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Enhancing the Success of Organizational Change

Exploring Middle Managers' Different Roles During the Change Processes

School of Management
Master's Thesis in
Strategic Business Development

Vaasa 2021

VAASAN YLIOPISTO
Johtamisen akateeminen yksikkö

Tekijä:	Verneri Lindholm
Tutkielman nimi:	Enhancing the Success of Organizational Change: Exploring Middle Managers' Different Roles During the Change Processes
Tutkinto:	Kauppatieteiden maisteri
Oppiaine:	Strategic Business Development
Työn ohjaaja:	Jukka Vesalainen
Valmistumisvuosi:	2021 **Sivumäärä:** 89

TIIVISTELMÄ:

Alati kasvava muutosnopeus on laajalti tunnistettu ilmiö nykypäivän dynaamisessa liiketoimintaympäristössä. Muutoksia tapahtuu useammin kuin koskaan aikaisemmin, ja yritysten on pakko sopeutua niihin uudistammalla organisaatiorakenteitaan ja toimintamallejaan. Viime vuosina sekä keskijohdon rooli että vastuualueet ovat kasvaneet, kun tiimityöskentelyn suosio on lisääntynyt yrityksissä. Keskijohdon rooli on erittäin monialainen, koska heillä on strateginen asema organisaation ylimmän johdon ja etulinjan työntekijöiden välillä. He tasapainottelevat organisaation strategian ja päivittäisen operatiivisen toiminnan välillä ja ovat näin ollen usein myös vastuussa uusien muutosaloitteiden jalkauttamisesta käytännöntasolle.

Keskijohdolla on merkittävä – mutta silti heikosti ymmärretty rooli yritysten muutosprosessien aikana. Tarvitaan siis lisätutkimusta siitä, miten eroavaisuudet keskijohdon muutoskäytänteissä ja toimintatavoissa vaikuttavat organisaation suoriutumiseen ja muutosaloitteiden onnistumiseen. Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena onkin selvittää, millä eri tavoilla keskijohtajat vaikuttavat organisaation muutosprosesseihin. Tutkimuksen teoreettinen viitekehys on muodostettu määrittelemällä organisationaalinen muutos, tunnistamalla sen eri lähestymistavat, esittelemällä ja analysoimalla olemassa olevia muutosmalleja ja viitekehyksiä, tunnistamalla muutosprosessin eri vaiheet, ja lopuksi määrittelemällä keskijohdon eri roolit, vastuualueet ja tavoitteet muutosprosessin aikana. Koska tutkimus pyrkii kaventamaan kuilua alan teorian ja käytännön välillä, teoreettiset havainnot testataan empiirisen tutkimuksen avulla. Laadullista tutkimusmateriaalia kerätään haastattelemalla keskijohtajia puolistrukturoiduin teemahaastatteluin. Empiiriset tutkimustulokset analysoidaan ja peilataan edellä kuvattuun tutkimuksen teoreettiseen viitekehykseen.

Sekä tutkimuksen teoreettiset että empiiriset havainnot viittaavat siihen, että keskijohdon rooli muutosprosesseissa korostuu erityisesti jalkauttamisvaiheen aikana. Muutosorientoituneen johtajuuden avulla he voivat edesauttaa muutosprosessin etenemistä ja johtaa organisaatiota haluttuun suuntaan. He voivat myös omalla toiminnallaan estää mahdollista muutosvastarintaa, motivoida ihmisiä osallistumaan muutokseen ja varmistaa kehityksen jatkuvuuden. Tutkimus pyrkii tarjoamaan alan tutkijoille uusia näkemyksiä nykypäivän muutosjohtamiskäytänteistä ja siitä, miten menestyvät muutosjohtavat toimivat muutoksen eri vaiheiden aikana. Lisäksi tutkimustulokset vahvistavat omalta osaltaan alan teoriaa ja tarjoavat uusia näkemyksiä aikaisempiin tutkimustuloksiin.

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Title of the Thesis:	Enhancing the Success of Organizational Change: Exploring Middle Managers' Different Roles During the Change Processes
Degree:	Master of Science in Economics and Business Administration
Programme:	Strategic Business Development
Supervisor:	Jukka Vesalainen
Year of graduation:	2021 **Number of pages:** 89

ABSTRACT:

The increasing rate of change is widely recognized in today's dynamic business environment. Changes occur more frequently than ever before, and companies are forced to adapt to them by reforming their organizational structures and operating models. In recent years, middle managers' role and responsibilities have grown as a teamwork design has gained popularity within the organizations. The role of middle management is highly cross-functional as they hold a strategic location between organization's top management and frontline employees. They balance between organization's strategy and day-to-day activities, and hence, are also responsible for implementing changes.

Due to the middle management's essential yet poorly understood role in change processes, additional research on how differences in middle managers' change practices and policies influence on organizational performance and improvement efforts' success is needed. Hence, the aim of the thesis is to figure out how do middle managers influence on the organizational change processes. The theoretical framework of the study is formed by defining organizational change and different approaches to it, presenting and analysing existing frameworks and change management models, identifying different phases of a change process, and finally examining middle managers different roles, areas of responsibilities, and objectives during an organizational change process. As the study aims to fill the identified gap between the theory and practice, an empirical research is conducted. Qualitative research material is collected by interviewing people in middle management positions through semi-structured theme interviews. Findings of the empirical research are analysed and reflected to the theoretical framework of the study.

Both theoretical and empirical findings of the study suggest that the middle managers' role in organizational change processes is emphasized especially during the change implementation phase. Through change-oriented leadership, they can enhance the success of change processes and lead the organization into the desired direction. With their own actions, middle managers can also prevent possible change resistance, motivate people to engage in the change, and ensure continuity of the development. As theoretical contributions, this study seeks to provide academics new insights on today's change management practices and how successful change leaders act during the change processes. In addition, the findings of the study reinforce the existing literature of the field and contribute to the prior studies in various ways.

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"There is nothing permanent except change"

Heraclitus (535-475 BCE)

1   Introduction

There seem to be a clear agreement on the increasing rate of change in the business environment. Changes occur more frequently than ever before, and the business environment is evolving continuously (e.g. Kotter 1995; Moran & Brightman 2000; Higgins 2005; Todnem By 2005; Hudescu & Ilies 2011; Raineri 2011; Al-Ali, Singh, Al-Nahyan, & Sohal 2017; Baddah 2017). Basic operating assumptions and traditions are challenged (Moran et al. 2000) and companies need to anticipate or adapt to increased global competition, downturns in national economics (Hudescu et al. 2011), and new technologies, markets, and legislations (Raineri 2011). In addition, internal factors such as changes in staff and new policies and procedures are forcing companies to reform their organisational structures and operating models (Raineri 2011).

Due to this rapid change rate, the risk of failure is greater than ever before (Moran et al. 2000). Studies have shown, that approximately 70 % of all attempts to implement change initiatives fails (Beer & Nohria 2000; Miller 2001). It has been suggested that change programs often fail due to the poor execution of change initiatives rather than the incomplete or erroneous change plans (Miller 2001; Gill 2002). In addition to poor change management practices, the lack of effective leadership and guidance have been identified as one of the key factors causing failures of change programmes (Miller 2001; Gill 2002; Kang 2015). This highlights the role of executors and managers who are in charge of implementing change initiatives. As a matter of fact, for example Graetz (2000) have argued that the primary task of today's management is the leadership of organisational change.

Even though the change management gains all the time more and more attention from both academics and practitioners, it is not any new revolutionary concept (Baddah 2017). Since the Lewin's (1947) early publicizations, management literature has proposed several different models, frameworks, guidelines, and strategies for implementing change (Hudescu et al. 2011; Raineri 2011; Baddah 2017). Authors have identified both factors causing change efforts to fail (Gill 2002) and critical success factors of change

initiatives (Hudescu et al. 2011; Raineri 2011). Although views and opinions vary depending on the context and chosen approach (Baddah 2017), it is commonly agreed that the successful management of change is an essential skill in today's highly competitive and rapidly changing business environment (Kotter 1996; Guimaraes & Armstrong 1998; Doyle, Claydon & Buchanan 2000; Moran et al. 2000; Todnem By 2005; Radeke 2011; Talmaciu 2014).

1.1 Research gap and scope of the study

Even though there is a wide range of different theories, change models, and approaches available to the practitioners (Todnem By 2005; Hudescu et al. 2011; Raineri 2011; Baddah 2017), executors seem still to be struggling with the frequently ongoing change initiatives and programs (Beer et al. 2000; Miller 2001). The previous research regarding the subject indicates that organizations tend to use different change management practices more often during the change preparation and planning stages rather than during the implementation stage. Implementation practices may even be overlooked by the executors. (Raineri 2011.) Thus, more empirical research on how successful change leaders act and behave during the actual implementation phase of a change is needed (Milleri 2001; Todnem By 2005; Raineri 2011).

It has been argued that the existing theories and approaches are both confusing and contradictory (Burnes 2004b: 4) and organisations do not have clear understanding of them (Burnes 2009: 4). In addition, authors (e.g. Elrod II & Tippett 2002; Rosenbaum, More, & Steane 2018) have argued that the recent literature of change management has not developed anything completely new but rather tried to give insights on how to adopt the old change models and theories in today's context. Academic literature tends to be more conceptual-oriented while on the other hand practitioners prefer case studies and analyses (Raineri 2011). Several authors (e.g. Doyle et al. 2000; Miller 2001; Young 2009; Raineri 2011) have identified this gap between the theory and practice. The existing literature lacks empirical evidence to support and justify the claims made by authors of

the field (Guimaraes et al. 1998; Todnem By 2005). In order to fill this gap, more empirical research within the context of organisational change is required (Todnem By 2005; Bartunek 2008).

Lastly, several authors have pointed out the largely overlooked role of middle managers as change agents. Even though the previous literature has tried to explain the complex nature of a change process, the focus has mainly been on senior leaders and top management, and thus, there is a little research on middle managers' involvement in organizational change processes (Wooldridge & Floyd 1990; Noble 1999; Chuang, Jason, & Morgan 2011; Birken, Lee, & Weiner 2012; Birken, Lee, Weiner, Chin, & Schaefer 2013; Engle, Lopez, Gormley, Chan, Charns, & Lukas 2017). In recent years, middle managers' role and responsibilities have grown as a teamwork design has gained popularity within the organizations (Birken et al. 2012). In addition, Noble (1999) has argued that plans and change initiatives are usually communicated through middle management during the change implementation process. Other authors (e.g. Wooldridge et al. 1990; Caldwell, Chatman, O'Reilly III, Ormiston, & Lapiz 2008; Birken et al. 2012; Birken et al. 2013) have also noticed middle managers' strategic location between organizations' top management and frontline employees. Middle managers – who in many cases are actually in charge of the implementation of new practices (Hagedorn et al. 2006) have the ability to either bridge or create information gaps depending on their commitment to the ongoing change process (Birken et al. 2013). They also balance between organization's strategy and day-to-day activities, and hence, are responsible for implementing changes (Birken et al. 2012). Due to the middle management's essential yet poorly understood role in change processes, additional research on how differences in middle managers' change practices and policies influence on organizational performance and improvement efforts' success is needed (Wooldridge et al. 1990; Noble 1999; Hagedorn et al. 2006; Chuang et al. 2011; Birken et al. 2012; Birken et al. 2013; Engle et al. 2017).

1.2   Research problem and theoretical contribution

As pointed out, if companies want to keep up with the competition it is crucial for them to effectively implement new practices and successfully drive change. The high importance of successful change management combined with the low success rates of change initiatives highlight the executors' – and especially middle managements' role in the change processes. To gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon and explore the different roles of executors, more empirical research is needed. Thus, the main objective and research question of this study is:

RQ: How do middle managers influence on the organizational change process?

In order to achieve the main objective, this study focuses on three main sub-questions to guide the research work. The research question will be answered by answering the following three supplementary questions:

1.   What different phases of a change process can be identified?
2.   What roles does middle management have during these stages?
3.   What are the special characteristics of middle managers' role during the change processes?

This thesis aims to fill the above-described research gap and present an interplay between the theory and practice by conducting a qualitative interview study. Data collection is carried out by interviewing people who are in the middle management positions and in charge of implementing change initiatives. Findings of the empirical research are later on reflected to the theoretical background of the study. As theoretical contributions, the study seeks to provide academics new insights on today's change management practices and on how successful change leaders act during the change processes. As earlier described, it has been argued that the recent literature of change management has not developed anything completely new but rather tried to give insights on how to adopt the old change models and theories in today's context. Thus,

this study aims to bridge the gap between existing change management literature and practice. As managerial implications of the study, executors can gain a broader perspective of the field. By familiarizing themselves with the existing literature executors can gain a better understanding on how to utilize available models and frameworks the most efficient way. Also, understanding the middle managers' different roles as change agents can help organizations' top management to allocate resources and support more effectively during the change processes.

1.3   Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction of the topic which also includes the demonstration of the previous research regarding the subject and the layout of the research questions. The first chapter is followed by the main theory chapter which formulates the theoretical framework of the thesis. Second chapter is divided into three sections. The first one concentrates on the change management process and analyses the different phases of it. Existing frameworks and models are presented in order to demonstrate the progress of the change process. Second section focuses on executors' and middle management's different roles and objectives during the change process. Third section aims to form a synthesis between the first two sections. Later on, collected data from the empirical research is analysed through this theoretical background of middle management's role in the organizational change.

The theoretical part is followed by the methodology which includes introductions and justifications of the research philosophy and used research strategy and methods. Also, collection, handling, and analysing methods of the empirical data are explained and justified. The third chapter also introduces the context of the study in detail. The fourth chapter present findings of the empirical research. The key findings are analysed by reflecting them to the theoretical framework of the study in order to present interplay between the theory and practice. The final chapter summarizes the thesis with conclusions and presents findings on the main research problem and questions. The last

chapter contains both theoretical and managerial implications and presents suggestions for future research. Also, limitations of the study are discussed.

2   Theoretical background

2.1   Change management

As a discipline, change management offers a systematic approach for both academics and practitioners to help them understand and manage change that is affected by several different factors (Al-Ali et al. 2017). Change management is evolving from a current state to a desired future state (Gill 2002; Galli 2018) and deals with all the supporting actions and problems that are part of the change process (Gill 2002). Galli (2018) has divided change management to consists of three layers: organizations, people, and projects. The human aspect and the role of people involved in the change are highlighted also by other authors. According to Kotter (1995), change requires creating new systems, which on the other hand demands leadership. Also, since managing change can be seen as managing people (Moran et al. 2000), leadership is an essential part of change management (Miller 2001; Todnem By 2005). While some authors (e.g. Gill 2002) define change as being primarily about leadership, others (e.g. Kotter 1990; Moran et al. 2000) see management and leadership as complementary actions that are both required in order to successfully drive change. Thus, in the literature of the field terms such as *change leadership* and *the leadership of change* are often used either as a synonym or a substitutive for the term change management.

Although the research on change management has been developing for decades, there is neither generally accepted nor widely used definition of change management (Bamford & Daniel 2005; Kang 2015). Due to this, people use the same terms and concepts with various different meanings (Todnem By 2005; Kang 2015). Jansson (2008) has identified change management as an umbrella term for a wide range of different concepts, which makes defining the change management even more difficult. Table 1 presents different definitions of change management from the literature of the past two decades. Authors tend to define change management based on their own perspectives

(Kang 2015) which causes some disagreements about the key approaches of the change management (Bamford et al. 2005).

Table 1. Definitions of change management

Author(s)	Definition
Rothwell (1999: 26, cited in Kang 2015)	*Change management is a process that ensures (1) that interventions are implemented in ways consistent with desired results and (2) that they help individuals and groups achieve results.*
Moran & Brightman (2000: 66)	*Change management is the process of continually renewing an organization's direction, structure, and capabilities to serve the ever-changing needs of external and internal customers.*
Bendor-Samuel (2004, cited in Al-Ali et al. 2017: 726)	*Change management is a process of reconfiguring components and of making alterations to structures and culture, people and/or technology within an organization to increase efficiency and effectiveness.*
Varkey (2010: 268)	*Change management is a term used to describe any action taken to smoothly transition a business process encompassing an individual or group from a current state to a future desired state of being.*
Van Tiem, Dessinger, Moseley, & Moseley (2012: 61)	*Change management is a process whereby organizations and individuals proactively plan for and adapt to change.*
Prosci (2020), World's leading change management consultant firm	*Change management is the process, tools, and techniques to manage the people side of change to achieve the required business outcome.*

Definitions listed on the table differ from each other depending on the aim of change management. For example, Bendor-Samuel (2004) appoints "*increased efficiency and effectiveness*" as main targets of the change processes while as Moran et al.'s (2000) description highlights the importance of "*meeting the needs of internal and external shareholders*". The most extensive description sees any action taken towards the new desired state as a part of change management (Varkey 2010). Despite of the differences, there are also a certain consensus among the definitions. Majority of the authors have

described change management as a process (Rothwell 1999; Moran et al. 2000; Bendor-Samuel 2004; Van Tiem et al. 2012; Prosci 2020) which means that once the change program is implemented, it can be repeated (Galli 2018). Moran et al. (2000) have highlighted the cyclical nature of change processes; to implement change effectively management team need to cycle repeatedly through different phases. The process perspective and its different phases and stages are introduced in more detail in the following sections.

As a solution to this disagreement and variety of different perspectives, Kang (2015) proposes a new approach to the issue. Based on the characteristics of existing aspects of change management, Kang has separated *macro* and *micro change management* to be their own individual terms. Macro and micro change management approaches differ from each other in various ways. While macro change management practices focus on overall change initiatives and processes at the organizational level, micro change management consist different tactics and guidelines to manage change at the individual level. Thus, the aim of macro change management is to accomplish change in organization's directions and structures whereas micro change management tries to achieve improvement within specific tasks and practices. (Kang 2015.)

2.1.1 Defining organizational change

Change has been identified to appear in various forms (Hudescu et al. 2011), and thus, not all the change programmes are the same (Schech-Storz 2013). Change can be caused by several different factors and also the characterization of a change can be done by several different ways (Todnem By 2005). In her research, Kezar (2001: 23) have identified aspects influencing the nature of a change. Change programmes can differ from each other on four levels which can be named as *why*, *what*, *how*, and *outcome*. By answering the question why, forces and sources causing the change can be identified. Secondly, variables such as order, scale, focus, timing, and degree of change determine what the change is about. Thirdly, how refers to chosen approach of implementing the

change; whether it is adaptive or generative, proactive or reactive, active or static, planned or unplanned. The schools of planned and emergent change will be introduced more comprehensively in the following section due to the great interest they have gained within the literature of the field. Finally, the fourth level of change refers to outcomes of it, and thus, determines the targets of change. Answering the above-mentioned questions is essential in order to frame the analysis of change and understand the differences between change processes. (Kezar 2001: 23.)

As above-mentioned, the determination of how change actually comes about is one of the major ways to characterize organizational change. The most widely used approach based on which change concepts can be divided into different categories is the categorization between *planned* and *emergent* changes initiatives. The origins of planned organisational change approach are in Lewin's (1947) early publicizations, and ever since, the approach has dominated both the theory and practice of change management. (Bamford & Forrester 2003; Rosenbaum et al. 2018.) Change can be categorized as planned if business decisions made by executives are later on implemented throughout the organisation (Miller 2001). The approach determines organisational change as a process that leads a company from one state to another through a series of pre-planned actions and phases (Bamford et al. 2003). Since the change proceeds in a linear order and has clear pre-planned phases, the approach have generated a large number of different kind of models and frameworks which will be introduced in the following sections.

Despite of the popularity of planned approach and its different applications, it has also received criticism from academics and practitioners. Lichtenstein (1997) has argued that the approach is useful to a certain point, but a relatively theoretical and rational nature of the planned approach sets limitations to the practical implications of it. According to the planned approach, the change is isolated (Schein 1985), and thus, it ignores the effects of rapidly changing and unstable business environment (Garvin 1994; Burnes 1996; Burnes 2004b). Another disadvantage of the approach is its rational view of the

change process. The planned approach is based on the assumption that all the stakeholders involved in the change are willing to co-operate and share the same views and targets – which is not always the case (Burnes 1996; Bamford et al. 2003; Burnes 2004b). Finally, it has been argued that the approach is suitable only for small-scale changes (Burnes 1996; Burnes 2004b) and therefore it does not support major size nor rapid changes which require more directive and reactive approach (Stein, Jick, & Kanter 1992; Burnes 1996; Burnes 2004b).

As a response to the criticism towards the planned change, the emergent approach has gained ground in the recent decades (Todnem By 2005). While the planning approach is more rational and sees change progressing linearly, the emergent approach treats change as bottom-up driven and continuous phenomenon. The rationale behind this stems from the complex and rapidly changing business environment; as the changes occur in a fast pace, it is impossible for organization to identify, plan, and implement every action required. Thus, the uncertainty of the environment makes the planned approach inappropriate and highlights the role of emergent approach. (Burnes 1996; Bamford et al. 2003; Burnes 2004b.) According to the emergent approach, the key to an organisational change is a comprehensive understanding of the complex ongoing situation (Bamford et al. 2003). Rather than seeing an organisational change as a set of pre-planned steps and actions, the approach emphasis an organisation's ability to match its resources and capabilities to the needs of a dynamic environment. An organisational change is thereby achieved through a variety of small-scale incremental changes which will over time lead to a transformation of an organisation. (Burnes 1996.)

Even though several authors of emergent approach have suggested methods and sequences of actions that organization should comply with, Burnes (2004b) have argued that many of them are difficult to apply in practice and relatively abstract in nature. In addition, Bamford et al. (2013) have pointed out emergent approach's lack of coherency and diversity of techniques. The approach consists a variety of different models that tend to be more united in terms of criticizing the planned approach instead of offering an

alternative option for it. Finally, Romanelli's and Tushman's (1994) empirical findings indicated that a majority of organizational changes are accomplished via rapid and discontinuous change processes rather than through an accumulation of small-scale changes in strategies, structures, and organizational behaviour.

2.1.2   Existing models and frameworks

The literature of management has frequently proposed various strategies, managerial practices, and different change models in order to facilitate and enhance the success of change programs (Kotter 1996; Hudescu et al. 2011; Raineri 2011). Bamford et al. (2005) have suggested that various change models described in the literature can help executors to characterise the change process. However, due to the complex nature of change processes, a number of different models may need to be applied and utilized simultaneously (Bamford et al. 2005). Since the changes differ from each other at various levels, organizations' executives need to use different change models and methodologies depending on the situation (Schech-Storz 2013). Hence, Galli (2018) has argued that before an organization can create a realizable change management plan, management or a project team should familiarize themselves with the available models and frameworks in order to find the most suitable and effective one for the change program in question. To avoid misunderstandings, Schech-Storz (2013) has separated change *models* and *methodologies* as their own concepts. While the change models work as a guidance for the organizations through the change processes, different change methodologies are practical applications by which change models are implemented and put into action. Change methodologies and executors' different roles are analysed more comprehensively in the later sections whereas this section focuses on introducing the existing change models.

Talmaciu (2014) has identified three main objectives that organizational change models generally pursue for. Firstly, change models usually aim to *define change* by analysing and understanding the existing situation within an organization. This also includes

identification and evaluation of possible solutions. The second objective is *implementation of change* which consists applying the chosen change strategy into action. As a third and final objective, *consolidation of change* guarantees the assimilation of new behaviour and changes.

As the majority of change models focuses on implementing pre-planned steps and activities, they can be considered to represent the planned organizational change approach. Thus, the above-described popularity of planned organizational change approach can also be perceived in the existing change models; most of them suggests that change is relatively analytical and rational and progresses logically. (Miller 2001.) Due to the popularity of different change models, several authors have made comparative analyses between the major change management models. The amount of examined change models and an extent of a research varies depending on the scope and focus of the study. Elrod II et al. (2002) identified, compared, and contracted fifteen different change models while Varkey (2010) focused on the analysis of three different models. In her research, Schech-Storz (2013) identified eleven different models that are based on Lewin's three-step model. Talmaciu (2014) made a comparative analysis between eight models and identified the advantages of their applications. Kang (2015) on the other hand introduced five major change models and displayed them based on the categories of Lewin's (1947) three-step model. Galli (2018) also identified five major models and presented both advantages and disadvantages of each model. As a most recent research, Rosenbaum et al. (2018) identified a total of thirteen different commonly used change models and revealed their linkages back to Lewin's (1947) change model.

In the following, the most popular change models throughout the history of the field are presented, analysed, and compared in order to form a comprehensive overview of the available models. Analyses also include the presentation of criticism the models have received. Based on the literature review, in total of three the most significant change models have been chosen to be under review. These are Lewin's (1947) *Three Step*

Change Model, Kotter's (1996) *8 Step Change Model*, and Prosci's *ADKAR model* (Hiatt 2006). The selection is based on the amount of attention different models have gained within the field's literature and significance they have had for the practical purposes. Also, the models represent different periods of management literature's history. The models are presented in a chronological order by the year of the first publication.

Lewin's Change Model (1947)

Lewin's research and work in action research, group dynamics, and force field analysis is considered as a foundational element of organizational change management literature (Rosenbaum et al. 2018). His three-step change model (Lewin 1947; 1951) represents a framework for planned change (Rosenbaum et al. 2018) and most of the later change models have adopted similar approach to a change process (Elrod II et al. 2002; Bamford et al. 2003; Bamford et al. 2005; Hudescu et al. 2011; Schech-Storz 2013; Kang 2015; Rosenbaum et al. 2018). Lewin's model consists three steps: *unfreezing*, *changing*, and *refreezing* as presented in Figure 1. The main idea of the model is that before change and new behaviour can be adopted successfully, the old one must be discarded (Burnes 1996; Bamford et al. 2003; Bamford et al. 2005). As a relatively simple and effective model, it is especially suitable for large organizations and project teams. In addition, the model proceeds linearly, and the three major phases are transparent enough for people involved in the change to understand them. (Galli 2018.)

Figure 1. Lewin's (1947) Three Step Change Model

According to the model, the process begins by recognising the need for a change. In order to unfreeze and fully understand the existing patterns and operating models, in-

depth analyses of what does and what does not work is required. During the stage of change, an organisation starts to implement planned change initiatives and move towards the desired future state. After the transition, the final phase is refreezing new formulas as a routine. (Lewin 1951.)

The model is based on several assumptions. Lewin's first assumption was that the change does not occur if there is not a change motivator. Secondly, he pointed out that the employees of an organization are at the heart of upcoming changes. As a third assumption, Lewin argued that those affected by the ongoing change need to both adapt and incorporate the new processes into their routine. Also, the previous operating models need to be discontinued. Lastly, Lewin assumed that resistance to change is normal even with the case of desirable goals. Hence, the change needs to be reinforced by replacing organizational behaviour and attitudes in order to make it successful. (Schech-Storz 2013; Galli 2018.)

As earlier mentioned, several authors have adopted Lewin's approach as a base of their research on change processes. Elrod II et al.'s (2002) examination of different change management models revealed that Lewin's three-step model was the most followed one. For instance, Rosenbaum et al. (2018) identified a total of thirteen different commonly used change models and revealed their linkages back to Lewin's model. In her research, Schech-Storz (2013) identified eleven different models based on Lewin's three-step model. The three-step model has been further developed by adding more details and phases around it. For example, Bullock and Batten's (1985) planned change model consists of four phases, Kwon and Zmud's (1987) model six-phases, and Kotter's (1996) model eight-phases.

Despite of the model's popularity it has also come under criticism. Lewin's model has been criticised on the same grounds as planned change approach in general. A relatively theoretical and rational nature of the planned approach sets limitations to the practical implications of it (Lichtenstein 1997) and the approach tends to ignore the effects of

rapidly changing and unstable environment (Garvin 1994; Burnes 1996; Burnes 2004b). Also, it has been argued that the planned approach does not support major size nor rapid changes which require more directive and reactive approach (Stein et al. 1992; Burnes 1996; Burnes 2004b). Galli (2018) has criticised Lewin's model for the lack of attention given to the human aspect of the change. He also notifies that the phase of unfreezing can be time-consuming and costly if planned poorly or not supported by the top management.

On their exploratory literature review, Rosenbaum et al. (2018) argued that Lewin's model is actually more dynamic than the criticism suggests. Constant feedback into the system causes ongoing refinements and helps change managers to act more reactively. Also, the authors argue that references to Lewin's model tend to be one-dimensional in that they seek to isolate change management to a simple linear process of three phases. This one-dimensional approach fails to recognize and understand the other elements of change, and thus, the three-step model should not be isolated from Lewin's work within force field analysis and action research. Examining all the elements of change simultaneously provides a more complete picture of a change process. (Rosenbaum et al. 2018.)

Kotter's 8 Step Change Model (1996)

Build on Lewin's works, Kotter (1995; 1996) expanded the original three-step model into the eight-stage model of creating major change. Kotter developed the model by observing one hundred organizations undergoing change and further converting his findings into a procedural approach to managing the change process. As a practical and comprehensive model that focuses on people and their feelings towards the change, Kotter's eight-step model is widely used (Varkey 2010) and some authors (e.g. Hudescu et al. 2011) have even argued that it is the most known model offering practical guidance to organizations. Due to its rather practical nature, there is a disagreement among the

authors whether the model should be considered as emergent approach to change or as a model of planned approach (Hudescu et al. 2011).

Figure 2 presents the different phases of Kotter's model. Each stage is associated with one of the eight fundamental errors (Kotter 1995) or mistakes undermining change efforts (Kotter 1996: 20). It is essential to notice that change should proceed sequentially through all of the eight stages with focused attention being spent at each phase. Skipping even a one stage or moving ahead on too fast phase leads into problems (Kotter 1996: 23). Also, critical mistakes in any of the eight stages can have a negative impact to the change process and its success in the long-term (Kotter 1995).
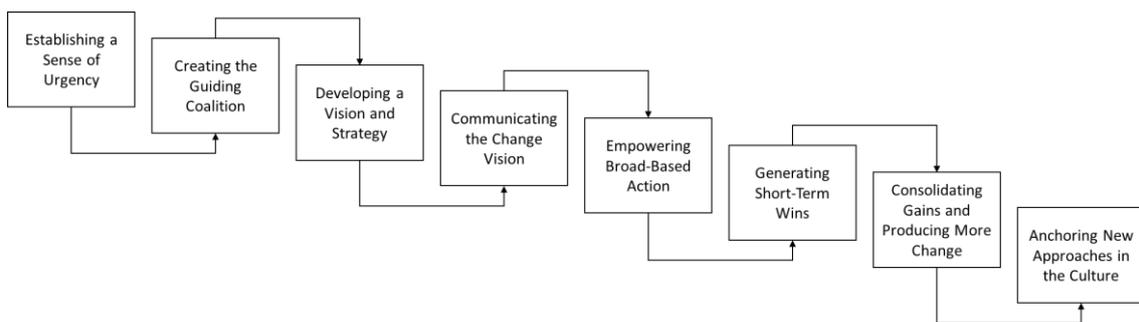
Figure 2. Kotter's (1996: 21) 8 Step Change Model

Each of the model's eight steps can be categorized into three groups similar to Lewin's (1947) three phases. The first four steps of a change process aim to break the existing state of affairs, and thus, they can be considered as a phase of unfreezing. Stages from five to seven introduce new practices and the change is most visible. Finally, the last stage aims to ground changes and new practices in the organisation's culture and refreeze the situation. (Kotter 1996: 22.) In the following, each of the eight steps are introduced and discussed in-depth.

According to Kotter (1995; 1996), change processes should start by *Establishing a Sense of Urgency*. In short, this means creating a reason why the change is needed (Schech-Storz 2013; Galli 2018). Organizations can realize the need for a change by examining

market and competitive realities and by both identifying and discussing potential crises and major opportunities (Kotter 1995; Kotter 1996: 21). Establishing a sense of urgency is essential in order to gain cooperation and involvement needed (Kotter 1996: 36). Next step is *Creating the Guiding Coalition* (*Forming a Powerful Guiding Coalition* in Kotter 1995). By this, Kotter (1995; 1996: 21) means assembling a group or team who is willing to work together and who has enough power to lead the change. It is recommended that the team is both cross-functional and consists people from cross-level of the organization (Schech-Storz 2013). A strong guiding coalition with the right composition, high level of trust, and shared objectives is crucial to sustain the change process (Kotter 1996: 51-52).

Third step of the model is *Developing a Vision and Strategy* (*Creating a Vision* in Kotter 1995). Creation of a vision and developing different strategies to achieve that vision guides the whole change effort (Kotter 1995; Kotter 1996: 21). Organization and its employees need an overall roadmap for the change, and hence, change will not succeed without a clear and well-developed strategic vision (Galli 2018). According to Kotter (1996: 68-69), a strategic vision of a change process serves three purposes. Firstly, the vision clarifies the general direction for change and simplifies detailed decisions. Secondly, it motivates people involved in change to take action in the right direction. Thirdly, a vision helps a change management team to coordinate the actions of different people in a fast and efficient way. However, even with a great vision and well-developed strategy change efforts might end up to failure if the organization does not have a common understanding of change process' goals and direction (Kotter 1996: 85). Thus, the fourth step of Kotter's model is *Communicating the Change Vision* (*Communicating the Vision* in Kotter 1995). The step of communicating the change vision is crucial in terms of employees' involvement and avoidance of a change resistance (Galli 2018). In this process, change leaders should set a team or a role model to implement desired behaviour expected from the employees (Kotter 1995; Kotter 1996: 21).

During the fifth phase of *Empowering Broad-Based Action* (*Empowering Others to Act on the Vision* in Kotter 1995), organization should get rid of obstacles and remove barriers resisting the change. Also, structures undermining the change visions need to be changed. Employees should be encouraged to take risks and empowered to try new ideas and approaches. (Kotter 1995: Kotter 1996: 21.) Next, *Generating Short-Term Wins* (*Planning for and Creating Short-Term Wins* in Kotter 1995) is model's sixth step. Short-term wins help change leaders to demonstrate that the change efforts are constructive. In addition, they allow change vision to be tested in action and necessary adjustments to be done. (Galli 2018.) It is also important to recognize and reward people involved in the improvements and achievements (Kotter 1995; Kotter 1996: 21).

As a second to last step, Kotter identifies *Consolidating Gains and Producing More Change* (*Consolidating Improvements and Producing Still More Change* in Kotter 1995) to be change processes' seventh phase. In many cases, change initiatives fail because participants revert to their prior habits and behaviour (Galli 2018). In order to continue change implementation, change management team can reinforce the change by using its increased credibility to change all the policies, systems, and structures that do not enhance the change vision. More change can be produced by new projects and themes, and by involving more change agents into the process. (Kotter 1995; Kotter 1996: 21.) Finally, the last step of the model is *Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture* (*Institutionalizing New Approaches* in Kotter 1995). In this phase, the goal is to institutionalize the change and to anchor it in the organizational culture (Schech-Storz 2013). Change management team should not only aim to articulate correlation between new behaviour and organizational success, but also generate new ways to ensure leadership development and succession (Kotter 1995; Kotter 1996: 21).

Even though Kotter's model offers an excellent guideline for managers to implement change, it should not be considered as something that automatically guarantees success (Wentworth, Behson, & Kelley 2020), and it is important to adapt the model to the needs of the particular organization (Calegari, Sibley, & Turner 2015). Although in a comparison

to Lewin's three-step model Kotter's eight-step model manages to give more attention to people involved in the change, it comes across as a top-down approach and with a lack of employees input to the change process (Galli 2018). Instead of a rather hierarchical approach, the communication should be two-way – not just top-down (Calegari et al. 2015). Kotter's model lacks also a specification of interpersonal influence tactics and provides only narrow guidelines on how to effectively persuade individuals to comply (Calegari et al. 2015). Thus, it can be argued that the model is limited from the aspect of people dimension (Bucciarelli 2015).

Another critique of Kotter's model is that it does not pay enough attention to the analysis of needed change. Instead, the model focuses on the leadership as the most important aspect ignoring the aspects such as financials, political forces, and change resistance. (Bucciarelli 2015.) Finally, model is criticised to proceed too linearly (Bucciarelli 2015), and to provide only little explicit direction on implementation (Wentworth et al. 2020). In some cases, it is necessary to cycle back through previous stages before proceeding to the next phase of the model (Calegari et al. 2015).

Prosci's ADKAR Model (Hiatt 2006)

The ADKAR model is a results-orientated change management tool representing a framework for understanding change at an individual level. As the Figure 3 indicates, ADKAR is an acronym standing for five objectives that the model aims to accomplish, and which can be considered as basic building blocks for a change process. (Hiatt 2006: 1-2.) In comparison to Lewin's and Kotter's models, the ADKAR focuses on people change adaption rather than to the change itself. Hence, the model is sequenced by how an individual experiences the change. (Galli 2018.) The model can help change management team to make systematic and proactive onboarding (Karambelkar & Bhattacharya 2017), and to manage change resistance (Rosenbaum et al. 2018). Also, it helps change leaders to organize and coordinate their work (Rosenbaum et al. 2018) and

it maps a variety of different enablers of change to a list of management activities (Hiatt 2006). Despite of the different approaches, the ADKAR model has strong connections to Lewin's work on force field analysis (Rosenbaum et al. 2018).
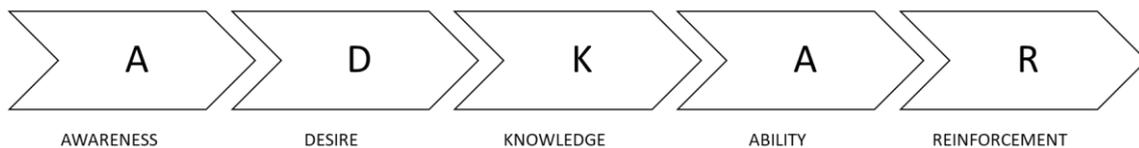

Figure 3. Prosci's ADKAR Model (Hiatt 2006: 2)

The lifecycle for ADKAR begins after a change has been identified. From this starting point, the first objective is to raise *awareness* of the change and why it is needed. The element of awareness is achieved when employees understand the nature of the change and the risks of not changing. (Hiatt 2006: 2-5.) As a next step, *desire* of both change management team and employees represents the willingness to support and participate in a change. It requires the motivation to engage in the change along with the ability to perform necessary changes (Hiatt 2006: 2; Galli 2018.) Third step requires employees to have *knowledge* of how to change and what the change entails. The phase of knowledge also includes the information, training, and education about behaviours, processes, tools, systems, skills, and techniques that are required to implement the change. (Hiatt 2006: 2.) Next, *ability* to implement required skills and behaviours is needed. It represents the execution of the change and ability to implement change on a daily basis. Finally, *reinforcement* is the last objective of the model. It represents both internal and external factors sustaining and maintaining the change in the organization. (Hiatt 2006: 2-3.)

As in the case of Kotter's eight-step model, also ADKAR proceeds linearly, and it is important to not skip any phases before moving ahead to the next phase (Hiatt 2006: 3). The model's advantage is the relatively high focus on employees' and change management team members' acceptance of change. Although the great focus on employees and people is ADKAR's advantage, it also set limitations for the use of the

model. The disadvantage of the model is its unsuitableness for large-scale organizations with complex processes. (Galli 2018.) Other aspects that the mode is lacking are what type of change is required and which information must be gathered prior to the first phase of the model. This information is needed in order to define and form the change strategy, to determined who needs to be involved in the change, and to understand the urgency of the change. (Da Veiga 2018.)

2.1.3   Different phases and stages

As earlier described, there is a variety of different approaches differentiating change by type and how it appears within organizations. While the approach of planned change determines organizational change as a linear process of implementing pre-planned steps, the emergent approach treats change as a continuous phenomenon. For example, Pettigrew, Woodman, and Cameron (2001) adopted the latter approach describing organizational change as a continuous and cumulative process that leads to organizational level changes without explicit prior intentions. Tsoukas and Chia (2002) have also argued that change is a permanent aspect of all organizations and they are patterns that are constituted, shaped, and emergent from change. Nevertheless, there are also empirical findings (e.g. Romanelli et al. 1994) suggesting changes to be accomplished via pre-planned change processes rather than via continuous small-scale changes and improvements.

As the analysis of major change models indicated, frequently occurring patterns and phases of change processes in general can be identified. Galli (2018) presents Adaptive HVM's *General change management process model* from a perspective of project management. The process map includes five steps as presented in Figure 4. Rather than being seen as a change management tool, Adaptive HVM's process model should instead be considered as a framework or a checklist to help change management project teams to organize the change process. Although the framework has similarities with another change models proposed by the management literature, it has adopted a rather practical

approach as the process map is developed by a business consulting company. Thus, there is a relatively small number of theoretical peer reviews and empirical research supporting the framework, which should be taken into consideration while applying the model into practice.
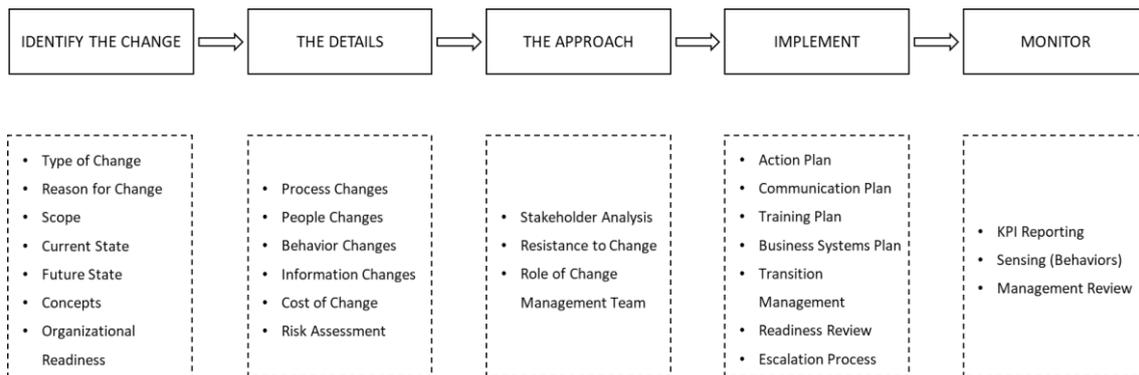

| IDENTIFY THE CHANGE | THE DETAILS | THE APPROACH | IMPLEMENT | MONITOR |

- Type of Change
- Reason for Change
- Scope
- Current State
- Future State
- Concepts
- Organizational Readiness

- Process Changes
- People Changes
- Behavior Changes
- Information Changes
- Cost of Change
- Risk Assessment

- Stakeholder Analysis
- Resistance to Change
- Role of Change Management Team

- Action Plan
- Communication Plan
- Training Plan
- Business Systems Plan
- Transition Management
- Readiness Review
- Escalation Process

- KPI Reporting
- Sensing (Behaviors)
- Management Review

Figure 4. A general change management process by Adaptive HVM (Galli 2018: 125)

The first phase of *Identifying the Change* arises from the recognition of a need for change. An in-depth analysis of the current state of the organization and its readiness for change is requires. Also, type, reason, scope, and concept of the change need to be determined. In the second phase, *The Details* of the change process are considered from aspects of people involved, their behaviour, and information systems. In addition, cost and risk analyses need to be performed for to proportion available resources to scale of the change process. Next, the selection of *The Approach* plays a critical role in terms of succession of the change implementation. In this phase, different change management models come useful for the change management team. Different stakeholders' needs and interests need to be identified and analysed in order to prepare for possible change resistance. Fourthly, created action, communication, resistance, training, and business system plans are put into practice during the *Implementation* phase. As the fifth and final phase, *Monitoring* controls the changes and ensures that the process is on its way to the desired state. Analysis of the possible mistakes that were made is a valuable reference for the future change processes. (Galli 2018.)

In Table 2, Lewin's three-step change model, Kotter's eight-step model, and Prosci's ADKAR model are combined with the above-described process map of a change management process in order to demonstrate the general progress of change processes. The harmonization of models' phases is done by comparing the steps with each other, and then categorizing them under broader themes. Authors such as Kotter (1996: 22) and Varkey (2010) have used the same harmonization of phases as described in Table 2. However, while applying the ADKAR model into the context of project management, Karambelkar et al. (2017) categorized the phase of *Desire* under the design and preparation phase of change process instead of the implementation stage. In addition, Rosenbaum et al. (2018) have suggested that Kotter's model's seventh step of *Consolidating Gains and Producing More Change* is a comparable with Lewin's *Refreezing* phase rather than with the *Change* phase. They have also classified Kotter's fourth phase of *Communicating the Change Vision* under both *Refreeze* and *Change* phases proposed by Lewin. This arguable role of communication is also recognized by several other authors. For instance, Varkey (2010) has argued that rather than seeing communication as an individual phase or a task of a change management team, it should be a continuous theme covering the whole change process. Several other authors (e.g. Doyle et al. 2000; Gill 2002; Lewis, Schmisseur, Stephens, & Weir 2006) have also highlighted the crucial role of communication as an enabler aspect of successful change processes.

Table 2. Phases of a change process

Lewin (1947)	Kotter (1996)	Prosci (2006)	Galli (2018)
Unfreeze	Establishing a Sense of Urgency Creating the Guiding Coalition Developing a Vision and Strategy Communicating the Change Vision	Awareness	Identify the Change The Details The Approach
Change	Empowering Broad-Based Action Generating Short-Term Wins Consolidating Gains and Producing More Change	Desire Knowledge Ability	Implement
Refreeze	Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture	Reinforcement	Monitor

To conclude the literature review on change management processes, Table 3 presents a summary of different approaches and change management models. In order to simplify the complex change management process into a more linear process model, the categorization of identified phases is done with similar approach to Lewin's three-step model. Subtasks and objectives of each phase are presented to give more practical and specific guidance on the progress of a change process. The change model presented in Table 3 is based on analysed change theories and models. Identified phases of analysed change models are combined to form a consistent and comprehensive overview of the change process. By comparing and combining different phases, strengths and weaknesses of each model can be taken into closer consideration. For example, as both Lewin's and Kotter's original models have been criticised for the lack of attention given to the human aspect, the model presents an extended version by complementing them with the aspects of people oriented ADKAR model. Hence, it can be argued that the change models complementary to each other.

Table 3. Summary of the change management models and processes

Preparation of Change	Implementation of Change	Stabilization and Monitoring
• Recognize the need for change • Analyse the existing state of organization • Identify opportunities and threats • Assemble change team and appoint leaders • Create change vision and strategy • Determine type, scope, and approach • Conduct cost and risks analyses • Communicate the change vision • Justify the need for change	• Put change plans and initiatives into action • Remove barriers resisting the change • Ensure the required level of knowledge and skills necessary to perform changes • Motivate people to engage in the change • Encourage risk taking • Generate short-term wins • Recognize and reward people involved in the improvements • Make necessary adjustments	• Consolidate new operating models and behaviour as a routine • Demonstrate the correlation between new behaviour and organizational success • Ensure continuity of the development • Monitor the change process • Analyse the results and possible mistakes

2.2 Executors' role

The lack of effective leadership and guidance have been identified as one of the key factors causing failures of change programmes (Miller 2001; Gill 2002; Kang 2015). It is commonly agreed that the successful management of change is an essential skill in today's highly competitive and rapidly changing business environment (Kotter 1996; Guimaraes et al. 1998; Doyle et al. 2000; Moran et al. 2000; Todnem By 2005; Radeke 2011; Talmaciu 2014). Graetz (2000) has even suggested that the primary task of today's management is the leadership of organisational change. As there are several different methods to approach the issue, the literature of management has proposed a variety of terms to describe people in charge of organizational change. *Change managers*, *change agents*, and *change leaders* are often used as a synonym for each other to describe people in charge of planning and implementing change initiatives. In addition, *transformational leaders* is also a rarely used expression for the change executors. For clarity, in this thesis the above-described terms will not be distinguished from each other despite of the minor differences between them.

Through the history, authors of the field have proposed and described several different roles and areas of responsibilities of change executors and people involved in the change. For example, Stein et al. (1992: 16-17) have identified three action roles in the change process as follows. Firstly, *change strategists* are the ones connecting organization's operations to its internal and external environments. The role of change strategists is usually emphasised at the beginning of a change process; they identify need for changes, determine what changes needs to occur, and are in charge of the organization's overall direction. Research conducted by Raineri (2011) indicated that change strategists report a higher use of change management practices than the other change executors. As a second action role, Stein et al. (1992: 16-17) identified *change implementors* to be in charge of coordinating and translating change initiatives into discrete actions and tasks. Change implementors are responsible for the change process' micro dynamics and day-to-day activities of the change. Finally, the third group of the categorization is *change recipients*. They are usually in charge of institutionalizing and adopting the changes into

daily practices, and thus, strongly affected by the change. However, in many cases the recipients do not have power to influence on change initiatives or control over the process.

The chosen approach and perspective from which the change process is examined has also an influence on the determination of change executors' different roles. As Kang (2015) proposed, macro and micro change management approaches differ from each other in various ways. In addition to definition, target, and focus, roles and required competencies of executors differ depending on the chosen aspect. In the context of macro change management, change agents should act as facilitators and plan change initiatives in a more comprehensive and strategic manner. On the other hand, micro change management executors are expected to implement chosen change practices by coordinating, motivating, and managing change resistance. (Kang 2015.) Another topic causing disagreement about change executors' roles is the contrast between planned and emergent approaches. While the planned approach sees executors as rational planners and strategists controlling the change process from the top, the emergent approach treats them as bottom-up driven facilitators who are responsible for developing the common purpose and vision that gives direction to the organization (Burnes 1996; Bamford et al. 2003). Despite of the popularity and wide ranges of supporters of different approaches, Burnes (1996) has argued that the managing change is all about making choices rather than adopting the best practices or approaches proposed by the academics. Hence, the issue for managers and change executors is to make choices in terms of what to change and how to adapt to prevailing circumstances.

2.2.1 Change leadership

One of the most popular ways to approach the issue of change management – and especially executors' role within it, is to examine it through change leadership. Several authors have pointed out the positive relationship between change leadership and successful change management. Change-oriented leadership has a positive and

significant direct and indirect effect on both planned and emergent change (Al-Ali et al. 2017), a positive relationship with an ability to manage organizational change (Baddah 2017), and an essential role in promoting and sustaining the change agenda (Graetz 2000). In addition, authors such as Miller (2001), Gill (2002), Bamford et al. (2005), Caldwell et al. (2008), and Galli (2018) have also noticed that a strong and effective leadership is central to a successful change management.

Gill (2002) has argued that while change must be well managed, it is the effective leadership that makes change initiatives to succeed and sustain. Hence, organizations should aim to broaden leadership skills for all organization levels (Galli 2018). Traditionally, executors have focused on rather technical and operational dimensions of change management (Graetz 2000) such as planning, organizing, directing, controlling, monitoring, and allocating resources (Hooper & Potter 2000; Gill 2002). Especially the planned approach and its different applications have highlighted these managerial capabilities and duties listed above. Leadership on the other hand emphasizes interpersonal dimensions of the change process. Graetz (2000) has suggested that the successful change management requires adopting both of these dimensions; managerial capabilities as an operational instrumental, and interpersonal skills as a charismatic leader.

Due to the multidisciplinary of the field, several authors have proposed different characteristics and requirements of a successful change leader. To emphasize the human aspect, Gill (2002) has identified four dimensions of the leadership as follows: cognitive, spiritual, emotional, and behavioural. To support this people-oriented approach, Elrod II et al. (2002) have stated that a fundamental tenet of leadership is that there is continuous need to transition people from one state of being to another. Maimone and Sinclair (2014) have pointed out that a mindful leader is able to create bridges between different dimension and levels of organization, build a framework that facilitates free expression, and mediate among the differences to make people feel united.

To give more practical guiding, Hooper et al. (2000) and Gill (2002) have argued that the role of executors is to (a.) establish a direction of the organization, (b.) develop a vision, (c.) align people, (d.) communicate the change vision, and (e.) motivate and inspire people involved to overcome barriers and obstacles resisting the change. Elrod II et al. (2002) have identified four main responsibilities of leaders similar to those mentioned above. Firstly, leaders must be able to set a direction for a change process and develop a complete and accurate understanding of the change to be implemented. Next, expectations need to be communicated effectively. Thirdly, leaders must ensure that people involved in the change have an ability to accomplish all the required steps and changes. Finally, leaders need to encourage people to continue new behaviour and reinforce the changes.

Miller (2001) has proposed a framework of successful behaviour in change leadership. According to the framework, change leadership is based on two dimensions: executors' own personal level of change adaptability and their change beliefs. Change adaptability is a key determinant of implementation success – it is the ability to navigate changes successfully. Miller has identified seven basic characteristics of adaptable leader as follows: optimistic, self-assured, innovative, collaborative, purposeful, structured, and proactive. Next, he identified four stages of leadership change beliefs. Ideally, leaders will understand that people may not be willing, able, or ready to change. Underlying assumptions are that commitment must be built for successful change and power nor sanctions are not likely to be effective. Finally, Miller listed six behaviours typical for successful leader. They (1.) engender tremendous focus on particular changes, (2.) delay implementation until the imperative for change is clearly understood and shared, (3.) personally lead the implementation, (4.) act as if their own personal behaviour is critical for change success, (5.) understand that change is a contact sport, and (6.) know implementation needs to be systematic and relentless. (Miller 2001.)

Moran et al. (2000) have also identified common characteristics of effective change leaders. Firstly, they frame the change in terms of outcomes for both organizational and

individual level. They also provide the required resources and align others with the changes. Secondly, leaders should aim to create an open atmosphere in which people are enabled to test and experiment new ideas and operation models and generate recommendations for further development. Thirdly, change leaders should act as role models and lead the change by example. Also, it is their responsibility to present justifiable reasons for the changes and identify and overcome potential sources of change resistance. Fourthly, they should be dedicated and focused to analyse results and failures in order to determine areas of improvement. As a fifth and final characteristic, change leaders should continuously interact with others to explain and answer the questions of who, what, when, where, why, and how. They need also to understand people's different levels of receptiveness; while others are early adopters, some people are sceptical and need more convincing. (Moran et al. 2000.)

2.2.2   Change management practices

Previously, different phases and main objectives of change management process were identified and presented in Table 3. The purpose of this section is to examine different change management practices by which executors can achieve those identified tasks and objectives. The literature of management has frequently proposed various strategies and managerial practices in order to facilitate and enhance the success of change programs (Kotter 1996; Hudescu et al. 2011; Raineri 2011). Lists of change management practices proposed by different authors have strong similarities, usually presented as suggestions of how to manage organizational change processes more effectively (Raineri 2011). Even though Burnes (1996) has argued that managing change is not about adopting the best practices proposed by the academics, Varkey (2010) has suggested that adoption of change management practices enhances chances of success by placing focus on the people in the organization. Change management practices include a wide range of organizational interventions (Raineri 2011) which in many cases need to be accomplished simultaneously (Moran et al. 2000).

Additional to previously discussed Lewin's (1947), Kotter's (1996), and Prosci's (Hiatt 2006) models, several other authors have also suggested different sets of change management practices. A categorization of proposed practices can be conducted in various ways. Raineri (2011) has distinguished change preparation and implementation practices from each other. Several other authors (e.g. Klein, Conn, & Sorra 2001; Varkey 2010; Calegari et al. 2015; Wentworth et al. 2020) have also identified different change management practices and executors' tasks based on the phase of a change process. Another way to classify different change management practices is to categorize them under more broader themes. Different themes under which change management practices have been categorized are similar to those identified in Table 3. Arising in the literature, following practices have been suggested among the earlier identified: (a.) *resource utilization* (Moran et al. 2000), (b.) *employee involvement* (Guimaraes et al. 1998; Moran et al. 2000), (c.) *organization of work* (Moran et al. 2000), (d.) *communication* (Guimaraes et al. 1998; Doyle et al. 2000; Graetz 2000; Klein et al. 2001; Bamford et al. 2005; Raineri 2011), (e.) *evaluation and monitoring* (Guimaraes et al. 1998; Doyle et al. 2000), (f.) *learning* (Doyle et al. 2000), (g.) *commitment* (Graetz 2000; Bamford et al. 2005; Young 2009), (h.) *diagnosis and alignment* (Raineri 2011), (i.) *compensation and incentives* (Klein et al. 2001; Raineri 2011), (j.) *risk and cost-benefit analysis* (Guimaraes et al. 1998), and (k.) *creating a capacity for change* (Graetz 2000; Klein et al. 2001).

As the list above indicates, the essential role of communication is recognized by several authors. There is a disagreement whether the communication should be seen as an individual change management practice or as a continuous theme covering the whole change process as Varkey (2010) has suggested. Communication can also be seen as a means to achieve or implement other change practices such as increasing commitment or validating the need for change. Lewis et al. (2006) have conducted an analysis undercovering different themes concerning the communicative role of change executors, general strategies to communicate and introduce change effectively, and tactics to communicate during the change implementation. Based on the literature review on the

most popular change management books available, authors identified three general themes of communication describing change executors' duties during the change process. The role of change executors is to (1.) *promote communication and participation* by putting a focus on stakeholders, (2.) *facilitate the process for change* by guiding specific steps of a change process, and (3.) *create a vision* for others to follow.

Despite of the differences between approaches, it is commonly agreed that employees' involvement and two-way communication are essential parts of a change process. As a solution to disagreement whether change should be driven from top or bottom, Moran et al. (2000) and Galli (2018) have suggested that both top-down and bottom-up approaches are required. While creation of a change vision and structures require a top-down approach, participation and involvement of employees are bottom-up driven activities (Moran et al. 2000). Lewis et al. (2006) have argued that change leaders should strive to create more structured dialogue between stakeholders, enabling them to feel more engaged in the change process. The importance of employees' commitment and participation is recognized by several authors. Although managers have a great responsibility to lead and facilitate change processes, it is the employees who make the difference; no change effort will succeed without the employees' willingness and desire to change and implement change initiatives (Tsoukas et al. 2002; Caldwell et al. 2008; Galli 2018). Thus, it is crucial for change leaders to understand human response to change (Elrod II et al. 2002) and be aware of both intended and unintended outcomes of change processes (Kezar 2010: 22-23).

Finally, a wide range of change management practices aim either to prevent or manage change resistance. Resistance is a natural aspect of any change process and one of the main reasons causing change efforts to fail. However, not all change resistance is bad; it forces change leaders to check their vision in order to identify problem areas and provides information about employees' emotions and receptiveness. (Galli 2018.) Stein et al. (1992: 17) have argued that resistance occurs when change recipients' own interest and goals does not meet the aims of change initiatives, and hence, proactive change

leaders address employees' concerns immediately in order to ensure their commitment to the changes (Galli 2018). Maurer (1996, cited in Elrod II et al. 2002: 280) have identified eight different forms of resistance by which individuals response to change both passively and actively; *confusion*, *immediate criticism*, *denial*, *malicious compliance*, *sabotage*, *easy agreement*, *deflection*, and *silence*. Gill (2002: 308-309) has argued that the most powerful forces of change resistance are emotional. He identified sources of resistance as follows: *dislike of imposed change and surprises*, *lack of self-confidence and confidence in others*, *reluctance of management to deal with difficult issues*, *disturbed practices, habits and relationships*, *self-interest and shifts in power and influence*, *lack of respect and trust in the person or people promoting change*, and *scepticism as a result of the failure of previous change initiatives.*

2.2.3   Middle managers as change agents

In recent years, middle managers' role and responsibilities have grown as a teamwork design has gained popularity within the organizations (Birken et al. 2012). Several authors (e.g. Wooldridge et al. 1990; Caldwell et al. 2008; Birken et al. 2012; Birken et al. 2013) have noticed middle managers' strategic location between organizations' top management and frontline employees. They balance between organization's strategy and day-to-day activities, and hence, are responsible also for implementing changes (Birken et al. 2012). The emphasis on the role of middle management especially during the change implementation phase is noticed also by Hope (2010). Even though the literature of management has tried to explain complex nature of a change process, the focus has mainly been on senior leaders and top management, and thus, there is a little research on middle managers' involvement in organizational change processes (Wooldridge et al. 1990; Noble 1999; Chuang et al. 2011; Birken et al. 2012; Birken, et al. 2013; Engle et al. 2017).

Frohman and Johnson (1992) have defined middle management as managers holding positions between organization's first-level supervisors and top-level executives having

company-wide responsibilities. Hence, the role of middle management is highly cross-functional as they serve as a linkage between frontline employees and organization's top-management (Bamford et al. 2003). Especially the shift in focus from traditional planned approach towards the emergent change approach has emphasized middle managers' role. According to the emergent approach, the pace of changes is so rapid and complex that it is impossible for companies' top-level managers simultaneously to identify, plan, and implement necessary changes effectively, and thus, middle management has been given more responsibility in terms of managing change processes (Burnes 1996).

Middle managers – who in many cases are actually in charge of the implementation of new practices (Hagedorn et al. 2006; Hope 2010) play a pivotal role during change processes (Herzig and Jimmieson 2006). Mangers in the middle-level positions are expected to help team members and employees to reach their full potential (Galli 2018) and assist employees in the change transition (Herzig et al. 2006). Noble (1999) has argued that plans and change initiatives are usually communicated through middle management during the change implementation process, and thus, they have the ability to either bridge or create information gaps depending on their commitment to the ongoing change process (Birken et al. 2013). Therefore middle-level managers can either enhance or undermine the organization's ability to implement change initiatives (Caldwell et al. 2008).

Several authors have highlighted middle managers' role especially during the implementation phase of a change process. Stein et al. (1992: 16-17) have compared middle managers with the change implementors who were identified as a second action role of change processes. As change implementors, middle managers are in charge of coordinating and translating change initiatives into discrete actions and tasks, and responsible for the change process' micro dynamics and day-to-day activities (Stein et al. 1992: 16-17). Noble (1999) has pointed out the differences between the roles of senior and middle managers especially in the context of strategy processes. While the

formulation aspect of change initiatives is usually in the domain of senior managers, middle managers are in charge of the actual implementation phase. Bamford et al. (2003) have suggested that middle managers are usually the ones to make initiatives for changes to top-level management who further develop these suggestions to more specific change plans. Later on, these change plans and initiatives are passed back to middle managers for them to implement required changes. Thus, Wooldridge et al. (1990) have argued that a succeeding in rapidly changing business environment demands a mix of top management purpose and middle management initiative.

Doyle et al. (2000) have conducted a research comparing the views of change process and its outcomes between different levels of management. The results suggested that organizations' senior and middle managers work with different assumptions about change; the top-level's views appeared to be considerably more positive than the middle managers' views. The results highlight the importance of middle managers' involvement in change processes. Research conducted by Wooldridge et al. (1990) indicated that middle managers' involvement already in the formation phase of change initiatives is associated with improved organizational performance. This claim is supported by the empirical findings of Chuang et al. (2011). Authors have suggested that middle managers' support and commitment to change programmes is highest when they feel the change initiatives fit their workplace needs and priorities and they have more discretion and control over how the changes are implemented. However, Wooldridge et al. (1990) have proposed that the purpose of middle management's involvement should be to improve the quality of decisions rather than facilitating implementation.

Birken et al. (2012) have identified four different implementation policies and practices by which middle managers influence on the effectiveness of change implementation. The research was conducted in the context of healthcare innovation implementation aiming to undercover middle managers' role during the change process. Engle et al. (2017) have further expanded the themes proposed by Birken et al. (2012) into more specific actions and expressions of middle managers. First, middle managers can express

their commitment to the change by (1.) *diffusing information* (Birken et al. 2012). The theme of information diffusion highlights especially middle managers' communication mechanisms and styles; communication needs to be both formal and informal, direct, transparent, multidisciplinary, and multidirectional (Engle et al. 2017). Next, middle managers influence on change process by (2.) *synthesizing information* (Birken et al. 2012). This requires middle managers to facilitate the improvements, analyse prior change initiatives, encourage people to participate, identify the root cause of lack of engagement, and take action to address the core issues in order to enhance the change (Engle et al. 2017). As a third role, middle managers (3.) *mediate between strategy and day-to-day activities* (Birken et al. 2012). To extend employees understating on change initiatives, middle managers need to encourage independent thinking and provide resources and support by offering required training and coaching (Engle et al. 2017). As a fourth and final role, middle managers are expected to (4.) *sell innovation implementation* (Birken et al. 2012) or *sell change initiative implementation* in the context of change management. This can be achieved for example by facilitating effective adoption of new practices, creating a sense that the use of new practices is an expectation, and providing support and encouragement to follow new guidelines (Engle et al. 2017). In addition to the above-described roles and policies, Engle et al. (2017) have identified general change management practices for middle managers to lead the change effectively. These include practices such as the utilization of incentives and rewards and building a culture of improvement among which quality improvement is supported and expected.

2.3 Middle managers' role in the change management process

Change has been identified to appear in various forms, and thus, not all the change programmes are the same. Organizational change programmes can differ from each other in various ways depending on the factors such as scale, focus, degree, cause, order, timing, and aim of the change. Depending on the chosen approach, change can either be considered as pre-planned, emergent, continuous, cyclical, or process by its nature.

Despite of the disagreements and field's interdisciplinarity, there are also a certain consensus among the different theories and approaches. Based on the review of change management literature and analyse of different approaches and change management models, general phases of change management processes can be identified. Change management can be generalized into a linearly proceeding three-phase process model (see Table 3 in page 32) consisting the phases of preparation, implementation, and stabilization. The model provides also a summary of different objectives, subtasks, and areas of responsibilities of change executors during each three phases.

In recent years, middle managers' role and responsibilities have grown as a teamwork design has gained popularity within the organizations. The role of middle management is highly cross-functional, and several authors have pointed out their strategic location between organizations' top management and frontline employees. Middle managers' role is highlighted especially during the implementation phase of a change process. Change plans are usually communicated through middle management during the change implementation process, and thus, they can either enhance or undermine the organization's ability to implement change initiatives. As change implementors, middle managers are in charge of coordinating and translating change initiatives into discrete actions and tasks, and responsible for the change process' micro dynamics and day-to-day activities of the change.

In addition, other objectives and duties of middle managers during the implementation phase are for example removing barriers resisting the change, facilitating the improvements, ensuring the required level of knowledge and skills necessary to perform changes, motivating people to engage and involve in the change, encouraging risk taking and independent thinking, recognizing and rewarding people involved in the improvements, and making necessary adjustments. In order to stabilize the situation and anchor the changes into the organizational culture, middle managers are required to consolidate new operating models and behaviour as a new routine. This can be achieved by creating a sense that the use of new practices is an expectation and demonstrating

the correlation between a new behaviour and organizational success. Also, middle managers need to reinforce the changes and ensure the continuity of development.

While discussing the change management practices and characteristics of a successful change executor, especially two factors emerge from the literature. First, the role of communication as an enabler aspect of successful change processes is recognized by several authors. Communication can be seen as a means to validate the need for change, facilitate the process for a change, increase the commitment of people involved, and both prevent and manage change resistance. Communication needs to be both formal and informal, direct, transparent, multidisciplinary, and multidirectional. The second aspect closely related to a successful change management is change leadership. While the term management is traditionally associated with rather technical and operational dimension of a supervisory work, leadership on the other hand emphasizes interpersonal dimensions of change processes. It has been suggested that there is a positive and significant relation between a change-oriented leadership and an ability to both manage and sustain organizational change. As middle managers were identified to serve as a linkage between organization's top-management and frontline employees, interpersonal skills – and hence also change leadership skills are essential. Authors of the field have proposed different sets of characteristics and requirements of a successful change leader. Change adaptability has been identified as one of the key determinants of successful change implementation. It requires leaders to be optimistic, self-assured, innovative, collaborative, purposeful, structured, and proactive. In addition, change leaders need to be aware and able to manage all four dimensions of the leadership; cognitive, spiritual, emotional, and behavioural. Finally, successful change leaders are expected to align people by continuously interacting with others, develop a complete and accurate understanding of the change initiatives, understand people's different levels of receptiveness, create an atmosphere and an organizational culture which enhances the change and enables improvements to be made, and personally lead the implementation process as a role model.

3 Methodology

Within the chapter, methodological choices of the research are presented and discussed. Methodology refers to an aggregate of a philosophy of science, an acquisition method of theoretical background, and an empirical research method (Sirén & Pekkarinen 2017). The chapter starts with a discussion on philosophical assumptions of the research. Next, research design and strategy are presented in order to form a comprehensive understanding of the research process. Also, the selection of used research methods is justified, and context of the study introduced. The chapter continues with a discussion on both data collection and analysis methods. Finally, trustworthiness of the study is discussed by analysing both validity and reliability of the research.

3.1 Philosophical assumptions

Whether consciously or unconsciously, every research is based on several assumptions and beliefs. It is essential to be aware of these philosophical commitments as they have a significant impact on how we perceive and understand issues under examination. (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill 2016: 124-125.) Hence, philosophical aspects and questions should always be taken into consideration while conducting a research (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008: 10). Saunders et al. (2016: 124) have defined research philosophy as a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge. Eriksson et al. (2008: 12) have further divided the philosophy of social sciences into five key concepts; ontology, epistemology, methodology, methods, and paradigm.

Ontology and epistemology represent research assumptions through which different research philosophies can be examined. Ontology refers to assumptions about the nature of reality. (Saunders et al. 2016: 127.) It concerns the ideas about the existence of and relationship between people, society, and the world in general (Eriksson et al. 2008: 13). Ontological assumptions shape the way in which research objectives are both seen and studied. In the context of business and management research, objectives

include factors such as organizations, management, individuals' working lives, and organizational events and artefacts (Saunders et al. 2016: 127). In the context of this study, change management as an examined phenomenon and organizations' middle management as actors serve as research objectives. The division between objectivism and subjectivism is a typical approach to study different conceptions of reality (Eriksson et al. 2008: 13). Objectivism – or ontological realism (Sirén et al. 2017) – assumes that the social world has existence independently of people and their actions and activities (Eriksson et al. 2008: 13). On the contrary, subjectivism – or social ontology (Sirén et al. 2017) – assumes that the social reality is produced by people through social interaction (Eriksson et al. 2008: 13-14). The term constructionism is often used to describe this social nature of reality (Eriksson et al. 2008: 13). As this study is based on the assumptions that middle managers who act as individuals have influence on change processes and change management as an examined research objective is constructed by social interaction of people involved, it has adopted the conception of subjectivism to study reality.

While ontology focuses on a question "*what is there in the world*", epistemology on the other hand is concerned with the questions "*what is knowledge*" and "*what are the sources and limits of knowledge*" (Eriksson et al. 2008: 13-14). As epistemology aims to answer question "*how to get information about the research objective*", it is also a concern of research methods (Sirén et al. 2017). The multidisciplinary context of business and management studies enables an opportunity to adopt different epistemologies depending on the type of knowledge and examined issue (Saunders et al. 2016: 127). Eriksson et al. (2008: 15) have identified three main directions and epistemological views as follows. Empiricism considers reality as a constitution of observable material things. It is closely related with the philosophical position of positivism according to which "k*nowledge of the world is obtained through applying the scientific methods to experiences and empirical world*" (Eriksson et al. 2008: 18). Secondly, the approach of subjectivism sees reality as being socially constructed. This epistemological view is associated with the philosophical position of interpretivism

which concerns with subjective and shared meanings (Eriksson et al. 2008: 18). Finally, authors have identified substantialism as a third and final view. It takes reality as material but acknowledges that people interpret it differently depending on time and context. Substantialism is usually associated with philosophical position of critical realism concerning with the identification of different structures of the world (Eriksson et al. 2008: 18). Among positivism, interpretivism, and critical realism, Saunders et al. (2016: 135) have identified postmodernism and pragmatism as major philosophies in the research of business and management. While postmodernism emphasis the role of language and power of relations, pragmatism asserts that concepts are only relevant where they support action (Saunders et al. 2016: 141-143).

This study aims to explore change executors' different roles and areas of responsibility by interviewing people in middle management positions, and thus, it represents the philosophical position of social constructionism (Eriksson et al. 2008: 19-20; Saunders et al. 2016: 140-141; Sirén et al. 2017). Social constructionism is a form of interpretivism seeking to understand how the seemingly objective features are constituted by subjective meaning of individuals and intersubjective processes (Eriksson et al. 2008: 20). Thus, it assumes that reality is constructed through social interaction in which social actors create partially shared meaning and realities (Saunders et al. 2016: 130). However, reality is not defined nor perceived by individual acts but rather by complex and organized patterns of ongoing actions (Eriksson et al. 2008: 20). Interviewed middle managers – who act as informants of the study – are assuming the world from their own perspective shaped by their previous experience and personal perceptions. As the perspectives and views of individuals differ depending on the several demographical factors, the nature of a social constructionism research is rather subjectivist and findings apply only on certain circumstances and context (Saunders et al. 2016: 140-141). In terms of this study, the interviewed middle managers perceive an examined phenomenon from the basis of their own previous experience on managing change. Thus, instead of attempting to produce of discover a generalized theory of change

management practices, the research aims to create a deeper understanding of middle managers' change management practices within the examined context.

3.2   Research strategy and methods

A research design can be defined as a general plan of how the research questions will be answered (Saunders et al. 2016: 163). The thesis aims to fill identified research gap and present interplay between theory and practice by conducting a qualitive study. The literature review on change management processes formulates the theoretical framework of the thesis. Collected data and findings of the empirical research are reflected to and analysed through the theoretical background of middle management's role in the organizational change.

Eriksson et al. (2008: 21-23) have identified three different concepts by which theorizing in a research can be approached. According to *deduction*, the first source of knowledge is theory. Deductive research proceeds from a theory through a hypothesis to an empirical analysis. In the contrary, *induction* assumes that theories are outcomes of an empirical research. Indictive research proceeds from an empirical research to generalized claims and theoretical results. As a third and final concept, *abduction* combines the concepts of deduction and induction. Abductive research can be considered as a logic of exploratory data analysis generating new ideas and hypotheses. In terms of different theorizing concepts, this study has adopted elements from all three above-listed approaches. As the literature review is conducted in order to set a theoretical scope for the study, it can be argued that the research follows the concept of deduction. However, since the aim of the thesis is not to test existing theories but rather subsidize them by a qualitative empirical research, the chosen approach has also similarities with inductive and abductive research processes. (Eriksson et al. 2008: 21-23.)

3.2.1 Literature review

Synder (2019) has identified a literature review to be a relevant and efficient research method within the field of business research. It can broadly be described as a systematic way of collecting and synthesizing previous research regarding the issue. It creates a firm foundation for advancing knowledge and facilitating theory development. Literature review's strength as a research method stems from its ability to integrate different perspectives from various empirical findings. Also, it can help to provide an overview of topics in which existing research is incoherent and interdisciplinary – such as management studies. Based on the comparative analysis of existing guidelines for a literature review, Synder (2019) has identified three main approaches to the issue; *systematic*, *semi-systematic*, and *integrative*. Approaches differ from each other depending on the purpose of a review, type of research questions, chosen research strategy, characteristics of a sample, analysis and evaluation methods, and contributions of a review. For example, while the systematic approach focuses on forming a synthesize and answering specific research questions by systematic quantitative research methods, the semi-systematic approach aims to form an overview of the research area and answer broad research questions by utilizing a variety of different research methods and strategies. Integrative approach on the other hand aims to evaluate, critique, and synthesize the existing literature of a chosen research topic in a way that enables new theoretical frameworks and perspectives to be emerged. (Synder 2019.)

Both Synder (2019) and Eriksson et al. (2008: 21) have pointed out that different research concepts are often used simultaneously and elements from different approaches and concepts are often combined. Thus, even though the thesis follows the semi-systematic approach to a literature review, it has also characteristics of systematic and integrative approaches. For example, the sample consist material from variety of different sources such as research articles, books, and other publications which is typical for an integrative research (Synder 2019). In addition, among a formation of an overview of the field, the literature review aims to generate a theoretical framework of change

management processes which can also be categorized as an integrative research (Synder 2019).

3.2.2   Qualitative research

As a research method, qualitative research enables an opportunity to focus on and examine a specific phenomenon in a chosen context (Eriksson et al. 2008: 3). Hence, the method is practicable for examining middle managers' behaviour and different roles during the change management process. In the context of business research, there is a variety of different data collection techniques and methods to conduct a qualitative research. These techniques can be utilized simultaneously to carry out a multi-method qualitative study or they can even be combined with quantitative research methods (Saunders et al. 2016: 168-169). Due to a character of the study – and partly because of the limitations set by the nature of a master's thesis, this research has adopted a mono method qualitative study approach. In more specific, a qualitative interview study was selected as a research strategy of the thesis. For the practical reasons, the interviewees were selected from the same company. While the adoption of a multiple case study would allow both replication and comparison, the chosen approach of interviewing middle managers from the same company and with similar backgrounds is suitable for the purpose of gaining deeper understanding of a specific phenomenon in a studied context (Saunders et al. 2016: 197). Hence, the selected research method serves the purpose of the study and meets the requirements of a valid research method. Research data and material was collected through semi-structured theme interviews which were conducted in the selected company. Justification of the chosen technique and the data collection process in general will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

3.3   Context of the study

To a qualitative interview study, understanding the context is an essential part of a research process (Saunders et al. 2016: 185). As all of the interviewees work in the same company, it hence forms the context of the research. To ensure anonymity, the company will later on be referred to as Company X. Since the aim of the thesis is not to study Company X itself but rather change management processes and middle managers' roles and responsibilities in general, the usage of a pseudonym does not prevent the achievement of research objectives. However, examined topic and aims of the research set certain criteria for a selection of a company and interviewees. As a first requirement, the chosen organization needs to be structured in a way that allows people fitting the description of middle manager to be found within the company. As earlier defined, middle managers are employees holding positions between organization's first-level supervisors and top-level executives having company-wide responsibilities. They also serve as a linkage between frontline employees and organization's top-management. Next, interviewed middle managers need to have prior experience in addressed topic through which they can reflect their answers. In other words, interviewees need to have gone through organizational changes in a middle management position either while employed by the current or some previous company.

Company X is a public limited company with a vast experience in the Finnish market. It is a regional branch of a multinational corporation whose parent company operates globally with a main focus on Nordic and Baltic countries. Based on determining features such as annual revenue and number of employees, Company X can be classified as a large size enterprise. It has several units operating both regionally and nationally in Finland. Partly because of the company's long history – but also due to a dynamic industry and rapidly changing and evolving business environment, Company X has gone through several changes during its history. Depending on the scale and target, changes have been both minor and major size. As a most recent example, the company has lately been reshaping its organizational structure with the intention of moving towards

functionally organized team design. The change was driven by an effort to increase efficiency and teams' self-governance.

3.4   Data collection and analysis

Interviews in general have been identified as an efficient and practical way of collecting information (Eriksson et al. 2008: 80-81). The study has adopted semi-structured theme interviews as a collection method of primary data. The main advantage of semi-structured interviews is that the research materials are systematic and comprehensive but at the same time a researcher has an ability to be flexible and vary the wording and order of questions in each interview (Eriksson et al. 2008: 82). It is also a suitable method to study both '*what*' and '*how*' questions (Eriksson et al. 2008: 82).

Saunders et al. (2016: 393-396) have identified and categorized four different situations in which the usage of semi-structured interviews is advantageous. Firstly, in some cases *the purpose of the research* requires the use on semi-structured interviews. This might be necessary if, for example, a study includes exploratory elements or if the interviewees are expected to explain, or build on, their responses on a phenomenon under examination. Secondly, *the importance of establishing personal contact* emphasizes semi-structured interviews as a valid research method. An interview conducted in person might increase the quality of answers and provide more profound insights. Thirdly, sometimes *the nature of the data collection questions* requires semi-structured interviews. The data collection method is advantageous if there is a large number of questions to be answered, the questions are either complex or open ended, or if the order and logic of questions need to be varied. Finally, authors have identified *length of time required and completeness of the process* as a fourth situation demanding the use of semi-structured interviews. Compared to other data collection techniques, interviews have proven to be an efficient way to obtain data. (Saunders et al. 2016: 393-396.)

All criteria listed above justify the selection of semi-structured interviews as a main data collection method of the study. The interview template which served as a guiding outline of conducted interviews is translated from Finnish to English and attached to the end of the study as an appendix. The questioning and development of interview questions is based on the theoretical background of the study. The topics covered within the interviews are divided into more broader themes based on both the research questions and theoretical findings of the study. To collect background information on the interviewees, each of them was asked to briefly describe his or her career path and main responsibilities and tasks at the current position. To introduce the topic to the participants and encourage them to talk freely, open-ended questions on change management in general were asked at the beginning of each interview. Also, interviewees were encouraged to demonstrate their answer and thoughts through examples to get more detailed responses. Interviews continued with the questions on change processes and middle managers' different roles and responsibilities during them. In order to raise more discussion on change management practices, interviewees were asked about the challenges of change management and how to overcome them. At the end of the discussion, each interviewee was offered an opportunity to discuss topics that had not risen in the conversation already.

As a qualitative research does not aim to search statistical connections but rather deepen the understanding of an examined phenomenon, the number of interviews is not the first prior (Eskola & Suoranta 2000: 61). For the thesis, in total of six managers were interviewed. Interviews were conducted individually via a virtual communication platform and recorded with the permission of the interviewees. Table 4 presents a summary of the conducted interviews. To ensure anonymity of the participants, demographic factors or other information from which the interviewees can be identified are not published. As the interviewees answered the questions on the basis of their own previous experience and personal perceptions, devoted time and focus to each of the themes varied between the participants. In addition, a semi-structured nature of the interviews and a great number of open-ended questions allowed interviewees to have a

slightly different focus on covered topics. Thus, also the lengths of the interviews varied between 22 and 42 minutes.

Table 4. Summary of the conducted interviews

Date	Title	Years within Company X	Years in a management position	Length of the interview
3.6.2020	Group Manager	30	13	37 min
4.6.2020	Group Manager	9	14	32 min
8.6.2020	Group Manager	14	5	22 min
9.6.2020	Group Manager	36	20	29 min
12.6.2020	Head of Department	21	15	42 min
16.6.2020	Group Manager	4	4	31 min

As Table 4 indicates, majority of the interviewees were working in the role of Group Manager at the time of the interviews. Group Managers' tasks include a variety of different administrative and operational duties. As team supervisors they are in charge of facilitating and organizing daily working of the teams, taking care of human resource activities, allocating resources, ensuring efficiency and profitability of the teams, setting goals and targets for development, and monitoring and reporting teams' performance. One out of the six interviewees served as the Head of Department during the interviews. The Head of Department is responsible for the whole department's day-to-day activities and development. The position includes managerial functions such as planning, organizing, budgeting, staffing, leading, controlling, and developing. What combines the roles of Group Manager and Head of Department is that they both are in charge of implementing new change initiatives and serve as a linkage between frontline employees and organization's top-management.

Eskola et al. (2000: 137) have identified the main objectives of an analysis of qualitative data as follows. Purpose of the analysis is to create clarity among a research data, and thus, to produce new information about the issue under examination. In addition, aim

of the analysis is to summarize the research material without losing the information it contains. On the contrary, aim is to increase the value of information by creating coherent and meaningful information from fragmented material. (Eskola et al. 2000: 137.) Several authors (e.g. Eskola et al. 2000: 159-202; Eriksson et al. 2008: 127-139; Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008: 171-180; Saunders et al. 2016: 566-626) have identified different techniques and methods to analyse qualitative data. For the purpose of this study, multiple different analysing techniques were used simultaneously and combined with each other which is a common procedure in the context of qualitative studies (Eskola et al. 2000: 161). The study has adopted the three-phase process model of analysis suggested by Dey (1993: 31) as the main guiding principle. Stages of the process are *describing*, *classifying*, and *connecting* the research material.

To facilitate the analysis phase and ensure a validity of the research, all the interviews were recorded. For the beginning, the interview records were transcribed, and the transcripts stored in electronic form. Next, the research material was classified and categorized into themes defined by the theoretical framework of the thesis. During the connecting phase, regularities and similarities between the occurred themes were identified. Finally, the main findings were translated from Finnish to English.

3.5   Validity and reliability

Concepts of *reliability*, *validity*, and *generalizability* provide a basic framework for an evaluation of a qualitative research (Eriksson et al. 2008: 291). Reliability refers to replication and consistency of a research (Saunders et al. 2016: 202), and thus, it determines to which extent the research can be replicated with similar findings (Eriksson 2008: 292). To ensure reliability of the study, procedure by which the study is conducted is described and documented in detail. The interview template which served as guiding outline of the interviews can be found as an appendix at the end of the study. Also, all the interviews were recorded and transcribed in order to increase reliability of the study.

Validity of a research refers to the appropriateness of the used measures (Saunders et al. 2016: 202). Validity can further be divided into three concepts. Firstly, term *construct validity* is used to describe whether the research measures the intended construct adequately and produce exact conclusions of the examined phenomenon (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008: 187). To achieve construct validity, interview questions – which served as indicators and measurements of the study – were developed based on relevant existing knowledge of change management as a phenomenon. Secondly, *internal validity* refers to whether a research demonstrate accurately a causal relationship between two variables (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008: 188; Saunders et al. 2016: 203). To ensure internal validity, empirically detected patterns and actions of middle managers were paired with the frameworks established using existing theory and previous research regarding the subject. The third and final aspect of validity is closely related with the concept of generalizability. *External validity* deals with the issues of whether the findings of the research can be generalized and extended into a wider context (Eriksson et al. 2008: 292; Hirsjärvi et al. 2008: 188; Saunders et al. 2016: 204). As the thesis has adopted an approach in which the research objectives are examined in a chosen context, the generalization is analytic rather than statistic; the empirical findings are compared with a previously developed theory as an intention to allow replication (Eriksson et al. 2008: 293-294). To ensure external validity – and hence generalizability of the study, the research questions were developed in a manner that the finding of the study are not context dependent.

As a parallel concept to reliability and validity, a *trustworthiness* of a study can be used a means to evaluate qualitative research. It contains aspects of *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability* which all have been taken into consideration while conducting the research. Despite of the minor differences, all four aspects have strong similarities with reliability, generalizability, and different forms of validity. Credibility deals with the same issues as reliability of a research: whether the research data is sufficient to merit claims that are made, are there strong logical links between empirical findings and theoretical framework of the research, and can other researchers come to

same interpretations and conclusions on the basis of the research material. Transferability on the other hand is concerned with an ability to establish a connection between the study and previous research by illustrating similarities. Dependability refers to one's ability to demonstrate that the research process is both logical, traceable, and documented. Lastly, confirmability is about linking findings and interpretations of the study to the data in an easily understood manner. (Eriksson et al. 2008: 294.)

4   Analysis

In this chapter, findings of the study are analysed. At first, findings of the empirical research are demonstrated and explained. Later on, the key empirical findings are reflected to the theoretical base of the study in order to present interplay between the theory and practice. The aim of a discussion is also to identify whether there is a consensus or disagreements between the findings and the previous research.

4.1   Findings of the empirical research

As earlier described, empirical data was collected through semi-structured theme interviews conducted within Company X. Since the interviews were held in Finnish, the key findings are translated into English. To demonstrate the findings in a structured manner, the research material is classified and categorized into themes defined by the theoretical framework of the thesis. Research material is structured under the following three themes: *change processes* in general, *middle managers as change executors*, and *change management practices*. Each of the sections contains sub-categories dealing with the issues related to the theme. In the following section, interpretations based on the research material are compared against the theory as intention to present interplay between the theory and practice. To provide evidence to support the interpretations, observations, examples, and interview excerpts are utilized.

4.1.1   Change processes

The aim of this section is to gain a better understanding on how changes proceed within today's companies. Interviewed middle managers' perceptions of change management and its importance are also discussed. As the interviewees were encouraged to demonstrate their thoughts through examples, many of them reflected their answers through the organisational change process currently ongoing in Company X. Hence, the

change process and its progress are briefly described as it forms the context of the empirical research.

At the time of interviews, Company X had lately been reshaping its organizational structure with the intention of moving towards functionally organized team design. The change was driven by an effort to increase efficiency and teams' self-governance. Centralization of different business activities and improvement of the customer experience were also described as the main objectives of the change process. By giving more responsibility to both individuals and teams, the company aimed to increase the level of teams' self-organization and awareness of the effect of their daily activities. Even though the interviewees worked under the same department, they were located in different units. Thus, also the degree of change varied between the different units. While in some units the changes were only minor size, other units went through major changes in how the daily activities are organized and teams structured. The degree of change and receptiveness to change were identified to vary also between the individuals which in some cases had delayed the implementation of change initiatives.

Apart from the ongoing change process, Company X has gone through several changes during its history due to a dynamic industry and rapidly changing and evolving business environment. Depending on the scale and target, changes have been both minor and major size. Majority of the interviewees described that the role of change management is becoming all the time more and more important as the change is perceived as a permanent element of today's business life. As the following quote from an interviewed middle manager indicates, it is difficult to consider change management as an individual sections of today's supervisory work.

I see it (change management) as a commonplace. In my opinion it is dangerous to consider it as a separate or isolated aspect of managerial duties because everything you do, or do not do, and everything you say, or leave unsaid as a supervisor will take a change in some direction. […] Certainly, it may differ in terms of quality; some do it better than the others. And then of course there is a difference in how systematic you are. For example, whether you are considering what you are

trying to change, and by which means. That is, for some it is more planned than for the others.

The other interviewees agreed with the above-described approach according to which change management is an essential part of today's leadership. One of the interviewees with a vast experience in a management position described that her "*whole career as a supervisor has barely been nothing else but change management*" and that "*change has been constant – only the target of change has varied over the years*". As the change programmes differ from each in various ways, the participants of the study described that also the approach to change varies between them. In some cases, change management is systematic and planned whereas sometimes it is unconscious with a less attention paid to it.

According to the interviewees, change programmes tend to proceed on a case-by-case basis as they differ from each other in various ways depending on the factors such as scale, focus, and aim of the change. The interviewees did not recognize any particular change model that would have been exploited within Company X. Instead, as middle managers they are provided with change schedules according to which it is easy to proceed.

> *There has not been any particular of specific change model that has been exploited deliberately. We are aware of all the existing frameworks […] but, for example, during the ongoing change process different change models and frameworks have been combined. It is a conscious choice that we have not selected any particular framework nor copied some other company's way (of manage change).*

However, especially in the case of major size changes there is a certain pattern by which change progresses, and phases that can be identified. Large-scale changes are often broken down into smaller entities which helps in organizing the work and gaining an overall perception of the process. While in the big picture change is described to be continuous, smaller changes are more project-based by their nature – meaning that there are a clear-cut starting point and an end that can be identified. In some cases, change programmes are initiated systematically but further implementation is left out

to be more flexible and uncoordinated. The following quote from one of the interviewees summarizes the findings on change processes.

> *In the big picture, there is a certain pattern of change. […] There are constantly ongoing changes either on organisational or managerial level – both small and large-scale. In those cases, we aim to proceed according to the action plan which means that the company's strategy is implemented by exploiting the waterfall model. In this manner, for example the focus areas are defined. […] In the case of large-scale changes and projects, there are of course certain identifiable phases such as planning, negotiations, implementation, communication, monitoring, and so on. Small-sized commonplace development projects follow the same pattern, but it is not consciously thought as systematically.*

4.1.2   Middle managers as change executors

The aim of this section is to describe the role of middle managers as change executors. Based on the empirical findings, different roles of middle managers are described and required characteristics of a successful change leader defined. Different means by which middle managers are involved in change processes are also discussed. In addition, the interviewees' thoughts on the biggest challenges resisting the change are reflected.

As earlier described, change management is an essential part of today's supervisory work. According to one of the interviewees, the role of middle managers is emphasized especially in the beginning of a change implementation phase as they are responsible for both introducing and implementing new practices and behaviour among the frontline employees. How intensively middle managers are involved already in the planning phase varies between change programmes depending on the scale and target of the change. Interviewees described that especially in the case of large-scale changes, change initiatives have been given to middle managers as pre-planned action plans from the top level of the organization.

While the company's top-level executives are usually responsible for the policy formulation and creation of a change agenda, it is a common procedure to involve

organization's middle managers in later stages of a change. The interviewees described that they have been given an opportunity to express opinions and be involved in planning further measures and fine adjustments. Thus, the role and responsibilities of a middle management grow all the time more as the change proceeds. However, the involvement of middle managers should not be overlooked either during the early planning phase as the following quote from an interviewed middle manager suggests.

…they (managers working among the frontline employees) have practical experience and information on the daily operations and activities taking place within the teams. […] They have the most up-to-date knowledge and a good view of the existing situation.

While discussing on required characteristics of a successful change leader, the interviewees highlighted different interpersonal skills and dimensions. As a first quality, change executors need to be able to adaptable to changes at a fast pace. They need to delineate guidelines according to which it is possible to proceed into the desired direction. Secondly, leaders need to be present in the change. Especially in the case of large-scale changes – or if the change has negative side-effects, change leaders must have time to answer questions, listen and deal with people's concerns, and correct possible misunderstandings. Also, openness and transparency in all activity are of great importance. An ability to prioritize, simplify, and facilitate changes was also pointed out as a favourable characteristic. One of the interviewees characterised a successful change leader as a playmaker who act as a coach-like person. Finally, leading change processes requires perseverance and patience. In order to implement changes successfully, it may be necessary to repeat same things time after time again.

The discussion on barriers resisting change programmes brought up a variety of different challenges that interviewed middle managers had encountered during change processes. All of the interviewees identified people's change resistance as a one of the main challenges of change management. Possible sources of change resistance were identified as follows. Firstly, employees' sensation of being left outside of the planning phase was pointed out by several interviewees. It is essential to avoid ostensible

participation as it may lead to even greater lack of motivation. However, especially in the case of changes that affect many people, the involvement of a large number of people might be difficult – or even impossible – and compromises have to be made. Along with the lack of involvement, changes in a job description, responsibilities, and duties might cause resistance and raise fear of one's own position.

> *Even though we have sufficient reasons for the change, and we have been able to communicate them clearly, not everyone will accept the change nor justifications of it, if they feel that the change has an unfavourable influence on their position on a personal level or their tasks are becoming more unpleasant.*

> *In a sense people are used to working in a particular way which is perceived as the best option. Everything new is on the other hand perceived as difficult and some people are not willing to learn the new approach nor open to accept it right away.*

Another identified challenge of change management is a passive attitude towards the change; people are expecting problems to be solved on their behalf by someone else, rather than trying to think possible solutions by themselves. Interviewees mentioned also that it is common to give lack of time as an explanation for not adopting the change or new operation models. As one of the interviewees mentioned, it should be noted that people should not be put in a position where they are out of their depth. Instead of assuming changes to be implemented immediately, employees should be given time to absorb changes and new working routines.

> *The pace (of change) has been quite fast. Somehow it feels that in a managerial position it is easier to accept changes and understand reasons behind them as they are communicated to us more openly than employees. Then, it is expected that the same pace would proceed to employee-level and everyone would accept the change just as quickly.*

In addition to the ones previously described, carrying out clear, coherent, and effective communication was identified as one of the biggest challenges of change processes. Also, especially in the case of older employees – supervisors' location in a different place was described as challenging as they are not able to be present at the day-to-day activities.

Finally, a big workload of middle managers caused by changes was perceived as demanding; they have several different roles and areas of responsibilities to be handled simultaneously.

4.1.3   Change management practices

In the following, different change management practices and procedures are discussed. The interviewees identified both general and change-specific factors promoting the change. The identified practices are closely related with the above-described challenges and barriers resisting the change as they are commonly used for the purpose of overcoming these obstacles.

The first and foremost practice identified by all of the interviewees is an effective communication. It plays a big role in, for example, preventing and managing change resistance. It is also a means to justify the change and its objectives. In order to be able to do so, change executors have to had internalize the reasons for change as the questions "*what do we do*" and "*why do we do*" are common. In addition, it is essential to get employees to understand how their own daily actions are related to the organization's strategy and top-level objectives. The importance of personal communication is highlighted by several interviewees. Utilization of one-on-one conversations is an effective way to build trust and get people participate in the change.

> *As a supervisor, you need to have internalized and understood the changes in order to be able to justify them to others. You need also to be prepared for questions by seeking information and answers in advance.*

Secondly, the interviewees empathized the role of employees' participation and involvement as an enhancing factor of change processes. In the best scenario, change would be initiated by the frontline-employees rather than being given from the higher level of organization. The interviewees described that the employees have been participated by giving them only broad guidelines within they have been allowed to

create their own modes of action by which the objectives set together will be achieved. The employees' participation in change is also expected; it is not acceptable to refuse to do anything on behalf of the change. Efforts have also been made to make people understand their essential role in the big picture; after all, it is the people who make the change happen. In some cases, employees' involvement is even a necessity. Challenges caused by the different locations of subordinates and supervisor require delegating tasks and entrusting responsibilities. Also, it was argued that the frontline employees have the best knowledge of the daily operations of company, and thus, they have a lot to offer in both planning and implementing change. Finally, the significant role of early adopter and change advocates in promoting the change was pointed out by a few of the interviewees.

> *Concerning the new practices and changes, I certainly do not tell the team members everything as pre-given, even if I know the answer. I try to lead them to a correct answer and solution by asking questions.*

> *…the aim is that a change would be initiated by the employees themselves. Getting an advocate from the team to drive the change facilitates the process. […] After all, the team members have the best knowledge of how things are done at the operational level and what needs to be taken into account (concerning the change).*

As described in the previous section, change resistance was identified as one of the root causes of change programmes' failures. Thus, many of middle managers' change management practices aim particularly to prevent and manage change resistance. The interviewees described that receptiveness to change varies between individuals and teams. It is up to middle managers to identify people resisting the change and get everyone participate. One of the interviewees mentioned that in some cases changing people's mindsets can take plenty of time. In addition to the transparent communication and employees' involvement, creation of a mutual aim was identified as a means to enhance change. Team spirit, commonly agreed goals, and understanding long-term benefits are all factors promoting the change. As one of the interviewed middle managers argued, it should also be noted that not all resistance of change can be prevented; there needs to be pre-planned procedures to handle these kinds of situations.

Other general change management practices are for example planning up a clear schedule for the change, facilitating and organizing the change by breaking change journey into smaller steps, and generating short-term wins and objectives. An ability to prioritize and simplify was also mentioned as a desired capability of change leaders – "*less is more*" as one of the interviewees stated. According to one of the research participants, adopting the best practices from other executors by benchmarking is also an occasionally utilized method within Company X. Finally, as the following quote indicates – leading by example was described as an effective change management practice.

> *Leading by example is something I do. Whenever there are changes, the supervisor needs to stand behind them. Even if it is not such a pleasant thing or change, it should not be shown to the other team members.*

4.2 Analysis of the findings

This section presents an analysis of the key empirical findings. Interpretations based on the research material and the key empirical findings are reflected to the theoretical base of the study in order to present interplay between the theory and practice. Also, the aim of section is to identify whether there is a consensus or disagreements between the findings and the previous research.

Change processes

Based on the literature review, the field of change management was identified to be fragmentary with a variety of different approaches, frameworks, and models. Throughout the history of discipline, the literature of management has frequently proposed various strategies and managerial practices in order to facilitate and enhance the success of change programmes. Both theoretical and empirical findings of the study suggest that change can appear in various forms depending on the factors such as scale,

focus, degree, cause, order, timing, and aim of the change. As the organizational changes differ from each other, also the required phases of a change process vary between change initiatives. While the approach of planned change determines organizational change as a linear process of implementing pre-planned steps, the emergent approach treats change as a continuous phenomenon.

According to the empirical findings, change programmes tend to proceed on a case-by-case basis, and characteristics of both planned and emergent approaches can be identified. In some cases, change management is systematic and planned whereas sometimes it is unconscious with a less attention paid to it. Hence, Romanelli et al.'s (1994) claim that a majority of changes are accomplished via pre-planned change processes rather than via continuous small-scale changes and improvements is supported by the empirical findings only to a certain point. Even though in the context of major size changes there is a certain pattern by which change progresses and phases that can be identified, in the big picture change was described to be continuous. Burnes (1996), Bamford et al. (2003), and Burnes (2004b) have criticised the planned approach's assumption that all the stakeholders involved in the change are willing to co-operate and share the same views and targets. Since the change resistance and employees' lack of involvement were identified as one of the biggest challenges of change management, the criticism is corroborated by the empirical evidence.

Within the literature of field, there are disagreements whether change should be seen as a top-down or bottom-up driven phenomena. The empirical findings of this study suggest that while the change initiatives are usually given from top of the organization as pre-planned, the implementation phase is a bottom-up driven process; it is the people who make the change happen. This finding is in line with Moran et al.'s (2000) argument according to which the creation of a change vision and structures require a top-down approach, while as participation and involvement of employees are bottom-up driven activities. Thus, both top-down and bottom-up approaches are required as Moran et al. (2000) and Galli (2018) have suggested. As a conclusion, succeeding in a rapidly changing

business environment demands a mix of top management purpose and middle management initiative (Wooldridge et al. 1990).

Middle managers as change executors

Both theoretical and empirical findings suggest that the change management is an essential part of today's leadership. Also, Graetz's (2000) suggestion that the primary task of today's management is the leadership of organisational change is supported by the empirical findings of study. Due to the high importance of change management, considering it as an individual skill or aspect of leadership may be difficult or even irrelevant and unnecessary.

The literature review revealed several different roles and areas of responsibilities of change executors and people involved in the change. The empirical findings suggest that the role of middle managers is emphasized especially during the change implementation phase as they are responsible for both introducing and implementing new practices and behaviour among the frontline employees. This notion is supported by several authors (e.g. Stein et al. 1992; Noble 1999; Bamford et al. 2003; Hagedorn et al. 2006; Hope 2010; Bryant & Stensaker 2011). For example, Stein et al. (1992: 16-17) have compared middle managers with the change implementors who were identified as a second action role of change processes. As change implementors, middle managers are in charge of coordinating and translating change initiatives into discrete actions and tasks, and responsible for the change process' micro dynamics and day-to-day activities of the change. From the perspective of Kang's (2015) macro and micro change management approaches, middle managers appeared to have characteristics of micro change management executors who are expected to implement the chosen change practices by coordinating, motivating, and managing change resistance.

In terms of the contrast between planned and emergent approaches, the empirical findings suggest that the role of middle managers is more likely to fit the emergent approach's description of change executors. While the planned approach sees executors as rational planners and strategists controlling the change process from the top, the emergent approach treats them as bottom-up driven facilitators who are responsible for developing the common purpose and vision that gives direction to the organization (Burnes 1996; Bamford et al. 2003). However, the empirical findings suggested that middle managers' role includes also rather technical and operational dimensions of change management – such as organizing, facilitating, and monitoring – which are usually associated with the planned approach. Thus, Graetz's (2000) suggestion that the successful change management requires adopting both managerial capabilities as an operational instrumental and interpersonal skills as a charismatic leader is supported by the empirical findings of the study.

The empirical research revealed a variety of different characteristics of a successful change leader. Based on the findings, change executors need to adapt to changes at a fast pace, delineate guidelines according to which it is possible to proceed into the desired direction, and be present in the change. In addition, transparency in all activity and perseverance and patience are of great importance. These descriptive factors are closely related with the term change leadership which emphasizes interpersonal dimensions of the change process. For example, Miller (2001) have suggested that change leaders' own personal change adaptability is a key determinant of implementation success. Hooper et al. (2000), Elrod II et al. (2002), and Gill (2002) have on the other hand emphasized change leaders' ability to establish and set a direction for a change process and develop a complete and accurate understanding of the change to be implemented. Therefore, the study supports the findings on a positive correlation between change-oriented leadership and success of change management suggested by Graetz (2000), Miller (2001), Gill (2002), Bamford et al. (2005), Caldwell et al. (2008), Al-Ali et al. (2017), Baddah (2017), and Galli (2018).

Change management practices

As the empirical findings suggest that the change programmes tend to proceed on a case-by-case basis, also the used procedures and practices were identified to vary between the changes. Different change management practices are used to facilitate and enhance the success of change programs for example by increasing the employees' participation, preventing change resistance, and placing focus on the people involved in change. Both theoretical and empirical findings of the study suggest that especially the role of an effective communication is emphasized during change management. Varkey (2010) has argued that rather than seeing communication as an individual phase or a task of a change management team, it should be a continuous theme covering the whole change process. This claim is supported by the empirical findings according to which it can be used as a means to prevent and manage change resistance, justify the change and its objectives, and involve people in the change. According to Engle et al. (2017), in order to be effective communication needs to be both formal and informal, direct, transparent, multidisciplinary, and multidirectional. Along with those identified by Engle et al. (2017), the empirical findings highlight the importance of personal communication as an effective way to build trust and get people participate in the change.

As the theoretical findings suggested, the role of employees' participation and involvement as an enhancing factor of change processes was supported by the empirical findings. The interviewees' description of the most optimal scenario in which change would be initiated by the frontline-employees rather than being given from the higher level of organization is relatable to the views of emergent approach. Tsoukas et al.'s (2002), Caldwell et al.'s (2008), and Galli's (2018) statement that no change effort will succeed without the employees' willingness and desire to change and implement change initiatives is hence supported by the empirical findings. The interviewed middle managers emphasized the pivotal role of early adopter and change advocates in promoting the change. This is supported by Kotter (1995; 1996: 21) who suggested that

change leaders should set a team or a role model to implement desired behaviour expected from the employees.

Since the change resistance was identified as one of the root causes of change programmes' failures, many of middle managers' change management practices aim particularly to prevent and manage it. Thus, instead of being an individual or a specific change management practice, managing change resistance is rather a set of different means and procedures. The empirical findings suggest that the receptiveness to change varies between individuals and teams, and it is middle managers' responsibility to identify those resisting the change. This is supported by Moran et al. (2000) who have argued that change leaders should continuously interact with others to explain and answer the questions, and to understand people's different levels of receptiveness; while others are early adopters, some people are sceptical and need more convincing. Hence, it can be argued that it is crucial for change leaders to understand human response to change (Elrod II et al. 2002) and be aware of both intended and unintended outcomes of change processes (Kezar 2010: 22-23).

Both theoretical and empirical findings suggest that creation of a mutual aim and commonly agreed goal enhance the success of change processes. Also, the empirical findings suggest that scheduling, facilitating and organizing the change by breaking change journey into smaller steps, and generating short-term wins and objectives are commonly used and effective change management practices. This is supported by Moran et al. (2000) who have argued that effective change leaders frame the change in terms of outcomes for both organizational and individual level, and by Kotter (1995; 1996: 21) and Galli (2018) who have emphasized the generation of short-term wins as a means to demonstrate the constructiveness of change efforts. Finally, leading by example was identified to be an effective way to increase commitment and employees' participation. Both Moran et al. (2000) and Miller (2001) have made similar kind of findings suggesting that change leaders own personal behaviour is critical aspect in terms of the change process' success.

5 Discussion

This final chapter summarizes the thesis with conclusions and presents the key findings on the main research problem and questions. The chapter contains both theoretical and managerial implications and provides suggestions for future research. In addition, limitations of the study are addressed and discussed.

The aim of this study was to figure out how do middle managers influence on the organizational change process. Three supplementary research questions were set to guide the research work. The theoretical framework of the thesis was formulated by conducting a literature review on the previous research of change management. The theoretical part of the study was divided into three sections as follows. First, the field of change management was considered by defining organizational change and different approaches to it, presenting and analysing existing frameworks and change models, and identifying different phases of a change process. Next, change executors' – and especially middle managers' – different roles, areas of responsibilities, and objectives during the organizational change were defined. Finally, middle managers' role in the change management process was defined by synthesizing the first two sections.

As the study aimed to fill the identified research gap within the field's literature and present an interplay between the theory and practice, an empirical research was conducted. Along with the literature review, a qualitative research was adopted as a main research method of the study. Data collection was carried out by interviewing six people in a middle management position through semi-structured theme interviews. Findings of the empirical research were analysed and reflected to the theoretical framework of the study.

The first out of three supplementary questions of the study was considering with the identification of change processes' different phases. Organizational change programmes can differ from each other in various ways, and thus, not all the change programmes are the same. The literature of the field has proposed a number of different approaches

according to which change can either be considered as pre-planned, emergent, continuous, cyclical, or process by its nature. Despite of the disagreements and field's interdisciplinarity, there are also a certain consensus among the different theories and approaches. By analysing and comparing the existing change management models, three general phases of change management processes can be identified. Change management can be generalized into a linearly proceeding process model consisting the phases of preparation, implementation, and stabilization and monitoring.

However, both theoretical and empirical findings suggested that changes tend to proceed on a case-by-case basis depending on the factors such as scale, focus, degree, cause, order, timing, and aim of the change. In some cases, change management is systematic, well-organized, and planned – and thus, it can be characterised as planned approach. On the other hand, sometimes it is unconscious with a less attention paid to it and has characteristics of the emergent approach. The empirical findings suggest that especially in the context of major size changes there is a certain pattern according to which changes proceed, whereas in the big picture change is described to be continuous. There can also be variation in procedures within the same change process. For example, in some cases change may be initiated systematically but further implementation is left out to be more flexible and uncoordinated. The identification of different phases might sometimes be challenging – or even impossible as they can overlap each other and be underway simultaneously.

The second supplementary research question was aiming to examine different roles and responsibilities that middle managers have during the identified phases. In order to form a comprehensive overview of different objectives and responsibilities, the analysed models and frameworks were compared with each other. By doing so, strengths and weaknesses of each model could be taken into closer consideration. The identified objectives and tasks of each phase were further complemented with the findings of empirical research.

The preparation phase of a change process is traditionally considered as a responsibility of organization's top-level executives. However, there are also studies suggesting that middle managers' involvement already in the formation phase of change initiatives is associated with the improved organizational performance. The identified tasks are rather technical and operational dimensions of change management facilitating the change process. The managerial duties during the preparation phase were identified as follows: recognizing the need for change, analysing the existing state of organization, identifying opportunities and threats, assembling change team and appointing leaders, creating change vision and strategy, determining type, scope, and approach, conducting cost and risks analyses, communicating the change vision, and justifying the need for change.

During the implementation phase, change plans and initiatives are put into action and change is the most visible. Interpersonal skills of change executives are highlighted as more people are involved in the change. Change executors' objectives during the implementation phase are for example removing barriers resisting the change, ensuring the required level of knowledge and skills necessary to perform changes, motivating people to engage in the change, encouraging risk taking, generating short-term wins, recognizing and rewarding people involved in the improvements, and making necessary adjustments. Especially the empirical findings suggest that the line between change implementation and stabilization and monitoring is blurry since the phases are closely related with each other and partly overlapping. In the third and final phase of a change process, change executors are expected to consolidate new operating models and behaviour as a routine, demonstrate the correlation between new behaviour and organizational success, ensure continuity of the development, monitor the change process, and analyse the results and possible mistakes.

The third supplementary research question was aiming to explore the special characteristics of middle managers' role during the change processes. Based on both theoretical and empirical findings, the middle managers' role was identified to be

emphasized especially during the implementation phase. The role of middle management is highly cross-functional as they have a strategic location between organization's top management and frontline employees. Change plans are usually communicated through middle management during the change process, and thus, they can either enhance or undermine the organization's ability to implement change initiatives. As change implementors, middle managers are in charge of coordinating and translating change initiatives into discrete actions and tasks, and responsible for the change process' micro dynamics and day-to-day activities.

The empirical findings revealed a variety of different characteristics of a successful change leader. Based on the findings of the study, as change implementors middle managers need to be able to adaptable to changes at a fast pace, delineate guidelines according to which it is possible to proceed into the desired direction, and be present in the change. In addition, transparency in all activity, perseverance and patience, and an ability to prioritize, simplify, and facilitate changes are of great importance. While discussing the change management practices and characteristics of a successful change executor, especially two factors emerge from both theoretical and empirical findings of the study. Firstly, communication as an enabler aspect of successful change processes is widely recognized. It can be seen as a means to validate and justify the need for a change, facilitate the process for a change, increase the commitment of people involved, and both prevent and manage change resistance. Communication needs to be both formal and informal, direct, transparent, multidisciplinary, multidirectional, and personal. Due to its high importance and versatility, it can be argued that communication should be a continuous theme covering the whole change process rather than a separate task or responsibility of change executors.

As the second aspect, the cross-functional role of middle managers requires the adoption of change-oriented leadership. While the term management is traditionally associated with rather technical and operational dimension of a supervisory work, leadership on the other hand emphasizes interpersonal dimensions of change processes.

Characteristics of a successful change leader are for example optimism, self-assurance, innovativeness, collaboratives, purposefulness, structuredness, and proactiveness. As change leaders, middle managers are required to place the focus on the people involved in change and create a mutual aim and commonly agreed goal to enhance the success of change processes. Also, change leader are expected to align people by continuously interacting with others, develop a complete and accurate understanding of the change initiatives, understand people's different levels of receptiveness, create an atmosphere and an organizational culture which enhances the change and enables improvements to be made, and personally lead the implementation process as a role model.

After answering the three supplementary research questions, the main research question on how do middle managers influence on the organizational change process can now be approached. As the findings suggest, organization's middle manager role in the change processes is emphasized especially during the implementation phase. Middle managers are in charge of coordinating and translating change initiatives into discrete actions and tasks, and responsible for the change process' micro dynamics and day-to-day activities. Through change-oriented leadership, they can enhance the success of change processes and lead the organization into the desired direction. With their own actions, middle managers can prevent possible change resistance, motivate people to engage in the change, and ensure continuity of the development.

5.1 Theoretical implications

As theoretical contributions, the study sought to provide academics new insights on today's change management practices and on how successful change leaders act during the change processes. As this research is based on a qualitative interview study in which all of the interviewees were from the same company, caution must be exercised when attempting to generalize the findings. However, the findings of the study reinforce much of the existing literature of change management and contributes to the prior studies in various ways. Firstly, by analysing and comparing the existing change management

models from different periods of management literature's history, this study has provided a generalized linearly proceeding process model of change management. As both Lewin's (1947) and Kotter's (1996) original models have been criticised for the lack of attention given to the human aspect, the model presents an extended version by complementing them with the aspects of people oriented ADKAR model.

Secondly, there has been disagreements over the contrast between planned and emergent approaches within the field's literature. Instead of an adversarial comparison between the approaches, the findings of the study suggest that the planned and emergent approaches could be seen as complementing actions and even be adopted simultaneously. Especially large-scale changes were identified to be initiated systematically and proceed according to the pre-planned steps, but the further implementation is usually left out to be more flexible and uncoordinated. Hence, this study supports Burnes' (2004a) suggestion that instead of seeking one best way or approach to change, companies should rather strive to find the approach that is the most suitable for both type of changes they wish to undertake. Closely related to the comparison between planned and emergent approach, the disagreement on whether change management should be seen as a top-down or bottom-up phenomena has divided the authors of the field. This study suggests that while the change initiatives are usually given from top of the organization as pre-planned, the implementation phase is a bottom-up driven process. Thus, both top-down and bottom-up approaches are required as Moran et al. (2000) and Galli (2018) have suggested.

Finally, this study has emphasized the essential role of middle managers as change executors. The lack of attention paid to middle management's involvement in the context of organizational change management is widely recognized. This study has contributed to the prior studies by conducting an empirical research on how differences in middle managers' change practices and policies influence on organizational performance and improvement efforts' success. Therefore, it can be argued that this

study has for its part narrowed the gap between the theory and practice and provided academics new insights on today's change management procedures.

5.2 Managerial implications

As the findings suggest, it is essential for today's organizations to recognize the significant role of middle management within change processes. By understanding and paying attention to the above-described middle managers' different roles as change executors, companies can increase success rates of their change initiatives. As the middle managers who operate between organization's top management and frontline employees have the most accurate and up-to-date knowledge of how things are done at the operational level, it is recommendable to involve them already in the planning phase of change process. By utilizing middle managers' expertise and know-how, companies can get a wider perspective and new insights into the change process. Middle managers have the best knowledge on operational dimension that need to be taken into account considering the change, and they can help company's top-level executives to put focus on people already in the planning phase. As a consequence, a company can reduce the level of a possible change resistance.

Also, understanding the different roles of middle managers as change executors can help organizations to allocate resources more effectively during the change processes. They need to provide enough support and ensure the required level of skills to implement changes by offering education and training. In addition, companies can put middle managers' expertise to good use while drawing up a schedule for a change process as middle managers can help them to avoid delays and possible pitfalls of change implementation. Finally, this thesis offers executors an opportunity to gain a broader perspective of the field of change management. By familiarizing themselves with the existing literature executors can gain a better understanding on how to utilize available models and frameworks the most efficient way.

5.3   Suggestions for future research

Despite of the increasing amount of research in the context of change management and middle managers involvement, there are still several different suggestions for future research to be conducted. To expand the knowledge and understanding of middle managers' role in change processes, future research can build upon this thesis by paying closer attention to the key findings of it. As this study has pointed out that the change processes tend to vary by their nature depending especially on the scale of change, future research could focus on examining differences on middle managements' roles between minor and major scale changes more specifically. Also, while this study has aimed to form a comprehensive overview of change management processes in general, future research could focus on a correlation between success of change programs and one beforehand determined factor, variable, or a characteristic of a change executor. For example, as both communication and change-oriented leadership were identified critical success factors of change processes, future research should focus on examining them in more detail.

In addition, future research could contribute the existing literature by adopting a mixed method approach. Utilization of qualitative and quantitative research methods simultaneously would provide more accurate and comprehensive data on middle managers' contribution to organization change. Also, a longitudinal study and follow-up study research designs with a large sample would serve the same purpose. Finally, extending the sample to include participants from multiple companies and with diverse backgrounds would produce more generalizable findings.

5.4   Limitations

Due to a character of the study – and partly because of the restrictions set by the nature of a master's thesis, also this study has certain limitations. As the resources to conduct the study were rather limited, the sample of conducted empirical research was relatively

small. However, as a qualitative research does not aim to search statistical connections but rather deepen the understanding of an examined phenomenon, the number of interviews is not the first prior.

In terms of the fragmentation and incoherency of the field, Bamford et al. (2005) have pointed out that making a comprehensive analysis is difficult as the literature of the field tends to draw conclusions on slight empirical evidence. The lack of a consensus particularly in the context of change management models sets also its limitations for the study. Hence, Burnes (2004b) has argued that it is likely to challenging – or even impossible to produce a universally applicable change model. To avoid generalization on the basis of too slight empirical evidence, this study has aimed to examine a wide range of different approaches and perspectives available for both academics and practitioners. Regarding the analysis of different change management models, both advantages and disadvantages of each model were presented, and criticism addressed.

Lastly, organizational change as a studied phenomenon also sets its limitations for the study. For example, Pettigrew et al. (2001) have identified six interconnected analytical challenges that should be addressed while studying organizational change. These challenges include factors such as an examination of multiple contexts and levels of analysis, a linkage between change processes and organizational performance outcomes, and an investigation of international and cross-cultural comparisons on organizational change. To address these challenges and ensure validity and reliability of the study, the context of study and the justification of chosen research methods are both presented and discussed in the third chapter concerning research methodology.

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Appendix. Interview template

Date:

Name:

Number of years in Company X:

Current position:

Main responsibilities and tasks:

Number of years in a management position:

1. How is it going with the changes?

2. Change management in general
   2.1. What are the first things that come to your mind when thinking about change management in general?
   2.2. How do you experience change management's importance in today's working life?

3. How change proceeds within your company?
   3.1. Is there some particular procedure or model of change that is being utilized?
   3.2. How would you describe change management; as a continuous phenomenon or rather process-based?

4. What is your role as a supervisor in the different stages of a change?
   4.1. Are there certain practices or actions whose importance is emphasized during the change?
   4.2. In what ways does change management differ from your everyday managerial work – or does it differ at all?

5. Challenges of change management

    5.1. What do you consider to be the biggest challenges of change management and how to overcome them?

    5.2. How have you tried to prevent these challenges in your organization?

    5.3. Is there anything left to be improved in the sense of future changes?

At the end of the discussion, the interviewee is offered an opportunity to discuss topics that have not arisen in the conversation already. Also, the interviewee is encouraged to demonstrate his or her thoughts through examples.