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Driving successful internal change

A study on how to manage people-issues, key success factors and the role of change agents

Master's thesis in Management and Economics of Innovation

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Abstract

This study seeks to investigate how an internal change is undertaken at a high-tech established company, especially it studies the process of change and the role of change agents, in order to contribute to solutions to overcome the challenges that may arise in change projects. The case study has been undertaken at an international company operating in the telecom industry by comparing two attempts of the same change project.

Three sub-questions are studied derived from the main research question: how does a change process look like in a high-tech company. The sub-questions are a) what could be the success factors in a change process, b) how are challenges in relation to human behavior handled in high-tech firms during a change process, and c) what role does a change agent play in a change process.

The study is conducted by using an inductive approach. It included a literature study of current theory about change management, interviews with change agents and change recipients at the company as well as through participant observation. Eight interviews were held in a semi-structured manner and the result was analyzed by identifying common themes.

Structure and participation were identified as success factors and catalysts for making a positive cumulative process with other important factors to take place. Having supportive processes in place for handling challenges connected to people was seen as important for high-tech companies and to be able to adapt to the specific situation. Furthermore, the result showed that change agents are critical in ensuring the process is implemented and sustained, but it is not enough to secure success.

Key words: Change management, top-down, bottom-up, emergent change, change agents, resistance to change

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1. Introduction

The environment is constantly changing, especially if you are operating in a technological-intensive industry. In order to defend any competitive advantage or position in the market, organizations need to acknowledge this, be able to adapt and change according to the current circumstances they face (Todnem, 2005). Furthermore, since change is affecting and accomplished by people (Moran & Brightman, 2000), it suggests that the people leading change should take people issues in account at least as much as other more tangible parts of change management, such as setting up a project plan.

Although many managers recognize this fact, they are still having trouble recognizing when a change initiative is needed, how to plan and manage for its success (Nadina, 2011). The reason for so many change initiatives' failure is poor management, which includes poor planning, monitoring and control, lack of resources, know-how and incompatible corporate policies and practices (Gill, 2002). Further, they often fail to ensure sufficient resources, such as budget, time, necessary expertise, knowledge and skills (Gill, 2002). For example, if time is not created and protected for processes that support change, the time will be consumed by other work activities, technical responsibilities or other and the change effort will fail (Moran & Brightman, 2000). Important to note though is that there is a lack of empirical evidence supporting the statement that most change attempts fail, but despite that, there are still many factors that can go wrong during organizational changes (Hughes, 2011).

There are both external and internal factors that could inhibit or encourage a change effort. Internal factors are such as, the company's employees, the organizational structure, the quality of management and the organizational culture (Bamford & Forrester, 2003). The company's employees often showcase a reaction to change, and this becomes especially clear when they are not consulted regarding the process or do not fully understand the importance of the change (Nadina, 2011). The organizational structure matters since the more rigid structure, the more centralized power and the more difficulty to change. If the attitude towards change is favorable among management and within the organizational culture, the organization can foster an environment encouraging creativity and one that recognizes the need for change (Nadina, 2011).

Drivers for change arise either from the external or the internal environment of an organization and may include stakeholders' needs and expectations, emergence of a new technology and government policies (Nashim & Sushil, 2011).

A lot of theory exists on how change processes should be executed in the most optimal way in big established companies but despite this we constantly see change initiatives failing. This indicates that there exists a gap in the research and lack of empirical studies of high-tech companies faced with the increasing requirements of today's changing environment. The report aims to guideline how change can be implemented at big, established high-tech companies and how change leaders should deal with challenges related to the people.

1.1 Aim

The report will look into the internal process of changing work processes in a big, established company operating in the fast-changing environment of the high-tech industry in order to gain more insight in problems that arise and how to overcome them. In particular, focus will lay on challenges in regard to people issues. By comparing a real case with theory, the aim is to see what challenges related to human behavior occur at established companies in such industries, the role of change agents and factors contributing to success. Theory can help raise awareness to challenges relating to this perspective. By using a practical example, the objective is to help guide the improvement of future change projects for such companies.

1.1.1 Research Questions

The research questions that aim to be answered in the reports follow below:

1. How does a change process look like in a high-tech company?
 1. What could be the success factors in a change process?
 2. What are the challenges in relation to human behavior at high-tech firms during a change process?
 3. What role does a change agent play in a change process?

1.2 Delimitation

There exists a lot of studies and different theories have been presented around the area. To include all literature available would therefore have been unfeasible due to time and work scope. Thus, limitations were made based on own judgement as well as in discussion with supervisor in order to conduct more qualitative results. Further, the literature has mainly been focused on the process of change and the people leading it. Consequently, other areas have not been brought up as much in the report, but it is important to note that they as well play an important role and should not be neglected.

Furthermore, the report is focused on a specific branch and a specific type of company, meaning that the research may or may not be as applicable to other industries or companies that differs from the one studied. Finally, only a single case has been studied and for more trustworthy results additional case studies should be undertaken.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

The structure of the report is as follows: The report starts with the theoretical framework, going through different perspectives of change initiatives to provide you an understanding of the theory used. Further, it touches upon different perspectives in regard to people issues, communication and the role of change agents. After the literature there is an explanation of the method used, followed by a description of the company and the studied case.

Results are then described and analyzed in regard to the research questions and structured by using the process model of Hayes (2018). Afterwards a more in-depth discussion follows. The report ends with conclusion and suggestions for further research.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter aims to provide a description of the literature around change management in general as well as about more specific parts of the change process related to human behavior, such as resistance to change and the role of change agents.

2.1 Organizational Change Models

There are several ways to categorize change initiatives and when categorized by how it comes about there are four main approaches; planned, emergent, contingency and choice (Todnem, 2005). Within the high-paced climate for high-tech firms, companies must constantly improve, meaning that several changes often occur simultaneously (Biedenbach & Söderholm, 2008). This corresponds to the description of the emergent approach and it will thus, be explained in more detail below. However, what approach suits best will be dependent mainly on the time and frequency of organizational change, the size of the change as well as the context and therefore, all models will be discussed briefly (Biedenbach & Söderholm, 2008).

2.1.1 Planned change

The planned change approach describes change as going through steps in order to arrive at a desirable state from an undesirable one. In order to do that, the organization must move through the three steps of unfreezing the present level, moving to the new level and refreezing the new level (Lewin, 1952). The approach is applicable in a stable and relatively predictable environment (Lewin, 1952). It assumes that change will begin from a stable start position and move to a stable end through clear steps and that employees are willing to change (Biedenbach & Söderholm, 2008). This last assumption thus, ignores potential organizational politics and conflicts or believe that they are always easy to identify and resolve (Burnes, 1996). Characteristics of the planned approach is that it occurs top-down, the change process is analytical and rational, and management has gone through extensive planning beforehand.

Critique towards the model has been brought forward in regard to their assumption that change can follow a linear movement from one state to another, which is untrue in cases of turbulent, uncertain environment (Nashim & Sushil, 2011). Thus, it is less applicable to a fast-changing industry with rapid change (Burnes, 1996), since the increased competition and pace of changes has devalued planned change agendas (Biedenbach & Söderholm, 2008). Further, critics state that the extensive planning makes the change process too dependent on top management, that might not have the full understanding of their actions' consequences (Wilson, 1992).

2.1.2 Contingency change

The contingency theory emphasizes the need for organizations to adjust their structures to their specific situation and highlights contingency factors' effect on the organizational structure (Biedenbach & Söderholm, 2008). Thus, it concludes that no organization is the other alike or will necessarily face the same situational factors (Dunphy & Stace, 1993).

Critique has been raised about the difficulty to connect structure and performance as well as its assumption that the organizations are not able to influence or affect the situational factors or structures in any significant way (Burnes, 1996).

2.1.3 Choice change

The choice perspective is a combination between planned and emergent change (Biedenbach & Söderholm, 2008). It goes against the contingency theory in regard to the possibility to exercise some choice of an organization's situational variables (Burnes, 1996). The approach makes use of the emergent change to raise awareness of a future planned change (Biedenbach & Söderholm, 2008). The approach uses a 4x4-matrix characterized by the dimensions stable versus turbulent environment and slow versus rapid change. The matrix then guides which change approach is most appropriate for a certain situation (Biedenbach & Söderholm, 2008). It further states that the environment is manipulable, and that the organization should either adjust to fit the environment or manipulate the environment to fit the organization.

2.1.4 Emergent Change

Due to the rapid response required by today's environment, a culture of 'intrapreneurship' has been created in many companies along with fewer opportunities for effective top-down leadership. Change is instead more about empowerment, that is, involving people in the change process instead of forcing change on them (Gill, 2002). With that said, it is still essential that change is both receiving support from the top- and bottom simultaneously. Top-down support helps to provide vision and create structure while bottom-up generates support and encourages participation. This means that leading successful change is dependent on the commitment from the whole organization, where everybody needs to be going in the same direction (Moran & Brightman, 2000).

Emergent change inclines to see change as bottom-up, rather than top-down, even though it can be both. The explanation to this inclination is that because change occurs so rapidly, senior management are not able to identify, plan or implement the necessary organizational responses effectively (Kanter et. al., 1992). Related to this, it highlights the crucial role that power and politics can play for change and the fact that all employees have the joint responsibility for organizational change (Biedenbach & Söderholm, 2008). Furthermore, the approach suggests that change is not a process of linear events on a specific time period, rather it is an open-ended, continuous process of adaptation to changing circumstances and the environment (Biedenbach & Söderholm, 2008). It recognizes that change can be unpredictable and is affected by a variety of internal and external factors. Further, the change process is not just about changing organizational practices or structures, it is also an opportunity for learning (Todnem, 2005). The fact that emergent change can increase readiness and receptiveness also makes it work well as a preparation for a specific future planned change program (Biedenbach & Söderholm, 2008).

Since strategy, structure, systems, people, style and culture can all be either sources of inertia blocking change or be encouraging sources of a change process, the approach emphasizes the need for in-depth understanding of these factors (Burnes, 1996). Aligned with its thought of change initiatives not being linear, it states that rather than trying to achieve detailed plans and projection, the organization should focus on understanding the complexity and importance of the issue, as well as the different options available (Burnes, 1996).

Due to the nature of emergent change, they tend to be incremental and the speediness relatively slow (Biedenbach & Söderholm, 2008). Thus, the model may be more appropriate for exploiting opportunities rather than responding to threats and being implemented in operations rather than incorporate strategic change. Further, the less focused character of emergent change leads to it being less likely to deliver a transformational shift (Biedenbach & Söderholm, 2008). The critiques to this model are that due to its open-ended thought-model the recommended actions can be abstract and difficult to apply as well as it consists of a diversity of techniques and models that lacks coherence (Todnem, 2005).

2.1.5 A Process Perspective on Leading Change

There have been several models developed for how to best manage change, often in the form of step-models. Many of the models incorporated similar steps but are perhaps formulated a bit differently, or one or more steps might have been replaced or removed. One such model of change was developed by Hayes (2018), which this section will go into a bit more in depth. The model emphasizes the people-perspective throughout the process and thus, seemed suitable for an analysis of this kind. The model involves seven core activities:

1. Recognizing the need for change and starting the change process
2. Diagnosing what needs to be changed and formulating a vision of a preferred future state
3. Planning how to intervene in order to achieve the desired change
4. Implementing plans and reviewing progress
5. Sustaining the change
6. Leading and managing the people issues
7. Learning

Hayes (2018) points out that the steps are not always linear and the boundaries between them not always clear. Rather, it is an iterative process, some steps may be addressed continuously and what is important is that all steps are necessary as well as must be paid attention.

Recognizing the need for change, step 1, is not always easy and leaders may fail to identify new opportunities due to an insufficient attention towards the wider environment (Hayes, 2018). A technique to challenge the current ways of thinking is to involve new people in the change formulation phase, and not restrict this activity to only include top management. People throughout different levels in the organization may have knowledge about emerging threats or opportunities (Hayes, 2018). Furthermore, related to this, Kotter (1995a) suggests that successful changes should be initiated by attaching it with a sense of urgency and importance. In order to understand the need to change, dissatisfaction with the status quo needs to be created. This can be hard since employees often seek a sense of stability and thus, the change agent must create a safe environment encouraging them to collaborate, take risks as well as responsibility (Moran & Brightman, 2000).

Step 2 highlights the importance of creating a vision and a common direction, something that Kotter (1995a) further emphasizes. It includes assessing the current state, identifying problems as well as opportunities. The data gathered from this stage can be useful to assess how organizational members and other stakeholders will respond as well as to prepare people for the upcoming change (Hayes, 2018). The vision should communicate a desired future

state, leading the way for the change effort. It helps create commitment, inspiration and motivation by aligning and connecting people both intellectually and emotionally to the organization's growth and success (Kotter, 1995a). Without this shared vision, there will be no alignment and thus, no coordination between people's actions. Furthermore, the vision and the associated strategy should be communicated constantly to ensure employees behave as expected (Kotter, 1995a).

The planning stage is about articulating how the vision and the objectives will be reached. The detailed specification of how the end-state will look like might not be possible from the start and in such cases, the planning process should be viewed as an open, iterative process (Hayes, 2018). A clear and structured design over the change effort is more likely to be understood and implemented by the recipients (Lunenburg, 2010). It is essential that the change leader incorporate people issues in this process, more specifically in regard to who might be ready for change and who might feel threatened by the change (Hayes, 2018).

When implementing the plan, step 4, it is important to constantly monitor the progress, take corrective actions if needed and have milestones along the way (Gill, 2002). Gaining short-term wins and making them visible, recognizing and rewarding people who contributed to the win, can work as a factor boosting the motivation (Kotter, 1995a).

In order to sustain the change, the change leader will need the help of others. Old ways of working tend to come back if the change does not have a broad base of support (Moran & Brightman, 2000). When communicating and involving people, it often creates a sense of responsibility and a personal stake for the involved people (Kanter et al., 1992). More and more people thus need to be involved in order to build momentum until the sufficient mass has been reached (Moran & Brightman, 2000). Related to step 4, once the change is implemented and the organization's attention is focused elsewhere, monitoring the results helps with sustaining it (Moran & Brightman, 2000).

Step 6, leading and managing the people issues, will be discussed in more detail in later chapters and will thus, only briefly be discussed here. However, when leading change, communication is one critical part of it. The lack of it or inconsistent messages can result in misunderstanding of the aims and the process, which in turn can make people lose motivation and commitment to the change (Gill, 2002).

Furthermore, it is necessary to build coalitions of stakeholders and in order to do so, the leader needs to be able to influence others, communicate the vision, empower people and build competent teams able to turn the vision into reality (Tezke et al., 2008). Power and politics in organizations must also be recognized as crucial aspects of change (Biedenbach & Söderholm, 2008).

Learning is the 7th step and is, along with step 6, ongoing throughout the entire change process. Implementing change involves trial-and-error learning and if reflection is done based on different actions and feedback is given, an opportunity for learning opens up which can guide and improve future actions (Van de Ven & Sun, 2011). Regular reflective meetings increase the likelihood of learning and successfully implement the change (Van de Ven & Sun, 2011). Learning can also include identifying learning opportunities to close any gaps of skills that may be created due to the change (Moran & Brightman, 2000).

2.2 People Issues of Change

When people are exposed to change, it is common that they initially feel fear. The fear of loss due to change results in challenges to see the potential benefits of a change and can lead to people acting in ways that will block change. It is therefore essential to recognize that change will affect each person differently and that they need the opportunity to adjust to change. Change leaders have the responsibility to understand why people react as they do in order for them to create a safe environment giving the employees the opportunity to adjust (Moran & Brightman, 2000). Furthermore, change involves the establishment of new understanding, practices and relationships. If employees, change recipients, feel involved and have participated in the negotiations of those, they are more likely to take on the change (Thomas & Hardy, 2011). This section aims to go deeper in challenges in regard to people participating in the change process.

2.2.1 Demonizing vs Celebrating Resistance

In any change initiative there will be different forces present, among them those who push for change and those who strive to maintain the status quo. Trying to decrease forces to maintain status quo leads to less tension and is a more effective change strategy than trying to increase the forces who push for change (Christopher, et. al., 2014). There is no common definition of resistance to change and there are many ways to describe it, such as not buying in, criticism, not respecting time limits, agreeing to do something and then do not do it, and so forth (Ford & Ford, 2009). This means that what is defined as resistant behavior can vary from an eye roll to sabotage and what one manager sees as resistant, another may instead view as feedback. For example, resistance can be a valuable source of information and open up opportunities for enhanced change projects and thus, in some cases be viewed as feedback, rather than something negative (Thomas & Hardy, 2011). In order to utilize the benefits stemming from resistant behavior, change agents must shift their tendency to accuse resistance of being the primary cause of failure. Since the majority of organization change projects fail and the majority of managers involved blame resistance, this however may be difficult (Ford & Ford, 2009).

Furthermore, this suggests that whenever a resistant behavior is detected by a change agent, she should ask herself why she is characterizing this as resistance and not engagement or feedback. Doing this may help shift the perspective and the change agent can start using resistance as a resource instead of a barrier (Ford & Ford, 2009).

The resistance to change is conceptualized in two dominant approaches; celebrating resistance and demonizing it (Thomas & Hardy, 2011). The most common approach is however to demonize change (Dent & Goldberg, 1999). That means regarding resistance as a problem, something that the change agents have the right or even duty to do whatever necessary to prevent (Hardy & Clegg, 2004). The origin of the resistance was typically conceptualized into deficiencies in an individual's attitudes, emotions and/or behavior (Thomas & Hardy, 2011). For instance, employees acting in their own self-interest leading them to resist change, misunderstanding the change, lack of tolerance or cynicism towards change. This approach has attempted several solutions, some believe it can be resolved around communication, education and participation and as stated above, when such needs are not sufficient, the change agent is justified to exert its power to force the change (French & Delahaye, 1996).

Such power coercion can be manipulation, implying future benefits, threats, dismissal, sanctions, etcetera. The change agent can in other words both use incitements and punishment as means to implement change (Thomas & Hardy, 2011). However, due to the rate of failed change initiatives, one can conclude that this approach is unsuccessful (Beer & Nohria, 2000).

Celebrating change on the other hand means viewing resistance as feedback, meaning that behind the resistance, better and novel ideas can hide. Further, the approach suggests that initial negative reactions to change can be motivated by positive intentions. Those intentions or ideas can only be found through questioning and understanding the recipients' reactions (Piderit, 2000). The result can be enhanced and improved change initiatives. Thus, resistance should be encouraged instead of frowned upon (Ford & Ford, 2009). In this approach the resistance to change is described as the change recipient questioning the initiative and the change agent should then be willing to meet that proposition even though it differs from the original plan (Thomas & Hardy, 2011). With this approach resistance is no longer regarded as a dysfunctional behavior, rather it is a product of the interaction between the change agent and recipient (Thomas & Hardy, 2011). However, the power is still privileged towards the change agent since it is the agent that will decide if the reaction of the change recipient is characterized as resistant or not. This leaves the change recipient with the choice of either speaking up and risk it being categorized as negative or keep quiet and risk being seen as unengaged (Thomas & Hardy, 2011).

Critique has been raised to both of the approaches due to the number of challenges derived as a consequence of an unbalanced power relationship between change agents and recipients, affecting the creation of a better understanding of organizational change (Thomas & Hardy, 2011). Further, this is important to acknowledge, since a successful change initiative is dependent on the cooperation of the involved employees. Practical challenges when demonizing resistance are disregarding the opportunity to use resistance to improve change initiatives and that, in turn, increase the risk of inefficient conversations and reproduction of already existing knowledge, leading to failed implementation (Thomas et. al, 2011). When change agents instead reflect on the challenges posed to their assumptions, they can create new knowledge and thus, more innovative change (Thomas, et. al, 2011). The approach celebrating resistance assumes that change agents are responsive to challenges and will not dismiss them as resistance in advance. In reality this assessment of whether or not the resistance will enhance the change efforts is complex. Human beings are biased towards information that supports a chosen alternative rather than engaging in conflicting information (Schulz-Hardt et. al, 2000). Thus, that one single person, the change agent, should have the decisive power over if specific reactions should be accepted, challenged, accommodated or dismissed becomes problematic (Thomas & Hardy, 2011). With a more balanced view of resistance, it can be both an asset and a liability, and it can provide more flexibility in the field of managing change (Ford & Ford, 2009).

There are also ethical concerns when the power relationships become privileged to one actor, there is a risk of ignoring employee concerns (Thomas & Hardy, 2011) and organizational change initiatives rarely represent “win-win” scenarios (Staw & Epstein, 2000). Furthermore, theoretical challenges arise with resistance being something only determined by the change agents since the change agent could simultaneously be a recipient, as in cases with middle managers, and successful change arises from co-constructions of meanings by multiple actors (Thomas & Hardy, 2011).

2.2.2 The Tendency to Blame Resistance

There are three forces that together drive the tendency to regard resistance as negative; cognitive bias, social dynamics and managerial missteps (Ford & Ford, 2009). Being aware of the sources of these forces can help challenge assumptions, see alternatives and gain a more balanced point of view.

Cognitive biases mean that people are more likely to attribute good performance to their own abilities and efforts, and attribute poor performance to bad luck or unbecoming behaviors of other people or external factors (Lovallo & Kahneman, 2003). As a result, managers tend to blame negative results on the employees and the employees blame it on external factors and lack of managerial support (Ford & Ford, 2009). Furthermore, people tend to underestimate the role of others' contributions and overestimate their own role in achieving objectives (Ford & Ford, 2009).

The force of social dynamics includes the fact that people avoid failures due to the risk of embarrassment and loss of respect. This fear is especially strong in business, where a mistake can mean losing reputation, a bonus, promotion or even a job (Ford & Ford, 2009). Thus, when facing problems or surprises in a project, managers are likely to downplay them and blame resistance since it is socially accepted amongst managers and “everyone knows” that people resist change. Thus, instead of considering their own role in the problem, this explanation comes handy (Ford et al., 2008).

Aligned with managers' tendency to dismiss their own mistakes, they fail to see how such missteps can influence the employees' behavior and even drive them to make missteps of their own (Ford et al., 2008). One mistake of managers is to break agreements and then failing to rebuild that lost trust, which can lead to reluctance to support following proposals. For example, managers who constantly miss deadlines or budget targets and do not see this as an issue of corporate or managerial integrity will fail to see how and when breaking promises as well as agreements becomes part of the culture. Thus, even if missing deadlines could be a sign of resistance, it could also be due to managerial missteps (Ford et al., 2008). Further, the creation of plans, objectives and deadlines can be positive acts, getting all participants in agreement, but if the requirements of those are then not fulfilled, the participants learn that agreements do not matter in reality and that repetitive failures can be explained away. This can be compared to learning that change initiatives will not get enough follow-ups to ensure its success and that to only fulfill parts of the agreement is acceptable (Ford & Ford, 2009).

Even overstating benefits can sometimes cause trouble, even though that can spark initial enthusiasm, it can also cause a feeling of betrayal and loss of confidence if those benefits do not get accomplished (Tomlinson et al., 2004). Employees who have experienced repetitive unfulfilled expectations will be more cautious about preceding change proposals, questioning and challenging it, which can be viewed as resistant behavior (Ford & Ford, 2009). Instead, in order to raise motivation, organizations should establish short-term objectives along the way, which help create a sense of short-term wins. Gaining those wins requires planning and creating visible improvements that are recognized and rewarded during the change process (Kotter, 1995a).

Finally, if the leader of the change is hesitating about the change, that could wear off to the participants as well. If managers are not consistently showing their support to the change, they undermine their own legitimacy and reduce the likelihood to get the team's best effort meanwhile increasing the likelihood of getting lacking enthusiasm or resistant behavior from the participants (Larson & Tompkins, 2005). The response to any managerial misstep should be a legitimate apology and recognition of their mistake. Managers who listen can identify if that is the case and take the appropriate action (Ford & Ford, 2009).

2.3 The Role of Change Agents

Change agent(s) are essential in any organizational change, small and large. A change agent can be any person with the skills and power to stimulate, support and coordinate the change effort and its success is heavily dependent on the change agent's relationship with key decision makers within the organization (Lunenburg, 2019). They are the role models of change and must lead with focus and dedication, utilizing every opportunity to interact with others in order to legitimize change as well as identify and persuade potential resistors (Jacobs et. al, 2013). If the change agent herself lacks commitment to change, it is unlikely that the recipients' commitment will be any different. The change agent's lack of commitment is visualized through reluctance to take ownership over the initiative, scale of eagerness to be involved, willingness to commit resources, regular reviews of the progress, etcetera (Gill, 2002). Management may feel reluctant to put itself forward as the change leader due to the fear of being blamed if it falls (Moran & Brightman, 2000).

Effective leadership plays a crucial role in successful change initiatives. Leadership is about guiding the way, using personal power to persuade hearts and minds of people to work together towards a common goal (Gill, 2002). A study made by Oreg & Benson (2019) showed that there are three key behavioral functions through which leaders can shape the recipients' response to change. These are effective communication, being supportive and attentive to concerns, and involving the recipients. People in today's work environment will not plainly accept to do something without knowing the why. In order to give an answer to "why should I do it?", a change agent must be able to persuade and effectively lead (Conger, 1998). Effective persuasion includes not only listening to others but also being able to compromise and come up with a shared solution. If colleagues see that the change agent is willing to make changes in response to their concerns or needs, they will respond very positively and establish a stronger feeling of trust. They stop fearing that they will be manipulated and instead start seeing the change agent as flexible. People need to be able to identify the shared benefits in order to commit to change and it is the change agent's job to show them (Conger, 1998).

It is the role of the change agent(s) to inspire and motivate the recipients and for that they need to be credible. Inspiration comes from people perceiving the change agent as honest and competent as well as the alignment of organizational goals with individual's needs (Gill, 2002). The same is true for motivation but motivation can also arise from the feeling of short-term wins, and for recognizing as well as rewarding people for such wins (Kotter, 1995). The alignment of individuals' purposes with the organization change can only take place in a safe environment where people is encouraged to ask questions, collaborate, take risks and responsibility. It is up to the change agent to provide such an environment (Moran &

Brightman, 2000). Furthermore, the interaction with people paves way for the change agent to not only see the big picture of change but also view it from a local perspective and create the necessary understanding of both the processes and people involved (Moran & Brightman, 2000).

Additionally, the organization must recognize that both formal and informal leaders must become competent change agents, help to create networks and support learnings across the organization (Christopher, et. al., 2014). The informal networks of change agents can have a decisive role in whether or not a change initiative is a success, it even matters more than the change agent's rank in the hierarchy (Battilana & Casciaro, 2013). Although formal authority is important and it is harder for people to drive successful change bottom-up, research has shown that a change agent that is appreciated between colleagues and employees have better chances to be listened to and get their opinions supported (Conger, 1998). Informal connections give the change agent access to knowledge, opportunities, information and personal support. Thus, the ability to mobilize others (Battilana & Casciaro, 2013).

More specifically, being close with people ambivalent to change gives clear advantages, regardless of the position of the change agent within the formal hierarchy. However, even more so when the change is incremental rather than disruptive. When it comes to incremental changes, the change agent's informal network will trust her intentions and those harder to convince will feel pressured from others in the network to cooperate and, since the change is not too disruptive, it is more likely that they will give in to the pressure due to social obligation (Battilana & Casciaro, 2013). If the change agent is not initially close to the change recipients, she needs to earn their trust. One way to establish such credibility is to demonstrate the project on a small scale, launch a pilot project, and by that demonstrate the value of the change along with her expertise (Conger, 1998).

Further, research shows that being close to people who were plainly against the change do not generate special benefits and could rather risk work in a counteractive manner (Battilana & Casciaro, 2013). That is, the reluctant employee manages to persuade the change agent that the change is a bad idea instead of vice versa. However, the change agent must identify which are the resisters, try to enlist their support and identify which are ambivalent about the change in order to guide their next action.

Leadership is also about empowerment and it is the change agent's role to empower the recipients. Making them able to do what needs to be done by giving them the needed knowledge, skills, opportunity, freedom, self-confidence and resources (Kotter, 1995b). It also involves engaging people in the change process, which the importance of has been discussed earlier in the section about people issues. People are more positive towards something they help to create, rather than something forced upon them (Gill, 2002).

2.4 Communication

Change agents must engage in verbal activities constantly, this includes both talking and listening. Communication help, amongst several things, the change agent to gather information, identify problems, align shared meanings, make action happen, develop relationships and set authority (Eccles et al., 1992). This indicates that communication and

relationships are highly important, as well as adopting a learning approach to change (Nashim & Sushil, 2011)

Key to making change a success is first and foremost leadership, however, closely followed by corporate values and communication. One of the most important tasks of a change agent is continuous and effective communication (Gill, 2002). Lack of communication or inconsistent messages will result in misunderstandings over the objectives, aim and process of change, which in turn will result in people's lack of commitment to change (Gill, 2002). Communication serves a wide set of purposes, along with those mentioned above, it includes legitimizing change and calling people to action (Ford et al., 2008).

By conducting open communication, change recipients get a chance to address any strengths, weaknesses or fears they identify, which in turn gives the change agent the opportunity to respond with compelling justifications (Knowles & Linh, 2004). People want to be offered the dialogue where they can express such concerns but often management tends to avoid such conversations due to the fear of being met with hostile reactions. Thus, they miss the opportunities the conversations offer to legitimize the change (Moran & Brightman, 2000). If one of the change leaders continually communicates about the change with the rest of the team, she also tends to assume that those will continue the conversation with their respective teams, especially supplying information about the change benefits. However, often they do not due to the fear of the news being perceived as bad or because they do not feel equipped answering certain questions (Ford & Ford, 2009). The dialogue should also bring attention to potential communication gaps and address how that gap will be closed through learning opportunities. Such opportunities need to be planned for in advance and be backed up with needed resources (Moran & Brightman, 2000).

Furthermore, communication to produce understanding of the change is not sufficient to produce any actions. For that to happen, the change agent must also start conversations for performance (Ford et al., 2008). Through rhetorical means, such as storytelling, change agents can give meaning to their actions and convince others to take action. They are able to build momentum for desired actions and oppose hindering actions (Eccles et al., 1992).

In order to implement change on a wider organization scale, gathering more and more supporters is essential, which requires a range of communication skills (Gill, 2002), including effective and visionary communication (Oreg & Benson, 2019). Moreover, if the change agent herself lacks commitment to change, it is unlikely that the recipients' commitment will be any different. Most people in organizations have more assignments than they have time. Thus, they often react negatively to changing their current ways of working because it disrupts the status quo and, sometimes, established power structures. Especially this is the case when the recipients are held accountable for continuing to produce the same amount and quality of results (Ford & Ford, 2009). This negative reaction may in part be a product of a lack of knowing how to communicate efficiently. Being aware of this can help deepen the conversation and bring attention to the issue, but it is the change agent's responsibility to not just disregard the reaction (Ford & Ford, 2009). Furthermore, when change recipients are outspoken about their concerns, it often means that they care about getting things right or they are the people actually doing the implementation and thus, are able to see pitfalls in the plan (Eccles et al., 1992). Change agents should work with those people to alter and improve their plans. Too many managers equalize compromising with surrender and forget that it is

essential for a successful change. Change initiatives are rarely a one-shot effort, rather it includes a process with experimentation in order to come up with the best, most sustainable solution (Conger, 1998).

Constant communication includes the need for change agents to interact with others every chance they get to legitimize change, encourage challenges and answer questions (Moran & Brightman, 2000). Further, change agents must realize that there will be a gap between their understanding of the change and the rest of the organization. Communication helps close that gap (Ford et al., 2008).

3. Research Design and Data Collection

The method has included a literature study of current theory about change management, interviews with change agents and recipients of both the first and second attempt of the studied change as well as own observations from being a team member during the second attempt. This specific case studied at the company was chosen due to the change project being ongoing at the time of study and the author was participating in the second attempt of the project. Thus, it was a natural choice to conduct the study on this specific case. The author had access to the majority of data from the previous attempt and the current one. Furthermore, since the specific case had been conducted in two attempts, a clear comparison between them was possible, which was important in order to be able to analyze possible success factors as per one of the research questions.

The fact that only one case was studied also allowed for more detailed data to be collected, since the fewer cases studied, the more information can be collected about them (Gomm et. al., 2000). Another reason for the choice of using a case study is that it makes it possible to investigate real causal processes, rather than artificial ones, as is the case with experiments (Gomm et. al., 2000). However, some cons with choosing a case study as a method is the problem of generalization. Meaning, how could the result of one case study be generalized and applicable to a wider context. Nevertheless, case studies can form working hypotheses that can be helpful in other cases. In order to connect a case study with a wider societal context, theory should be used (Gomm et. al., 2000), and was so in this report. The authenticity of case studies has also been questioned, in terms of how well the researchers are able to speak for the participants of the case in an authentic and truthful way (Gomm et. al., 2000).

As described, several sources have laid as background to the analysis and made it possible for more legitimate results. The study is made up of qualitative data and an inductive approach has been used, meaning that the theoretical analysis has been built based on the relevant insight from the case of study (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2007). This approach is suitable when studying individual activities, interpersonal connections and the correlative effects between individuals and larger social activities (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2007). Thus, it was deemed an appropriate choice for this report.

3.1 Interviews

Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured design. A semi-structured interview means that the interviewer has prepared a set of questions (see Appendices 8.1 and 8.2), but by letting the interview unfold in a conversational and informal manner, it allows for the participants to explore issues of importance to them (Longhurt, 2013). This meant asking open-ended questions to allow for more discussion and the opportunity to ask additional questions, outside the template, depending on the answers received. That also meant that not all questions prepared were asked to all interviewees or in the same order. For example, if a question allowed for a yes or a no answer, the follow-up question depended on if the interviewee answered yes or no on the previous question.

Interviews were held with representatives from both the first and second change attempt as well as with both change drivers and recipients. Furthermore, depending on if the interviewee were a part of the first or second attempt or were a change agent or recipients, the prepared questions could differ. The benefits gained from using a semi-structured approach are that it encourages a more dynamic conversation, making the interview object more comfortable and perhaps more willing to express uncomfortable feelings or opinions (Newcomer & Hatry, 2015). However, there are also disadvantages with semi-structured interviews. They are time-consuming in regard to preparing questions, conducting the interviews and analyzing the result. They also require the interviewer to inhabit certain skills for the interviewees to open up in regard to the theme, it requires the interviewer to be not only knowledgeable about the subject but also to be smart, sensitive and calm (Newcomer & Hatry, 2015).

In total eight interviews were held, whereas five were with participants solely from the first attempt, three were categorized as participants of the change and users of the new tool of the pilot team and two were categorized as change agents driving the first attempt. There were also people interviewed who had a more passive role in the first attempt but are in the second attempt characterized as drivers of the change. Two such interviews were held, one representative from top-management and one leader of the pilot team. The final interview was held with one of the change agents engaged in the pilot team as a user and driver. Since the second attempt was ongoing at the time of writing the report, not as many participants had been onboarded yet. The interviewees from the first attempt were selected with help from the supervisor at the company, due to them sitting on relevant knowledge and insights about the process. From the second attempt the interviewees were selected due to them being most active and currently participative as well as and have been from the second attempt's beginning. Furthermore, a decision criterion was also that both change agents and change recipients should be interviewed in order to get insights from different perspectives. Due to the agreement with the company to stay anonymous, the respective roles of the interviewed will not be displayed.

All interviews were between 25-55 minutes. The topics discussed were specific questions directed to the change attempts such as their role in the project, their onboarding and commitment, motivation and potential challenges as well as more general directed questions to change management. The aim with the interviews were to analyze the participants' own views of what happened and how the change process was structured, their opinions on what the key success factors are and improvement areas for the company. By interviewing both change agents and recipients a more multidimensional analysis was enabled. Furthermore, interviewing participants from the first and the second attempt allowed a comparison between the two projects in order to see critical differences relating to their failure and success.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed directly after the interviews were held. The recordings were conducted to not miss, misunderstand or later forget anything and were assessed to be the most reliable way to gather as much information as possible. By transcribing as soon as possible after they had been conducted makes it easier to remember any tones, facial expressions or behaviors related to certain topics (Longhurst, 2013). Recording also allows for the interviewer to be fully focused on the interviewee, instead of worrying about not missing to type anything down (Longhurst, 2013).

3.2 Observations

Being a team member of the second attempt to the project, participating in the majority of project meetings and being involved in the development of the process allowed for participant observations to be used as a method throughout the second attempt of the project. Participant observation can be used as a data collecting tool about people, processes and cultures in qualitative research (Kawulich, 2005). It enables the observer to learn about the study in a natural setting and holistic way, to identify non-verbal expressions of feelings, interaction patterns and potential events that interviewees are not willing to share verbally. However, it requires the observer to maintain a sense of objectivity through distance (Kawulich, 2005). The data was collected by taking notes throughout all meetings and being included in communication threads regarding the change initiative, such as email or chat functions as well as through own reflections. In this case, this allowed for more information to be gathered regarding the process plan and information of informal character such as informal support, networks and opinions.

3.3 Data Analysis

Throughout the report the chosen method has been reflected upon in regard to its validity and reliability. After the interviews, analysis over the answers and insights were concluded. The analysis included identifying common themes that the interviewees brought up and from those reflect on specific insights. The interviews were coded, which was helpful in order to identify the themes. Coding helps to analyze and make sense of the data (Basil, 2003). The coding was conducted two times, the first time was done more inductively based on the interview outcomes. The themes identified were focused on people's feelings and perceptions in regard to the change efforts as well as what they, from their perspective, find important in regard to change in general. The second time, the coding was done in relation the steps introduced by Hayes (2018).

The themes identified in the interviews were then compared with the literature study in order to formalize a conclusion and final recommendations. The literature has been chosen from well-known publishers to ensure its reliability. The data analysis is structured by using the steps of Hayes (2018) (see Section 2.1.5). The steps correlate to the themes identified in the empirical data and the fact that all steps integrate the perspective of people led to the belief that this way of structuring the analysis was the most beneficial. Furthermore, the selection of Hayes was motivated by the fact that it is directed towards the leaders of a change process, which is compatible with the focus of this report.

In addition, the interviewees responses were objectively looked upon but at the same time, tones and facial expressions needed to be accounted for, both in the interviews as well as in the observations. For instance, a tone of voice could emphasize a certain opinion of a person and facial expressions could reveal different feelings such as anger, irritations or happiness. These were accounted for by noting them down by the corresponding sentence when transcribing the interviews as well as in the observation notes, such as meeting notes.

3.3.1 Method Reflection

A reflection has been made in regard to the chosen method and even though there will always exist areas open for improvements, that might not be possible due to constraints such as resource or time constraints. However, since several method approaches were used, the validity increases compared to if only using a single approach.

The interviews were held over the internet, meaning it was not possible to guarantee that the interviewer was located in the 'perfect setting', for example since some of the subject brought up might be regarded as sensitive, the interviewees might not have been able to open up fully if they were sitting somewhere where they felt that they were listened to or observed. In addition, such sensitive subjects often require a certain degree of trust established between the interviewer and interviewee. By being a familiar face, it is possible that the interview objects were more willing to open up regarding their experiences.

Unfortunately, some interviews were made without video, which opens up the risk to miss valuable visible emotions such as facial expressions. Another drawback was that there was only one interviewer participating. Having two could be helpful in order to not miss anything and gain a better analysis over indirect reactions, such as tone of voice, facial expressions as well as behaviors. However, by using recordings this risk was minimized.

In order to study a real context case, other limitations have been necessary in order to prioritize quality results rather than quantity. Thus, the number of interviews has been limited and limitations in terms of only interviewing people that have been involved in the specific change effort analyzed.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the study touched upon what someone might call sensitive subjects and thus, interviewees might have held back on information because of fear, wanting to protect their organization or themselves, or it might not have been done on purpose. In a change initiative, many parties are involved, some actively and some not, some for full-time, some only frequently. This means that since only the most central participants were interviewed, all information might not have been captured.

3.3.2 Quality of Data

To assess the quality of qualitative research five key functions can be used: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility refers to if the participants in the research feel as though the findings represent their experience (Treharne & Riggs, 2014). Transferability refers to if the findings are applicable in other contexts. By clearly describing the empirical case and result, this is easier to evaluate (Treharne & Riggs, 2014). In order for the report to be trustworthy and ensure higher transferability, citations have been used whenever possible in the result chapter. The credibility can also be increased by prolonged engagement with the participants (Treharne & Riggs, 2014), which has been the case in this study. Further, the report has aimed a section (see Section 4) to give background to the case and company in order to ensure as high transferability as possible.

Dependability investigates if similar findings would be produced if someone else undertook the research. Allowing another researcher to follow the steps of the original researcher can audit this (Treharne & Riggs, 2014). This has not been possible to do or ensure due to, among other reasons, the anonymity of the company. Furthermore, due to the study being conducted in a social environment and in a single company, it is hard to anticipate how the study would look like in another setting. However, the reliability in regard to the extensive literature study is much easier analyzed. It is possible that new research will be conducted showing different

types of results, but it is likely that these will be incremental changes, which makes the reliability of the literature study high.

Confirmability looks at if the findings are free from the researcher's biases, motivations, interests or perspectives (Treharne & Riggs, 2014). The transparency of the results and the transcription of the results directly after the interviews have helped to ensure this.

Finally, authenticity refers to if the researcher presents different perspectives on the topic (Treharne & Riggs, 2014). Focus has been to connect the analysis from the interviews with underlying explanations from theory and different sources of literature have helped to ensure that several viewpoints have been considered.

3.4 Societal, Ethical and Ecological Aspects

Social, ethical and ecological considerations have been taken into account continuously. The majority of the participants belonged to departments outside Sweden, which means that from a social aspect it is important to be aware of any cultural differences that may be imposed. Furthermore, it is vital to acknowledge the effect human biases might have, both from the interviewees and interviewer's point of view. These two factors could influence the analysis of the responses and how the interviewees chose to express themselves. Being aware of this, opens up the opportunity to identify possible consequences of those and take the appropriate action.

Ethically, the report was sure to be written in a way that the company felt comfortable with as with the design of research. To ensure this, discussions were made initially and during the process as well as the company was sure to get a chance to read the report before it got published. For example, this meant to keep all interviewees and the company anonymous.

Accuracy and transparency are also part of writing ethically (Roig, 2006). As already mentioned above, accuracy was *inter alia* ensured by transcribing the interviews directly after they were held and transparency *inter alia* by using citations as much as possible. Furthermore, plagiarism is a serious ethical lapse (Roig, 2006) which is why references has been used throughout the entire report when spoken for.

From an ecological perspective little harm was posed upon the environment. Since the majority of the project was conducted with participants from other sides of the world, all interviews took place digitally and no travels were made in association with the report.

4. The Case Study

The empirical data was gathered from observations and interviews held in a global, leading company operating in the high-tech industry. This chapter aims to provide insights in the company and the studied case before presenting the results from the conducted interviews and observations.

4.1 The Company

The report was conducted in collaboration with a leading global provider for Information and Communication Technology, which will from now on be referred to as The Company throughout this paper. The Company started out in Sweden but has now an international reach all over the world with over 70 000 employees.

The Company operates in a technology-intensive industry that is under continuous change and development. This has been particularly true the last decade and in order to sustain competitive advantage and remain its position as a leading player, The Company needs to adopt a business model as well as a culture that encourages innovation and supports change. A player in a high-tech industry needs to be able to act quickly, dare to try new ideas and business models as well as implement winning ideas swiftly. A prerequisite for this is a flexible organization structure.

The Company's business model is built around the constant pressure from the industry on organizations to change in order to meet new market requirements and seize new business opportunities. It has a standard process in which to handle change initiatives, however, from the case it becomes evident that this differs depending on the situation and the change. For once, it depends on whether or not the change has been initiated from the bottom of the organization or encouraged from top management. Further, it depends on the size of the project and its context.

4.2 The Case

The studied case was an internal change initiative at one of The Company's departments. The majority of the studies were conducted with participants working in either the region Middle East and Africa or Europe and Latin America. The change project was a step towards the overall aim of becoming more digitalized.

The aim with the change project was to simplify, make suppliers' prices more transparent across all market areas at The Company, to ensure the cheapest and most efficient negotiations and to make it possible to benchmark prices. At the time of the first attempt, all market areas had their own ways of processing and storing such information, if such information was even stored and there existed no ongoing collaboration globally. Thus, the transparency was limited or non-existent. The change project included implementing a new tool serving as a platform for storing data that could be used across all regions.

The tool has been attempted to be implemented two times at The Company. The first attempt was a bottom-up, stand-alone initiative from a stakeholder 2-3 years ago but failed to be

institutionalized, leading to its stopped mainstream usage and leaving only the developer of the tool to use it, until he, himself, left The Company. The second attempt to implement the new tool is, at the time of writing the report, in its pilot phase. This time the change initiative is identified as a subproject of the bigger vision of The Company becoming more digitized. During the second attempt, the tool gained momentum once again by starting as a top-down initiative, it has support from top-management as well as has taken a more structured approach to the change process. However, the support is also visible from a bottom-up perspective and the solution that the tool can provide has been requested by its potential users.

More differences visible between the attempts are that the change agents active in the first attempt differ from the second attempt as well as the departments involved in the early stages of the project. Further, the way they go about implementing the tool and from whom the initiative was supported is different. Consequently, different people were involved in the first and second project.

5. Empirical Data

This chapter will introduce the results of the study made at The Company. That includes the interviews and my own observations. Themes have been identified and related to the model presented by Hayes (2018) in the literature study. The interviewees were asked specific questions regarding the first or second attempt of the change effort and questions about change management in general.

5.1 Recognizing the need for change

The first attempt got started as a bottom-up initiative. The problem was recognized internally within one market area and the team manager brought this up in informal discussions with another market area he had once been a part of. In those discussions it became clear that the problem was not isolated to his area alone and they started to collaborate on a solution, *“I kept in contact with my old team, since I believe in cross-collaboration. We started to share concepts and ideas and identified common traits”*. Thus, the project came alive due to an internal need within one isolated team and because of informal network connection it became a collaboration between teams.

The second attempt seems to have been initiated as a push from several actors. One of the interviewees said it started as a request from the head of the department. Due to his previous experience, he asked for information that could be provided by such a tool as this one and when the information could not be provided, he thought of it as essential to be put in place immediately. Another person from the leadership team said he got engaged due to an intuition to follow-up on the first attempt, where he had no responsibility but been involved in the emails and update meetings. He had worked with a similar tool in his previous market area and was thus well-equipped with experience of such a project and way of working. His experience made him more engaged and motivated to get things right, since he had already seen the success and value that such a tool could bring. This made the project prioritized and supported by top management from the start compared to the first attempt, where there was instead a lack of top management support. This resulted in the project not being a priority, not getting attention or enough visibility globally within The Company.

At the same time one of the change agents of the pilot stated *“I onboarded myself...due to my previous experience I was looking for the database where we stored pricing, we had no such thing. I talked to my manager about it, she said that there was a project in the loop and asked me if I wanted to lead it”*, thus the project had bottom-up support simultaneously as it had it from top-down. This was identified as one of the reasons the first attempt never stuck, *“I realized that having that push from management is really important. If they don’t understand its importance there is no point continuing with it”*.

Representatives from the pilot team had been a part of the discussions from the first attempt but it was not before a dedicated person was appointed to be the driver during the second attempt that it became clear that the change was happening. The manager of the pilot team had been participating in discussions, one-on-one calls and meetings in order to try to push for this change to happen, to make it a priority and raise awareness. She describes that she saw high potential and many benefits, and she knew that without priority, people will lose

interest as well as focus. This speaks to the importance to simultaneously have the support from top management and bottom-up to successfully initiate change.

Furthermore, a change agent in the second attempt also highlighted the importance of relationship across departments *“I have had two teams and I try to keep connection on a monthly basis to exchange ideas, get feedback and ask what their needs are”*.

5.2 A Common Vision matters

During the first attempt of implementing the tool, the problem was recognized but the specific solution was not widely accepted or recognized as the best one. Several discussions were held with top management involving key stakeholders and in those it was concluded that the tool was not beneficial for every market area and thus, that it should not be mandatory. The opinions of the decision were divided and there was no common vision.

The project leaders of the change were all initially excited, *“I felt excited because I had been looking for this type of function in my job! I was always saying that this was needed and I was looking forward to making it a reality”*. The majority of the involved had been thinking about this problem and the need for such a solution in their own work for quite some time before they got introduced to the initiative. However, the opinion was that without a unified view, people will tackle the problem differently and then get attached to their own solutions instead. Thus, they become more reluctant to change. Several of the interviewees contested this; *“At that moment we were not globalized, each market area was working as an independent function, silos, which is why each market area was doing their own solution...”*, *“Each one wanted to have their own ways of working even though we tested and showed that the tool was capable...”*. The lack of commitment from formal change agents can have had a negative effect on several things, such as legitimacy of the tool and the engagement as well as feeling of urgency from the recipients' perspectives.

Even though there existed informal change agents expressing extra enthusiasm, asking for more knowledge and promoting the tool informally in their team, the end-users of the tool did not see the urgency or its importance. *“In the end people were not so stressed if they didn't have the lowest price in their time”*, the recipient's perspective of why the tool was needed, that is in order to benchmark prices, were different from the pioneers of the tool. For them, the benchmarking of prices was only a part of its benefits, which once again shows that no shared vision existed.

During the second attempt the vision of the project seemed to be more clearly communicated from the start from top management and due to a clear link established between top management and the pilot team, that vision could be align with the users' perspective as well. That last part is important since *“People need to understand the importance of the tool and feel like it makes their ways of working easier. This can be achieved either by the usage of the tool or selling the idea”*. Having a common vision can help sell the idea and it is an opportunity for the change agent to set the expectations of the change.

Furthermore, apart from having a common vision, it is also important to establish objectives to keep the focus and commitment up. This means also establishing short-term objectives

along the way and communicating those, something that had room for improvement at The Company in general; *“Smaller results are not communicated in a smart manner, each time you need to say it and put it on the table for people to be conscious. Split the work in smaller portions if it is a big transformation, to get visibility. When this is not done, this is the reason that people lose focus. It is important to see progress and evolution”*. The objectives of the project must be aligned with the overall vision of the company. If it is not, it does not matter if it is a good idea, it will not succeed. For example, a few interviewees from the first attempt brought up that bringing a new tool into the organization in fact went against the overall vision to simplify and reduce the number of tools.

5.2 The Effect of Proper Planning

Planning for change involves setting up a structure, dedicating resources, setting up meetings, appointing who is responsible for different activities, and so on. During the first attempt there was a lack of ownership of the project; *“...at that moment, groups were splitting. Who is the owner of the tool? Who will respond?...”*, *“I just assumed, because it wasn't really my responsibility and I was focusing on other things, that it was being done right and when I checked, it turned out that it wasn't”*. This lack of ownership was also a consequence of time constraint. The leader of the change had it as a half-part job which was not sufficient to support the project and when he later switched positions, that support was lost with him.

Not only did nobody feel the sufficient responsibility to follow up on the tool, the necessary resources were neither planned for. Both in terms of budget and human resources. A proposal was put in asking for a dedicated team, *“We also proposed a central team dedicated to do this because we didn't want people to add extra things on top of their normal activities, but that didn't happen.”*, and the constrained budget were expressed as a critical problem, *“Another part was that because of the small budget, there could not be further development if decision-makers didn't see that the tool was used properly but it wasn't, due to its limitations”*. When asked what could have changed the outcome of this attempt, one stated; *“If the project would have been led by a project management team it would have survived. It would have bought additional resources, there would have been somebody in the team that would have been the project governor and had a structure that would endure people leaving”*. More interviewees pointed out the importance of structure and thorough preparation from the start; *“...Essential to fetch all feedback and data in the beginning...Even if everybody won't be all consensual, you need to have the full support and resources available, get the buy-in from the beginning”, “Program structure is key for success. It brings resources, executive focus, budget, allows you to validate if the project makes sense and there is a proper management team...”*.

Since one of the main inhibitors for the adoption of the tool was its interface and user-friendliness, the enhancements and extra budget could have contributed to the first attempt having another outcome. Some opinions about lacking a feeling of control and concerns about security were also aired during the interviews, which could have reduced the legitimacy of the tool. If the change agents would have addressed these concerns in a proper manner, the problem could have been solved. Furthermore, there lacked communication between the people developing the tool and its future users, which could have impacted the dissatisfaction of its interface; *“It might just have been a communication miss. The people designing should*

have talked to the people doing the work so they would have understood better the requirements“.

The resource constraints and lack of structure in the first attempt could partly have been due to the lack of top management support. In the second attempt, that support has enabled the budget and the extra resources needed as the project moves along. Furthermore, the second attempt is more structured in other aspects as well. It has a project plan, frequent follow-ups and a dedicated pilot team that is willing to do trial-and-error experiments. Other teams have also been involved to work with making the tool less manual, as requested by the users. There is ongoing communication between management and individuals in order to raise awareness as well as influence the direction. Due to this, it is clearer who is responsible for what and the collaborative environment makes it easier to reflect on which the stakeholders are that need to be involved as well as how to engage them.

Working with a transformation team dedicated to the change and not adding on extra work on top of normal activities, was the best way of implementing a change according to one of the change agents from the first attempt. The transformation team should be dedicated to handle any concerns and review the process all the time, they have the time to do so and the attention from top management who listens. In general interviewees complained of the lack of preparation and structure; *“I believe sometimes we think that change management is easy...only explaining what we are doing in an email and think people will start executing...No, we need to consider the concerns and review our process all the time and we need to have a dedicated team to do this“*, *“To keep the focus, give them a timeline and objective. Smaller results are not communicated in a smart manner...split the work in smaller portions if it is a big transformation to get visibility. When this is not done, this is the reason that people lose focus. It is important to see progress and evolution“*.

Good collaboration between competent people, end-users and authority with the same objective, clear deadlines and follow-ups were identified as key success factors. Due to the complexity and the size of The Company, no person can know everything and in order to reduce the change of something unexpected to happen influencing the change in a negative way, that collaboration is necessary and such preparation should be done in the beginning.

5.3 Implement Plans and Monitor Progress

Implementing the plan involves tracking the performance and following up to make sure the attention and focus is kept, and that the plan is actually seen through. The main opinion amongst the users from the first attempt was that it was not a tool that was easy to use, it took time, and some needed to get extra training to make it work. They felt that this only added on to their workload and since there was less and less follow-up, no enforcement nor sense of urgency, they did not make the time to use it properly. Instead, they preferred going back to their old ways, *“...it was stressed that this tool should be followed but it was lost in the other daily workings”*. Others were not using the tool because they did not think it was their responsibility; *“I haven’t used it for a year. I primarily would assume that X should use it...“*. This further speaks for the problem with no common vision nor structure as mentioned above.

However, even though some follow-ups were happening initially and some in more leading roles talked about regular meetings, the change was happening during a period of time where the organization also underwent other transformations, such as people switching roles. Unfortunately, there seemed to be no hand-over or perhaps no prioritization from the descendant people in regards to this change effort; *"There were initial follow-ups by the manager, but she switched roles and the preceding category manager just followed it up once. It was left in the transition"*. An even more critical consequence deriving from this was the lack of action from feedback; *"The intention was to review the tool and see if she could work with the technical team. However, then she switched roles and there was not much feedback, things felt through the cracks"*. Users did not feel like they were being a part of the creation process and with no follow-up they did not feel the urgency to use the tool nor the willingness to do so. With no place to give their opinions, no feelings of participation or enthusiasm of the change could be built, which left people giving their attention to other things. Further, a few expressed a lack of training and workshops and thought that this could explain why people did not see the benefits of the tool.

This step shows the importance of the change agent and someone being committed in driving the change all the way through, but even if that is the case, without other supporting activities in place, it will not be sufficient. One of the change agents in the first attempt was described by another person as very important because of her *"let-get-things-done"*-mindset. Another spoke more generally of the importance of having that change agent-push *"You need somebody to be vocal and to push for the change...You need a lot of energy"*.

As mentioned, at the time of the report, the second attempt is in its pilot phase and beginning to involve more and more stakeholders. When it comes to managing expectations of stakeholders, communication is key. To understand their needs, get inspiration and learn from each other. Furthermore, this time the transformation team is aware of the information gap that exists between them and people they are just now trying to onboard. Therefore, they are more equipped to address that properly and they recognize the need for creating an open environment where people feel safe to express any concerns.

Top management also gets constant updates to find out about progress or potential struggles, which can help create the sense of urgency and the feeling of 'having someone to answer to' can motivate to continue driving the change. Although this was lacking during the first attempt, people were still aware of its importance. One of the interviewees stated; *"Visualization and digitalization plays a role to ensure that we are tracking all work programs and activities...This is how we can control the work...Always communicate and track the utilization"*. Visualizing the result helps create the momentum and lets people know that things are happening within the planned time frame, which in turn helps keep people's interest.

Officially, The Company has a structured approach that change projects should follow. It involves among other things allocating a dedicated team and doing pre-study to evaluate the business value of the change. However, since all employees should thrive for simplicity and improvement all the time, not all projects are able to follow this process and the studied case was such a project.

5.4 Sustaining Change

As mentioned, even though change agents who were especially driving or excited about the first attempt could be identified there was a lack of someone taking full ownership of the project. Thus, the change could not be sustained; *“Somewhere last year, it was quite obvious that it was not being used. But all of our focus was on this other project and my team didn’t say anything”*, *“Due to the changes in some units, people lost momentum. Knowledge had been lost with people leaving the company or switching roles”*, *“There was no enforcement and after that I switched roles and was not able to follow up what was coming next”*.

Some interviewees expressed that they thought one of the reasons for the failed implementation was not sufficient noise; *“It should have been company-wide or departmental-wide sensitized, but people were dealing with other things...Not many people knew about it actually!”*, *“It wasn’t enough noise around it, if it were then maybe we could have had a better up-take on it”*. The interviewees talked about how including change recipients more in the process could help spread the word about the change initiative, which is important in order to get the buy-in from essential stakeholders as well as to promote the tool. Since this is now increasingly done in the second attempt, perhaps it can help make it a success.

This insufficient communication was also evident in other ways according to the interviewees. One person said that he just assumed that they were all talking about the same thing and that they were all in understanding of where the value laid. However, he later realized that his assumptions were because of his previous experience of a similar tool, but for the future users of the tool this was a completely new thing. Once again, there existed a knowledge gap between the new and the old participants of the change. Even though this step is not able to be analyzed for the second attempt yet, it is clear that establishing owners for the change and continuing to gain support is critical in order to sustain it.

The two final sections are focused more on the people perspective of change. Since these are not isolated, rather they are present in all steps of the process it has already been brought up in some way in the previous themes, but it will be more thoroughly analyzed below. Furthermore, since managing the people undergoing change is also present during all steps of change, this analysis as well will touch upon the entire process.

5.5 Leading and Managing People

Almost 100% of the interviewees thought that it was the management’s role to lead and make sure people are adopting the change; *“Usually it is up to the management to decide and cascade all the data to the people and to drive the right behavior and to lead by examples”*, *“It is all about the manager. It is more about the manager than the actual change”*, *“Reasons for failure are that it is not really promoted by top-managers, no follow up or no one asking about it”*. The under-prioritization of top management makes it impossible for the middle manager as well to keep the change going; *“In the beginning it was hard to move forward a little bit...because I needed help...The leadership team needs to move the people in the right direction and to prioritize...Which is why I tried to push to make people conscious that they need to prioritize this project because it will benefit a lot of people”*. One learning from this is

the importance for top management to be retentive of ideas coming from other levels or areas closer to where the action is happening.

The human tendency to be hesitant towards change were also discussed and the role of the change agents were emphasized. More specifically, their need to provide the necessary information for individuals to recognize the need for change and to get their buy-in. This requires knowing your people and listening to their individual reasons for being doubtful; *“People have different approaches to change, try to understand what is important for them to move things along”*. Also, an opportunity of improvement identified for The Company is to always secure proper and constant communication as well as making sure that an opportunity to respond is given to change recipients; *“It is not just about exerting things and we usually only get information that this is going to happen and then we just have to accept it without being a part of the discussions or decisions”*, *“It has to be run through a lot of people in order to get a grasp of the opinions. Look at people who will be affected and get their opinions, invite them to the discussions”*. By understanding their personal reasons, you could take the appropriate next step by either explaining, training or getting their opinions.

It was identified as especially hard for people to adopt the change if the new activities were not part of their daily routines; *“It is not that you are not being okay with change, it takes time and it is because it is not part of our status quo...You are not completely against it, but it is something extra you will have to do because it is not part of your normal routine. If it is something you are doing daily, it becomes part of your daily routine quickly”*. Another factors was the complexity of the change, *“People have other things to do and don’t want more complexity, if it is complex it will be met with serious resistance“* and the suggested solution for such cases was to make it tangible by breaking it down into pieces easier to grasp; *“We have to have back of mind that it can be hard for people to change...Need to establish trust...One way is not trying to change everything at once! We may have to phase it out, in small steps so that people are aware that change is coming but we are doing it in an unstressed, manageable way...The person you are trying to change also has other things to deal with, other problems or having their own pressure and we are adding on to that with our changes. Empathize with other people”*.

Moreover, one explains that people might be reluctant towards a change initiative initially because they know that it usually takes a lot of time for anything to change in The Company, *“Some might be reluctant because they know it takes a lot of time to change something...It takes a while, this is the main challenge and sometimes people don’t have that kind of patience and you lose the momentum.”* However, once they see that things are moving forward, it is likely their attitude will change. Thus, once again the importance of visibility of results is highlighted. Furthermore, meetings are an opportunity to express positivity and visualize the end of the tunnel, she continued. Others were more negatively directed towards this type of reluctance, saying that the people did not think strategically or broad enough, they were only seeing the micro point of view.

It is critical to prepare people for what is happening, make them understand the importance on an individual level and get their buy-in from the start. Preparing people comes naturally if the initiative comes bottom-up and in those cases where it is not, then the manager should set up time for discussion and try to influence the people to believe the change came from their ideas; *“Bottom-up initiatives are great because it means people will do it and drive it. If not,*

let's discuss together and make them believe that the change came from their ideas“, “Get the buy-in from the key stakeholders, not only the top management but also the people that get affected“, “...Also important, to show them the reason why and make them feel contributive to the changes, to get their personal buy-in, what is in it for them on an individual-level. Once you bring them that understanding, it goes natural“, “Change is not widely accepted. It should be about how you make it easier for the end-user to adapt to it. If they see the advantage, people will jump on it“, “...Companies are a bunch of people and if we can do it on an individual- and team level, then we can do it on the company level. If we as people don't believe in it, people won't change”.

However, there were still some mixed opinions about how to make sure people is adopting the change and using the new tool. Some emphasized the importance of mandatory regulations and that it is just about people being lazy; *“They always say it is about workload and about time, that they need another resource but it only takes 5 minutes of your time. It is just laziness”*. Others thought that forcing the tool on the users will only attract more resistance. In the end, people only change when they want to, and the leadership team must understand what approach is suitable as well as what is important for the recipients to move things along. This was expressed in several of the interviews; *“...But ultimately people only change when they want to change, up to the leadership team to come up with a compelling reason for making them want to change“*.

Fear was also brought up as an explanation of reluctance to change, the fear of having additional work or extra responsibility. *“Currently among our team there are a lot of questions about how this is going to be used and who is going to be responsible. It is a little bit of mixed feelings regarding it, it is a new thing that people never had before so I wouldn't expect it to be welcomed with open arms. They fear that they will have extra work to do or extra responsibility...”*. To not spur on this fear, one thought that it was important to not let the struggles in the pilot be spread amongst the rest of the team that would later adopt the tool. She expressed the importance of keeping up a *“good vibe”*.

One in the pilot team of the second attempt emphasized the importance of identifying the person in the team that has the capability to drive the project, are engaged and want to be involved. When asked how to identify such persons, she goes on to say that it is a matter of knowing your people, having individual talks to understand their interest, which direction they want to take and so on, as well as having regular meetings with the team as a group. The change agent needs to be vocal and be able to push for the change in a coordinated way.

5.5 Learning from feedback

Change process is also a process of learning. Change agents should accept, listen to and take action based on feedback, as well as the recipients should feel encouraged to provide feedback. Further, an environment open for experiments and accepting of trials and errors should try to be established. During the first attempt all participants agreed in the meetings that the solution in theory could be good, however, they felt that whenever they expressed how the tool needed to be further enhanced in order for them to fully see the point of using the tool, they got shut down with the answer that it was not possible due to the limited time and budget of the project; *“People were also trying to challenge the requirements in the*

knowledge session but the only response we got was that given the budget, this is the best we can give and further development could only be done if it [the tool] was utilized”, “The problem was the limitation and the user-friendliness...For us to every time use the tool, the time it took and the effort, it killed the ambition“.

In the second attempt, the link established between the pilot team and the top management team allows feedback to be received and given in both directions. Explained by a person in the leadership team, these meetings allow them to get extra help or resources whenever that is required or redirect to make sure the project is aligned with The Company’s overall vision. Furthermore, the way forward is in constant development in order to be able to incorporate the feedback and lessons learned from the pilot team and stakeholders.

Many of the interviewees recognized the importance of getting an opportunity to raise agitations and be a part of developing the new change. In the end, it is the end-users who have the expert knowledge about their daily work and thus, can give valuable insights in how to make the change as effective and beneficial as possible; *“...Follow-ups and brainstorming sessions with the team. Making sure that people get heard and that requires somebody to be responsible for follow-ups...recipients should feel like they are a part of the creation process and feel like they can express feedback. So that all agree with the solutions.”*, *“They need to be involved, but even if they are involved and feel like they are not being heard, they will have a harder time expressing their feedback later in the project process. Because sometimes they feel like “I proposed this at the beginning, I knew this would happen, but nobody listened””*.

Further, the subject of piloting before implementing the initiative on wide scale was also brought up. In part because people want to test things first before they make up their mind about their thoughts about if the change is beneficial or not, and in part, again, due to making them able to express opinions and be heard; *“...They are not able to make assumptions without being a part of the discussion and knowing the whole picture. So, in the end, the success factor appears when people are starting to use the tool and can come with feedback”, “...They don’t see the use of it because until now they haven’t used such information...People want to try and make their own conclusion”*.

Communication was expressed as a key for successful change initiatives. Structured communications can help set expectations, get opinions and prepare people. Furthermore, explained by one of the interviewees, it can help gain learnings from other areas of The Company; *“Communicate with other areas to get improvement, learn from each other, get inspiration. Some people have already invented the wheel, so why should you reinvent it”*.

Hayes’ process model of change	1st Attempt	2nd Attempt
Recognizing need for change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bottom up • Participants recognized the problem but never reached a widely accepted solution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top- and bottom-up
<i>General</i>	<i>Cross-collaboration between teams gives insights and opportunities</i>	

A common vision matter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No unified view → People created their own solution • Lack of commitment from formal agents to the tool reduced its legitimacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly communicated vision due to clear linkage between top management and pilot team • Vision aligned with the users'
Proper planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of proper planning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of ownership - Nobody took responsibility to ensure the tool's usage ▪ Time and resource constraints ▪ People switched roles/left the company 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top management support enables the resources needed as the project moves along • Have a project plan, frequent follow-ups and a dedicated pilot team • Involvement with other teams as needed • Clear delegation of responsibility
<i>General</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Important to create and communicate short-term objectives, assign a dedicated project team, and fetch feedback and data in the beginning to get the necessary support</i> 	
Implementing & Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants felt it added on to their workload/was not their responsibility - The tool was not being used as planned • Less and less follow-up, no enforcement and no sense of urgency • No prioritization or participation – Lack of action based on feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starting to involve more stakeholders • Aware of potential knowledge gaps • Aware of the essentiality of establishing ownership and continuous support from others
Sustaining Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No enforcement • Not sufficient 'noise' – people did not know about the tool or was not included • Knowledge and support were lost with people switching roles/leaving • Communication misses – knowledge gaps between pilot users and newly onboarded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not applicable since 1st attempt is in pilot phase

Leading and Managing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visualize progress • Managers' responsibility to make sure a change is adopted • People generally hesitant towards change → Change agents are important, and they need to understand what is important for individuals • Constant communication, having an open dialogue
Learning and feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning and acting from feedback requires top management to listen and give an opportunity to raise objections • Pilot project to learn before going wide scale

Table 1 - A comparison between 1st and 2nd change attempt

5. Discussion

This section aims to further analyze and discuss the results and connect them to literature. It is structured in relation to the research questions.

The environment for a high-tech company today requires constant change in order to defend one's market position. Despite this, change initiatives are challenging and are frequently failing. The sections below will go into more depth of the sub questions a) what could be the success factors in a change process, b) what are the challenges in relation to human-behavior in high-tech firms during a change process, and c) what role does a change agent play in a change process.

5.1 Key Success Factors

Literature brings up several factors that contribute to or inhibit successful change projects, such as company's employees, the organizational structure, management and culture (Bamford & Forrester, 2003). However, two key success factors, structure and participation, were identified as being extra important in the case to have in place for other factors to matter and to stimulate a reaction of positive cumulation. They were identified as catalysts of a positive spiral of more factors contributing to the process or vice versa if they were not in place and therefore characterized as extra important. These other factors affected will be more explained together with the discussion of structure and participation but to mention a few are that structure can help make sure the proper follow-up to sustain the change and participation can help with establishing the engagement from crucial change recipients.

Structure of the change was one success factor and from the case it could be seen more or less as having a role in the outcome of all process activities presented by Hayes (2018). For instance, in the first attempt there seemingly lack of structure resulted in no clear delegation of responsibility, no clear communication channel, nor follow-up and eventually the projected faded out. In comparison, the second attempt has a clear structure in terms of a dedicated project team, weekly meetings and a leadership team. The structure of the second attempt has helped to ensure the project is moving forward and secured necessary resources. Structure here encompasses multiple aspects, such as a proper team, the responsibility has been delegated and the structure of communication is set up with for instance, weekly meetings. If structure is in place, it translates to efficient follow-up, commitment and leadership. These factors in turn help with communication, creating motivation and a sense of urgency (Kotter, 1995a). It does not directly translate to not having flexibility within the plan, rather it is aligned with the emergent change approach suggesting that change is a process of continuous adaptation (Biedenbach & Söderholm, 2008), and it is more about the clarity of who is in charge and that the resources necessary for driving the project forward are in place. The structure was identified as being easier to put in place if there was visible top management support, which is aligned with literature stating that such support provides structure (Moran & Brightman, 2000). The study showed that without top management support, there will be no focus or priority to the change. The sense of urgency will not exist nor will the sense of importance and thus, recipients will prioritize other work activities. This signals that without structure, the change will have a harder time to be implemented, and even more so sustained. It also became evident from the case that structure brings with it a higher possibility to secure

the sufficient resources which will also help create the time required, since if people have more to do than they have time for they often react negatively towards changing their current ways of working (Ford & Ford, 2009).

The structure is further critical to ensure that the plan is followed and to get the opportunity to correct if needed (Gill, 2002). The case showed that without the structure, there was no follow-up, no clear leader, nor commitment. Missed deadlines can signal to participants in the change that the agreements are not important in reality and that it is acceptable to only fulfil some of the agreement requirements (Ford & Ford, 2009). In high-tech companies where new things pop up frequently this is important to understand, since prioritizing something new over the 'old' plan can have consequences. This could be compared to what happened in the first attempt, that is, the insufficient follow-ups could be interpreted as a signal that using the tool maybe was not important after all. Since the second attempt has a structure in place and regular follow-ups, people have somebody to be accountable for.

Structure and plan also include having milestones along the way and making them visible and communicated properly. Sharing the achieved milestones was recognized as important to keep people's motivation, especially in big companies where results might take longer to be visible. Another complexity that comes with being a big global company is that people frequently leave or switch roles. This was evident in the first attempt and in combination with the other challenges, knowledge and responsibilities left with the person leaving. In big companies like this one, and especially companies engaged in an industry with rapid changes, this must be considered and ways to ensure that key knowledge is secured within the company and in the project must be put in place. Structure will help to ensure this and even though companies always risk key persons leaving, structure will increase the possibility that change projects will survive despite that. As described in the text there are several elements that make up a successful structure and, in the case, top management support, delegation of responsibility, sufficient follow up and a plan with visible milestones were identified as such elements.

The second success factor was identified as participation. As with structure, participation includes and makes possible for several other factors, such as communication, creating a common vision and experimenting. A change initiative is dependent on the cooperation of the involved employees (Thomas et. al, 2011), which is important in order to get the buy-in from all affected stakeholders. In turn, this helps to create a common vision and to align the objectives. In big, high-tech companies, it can be argued to be impossible to have control over all affected stakeholders, especially if they are working in different departments, and the constant changes in environment will affect the company and the people in unpredictable as well as different ways. If a common vision and objective have been secured, they will help to guide the direction (Kotter, 1995a). Furthermore, it helps with creating motivation and engagement and it should be constantly communicated (Kotter, 1995a).

Constant communication is essential and helps with identifying and resolving challenges, aligning objectives, taking actions as well as set authority (Eccles et al., 1992) and it is the change agents' responsibility to make sure the communication is working properly (Gill, 2002). Communication will be further discussed in the section about the role of change agents.

In addition, even though this report has separated the two attempts to be able to compare them, one can also see it as one common attempt. Implementing change involves trial-and-error, learning and reflection (Van de Ven & Sun, 2011). Thus, from that perspective one might consider the 'first' attempt being a necessary learning step in order for the 'second' attempt to be able to successfully implement the change. Further, change could be viewed as a never-ending process in an organization and according to Van De Ven & Sun (2011) there are two kinds of strategies that tends to occur in cases of problems in a change project. The first one is action, trying to correct the issue and continue according to plan and the other is reflection. Reflection can help to revise the plan to one better suited for the situation they are in (Van de Ven & Sun, 2011). This means that change projects have a history behind them made up of a process of learning and reflecting, affecting how they are turning out. It means that even though change projects are often studied individually, they might not in fact be entirely individual. This report wants to highlight that researchers and managers might benefit looking beyond the individual case, into the broader picture as well as its context when trying to explain certain outcomes.

Literature states that strategy, structure, systems, people, style and culture can all be either sources of inertia blocking change or be encouraging sources of a change process. Thus, there is a need for in-depth understanding of these factors (Burnes, 1996). While the report agrees this to be true, it also argues that in order to utilize the effects of sources that could be encouraging, structure and participation will be major catalysts.

5.2 What are the challenges in relation to human behavior in high-tech firms during a change process?

Change is a process that disrupts the status quo and since employees often seek a sense of stability (Moran & Brightman, 2000), tension and issues will undoubtedly come to surface in one way or another. The case study validates this and the fact that people tend to stick to their comfort zone was acknowledged, but there were different feelings and opinions on how to go about it. This is most likely to be the case in the majority of big high-tech firms and thus, they have a choice to adopt a mindset more leaning towards a celebrative approach to reluctance or a demonizing one. To pick a demonizing approach will probably be the easier choice since it is the most common one (Dent & Goldberg, 1999) and widely recognized amongst managers as a reason for failure. In the study this was evident especially in the first attempt by statements saying that people are lazy or are lacking the ability to see the bigger picture as well as little actions taken based on feedback.

By not choosing the celebrative approach, managers will miss out on opportunities for improvement. Not only might the reluctance or opinions expressed be good suggestions of improvement, but also in order for people to be excited about the change there is strong evidence that they need to feel like they are participating, that their thoughts matter (Thomas & Hardy, 2011). It can be harder to incorporate all potential change recipients in a big company, for example several of the people interviewed expressed a feeling of being excluded and forced to change. Thus, this report argues for the importance of establishing change agents throughout the chain of command who actively choose not to demonize change, especially in companies of this size. Further, these change agents should take on the responsibility to make sure that those on their receiving end are feeling included.

A consequence of choosing to celebrate reluctance also entails that change agents must be willing to be flexible with the original plan (Thomas & Hardy, 2011). In any case, companies, especially managers, should start with paying attention to how they respond to people's reluctance. For example, are they listening and taking in the opinions or are they neglecting those and instead try to force the change? Furthermore, it is not always evident that a clear line is drawn between the two approaches. Sometimes managers can be more natural or their celebrative versus demonizing mindset can vary during the change process. For instance, more neutral reactions were showcased by statements such as it is important to empathize with people, we all have our own problems and stressing to-dos. This report wants to highlight this and rather than aiming for an either-or approach, the importance is for people to feel listened to and to recognize the important contribution from each participant of a change process. With a more balanced view of resistance, it can be both an asset and a liability, and it can provide more flexibility in the field of managing change (Ford & Ford, 2009).

Furthermore, challenges can be due to uncertainty or the legitimation of the change. Top management can help with legitimating a change process. Partly just by showing their commitment but also by identifying and engaging the right people (Moran & Brightman, 2000). Further, pilot-tests are a possible method for increasing the likelihood of getting the change adopted by the entire organization, but it also requires finding people willing to experiment and who are not discouraged by initial failures as well as those having the appropriate competence. Thus, evidence from the pilot together with top management support will increase the legitimacy of the tool (Conger, 1998) and can thus help overcome any reluctance to change related to this.

Cognitive biases are an attribute seen in many people. It means that people tend not to acknowledge their own part in a failure, blaming it on others and attribute only the good performance to their own activities (Lovallo & Kahneman, 2003). This could be due to the fear of admitting once faults or it can be because of them not seeing how they contributed. For instance, some cognitive biases in the case were visible when no one really addressed their own role in the failure. High-tech companies should acknowledge the existence of this bias and work towards creating an open environment where people feel safe enough to speak freely and admit wrongdoings, and as a consequence, a place where they can learn from such past mistakes as well as improve future change efforts.

This section wants to highlight how the mindset of company employees, especially those leading change, play a highly contributing role in how the change project is played out as well as in how people participating in the change will feel before, during and after the change. Something that will indirectly affect their attitudes towards future projects in similar fashion. It agrees with literature favoring the celebrative approach to change over the demonizing one, and the pros of such a mindset is highlighted by examples of the case study. However, it also suggests that it is foremost about listening to both change agents and recipients, without judging and taking their feedback into consideration.

5.3 What role does a Change Agent play in a change process?

Change agents are present in all changes and they can be the reason for the success or failure of the change. Change agents can play several important roles. For once, the role of making sure that the communication is constantly in place, both in terms of the factual data needed for different types of activities but also in terms of more soft values of communication, such as making sure people are aligned with the vision, committed and excited (Jacobs et al., 2013). They should be clear and transparent to avoid any misunderstandings since that can lead to misaligned actions. For example, during the first attempt, partly due to the lack of consistent follow-up, people went with what they thought was right, leading to no common solution.

Secondly, change agents help to ensure that the change is proceeding and help drive it forward. Without no such person, there is a risk that the change will be neglected. This was evident during the first attempt when people switched roles and no one made sure that the sufficient communication was there. It is the change agents' role to make sure everybody feels included, independent of whom in the change process they are, to understand why people react as they do and further, to create the opportunity for the employees to adjust (Moran & Brightman, 2000). Another example when this was not done was the conflicting views in regard to follow-ups and meetings during the first attempt, which could indicate that the dialogue did not include all necessary stakeholders. Thus, they were not on the same page.

Furthermore, if the change agent herself is unsure about the change, that will surely be reflected in the recipients' behavior (Moran & Brightman, 2000). The lack of commitment was visible during the first attempt in the insufficient follow-ups, the lack of resources and the divided vision. This uncertainty and inconsistent support from managers towards the change could have undermined its legitimacy and as a consequence could have affected the efforts of the team (Larson & Tompkins, 2005).

Lack of commitment can also be due to bursting communication (Gill, 2002). Structured communication can help set expectations, get opinions and prepare people (Eccles et al., 1992). Since it is the change agents' role to make sure consistent communication, they need to acknowledge this responsibility since that can set the basis for a successful change process or if this is not done, an unsuccessful one. In the first attempt, even though meetings were held frequently according to some stakeholders, the case could have been that the respective managers, change agents, failed to communicate the agreements or discussions further with their respective teams later on. This could have been due to no alignment in their meetings or no decisions taken, or it could be that the managers fear the reaction of their team or feel as they are unequipped with the knowledge to answer certain types of questions (Ford & Ford, 2009).

Additionally, change agents have the opportunity to involve employees in the decision phase in order to improve engagement and commitment. When communicating and involving people, it often creates a sense of responsibility and a personal stake for the involved people (Kanter et. al., 1992). Even if employees are not directly involved in the change, their support can be beneficial in the long-term to align the change with the overall goal and vision of the organization.

People throughout all levels in the organization may have knowledge about emerging threats or opportunities (Hayes, 2018). The informal networks of change agents can give them the chance to seize and take advantage of such knowledge and in big companies, it is especially likely that the same challenge occurs somewhere else in the company, or that another department have already solved it. Thus, connecting across departments is important to get that external knowledge and gain insight in different opportunities, which can be essential in order to recognize the need for change. It is also important for getting the buy-in, especially in incremental changes (Battilana & Casciaro, 2013). If the change agents' informal network includes people being ambivalent towards the change effort, they are more likely to persuade them because they are seen as more trustworthy or due to peer pressure to cooperate (Battilana & Casciaro, 2013). Some of the interviewees mentioned having regular meetings with departments they had worked with in the past. Another way to earn change recipients' trust if the change agents are not initially close with the recipients is, as mentioned above, to demonstrate the project in a small, pilot project first, and by doing that make its value visible (Conger, 1998). Literature states that informal networks are important and this report agrees with that, however, it also acknowledges that relationships take time to build as well as requires energy to sustain. That extra energy might not always be available for change agents and further, in a global company, having a personal relationship with all future change recipients might not be feasible. Taking this to account, big, high-tech companies should still aim to encourage such set-ups and how to do that should be the focus of future studies. Moreover, the second attempt was initiated during the outbreak of Covid-19 which had implications for face-to-face meetings and thus, other possible future research could be how to address the issues of both people issues and the role of change agents in a more online world.

In addition, previous sections have spoken about the importance of top management support. However, a sense of importance and commitment is also affected positively if the change comes from the bottom. A 'natural' change will bring with it more excitement and positive feelings in regard to the change. Thus, there is a need for change to have simultaneous support from the top and the bottom. Whereas top-down support provides structure, bottom-up generates encouragement (Moran & Brightman, 2000). The challenge is that driving a change from the bottom is harder, which is where the importance of change agents once again is visible. Change agents that are liked and appreciated between colleagues and employees have a better chance to gain the necessary support and thus, are better equipped to mobilize others (Battilana & Casciaro, 2013). The second attempt could be described to fulfill the requirements of both top- and bottom support and its current progress speaks for the agreement of these statements in literature.

The result speaks for the clearly important role of change agents in many aspects throughout the change process. However, without supportive function beside them a successful change cannot be guaranteed. Thus, change agents are critical but not sufficient. For instance, the result of the first attempt showed several change agents but due to the lacking structure, they were not enough for following the change all the way through.

This report has discussed the important role of change agents and different challenges related to human behavior, which together aims to provide guidelines for managers or people leading change in order to achieve the desired change objectives.

6. Conclusion

This report has studied a practical case at a high-tech global company and aimed to answer the research question (1) how a change process looks like in a high-tech company, and more specifically (1a) what could be the success factors in a change process, (1b) what are the challenges in relation to human behavior in high-tech firms during a change process and (1c) what role does a change agent play in a change process? Eight semi-structured interviews have been held with representatives from the first and second change effort at The Company. The representatives differed in forms of rank at The Company and role in the change.

When answering what the key success factor in a change effort in an established high-tech firm could be (1a), the results stressed the importance of having structure and participation throughout the entire process. Support from the top management, attaching a sense of urgency to the change and to make all affected of the change feel included were also emphasized.

When answering how challenges in relation to human behavior are handled in a high-tech firm (1b), the results show the importance for high-tech companies to make sure supportive processes are in place for handling such challenges. Understanding the reason behind employees' reactions is important and to be open for changes based on feedback along the way.

When answering the third question, what role change agents play in a change process (1c), it shows that change agents do play a critical role. Thus, it is essential to identify those persons and make sure they are continuously committed to the change and taking on the responsibility of dealing with the occurring people issues. However, the results also indicate that even though the change agents' role is essential, it is not sufficient to secure success.

6.1 Limitation

The study aims to investigate change efforts in established high-tech companies in general. However, one should be aware that the study has only been conducted at a single company and it is likely that how companies handle such issues discussed in this report will differ depending on the company.

Furthermore, change includes many parts, processes and aspects. This report has mainly focused on different factors contributing to or hindering success, and how managers can deal with challenges related to human behavior. The results are thus limited, and other aspects and perspectives must also be acknowledged as well as taken into consideration.

6.2 Call for Further Research

The findings in this case are hoped to contribute to companies in high-tech companies increasing their amount of successful change initiatives. It has brought up several issues related to the people undergoing change and different types of roles change agents could serve. For companies operating in a fast-changing environment, it is likely that the amount of change initiatives will only increase, making these subjects even more in need of attention. Furthermore, that indicates that new research will continue to be conducted. The author

suggests that further studies are made to address these issues that currently exist or will evolve and connect them with current as well as emerging literature.

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8. Appendix

8.1 Interview Guideline First Attempt

Questions were modified depending on the person interviewed and the answers given to previous questions.

Starting with an introduction to the thesis and explaining that answers will be anonymous and asking if the interviewee allow the interview to be recorded.

1. Can you explain a bit about the project of implementing the tool 2-3 years ago and how it got started?
2. What was the plan/strategy?
3. How did it go compared to your plans?
4. What role did you have in the project of implementing Quote checker 2-3 years ago?
5. Who onboarded you on this project/why did you get involved?
6. How did you feel about this initiative in the beginning of the project vs how you felt about it in the end?
7. Did you give any types of feedback in this project and in that case, what type of feedback?
 - a. If not, why not?
 - b. If yes: How do you think the feedback was being handled?
8. Why do you think the project was never fully implemented?
9. What factors do you think would have changed the outcome? (The key success factors)
10. Was there any person who was especially engaged or driving in this project? (It can be you)
 - a. If yes: How did this get expressed? What did this person do to drive the project?
11. Have you been a part of any other change initiatives at The Company that has succeeded/failed, why?
 - a. What were the critical success factors or the reason for failure for these initiatives?
 - b. How did the strategy or change process look like?
12. What would you say are the most common reasons for change management initiatives failing at The Company?
13. What do you think The Company could do to improve their change management?

8.2 Interview Guideline Second Attempt

Questions were modified depending on the person interviewed and the answers given to previous questions.

Starting with an introduction to the thesis and explaining that answers will be anonymous and asking if the interviewee allow the interview to be recorded.

1. Can you explain a bit about the change project and how it got started?

2. What is the plan/strategy?
3. Who onboarded you on this project/why did you get involved?
4. What role do you have in this project?
5. How did you feel about this initiative in the beginning of the project vs how you feel about it now?
6. What made you motivated to be a part of this change?
7. What factors do you think will be the key success factors for making this succeed and be globally implemented at The Company?
8. Do you give any types of feedback in this project and in that case, what type of feedback?
 - a. If not, why not?
 - b. If yes: How do you think the feedback is being handled?
9. Is there any person who is especially engaged or driving in this project? (It can be you)
 - a. If yes: How does this get expressed? What does this person do to drive the project?
10. Have you been a part of any other change initiatives at The Company that has succeeded/failed, why?
 - a. What were the critical success factors or the reason for failure for these initiatives?
 - b. How did the strategy or change process look like?
11. What would you say are the most common reasons for change management initiatives failing at The Company?
12. What do you think The Company could do to improve their change management?

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