



SCHOOL OF
ECONOMICS AND
MANAGEMENT

Between Expectations and Experiences

*A qualitative study of individuals' perceptions and responses to a
new reform at the workplace*

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Master's Program in Managing People, Knowledge and Change

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Abstract

- Title** Between Expectations and Experiences.
- Course** BUSN49 - Degree Project in Managing People, Knowledge and Change.
- Authors** Hanna Johansson, Eleonora Lundquist.
- Supervisor** Olof Hallonsten, Lund University, Sweden.
- Purpose** The purpose is to understand how individuals perceive and respond to a reform, particularly with the dichotomy between “surface”—the internal presentation of the reform—and “substance”—the internal reality experienced by employees—through the implementation of an Activity-Based Workplace (ABW) at Havsby.
- Methodology** Our study is qualitative and follows the interpretivist tradition and studies a single case organization, Havsby, through an abductive approach. Data was collected by 11 semi-structured interviews.
- Theoretical Framework** We aim to explore the purpose of Activity-Based Workplace (ABW) by leveraging earlier research and examining the empirical background at Havsby. By grounding our analysis in Scandinavian institutionalism, we theorize employee responses using frameworks such as the EVLN model, as well as research on cynicism and functional stupidity.
- Conclusion** Our case study reveals considerable ambiguity in how the reform is perceived and how employees interpret a new workplace setting. We identified both surface and substance elements throughout the case, concluding by suggesting the concept of functional acceptance.
- Key Words** Scandinavian Institutionalism, Surface and Substance, Exit, Voice, Loyalty, Neglect, Cynicism, Functional Stupidity, Functional Acceptance, Activity-Based Workplace (ABW).

Acknowledgements

We are immensely grateful for the support received throughout this journey and would like to extend our thanks to all those who contributed. We are particularly grateful for Filippa (pseudonym) and all the interviewees at Havsby for their keen interest and positive approach to participating in our study. Your enthusiastic help in arranging the interviews and your warm hospitality have been invaluable. Your contributions are the foundation of this thesis.

Moreover, a special mention must be made to our supervisor, Olof Hallonsten, for his invaluable guidance and mentorship. Your consistent direction and insightful feedback were instrumental in shaping our work. We deeply appreciate the time you dedicated to answering our questions and discussing with us.

Additionally, we would like to thank each other for a truly collaborative and enjoyable partnership.

Eleonora, I am profoundly grateful for having shared this journey with you. Your critical insights and unwavering support have been essential to our success. I truly appreciate your dedication and the considerable time you invested in our thesis, especially when my other commitments demanded my attention. Your confidence in our project and in me has been incredibly encouraging. Thank you for your understanding and partnership.

Hanna, I am deeply thankful for the opportunity to work alongside you during this thesis journey. Your exceptional insights and dedication have been invaluable. I have greatly admired your ability to stay focused and motivated, inspiring me to do the same. Your thoughtful feedback and collaborative spirit have made this experience truly rewarding. Thank you for being such a wonderful partner throughout this process.

We hope our thesis provides an insightful read!

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1. Introduction

The idea (with ABW) is that you should be able to sit anywhere in this landscape and still have the same conditions. And you should be able to adjust the chair individually for yourself. [...] Either you can sit in an open area. But if you need to focus, there are private rooms that you can go into if you need to concentrate and close a door. (Alexandra)

For me, quite frankly, it's about the employer wanting to reduce rental costs. It has very little to do with the person. (Erik)

1.1 Background

This thesis explores whether an Activity-Based Workplace (ABW) constitutes a substantive change that meets the unique needs and values of public sector employees, or if it merely represents a surface-level change motivated by other objectives. Catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the shift from traditional office work to remote setups has led many knowledge workers to develop a preference for flexible working environments. This shift has necessitated a reevaluation of workplace designs, giving rise to various flexible office arrangements (Nanayakkara, Wilkinson, & Halvitigala, 2023; Marzban, Candido, Mackey, Engelen, Zhang & Tjondronegoro, 2023). One of the flexible workplace designs is the Activity-Based Workplace (ABW). The ABW, designed to support diverse office activities such as concentrated work and collaboration, features a range of spaces from open to semi-open and enclosed, all without assigned seating (Eismann, Pakos, Rucker, Meinel, Maier & Voigt, 2022; Wohlers & Hertel, 2017).

The existing research associated with implementation of the Activity-Based Workplace (ABW) tends to discuss the more practical benefits and challenges, with benefits such as increased autonomy and collaboration, and challenges such as noise levels and decreased privacy (Hoendervanger, Ernst, Albers, Mobach & Van Yperen, 2018; Eisman et al., 2022). The management narrative tends to shed light on the benefits of ABW, such as aiming to enhance collaboration and employee satisfaction while reducing rental costs (Veldhoen + Company, n.d.; Schiavo, 2024). However, despite these benefits, studies suggest that ABW

still prioritize cost-saving and efficiency over genuine employee welfare, echoing principles of early 20th-century scientific management (Parker, 2016).

Organizational reforms, such as ABW, often reflect broader societal trends. Drawing from neoinstitutionalism, the concept of organizations mimicking the practices of others is known as isomorphism, as introduced by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). They argue that organizations replicate the formal structures of others in pursuit of embodying the ideal of being rational and contemporary, achieving legitimacy (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Thus, organizations might implement reforms because they are fashionable, such as the Activity-Based Workplace (ABW), without considering employees' actual reality. Brunsson and Olsen (1990) assert that individuals targeted by reforms may oppose these changes if they disagree with the organization's perspective of what constitutes effective solutions or desirable outcomes, stating: *"Their resistance to reforms can thus be due to their practical experiences, which in turn have led to institutionalized structures and processes, knowing that the proposed reforms are based on, for example, incorrect premises, that they are contradictory, or perhaps even destructive to the operation"* (Brunsson & Olsen 1990, pp. 18-19. Our translation).

In Sweden, there is a growing critique of the public sector's adoption of corporate management practices and fashion trends, referred to as management bureaucracy (Hall, 2012). Critics argue that integrating business principles into public governance diverts resources from core services, potentially leading to increased administrative costs and overshadowing the needs of frontline professionals (Hall, 2012; Abramowicz, 2023). The term "corporatization", coined by Brunsson (1991), refers to the process of reorganizing administrative positions and operations within public organizations by applying corporate business models as a framework (Kvåle, 2000; Forssell, 1992; Löfström, 2003). Furthermore, the term "corporatization" resonates with the principles of Scandinavian institutionalism (e.g. Vrangbæk, Forsell & Jansson, 2000; Christensen & Lægheid, 2002), which suggest that organizations increasingly resemble each other, focusing on the local implementation of reforms and the translation of organizational ideas within their own structures (Røvik, 2022).

Scholars specializing in organizational studies have noted a growing divergence between the external presentation and the internal realities of organizations. This divergence highlights a growing emphasis on surface over substance within organizational contexts (e.g. Meyer &

Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Alvesson & Willmott, 1993; Alvesson, Bridgman, & Willmott, 2011; Hallonsten, 2022). Specifically, in the context of the Activity-based Workplace (ABW), management narratives frequently emphasize the potential benefits. However, there is a gap in academic research exploring the disparity between these optimistic projections and the actual experiences of employees. Furthermore, while existing studies have explored how organizational images are manipulated and perceived from employees' perspectives (Collinson, 1992; Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Fleming, 2013), there is a lack of attention in understanding how employees respond if their experiences of an organizational reform, such as ABW, do not align with the perceived purpose.

Throughout the thesis, we will define “surface” as the internal presentation representing the purpose of the ABW as communicated from management, and “substance” as the actual organizational experience and reality of the reform from the employees' perspective. On the same note, we will apply reform and translation theory from Scandinavian institutionalism to analyze the ABW as a reform initiative and explore both its implementation and its translation within the specific case study. Building on a foundation in Scandinavian institutionalism, with the use of theories regarding employee responses to organizational change, this study will explore the divergence between the management's portrayal of ABW and the employees' actual experiences. By doing so, the study aims to uncover the deeper implications of this reform, assessing its impact on employee satisfaction and organizational functionality, and investigating the alignment between stated organizational goals and actual outcome.

1.2 Problematization

While there is an increasing adoption of Activity-Based Workplaces (ABW) promising flexibility, much of the existing literature focuses primarily on practical benefits or challenges. However, there remains a notable gap in understanding how employees perceive and experience the purpose of such reforms. Existing research extensively discusses how the external portrayal can misalign with internal realities. Yet, limited exploration exists from the employees' perspective. Although DiMaggio and Powell (1983) describe how organizations mimic each other's structures to appear modern and rational, the practical implications of such mimicry are not fully understood.

1.3 Research Purpose

While this topic can be explored across various contexts, industries, and methodologies, we aim to contribute to the literature by investigating a specific case. Our objective is to understand how individuals perceive and experience a reform, particularly the dichotomy between “surface”—the internal presentation of the reform—and “substance”—the internal reality experienced by employees—through the implementation of Activity-Based Workplace (ABW) within the public sector. Logically, we can draw conclusions about the subject, but questions remain about what happens to employees and how they respond if a proposed reform does not align with the reality of the organization. This forms the basis of this thesis.

Specifically, this study aims to assess whether the Activity-Based Workplace (ABW) genuinely results in a workspace design that meets the specific needs and values of employees, or if it predominantly serves as a superficial change or a change motivated by other objectives. With this goal in mind, our aim is to address the following research questions:

- What are employees’ perceptions and experiences of the intended purpose behind the implementation of an Activity-Based Workplace?
- How do employees adapt their work practices in an Activity-Based Workplace, and what are their responses to this new working environment?

1.4 Thesis outline

The study is divided into six chapters to answer the research questions and fulfill its purpose. The first chapter, *Introduction*, presents the background of the chosen subject and introduces the problem and research purpose. The second chapter, *Literature Review*, explores existing research on Activity-Based Workplaces and chosen relevant theories for the research purpose, providing the academic context for the study. Chapter three, *Methodology*, details the methodological approach, including research design, data collection, data analysis, and a reflective section discussing methodological limitations. In the fourth chapter, *Empirical Analysis*, the empirical evidence from semi-structured interviews is analyzed and interpreted. The fifth chapter, *Discussion*, examines our findings in relation to the previously reviewed literature. Finally, the sixth chapter, *Conclusion*, summarizes the empirical findings, answers

the research questions, highlights theoretical contributions and limitations, and offers recommendations for future research.

2. Literature Review

In this chapter, we will examine the selected theories for investigating employees' perceptions and experiences of the workplace. We will begin by providing background on the emergence of Activity-Based Workplaces (ABW), their rise in popularity, and the current research on ABW. To understand the transition to an Activity-Based Workplace in the public sector, we will delve into Scandinavian institutionalism on reforms and translation to better comprehend the popularity of such workplace design and the adaptation to the specific context. Furthermore, we will explore the concepts of surface and substance, presenting literature related to superficial marketing and policies and the actual substance of the organization. Finally, we will propose theories on different responses to a reform, such as the Exit, Voice and Loyalty model by Hirschman (1970) and theories on cynicism and functional stupidity to easier understand the responses of the respondents in our study if the proposed reform—surface, does not match the reality of the organization—substance.

2.1 The Activity-Based Workplace

The demand for flexible work environments has emerged due to advances in communication technology, the rise of knowledge-intensive work, the COVID-19 pandemic, and an increase in home offices. This shift has led organizations to reevaluate their office spaces, prompting a movement towards flexible office concepts (Nanayakkara, Wilkinson & Halvitigala, 2023). Notably, the concept of Activity-Based Workplaces (ABW), which emerged from the "activity settings" idea developed by architect Robert Luchetti in 1983, has become increasingly popular. ABWs differentiates from traditional workplaces for a variety of open, semi-open, and enclosed areas that cater to different work activities, aiming to enhance efficiency, collaboration, and employee satisfaction while reducing rental costs (Veldhoen + Company, n.d.; Schiavo, 2024). However, despite these benefits, studies like those by Parker (2016) suggest that ABWs may still prioritize cost-saving and efficiency over genuine employee welfare, echoing principles of early 20th-century scientific management.

Research on the effectiveness of ABWs presents mixed findings. Some studies highlight improvements in environmental aspects like air quality, aesthetic enhancements, enhanced communication and interaction that contribute to overall workplace satisfaction (Rolfö, Eklund & Jahncke, 2017; Eismann, Pakos, Rücker, Meinel, Maier & Voigt, 2023;

Hoendervanger et al., 2018). Conversely, research also highlights significant drawbacks, particularly in terms of privacy, concentration, high noise levels and overall satisfaction (De Croon, Sluiter, Kuijer and Frings-Dresen, 2005; Hoendervanger et al., 2018; Engelen et al., 2018; Eismann et al., 2022). Other studies depict that employees often show a preference for certain types of spaces, leading to underutilization of the flexibility offered by ABWs, with some employees feeling the need to “claim” spaces informally, which counteract the objectives of ABW (Appel-Meulenbroek et al., 2011; Rolfö et al., 2017). Other studies suggest that transitioning to ABW does not detrimentally affect well-being or productivity. Most employees found that productivity and well-being remained unchanged post-ABW (Franssila and Kirjonen, 2022; Engelen et al., 2018).

Studies exploring the adoption of desk-sharing policies and the transition of office environments have categorized employee responses into distinct groups based on their adaptability and acceptance of these new norms (Babapour, Karlsson & Osvalder, 2018). Further investigations into ABWs have suggested that their success largely depends on how they are implemented and adopted by the workforce (Marzban, Candido, Mackey, Engelen, Zhang & Tjondronegoro, 2023). Additionally, studies have identified a complex array of responses that vary by demographic factors, such as age, which can influence satisfaction levels and the effectiveness of ABWs in meeting diverse employee needs (Hoendervanger et al., 2018). As organizations continue to navigate the post-COVID landscape, the insights gained from these studies underscore the importance of a nuanced approach to workplace design that accommodates individual preferences and promotes a balance between collaborative opportunities and personal space (Marzban et al., 2023).

2.2 Scandinavian Institutionalism

To better understand the growing adoption of flexible work environments like Activity-Based Workplaces (ABWs), despite mixed evidence regarding their effectiveness, it might be insightful to analyze ABWs through the lens of Scandinavian institutionalism. This approach is particularly relevant due to its emphasis on reforms and the translation theory, which highlights how reforms are adapted and reinterpreted within different organizational contexts. By examining ABWs from this perspective, we can explore how these workplaces are not only responses to external pressures but also reflect an ongoing process of institutional

change and adaptation, where new ideas are continuously molded to fit specific cultural and organizational realities.

Early institutional theory introduced the idea that institutions are not inherently stable but dynamic, evolving through changes in rules and roles. Pioneers like Selznick (1949) highlighted how institutionalism focuses on the interplay between formal and informal structures within organizations, emphasizing that organizations adapt to both internal and external pressures. This led to a deeper understanding of institutionalization, where organizations gradually incorporate local influences and norms (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009). Emerging in the late 1970s and early 1980s, neoinstitutional theory with contributions from Meyer and Rowan (1977) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983) suggests that organizations conform to external norms to gain legitimacy, leading to isomorphism—where organizations become increasingly similar. This evolution of institutionalism shifts the focus from conflicts to how institutionalization limits actions and suppresses self-interests in favor of legitimacy, responding to external pressures and thereby promoting homogeneity and stability across organizations (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009).

Scandinavian institutionalism, emerging in the 1980s, blends these elements of change and stability, offering new perspectives on organizational adaptation, idea adoption, and trend influence through translation theory (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009; Røvik, 2008). Scandinavian institutionalism places its focus on how individual organizations receive external ideas and the ensuing processes resulting from this. It examines the interaction between external reform ideas and individual operations, considering both operational impact and the evolution of ideas resulting from these interactions (Røvik, 2008). Scandinavian institutionalism hence provides insights for understanding how a reform, such as an Activity-Based Workplace, is conceptualized, adopted, and integrated into organizational norms.

Modernized classical institutionalism (focusing on reforms) within the Scandinavian tradition posits that organizations progressively transform into unique institutions where the behaviors and mindsets of members are influenced by rules conditioned by local and historical contexts (March & Olsen, 1984, 1989; Olsen, 1997; Brunsson & Olsen, 1990). Expanding on this, March and Olsen (1984, 1989) contend that the speed of implementation and the nature of the proposed reform will determine whether or not they result in real changes. Waerness (1990) adds that in order to preserve the institutions' identity, reforms should be implemented

gradually. Olsen (1985, 1997) contends that for reform initiatives to be successful, they must align with the institution's technology, logic of action, and values.

Furthermore, Brunsson and Olsen (1990) explain that while well-developed institutions enable coordinated and efficient actions, they also introduce obstacles to reform due to inherent inertia or friction. Eriksson-Zetterquist (2009) echoes this by noting the difficulty of implementing changes in organizations viewed as well-established institutions with fixed routines. Reformers and organization members must both actively participate in reforms for them to be successful. Reform failures frequently result due to members' perceptions that they have a deeper understanding of the organization's operations or from their arguments regarding the suitability of the alternatives provided. Moreover, changing people's behavior presents significant challenges where the resistance is often rooted in habitual thinking or the individual defense of specific interests (Brunsson & Olsen, 1990)

Additionally, the concept of "Translation" within the Scandinavian tradition offers a fresh perspective on organizational change, where local ideas must be translated and materialized for broader dissemination. This theory explores how organizations actively shape, interpret, and implement external ideas, acknowledging the role of intentions, random events, and institutional norms in driving change (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Sahlin-Andersson, 1996; Røvik, 1998; Czarniawska & Sevón, 2005; Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009). Sahlin-Andersson (1996) emphasizes the role of "editing" in this process, where organizations customize models to fit their specific needs, allowing for interpretation and adjustment that leads to the evolution of ideas upon integration.

Røvik (2008) identifies three primary motives for intentional translations. Firstly, translations "can be a conscious, rational act where one tries to create a local version of an idea in order to get the best possible tools in terms of increasing efficiency and achieving better results" (Røvik 2008, p. 218. Our translation). Secondly, translation can occur under the influence of conflicting interests and negotiations that steer it in a certain direction. Reshaping a well-known concept can be justified by creating a local version that does not as strongly challenge specific interests within the organization. Lastly, translations can be performed to achieve symbolic or prestigious effects, although not always expressed (Røvik, 2008).

Moreover, Røvik (2008) identifies reasons for unsuccessful translations and categorizes these into decoupling, where organizations formally adopt new ideas but fail to integrate them into daily practices; rejection, where ideas are initially accepted but later discarded due to conflicts with existing practices and values; and failed implementations, where ideas are put into practice but result in unforeseen or undesirable outcomes. To understand why the implementation of reform ideas often meets resistance and conflict, it is of importance to consider the different interests involved (Røvik, 2008). The incompatibility argument, underscoring the incompatibility of the reform to an organization has two main points. Firstly, employees often possess important "tacit" knowledge of how existing solutions work in practice. When attempting to put the new reform idea into practice, this type of conflict frequently arises, which can occasionally result in its rejection (Røvik, 2008). Another common argument relates to values. Some organizations prioritize protecting specific values and norms. When introduced to reform ideas, these organizations often object that the changes may undermine their core values and commitments (Røvik, 2008). The translator's own assessment of the incompatibility arguments is decisive for three possible actions: abort the reform attempt, adjust the reform idea and translate it into another version, or continue with the chosen course and work to implement the translated version (Røvik 2008, p. 290).

2.3 Surface and Substance

A key theme in neoinstitutionalism as discussed and presented by Meyer and Rowan (1977), along with DiMaggio and Powell (1983), suggest that growth and complexity of organizational structures can be explained by accepted norms, myths or rules, which are generally accepted ideas about how organizations should function. These myths lead organizations to adopt specific structures and practices in order to appear legitimate and to increase their chances of survival, even if the changes do not increase efficiency. In turn, this can lead to a significant gap between an organization's official structure and its actual day-to-day operations (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Alvesson, Bridgman, and Willmott (2011) further discuss this gap between the official surface and the actual substance of organizations, criticizing the mainstream portrayal of organizations as rational and benign entities focused on shared goals and societal good. They argue that the reality of organizational life often involves negative consequences for both society and nature, which are downplayed by these mainstream portrayals.

Gabriel (2008) delves further into the role of image within organizations, illustrating how modern management increasingly revolves around orchestrating spectacles and managing appearances. This focus on image extends beyond mere aesthetic considerations, influencing the core operations and strategic decisions of organizations. Gabriel (2008) points out that such an emphasis can lead to a discrepancy between an organization's public image and its actual internal practices. This divergence can result in organizational activities that prioritize external perceptions over real improvements in efficiency or service quality.

Furthermore, Abrahamson (1991) suggests that organizations adopt managerial practices because they are considered fashionable. He challenges the dominant pro-innovation bias on the diffusion of innovations, which generally portrays innovations as beneficial and their adoption as positive for organizations. Technically inefficient innovations can diffuse, and technically efficient innovations can be rejected. Fads are innovations adopted due to internal group dynamics and imitation, while fashions are innovations promoted by external fashion-setting organizations such as consulting firms. Despite a widespread belief that management fads improve economic performance, research finds no significant positive correlation between the adoption of these techniques and corporate financial outcomes (Staw & Epstein, 2000). However, fads and fashions, if symbolically efficient, can benefit organizations by projecting an image of innovativeness (Nystrom & Starbuck, 1984), leading to a better reputation, perceived innovation, and higher management ratings (Staw & Epstein, 2000).

Moreover, Zbaracki (1998) examines how institutional forces can create a significant disconnect between the rhetoric and reality within organizations. He highlights that managers often adopt and promote a rhetoric of success that might not accurately reflect the actual effectiveness or application of their practices. This overly optimistic rhetoric often does not align with actual outcomes, leading to a cycle where idealized views dominate over real results. As managers shape their experiences to fit their optimistic narratives, the gap between claimed successes and real-world performance persists.

Alvesson and Jonsson (2021) introduce Organizational Dischronization (OD) to describe a situation where partially contradictory logics and inconsistent meanings coexist within an organization. OD suggests that while there is some misunderstanding and differing beliefs, it's not immediately apparent due to the underlying ambiguity. Unlike clear confusion or

conflict, OD shows a lack of clear consensus and reveals a subtle, often unnoticed mismatch in how people make sense of their environment, leading to inconsistent interpretations and actions—or “inconsistent sensemaking and nonsense-making” (Alvesson & Jonsson 2021, p. 745). In many cases, management's attempts to create a common understanding through framing falls short of expectations and are misinterpreted. Some may see no underlying logic, while others believe there is one they cannot identify. This situation reflects institutional logics devolving into organizational “illogics,” where broader organizational principles are locally viewed as confusing or meaningless (Alvesson & Jonsson, 2021, p. 745).

In summary, research in organizational studies indicates that elements of substantive practices are increasingly being seen as components of image-building. This discourse of fashion can lead to meaningless imitation and superficial initiatives that lack local relevance that could foster genuine organizational change (Prasad, Prasad & Mir, 2010). There is often a weak or nonexistent connection between attempts to polish organizational image and the actual substantive activities within these organizations. Appearances are prioritized over substance in modern organizational life, with managers and communication officers increasingly focused more on enhancing appearances than on fulfilling primary responsibilities (Hallonsten, 2022). While some research suggests that organizations can align their external image with internal realities and employee needs, the prevailing evidence points to a persistent and growing gap between organizational surface and substance, requiring further investigation (Hallonsten, 2022).

2.4 Exit, Voice, Neglect and Loyalty

To fully grasp employees’ experiences and reactions to a reform and how it’s translated—such as Activity-Based Workplace (ABW)—and therefore determine if it’s a substantial reform or merely surface level appearance, it’s useful to explore theories on organizational change responses. Hirschman’s (1970) Exit, Voice, and Loyalty model offers a foundational framework for understanding how employees respond to dissatisfaction within an organization. Exit occurs when members leave the organization in search of better alternatives, compelling management to address the underlying causes of departure. Voice involves members directly expressing their dissatisfaction to management or higher authorities, prompting an investigation into the roots of the discontent and potential solutions. This option is particularly relevant in settings where members choose to stay and advocate for

change from within rather than leaving. Loyalty adds a deeper dimension to the interplay between exit and voice. Defined by a profound attachment to the organization, loyalty not only restrains exit but also encourages voice, serving as a crucial element in the organization's adaptive and corrective processes. It positions loyalty as strategically significant, fostering an environment where constructive feedback is valued, which helps prevent declines in organizational standards and performance.

Building on Hirschman's contributions, Rusbult, Zembrodt and Gunn (1982) and Farrell (1983) scale up with a fourth strategy, neglect. Neglect is similar to loyalty since it is passive but also has similarities with exit because of its destructive nature. Rusbult et al (1982) argue that higher prior satisfaction and greater investment in the relationship would promote constructive responses (voice and loyalty) and diminish the likelihood of destructive responses (exit and neglect). Farrell (1983) found that lower job satisfaction not only led to higher turnover and reduced organizational commitment but also to behaviors like seeking transfers, tardiness, and increased error rates. Importantly, the study reveals that job dissatisfaction can lead to a range of behaviors, not just exit. This challenges the idea that exit is the only way to understand how employees react to job dissatisfaction. Farrell's (1983) work suggests that employees may choose to actively address dissatisfaction (voice), passively remain loyal in hopes of improvement (loyalty), or disengage through neglect or exit.

Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers and Mainous (1988) build on the studies by Hirschman (1970), Rusbult et al. (1982) and Farrell (1983) and summarize the different responses through following; Exit involves departing from an organization, which can occur through resignation, moving to another position, exploring new job opportunities, or contemplating leaving. Voice is the process of actively and positively seeking to enhance conditions by discussing issues with supervisors or peers, initiating problem-solving actions, proposing improvements, or turning to external bodies such as unions for assistance or engaging in whistle-blowing. Loyalty is characterized by a passive yet hopeful stance towards waiting for situations to get better, demonstrating support both publicly and privately for the organization, maintaining a positive outlook for future improvements, or engaging in actions that reflect commitment and responsibility towards the organization. Neglect is the passive deterioration of work quality and engagement, manifested in decreased motivation or

productivity, habitual tardiness or absences, engaging in personal matters during work hours, or an uptick in mistakes.

Understanding the Exit, Voice, Loyalty and Neglect (EVLN) model has challenged many researchers and scholars. In relation to change and resistance, Piderit (2000) called for a nuanced understanding of ambivalence towards change. She critiqued traditional views on resistance to change and proposed a new perspective that considers individual responses to be multidimensional, involving cognitive, emotional, and intentional dimensions. She emphasizes the limitations of the traditional resistance model, which tends to oversimplify employee responses and often dismisses the potentially positive intentions behind negative responses, such as a genuine concern for organizational well-being. By examining employee reactions from multiple perspectives, we can improve our ability to anticipate their behavior in previously unpredictable situations. When figuring out whether an employee responds to dissatisfaction, it is helpful to consider that employees often find it harder to express negative emotions than negative thoughts. This difficulty suggests that employees might prefer to voice concerns rather than remain loyal or neglectful when they hold mixed feelings about a change, as articulating beliefs is easier for them. Conversely, when employees face emotional ambivalence or a mismatch between their thoughts and feelings regarding a change, they may lean towards neglect, struggling with their feelings in isolation (Piderit, 2000).

2.5 Cynicism and Functional Stupidity

After introducing the EVLN model (Hirschman, 1970; Farrell, 1983; Rusbult & Zembrodt, 1983; Rusbult et al., 1988) scholars have extended the model to incorporate other responses. Naus, van Iterson and Roe (2007) found that employees undergoing an organizational change had another reaction as well, cynicism. Organizational cynicism is described and understood as a negative attitude toward one's employer, characterized through three dimensions; by a belief in the organization's lack of integrity, negative feelings toward the organization, and a tendency toward critical and disparaging behavior that aligns with these beliefs and feelings (Dean, Brandes & Dharwadkar, 1998).

Cynicism often serves as a self-defense mechanism, helping employees cope with disappointments caused by organizational actions and management decisions (Reichers, Wanous & Austin, 1997). While cynicism can lead to apathy, alienation, and other negative

effects it also acts as a potential voice of conscience within the organization, signaling issues that need to be addressed (Dean et al., 1998; Bommer, Rich & Rubin, 2005). According to Naus et al. (2007), cynicism embodies a critical skepticism in response to perceived adverse changes, and therefore represents a form of engagement different from responses in the EVLN model. Employees who adopt a cynical stance may appear negative, but they remain invested in the company and seek to see problems resolved. However, Naus et al. (2007) conclude that cynicism is not a desirable response for managers to encourage, noting its association with burnout and toxic work climates. This highlights the complex role cynicism plays within organizational dynamics, where it can both signal deep-seated issues and contribute to negative workplace environments.

Some cynicism might manifest as “stupidity self-management”, meaning that individuals consciously put reflexivity and critical thinking on hold and simply play along (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012, pp. 1207–1208; Paulsen, 2017, pp. 204–206). Functional stupidity is referred to by Alvesson and Spicer (2012, p. 1194) as “an absence of reflexivity, a refusal to use intellectual capacities in other than myopic ways, and avoidance of justifications”. They argue that functional stupidity is commonly found in settings dominated by an economy of persuasion, emphasizing image and symbolic manipulation where activities like marketing, public relations and image building become more central than actual production, which can diminish the importance of substance within organizations (Alvesson, 1990; Sennett, 2006, 2008; Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). These efforts aim to shape appealing images and narratives that influence both external groups, for example customers, and internal groups such as employees, focusing on corporate culture, branding, and organizational identity (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). Although the specific details of these efforts vary, they all aim to convince and attract employees to adopt beliefs that enhance the image of their organizations, their roles, and ultimately, their own self-perceptions (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012).

The effectiveness of these efforts of creating a favorable organizational image for internal groups such as employees is debatable. Some employees may react negatively to these attempts at manipulation, viewing them as inauthentic or oppressive. This resistance can manifest overt responses including the formation of workplace counter-cultures, where groups of employees actively oppose the organization’s official culture and values or cynicism, where employees may outwardly comply with organizational norms while privately rejecting and mocking them (Collinson, 1992; Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Fleming,

2013). Nonetheless, a significant number of workers will accept this symbolic manipulation while building a deep commitment with the company and its principles (Kunda, 1992; Alvesson, 1995; Casey, 1995). Employees in environments that value conformity over autonomy are frequently required to uphold and support the favorable reputation of the company. While some may be cynical, believing in the projected image can make persuading others simpler and more effective, potentially enhancing the work experience and overall organizational climate (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012, p. 1204).

Expanding on these observations, Paulsen (2017) distinguishes functional stupidity from more reflective forms of organizational compliance. He discusses functional stupidity as a lack of critical reflection. While we're engaged in tasks without much thought ("getting the job done"), we can still reflect on our lack of reflexivity. Although Paulsen (2017) notes that this automatic processing is sometimes identified as "functional stupidity", he means that true self-deception occurs only in our reflective moments, as the unreflective mind focuses on tasks rather than self-analysis. For instance, in the act of performing our job duties, we might neglect to question irrational tasks, a choice characteristic of functional stupidity. Simply put: "Functional stupidity in itself is unreflective in the sense that one cannot think about it without being reflective, thus suspending the stupidity" (Paulsen, 2017, p. 205). Functional stupidity could be seen as a coping mechanism through "ego-dystonic compliance", where employees "enter in order to endure long hours of imposed work assignments we would rather not perform" (Paulsen 2017, p. 185). This could help them to manage their work by reducing the burden of questioning or critiquing the rationale of their tasks, thus being productive through "not thinking too much", "getting on with the job", "staying positive" and further signs of functional stupidity (Paulsen, 2017, p. 193).

2.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter, we delved into various theoretical frameworks to better understand employees' perceptions and experiences concerning workplace reforms, focusing on the discrepancy between proposed changes and actual organizational practices. We began by exploring the emergence and popularity of Activity-Based Workplaces (ABWs) and assessed its implementation and effectiveness through the lens of Scandinavian institutionalism, which emphasizes the adaptation and translation of popular reform ideas to organizational contexts. We discussed the dynamic between surface-level marketing and substantive organizational

changes, to help us investigate further whether ABWs truly improve workplace design or primarily serve other purposes. Additionally, we explored employee responses to organizational reforms by employing the EVLN model, along with studies on cynicism and functional stupidity, to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities in employee reactions when confronted with reforms that may not correspond with the actual dynamics of their organizational environment. This comprehensive review sets the stage for further analysis of how such disparities influence employee reality.

3. Methodology

The forthcoming chapter outlines the core methodology of our thesis. Initially, it presents our overall research approach and provides detailed explanations of the foundational ontology and epistemology. Furthermore, it summarizes the context of the research and explains the methods used for data collection and analysis. Finally, it addresses the limitations associated with our study and the use of generative AI.

3.1 Research Approach

This study aims to explore employees' interpretations of a reform's purpose and how they respond to and experience it, in the context of an implementation of an Activity-Based Workplace (ABW) in a public organization. We investigate employees' behaviors, thoughts, and interactions within the organization's newly adopted work approach. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the employees' perspectives, we concluded that a qualitative approach was pertinent for this thesis. Silverman (2017) asserts that in the investigation of individual experiences, the application of a qualitative methodology is imperative. Qualitative research allows for the exploration and comprehension of specific phenomena within their contextual setting, extending and deepening the understanding to more generalized terms (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). According to Bell et al. (2022), the qualitative method is favored for its ability to facilitate a deeper analysis of phenomena compared to quantitative methods, which are more commonly used for assessing statistically measurable data. Since this study does not aim to test theories or measure numerical data, but rather to understand the narratives and motivations behind individuals' realities, a qualitative approach is deemed more appropriate (Bryman, 2018).

In addition to employing a qualitative methodology, our research is situated within the interpretivist tradition, which influences our foundational ontological and epistemological assumptions (Prasad, 2018). Ontology concerns the essence of the social world, questioning whether an objective reality exists or if reality is subjectively interpreted (Bell et al., 2022). Unlike positivism, which assumes an objective reality, the constructionist perspective contends that reality is subjective and embraces the social construction of reality as its foundational principle (Bell et al., 2022). This study is deeply rooted in Neo- and Scandinavian institutionalism, both of which prioritize the process over statistical objects and

emphasize the construction of meaning within organizations (Czarniawska, 2008). Given our goal to understand individuals' perceived purposes of an Activity-Based Workplace (ABW) and their experiences of reality in the organization, along with our own interpretations, we adopt a constructivist perspective.

Meanwhile, epistemology explores the nature of knowledge acquisition, questioning whether it is something objective that can be possessed, or subjective, shaped by experience and practice (Hislop et al., 2018). Contrasting with the positivist perspective, which holds that knowledge can be discovered and verified through objective reality, this study adopts an interpretivist tradition. We recognize that there is no singular truth; rather, multiple realities and understandings exist, allowing for a deeper exploration of the phenomenon. Our aim is to understand the actions of interviewees and their interpretations of their own realities, needs, and behaviors. This approach acknowledges the complexity of human experience and the subjective nature of knowledge, providing a richer, more nuanced understanding of the social dynamics at play. This becomes evident in our study, since reforms can have different success depending on the context, as well as being perceived and experienced differently by the employees.

Within the framework of interpretivism, our study draws upon symbolic interactionism (Prasad, 2018). This perspective emphasizes how individuals make sense of their environments and the role of the self in constructing reality, aligning closely with our aim to explore how employees' construct meaning and act within an Activity-Based Workplace. Symbolic interactionism posits that objects do not possess inherent meanings; instead, meanings are ascribed through social interactions (Prasad, 2018). For example, while some individuals may view the office primarily as a symbol of collaboration and a social space, others might symbolize it as a place for solitude, highlighting the variability in interpretations. By adopting symbolic interactionism, we are able to examine how the implementation of Activity-Based Working (ABW) is understood, challenged, or adapted by employees on an individual level. This approach is substantiated by our analysis, which reveals diverse individual responses to the reform, showcasing the nuanced ways in which employees engage with changes in their workplace.

When conducting qualitative research, it is possible to distinguish among inductive, abductive, and deductive approaches. Deductive reasoning begins with established theory and

earlier literature to formulate a hypothesis that is later compared with study findings. Conversely, an inductive approach centers on analyzing the data to subsequently build a theory and hypothesize (Bell et al., 2022). An abductive approach merges elements of both, enhancing understanding by reinterpreting the material in light of both theory and empirical evidence (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). In this study, by grounding our research in Scandinavian institutionalism, we had some initial direction when collecting data, aligning with a deductive approach without feeling constrained. After gathering our data, and with guidance from Scandinavian institutionalism, we identified more relevant and specific theories regarding employee responses to organizational change that elevated our material and provided a deep and nuanced understanding, aligning with an inductive approach. An abductive approach particularly highlights the dialogic nature of the empirical findings, which can generate or inspire alternative interpretations, and emphasizes the importance of problematizing and rethinking dominant ideas and theories (Bryman, 2018). Thus, this study conducted an abductive approach.

3.2 Research Design and Process

Following our research question how individuals perceive the purpose of and experience the Activity-Based Workplace, it is appropriate to study a singular office. A single case analysis offers the opportunity to delve into real-life experiences, fostering a deep comprehension of the phenomenon. This approach allows for a more thorough exploration compared to studying multiple offices simultaneously, enabling a nuanced understanding of the subject matter (Bhattacharjee, 2012). However, in the office we did not restrict ourselves. We welcomed all types of respondents from all the different departments, regardless of gender or position, the only restriction being the chosen office. This allowed us to gain different perspectives and inputs of the same reform. In the following, we provide information about the chosen organization in our study and how we sampled the data. We then provide information on how we collected our data and the analysis process.

3.2.1 Case Context

Our study was carried out at the municipality of Havsby, which is located in a city in Sweden and serves the local community. Havsby is used as a pseudonym for the organization under study, chosen to ensure anonymity for both the organization and its interviewees. Havsby has under the last few years initiated its transition to an Activity-Based Workplace and aims to

complete this shift at all offices by 2024. This change is part of a broader project at the organization, which was aimed at increasing Havsby's competitive advantages as an employer, and "encounter the need of a flexible, innovative and engaging workplace" (Havsby, 2024). Havsby operates offices throughout a city; however, to allow for a more detailed analysis and a single case context (Bhattacharjee, 2012), a single office within the organization has been selected where employees have been experiencing the change for a period of approximately six months. To gather background information on the implementation of ABW at Havsby, a conversation was held with a key individual, Filippa (pseudonym), prior to conducting the interviews for empirical material. Filippa also served as a contact person for the full study, and as a middle hand in collecting subjects for interviews.

Filippa provided us with essential material detailing the project's purpose, expected outcomes, and the events leading up to its implementation. In addition to these materials, we were able to observe and evaluate the office space firsthand, enhancing our understanding of employees' answers regarding the office environment during the interviews. The information about the office space, alongside material from Havsby, is outlined in the empirical background section. This section serves as both a guideline for our study and a foundation for developing the interview questions. None of these discussions were recorded. The background information we relied on includes a document received post-meeting, which clarified the purpose and processes, as well as materials sourced from Havsby's official website and accounting records.

3.3 Data collection

3.3.1 Sampling

Upon selecting the topic for our master's thesis, we initiated contact with Havsby—a company known to us through mutual contacts—that had recently implemented an Activity-Based Workplace (ABW). We believed it was essential for employees to remember the environment prior to the implementation and understand the reasons behind the transition, making Havsby an ideal choice due to its recent adoption of ABW. During our initial meeting, we engaged with an individual knowledgeable about the project. This person then directed us to a second contact, who subsequently introduced us to Filippa, our primary contact at Havsby, who provided detailed insights into the project.

After these initial conversations, as the framework and goals of our thesis became clearer, we contacted Filippa again to express our interest and begin arranging employee interviews. Our methodology aimed to capture employees' perceptions of ABW, focusing on those involved in offices where ABW had been fully implemented, regardless of hierarchical position, age, role, or similar factors. In agreement with Filippa, we decided to conduct the interviews at one of Havsby's offices where ABW had been in place the longest. We selected four departments from this office, targeting three participants from each, which initially set us up for twelve interviews. This sampling was intended to ensure a diversity of responses, experiences, age, and gender is akin to purposive sampling, a non-random and strategic form of selection (Bell et al., 2022). Additionally, elements of convenience and snowball sampling occurred when one interviewee recommended another colleague, further enriching our pool of participants. In the discussion with Filippa, we agreed that the provided sample would serve as an initial sample, and that we would include additional participants as necessary to achieve theoretical saturation (Bell et al., 2022).

Some problems with purposive sampling relate to generalizability. In probability sampling, the sample is random, which helps to generalize the findings to a larger group (Bell et al., 2022). However, our approach of selecting employees from four departments, rather than risking responses from a single department through random selection, tried to address this issue. Furthermore, purposive sampling could introduce a risk of researcher bias since the researchers choose the respondents (Bell et al., 2022). In our case, the focus was not on

selecting specific individuals; instead, we aimed to include a specific number of respondents from each department, regardless of their identities or particular roles. Additionally, we did not personally select the respondents, as this task was handled through our contact, Filippa.

Following the determination of our sample, we crafted a brief introduction outlining our identities, the aims of the study, and the potential significance of their participation. This introduction included a link to schedule interviews, with options for both online and on-site meetings. This was then conveyed to Filippa, who distributed it among the chosen department leaders throughout the office, who in turn forwarded it to members of their departments. Due to cancellations and a constrained timeline, the total number of completed interviews was fewer than anticipated, eleven, as recorded in Table 1. However, we believe that we achieved theoretical saturation with this sample, as further interviews would likely not have provided any new insights or perspectives.

Name (pseudonym)	Length:
Bianca	50 minutes
Fredrik	65 minutes
Alexandra	46 minutes
Gunilla	48 minutes
Cecilia	54 minutes
Denise	55 minutes
Erik	52 minutes
Håkan	56 minutes
Irene	45 minutes
Kerstin	54 minutes
Jonas	50 minutes

Table 1: Overview of interviewees. Own illustration.

3.3.2 Semi-structured Interviews

Aligned with qualitative research, interpretive traditions, and symbolic interactionism, viable methods for data collection include conducting observations or in-depth interviews. We chose in-depth interviews to uncover significant insights through participants' interpretations of their social realities (Prasad, 2018). In these interviews, the interviewer seeks to understand the participants' perspectives and extract meaning from their experiences, thereby gaining insights into their attitudes, experiences, and feelings about their world (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2021). Considering the potential of observational methods to reveal how individuals navigate the dynamics of an Activity-Based Workplace, we decided that observations would be too time-consuming and less effective at capturing the depth of individual experiences and their meaning-making.

To gather comprehensive empirical data, we conducted semi-structured interviews with Havsby employees using a pre-prepared guide that outlined the project's goals and provided a framework for directing the conversations (Appendix 1). This approach allowed us to dynamically explore emergent themes, primarily through open-ended questions that encouraged participants to express their views freely, thereby minimizing the influence of biased or predefined responses, and providing us with the flexibility to ask additional questions based on the respondents answers (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2021). Some questions specifically addressed a statement from Havsby about the project, prompting participants to elaborate on their individual perspectives. However, using only specific questions would have been inconsistent with the qualitative approach (Bryman, 2018). Instead, our emphasis was on active listening and posing pertinent follow-up questions to stay aligned with the themes without leading the discussion. By asking follow-up and probing questions, we could guide the interview and obtain answers to all questions without leaving room for misunderstandings, therefore obtaining additional explanations, examples, and deeper insights (Bryman, 2018). Furthermore, in order to avoid influencing the direction of the interview based on our assumptions, we opted for "how" and "what" questions instead of "why". This approach allowed the interviewees to describe their thoughts, perceptions, and beliefs spontaneously rather than relying on broad assumptions (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). After listening to and transcribing the material from each interview, the quality of subsequent interviews improved. By identifying what was compelling and learning how to prompt more in-depth responses, we further aligned with an abductive approach.

We conducted the interviews over a period of four weeks, extending from late March to mid-April. Originally, the timeline was set to conclude earlier, but due to difficulties in scheduling interviews, it was necessary to adjust our schedule. Each interview ranged from 45 to 65 minutes in duration; two were conducted on-site, two were held over the phone due to technical issues, and the rest were facilitated online via Google Meet. Our initial preference was to conduct most interviews on-site, as direct interactions are more effective for capturing emotions and spontaneous non-verbal reactions, which build trust and enrich the sharing of experiences (Vogl, 2013). Moreover, face-to-face settings enhance the clarity of communication, reduce misunderstandings, and provide a deeper insight into the subtext of the interviews (Vogl, 2013). However, our experience with a video call interview via Google Meet demonstrated that this format could still accommodate a comprehensive understanding of the participants' responses. Utilizing Google Meet also provided greater flexibility for both the participants and us, helping to easily coordinate schedules and eliminate the need for travel to Havsby's office. This method still allowed us to observe and respond to facial expressions and gestures, thus approximating a face-to-face interview environment (Bell et al., 2022).

We initiated the interviews by introducing ourselves and explaining the central question of our research. We shared our areas of interest in the research, careful not to disclose our previous findings or insights from the literature to avoid influencing the participants' responses. This approach allowed the respondents to freely discuss topics of relevance to them. We guaranteed the confidentiality of all responses, pledging to anonymize personal details and sensitive information, thus creating a safe space for open dialogue (Yin, 2009). We also obtained consent to record the interviews for precise transcription. Following a structured interview guide (Appendix 1), we concluded by inviting any additional comments or questions from the interviewees. During the sessions, we allocated roles: one interviewer focused on posing predetermined questions, while another observed non-verbal cues and the overall environment. This approach, as highlighted by Bryman (2018), enabled us to effectively capture key themes and subtle social dynamics. The observer also took notes and had the opportunity to interject with questions when noticing something significant that the primary interviewer might have missed.

3.4 Data Analysis

After collecting all the necessary data, we began preparing it for analysis. The semi-structured interviews audio recordings were first transcribed into a separate document. All quotes from our respondents in the empirical section are translated by us from Swedish to English. Consequently, the translations may vary from the exact wording or phrasing used originally, as the two languages often differ in expression and syntax. When working with the data analysis, we adopted the analytical approach suggested by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2022), which includes sorting, reducing, and arguing the data, allowing us to systematically understand and derive insights from it.

The initial phase, sorting (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2022), started with the transcription of the interviews. The transcription was conducted with the help of Office Words' transcribe function. During this process, we omitted pauses, filler words, and other non-essential elements to produce a focused and coherent text, facilitating easier analysis. The interviews, conducted in Swedish, were transcribed in the same language. As we transcribed, we performed an initial thematization of the data, noting significant quotes or moments in the interviews for further examination. After completing the transcription, we reviewed the material again, marking additional noteworthy quotes and findings.

We then began the second phase, reducing our qualitative material to get better order and more overview before the analysis (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2022). We reduced the material into different categories and subcategories. We went through the material and reread it to discover new findings that we had previously overlooked. When categorizing the material, we kept the thesis purpose in mind and aimed to construct a narrative from the empirical data. This approach helped us understand the material while ensuring it highlighted the most interesting and surprising findings (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2022). After categorizing the data and assigning relevant quotes to each category, we gained a clear overview of the empirical findings and identified which categories best represented our purpose. During the refinement process, we eliminated two categories we initially thought would be useful because other categories proved more relevant. Consequently, we removed several quotes that no longer fit the overall narrative of our paper. Some quotes were reclassified under different categories, while others were integrated directly into the text as in-text citations or

explanations. Ultimately, we selected primary and supplementary quotes that effectively reinforced the themes of our chosen categories (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2022).

Finally, we engaged in arguing during the analysis to interpret, support and discuss our findings effectively. Arguing involves actively engaging with existing literature and empirical data to present new perspectives, challenge established ideas, or propose modifications. This process allows the analyst to contribute meaningfully to ongoing debates within their field, regardless of the scope or scale of their findings (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2022). To achieve this, we aligned our findings with the foundational principles of Scandinavian Institutionalism. Subsequently, we applied Hirschman's (1970) "Exit, Voice, and Loyalty" model, alongside other responses, to conduct a deeper comparative analysis of the empirical material. This methodological approach facilitated a more engaging and substantive discussion of the data. By situating our findings within the existing body of literature, we were not only able to challenge established viewpoints but also introduce new perspectives. This contributed to a broader and more nuanced understanding of the topic.

3.5 Reflexivity and Methodological Limitations

The findings of this study reveal the implications drawn from members' experiences within a single office in a single organization implementing an Activity-Based Workplace. Our objective is to uncover the collective implications of subjective meaning within this specific context, aligning with interpretive traditions. We aim not to uncover the objective truth about a particular phenomenon but to interpret employees' at Havsby's behaviors and their attributions of meaning to various aspects of work (Prasad, 2018). Despite careful selection of the methodology, it is not without limitations, highlighting the need for increased reflexivity in qualitative research. Reflexivity emerges from the interaction between careful data interpretation and the researcher's self-reflection. It is essential not to presume that the findings are universally applicable beyond the research context (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). Considering this study relies on a single case study in a Swedish environment, it makes no attempt to achieve significant generalizability. Instead, this thesis aims to perform a thorough examination of a complex concept in a specific organizational context.

On that note, since we are only using Havsby as a case, intra-source critique becomes vital (Schaefer & Alvesson, 2020). Authors must maintain the credibility of the empirical material

through continuous reflection and critical examination. This is necessary because the level of subjective truth derived from interviews can be influenced by respondents' adherence to social norms and personal interests (Schaefer & Alvesson, 2020). We tried to mitigate this by being critical and reflective about behaviors and responses, and by emphasizing anonymity to prevent respondents from skewing the truth. Secondly, to avoid interviews being influenced by specific circumstances or not being genuinely reflective and consistent, it may be beneficial to vary how and where the interviews are conducted, so that a specific location does not shape the responses (Schaefer & Alvesson, 2020). We accomplished this by conducting interviews in various locations within the office, on Google Meet with people working both on-site and from home, and also by telephone. Lastly, Schaefer and Alvesson (2020) point out that researchers must continuously update their understanding of the subject and learn continuously throughout the process, which involves reviewing the material they have and possibly following up with respondents. We did this by continuously developing our questions, and after each interview, we discussed whether our understanding from the interview was consistent, how it differed, and also adjusted the way we asked questions.

Moreover, we considered the possibility that interviewees might not fully disclose their thoughts due to fears of potential negative repercussions if their responses were traced back to them (Bell et al., 2022). We addressed this concern by ensuring their anonymity in the initial brief sent via email and throughout the interview process. However, we cannot guarantee that the risk of interviewees withholding their thoughts was completely eliminated, especially since maintaining anonymity among colleagues proved challenging. This was apparent as team leaders had some influence over interview participation, and some interviewees discussed and referred to each other, as in the case of snowball sampling. To address this issue, we took extra precautions to anonymize the interview data, removing any details that could be linked to individual identities, such as age or previous employment history. As we translated the interviews from Swedish to English, we also ensured that the choice of words would not be traceable to any individual.

Additionally, we focused solely on questions related to their experiences with the Activity-Based Workplace without asking leading questions, and avoided showing signs of emotion with their answers, to mitigate participation and observation biases, which could affect the validity of the research (Robson, 2002). Furthermore, we adhered strictly to ethical

principles, using the information solely for the purpose of the research and ensuring that the data remained inaccessible to unauthorized persons (Bell et al., 2022).

3.6 Generative AI

During the writing process, we have utilized generative AI tools such as ChatGPT to assist us in writing our essay. These tools have been instrumental in refining our language, providing synonyms, and ensuring that our intended messages are conveyed clearly. Here are examples of prompts we used:

- Does this make sense to you?
- Could you find synonyms for this word?
- Could you rewrite this sentence to make it clearer?
- Could you give suggestions for improvements in this paragraph?

3.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the methodology of our thesis, which employs a qualitative research approach grounded in the interpretivist tradition. This approach is chosen to deeply explore employee perceptions and reactions regarding the implementation of an Activity-Based Workplace (ABW) in a municipal context. The qualitative methodology is appropriate due to its strength in capturing detailed, contextual insights into individuals' experiences and interpretations. Furthermore, this research will leverage symbolic interactionism to examine how individuals understand and influence their work environments, focusing on the subjective construction of reality and meaning. We presented our case of Havsby and showed how data was collected through semi-structured interviews, offering a rich, empirical look at the employee experience of workplace reform. The study acknowledges its limitations, emphasizing the importance of reflexivity. Altogether, the methodology chapter outlines a comprehensive approach to understanding the reform of an Activity-Based Workplace and how it is perceived and experienced by employees.

4. Empirical Analysis

In this chapter, we explore the empirical data collected for our study on the implementation of an Activity-Based Workplace in a municipal office. The section starts with an empirical background that introduces our case, Havsby, and their motivations behind adopting ABW. Throughout the chapter, we analyze the data derived from our semi-structured interviews, examining key themes and insights about how employees perceive and interact within the reform. We continuously analyze what the quotes from these interviews indicate and this ongoing analysis aims to explore how employees experience and respond to a reform.

4.1 Empirical Background

When we initially reached out to Havsby, we began with an introductory conversation with two employees who were somewhat involved with the project. This conversation led to a meeting with Filippa, who played a more central role in the project and became our primary contact. Through these discussions, we gained an understanding of Havsby's reasons for implementing an Activity-Based Workplace (ABW), the process they followed, and the current status of the implementation. We observed that the different departments at Havsby were at various stages of implementing the ABW. Some offices had completed the process, while others were still undergoing changes, as noted from our observations during the office visits. The project was initiated in response to the workplace shifts brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Previously, nearly all employees worked on-site at Havsby's offices. However, the pandemic necessitated a transition to remote work, resulting in a significant increase in employees working from home. This shift left many of Havsby's offices and workspaces unoccupied. From this background, Havsby initiated the project. Insight into parts of the vision and objectives of the new office are outlined in illustration 3.

Regarding the workplace design, Havsby conducted a third-party survey to assess employee perspectives on their workplace. This survey was instrumental in determining the direction and strategies for future workplace adjustments. It provided insights into the priorities and satisfaction levels of employees concerning their current working conditions. Additionally, the survey detailed the range of activities performed by employees throughout the week, including concentrated work, meetings, and breaks (Illustration 1). Notably, the results indicated that tasks requiring individual focus and a fixed desk accounted for just 44% of the

workweek (Illustration 2), highlighting potential areas for enhancing workspace flexibility and efficiency.

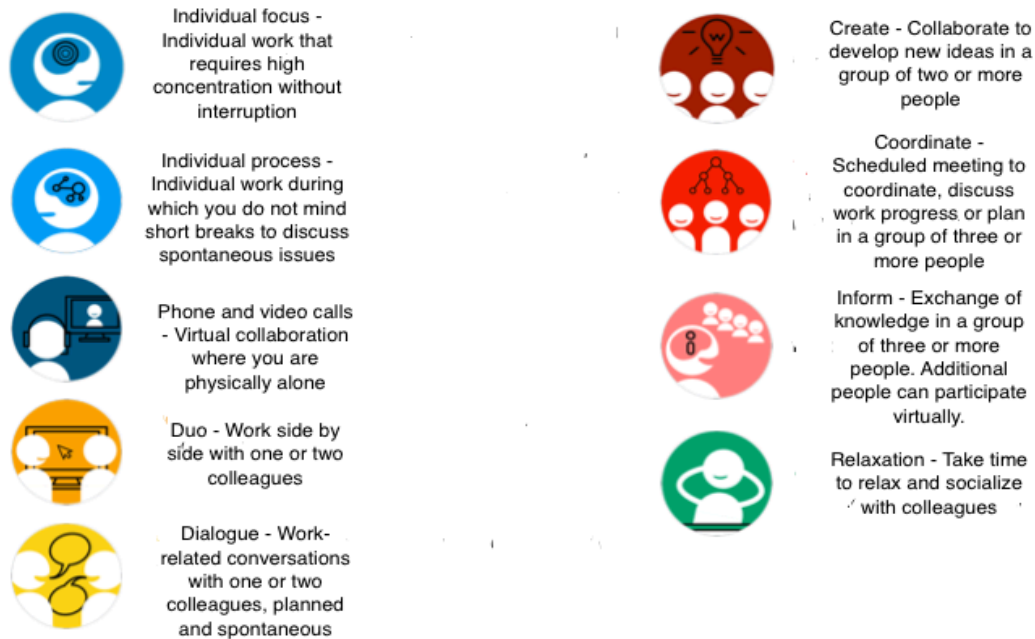


Illustration 1 (Havsby, 2024, translated).



Illustration 2 & 3 (Havsby, 2024, translated).

From their survey, Havsby compared various office settings including open-plan, fixed desk, and Activity-Based Workplaces (ABW). Based on their findings, Havsby concluded that an ABW was the most suitable option for the organization. This decision marked the beginning of the implementation process. Starting with an initial workshop and the survey data, Havsby developed four “personas” that encapsulated the needs and activities of most employees.

Recognizing that some individuals might have specific requirements, team leaders subsequently consulted their staff to identify any special needs not addressed by these four personas. Additionally, various workshops were conducted to ensure that the planning of the Activity-Based Workplace took into account all employee needs (Havsby, 2024).

Once the new workplace was completed and the employees had settled in, Havsby (2024) set up a feedback board where employees could post notes using Post-its to share their thoughts on the implementation. They could offer suggestions for improvements or voice any complaints. The board was organized into sections to display the progress and resolution of each note. Additionally, Havsby conducted a survey 100 days after the move, gathering feedback to assess employees' overall impressions of the new environment.

To gain a clearer picture of what an Activity-Based Workplace entails, we were provided with several illustrative images, as displayed in illustration 4.

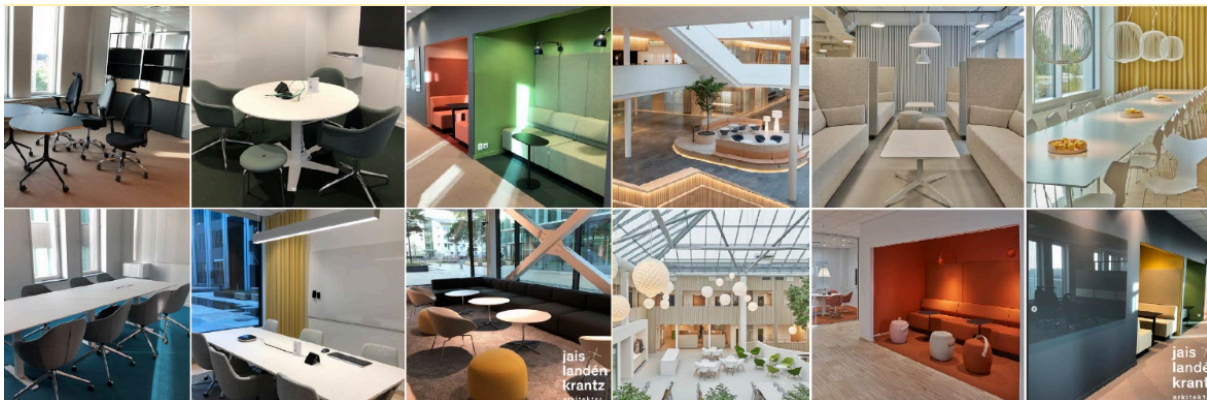


Illustration 4 (Havsby, 2024).

This empirical background outlines the background behind Havsby's decision to change their workplace, their purpose and the process, as well as the measures taken before and after to ensure a smooth transition tailored to the needs of the employees' and the organization as a whole.

4.2 Purpose of a Reform

Building on the empirical background of Havsby's intended outcomes and purpose for introducing an Activity-Based Workplace (ABW), along with the research presented on ABW in the introductory chapters, we have developed a more nuanced knowledge of the

purpose behind adopting this idea of workplace design. We began our interviews by exploring employees' perspectives on the objectives of ABW, deepening our understanding and providing us with a preliminary structured overview:

The idea is that you should be able to sit anywhere in this landscape and still have the same conditions. And you should be able to adjust the chair individually for yourself. [...] Either you can sit in an open area. But if you need to focus, there are private rooms that you can go into. (Alexandra)

I would describe it as an office where you can move quite freely. [...] I can adapt my seating based on what I'm actually doing at the time, and I can change it throughout the day as needed, based on my agenda and such. (Jonas)

The idea is somehow that there should be a flow, that you should be able to change places depending on what you're working on and in that way also make better use of the premises. (Cecilia)

The purpose is, I suspect, to save space and save money by reducing space and seating, but at the same time, not everyone has the opportunity to sit (at the office). (Gunilla)

If we're being quite blunt, it's mostly about saving money. [...] Then, there are soft values, like, it's said that a person doesn't really thrive from always sitting in the same chair, or the same side of the bed. You should change to activate the brain, so I think it's really good. (Fredrik)

The purpose is simply to save money, nothing else. We cost. We take up space. If we are to have our own room, as we have had before... How I have interpreted the purpose, the real purpose, it is to save money. (Bianca)

For me, quite frankly, it's about the employer wanting to reduce rental costs. It has very little to do with the person. (Erik)

The reactions of employees to the introduction of an Activity-Based Workplace (ABW) reveal a complex interplay between individual perceptions and organizational objectives, where each person constructs their own understanding of the space based on personal and shared experiences. Alexandra, Jonas, and Cecilia see the redesign as enhancing their ability to adapt and personalize their work environment, reflecting an appreciation for the autonomy and productivity such flexibility affords, aligning with the purpose of ABW. On the other hand, Gunilla, Bianca, and Erik interpret these changes primarily through the lens of cost

reduction, suggesting a tension between management's motives and the personal implications for the workspace users. This shows a misalignment with what ABW is inherently good for, what Havsby intended and what the employees understood. Fredrik recognizes the primary goal of the change as cost-reduction, but also sees additional benefits associated with it. These diverse perspectives underscore the need for a nuanced analysis of the meaning of a reform, such as the Activity-Based Workplace and whether an Activity-Based Workplace (ABW) constitutes a substantive change that meets the unique needs and values of employees, or if it merely represents a surface-level change motivated by other objectives.

4.3 Initial Thoughts on a Change

After initially discussing the purpose of the Activity-Based Workplace, we asked the respondents for their thoughts on the change and how their feelings had evolved since the new office reform was implemented. Gunilla reflected, "My first thought was not again. I wonder if anyone has ever been completely satisfied with a workplace." She was displeased about having to adapt once more but questioned whether true satisfaction with a workplace is even possible. Gunilla's initial reaction, "not again", highlights her discomfort with the lack of permanence in her workplace. Her sentiment suggests a preference for a stable environment where changes are minimal. This response reveals a deeper psychological need for consistency and predictability in her professional surroundings, which she feels contributes to her overall job satisfaction. Her questioning of whether it is even possible to be happy with any workplace reflects a broader skepticism about the ideal work environment, possibly shaped by previous experiences of organizational changes that did not meet her expectations. Kerstin on the other hand, offered a different perspective:

We are also very used to changes, you know. The whole industry is like a change in itself. I think we have worked a lot, really (within changing environments). No, but you get used to things happening. But I also believe that our experience is often that it eventually turns out well in the end. (Kerstin)

Kerstin's ease with change is indicative of her pragmatic approach to the evolving nature of her industry. She views change as an inherent and even beneficial aspect of her professional life. This attitude likely helps her manage transitions effectively, maintaining a positive outlook even during disruptions. Her perspective suggests that she sees these changes not as obstacles but as necessary steps toward progress and adaptation in her field. When we asked

Jonas about his thoughts about the new workplace, he said: “I’m coming from this workplace. It’s a bit difficult (for him to answer), maybe especially with me because I am very used to working activity-based.” Rather than focusing on the change itself, Jonas reflects on his prior experience which has perhaps made it easier for him to adapt. This comfort speaks to a deeper alignment of his work environment with his personal work style preferences, enhancing his overall work efficacy and satisfaction. Bianca had different reflection:

My initial thought was that it became a bit stressful right away. Because it was nothing that I had researched or seen in other organizations already, or heard from friends about their own experiences when they have gone through such a journey. So the first feeling was stress. (Bianca)

Initially, Bianca experienced stress due to a lack of familiar references for the new working model. This stress can be understood as a clash between her expectations (informed by previous experiences and social norms) and the new reality, which lacked precedents in her social circles. However, she continued: “But I, I take such changes quite positively, with the attitude of let’s see”. Her transition to a more accepting attitude (“let’s see”) represents a significant renegotiation of meaning. She moves from viewing the change as a source of stress to potentially seeing it as an opportunity for growth, shaped by her positive reinterpretations of the workplace. When we asked Cecilia, she said: “I guess, that for me, once a decision has been made, that’s just how it is. Then there’s no reason to fight against it.” Cecilia’s response to the changes shows a form of resignation mixed with practicality. By accepting the decisions as final, she avoids the emotional turmoil of resistance, suggesting an approach that values peace and procedural compliance over personal preference. This approach may serve to reduce personal conflict and align her with the broader directives of her organization, demonstrating a prioritization of harmony and order over individual desires. Denise further reflected on changes:

All changes tend to engage people both positively and negatively, and unfortunately, it is often more negative. So a lot of effort has been put into this with risk assessments and action plans, and attempts have been made to thoroughly examine it and so on. But then, when push comes to shove, when you make this transition, move in, and start to see how it is after a while, you realize that it actually works quite well. (Denise)

Denise’s expectation that things generally turn out well in the end could be seen as a protective mechanism against the uncertainty of change. By holding onto a positive outcome

narrative, she possibly influences her own experience and that of her colleagues towards a more positive engagement with the new workplace model. Her narrative could act as a buffer, mitigating the anxiety associated with the changes and framing them as opportunities for improvement.

I think I found it quite positive because then we are quite... It means that everyone thinks it's OK to be flexible and work from home some days and work in different places. And that's also a positive because I want to... For my role, it's very important that I understand how the different operations are doing, so it's really fun to be able to just go there and work, sit down and meet others, so I think it's just fun. (Irene).

Irene's positive view of the flexibility offered by an Activity-Based Workplace aligns closely with her personal and professional needs. For Irene, the ability to work from different locations represents freedom and adaptability, crucial aspects of her job satisfaction and effectiveness. Her enthusiasm likely influences her personal engagement and overall perception of the workplace positively.

Through the lens of symbolic interactionism, this section highlights how individual employees attach different meanings to their workplace and how these meanings influence their interactions and responses to organizational changes. This approach allows for a richer understanding of the complexities involved in implementing an Activity-Based Workplace at Havsby, acknowledging the subjective experiences and constructed realities of each employee, reflecting the need to understand the individual experiences of working in a new workplace design.

4.4 Experiencing the Activity-Based Workplace

Delving into the individual experiences with the new Activity-Based Workplace (ABW) within Havsby, our interviews brought forth several intriguing themes. We observed a spectrum of experiences—where some employees thrived in the new collaborative spaces, others grappled with finding the balance between teamwork and the need for solitude. While certain individuals celebrated the boost in productivity afforded by the flexibility to choose workspaces, others faced obstacles in maintaining their usual performance levels amidst the new office dynamics. To gain a deeper insight into employee experiences with workplace

design, this section begins by exploring “Social Interaction and Collaboration”, then transitions into “Efficiency and Work Performance”.

4.4.1 Social Interaction and Collaboration

Most interviews suggest that the Activity-Based Workplace significantly influences social interactions and collaboration among colleagues. While some employees find it easier to engage and collaborate in this environment, others experience a decrease in personal interaction, partially due to the rise in remote work. Cecilia points out that the office design does not necessarily impact interactions or creativity, indicating that these elements can thrive independently of the physical workspace:

So it doesn't matter so much where we sit. We can be creative, and we'll get to know each other anyway. It might be more at other meetings that you get to know people, like networking events and office meetings, and it's at those times you meet people. But otherwise, personally, I contact those I need and search until I find someone who can do what we need. (Cecilia)

This quote indicates a level of autonomy in the decision of collaborative efforts, rather than the office design itself, which may not align with the organization's vision for the reform. It raises questions about whether employees' individual initiatives are in harmony with the broader goals of the reform and if there's effective alignment between the leadership's vision and employees actions. Cecilia adds that “it's not really the room itself that determines whether we become creative or not. It's the interaction with other people, you know”. Similarly, when asked if Gunilla perceives the office as more social since the reform, she responded:

No, but I mean, I don't understand why there should be a difference between an activity-based office and a fixed desk office. Why would it lead to more social interactions if people still end up sitting where their colleagues are, regardless? I don't see people sitting with us one day, and another day sitting with another department. That's not how it works; people generally sit in the same place anyway if there's room. (Gunilla)

Gunilla questions whether the Activity-Based Workplace (ABW) truly fosters more social interactions than traditional fixed desks. This suggests a skepticism regarding the claimed benefits of ABW to promote meetings and collaboration among different departments and

colleagues. It indicates that despite attempts to introduce an Activity-Based Workplace, many still adhere to existing social structures and relationships, suggesting a lack of flexibility or feasibility in implementing the reform. Erik has a different but similar perspective on how social interaction is affected, suggesting that social interactions are more challenging in the new office environment due to practical issues, stating, “But the social aspect disappears for those who have the need for it. [...] There are 34 people, and maybe 10 seats available.” He continues:

But some feel lonely regardless of whether they are among others, or if they are alone, and then these positions occur. So many, I think, stress in the morning just to be in the thick of it, because then they feel they are part of a social context. If they're not there, they lose the social context. They lose themselves in another way. (Erik)

Erik indicates that for many individuals, the sense of belonging to a social context is crucial for their well-being and self-image. He suggests a lack of an adequate number of seats in the workplace can create stress to secure a spot and participate in the social dynamics of the workplace. If the goal of providing flexible and versatile workspaces does not meet the needs of all employees, it could potentially affect their well-being. Erik's viewpoint indicates a potential evolution in how individuals perceive and prioritize social interactions within professional settings. Furthermore, Håkan offers a different perspective, and argue that social interactions with all departments are not crucial:

And it's been kind of a thing that's been the deal with Activity-Based, you can get an exchange. Anyone can sit with other people and sit close to someone else and get new ideas and such. But, it doesn't work that well in practice because I don't really benefit from sitting with Abigail, 67, who works in X, because I have nothing to talk about, nothing, our tasks are so dominantly separate. It becomes difficult. (Håkan)

Håkan expresses some skepticism towards the reform's purpose concerning the benefits for creativity and idea exchange. He questions the practical utility of being surrounded by people with different tasks, as he struggles to see how it would personally benefit him. This suggests a critical view and uninterest of the general notion of idea exchange through random interactions in the workplace. On the contrary to Håkan, Kerstin states that the reform has made it easier to connect with others, which she finds enjoyable:

I also like socializing with each other, but it's like this, the Activity-Based approach for us often means gathering in roughly the same place because we work closely together and know each other well. But what's really nice is that you also get to know the other departments. (Kerstin)

Kerstin, like many of her colleagues, notes that the new office layout tends to bring her team together in the same area due to their close collaboration and familiarity with each other. However, she uniquely acknowledges the benefits and the opportunity to interact with individuals from other departments, fostering increased cross-functional collaboration and enhanced communication, underscoring the advantages of an Activity-Based Workplace.

4.4.2 Efficiency and Work Performance

Opinions are divided on whether the Activity-Based Workplace impacts productivity and work performance. Some employees report decreased concentration and productivity due to distractions in the open-office environment, whereas others believe that the flexibility of choosing their workspace actually boosts their efficiency. As Cecilia stated:

I'm the kind of person who can sit in practically any lively office and work very focused, and I prefer an office with more flow, you know, so I never choose a place that's too focused. But that's just me personally. (Cecilia)

This quote indicates that Cecilia has a flexible working style and favors a work environment that is dynamic and active. She highlights that this preference is personal and might not be suitable for everyone. The quote also stresses the significance of accommodating individual needs and preferences in the ABW design to enhance productivity and overall well-being. A recurring theme during the interviews was the availability of rooms and other quiet spaces in the office reform. Denise stated that "it's absolutely very easy and great to find quiet environments here when I need to focus", and similarly Alexandra said "When needing focus, individual rooms are available for concentration with the option to close the door, which is essential for tasks or digital meetings requiring privacy and connection". However, many contend that the new reform does not support focused work and falls short in providing sufficient quiet spaces for concentration, as Bianca highlighted:

As long as the managers and leadership allow (me to work from home), I will continue like this. I can't handle (working at the office). I need to be able to focus. (Bianca)

Bianca provides insight into an employee's experience of the new reform and its impact on productivity. By expressing difficulties with working in the office, she points to potential challenges in the physical work environment. The quote suggests a possible gap between the municipality's stated vision for the reform and Bianca's actual experience at the workplace, highlighting a disparity between the idealized image and its real impact on employee performance. Erik also notes concentration difficulties when surrounded by people, stating, "I sort of act reactively when people pass." He elaborates:

In my individual work, I actually have no need to be at the office at all, and I work very independently. I have reference groups, so I usually meet them. But, for me, activity-based work methods are a hindrance. Not a hindrance. [...] I don't produce to the extent that I could or do when I'm alone at home. (Erik)

Despite the potential benefits of the reform for collaboration, the quote suggests that it may be hindering for some individuals. It indicates that Erik doesn't see the advantages of the open work environment and instead finds it disruptive to his work performance. By comparing his productivity in the office to his output when working from home, Erik sheds light on the significant influence that the work environment can have on his performance. This comparison highlights that certain environments, including his home, may better support his individual work and result in increased productivity. Gunilla adds that while the reform may suit others, she struggles to focus and finds it hard to secure a stable, distraction-free space, she elaborates:

If I want undisturbed work, I need my own workspace. That's just how it is. With Activity-Based setups, there's a risk of ending up in a spot where you're not used to sitting. There are lots of unfamiliar people around that you don't normally see, so you get more disturbed by that. It's the movement, the people. If you're sitting in a landscape and with the same people, you don't react to it, but when new people come, you react. (Gunilla)

This quote underscores the challenges posed by the new reform for employees who need a stable and private workspace to concentrate and effectively perform their tasks. Gunilla also notes that the unpredictability of sitting in unfamiliar locations with unfamiliar colleagues can exacerbate disruptions, leading to reduced productivity for some individuals. This indicates that the dynamic nature of the work environment, while intended to foster flexibility and

collaboration, might in fact be counterproductive and detrimental to performance for those who are sensitive to new stimuli and frequent disturbances. This highlights a potential misalignment between the intended benefits of the reform and the actual impact on employees' work habits and efficiency. Håkan highlights another matter, noting that "It's also an issue not having a designated spot, it takes time in the morning to set up. Sometimes, no seats are available, so you have to sit somewhere else". Håkan reflects that a lack of a designated spot creates practical difficulties, as the time spent setting up each morning and the challenge of finding available seating disrupt his routine and hinder his productivity. This illustrates how individual experiences and the interpretation of workspace dynamics directly impact daily work processes. These findings illustrate the practical experiences of working in an Activity-Based Workplace, highlighting the subjective nature of individual perspectives and the diverse meanings each employee assigns to the new office environment. Next, we will conduct an analysis of how individuals have adopted the new office environment and their specific concerns and reflections.

4.5 Adaptation to the Change

As employees at Havsby municipality transition to an Activity-Based Workplace (ABW), responses vary. Despite the goal to foster flexibility, many continue to frequent familiar spots, revealing a disconnect between the reform's intent and its practical outcomes. Interviews highlight the natural formation of informal territories and occasional tensions when seating norms are challenged. While some adapt positively to the change, habitual behaviors and informal reservations indicate challenges in achieving the reform's objectives. The first section explores these dynamics, focusing on the balance between intended collaboration and the natural inclination towards established practices. The last section delves into individual reflections and concerns regarding the new reform.

4.5.1 Where do I Sit?

In nearly every interview, a common theme emerges: departments consistently choose to sit in the same spots daily. Several interviewees noted that this pattern was not the anticipated result of the reform, but rather a natural evolution. Many attributed this tendency to human nature, emphasizing that people are creatures of habit. As Fredrik stated "I see the same person in the same spot every time I'm here, and I'm not here often". Notably, many

respondents reflected that this wasn't the intended purpose of the reform from the management's perspective. Cecilia elaborated on the phenomena:

Yeah, but if you know that X department is always there, X is always there, then you know that they're probably not in the office if they are not sitting there, otherwise you'd have to run around looking for them, so it's quite practical. This isn't really the idea about activity-based. I understand that too, but it's still with the closest group you work with the most, so it's very practical not to sit in separate corners, but to sit together. (Cecilia)

This quote reflects how employees navigate and negotiate the shared spaces within the new Activity-Based Workplace, adapting to its flexibility while also creating informal rules and patterns that lead to predictability in their environment. Cecilia notes the practicality of knowing where to find members of a particular department, as well as sitting in close proximity to her closest colleagues. Even in an environment designed for flexibility and movement, the tendency to seek consistency in where teams and departments are located suggests a shared understanding among employees about optimizing their work processes. However, Cecilia acknowledges that this informal practice contradicts the idea of an Activity-Based Workplace, which is intended to encourage movement and interaction across different areas and groups. Her recognition of this contradiction shows an awareness of the tension between the idealistic goals of ABW workplaces and the practical needs of employees. It highlights how workers create and adhere to routines that provide a sense of stability and reliability in their interactions, even if these routines seem counter to the intended use of the space.

Similar to this, other respondents reflected on not only the practical implications of working at the same spot, but also the habitual tendencies of this. Fredrik, echoing many others, suggests that individuals naturally establish personal territories, preferring to sit in the same place:

The intention is good, but humans don't work that way; it's almost like going against our natural instincts. We want the same, maybe not the same chair, but at least the same area. (Fredrik)

Fredrik's insights highlight a fundamental challenge in workplace design: the natural human inclination towards stability contradicts the intended flexibility and change promoted by

workplace reforms. He suggests that while the reform aims to encourage dynamic workspace usage, people inherently prefer some degree of continuity, seeking familiarity with at least the same area if not the same chair. This suggests that people tend to have a need for stability in their surroundings and reflects a potential mismatch between intentions and actual human behavior. Kerstin's skepticism deepens this analysis. She questions the practicality of the reform's expectations for employee dispersion, stating, "I find it very difficult to imagine that they thought everyone would be completely scattered. I can't envision it, because then they wouldn't have any psychological, I mean, then they wouldn't have thought about people at all". Her comment points to a potential oversight in the reform's design, implying that it may have neglected to consider fundamental human needs for community and psychological comfort. Denise's observations further underline this point. Despite the intentions of the reform, she notes that different departments and individuals have still "found their part of the office", naturally establishing territories. She concludes, "That's just how humanity works, I believe".

After understanding that the departments usually sit in the same area, we asked respondents what would happen if anyone else outside the department would sit in their "taken" area. Alexandra reflected:

It happens that someone comes and sits there who doesn't belong (in her department). [...] They're certainly allowed to sit there. We never drive anyone away. But, yeah, it's a bit like, not uncomfortable, I shouldn't say that because it sounds wrong, but. Yeah no, but they can. We know how it is, so they can sit there. Just as well as we can sit somewhere else, so it's like... We have an acceptance for each other as long as one doesn't behave strangely or anything like that, so it's totally fine. But it gets a bit weird. (Alexandra)

Alexandra's mixed feelings about people from other departments using space typically occupied by her own department highlight the subjective interpretation of shared spaces and the social norms surrounding them. Although she acknowledges the official policy that allows anyone to sit anywhere "we never drive anyone away", she also expresses a sense of discomfort, although hesitantly. Her use of phrases like "it gets a bit weird" and the tentative and ambivalent manner in which she communicates her discomfort suggest a tension between the ideal of an open, flexible workspace and the reality of daily interactions within that space.

Erik highlighted another dimension of people occupying the same spots, “there’s a bit of territoriality going on.” When asked to elaborate, he stated:

No, but it’s like you ask, “Is it free?” (and you get the answer) “No, she’ll be here soon. She’s coming soon, she’s going to be there” and then you don’t want to take it, but it’s actually available. But many of my younger colleagues have a very strong need to have another colleague with them all the time. Because they are so afraid of being alone. (Erik)

Erik reflects on situations where people reserve vacant seats while waiting for others. Erik’s comment about younger colleagues needing the presence of others suggests a stronger preference for working alongside others and potentially reserving seats for this reason. He also stated that “this system has resulted in subgroups within the whole. If everyone had assigned seats, this wouldn’t have happened because there would be a natural distribution. [...] Now there are subgroups that I haven’t experienced before when we had rooms”. This suggests that the flexibility could have influenced the dynamics of the workplace by creating separate groups based on where people choose to sit. This not only reveals how individual feelings can influence workplace relationships and dynamics but also illustrate the complex interplay between personal needs and the social structures, all through everyday encounters. Overall, it indicates frustration and inefficiency resulting from reduced workspace availability.

Others suggest that employees deliberately arrive early to reserve seats, a practice that can result in tensions within the workplace. Some of this frustration and struggle is illustrated by Håkans statement: “the eternal search for a vacant place”. Bianca develops through following:

I have very energetic colleagues who are already at work at 7 a.m., and the rooms that are a bit more secluded are taken when I arrive. [...] I have a colleague, who is there as said at 7 a.m., and it’s always precisely a certain room that they go and sit in, so I have no chance to sit there. [...] Yes, and we are creatures of habit. (Bianca)

Bianca’s observation about her colleagues’ behavior in arriving early to claim specific, secluded workspaces highlights a competitive aspect of workspace utilization that has emerged in the office. This practice underscores the informal office dynamics where employees develop strategies to secure preferred spots by adhering to unspoken rules about

arrival times. Her inability to access her preferred room due to a colleague's consistent early presence illustrates how such routines can create informal hierarchies and influence personal work experiences. Bianca's narrative shows how these individual actions, driven by a desire for a comfortable and familiar environment, shape the broader social structure and day-to-day interactions within the workplace. Similar to this, Irene's struggle with the non-assigned seating system reflects these challenges, as she states, "will I find a place to sit, can I work, or will I just spend time walking around finding a spot?" This uncertainty adds inefficiency to her day, suggesting that the flexibility of such a system might actually hinder productivity. Furthermore, Cecilia points out the inefficiency of constant relocations: "there's no efficiency in this at all if you have to change places all the time." Both highlight the need for more stable and equitable workspace arrangements to enhance comfort and productivity.

When we asked the respondents what they would do if they couldn't find a spot at their usual space, Jonas said:

Then I'll just sit in another part of the open landscape or move on to the closest one, and then you kind of keep in the area and then cheer a bit. But now that person has left for the day or gone to another location or something. Then you usually sneak and sit in a place where you have friends. (Jonas)

In contrast to the earlier discussions, Jonas introduced another aspect of arriving at work to find no available space in his department's area. He describes a strategy of first exploring nearby areas and then choosing a vacant spot that suits his needs. When a desired spot becomes available as someone else leaves it, Jonas seizes the opportunity to switch to it to sit with his "friends". This indicates a desire for social interaction within the department at the workplace, while also demonstrating a pragmatic approach to adapting to available workspaces.

4.5.2 Reflections

In the transition to an Activity-Based Workplace (ABW), employees expressed a spectrum of sentiments, particularly highlighting the flexibility of working from home as a vital positive. This adaptation reflects a broader response to the challenges and limitations perceived within the ABW setup, where the ability to choose between working environments—home or office—is notably valued.

Others have said this to me before. That, if I have something like this that needs focus and I have to read or work concentratedly on this for a day or so, then I sit at home. That's quite common to say. (Denise)

Denise's quote reflects a common theme among employees. She explains a common strategy among her colleagues who, when faced with tasks requiring significant focus, opt to work from home, a setting they associate with solitude and concentration. This preference is indicative of how employees attribute different meanings to their work environments based on personal and shared experiences—home becomes a sanctuary for deep work, while the office, though intended as a collaborative space that should allow for concentrated work, is sometimes viewed as too busy for focused tasks. Such distinctions in workplace perception significantly influence behaviors, pushing employees to choose their work environment based on the nature of their tasks.

Those who want to be at the office and work make a point of saying that “no, this has to be a physical meeting because it's very important that it's a physical meeting”. Then you go to the physical meeting and don't understand why it was so damn important that it was a physical meeting, we accomplished nothing. [...] Whose need was fulfilled? But then, those who say it has to be a physical meeting, they have more authority because that's the way it is, it's a bit better. There's a hierarchy in it all. (Erik)

Erik describes a recurring scenario where the insistence on physical meetings, often mandated by those often at the office, does not necessarily correlate with productive outcomes. This situation illustrates how physical meetings have come to symbolize importance or authority rather than efficacy. For employees like Erik, who perceive these meetings as often unnecessary, there arises a sense of frustration and cynicism—a reaction to the discrepancy between the attributed meaning of these gatherings and their actual utility. The problem with adjusting for those working from home with those at the office, is further reflected by Denise:

Sometimes it's a bit difficult to find cooperation within the team and make it flow because we don't see each other all the time. [...] Again, it's not that I think it would be good if everyone were here because I also see that it is way better (to work from home). Overall, it works for people who have children and there are many other practical things and commuting and so on. Everything is just so much better. And it makes you feel better because life works better. Yes, then you do a better job too, so you can't forget that aspect. (Denise)

Denise acknowledges that not seeing team members regularly can hinder the fluidity of cooperation and the natural flow of teamwork. This observation highlights the importance of physical presence in fostering spontaneous interactions and a seamless collaborative process. The physical office space traditionally acts as a common ground where the mere presence of team members facilitates easier communication and quicker problem-solving. Without this regular face-to-face interaction, teams might struggle to maintain the same level of synergy. However, Denise simultaneously appreciates the flexibility that remote work offers, especially for practical reasons. This flexibility suggests an enhancement of personal well-being, and she directly associates it with improved job performance, suggesting that when personal life flows more smoothly, professional life benefits as a result. However, Bianca had another point on said spontaneous interactions that a physical presence at the office should allow:

And then, even if I have quick questions that I might need to discuss with a colleague, I still have to go into Teams and check that my colleague is available. Even though my colleague is sitting right in front of me. (Bianca)

Bianca's comment reveals an intriguing aspect of modern workplace interactions, particularly in environments like an Activity-Based Workplace (ABW) where space is intended to be more fluid and adaptable. Her reliance on Microsoft Teams to verify a colleague's availability, despite their physical proximity, highlights a shift in how workplace communication norms are established and maintained. In this scenario, the digital platform — Microsoft Teams — becomes a mediator of interaction, even overriding the traditional advantages of physical presence. This shift suggests that employees are developing new social cues and habits around availability and engagement. The use of a digital tool to check availability, rather than directly initiating conversation, indicates a respect for personal boundaries and a preference for planned interactions over spontaneous ones. It reflects an adaptation to a new set of social norms where digital readiness signals availability more clearly than physical presence. Similar reflections came from Jonas:

Rather, it's Teams that makes it the place where you make contact and where you schedule things, and that might be part of Activity-Based working. I'm not sure how you interpret that, but I would say Teams, rather than the physical location, is what facilitates crossing boundaries. (Jonas)

This statement suggests that the digital platform, rather than the physical workspace, has become the primary facilitator for crossing departmental boundaries within the organization. Furthermore, this behavior points to a broader transformation in how workspaces are perceived and utilized. Despite the physical closeness that an ABW promotes, the actual interaction may still adhere to a digital-first approach, implying that the function of the physical office is evolving. This evolution could be driven by a collective understanding among employees that efficiency and respect for individual work modes are prioritized, possibly influenced by wider trends in workplace digitalization and individual preferences for how and when to engage with colleagues.

When we asked the respondents about their views and reflections of Havsby's decision to implement an Activity-Based Workplace, Cecilia responded:

People really believed in this, but then, there were no ulterior motives or anything with doing Activity-Based work; they (the management) genuinely believed that this would promote cooperation and such things. I think that was the thought. Yes, I don't think there's a huge difference from how we were before because when we work on different projects, then we do that anyway with different people. (Cecilia)

Cecilia reflects on the overarching intentions behind the shift to an ABW, noting that the management believed this would enhance cooperation. However, her perspective suggests a skepticism about the actual changes in collaboration patterns. Her experience indicates that while the physical workplace was designed to foster more interaction and collaborative opportunities, the nature of work—often project-based and involving different teams—has not fundamentally changed and is what actually fosters such collaboration, not the office itself. This observation points to a possible disconnect between the theoretical benefits of ABW and the practical realities of day-to-day work. Furthermore, Fredrik reinforced this point by stating that Havsby had “a vision for this whole office concept, aiming to be an innovative force generating ideas in the hallway”, which he believes is not feasible for Havsby. Fredrik's observation of fostering innovation in the office setting illustrates the discrepancy between organizational intentions and employee realities. He elaborates that despite the vision for spontaneous creative exchanges, the prevailing administrative focus leads employees to adhere to routine tasks. This indicates a potential hindrance to the innovative interactions envisioned.

4.5.3 Concerns

When we asked if the respondents had voiced their concerns during the move, we had some insightful glimpses into the individual adaptations and broader organizational shifts following the transition to an Activity-Based Workplace (ABW). Each employee's experience highlights varying degrees of acceptance, adaptation, and resistance to new workplace norms, as well as the personal strategies employed to navigate these changes.

Even though I had a fixed desk at the old office, the new one is better than before, with a better layout and all. But if I had had Activity-Based seating at the old office, it would have been a disaster. If I had a fixed desk there today, it would be better than having Activity-Based seating. [...] Also, what battles do you choose? Since I need to work from home all the time, I feel that I don't have the same need to express myself and make demands. I have always thought that working from home was a good solution regardless. (Gunilla)

Gunilla's narrative reveals a nuanced acceptance of the new office setup. Although she had a preference for a fixed desk—a preference shaped by her past experiences and comfort with the old office—she appreciates the aesthetic and functional improvements in the new environment. Her response encapsulates a common workplace dynamic: the trade-off between personal comfort and perceived overall benefits of a new system. Her decision to not voice a preference for a fixed desk in the new setup indicates a pragmatic approach to change. She chooses her battles, recognizing that while not ideal, the new arrangement offers sufficient advantages that make her less inclined to contest the change. Additionally, her ability to work from home alleviates any lingering dissatisfaction with the ABW, underscoring how remote work options can serve as a buffer against potential disruptions caused by office reconfigurations. We had similar response from Bianca, when we asked if she had expressed her concerns of working in an Activity-Based Workplace, or had discussed with the management regarding the reform to receive the support needed, she elaborated:

I don't think I have reached the point where I've needed it. [...] Because my bosses have made it clear that it's okay to work from home. [...] As long as you need and as long as you have the possibility, and for me, working from home essentially means having a private room. [...] My workspace is at home in the bedroom. (Bianca)

Bianca's comments further underline the flexibility that remote work provides. Her lack of urgency in addressing any dissatisfaction with the office changes is mitigated by her ability to

work from home, where she feels more comfortable and productive. The support from her bosses to work remotely as needed shows an organizational acknowledgment of the diverse needs of employees, allowing for a more personalized approach to work. This setup not only accommodates individual preferences but also reduces the potential friction that might arise from the new ABW environment. To gain a clearer understanding of the new office implementation and individuals' tendencies to voice concerns, the discussion shifted to the 100-day trial and the feedback board with Post-it notes. Fredrik commented:

I think that these 100 days trial made the backlash less severe than it would have been otherwise. I mean, the board where you could complain or put up a post-it note about what needed to change. That first stopped the initial anger that can arise. You know, like damn nothing works, it's generally always like that after a change. [...] Then people would think, well in 100 days they will address it. Then you might even forget that you wanted a toothpick. (Fredrik)

Through Fredrik's narrative, he highlights Havsby's strategic approach to managing change backlash. By setting up a feedback mechanism—such as a board for posting complaints or suggestions—early in the transition phase, Havsby could address and mitigate initial resistance and frustration sparked by the new work environment, “like damn nothing works”. This method served not only to address immediate issues but also as a psychological buffer, giving employees a sense that their concerns would be recognized and potentially resolved within a defined timeframe. Fredrik's statement underscores the importance of how organizational changes are framed and communicated. The introduction of a trial period and feedback system helped shape employees' perceptions and interactions with the new workplace setup. By understanding that their input could lead to adjustments, employees might have been more willing to engage with and adapt to the new office, even if initially skeptical. The fading memory of initial complaints “you might even forget that you wanted a toothpick” suggests that over time, what was once perceived as necessary or problematic can become trivial or irrelevant, illustrating the fluid nature of human needs. This fading memory of initial complaints was further addressed by Jonas: “Even I have actually forgotten what we thought, but I'm not bothered by anything now that I can think of, so they must have fixed it, or perhaps one gets used to it”. The final part of Jonas's statement suggests two possible explanations for his current satisfaction: either the workplace addressed the issues, or Jonas simply adapted to the new office conditions. This underscores how our work experiences can improve either through tangible changes or as we adjust our expectations and perceptions over

time. Jonas became accustomed to the new environment and gradually redefined his priorities, leading to earlier complaints becoming less significant.

4.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has provided an in-depth examination of the implementation and outcomes of an Activity-Based Workplace (ABW) at Havsby. The analysis commenced with a detailed empirical background, exploring the motivations behind the transition to ABW, triggered by the shifts in workplace dynamics due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our findings suggest that employee responses were mixed, with some viewing the change as a cost-saving measure by the management, while others appreciated the flexibility and the opportunity for increased interaction and autonomy in their workspaces. While some thrived in the new setting, enjoying the flexibility and collaborative spaces, others struggled with the lack of personal space and the constant need to adapt to different working locations. Notably, despite the intention to promote flexibility, many employees tended to return to familiar spots, indicating a natural resistance to change and a preference for stability. Moreover, our empirical findings suggest that some employees found it easier to collaborate, while others felt that social interactions had diminished. The effectiveness of the workspace in enhancing productivity was also debated, with some reporting improved efficiency, while others experienced increased distractions. The feedback mechanisms, such as the feedback board and surveys, played crucial roles in identifying issues and making necessary adjustments. Despite possibilities to voice concerns, many respondents still withheld from this type of feedback. In the next chapter, the empirical findings will be discussed, with the utilization of the chosen theories presented in the literature review.

5. Discussion

Through our empirical data, we have sought to understand how employees at Havsby municipality perceive and navigate the reform. In this section, we analyze our empirical findings using the theories from our literature review as our framework. We begin by analyzing our empirical findings through the lens of Scandinavian institutionalism, focusing on the reform itself and how it has been translated within the municipality. Thereafter, we discuss the context of Havsby with literature regarding surface and substance. Next, we apply the framework of Exit, Loyalty, Neglect, and Voice to explore the responses to the reform from our respondents along with theories of cynicism and functional stupidity. Finally, we propose an expanded version of the theory of functional stupidity, arguing that the existing theory does not fully capture the dynamics observed in our case. We introduce “functional acceptance” as a more fitting description of these dynamics.

5.1 Translation and Interpretation

By applying Scandinavian institutionalism to our empirical analysis of the implementation of an Activity-Based Workplace (ABW) in a municipal setting, we have uncovered the complex interplay between external reform initiatives and internal organizational dynamics. This approach emphasizes that adoption is not merely about conforming to external norms but also about adapting new practices to fit unique cultural and organizational contexts (Røvik, 2008; Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009). Our study reveals that reforms such as new workplace models like ABW are not simply adopted; they are continuously reinterpreted and reshaped to align with specific organizational needs and cultural nuances, thus confirming basic assumptions of Scandinavian institutionalism. Through this lens, we have explored the operational impacts and the evolution of workplace design ideas, providing insights into how organizations navigate the balance between external influences and internal realities. This perspective allows us to view the transformation within public sector workplaces as a dynamic and dialogic process, where the implementation of management practices such as ABW involves significant customization and negotiation to achieve both legitimacy and practical functionality.

One of the key themes in Scandinavian institutionalism is reforms. We understand from previous studies that organizations, perceived as well-established institutions with fixed

routines, often find it challenging to implement changes (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009). This phenomenon was evident in the office dynamics we observed, where employees continued their established fixed routines and habits. They preferred sitting in familiar spots and interacting primarily with the same colleagues as before the change, a human tendency to seek stability and predictability in Havsby's new office environment. Although the municipality has demonstrated the capacity to implement ABW, feedback from some respondents indicates that the function of ABW has not always been utilized as intended, with for example individuals reserving seats. This suggests that the reform may not be functioning as the municipality had anticipated, a sentiment echoed by many respondents. This aligns with Brunson and Olsen (1998), who noted that while well-developed institutions create capacity for action, they can also generate inertia or friction in attempts at reform.

March and Olsen (1984, 1989) argue that the translation of a change into actual practice depends on the nature of the reform and the rate at which it is implemented. Wærness (1990) asserts that changes should be introduced gradually to avoid disrupting the institution's identity. The rate of the implemented reform could be viewed differently depending on the respondent asked. Some respondents had prior experience with Activity-Based Workplace (ABW), which facilitated a smoother transition—a sentiment they highlighted during interviews. In contrast, for others, ABW was a novel and challenging concept to understand, therefore making it more difficult to implement. Many employees expressed satisfaction with the transition and implementation of the new office, however, this satisfaction was often linked more to the upgraded physical environment than to ABW itself. This suggests that the success of the implementation might depend less on the gradual introduction of changes and more on the tangible improvements in the workplace environment, signaling a shift in focus from process to outcome.

Furthermore, Olsen (1985, 1997) and Røvik (2008) maintain that for a reform to be successful, it must align with the institution's values, technology, and operational logic, especially since employees may have personal interests that diverge from organizational goals. For Havsby, values, technology and operational logics have undergone changes. Advances in technology have reduced the need for paperwork, altering operational logistics. Additionally, the shift to remote work during the pandemic redefined the company's earlier values (such as solely on-site work), making a case that ABW now aligns better with Havsby's identity. Therefore, the integration of this reform pre-pandemic and before the

technological advances may have been disrupting the identity of Havsby. Still, challenges remain, such as some employees' need for quiet spaces, indicating that some aspects of operational logic are not yet fully aligned with ABW.

Eriksson-Zetterquist (2009) emphasizes the necessity of active participation from both reformers and organizational members for successful reform, noting that failures often stem from a lack of consensus on the reform's merits. While it's debatable whether our respondents fully support the reform, it is clear that some disagree with it, particularly criticizing its impact on their ability to find focus. Nevertheless, it is premature to deem the reform a failure; rather, it's apparent that it does not resonate with all respondents. Brunsson and Olsen (1990) point out that altering people's behaviors can be challenging, as resistance often arises from entrenched habits or as a defense of specific interests, which might explain the dynamics observed in our case. While some respondents highlight the benefits of the reform, others remain skeptical about it and point out difficulties in concentrating and finding adequate workspace. This aligns with Røvik (2008), who identifies reasons for unsuccessful translations of new ideas into organizational practices. Røvik categorizes these reasons into decoupling, where organizations formally adopt new concepts but fail to integrate them into daily operations. This is partially evident in how the office, intended to be open and accessible to all, is underutilized in this way because people continue to sit with their departments.

Furthermore, rejection occurs when ideas are initially accepted but later discarded due to conflicts with existing practices and values (Røvik, 2008). This could be seen in our case, not because the reform has been completely discarded, but rather because it fits the pattern where employees work from home as they find the Activity-Based Workplace (ABW) incompatible with their work styles, effectively rejecting the physical office space. However, it's worth considering that the situation could also imply the opposite; the option to work from home might actually be seen as a consequence of the Activity-Based Workplace. Lastly, Røvik (2008) discusses failed implementations, where ideas are executed but lead to unforeseen or undesirable outcomes. Our empirical data suggest that while the implementation has not been a complete failure, the implementation has however led to unexpected consequences such as employees reserving the same spots and clustering by departments.

Moreover, Røvik (2008) mentions that reforms can face resistance and conflicts since employees have their own interests and aim to perform their jobs correctly, leading to natural resistance to reforms that are not compatible with their working methods. This can be found from our empirical data, particularly in the responses from Erik and Bianca. Both express a critical need for focused environments that support their productivity. The lack of personal spaces within the new Activity-Based Workplace (ABW) implies that these needs are unfulfilled, leading them to prefer working from home where they can control their environment more effectively. By highlighting this, Erik and Bianca emphasize a natural form of resistance by working from home to safeguard their ability to focus and perform their jobs effectively—emphasizing that the office environment does not align with their work methods.

Røvik (2008) distinguishes between intentional and unintentional translations when organizational ideas are adapted and reshaped within organizational contexts. He identifies three primary motives for intentional translations. The first motive involves deliberately adapting an idea to local contexts to improve efficiency and effectiveness. This is where the municipality's adoption and implementation of Activity-Based Working (ABW) can be considered. In this instance, the implementation can be viewed as a deliberate and rational translation aimed at yielding better results. Feedback from respondents indicates that this goal was achieved for some, while for others, the theory was lost in translation, resulting in a less effective application of ABW as initially intended.

The second motive Røvik (2008) discusses is that translation can occur under the influence of conflicting interests and negotiations, leading to adaptations of a concept to suit specific organizational needs. Our findings suggest that a few employees in some way resist or disfavor the ABW implementation due to conflicting interests. By using strategies like post-it notes on a board, the municipality negotiated modifications to the workspace that better aligned with personal or departmental preferences. This type of translation might produce a version of ABW that does not fully align with the intended version of the reform, but managed to accommodate specific employee preferences.

The third motive involves translations made to achieve symbolic or prestigious effects, even if these are not always explicitly stated (Røvik, 2008). In our case, the municipality's motivations for implementing ABW were not clearly communicated to employees, leading to

mixed perceptions about the purpose of the reform. As Fredrik suggested, the municipality may have aimed to position itself as an innovative force that generates spontaneous ideas in the hallway, although, in practice, this has not been fully realized. Thus, we found indications that some respondents believe the reform was designed to enhance external and internal perceptions, without substantially improving internal processes.

As consistently highlighted in the essay, there are divided opinions among our interviewees about the implementation of Activity-Based Working (ABW). Røvik (2008) observes that employees often possess essential “tacit” knowledge about the functionality of existing systems, which may result in incompatibility and potential rejection of new reforms. Our respondents’ experiences echo this point, with some expressing that the reform disrupted their workflow and did not satisfy their needs, among other concerns. This “tacit” knowledge could be the need of working in close proximity to closest colleagues, resulting in an incompatibility and potential rejection of the reform and thus the tendency of employees to cluster by departments. Røvik (2008) discusses how incompatibilities in organizational reforms often stem from differing values. He notes that many organizations strive to preserve specific values and norms, leading to significant opposition when introduced reforms conflict with these foundational principles. This perspective is reflected in our respondents’ feedback, with some expressing dissatisfaction towards the implementation of Activity-Based Working (ABW). Varied responses emerged when respondents were asked about the motivations behind ABW. Some perceived the reform primarily as a cost-saving measure rather than a genuine effort to enhance the work environment. Furthermore, one respondent felt that the reform completely overlooked employee needs, highlighting a significant disconnect between the intended purpose of ABW and its reception among employees.

Røvik (2008) outlines three potential responses to such incompatibility: canceling the reform, modifying the concept, or persisting with the original plan. In our case, the management at Havsby appears to be opting for modification. This decision is evidenced by their approach to planning the implementation phase, which includes workshops and the development of four personas, coupled with a feedback mechanism using post-it notes. This approach aligns with what Sahlin-Andersson (1996) terms “editing”, which involves tailoring a reform to better fit the specific needs of an organization. Most respondents felt that their individual needs were addressed during this process. However, a few expressed mixed feelings, indicating a level of

ambivalence towards the disparity between the proposed changes and their actual reality. This tension introduces the next section of our discussion: Surface and Substance.

5.2 Surface and Substance

When examining the discrepancy between surface and substance, we have found that some respondents express divergent views regarding the municipality's vision of the reform versus their actual experiences. As Gabriel (2008) points out, an emphasis on image can lead to a gap between an organization's public image and its actual practices. Our findings from Havsby illustrate that despite management's intentions, the implementation of the reform is not always perceived by employees as a significant enhancement to the workplace. Instead, it is often viewed as a superficial adjustment—prompted by factors like cost savings associated with increased remote working—rather than a change that genuinely benefits all employees. This aligns with Meyer and Rowan's (1977) observation that organizations may adopt certain structures and practices to appear legitimate, termed as “myths”, even if these changes do not improve efficiency. This often results in a significant disparity between an organization's official structure and its everyday operations. While some respondents recognize that the reform may increase flexibility, they also feel it compromises personal peace and privacy, reinforcing the perception that the reform could be more of a cosmetic alteration than a substantial improvement to their work environment.

While some respondents acknowledged that the reform had improved the office environment, primarily in terms of flexibility, there appears to be a misalignment between the municipality's vision of the office and their personal experiences of it, echoing the principles of Organizational Dischronization (OD) as described by Alvesson and Jonsson (2021). While the municipality's vision aimed at enhancing flexibility, social interactions and places for solitude, the respondents' experiences unveiled a misalignment between this vision and the practical realities of the workplace. Despite perceived improvements in flexibility, respondents' noted a tendency to remain rooted with their departments, indicating a preference to engage primarily with colleagues from their own units. Moreover, some respondents felt that the office did not allow for concentrated work, opting for remote alternatives instead. This discrepancy reflects the underlying ambiguity characteristic of OD, where contradictory logics coexist within an organization (Alvesson & Jonsson, 2021).

Alvesson and Jonsson (2021) propose that OD manifests as a subtle mismatch in individuals' perceptions and interactions with their environment, leading to inconsistent interpretations and actions. In the context of the reform at Havsby, this manifests as a disconnection between the intended fostering of a dynamic and interactive environment and the observed day-to-day interactions. Moreover, the concept of OD sheds light on the phenomenon of "illogics" within organizations, where broader institutional principles may be perceived as confusing or meaningless at the local level (Alvesson & Jonsson, 2021). This insight resonates with the respondents' observations, indicating a divergence between the municipality's overarching vision and the lived experiences of employees within specific departments. This "illogics" could be exemplified from Fredriks comment about Havsby "aiming to be an innovative force generating ideas in the hallway", which he couldn't see as a viable option in the local context of Havsby.

It's important not to overlook those who believe that the reform is effective and functioning well. It is also worthwhile to explore the reasons behind such internal ambiguities regarding the benefits and perceived motivations for the reform. Literature indicates that substantive practices in organizations are often reduced to elements of image-building, characterized by meaningless imitation and superficial initiatives that lack local relevance for genuine organizational change (Prasad, Prasad & Mir, 2010). However, respondents rather seem to perceive these patterns as a natural human evolution and habits (for example, sitting together with respective departments). Nonetheless, there remains a discrepancy between the management's intentions and employee experiences. This is evident as employees continue to reserve specific spaces and predominantly interact within their own departments, suggesting that while the reform's objectives may be well-intended, their implementation fails to resonate effectively with the actual needs and habits of the workforce. Based on feedback from the respondents, it could be argued that the reform may lack relevance and applicability to the specific context of the municipality (Røvik, 2008; Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2009). In summary, our empirical material indicates a gap between what is envisioned about the reform and its actual outcomes (Zbaracki, 1998; Hallonsten, 2022). In the following section, we will discuss any actions taken by employees, from the actual outcome.

5.3 Exit, Voice, Loyalty and Neglect

By utilizing the voice-exit-loyalty framework proposed by Hirschman (1970), we had the opportunity to include elements of these responses in our findings. The exit strategy, a response characterized by leaving the organization, exploring new job opportunities, or contemplating leaving (Hirschman, 1970; Farrell, 1983; Rusbult & Zembrodt, 1983; Rusbult et al., 1988) was not explicitly mentioned in the responses. However, the respondents' tendency to work increasingly from home might represent a modern adaptation of the exit strategy. Although none of our respondents directly expressed a desire to leave, it is plausible to argue that individuals like Gunilla, Bianca, and Erik, who have increasingly started to work from home, are subtly employing an physiological exit strategy by relocating their office environment entirely to their homes.

However, the option to work from home offers other benefits such as improved work-life balance through the elimination of commuting, better childcare options, and enhanced personal comfort, even if the office setup at the workplace would fully meet their needs. Therefore it's difficult to know whether an office fully suited for their needs would indulge individuals like Erik, Gunilla and Bianca to go back to the office, or if they still would stay at home because of mentioned benefits. Nonetheless, Piderit (2000) suggests that employees find it easier to articulate negative thoughts rather than negative emotions. This implies that the shift to increased remote work may serve as a channel for expressing these negative thoughts rather than emotions in the traditional office setting. Such response aligns more with neglect than exit, characterized by a passive decline in work quality and engagement (Farrell, 1983; Rusbult & Zembrodt, 1983; Rusbult et al., 1988). This scenario unveils a nuanced and dynamic adaptation to evolving workplace dynamics, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and intentional facets in comprehending responses (Piderit, 2000). By examining employee reactions from various perspectives, we can enhance our understanding of how they might navigate situations where predicting their actions has historically proven challenging (Piderit, 2000).

According to Hirschman (1970), loyalty stems from strong organizational commitment. Individuals with high loyalty are often influential within their organizations, suggesting that those employees who advocated for physical meetings as exemplified by Erik, asserting their superiority, may demonstrate higher loyalty. Furthermore, loyalty is evident among

employees who, when asked about the purpose of the office, chose to describe its function and usage by echoing the explanations previously provided by Havsby (2024). This could indicate a deep-seated loyalty contrasting to the individuals who were more cynical, highlighting e.g the cost-saving motives instead. Loyalty is characterized by a passive yet hopeful attitude toward awaiting improvements, showing support both publicly and privately for the organization, and maintaining a positive outlook for the future, or by engaging in actions that reflect a commitment and responsibility toward the organization (Rusbult et al., 1988). This is exemplified by employees like Kerstin, who, despite ongoing changes, views them as potentially beneficial in the long term. Her understanding and patience with the process signify therefore loyalty to the organization's decisions. A similar sentiment is observed in Cecilia, who acknowledges the management's genuine intentions, even though she does not fully agree with the reform.

From the material provided by Havsby (2024), it is evident that they took deliberate steps to incorporate employee feedback into the design of the new office space. Havsby initiated multiple efforts, including workshops and surveys, to ensure that employees could share their working habits and individual needs (Havsby, 2024). This approach suggests that employees were not only given the opportunity but were also encouraged to use the "voice" option as outlined by Hirschman (1970). By implementing such changes and actively seeking employee feedback, Havsby demonstrated a commitment to allowing their employees to voice their preferences. However, the effectiveness and genuine consideration of this feedback is questionable, as some employees, like Bianca, perceive these efforts as superficial—primarily aimed at justifying the Activity-Based Workplace, rather than genuinely improving employee satisfaction or addressing their concerns. However, other employees appreciated these efforts, and underscored its effectiveness.

Further analysis during our interviews suggests that the voice option was also implicitly employed when employees discussed the organization with us as interviewers. Instead of voicing direct criticisms, many employees chose to defend their organization. They acknowledged good intentions behind the decisions, even if they did not fully agree with them. This could be exemplified by an employee who raised concerns about the home-office ratio but still concluded that having the option to work from home was preferable to not having it at all. This reflects a nuanced use of the voice option, where employees use it not just to express dissatisfaction but also to articulate support and understanding of the

organizational intent to us as interviewers. This increased propensity for voice is according to Hirschman (1970) fueled by loyalty and indicates that those with strong organizational commitment are more likely to attempt to influence and rectify issues, driven by the belief that improvement is possible from within. It could therefore be argued that the individuals noting the discrepancy between intentions and actual reality, but still choosing to defend the organization to us, are employing high levels of loyalty.

As mentioned, Havsby introduced a board for employees to put post-it notes expressing their concerns over a trial period of 100 days. According to Fredrik, this board served as an early indicator of resistance and provided an outlet for frustrations, common during periods of change. The initial 100 days also allowed employees, like Jonas, to vent frustrations and adjust to the new environment; Jonas eventually forgot his initial complaint, uncertain whether it had been addressed or if he had simply adapted. Interestingly, interviewees did not mention this board unless prompted, suggesting a reserved engagement with this feedback method, despite its availability.

This approach aligns with Hirschman's (1970) concept of voice, indicating that using post-it notes to express concerns reflects a significant degree of loyalty and contributes to an environment that values feedback (Hirschman, 1970). However, as explained by Rusbult et al. (1988), voice involves actively seeking to solve problems and discussing issues and would involve employees directly voicing concerns to superiors, whereas the use of post-it notes could represent a more modest, passive form of voice. Thus, the feedback mechanism through post-it notes may more accurately reflect loyalty, as described by Rusbult et al. (1988), denoting a passive yet hopeful response to changes and demonstrating commitment to the organization through this reserved engagement.

Conversely, responses from other employees, such as Gunilla, who asked, "what battles do you choose?" represent the opposite of loyalty and voice. Gunilla's sentiment displays passivity and a lack of commitment, illustrating the very antithesis of voice, both in her choice not to engage or express her opinions and in her expressed sense of hopelessness. Given her option to work from home, she sees no need to address issues directly. Responses similar to Gunilla's, characterized by disengagement from the workplace and a passive stance, resemble neglect, which is passive by nature and typically marked by a deterioration in work quality and engagement, leading to reduced motivation or productivity (Farrell, 1983;

Rusbult et al., 1982, 1988). However, none of the respondents exhibited signs of decreased productivity or motivation; in fact, quite the opposite was observed since they experienced increased productivity with the option to work from home, and all were highly motivated by their work activities. Therefore, it could be argued that neglect was not evident in our analysis. Still, the laid-back attitude, the sense of hopelessness, and the responses from many employees could instead represent another more cynical form of response.

5.4 Navigating the New Dynamics

At Havsby, some employees expressed emotions indicating a lack of appreciation for the office setup but refrained from openly discussing their feelings to management, possibly due to a more cynical approach. While some understood and praised the benefits with the Activity-Based Workplace (ABW), others saw it primarily as other objectives. Many respondents reacted negatively to this change, in line with organizational cynicism as defined by Dean et al. (1998). Their behavior, reflective of discontent with the ABW concept rather than the organization as a whole, could for example be observed in their inclination to sit with their department. By expressing their thoughts anonymously in the interviews rather than to management, the respondents appeared to be shielding themselves from management decisions, a mechanism identified by Reichers et al. (1997). Additionally, Dean et al. (1998) and Bommer et al. (2005) suggest that cynicism serves not only as a defense mechanism but also as an internal warning system within the workplace, potentially fostering feelings of alienation and disconnection among employees. This sentiment was particularly noticeable in the cases of employees who primarily worked from home and displayed a sense of indifference. For example, Erik perceived a hierarchical divide from people working on-site in contrast to the individuals working remotely, Gunilla expressed skepticism about the purported outcomes of ABW, and Bianca was frustrated about adapting to a new office layout.

However, this indifference and cynicism could also signal cases of functional stupidity. Functional stupidity involves consciously avoiding critical reflection and simply going along with tasks, as noted by Alvesson and Spicer (2012) and Paulsen (2017). Therefore, this indifference could partly be signaling functional stupidity, as the individuals continued as usual despite their concerns, refraining to voice them to management, dismissing the importance of them by using the option to work from home as a coping mechanism (Paulsen,

2017). However, many employees at Havsby could describe the purpose of ABW such as changing workstations, yet their actions—such as sitting in the same places all day—demonstrated a lack of reflection on how their behavior contradicted the intended goals, employees simply played along (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Paulsen, 2017). This suggests a lack of critical evaluation, as they continue their routine tasks despite noticeable discrepancies between their perception and the reality of ABW.

Alvesson and Spicer (2012) contend that functional stupidity is prevalent in environments dominated by an economy of persuasion, which prioritizes image and symbolic manipulation. Before implementing the Activity-Based Workplace (ABW), Havsby's used surveys, workshops and purposefully crafted images and visions to promote the concept to the workers (Illustration 1, 2 & 3). These tactics could be seen as strategically crafted to create appealing images and narratives that encourage employees to adopt beliefs that reinforce the organization's desired image, define their roles within it, and shape their self-perceptions (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). The effectiveness of these efforts at Havsby varied, from those echoing the company's messaging to others who remain skeptical or ambivalent. This variation in responses reflects the previous research that suggests some employees resist while others remain ambivalent to symbolic manipulation (Collinson, 1992; Fleming, 2013; Fleming & Spicer, 2003). This divergence in opinion could be further demonstrating the presence of functional stupidity at Havsby, however, we want to stress that functional stupidity does not necessarily imply something negative. Instead, it could be seen as "functional acceptance", where tasks are performed as expected despite personal disagreement, maintaining functionality. Therefore, it could be argued that a further development of the theory is needed, and we propose our refinement of functional stupidity as "functional acceptance" in response to reform.

5.6 Functional Acceptance

Functional acceptance can be conceptualized as a state where employees acknowledge and continue with organizational reforms without significant resistance or enthusiasm. Unlike cynicism, which carries a negative connotation of disengagement and criticism, or loyalty, which implies a deeper, emotional commitment, acceptance is characterized by a pragmatic or indifferent adherence to new norms and practices. In our analysis of employees at Havsby, we observed a prevalent attitude of "going with the flow". Despite not necessarily agreeing

entirely with the changes, employees demonstrated contentment, supported by their bosses and enabled by the option to work from home. Even those with more negative perspectives were generally satisfied with their jobs and exhibited no strong objections to remote work, quite the opposite. We argue for acceptance over stupidity, as employees who are content with their work and have viable options may choose to accept and continue functioning within the organization.

This distinction between acceptance and other responses such as loyalty, voice, exit, and neglect is significant. While loyalty entails emotional investment, acceptance lacks strong emotional ties but maintains functional compliance. Many employees who initially expressed negativity still accepted the situation without any intention to leave. This differentiation is evident from those with active engagement or complete disengagement, such as cynicism. For many, their job was simply a job—without implying unhappiness. They were content as they were and saw no need for further engagement or overall reflection, thus showcasing functional acceptance.

6. Conclusion

Our research explores whether an Activity-Based Workplace (ABW) constitutes a substantive change that meets the unique needs and values of public sector employees, or if it merely represents a surface-level change motivated by other objectives. To achieve this, we address the following research questions: *“What are employees’ perceptions and experiences of the intended purpose behind the implementation of an Activity-Based Workplace?”* and *“How do employees adapt their work practices in an Activity-Based Workplace, and what are their responses to this new working environment?”*

In this concluding chapter, we discuss our empirical findings and explain their contribution to the existing body of knowledge in the field. We also identify the limitations of our study and offer recommendations for further research.

6.1 Empirical Findings

Initially and mainly, our empirical findings primarily indicate that the reform, as envisioned by the municipality, is perceived in various and ambiguous ways among the employees at Havsby. In a study of this kind, it is not uncommon to have such a wide range of responses from participants; however, what is striking is how ambiguously and considerably these responses differ, to the point that it has caused us to have numerous discussions. What we discovered at Havsby was a divide: some employees did not view the intended reform as particularly beneficial, while another group was satisfied with the changes. Interestingly, even those who were satisfied did not seem to utilize the purpose of the reform in a way that could be beneficial as intended by the reformers; they either stayed with their departments or closest colleagues in the same places, or they worked from home. In contrast, and equally intriguing, is that the group dissatisfied with the reform noted that people still reserved specific places for themselves, which led to decreased interaction with other people and departments. This situation suggests that there is a disconnect between the intended flexible workplace design and its practical implementation.

One theme that emerged in every interview was that many employees are working from home, a practice highlighted as flexible. Some pointed out that this arrangement made it easier to balance work with family life and other commitments. However, others mentioned

that they work from home due to the uncertainty of not knowing whether they will have a desk available at the office. They also indicated that they have set up a home workstation that feels more secure than the office, knowing they have a fixed and comfortable spot at home. Additionally, some employees suggested that their choice to work from home is a response to the new workplace design, viewing it as a form of resistance. Interestingly, many respondents highlighted the convenience of working from home as a favorable aspect of the Activity-Based Workplace. However, this favorable aspect of remote work is not possible for all employees due to aspects such as smaller living arrangements without the possibilities of a designated office. We argue that while the design of an ABW might assume remote work, its core purpose is to accommodate all employees' needs within the office environment itself. Therefore, remote work should not be considered an integral aspect of the ABW.

Combining all these insights, we propose that there is indeed a distinction between surface and substance, which is crucial to understanding workplace dynamics at Havsby. A pivotal issue in this dynamic, and these differing perspectives on the reform, is whether employees are aware of the municipality's intentions, or if they misunderstand them. This suggests that what is perceived as the surface of a reform like an Activity-Based Workplace depends not only on what is marketed and symbolized by the reformers but also on how employees perceive this surface. We observe that theories about ABW present one surface, Havsby presents another, and the employees perceive yet another. These various surfaces contrast with the actual experience, which in turn influences one's view of its surface. This complexity presents an intriguing dynamic and complicates understanding. For example, a respondent who views ABW as promoting remote work and enjoys working from home might misinterpret the surface yet find it substantively fulfilling. This tendency was evident in most themes, showing how attitudes and reactions are dynamic and can be more influenced by an individual's personal perception of the surface than by the actual intent. This discrepancy and complex dynamic became further apparent when the surface, as intended by the municipality, was clearly described by respondents in terms of their personal fit, yet interviews revealed they often e.g. remained at the same desks. Thus, there was a disparity between their perceived surface and the actual substance, yet the overall experience remained positive.

We can logically argue that not everyone can be satisfied in a workplace, and it can be challenging to determine who decides whether something is beneficial, even with sound

implementation and a clear vision. As emphasized throughout our thesis, people are creatures of habit and tend to adhere to their established routines. Therefore, we are not surprised by the absence of a singular response; rather, we acknowledge the presence of multiple simultaneous responses, reflecting that experience is multidimensional. Furthermore, we have observed that many organizational ideas are often presented in an appealing manner, and theories about responses to organizational change tend to be either overly positive or overly negative. This insight leads us into our next section, “Theoretical Contribution”, where we propose a new approach to understanding and responding to organizational change and reforms.

6.2 Theoretical Contribution

In this thesis, we propose an expansion of “functional stupidity”, originally defined by Alvesson and Spicer (2012), into what we term “functional acceptance.” This extension builds on our findings from Havsby, where the employee responses to the implementation of an Activity-Based Workplace (ABW) showcased behaviors that were not fully explained by existing theories in our framework. Rather, these behaviors seemed to represent a form of ambivalence we have identified as functional acceptance.

Functional stupidity, as discussed by Alvesson and Spicer (2012), and further explored by Paulsen (2017), describes a scenario in which employees refrain from critical reflection and unreflectively adhere to organizational directives. Though certain employees at Havsby showed indications of awareness and disapproval of the new office arrangement, they fell short of open opposition or active participation. This conduct is more in line with an intentional, or unintentional, choice to preserve operational functionality in spite of personal opposition to organizational changes, thus showing what we term functional acceptance. Functional acceptance draws attention to a compromise that is characterized by contented but disinterested compliance, situated between active resistance and passive submission. We argue that employees who, although having differing opinions about ABW, carry out their duties without a strong desire to change or question the current situation are said to be functionally accepting of the new norms and practices rather than showing functional stupidity.

Furthermore, adding functional acceptance into organizational research helps to clarify how employees deal with the challenges posed by workplace reforms. It takes into account the subtle aspects of employee responses. This theoretical addition adds value to academic discussions by shifting the focus from functional stupidity to functional acceptance and highlights the significance of grasping a range of employee behaviors that are functionally motivated rather than emotionally or critically driven. It suggests that pragmatic acceptance, rather than critical engagement or emotional attachment, is the driving force behind this type of compliance.

6.3 Limitations

This study acknowledges several limitations that are important to consider in order to understand the conclusions we have drawn. First, it is crucial to note that the study was conducted within a single municipality, which poses a significant limitation in terms of the generalizability of the findings. As such, the dynamics observed in Havsby may not accurately represent broader public sector dynamics or the specific challenges and responses encountered in other municipalities. This limitation, therefore, restricts our ability to extend our conclusions to other contexts without additional comparative studies.

Additionally, as reported in our methodology chapter, we conducted 11 interviews. Having more time and conducting additional interviews could have strengthened our findings and further enhanced the generalizability. Although we do not believe that more time or interviews would have significantly altered our findings, given the limitation of studying a single office and case context, we still caution against using this study to generalize to other contexts. Every organization has unique aspects that can influence how reforms are implemented or received, and in our study, the specific organizational context must be considered. Therefore, our study can be viewed as highly context-specific. While it provides valuable insights into the phenomenon of functional acceptance, this does not imply that the findings can be directly transferred to other organizations without adjustments or further exploration.

Our findings suggest that resistance to change among employees could be influenced by their comfort with past experiences, which may influence their perceptions of the reform's effectiveness, and, consequently, our conclusions. Moreover, some employees in our study

have chosen to work almost exclusively from home. This tendency can compromise the intended results of the reform and makes it difficult to accurately evaluate the reform's adoption and effectiveness.

6.4 Future Research

As we conclude this thesis, we are excited to have discovered that surface and substance, which remain relatively underdeveloped, are indeed significant issues within organizations. While studies on symbolic manipulation and organizational images have been around for some time, there is a lack of research on how internal reforms are perceived from the employees' perspective. Therefore, we encourage future researchers to further explore this topic. Although this research has taken a fairly critical approach to examining reforms and the concept of surface and substance, exploring the opposite perspective could also be valuable for a broader understanding.

Ultimately, we recommend broader research across different municipalities to better understand reforms and generalize the findings. However, our study is not necessarily limited to municipalities alone, and it could be rewarding to examine similar reforms and gather data within other organizations and businesses, both private and public. We are pleased to have advanced the literature with functional acceptance. Future researchers could further develop functional acceptance by exploring more psychological aspects and its nature as a response to organizational reforms.

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Appendix

Brief before interview

Hi,

We are two students who are currently finishing our last semester of the master's program in "Managing People, Knowledge and Change" at the School of Economics, Lund University. At the moment, we are working on our degree project, which aims to investigate employees' perceptions of working in an Activity-Based Workplace. Given that your organization has recently moved to this way of working, we would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss your experiences and perceptions. The interviews will be conducted anonymously and are expected to last up to one hour. If you have any questions, you are welcome to contact us. We would be very grateful for your participation and look forward to the opportunity to collaborate.

With kind regards, Hanna and Eleonora.

Interview guide

Start of the interview

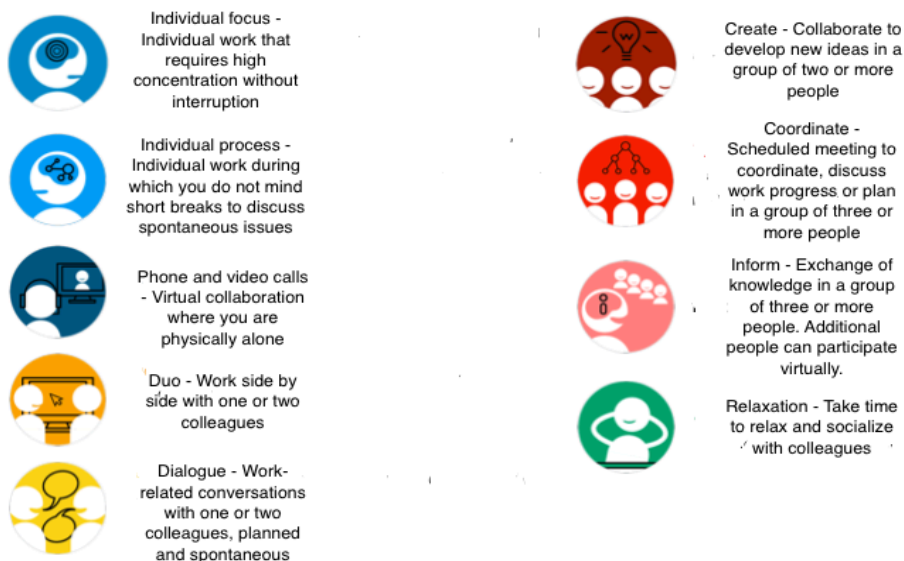
- Who are we (name, program, background)
- What are we researching (we are not here to evaluate, just to learn how it works in practice)
- Inform of consent and anonymity.
- Permission for recording of the interview.
- Time interval: approximately one hour

Introduction

- Would you like to tell us a little bit about yourself and your role?
- Do you usually work at home or on location?
- How would you describe an activity-based workplace and its purpose?
- What was your first thought when you heard that the office was going to start working activity-based?
- How have your thoughts been since then?
- How does an activity-based way of working make you feel?
- Has it personally changed the way you work?
- Do you think it's different to work activity-based in the public sector?

Work Activities

Description of the respective activity from Havsby, this was not precisely shown to the respondents, but we had these activities in mind.



<p>Alone Work</p> <p>Individual focus individual process Phone and video calls</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do you experience individual work in the office? - How do you get the best focus? - What do you do if you get a call? On video?
<p>Few people (1-2)</p> <p>Duo Dialog</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you often sit alone or with another colleague? - If you work together, how do you do it? - Is there an opportunity for spontaneous work interviews?
<p>(2 or more)</p> <p>Create Coordinate Inform</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you do if you have to sit with some colleagues and brainstorm ideas/similar? - How do you experience planned meetings? - How do hybrid meetings work?
<p>Relaxation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where do you usually take breaks? - Where do you eat lunch? - Where do you drink your cup of coffee? - Is the office a social place for you?

An attractive office environment:

- Where we want to spend our time and invites to social interactions.
- Provides opportunities for undisturbed work.

A workplace that:

- Supports our working methods and processes.
- Is tailored to the needs of the organization and its employees.
- Stimulates effective collaboration within and across organizational boundaries.

Questions about what they think about these statements from the picture above.

Main question

Follow up question

How would you describe the office environment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Appearance-wise”, what do you think of it? - What can its design contribute to? Prevent?
How would you describe the activity-based workplace?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does the workplace support your working methods and processes? - Is it adapted to your needs? - Does the workplace stimulate effective collaboration within and across organizational boundaries? - <i>Biggest difference between regular office and ABW?</i>

The creators of ABWs image and purpose:

Powerful framework to improve **engagement, efficiency, and wellbeing.**

Commitment question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are you motivated at your workplace? - What motivates you?
Efficiency question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do you feel about your productivity? - When are you productive?
Well-being question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How are you at your workplace? - Do you have support from leaders? - Do you have the opportunity to collaborate and connect with others?

What do you think about this?

Summary

- Follow up questions.
- Is there anything else on the topic that you would like to add?
- Thank you!