaijenbrink, 2018). Being a leader of change, one is bound to constantly deal with the aspects of acting in a VUCA-world and ultimately, run into some wicked problems along the way. According to Camillus (2008), a wicked problem cannot be solved, but it can be tamed if the situation is approached strategically.

Needless to say, the COVID-19 pandemic has most likely put organizations and leaders of change to the test as it is the very essence of a wicked problem in a VUCA-world. Unpredictable changes call for quick actions and a clear strategic path (Moss Kanter, 2012), which is why it is of great interest to investigate how an already planned change process has changed and been adjusted accordingly, due to external factors and events that are far beyond management teams' control. In the public sphere, one could argue that change, uncertainty, and complexity affect everyone – which makes it a societally valuable study object. To understand the VUCA-aspects of change in a public management context, change management, public management and the interference of external factors are in this thesis studied in correlation with each other.

1.1.1 Change Management

As defined by Moran and Brightman (2001:111), change management is "the process of continually renewing an organization's direction, structure, and internal customers". This is only one of many definitions, and as a framework, change management offers multiple directions. A change process can further be understood as evolutionary, dialectical, teleological, or through life-cycle terms (Svenningsson & Sörgärde, 2020). Change on its own can be seen as an ever-present feature of organizations and they are often seen as ever-changing in their very nature, both operationally and strategically (Burnes, 2004).

Furthermore, as a result, Todnem By (2005) argues that it is of great importance to any organization to increase its ability to identify where it needs to be in the future as well as how to best manage the necessary changes to get there. According to Burnes (2004), often, the need for change is unpredictable and tends to be ad hoc and reactive. The triggering situation is not seldom a situation of organizational crisis due to either, or both, internal and external factors.

1.1.2 The public sector

As stated by Lane (2000) The public sector does to varying degrees impact us all. The traditional view of the public sector emphasizes a sector that serves the public through different hierarchical structures as part of the political arena. To describe the

tasks of public administrations, Lane (2000) highlights some key factors – tasks within public institutions are decided by politicians, and executed by administrators as well as tasks that are considered public, are structured and carried out on a continuous, rule-governed basis. Changes within the public sector are often due to changes in policies or legislations, technological change, reorganizations, top management replacements, a political shift, and the joining or breaking up of public agencies (Sminia & Van Nistelrooij, 2006).

According to Svenningsson and Sörgärde (2020), the scope, scale, and content of organizational change depending on how it is interpreted. Hence, it is a matter of the interpreter's perspective. Followingly, Svenningsson and Sörgärde (2020) emphasize the importance of following up on how a change process was perceived by employees. Management in public settings and governmental organizations has been studied quite extensively throughout the world but through different perspectives and lenses.

The most known and possibly most established and studied framework for public management is *New Public Management (NPM)* (Hood, 1991). In his article from 1991, Hood manages to tie together public sector reforms influenced by a managerial context into seven doctrinal components which in many ways can be seen as enablers of research focused on reforms in the public sector, and is to this day a substantial contribution to research on public administration. Accordingly, Hood's (1991) original article is one of the most cited articles in public management (Hood & Dixon, 2016).

1.1.3 Environmental Changes

In Sweden for instance, Almqvist, Catasús, and Skoog (2011) have investigated how fundamental changes in the environment forced the Swedish Armed Forces to re-evaluate their management control system in which they found that organizational technologies often promote stability in organizational routines – meaning that organizational change might be difficult to carry out as it requires the organization to unlearn established routines. Furthermore, Almqvist et. al (2011) found that management structures tend to fall into pieces in terms of their focus and practices when an organization's mission is disputed. Interestingly, it seems as when the body of an organization is up for debate, flexibility is not enough to move forward. In the

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specific case, Almqvist et. al found that as a result of external factors changing the revolving environment, the Swedish Armed Forces re-invented its vision, strategies and its management control to adapt to environmental changes.

Additionally, Almqvist et. al (2011) demonstrates that external factors can have a great impact on internal processes. As mentioned by Svenningsson and Sörgärde (2020), external factors such as economy, politics, trends, sociocultural factors and technological developments can be found in an organization's environments and trigger different types of change. As in any organization, a public organization has goals and objectives. Developments in the external environment often require large-scale strategic change in order to regain coherence with both goals and the mission (Sminia & Van Nistelrooij, 2006). Furthermore, as in any organization – private or public – it can be argued that in order to survive and succeed in a highly competitive and continuously changing and evolving environment, successful change management is crucial (Todnem By, 2005).

A crisis can both act as the trigger for a change process or as an external factor impacting an ongoing change process. Throughout this thesis we look at the latter and explore a crisis' effects on change management. As organizations, whether or not they are already undergoing a change process, are impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which forces adaptations from the original plan upon them and has a deeper influence on business processes and society as a whole compared to other non-global external factors mentioned above.

Finally, there is clearly a need for more comprehensive knowledge on contemporary organizational change in public sectors in which specific regard is taken to external factors such as crises and threats. In the following section, the research purpose and its connected research questions are presented.

1.2 Research Purpose

With the aforementioned facts and research in mind, this thesis's ultimate goal is to;
- Describe and analyze how a change process is carried out in a public organization when faced with external disturbances.
- Investigate what factors explain or decide how employees view a change process and what implications that might have for management.

This is why we should empirically study a recent change process within a public organization that has been influenced and affected by some sort of crisis.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What strategic options for managing change are there in public organizations?
2. What implications can these strategies have on employees' attitudes towards a change process?
3. What factors could positively influence the perception of a change management process in public organizations?
4. How can external disturbances be described and analyzed in relation to a change process in a public organization?

1.4 Thesis Outline

The thesis follows the structure of seven main sections, each with subsections correlated to the content of the specific chapter. Chapter one is the introductory section in which background to the research problem is given, as well as a description of the specific case that constitutes the basis of this study. Furthermore, the introduction states the study's purpose and its respective research questions. The second section, the theoretical framework, presents the main theoretical stance that lays the foundation for the analysis – *Kotter's 8 steps of change.* This is followed by the third chapter, which thoroughly explains the chosen methods, the thesis' research design and approach as well as the context of this study. The methodological section also contains a discussion of the study's limitations as well as the ethical measures and considerations. The fourth chapter, A Case Study of the Digital Malmö, gives a brief description of the chosen case and internal documentation used in analysis and as background information. Followingly, the fifth chapter thoroughly presents the results from both the qualitative and quantitative data collection. In the following section, discussion, the empirical data findings are analyzed in relation to the theoretical framework. The discussion section also goes back to the research questions and provides answers according to theory and findings. Finally, the concluding chapter summarizes and concludes the key findings. as well as suggests future research areas and shows how this study contributes to academia and practice.

2 Theoretical Framework

In a rapidly changing world managing change is one of the key processes in organizations across sectors. Organizational change is inevitable and happens naturally (Sveningsson & Sörgärde 2020). This chapter aims to describe and discuss the theoretical framework which is the foundation of the analysis of the empirical data, and is divided into three parts: change management, public sector, and crises as an external force. It is aimed at discussing the theoretical basis of these areas and their interrelations. Processes like digitalization and globalization make the world increasingly fast-paced and ever-changing. "The era of information-driven globalization is characterized by frequent, rapid, and sometimes unpredictable change" (Project Management Institute, 2013, p.10). In a more complex world where changes occur more rapidly than ever organizations need to be agile and able to react to and actively implement changes more quickly and effectively.

Compared to the private sector, the public sector reacts more slowly to these changes as internal structures are less flexible and adaptive, and tied to regulations and fixed processes and procedures. Thus, specific conditions apply to the public sector. Change management is also highly dependent on various internal and external factors. Especially in times of disruption, as during the COVID-19 outbreak and pandemic where changes often occur as a result. Furthermore, ongoing change processes are inevitably being disturbed by external forces. Within this chapter we look at models within change management in general and the intersections of managing change in public organizations during times of disruption. We thereby take a current external factor on change processes into consideration, in this case a crisis in the form of a pandemic and its impact on an organizational change.

2.1 Change Management

Organizational change is claimed to be inevitable, as many factors make a change necessary or beneficial, and vital, as it has a direct influence on the success of an organization. Sveningsson and Sörgärde (2020) discuss change fetishism as a phenomenon in research. Though it is inarguable that change management is an important management category, the question is in how far certain factors like VUCA and external factors and developments besides globalization and digitization have an impact on changes within organizations (Svenningsson & Sörgärde, 2020). There

has always been pressure of some sort on organizations, and though the pressure on organizations and competition rooted in digitization and globalization are highly relevant, change management has always been dependent on factors and developments outside of the organization (Svenningsson & Sörgärde, 2020).

Change is an all-embracing term that can refer to anything that is modified or replaced entirely. As there are many types of changes, larger or smaller, it is crucial to take many different factors influencing the change into consideration. Change management has many levels and also refers to managing projects, cultural changes, motivation, resource allocation, finances (Sveningsson & Sörgärde, 2020). Just as project management, change management is often depicted as a gradual process, including several steps as well as measures to make the change sustainable and to avoid falling back into old patterns. The new ideas and behavioral patterns need to be incorporated in all future actions (Sveningsson & Sörgärde, 2020).

2.1.1 Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model

Kotter's (1996) eight-step change model depicts change processes in the form of a gradual procedure, encompassing different steps, and is applicable to various kinds of changes within organizations including structural, strategic or cultural change, mergers, acquisitions, and digital transformation.

8 Make Change Stick
7 Don't Let Up
6 Create Short Term Wins
5 Empower Action
4 Communicate for Buy-in
3 Develop the Vision
2 Build Guiding Team
1 Increase Urgency

Figure 1: Kotter's Eight Steps

Furthermore, Kotter (1996) denounces "establishing a sense of urgency" as step one as a change "requires great cooperation, initiative, and willingness to make sacrifices from many people" (1996:35). This prevents employees from not taking part or even sabotaging the change process, and only with a group of supporters it is possible to push and lead the change. There are plenty of strategies to increase the urgency of the change process. During this stage, Kotter (1996) also emphasizes the importance of removing complacencies.

Exhibit 1
Sources of Complacency
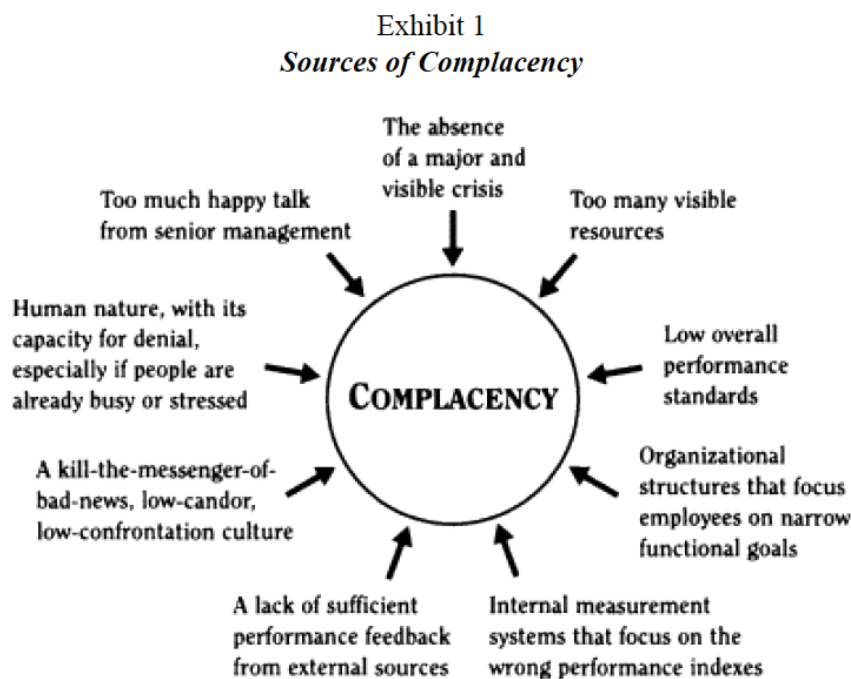
Figure 2: Sources of complacency (Kotter, 1996, p.40)

In order to increase the urgency level, Kotter (1996) suggests various actions that mainly fall under the category of creating a negative outlook. Some aim at raising awareness for the organization's problems and creating room for more "honest discussions" and "bombard people with information on future opportunities" (1996, p.44). In this context, Kotter (1996, p.45) also mentions crises as factors further pushing this effect, though he mentions that waiting for a crisis to happen is not the right strategy.

Further, changes can successfully be implemented when an organization is doing well economically, as long as they get information on aspects that do not do well. In an article from 2012, Kotter discusses how hierarchies and conventional

change management tend to restrict businesses, as these to some extent cannot handle the rapid changes in the contemporary business landscape. However, with the evolution of dual operating systems, businesses and organizations stand a better chance in sudden, dramatic change processes. Furthermore, Kotter (2012), means that a system with dual operating systems offers a way to handle increased speed and the need for more rapid decisions and a more agile way of working. Working in a single hierarchical system also means that there is a greater need for more leaders. In a fast-paced environment, an organization's top two, three or four managers are no longer able to bear the work alone. The issue, however, is that organizations within the traditional hierarchical structure do not have the necessary means, such as information and experience, to develop great leaders (Kotter, 2012). Consequently, Kotter (2012) argues the importance of implementing a dual hierarchical structure as organizations that lag now, will suffer greatly, if they even survive at all.

Kotter's steps seem to be equally important and have a fixed order. Do the order and weight of these steps differ? And if so, how do they differ? When researching the success of change individual perspectives have a huge impact on the perception. Sveningsson and Sörgärde (2020) present three perspectives on change. In the tool-based perspective on change management, the environment is objectified (Sveningsson & Sörgärde, 2020). Since it is a matter of perspective and since two individuals can view one and the same incident very differently, interpretations based on individual backgrounds and experiences are neglected when looking at the environment as an object detached from the organization (Sveningsson & Sörgärde, 2020). When researching change management, it is of importance to take into consideration individual differences:

> When making impassioned speeches about the organization's critical situation, change leaders themselves participate in creating and maintaining a certain understanding of the situation. (Sveningsson & Sörgärde 2020:223)

With this in mind, are Kotter's eight steps applicable to public organizations? The question is if managers and employees affected by the change have the same perception of these steps and measures taken accordingly.

2.2 Public Management

Kotter's model is universally used. However, little attention has been given to the unique features of the public sector. In the private sector, innovation and competition drive change and foster a certain level of adaptiveness to change. The public sector differs from the private sector as it is usually more static and less adaptive to change than it is the case for private organizations who are a lot more used to innovating in order to stay competitive and reacting to external and internal forces. The public sector, especially administrative organs, do not have competitors in that sense and thereby are not affected by pressure to implement change that much, which is why both the technology and organizational procedures and structures stay the same over a longer period of time, mostly until some factor forces a change to happen, rather than making it happen in order to be up-to-date.

That organizations within the public sector react to changes more slowly does not mean that they are not affected by constant change (Jurisch et al., 2014). The public sector is under constant supervision and criticism as it works with public funding, thus it has to be cost-effective and also explain investments more thoroughly. Especially communication strategies matter:

> The public-management literature contains evidence of the importance of determining the need for change and persuasively communicating it through a continuing process of change with as many stakeholders and participants as possible. (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006:169)

Research on change processes looks at similar factors as seen in Kotter's model. Fernandez and Rainey (2006) suggest eight factors that influence the outcome of change initiatives: (1) Ensure the need, (2) provide a plan, (3) build internal support for change and overcome resistance, (4) ensure top-management support and commitment, (5) build external support, (6) provide resources, (7) institutionalize change, and (8) pursue comprehensive change. If they are similar to other models for change processes in general, whether private or public sector, is there also no difference in the importance of these factors? Does the more static nature of public sector organizations have an impact on how employees and managers perceive change?

2.2.1 New Public Management Over Time

New public management, NPM, is to this day one of the most dominant frameworks in public management (Funck & Karlsson, 2019). The framework, coined by Christopher Hood in 1991, lays out some public sector reforms which are influenced by different managerial contexts and then, by Hood, tied together into seven overlapping doctrinal components:

1) 'Hands-on professional management in the public sector
2) Explicit standards and measures of performance
3) Greater emphasis on output controls
4) Shift to disaggregation of units in the public sector
5) Shift to greater competition in public sector
6) Stress on private-sector styles of management practice
7) Stress on greater discipline and parsimony in resource use (Hood, 1991:4-5)

Over time, NPM has been subject to an increasing amount of critique in which Christensen, Lægreid, Roness & Røvik (2007) call it a loose concept, while others (Dan & Pollitt, 2014; Pollitt, 2009; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011) call it non-transparent and vague. In an extensive literature review, Funck and Karlsson (2019) revisits the current knowledge on NPM by reviewing 299 articles published on the matter between 1991 and 2016. In their review, Funck and Karlsson (2019) found that research on NPM seems to boil down to 1) a reform with a vague intention, 2) a limping concept, 3) a one-sided perspective and 4) NPM as the new norm.

Furthermore, even though NPM is still a dominant framework in public management, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries (Funck & Karlsson, 2019), research and reviews (Christensen, Lægreid, Roness & Røvik, 2007; Dan & Pollitt, 2014; Funck & Karlsson, 2016; Hood & Dixon, 2016; Pollitt, 2009; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011) clearly show that the now 30-year old framework is either becoming outdated or increasingly flawed. Consequently, NPM cannot be assumed to function as a one size fits all and public management is in need of other approaches – whether those are new ones or additions, changes and adjustments.

2.3 Crises as an External Force

Most change management models take external factors into consideration as they trigger, disrupt or shape change processes. Internal and external forces can "push change in unplanned directions" (Palmer et al., 2017). Whether an external factor forces a change, disrupts or impacts it, these factors add a whole new dimension that needs to be considered in change management. Internal and external forces are handled differently and the extent to which they have an impact on the organization varies. There are several types of internal and external forces:

> Internal forces can include interdepartmental politics, long-established working practices that are difficult to dislodge, and deep-seated perceptions and values that are inconsistent with desired changes. External forces can include confrontational industrial relations (which can bring management-inspired changes to a standstill), legislative requirements (tax demands, regulatory procedures), or industry-wide trends affecting an entire sector (trade sanctions, run on the stock market). These internal and external forces typically override the influence of individual change managers, whose intentions can be easily swamped. (Palmer et al., 2017:37)

By being able to manage external factors like the ongoing pandemic organizations benefit long-term. A dynamic external environment can make organizations more adaptive to manage unknown and uncertain conditions and situations (Project Management Institute 2013), so resilient organizations handle external forces better than their counterparts (Hirt et al., 2019). Once a crisis has been successfully managed, other crises become easier to work with.

Most change management theories take external factors like new markets, societal changes, global economic development, populational changes, technological developments and legal aspects into account. As seen above and in the graphic below, most research does not take crises into account, but rather economic or societal factors, which are both part of a crisis. Furthermore, a crisis most often affects several ones of those factors, especially if it leads to as many restrictions as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Technological	Cultural	Socioeconomic
Knowledge management	Higher levels of education	Global economy
Computational power	Social networking	Growing population
Increasing capability	Cultural shift	Shifting demographics
Global communications	Social pressures	New markets
		Legal/regulatory

Figure 3: Environmental Factors Affecting Products and Services (Project Management Institute 2013, p.10)

External forces can occur abruptly and change the whole dynamic of a change process. Measures planned and taken before the external force hits, can suddenly become useless. Plans need to be adjusted and change leaders need to go back a few steps and/or take additional steps. How do these external factors impact change processes? How does a global crisis affect the perception of a change process and how can major disruptions during a change process be managed effectively? Adaptations from original plans have to be made in order to reach the original goal or an altered goal, adapted to the external forces. The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on various aspects of our lives. The current circumstances are an opportunity for organizations able to react to this force (Amis et al., 2020), however, they are a threat to organizations that lack this ability. There is little accessible research on a crisis' impact on change processes. For all organizations, no matter if private or public sector, the COVID-19 pandemic has been fuel to changes with regard to digitization.

2.4 The Interrelation Between Change Management, Public Management and External Circumstances

Linking these three areas is key in order to understand change processes in public organizations, especially during times of uncertainty and disruption. With the COVID-19 pandemic changes are being managed in times where the external world is in a state of exception. Digitization is fueled while globalization is on hold. Offices worldwide have changed the way they are structured, work and collaborate.

Change management with regard to the public sector is special in so far as public organizations are subject to certain regulations and are pressured by external factors rather than competitors. Especially in times of crises like the current pandemic it is of importance for public organizations to manage change effectively and strategically lead the change into the right direction. Each of Kotter's eight steps may not have the same level of relevance for change processes of different kinds, and a crisis as an external factor, also impacting internal factors, puts a unique variable to it.

The management's perspective does not necessarily match with the perception of employees, team members and subordinates. What the management team or change leaders decide and prioritize as their strategies to manage change might not meet the needs of the individuals of the workforce affected by the change process. Hereby it is important to weigh all measures and Kotter's steps accordingly, creating a management strategy that fits the organization's needs. Strategies also might have to change along the way as external factors disturb the process in the middle of it. There might also be measures and steps that do more harm than good and sabotage the success of the change process.

3 Methodology

In this chapter, the methodological approach and design is described and motivated in relation to the research topic. The methodological chapter entails a walkthrough of the research approach and how the study has been designed and conducted. Followingly, the chosen methods for empirical data collection are described as well as the following methods for analyzing the empirical data. Finally, limitations and the ethical stance in which we place ourselves as researchers and our findings, are accounted for.

3.1 Research Approach

Since the purpose of this study is to describe and analyze how a change process is carried out in a public organization when faced with external disturbances, the study needs both qualitative and quantitative data in order to develop a comprehensive and valid analysis. Furthermore, it means that we have to work more inductive than deductive to secure data that suits the purpose and provides us with answers to the research questions. The important arguments for an inductive and grounded approach are that it allows flexibility and has a close attention to context – which is also one of the key benefits of conducting a case study (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Additionally, by conducting a mixed research method in which we take on both a qualitative and quantitative approach, we decrease the risk of excluding smaller samples and less noticeable notions. More specifically, qualitative interviews are the main source of empirical data, but to either confirm or contradict, the qualitative data is compared against quantitative data in the form of a questionnaire with similar questions – to a broader sample.

To fulfill the purpose, a case study has been conducted in which we sought a case where people have experience and have in one way or another, been involved. With these characteristics in mind, Malmö Stad makes a good case study as it fits these criterions. By having a solid theoretical base and a reasonable methodological design, a purposive study is rigorous (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). In this study, rigor is ensured by representativeness, awareness of bias, and a holistic approach that is not solely reliant on interview material. By interviewing a range of employees – top management, middle managers, communicators, administrators, IT employees, and others – we can gain a broader knowledge and avoid getting a narrow and biased

picture of the situation. Also, by being aware of how we potentially bring bias and preconceived notions into our research questions and the interview and survey questions, we can actively work with being more open and aware of any cognitive biases. However, limiting the study to one case can seem exclusionary but is in this context seen as an opportunity to gain deeper insight into one specific study object.

In the following sections, the research philosophy, design, and the overall methodology will be discussed and accounted for. The methodological chapter will also provide comprehensive descriptions and discussions of data collection, data analysis, credibility, and limitations. Methodological reasoning is built on the *research onion model* (Saunders, Thornhill & Lewis, 2007), which provides a framework for the most suitable strategies and methods to approach a study subject.

3.2 Research Design

By conducting a study with mixed methods, we ensure that the study reaches content validity and saturation as combining a qualitative and quantitative approach allows us to include an adequate and representative set of items to measure and understand the content. Furthermore, using both qualitative interviews and a quantitative survey, we utilize two different measuring instruments which by having highly correlated results establishes convergent validity (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Since the question is ambiguous, we need both qualitative and quantitative data. Also, as we are conducting a case study which has to be validated, the quantitative survey is a way to analyze how widespread the results from the qualitative study are. Although a specific case study is difficult to generalize, the more generalizable its research design and methods are, the greater is its usefulness and value (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

As we are not aiming to test a hypothesis, but rather better understand the nature of a problem, a qualitative method is preferable. However, as we are doing a multidimensional case study, our research questions are too widespread to be answered by only a qualitative approach. Therefore, we are conducting a mixed-methods study where we set out to collect, analyze and mix both qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (survey) in one single study. With a mixed-methods approach being increasingly advocated within business research (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016), it is a way to increase the study's validity. Using a mixed-method approach,

we can combine both inductive and deductive thinking and answer our research questions using different types of data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The drawback of using mixed methods is that it complicates the research design. However, this is not an issue in our case – as we are a research team of two students, making the workload more bearable.

3.3 Data Collection

As investigating change processes in theory might be difficult, we have as previously argued chosen to do so through the lens of a case-study. Despite this specific change process not being Malmö Stad's first-ever major reorganization, the municipality is yet to investigate how they can better their ways of planning, managing, and carrying out changes that are to affect a large number of employees. Hence, Malmö Stad was selected as a suitable subject for this mixed-methods case study, as the currently carried out change process entails change management in relation to external disturbances.

The empirical base of this study is primarily derived from primary data in terms of qualitative data from research interviews and quantitative data from a survey. In eight qualitative research interviews with three managers and five employees, primary data has been collected through 45-60 minute long digital interviews. Through a quantitative survey distributed to 120 employees we have gathered data similar to the interviews, but one a much larger scale in order to make the results more valid and reliable as a change process of this size is hard to generalize through a limited number of interviews. Taking the limited time frame into consideration, combining the two methods will give the most nuanced and trustworthy results. As for both the interview and survey questions, both take their stance in theory which has been used as inspiration in order to ensure a theoretical baseline.

The secondary data consists of internal documentation from the case which is studied, and is used as background information. The internal documentation provides us as researchers with background knowledge into current processes, objectives, decisions and results of the change which we use as empirical evidence. Statements from interviews and data from the survey are also used in conjunction with organizational internal documentation to further strengthen and nuance the

analysis of employee perception of change management. In the following section we will firstly describe the sampling method, followed by a walkthrough of the chosen qualitative and the chosen quantitative data collection method.

3.3.1 Sampling

As previously mentioned, the participants of the interviews were chosen by referrals via the snowball method, meaning that each participant was approached and chosen based on a recommendation from a previous participant. The snowballing method is preferable when it is difficult to identify possible participants within the population of the organization (Saunders et. al, 2018). For a study to be representative, Eriksson-Zetterquist and Ahrne (2012) withholds the importance of achieving saturation. To achieve satisfactory saturation we initially did not decide on a set number of interviews, but rather went with a hunch of 6-8 interviews which after the seventh interview, proved to be a satisfactory number given the time frame. This strategy has proven to be successful in terms of qualitative approaches as it is difficult to predict how much data might be enough to achieve sufficient empirical saturation (Eriksson-Zetterquist & Ahrne, 2012).

Furthermore, as the purpose of this study is to describe and analyze how a change process is carried out in a public organization when faced with external disturbances, using the snowball method has proven to be fruitful as it often results in a variation of participants and minimizes the risk of researchers putting too much value and bias into who is going to participate (Saunders et. al, 2018). Using the snowball sampling method, we set out to find eight interviewees with three on each level: top management, middle management and employees. Snowball sampling has been subject to some criticism as to whether it is a method that ensures sufficient validity (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). The critique is mostly based on the assumption that the recommendations that lay the foundation of the sampling are biased, as they are completely based on interviewees' opinions. To counteract this, we have asked control questions to each recommended interviewee, as well as vetted their employment and organizational belonging to ensure that their participation is of relevance for the purpose of this study.

The survey participants were 82 out of 120, which is the total number of employees involved in the change process, giving us a response rate of

approximately 68 %. By surveying the 120 people, every person who is in any way affected by the change process was given an opportunity to voice their opinions and contribute to the study. Below, an overview of the interviewees is presented:

Top Management	Middle Management	Employees
IP3	IP2 IP6	IP4 IP5 IP1 IP7 IP8

Table 1: Overview of interviewees and their career level

3.3.2 Qualitative Research Interviews

The qualitative part of the collective data aims at providing us with the main insights into the change management process of the chosen case study. The data was collected directly from the participants via interviews, eight in total. The interviews are semi-structured to allow flexibility while following an interview guide with previously determined questions.

The participants represent different career stages and organizational levels. Three of the interviewees each are in top management, middle management and on the employee level. This type of selection ensures that both decision-makers as well as employees affected by the change process are included, thereby it is possible to get insights into decision making and how decisions have been perceived by the rest of the employees involved in the change process. The answers of top level managers can then be compared to those of middle managers and employees.

3.3.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

Prior to conducting the interviews, a thorough interview guide (see appendix 1) was drafted and tested on three persons without any ties to the study. This was done to ensure that the questions are understandable and that they allow for potential follow-up questions if found necessary. The interviews with participants from the organization were conducted in English or Swedish, depending on the preference of

the participant as both Swedish - and non-Swedish speakers participated and lasted from 45-60 minutes. The interviews were also audio-recorded and transcribed afterwards. A consent form informed the participants of the anonymity, the recording and other details important to ensure the participants are aware that they take part voluntarily and that no personal information and none of their answers are reaching their employer (see appendix 2). Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic the interviews were all held digitally, via video call on Zoom.

In order to being able to fully understand and explore each participant's experiences and understanding of the specific situation as well as more general phenomenons, the interview questions in the interview guide were of a semi-structured nature which according to Kvale (2008), provides the researcher with an open arena to comprehensively gather data relevant to the study. Furthermore, as suggested by Kvale (2008), the interview guide provided a structure for the interview and gave an outline which ensured important topics were covered. However, even though each interview started out the same, the questions and content varied some depending on the interviewees' answers and way of telling their story. Consequently, having a flexible approach during semi-structured interviews allows for follow-up questions and discussions beyond the interview guide (Kvale, 2008), which serves to fulfill the purpose of the study further.

3.3.4 Quantitative Research Survey

In addition to the quantitative interviews a survey was distributed to all employees involved in the change process, which counts to 120 people. The survey is used to back up and support the findings of the interviews in order to increase the validity and generalizability of the study. As only eight interviews were conducted, the survey filled out by 82 individuals involved in the process, provides more insights into the validity of the replies as they only represent specific individuals who could represent an opinion that is not widely shared by others. Hereby it is ensured that the answers to the interview questions are double checked and can be seen as a stronger representation of the empirical findings.

3.3.5 Questionnaire

The Questionnaire was set up in English and translated to and sent out in Swedish as almost all employees are Swedish speakers. It encompasses 24 questions that are based on the interview questions since the survey is used to be compared to the interview answers. Adding the insights of the survey ensures the validity of the interviews.

A beta version of the questionnaire was sent out to people not involved in this study to check the relevance of the questions and to make sure they are understandable. That way we minimized the room for error and confusion for the final version that was sent out.

3.4 Data Analysis

The primary data used in this study is derived from the qualitative interviews, meaning that the data analysis of the qualitative interviews represents a larger portion of the empirical material analyzed. However, as the topics of the interviews correlate with the questions asked in the quantitative survey, these results are also analyzed in conjunction with each other as comparison to either strengthen, or lessen findings.

3.4.1 Qualitative

The analysis of the qualitative data followed the structure provided by Ryan and Bernard (2003), which consists of four steps.

1. Exploring themes
2. Selecting the most prominent and important themes by filtering
3. Organizing the chosen themes into categories, hierarchies or frameworks
4. Connect the emerged themes with theoretical frameworks

By pursuing these four steps, four major themes have been identified; communication and culture, leadership and management, involvement and adoption to disturbances. The findings from the qualitative empirical data which emerged from theme exploration was then put into relation to the findings from the quantitative empirical data, through comparing the emerging themes to results shown in graphs and tables. Finally, these two methodological elements were combined by the

emergence of patterns, strengthened as well as lessened themes when putting the qualitative and quantitative data together.

3.4.2 Quantitative

The quantitative data consists of primary data in the sense it is derived directly from people involved in the studies case. However, the quantitative data does more so fill the purpose of acting as either evidence of strong correlation between theory and empirical data, or deviation from theory. The quantitative data has been analyzed in comparison to qualitative data, by comparing responses.

3.5 Limitations

Within this paper the conclusions are drawn from studying one particular public organization, a municipality. Taking into account previous research and our findings assumptions can only be made about change management in public organizations based on the respective study object.

The eight participants represent different career and authority levels since this study aims at looking into both ends of a change process, the managerial decision-making and practices as well as the effect those have on the rest of the affected workforce. As those participants were chosen based on snowball sampling and participated voluntarily the survey ensures that the chosen interviewees do not happen to represent minority opinions but provide a detailed insight into the perception of the change process.

3.5.1 Subjectivity

As researchers it is not always entirely possible to enter a research project without preconceived notions and biases. Several steps and measures have been taken to eliminate the majority of any subjective factors influencing the research, both during data collection and data analysis. Throughout the process we constantly challenged our assumptions and made use of uninvolved third parties to check any of the material. According to Kvale (2008), when conducting research within the worldview of social constructivism, reality is viewed as a subjective construction which makes it subjected to researcher's preconceived notions in each step of data collection and

data analysis. As a way of minimizing biases, we have been fully aware of the role we, as researchers, play in this process in the sense that this study is to some extent driven by our previous knowledge and interests going into this research project.

3.5.2 COVID-19 Pandemic

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic certain limits were in place. For safety reasons, because of social distancing and remote work, the qualitative data was collected online, thus the interviews were conducted virtually, via Zoom video calls. Barely any visits of the organization were made, though the vast majority of involved individuals work from home in the current situation either way. This limits the way we were able to make observations of the change process at the office. The data collected also includes internal documentation of the whole process, before and during COVID-19.

3.5.3 Time Frame

The most practical limitation is related to its limited time frame. The limitation in time has to some extent restricted the scope of the study, as a wider time frame would have allowed for more empirical data, and therefore, a wider analysis. However, with two researchers, work was divided in order to work more efficiently which did not only contribute to providing qualitative work within a limited time frame, but also a more nuanced perspective and more comprehensive insights. Furthermore, the mixed methods approach allowed for a more widespread data collection which also allowed for more data and a richer analysis in a shorter period of time.

3.6 Ethical Stances

For this research all necessary preparations were carried out to ensure confidentiality, transparency and objectivity. It has a generalizable purpose and it was ensured that the public organization involved, Malmö Stad, did not influence the objectivity of this study or of the interviews. A letter of consent that was signed by all participants of the qualitative interviews aims at maintaining transparency for all parties involved in this research which is in line with recommendations of Lindstedt (2017) and Bryman (2011). A way to avoid putting any biases or interpretations into

the participants when analyzing the material is to not use fictive names, but rather use interview person 1 (IP1), interview person 2 (IP2) etc (Lindstedt, 2017).

4 A Case Study of the Digital Malmö

To fulfill the purpose of this study, to describe and analyze how a change process is carried out in a public organization when faced with external disturbances, the research questions are approached using a case study. The following section will give a description of the chosen case study, as well as entail why this specific case is valuable as empirical data in relation to the purpose.

4.1 The Case

Malmö Stad, the third-largest municipality in Sweden has during 2020, continuing in 2021, carried out a major reorganization in which the departments of IT and communications & service are to form a new, merged organization. Malmö municipality is working towards becoming more digitized through an initiative called *Det Digitala Malmö (The Digital Malmö),* in which several investigations have been carried out to concretalize an action plan. The goal of *Det Digitala Malmö* is to better the city of Malmö's prerequisites in terms of being able to adjust the daily operations to a more digitized climate as well as to fulfil their mission in creating welfare for all citizens now, and in the future. Internal investigations show that a key success factor is to coordinate and prioritize IT-investments. To do this, many departments and organizations within Malmö municipality must coordinate with each other in a complex environment and come up with well-reasoned decisions for investments. During the investigation, it became apparent that these key success factors are not always present in daily operations and lacking in several organizations as of today. More specifically, what has been identified as missing is clear interfaces within the organization, clarity in management models, defined areas of responsibility and an efficient use of common resources. To solve these shortcomings, a reorganization in which the IT- and digitization departments together with parts of the city service organization (more specifically, communication) and IT-service are to form a new, joint organization.

The reorganization was initiated before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and has been planned for over the last three years. As a municipality, Malmö Stad is ultimately a politically run organization where all major decisions have to be approved and decided on by the city council and the mayor which means that

getting final approval on ideas, changes and processes usually takes much longer than the decision making process in a privately owned organization. Therefore, the actual groundwork has been in the works before an official decision has been made – furtherly contributing to the volatility of the situation. Additionally, as an ultimately political organ, Malmö Stad is also under the scrutiny of the public. In Sweden, the Principle of Public Access to Official Records is embedded in most constitutional legislation and specifically regulated in the Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act (2009:400). A public organization, such as a municipality is therefore obligated by law, to act and work under the eyes of the public. Hence, conducting a major change process is in comparison to a limited company, a very public process.

4.2 Internal Documentation

In order to increase the validity of the study, secondary data has been collected to obtain accurate and official information from the study object. According to Bowen (2009), using company material as secondary data is a way of increasing the validity and making sure official information is correct in a case study. The material obtained from Malmö Stad mainly includes internal documentation – a communication plan, steering documents, organizational charts and planning documents outlining the timeframe and task forces involved. The organization also has a Sharepoint website dedicated to the change project, which employees can access to read news, updates and catch up on live material in retrospect. We have had access to this website, as well as webinars that have been sent live to employees and recorded and uploaded to Sharepoint afterwards. In total, we have viewed four webinars, all which have been directed towards affected employees with the purpose of clearing up questions and giving updates on how the process is going. To get an idea of the organization's values, goals and ways of working, we have gathered public information from the public, official website of Malmö Stad.

The secondary data serves mainly as a complementary database, which results and findings can be analyzed against in order to answer the research questions. As suggested by Svenningsson and Sörgärde (2020), a change process is different to each interpreter. Therefore, following up on employees' interpretations of the process is of importance to understand the results (Svenningsson & Sörgärde, 2020). To better understand the employees' of a public organization views,

comparing the material they have taken part of to their interpretations of how it will aid in achieving the study's purpose to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how a change process is carried out in a public organization when faced with external disturbances.

5 Results

The following chapter gives a walkthrough of the main findings derived from the empirical data collected from interviews, a survey and internal documentation. The key findings are based on its recurrence, which has made it possible to develop themes based on patterns that we have divided into key themes. The key findings have culminated in four themes; *communication and culture, leadership and management, involvement and adoption to external disturbances.* The themes are derived from and based on empirical data and are fundamentally the outputs of the two research methods.. The chapter ends with a table illustrating the structure which lays the foundation of the four themes, where direct excerpts from interviews and results from the survey have been put into conjunction with each other in order to form four themes. The table also aids in showing how the two separate research methods correlate with each other.

5.1 Interview

The analytical chapter follows a three-part structure in which the key findings from the qualitative interviews are presented and analyzed first. Followingly, direct quotes and excerpts from interviews are presented in terms of the four major themes in correlation with theory.

5.1.1 Communication and Culture

As argued and presented by Kotter (1996), creating a sense of urgency is of the utmost importance when implementing a larger change process. However, Kotter's 8-step model is not necessarily universally applicable and cannot be assumed to be the best practice in every change process. Regardless, it does however appear that creating some sort of urgency or starting point in which a larger change process is anchored, is important to avoid misunderstandings and increase the sense of value. Interview person 2 tells us:

> Preparations for this have been underway for a number of years. There has been talk of steps you need and wanted to take, but the start itself has been

unclear which has contributed to making this entire thing unclear from the beginning.

Interviewee 7 agrees and has a more negative outlook:

The biggest flaw of this entire reorganization is the lack of the how, where and why? There is so much missing information in total. Many people feel that the reorganization has affected one's work role very negatively.

Some interviewees offer their take on what could have been done to increase the sense of urgency using communication and reflect on how communication has played a role in either strengthening, or lessening the sense of urgency and involvement. Interview person 1 reflects on how the communication have impacted the level of engagement:

So I think maybe I have not taken it as seriously, because maybe it is not really being communicated in a way that it was as obvious what was really going to happen. So it just felt a bit like, there may be a lot of change, there might be none.

Internal documentation shows that there have been several communicative incentives of various sizes throughout the change process. The view on how these have contributed in different ways are not unanimous. IP1 report on how the digital setting has made meetings less involving and how this has not been considered:

I think there were these webinars, which is like, oh, everyone's getting involved. But again, it doesn't take into consideration that you have people who don't feel happy putting their hand up, and 170 people meeting to voice their concerns isn't necessarily a safe place to speak up.

Interviewee 4 agrees and says that the feedback has mostly occurred in more casual settings between colleagues and the closests manager:

We've been invited to webinars where you have received a lot of information in more of a broadcasting form. In some cases someone has dared to ask a question but rarely. (...) The place and forum for feedback or whatever has mostly been just casual ventilation with colleagues and my manager.

The more casual feedback loop is also recognized by IP5:

It has been more informal information that comes sliding in conversation between us colleagues, rather than official information that has actually been valuable.

Interviewee 5 continues:

But it (the Sharepoint website) hasn't been a place for communicating yourself on the actual page. (...) So no kind of feedback, the comment function is there but no one uses it because the general notion is that you should not. So it's not really any two-way communication, it's just simple one-way communication from higher up.

However, in terms of how the tonality of communication has impacted the level of onboarding IP5 says:

But transparency, clarity and a generally pleasant tone have been consistent throughout in terms of communication and that have made me feel more onboard.

As stated by Fernandez and Rainey (2006), implementing change in a public organization is to some extent different from a private business. Furthermore, communication strategies are highlighted as important and seem to play a large role in anchoring and withholding a sense of security. The data clearly supports the notion that communication is an important tool when driving change in a public organization as several interviewees both positively and negatively reflect on how communication has impacted their attitudes towards the change process. On the question of whether, and how, tonality have had an impact IP1 says

Yeah, I mean, I think so and mainly in a positive sense, because it felt very friendly. But at the same time, it has not been very open. I then honestly do not trust it, I am just like, okay, you are informing me of stuff, and we will see what happens here. I am not completely convinced.

Using communication as a strategy is recognized by IP6, who is of the opinion that the later a communicative strategy is set in place, the more difficult the change process will be to carry out

The most interesting and important strategy was the communication strategy. The most interesting thing with the communication and the communication plans are that they have been implemented late. And I do not think enough effort has been put into them, and also they have not been focused enough.

On the question of how communication has been perceived, IP6 says

Confusing, there has been a lot of a lot of angry voices from people in the organization regarding the communication. So they have not learned from experience.

Similar to IP5, interviewee 7 has positively perceived the tone of project communication, but highlights a recurring factor:

I think it has been nice and straightforward, but sometimes it has been too technical around this thing with organization and politics which makes it difficult to comprehend and relate to.

Interview Person 2 agrees:

In the webinar, it has been more accurate, formal, a little dry and therefore sometimes hard to understand.

Subsequently, it is clear that communication does play an important role when implementing change. However, the quality is even more important.

5.1.2 Leadership and management

Most replies have a connection to leadership and management, with a strong link to communication. IP1 puts emphasis on communication issues connected to leadership:

> I think it's been hard, because it feels like it's a kind of weird middle layer that's driving the change. But we're getting no input from leadership, and then we are not allowed to give input either. And it's like, who is actually involved in this and who is driving it and what's happening. So it feels just very much like friendly conversations, because it's kind of colleagues updating each other on something that's happening somewhere.

How managers communicates and thereby lead the change orally, with words, has an impact on those involved in the process, as IP4 emphasizes:

> But something that became quite clear is when we got the organization chart in front of us we very much agreed that this does not feel good. There were many difficult words and I felt that the oral communication from managers and senior management involved in the project does not match the written and documented communication that we've received throughout.

> Critique with regard to leadership in general was voiced by IP1:

> So I also feel, maybe that I don't necessarily trust it, I also don't know who's driving it. The people involved do not necessarily have a mandate for leadership. (...) they *(managers)* also don't know anything that's happening.

> IP8 related this to the way Malmö Stad was previously organized and structured:

I think a big part of the problems with the previous organization was leadership. And we continue having the same leadership just in different positions within the organization. [...] I don't think we really considered the concerns of people and their needs properly when making decisions . Our new boss had basically eight weeks since he was hired until they had to make the final decision. He was our external consultant that we have no idea of why we should trust him without knowing anything about the organization. [...] It's happening in all the different departments, middle management, management, making decisions without ever including the people that are actually executing and trying to make a positive change.

Leadership failed as the employees' concerns and needs have not been taken into account. Involvement is another major theme that has been identified. Discussions about important issues were neglected, leaving people clueless, as IP6 hints on:

During the change itself, I saw a lot of things concerning me. Mainly regarding leadership. I didn't see the right people taking ownership of the change. I didn't see people understanding what the change meant. What was the driver for the change? And I tried to raise these discussions in different forums and simply said, a lot of people were not interested in discussion. And for me, I think it's a lack of knowledge. And there's a lot of stages in the organization that people don't like to be challenged with. So there's a lot of political influence in the process.

When being asked what could complicate a change process, IP7 said, "Lack of clear leadership and leaders who are not honest and try to hide things." In the end, it is not only about the change itself but all the individuals involved:

The organizational structure is one thing, but it's the people that make it whatever it turns out to be. You could put 20 completely different people into the same type of organization. And they would all have completely different results depending on how comfortable those people feel, how much trust they

have with each other, how much belief they have in the organization and those kinds of things.

IP1 hereby puts emphasis on the impact the workforce has in return of good or bad leadership. IP2 shares this opinion:

It's all about managing the people and their expectations, and how they feel throughout the process – that they are getting promoted somewhere better than where they were to begin with.

Though change processes seem technical, emotions play a big role in change processes that involve people as IP4 explains:

What is difficult is to make people feel seen and confirmed. It is better to come out with information, even if you do not have new information so everyone that's affected feels like we all know as much and no one is hiding something. It is important to feel that you know the situation and your colleagues. At times, it has felt like "we" and "them". You move in with someone else, but it does not feel completely natural because the focus has been too much on practicalities and in this public context, regulations and policies and the softer things like culture, values and relationships are completely forgotten.

IP7 mentions the strong link between personal and professional life:

Why aren't employees taken seriously? These are people's whole lives and these things affect not only working life, but also family and our personal lives. They cannot answer these kinds of questions. (...) Why was it so important to set 1 May. Like, what now? There has been no structure whatsoever. It just messes up, again, both privately but also with customer contacts.

Leadership is also linked to the company culture and relationships. IP7 makes it clear how leadership, communication, relationships and culture cannot be separated:

Personal relationships are definitely the most important if a project like this is going to stand a chance. Also, the culture must not be forgotten. You can't just build a lot of new groupings and think it's going to work. When there is such a lack of communication and information, cultural work and clear leadership are very important.

All of the above aspects depend on the chosen strategy. IP1 thinks there is a lack of strategy and asks what the thinking behind all of it is. Same as for the goals and vision:

And what, what were the goals? Like, what were we trying to achieve here? Was it just because we had to align? But then was it we were trying to save money? We were trying to save people? I've not seen that either. I've not seen that there's going to be 30% job cuts? Because no, we have the same people doing the same thing.

I think it's hugely important to have a vision and clear goals. I think it's kind of the cornerstone that you can always come back to – it's always hard, it's always emotional. But if you have this image of what it's going to be like, and people can then see it, okay, there's light at the end of the tunnel. That's what we're aiming for. Like, I mean, if you compare it to COVID, you know, everyone's like, I'm going to be on a beach next summer. They have this picture, which allows them to continue muddling through, to get on with it, because they're like, I know what it could be like, and I know what we're aiming for. So I think it's hugely important.

As it is a long-term change process there are certain risk when employees do not feel as involved and heard, expressed by IP1:

I think there's a huge risk that, especially because it's taken so long, I think a lot of people have started to look elsewhere. What's the point if you lose half of your staff anyway?

When being asked what strategies IP2 can identify, IP2 said:

There are none, the purpose is unclear from the beginning. Reduce people in the business but why?

IP5 was able to identify a strategy regarding management and communication:

One thing I see as a clear strategy is that managers have communicated with us themselves rather than relying on communicators or other more "project"-persons.

IP6 is critical with regard to the strategy and vision:

There's been a few attempts to have a strategy. The most interesting strategy was communication and the communication plans have been implemented late. And I don't think enough effort has been put into them, and also they haven't been focused on one of the projects. And since the change has been spread out in different projects and so on, the result has not been consistent. And I would say that the split of projects has been a strategy in itself.

But a lot of organizations don't work actively with this. You set the vision for some period, hopefully, a lot of times you don't have a vision at all, and you work with it, once a year, you set the goals for this year, and then you measure them. And then once a year you follow up on them. Often that is slow, static, and then you don't get the effect because things change around you.

IP7 needs clear objectives, clear roles and direct leadership:

Since the objectives and purpose have changed and are not clear, it is difficult to say if the objectives in this particular project are met. But in general, having clear and direct leadership and a clear role distribution and almost an abundance of information is in my opinion, what is going to help a change project like this to be successful.

How did the interviewees talk about the influence of the public sector, which Malmö Stad belongs to? IP7 said:

There is something about the municipal spirit and managing reorganizations. There is no follow up on what has been done in the past, they change the purpose radically without saying either why or how it should be worked around and you work in a more enclosed way.

IP2, on the other hand, mentions the top-down approach and hierarchies of public organizations:

As with any public sector organ, this has been very top-down from the beginning. Inviting people to feedback and involve themselves has just been for show and I guess some people buy it.

IP1 does not see any particular impact of the public sector, but goes back to the emotional aspect of the process with many individuals and groups involved:

I think I'm not sure if it has to do with being a public organization, I think when having an organization that is driven by people, then how other people feel is probably the most important thing. And because that is your sustainable advantage - the people and their relationships and how they are in their jobs. And that's what I think has completely been missing here. And I mean these are basic things. I mean, how much time would it really have taken to do a 15-minute interview with every member of staff to gather some insights. There are very small things that can be done to make you feel a little bit more in control, or make you feel like you understand what's happening.

This interviewee mentioned what is missing now when comparing the change process to a previous one with another employer:

So we had regular workshops, we were involved, we did prototyping, and it was very much an open dialogue. And I think most people knew what was happening. The people who were involved, maybe in hindsight, were at too

high a level again. But some of them were quite good at involving their colleagues.

The people involved have been a focus, which has a major connection to the involvement of those affected by the change process.

5.1.3 Involvement

Leadership is highly connected to involvement and the way employees perceive the way they are involved in the process. IP1 states:

> Our immediate boss said a couple of times that we can contact her/him. But to be honest, that feels like sending something into a black hole.

IP4 agrees:

> I rarely think that as a regular employee you are actually involved in such reorganisations. They all asked what we think, but then it is compiled in a generalized report where you lose all nuances. I do not think that reorganizations are particularly involving even if you try, it's more for show. (...) It's probably why it creates so much insecurity and why it's sometimes hard to anchor a change.

Here, the involvement is rated as quite low. But IP4 clearly says it is not a problem of Malmö Stad in particular, but one that applies to reorganizations and change processes in general. Involvement does also involve a feedback culture or at least opportunities for employees to give feedback in addition to the information they receive via several means of communication. While IP5 does not feel involved except being told what is happening, IP1 is also critical:

> So even some of the more formal feedback stuff kind of feels like it was a tick-the-box exercise, maybe more than it has been anything useful or valuable.

IP3, as a top level manager, is more positive towards involvement when being asked about strategies:

The involvement process that we have worked very hard on. Great focus on communication and information, having an open dialogue throughout.

Involvement, communication and leadership are clearly connected. When being compared to change processes the interviewees have previously been part of IP5 concludes:

I have experienced previous change processes as more involving, but during this process I am not entirely sure about what has been done to ensure involvement.

Confusion is also expressed by IP7:

My biggest dilemma is that I don't know what to work with or what my actual tasks are since May 1st.

This particular interviewee rates the involvement so low that even their own tasks are a miracle to them. During this change process the employees feel like spectators rather than involved individuals, as expressed by IP7:

I'm more of a spectator. I wish I could have been more involved. I got to participate quite early but then I got no feedback on the thoughts and ideas we had at the time. Since the beginning of the year (2021), much of the initial work we employees have been involved in has disappeared into thin air.

Feedback has not been taken into consideration, having resulted in frustration and the distancing of IP7. All of the interviewees in the employee and middle management categories rate the involvement as low. Especially during a process conducted online for this long time frame, involvement and leadership are necessary.

5.1.4 Adoption to external disturbances

As previously mentioned, a crisis can shake things up in terms of various aspects related to change processes. As a result of social distancing many employers sent their employees home to work remotely. This can be tricky as Interview Person 4 said:

> We were not allowed to leave the job initially, but then it was questioned due to recommendations from FHM. The management considered that you only work when you are (physically) at work.

Remote work did cause problems and confusion amongst employees. Several IPs mentioned that no one thought about any support for those in the workforce who have no car to transport the equipment needed to work from home. As the home offices were set up though, the digital infrastructure and trainings related to this improved the situation as IP4 confirms:

> Office 365 was already in place - the technical infrastructure was in place but not the knowledge around it. We created e-learning films to explain and teach, creating a sense of security. Has received a very good response to this.

Working from home also changed all meetings and communication to an online mode. For some it can be considered more social. IP3 shared the following:

> Some people think it's better to do digital meetings as I think it fosters greater involvement. (...) Everyone has the same conditions and some who have never spoken before at a physical meeting make themselves known in the digital ones.

IP3, however, also admits that it is more difficult to gather in large groups and have an engaging dialog online. IP6 even states:

> But also, some people have gotten much closer working from a distance even when they previously had their rooms almost next to each other. Because it's

all the new tools with the chats and so on. Sometimes it makes you more accessible than when you're locked into a conference room all day long and no one sees you.

Chats in Microsoft Teams are used as forms of informal communication and replace any real-life chats in the corridor at the workplace that have taken place pre-COVID. But what about the IT skills? A lot has changed since 2020, in the beginnings of the pandemic. IP7 summarizes:

Now they have hired the right people, in the past they have invested in people within the municipality. There has been a lack of IT skills in the past. We are an IT company in the city of Malmö, it has not been understood before, but you now understand that and therefore hire people that have knowledge in IT and have worked with it for real.

IP7 calls out on the lack of technological knowledge that is key in order to work from home and manage changes remotely. Even if the infrastructure is in place, it takes IT professionals to get the right software, hardware and organize training. Of course, not all employees appreciate virtual collaboration. IP1 concludes that digital department meetings are "the most boring meetings ever". IP1 also explains the details of the way virtual collaboration is carried out:

Surely we should be at the forefront of how you could create digital engagement, but it's very much not like that. I think Teams is okay. We're also a little bit rebellious, we use Slack on the side (...). So we find what we need in order to make the digital workplace work. And we try as much as possible to consider the policies and everything else. But at the same time, it's also a balance of being able to do the work you need to do versus considering all the regulations.

Policies and rules restrict the pool of digital tools to choose from. IP1 concludes that during this one year of working remotely a lot has been improved, especially those units except the IT department:

And the journey the organization has made within a year, I think is incredible. Particularly for the other departments, and how they have embraced it in order to continue to deliver the services they do or to speak to colleagues digitally. Ironically, I'm not sure that the digitalization of the IT department has utilized it as well.

5.2 Survey

The survey, filled out by 82 participants, serves as a control mechanism of the interviews as only eight interviews have been conducted. To investigate if the opinions and statements reflected by the interviews are exceptions or represent a general impression by the workforce the survey is added as a quantitative research method. As the questions within the survey are similar to the ones in the interviews, thematically and formulation-wise, the structure and subchapters are similar to those of the qualitative analysis. The survey questions are categorized into the same themes as those found in the interviews.

5.2.1 Leadership and Management

Leadership and management here mainly refers to strategy, vision and goals. Most of the 82 participants state that this project only has a strategy to a certain extent while over a third stated that there is no clear strategy. About 16 percent say there is a clear strategy.
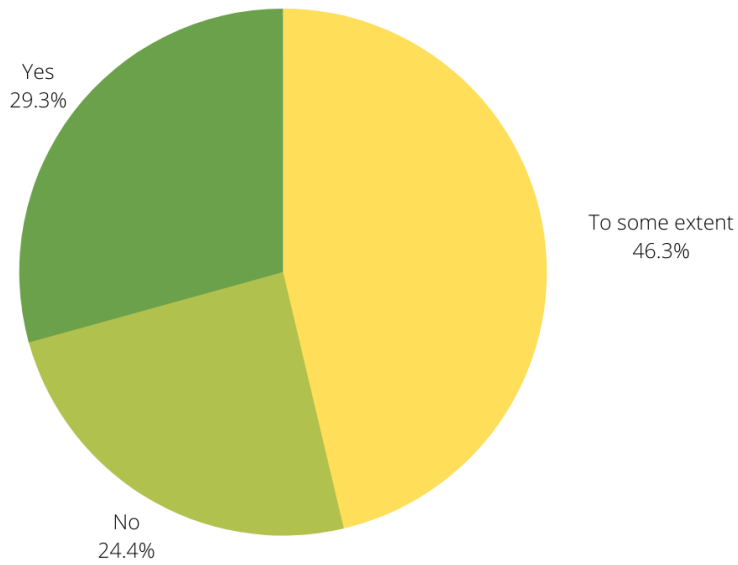
Do you confidently know the vision of this project?

Figure 4: Do you confidently know the vision of this project?

The end goal is known to the majority of participants, with 47.6 percent knowing it to some extent and 46.3 percent knowing it fully.

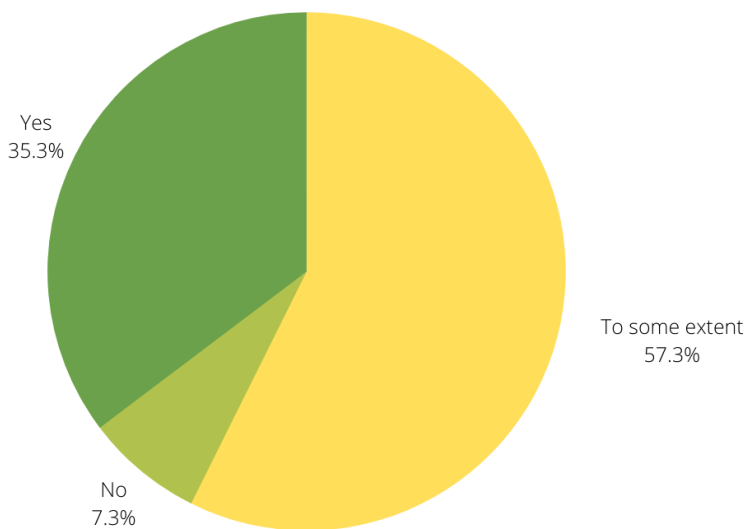Do you confidently know the end goal of this project?

Figure 5: Do you confidently know the end goal of this project?

67.1 percent know the reason for the reorganization, only 6.1 percent state that they do not know why it is happening.

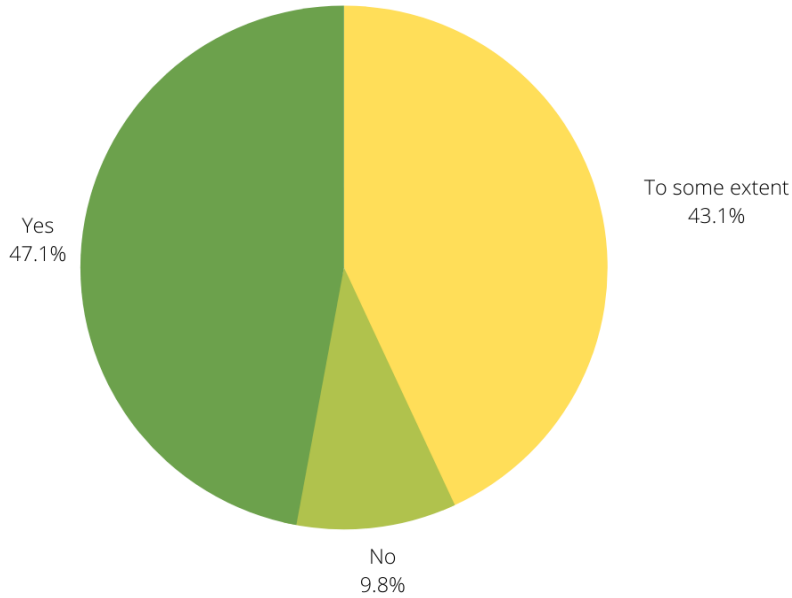Do you confidently know why this reorganization is done?

Figure 6: Do you confidently know why this reorganization is done?

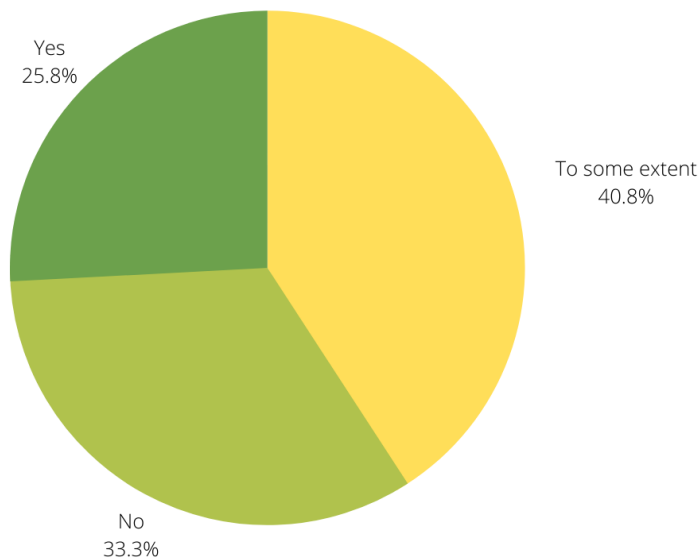In your opinion, is there a clear strategy for this project?

Figure 7: In your opinion, is there a clear strategy for this project?

5.2.2 Adoption to external disturbances

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the whole workforce at Malmö Stad started working from home. Digitization is one of the major developments fueled by the virus and its impact. The digital infrastructure thereby is one of the most important factors in this process. Most participants rated the digital infrastructure as adequate or close to adequate. Only a few disagreed.

To what extent is the digital infrastructure at your workplace meeting the needs of a digital workplace?
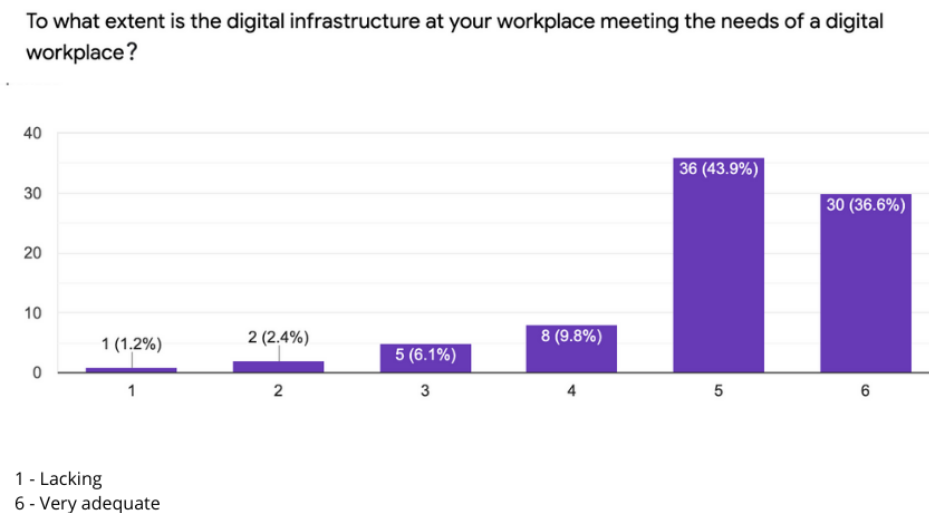
1 - Lacking
6 - Very adequate

Figure 8: To what extent is the digital infrastructure at your workplace meeting the needs of a digital workplace?

Digital infrastructure is one part of remote collaboration, the knowledge needed to work fully digitally is another. With over 85 percent choosing either five or six on the scale, most participants perceive that they have the knowledge and resources needed.

To what degree have virtual meetings contributed to your involvement and understanding of the change?
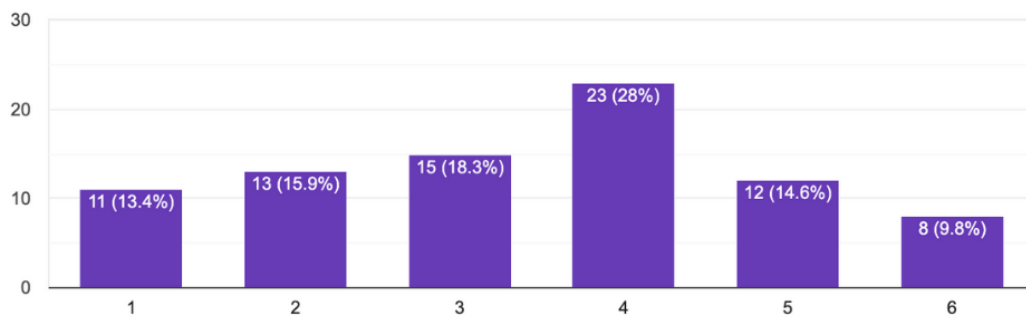
1 - Not at all
6 - Very much

Figure 9: To what degree have virtual meetings contributed to your involvement and understanding of the change?

Right after the start of this change process, virtual meetings replaced meeting in person.

Which factors do you think can make a change process similar to the one your workplace is going through more complicated?

One person each typed in these answers:

Not including employees in the process
Not having a clear purpose
Not specifically public activities but sums up lack of involvement: Does not see the whole map, does not see the process work, staff placement without dialogue in the new organization, lack of individual dialogue, 40 people from an organization with their culture to be merged with another culture and approx. 80 people.
Lack of communication
Two administrations that are going to try to work together but they do not know who is really responsible for what
Unclear purpose as to why the reorganization is taking place and unclear goal
Information is provided too late and to too little extent
That you fail to create an image of the current situation before the change begins.
That you do not dare / want to make the necessary decisions

Figure 10: Which factors do you think can make a change process similar to the one your workplace is going through more complicated?

5.2.3 Involvement

Involvement was rated quite low by the participants. Over one third feels like they are not involved at all in the process. Only 24 percent of opinions chose an option on the scale closer to a high involvement.

To what extent do you feel involved in the change process?

1 - Not involved at all
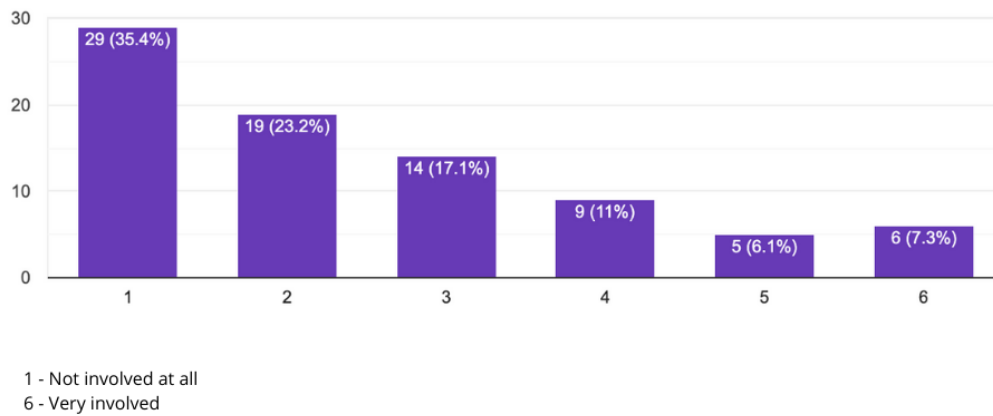6 - Very involved

Figure 11: To what extent do you feel involved in the change process?

When being asked if the reorganization is affecting their role, most agreed.

Is the reorganzation affecting your current or most recent role within the organization?

Yes
26.7%

No
12.2%

To some extent
61.1%
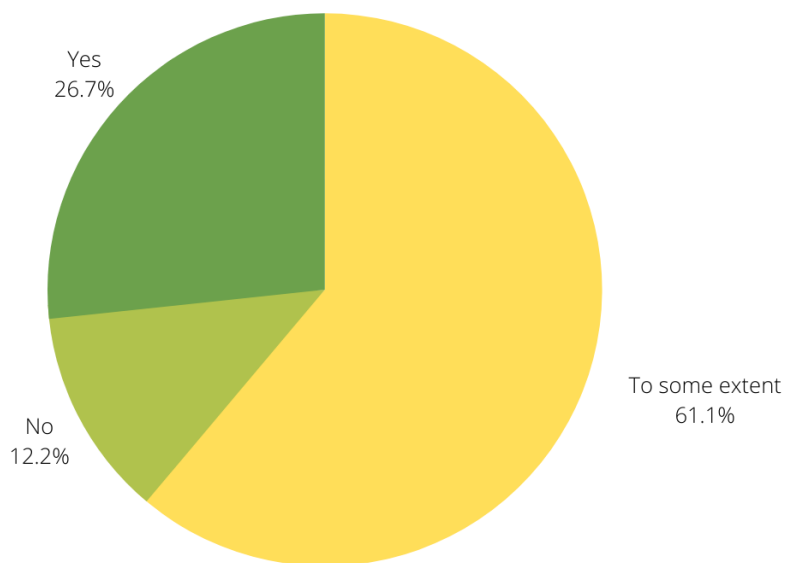
Figure 12: Is the reorganization affecting your current or most recent role within the organization?

5.2.4 Communication and Culture

A variety of channels have been used to deliver information. The participants were able to choose from a list of options.

What have been your primary sources of information during this process?
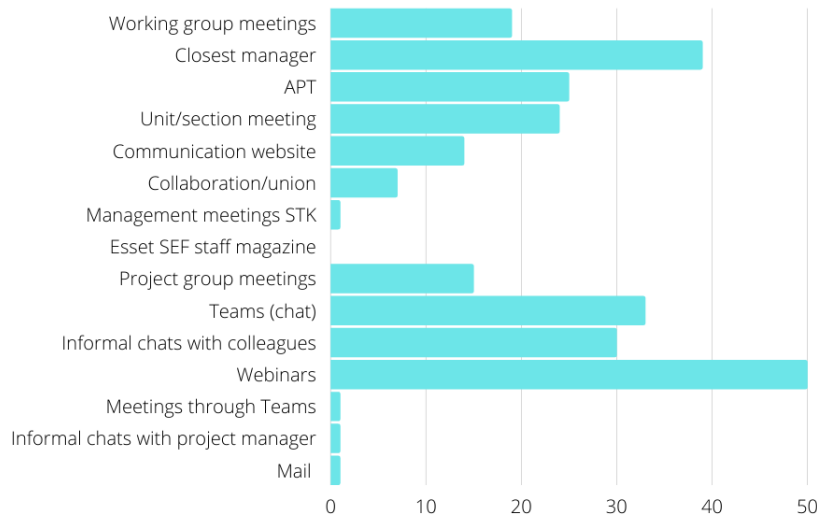
Figure 13: What have been your primary sources of information during this process?

In terms of feedback and questions, the participants could not only choose from a list below but add their own comments.

What communication channels have been available
for you to provide feedback or ask questions?
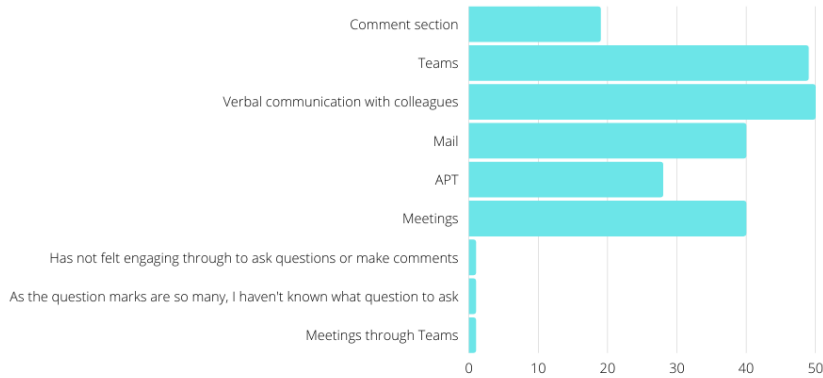
Figure 14: What communication channels have been available for you to provide feedback or ask questions?

The chosen channels and words influence the tone of communication and thereby the way the workforce views the change process:

Figure 15: How do you perceive the tone of communication during this change process?

5.3 Results of the Quantitative and Qualitative Sides

In order to either validate, or find deviations, the qualitative data – is put up against quantitative data gathered from a survey with questions very similar to those asked during interviews. When comparing the two results, it is clear that the data has a high correlation which strengthens the validity of the results overall. Table two, which is presented below shows an overview of the correlations between the qualitative and quantitative data. The content of the table is generated from empirical data and is to be considered as empirical evidence.

Qualitative Empirical Data	Quantitative Empirical Data	Theme
● Several interviewees report on struggling with understanding the content of communication. ● Several interviewees mentioned that there are often very big and hard words thrown around like confetti. ● The language is too formal and has too much political jargon, which makes it non-including. ● Only people working with these specific topics know and understand the meaning and value of certain words and contexts, whilst a vast majority of the people interviewed say that they to some extent view the language as difficult and excluding. ● Culture is often forgotten. ● There has been limited room for feedback.	● Respondents report on perceiving communication as confusing and excluding, yet positive and informative. ● A majority of respondents thinks that the communication has had more of a negative than positive impact on their attitude towards change. ● 78% of respondents view miscommunication as a contributor to making a change process complicated in general. ● 82% of respondents view clear communication as a key factor to successfully carry out a change process in a public organization. ● A majority of respondents report on not feeling listened to throughout the process.	**Communication and culture**
● Leadership within the organization varies in perceived quality. ● The leadership mandate is sometimes unclear. ● Managing people **and** their expectations. ● Lack of strategy. ● Some say change is more often top-down, while others say change often comes from below. ● Having clear goals and objectives is important. ● Have a purpose and communicate it. ● Lack of ownership.	● Almost half of the respondents report only knowing the vision of the change to some extent. ● 14% of respondents report having no worries at all throughout the process whereas the most prominent concern seems to be getting a new manager and new assignments. ● 78% of respondents view lack of leadership as a contributing factor to a complicated change process, in general. ● A clear majority report on feeling confused throughout the process.	**Leadership and management**
● Feedback exercises and incentives perceived merely as "tick-the box". ● A vast majority reports zero to no feeling of involvement. ● Change processes as non-involving in general. ● Getting involved but then forgotten. ● Using communication as a tool to increase involvement.	● A clear majority report on not having felt involved throughout the change process. ● Digital meetings have to some extent contributed to feelings of involvement. ● 80,5% of respondents view employee involvement as a key success factor in successful change processes.	**Involvement**

• Digital infrastructure in place, but lack of knowledge on how to use it – information videos. • Getting together digitally is often perceived as boring and time consuming. • Trying to keep the balance between following policies and regulations whilst actually getting the work done. • Different meeting culture. • Some say digital meetings foster involvement, while others say it is the complete opposite. • The idea of "you only work when you are at work".	• Responses do not indicate whether working from home has affected the change process in a specifically good or bad way, respondents are neutral. Some think working from home has had a good impact, while others lean more towards the negative side. • A clear majority thinks that their workplace meets the needs of a functioning digital workplace. • A clear majority thinks they have the knowledge needed to work from home.	**Adoption external to disturbances**

Table 2: Key findings divided into four major themes

6 Discussion

This chapter provides an analysis of the empirical findings in relation to theory as well as goes back to the research questions by answering them separately with the empirical findings and its analysis as basis. Lastly, this chapter provides a discussion of this study's validity, reliability and generalizability.

6.1 Analysis of results

Supported and backed up by the results of the survey, the interviews show patterns and correlations with regard to managing change in a public organization in times of a crisis. This study shows that each of Kotter's (1996) eight steps is of different importance, with some being more relevant under certain circumstances. The first step, increasing urgency, is especially important in order to maintain the employees motivation to participate in and contribute to the change. Their involvement and engagement can only be activated by making the urgency visible, through clarifying the reasons and goals. Most employees could not say why the change process started in the first place, which contributed to their confusion and frustration.

Kotter's (1996) second step, building a guiding team, is highly relevant in terms of leadership. The qualitative results of this study prove that qualified leaders of the change, a clearly defined and tangible vision and end goal and an effective information flow are key in order to move forward in the change process. Leaders need to take ownership and show responsibility, not only in times of success, when reaching milestones, but in difficult times, when deadlines are postponed and difficult decisions have to be made. Leadership also needs to make the vision and end goal clear to all individuals involved. This study shows that employees need to know why the change is necessary, what exactly will happen, how it is done and how it affects them, what the outcome should be and how long it will take. This prevents them from losing motivation, looking for another job and actively sabotaging the change process. Leaders can be appointed, steering groups and a management team in place, but employees still criticize a lack of leadership, which means that structures have been introduced but true leadership is more than just organizational matters.

This is where communication and involvement come into place, which then lead to trust and engagement.

It turns out that communication is not only relevant as step four. A communication strategy needs to be in place during all eight steps. When the urgency is not properly communicated and understood by the affected workforce, the next steps are deemed to fail. Communication skills are also needed by the change leaders. Clear, honest, consistent, simple and reassuring communication is key, especially in the beginning of the process, but it should be maintained towards the end. An overly positive attitude and happy talk is not appreciated and leads to distrust and more confusion. Organizations need to give out information in a quick, transparent and thoughtful way.

With regard to the competencies Kotter (1996) describes, this study showed that happy talk and a "low-confrontation culture" is to be avoided from an early stage onwards. Once the employees, who most likely already know when something is not going as planned, hear that, in any posted updates and meetings, any problems suddenly disappear, they think the management team wants to hide and cover the truth. A similar reaction is triggered when critique and negative feedback is neglected. That leads to distrust. Another complacency that turned out to be highly relevant is the organizational structure. If it is too narrow in terms of the employees' roles, tasks and impact, they are most likely to stop pushing the change and might even look for another job.

It has been identified that public organizations struggle most with the length of change processes and the top-down approaches and hierarchies. Other than that managing change is similar to public organizations and depends more on the specific type of change than the sector. In order to tackle the issue of the length of the process, public organizations need to focus on Kotter's (1996) first step. If the process takes over a year but the urgency stops after a month, employees see no reason to contribute to the change anymore. Same goes for both the leadership and communication aspect. It is harmful to the change process if the change is communicated and led less throughout the lengthy process. The urgency needs to be maintained until the end of the process, so that it drives the change. Communication should also involve regular updates about milestones and setbacks. It is not only about giving information, but also receiving feedback, creating

opportunities for anyone to voice opinions and concerns anonymously. Making them feel heard is one of those aspects that increase their involvement and engagement.

External factors can have an impact on many factors that are important for the organization and its change process. As important communication is, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the means of communication. Besides a few delays, the aspect of digital work has shaped the change process the most. Before, face-to-face chats in the hallways, cafeteria and offices happened daily. Meetings were conducted in person in the office building and change leaders and managers saw their teams on a daily basis. The crisis turned everything digital. Virtual meetings, chats on Microsoft Teams and home offices replaced all that has been routine in the previous years and decades. In this particular case the digital infrastructure was rated as very appropriate, and training and webinars prepared the workforce for their remote work.

This shows that external factors like a crisis have to be implemented into the strategy immediately. They can have positive and negative impacts, which have to be identified by the change managers. The positive ones then need to be made use of. As external factors can disrupt a change process at any time, Kotter's (1996) eight steps need to be viewed and used as a flexible scheme. An external factor can cause delays and certain steps can be revisited or skipped, some may even have to be repeated several times.

6.2 Research Questions

Going back to the research questions, the material has as shown provided a rich foundation for answering the questions and therefore, fulfil this study's purpose.

6.2.1 What strategic options for managing change are there in public organizations?

The findings suggest that communication is an important tool, no matter which stage the change is in. It is a tool for involvement, information, sense-making and creating a sense of belonging. Cultural changes within the organization have to be recognized as well. The study shows how important a focus on people and their emotions is whenever larger amounts of individuals are affected by the change process. A reorganization does not only change structures but it involves peoples' needs and leads to cultural shifts. Communication has to be maintained in every step

of the process. As mentioned, based on the length of changes in public organizations, as well as the political influence and hierarchical structure, communication needs to be used to increase the involvement of the workforce and the urgency of the change. With hierarchies and top-down structures it is necessary to show strong leadership and motivate and engage everyone involved

Though public organizations face little to no competition, related to theories within New Public Management, more competitive thinking and behavioral patterns are beneficial for organizations within the public sector. Public organizations, just as private ones, face the challenge of the war for talent. If they cannot keep up with the benefits of working for private organizations, they will lose in the fight for top talents. In many aspects it can be helpful to adapt to and adopt or borrow private-sector management practices. With regard to change processes it turns out that, as an organization modernizes, employees criticize top-down decision-making and behind-closed-doors management styles.

6.2.2 What implications can certain strategies have on employees' attitudes towards a change process?

Involvement has the most positive influence on employees' attitude and motivation. Those who feel not involved will get frustrated, start sabotaging the process and find ways to leave the organization. Taking ownership and responsibility avoids losing the trust of the employees. Disclosing information and happy talk may be used to avoid chaos and negative emotions, however, it leads to exactly that. If the communication and information flow fails, there is a high risk of employees' seeing the change process as a disturbance and inconvenience.

6.2.3 What factors could positively influence the perception of a change management process in public organizations?

These are closely related to the strategies mentioned above. Openness and bottom-up decision-making can positively affect change processes within the public sector. Though the structures are mainly hierarchical, opinions of those working for the organization need to be considered as the organization does not function without its employees. They want to be involved as it affects their professional and private

lives. Important is also a recognition of the change as a major adjustment for the workforce, especially if at the same time a crisis merges their private and professional life by working from home. Communication should be a two-way street.

6.2.4 How can external disturbances be described and analyzed in relation to a change process in a public organization?

An external disturbance such as a pandemic already puts an organization in an additional change process. Kotter's (1996) step one, urgency, has to be revisited and is more relevant than ever. Though the external factor may not be directly related to the original change process, it shifts the working mode, the timeline and many other aspects. Urgency can get lost and has to be reactivated. The change within the organization and the new possible effects of the external factor needs to be recognized and communicated. If strategy, vision and end goal change, this must be addressed in order to avoid distress, confusion and resentment of any sort. The need for information, support and involvement is much higher than initially. In this specific case, when the pandemic hit the process was put on hold and the missing sense of urgency was apparent. Each step, regardless if it's Kotter's (1996) model or any other change management model, has to be revisited to ensure continuity. Organizations can make use of the advantages of an external factor, such as being fuel for digitization, and implement those into their strategy. Of course, on the other hand disadvantages also have to be identified and considered early on. They can be an opportunity to modernize and re-evaluate current working processes.

It can be concluded that Kotter's (1996) eight steps are applicable to the public sector, though for public organizations increasing urgency and involving employees by overcoming strict top-down structures, thereby leadership, and communicating in a clear and consistent way have a large impact on change processes. Kotter's steps may also be revisited and changed in their order and weight as an external factor like a crisis comes into place. The advantages and disadvantages of an external factor need to be identified immediately and implemented into the strategy.

6.3 Discussion of validity, reliability and generalizability

Guidelines from Sekaran and Bouige (2016) and Kvale (2008) were followed to ensure validity and reliability. Several measures have been taken to maintain this level of quality throughout the data collection and analysis of the interviews and survey results. Each measure is discussed more in detail below.

6.3.1 Validity and Reliability

In terms of qualitative research, having strong validity is correlated with strength and correctness of statements (Kvale, 2008). In this study, validity is mainly ensured and strengthened by its mixed methods approach, in which material and findings have been compared to each other in order to either strengthen or weaken statements and arguments presented by participants.

In order to make sure the findings are reliable this study makes use of two different research methods, both qualitative and quantitative. In this case the quantitative part, the survey, is used to review and verify the findings of the interviews as they represent only eight opinions of the affected departments and they were partly selected by the organization itself. Guidelines on interviews and surveys for research purposes were strictly followed in order to avoid leading or confusing questions and make sure that the questions are neutrally phrased, open and leave room for the interviewees to answer in a non-biased way. A lower reliability could also arise during the stages of transcription and data analysis (Kvale, 2008), which was worked against by dividing the material amongst us by transcribing and analyzing the material separately before jointly going through the material. By doing this double process, we have also ensured that the analysis is not biased towards one view more than the other.

Furthermore, to obtain parallel-form reliability it is advised to use two different research methods to measure the same ideas (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016) which also serves the purpose of this study and therefore, increases its reliability.

6.3.2 Generalizability

By providing a detailed research design in which we lay out sampling methods, data collection methods and how we have gone about the study, we ensure the study's replicability – which according to (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016) is a hallmark of scientific research. Additionally, providing a detailed description of the research design, as done in the methodological chapter, also increases a study's generalizability. Although a specific case study is difficult to generalize, the more generalizable its research design and methods are, the greater is its usefulness and value (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). As for the questionnaire, we formed the survey questions based on existing knowledge in the field of quantitative surveys to phrase questions in the most unbiased way possible. To further minimize the room for error, we ran a test survey amongst friends prior to sending out the real one. By doing this, we had a chance to change and re-phrase any questions that were confusing or unnecessary. Furthermore, the trial run also allowed us to catch any cognitive biases.

7 Conclusions

In conclusion, this study has shown that communication is key in a change process in a public organization, and the quality of the communication determines whether or not it is useful and serves a purpose. Also, it is shown that communication can be used as a strategic tool to foster involvement and create a shared purpose and sense of urgency. Therefore, one could suggest that viewing communication as a strategic tool in change processes in public organizations is advantageous for management teams. Also, it is shown that communication does not serve any use if it is only going one direction. Participants in this study clearly highlighted feedback opportunities as important and as a way of feeling more involved which indicates that creating a well-functioning structure for continuous feedback can have a positive impact on attitudes toward change in public organizations.

Furthermore, this study shows that employees in a public organization seem to want to be, or at least feel, involved in the change process. However, if management asks for feedback and wants to involve employees, this should be done in a valuable way. This means that it is unnecessary to waste employees time with exercises, assignments and activities that are perceived as just ticking the box as it, as shown by the results, can have an opposite effect. Hence, every activity within a change process has to create value, as shown in this study, it appears employees can clearly tell whether activities are well-planned and serves the change process' overall purpose or not.

Finally, the results show that people are indeed one of the most important assets in an organization which is supported by Amabile and Kramer (2011), who also show that employees often do not think their employers appreciate their value. The results from this case study further indicate that employees feel managers tend to forget them in major change processes. Additionally, changing and, or, adapting the culture is as shown in this study just as important as every other aspect. Feeling psychologically safe is a fundamental key factor for accepting and embracing change (Edmondson & Kramer, 2004; Edmondson, 2002), if the culture does not feel safe, then employees are not going to embrace and accept the change either.

7.1 Contributions and Further Research

This study and its findings shed light on those factors and strategies that can drive change management in organizations, looking at the specific needs of the public sector and the shift in the importance of those factors and strategies when being adjusted to a digitization process fueled by a pandemic. Few researchers have looked into the special conditions of change management in public organizations. Though many strategies are overlapping, the public sector does show that some adjustments have to be made in terms of change management theory. A crisis to the extent of the COVID-19 pandemic has rarely ever hit and shook up organizations, so even fewer research relates to this type of crisis. Also, rarely has there ever been an external factor that fueled the digitization of organizations that much and that fast.

Furthermore, this study is unique in its research design, as it contributes with material derived from a specific case study through the lens of both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. Not only does this study contribute with rich material and findings on a contemporary problem, but it also contributes with data which can be regarded as highly reliable and valid as the findings from the respective approaches have been strengthened by each other.

In terms of further research, to have a deeper look at change management processes in public as opposed to private organizations, a comparative study may be conducted to further narrow down and understand the aspects that make change processes within the public sector unique. As a reorganization in the middle of a pandemic that fuels digitization is a very specific change process, further research may also look at different types of changes and their specific needs concerning Kotter's steps. The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on the way of working and on both the professional and private life of the workforce, so what about other types of external factors? How do they affect change processes? One may also study the effect of various communication strategies on change processes, especially digital communication, as this has been identified as a major influence. Which communication strategies can be used for each step? Looking at the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic with regard to digitization and implications on future change processes can also be an option for research.

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9 Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Background questions (information about the participant)
1. How old are you?
2. Could you tell me about your position, what is your role and responsibilities?
3. For how long have you had this role and within your department?
4. For how long have you been working at Malmö Stad?
5. What is your highest level of education?

I.   Perception of communication

How did you first hear about this change process that your department is going through?

What have been your primary sources of information during this process?

What communication channels have been made available to you to give feedback and voice your opinions?

When changes have occurred during the process, how have these been communicated to you?

To your understanding, how is the digital infrastructure at your workplace meeting the needs of a digital workplace?

How do you perceive the tone of the communication that you've encountered throughout the process?

How do you think the tonality of the communication has affected your view of the change process?

Attitude towards the reorganization

Have you been through a similar process before – if so, could you please tell us about it.

     If yes: What are the most distinguishing differences between this process and the one you've experienced before?

To your understanding, why is this change process done?

How are you involved in the process?

Is the reorganization affecting your current or most recent role within the organization, if so how (and how do you feel about it)?

What concerns have you had before and during the reorganization, could you please elaborate on them?

      (Follow-up) - Have you taken any specific actions to these concerns, if so – what have you done?

To your best understanding, what do you think is important when implementing change in a public organization?

What factors could possibly complicate a change process?

What strategies can you identify as part of this change process?

  II.   Clarity of vision and end-goal

To your understanding, what is the end-goal of this process?

To your understanding, what is the vision of this reorganization?

What do you think are key factors in achieving the set objectives?

Do you think goals and having a vision is important when implementing change within an organization - if so, why?

  III.   Adjustment to the COVID-19 pandemic

When you first learned about having to work from home, what was your initial reaction?

      Follow-up: How do you currently feel about working from home?

What means have you been giving to improve your home office, and do you think these have had an impact on your feelings towards being part of a merger?

What do you think are the differences when merging the two departments when working remotely in comparison to being physically at the office?

To what degree have virtual meetings contributed to your involvement and understanding of the change?

Appendix 2: Consent Form for Participants

Consent to take part in research

I _____ voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences.

I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

I agree with my Zoom interview being audio-recorded.

I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially and all interviews will be fully anonymous and will only be used within the thesis.

I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous to all third parties, including Malmö Stad.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted.

I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for the researchers only.

I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Anna Fältström, Lioba Frings, Lund University School of Economics and Management
annafaltstrom@hotmail.se
li1645fr-s@student.lu.se

_____   _____

Signature of participant   Date

Appendix 3: Survey

Undersökning av uppfattningar kring förändringsprojektet DIOS

Hej!

Stort tack för att du tar dig tiden att dela med dig av dina tankar, känslor och reflektioner kring den förändringsprocess din arbetsplats genomgår i samband med projekt DIOS och dess omorganisation. Samtliga svar är anonyma och kommer att sammanställas i tabellform för att sedan användas som underlag för analys i vår masteruppsats.

Syftet med vår masteruppsats är att utveckla en djupare förståelse för förändringsprocesser i offentlig verksamhet, där kommunikation särskilt används som ett verktyg för att driva förändringar. Vid minsta fråga eller fundering är du varmt välkommen att höra av dig till oss via mail, eller telefon - inga frågor är för stora eller små!

Återigen, stort tack för ditt deltagande,

Anna Fältström & Lioba Frings
Masterstudenter vid Ekonomihögskolan Lunds Universitet
Handledare: Ola Mattisson

annafaltstrom@hotmail.se
li1645fr-s@student.lu.se
072 396 07 66
* Required

1. Hur gammal är du? *

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ 20 år eller yngre

    ◯ 21 - 30

    ◯ 31 - 40

    ◯ 41 - 50

    ◯ 51 - 60

    ◯ > 60

2. Vilken är din högsta avslutade utbildning? *

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Gymnasium

    ◯ Universitet/högskola

    ◯ Yrkeshögskola

    ◯ Komvux

    ◯ Folkhögskola

    ◯ Annat

3. Hur länge har du arbetat i din nuvarande roll? *

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Mindre än 1 år

    ◯ 1 - 5 år

    ◯ 6 - 10 år

    ◯ Mer än 10 år

4. Tycker du att omorganisationen har en vision? *

Mark only one oval.

◯ Ja

◯ Nej

◯ Till viss grad

5. Tycker du att omorganisationen har ett/flera mål? *

Mark only one oval.

◯ Ja

◯ Nej

◯ Till viss grad

6. Vet du varför Malmö Stad gör den här omorganisationen? *

Mark only one oval.

◯ Ja

◯ Nej

◯ Till viss grad

7. I vilken utsträckning känner du dig involverad i förändringsprocessen? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Inte involverad alls	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Mycket involverad

8. Enligt din uppfattning, finns det en tydlig strategi för förändringsprojektet? *

Mark only one oval.

◯ Ja

◯ Nej

◯ Till viss grad

9. Har omorganisationen påverkat din nuvarande, eller tidigare roll inom Malmö Stad? *

Mark only one oval.

◯ Ja, på ett positivt sätt

◯ Ja, på ett negativt sätt

◯ Nej, min roll har inte blivit direkt påverkad

10. Hur tycker du att arbeta hemifrån har påverkat omorganisationen? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Gjort det mycket mer komplicerat/långsammare & svårare	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Gjort det mycket mindre komplicerat/snabbare & e

11. I vilken utsträckning möter den digitala infrastrukturen på din arbetsplatsen kraven för en välfungerande digital arbetsplats? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Mycket låg utsträckning	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Väldigt hög utsträckning

12. I vilken utsträckning anser du att du har den kunskap och de medel du behöver för att arbeta kvalitativt hemifrån? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Väldigt låg utsträckning	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Mycket hög utsträckning

13. I vilken utsträckning har digitala möten bidragit till din känsla av involvering och förståelse för förändringsprocessen? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Inte bidragit alls	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Bidragit väldigt mycket

14. Vilka är, och har varit dina primära informationskällor under förändringsprocessen?

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Arbetsgruppsträffar
- ☐ Närmsta chef
- ☐ APT
- ☐ Enhets/sektionsmöte
- ☐ Kommunikationswebbplats
- ☐ Samverkan/facket
- ☐ Förvaltningsträffar STK
- ☐ Esset SEF (Personaltidning)
- ☐ Projektgruppsmöten
- ☐ Teams
- ☐ Informella samtal med kollegor
- ☐ Webinar
- Other: ☐ _____

15. Vilka kommunikationskanaler har funnits tillgängliga för dig att framföra feedback eller ställa frågor? *

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Kommentarsfält
- ☐ Teams
- ☐ Verbal kommunikation med kollegor/chef
- ☐ Email
- ☐ APT
- ☐ Möten
- Other: ☐ _____

16. Hur uppfattar du tonen på kommunikationen kring förändringsprocessen som du tagit del av under projektets gång? *

Check all that apply.

☐ Hjälpsam
☐ Positiv
☐ Reflekterande
☐ Neutral
☐ Informativ
☐ Kritisk
☐ Förstående
☐ Motiverande
☐ Torr
☐ Inspirerande
☐ Ursäktande
☐ Oroad
☐ Förvirrande
☐ Diplomatisk
☐ Direkt
☐ Optimistisk
☐ Inkluderande
☐ Subjektiv
☐ Exkluderande
☐ Angelägen

17. På vilket sätt har kommunikationens tonalitet påverkat din syn på förändringsprocessen? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Ett mycket negativt sätt	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Ett mycket positivt sätt

18. Vilka av följande faktorer tror du kan göra en förändringsprocess likt den din arbetsplats genomgår mer komplicerad? *

Check all that apply.

☐ Missförstånd orsakade av kommunikation
☐ Externa kriser (till exempel, COVID-19)
☐ Avsaknad av ledarskap
☐ Digitalt samarbete (till exempel, digitala möten)
☐ Villkor och policys som är specifika för offentlig verksamhet
☐ Arbetssätt som följt samma rutin under en längre period
Other: ☐ _____

19. Vilka av följande faktorer har oroat dig mest, före och under omorganisationen? *

Check all that apply.

☐ Förlora mitt jobb
☐ Flytta till ett annat kontor
☐ Få en ny chef
☐ Få ett nytt team/nya kollegor
☐ Nya rutiner
☐ Nya arbetsuppgifter/ansvarsområden
☐ En ökad svårighetsgrad
Other: ☐ _____

20. Enligt din uppfattning, vilka av följande faktorer är viktigast vid förändring i offentlig verksamhet? *

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Tydlig kommunikation
- [ ] Möjlighet att ge feedback
- [ ] Att medarbetare är involverade
- [ ] Hålla sig inom given tidsram
- [ ] Att känna sig stöttad
- [ ] Enkel tillgång till information
- [ ] Kontinuerliga uppdateringar

Other: [ ] _____

21. Vänligen gradera i vilken utsträckning du känt dig förvirrad under projektets gång *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Väldigt förvirrad	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Inte förvirrad alls

22. Vänligen gradera i vilken utsträckning du känt dig motiverad under projektets gång *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Inte motiverad alls	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Väldigt motiverad

23. Vänligen gradera i vilken utsträckning du känt dig hörd under projektets gång *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Inte hörd alls	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Mycket hörd

24. I vilken utsträckning ser du fram emot att börja arbeta i, eller med den nya organisationen? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Ser inte fram emot alls	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Ser mycket fram emot det