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Sustaining Change Through People

The Role of Super Users as Change Ambassadors

Master's thesis in Design and Construction Project Management

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Abstract

Organisations are increasingly operating in settings characterised by continuous and complex change. While many change initiatives succeed in implementation, fewer manage to sustain new ways of working once formal change initiatives end. This thesis explores how super users function as change ambassadors and how their role can support the long-term sustainment of organisational change. The study adopts a qualitative case study approach within a large organisational change programme. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with super users and managerial roles involved in a change programme, focusing on multinational system implementation. The empirical material was analysed thematically and interpreted in relation to established change management theory of organisational change. The findings show that super users played a central role in sustaining change through relational influence rather than formal authority. They acted as a link between change objectives and lived reality, enabling local adoption and stabilisation of new practices. However, their impact was strongly shaped by organisational conditions and their surrounding context. Sustainment of the change often emerged informally, creating dependency on individual commitment and limiting organisational resilience. The study concludes that sustaining change requires viewing super users not as temporary implementation resources, but as part of a long-term organisational asset. It was shown how change is not sustained by systems alone but rather the people and conditions that allowed them to succeed.

Keywords: Organisational Change, Change Ambassador, Super User, Change Sustainment, Organisational Learning, Knowledge Sharing, Continuous Change

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1 Introduction

Organisations today operate in environments characterised by continuous and accelerating change, driven by political developments, regulatory pressures, economic volatility and technological advancement. In this context, the critical challenge is no longer initiating change but sustaining it over time. While many organisations succeed in launching change initiatives, far fewer manage to embed new ways of working once formal projects end and attention shifts elsewhere. The ability to anchor change in everyday practice has therefore become a decisive organisational capability (Buchanan, 2005).

However, organisational change does not unfold in a mechanical or linear manner. Organisations are social systems in which individuals interpret, negotiate and enact change through relationships, emotions and informal norms. Even well-designed change initiatives may fade if people struggle to understand their relevance, lack trust in the process, or revert to familiar routines when formal support is withdrawn. This highlights that sustaining change is not merely a technical challenge, but a deeply human and relational one (Buchanan, 2005).

Traditional change management approaches have tended to prioritise structures, plans and system implementation. While these elements remain important, research increasingly shows that transformation rarely fails due to flawed design alone. Instead, change often falters because new practices are not meaningfully adopted, socially reinforced or integrated into daily work. Sustained change therefore depends on how people engage with, make sense of and continue to enact change beyond initial implementation (Buchanan, 2005; Stouten & Cremer, 2018).

Building on this perspective, this thesis examines the role of individuals who operate close to everyday work practices and act as active carriers of change. Often referred to as change ambassadors, these individuals communicate, translate and reinforce change in their local contexts, helping to maintain momentum when formal change structures recede. By focusing on change ambassadorship, the study explores how organisational change can be driven, anchored and sustained through people over time (Stouten & Cremer, 2018; Oxtoby, 2002; Buchanan, 2005).

1.1 Background - Sustaining Change Through People

Despite extensive research on change implementation, comparatively little attention has been devoted to how change is sustained in the months and years following initial deployment. Sustaining change requires ongoing cognitive and emotional effort at multiple organisational levels, particularly among employees who are expected to abandon established habits, adopt new routines and continuously make sense of evolving expectations. At the same time, this effort is often unevenly distributed, with certain individuals taking on a disproportionate share of the work required to explain, legitimise and reinforce change in everyday practice (Buchanan, 2005; Stouten & Cremer, 2018). When the purpose of change becomes unclear, leadership attention declines, or cultural assumptions remain unchallenged, organisations often experience regression to prior ways of working (Kotter, 1995).

Research increasingly suggests that long-term sustainment depends less on formal systems and more on social and relational mechanisms. Informal influence, trust, sensemaking and emotional engagement shape whether change becomes embedded or fades. However, there is limited empirical understanding of how organisations can deliberately harness these mechanisms through specific roles or actors embedded in everyday work (Buchanan, 2005).

Change ambassadors have emerged as a promising but underexplored mechanism in this regard. Positioned as trusted peers rather than formal authorities, ambassadors support colleagues by translating strategic intent into locally meaningful practices, modelling desired behaviours and legitimising change through social influence. Yet, existing literature offers limited guidance on how ambassadorship should be defined, selected and supported, how the role evolves across different phases of change and how organisational conditions enable or constrain ambassadors' effectiveness over time (Stouten & Cremer, 2018; Oxtoby, 2002; Buchanan, 2005).

1.2 Case context - Sustaining Change in a Global ERP Transformation

The global company referred to as *The Company* in this master's thesis is currently undergoing a large-scale organisational transformation, hereafter referred to as *The Change Programme*. A central component of this transformation is a global implementation of a new version of Systems, Applications & Products in Data Processing (SAP), an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system intended to standardise and harmonise business processes, improve data quality, and enable better coordination and collaboration across functions within the organisation (SAP, 2025). While ERP implementations are often described as technical or IT-driven initiatives, the Change Programme represents a planned, large-scale socio-technical transformation. The introduction of the new SAP version fundamentally changes how employees perform daily tasks, coordinate work, interpret information and decision-making. Overall, this change will affect over 30 000 employees worldwide with a duration of over ten years. As such, the Change Programme constitutes a behavioural and cognitive transformation rather than merely a technical system change.

In this study, end users refer to employees who are expected to adopt and use the new system and related ways of working in their daily work, but who do not hold formal roles within the global Change Programme. As established routines are replaced by standardised processes and redefined roles, employees are expected to adopt new logics of work based on integrated data flows. As a result, the transformation extends far beyond system installation and directly affects everyday practices across the organisation.

The Change Programme is implemented through regional deployment phases, with each phase introducing the new version of SAP and related processes to selected neighbouring countries. Within each phase, the participating countries are centrally managed and supported by the Change Programme team, whose role is to identify emerging challenges and facilitate a smooth transition into the new ways of working. However, while the implementation is structured around defined phases, the transformation itself is ongoing and does not conclude once a phase is completed. Instead, change continues as employees are expected to use, adapt to, and embed new ways of working in their daily operations. The success of the Change Programme therefore depends not only on effective deployment, but also on the organisation's ability to sustain and

institutionalise new practices over time, particularly after the Change Programme team and focused managerial attention have receded.

Sustaining change in this context is especially challenging. The scale of the Change Programme, its cross-functional nature, and the diversity of local contexts increase the risk that new practices remain superficial or unevenly adopted. While the Company has invested in formal governance structures, training programmes, and project management frameworks, much of the long-term responsibility for anchoring change appears to rest with individuals embedded in daily operations. This shift of responsibility highlights the importance of understanding how change is carried forward in practice, beyond formal plans and timelines. In this thesis, a global ERP transformation is therefore understood as an organisation-wide change initiative that combines technological implementation with substantial changes to work processes, roles, and everyday practices. From this perspective, sustaining change becomes a human and organisational challenge rather than a purely technical one.

To support the Change Programme, the Company has established a structured super user role intended to act as a link between the Change Programme team and end users. While the role is formally defined in technical and process-oriented terms, super users are in practice also expected to provide emotional support, translate overarching Change Programme goals into locally meaningful working practices, and help sustain commitment during periods of uncertainty. The role therefore carries implicit expectations that align with change ambassadorship.

Findings from a pre-study conducted at the Company illustrate why this role becomes particularly critical in the context of the Change Programme. Interviewees described the programme as a large-scale and complex transformation affecting all business processes, raising concerns about how such change can be understood, adopted, and sustained over time. A recurring theme was the need for improved knowledge sharing and more effective use of internal resources, with super users consistently identified as having significant potential to support change beyond formal change implementation.

As a result, this thesis shifts the focus away from the technical objective of the SAP implementation towards the validation of ambassadorship in practice. Specifically, it examines how the super user role is performed over time, how it is shaped by organisational and cultural conditions, and how it contributes to sustaining change through knowledge sharing and continuous improvement beyond initial implementation.

1.3 Aim

The aim of this thesis is to examine how organisations can use change ambassadors to drive, anchor and sustain organisational change over time. In the empirical context of this study, change ambassadors are enacted through the super user role. Specifically, the study explores how the super user role is defined, selected and enacted in practice, as well as the organisational conditions that enable or constrain super users' ability to support change. In addition, the thesis examines how social and emotional dynamics influence super users' engagement and impact, and how organisations can further develop ambassadorship as a capability to embed change in everyday work and strengthen long-term change capacity.

1.4 Research Question

To accomplish the aim of this study and establish the intended outcome, the following main research question is addressed:

How can super users be utilised to drive, anchor and sustain change over time and across the organisation?

This research question is addressed through four overarching and interrelated sub-questions:

- What characterises a super user and how is the super user role defined, selected and enacted in practice?
- What organisational conditions influence super users' ability to support and sustain change?
- How do soft dimensions shape super users' engagement and impact during change?
- How can organisations develop and improve the role of super users to strengthen knowledge sharing, embed change in daily work and enhance long-term change capability?

1.5 Delimitations of the Study

This study is based on a qualitative case study conducted within a single organisation, referred to as the Company. The empirical focus is limited to one large-scale change initiative, the Change Programme, which may constrain the applicability of the findings. While the case provides in-depth insight into super users in practice, the results may be influenced by organisational characteristics specific to the Company. Including multiple companies in similar contexts could have enabled broader comparative insights.

Geographically, the study is delimited to Northern and Central Europe, although the Company operates globally. The study examines experiences from three completed phases of the Change Programme: a pre-phase, pilot phase and the first phase. Current and future implementation phases, including the second phase and onwards, fall outside the scope of this study and may involve developments and experiences that are not captured in this thesis. The size and complexity of the Change Programme made it impossible to account for all country- and business unit-specific contexts in this study. Moreover, due to the large scale and complexity of the Change Programme, the study necessarily focuses on only a limited portion of the overall initiative and cannot account for all country- and business unit-specific contexts.

The study is constrained by a five-month period during the autumn of 2025. Empirical material was gathered through 23 interviews, which proved sufficient to identify recurring patterns and reach analytical saturation. However, the limited number of interviews restricted the inclusion of additional perspectives. In particular, end users were not interviewed directly, which limits insight into how organisational change is perceived and enacted by employees who do not hold the super user role.

The multinational context of the study introduces interpretive limitations. Interviewees work within different national and organisational cultures, which may affect how questions are perceived and how experiences are expressed. Variations in openness and willingness to share personal reflections may therefore have influenced the empirical material.

Taken together, these delimitations and limitations reflect both deliberate research choices and practical constraints. While they do not undermine the study's contribution, they should be considered when interpreting the findings and assessing their transferability to other organisational contexts.

2 Literature Review

This literature review examines how organisational change can be sustained over time through the involvement of change ambassadors. By using the research and theoretical angles within change management, a theoretical framework will be presented at the end of this chapter, showing the analytical lens used later in the discussion chapter. In this literature review, the term *change ambassadors* are used as an overarching concept, even though the literature employs a range of related terms. For clarity and consistency, this study adopts the term change ambassadors to capture this broader set of roles and perspectives.

2.1 Change Ambassadors as a key Mechanism for Sustaining Organisational Change

This section synthesises the literature on change ambassadorship to explain how change ambassadors contribute to sustaining organisational change over time. Rather than viewing ambassadorship as a symbolic title or a temporary project role, it conceptualises change ambassadors as a functional and relational role enacted through everyday practices, informal influence and ongoing interaction within the organisation. The section first clarifies who change ambassadors are, how they can be selected and the core functions they perform in change processes. It then explores how the ambassador role develops across different phases of a change, highlighting its evolving and relational nature.

2.1.1 Change Ambassadors - Who They Are, What They Do and How They Are Selected

Change management research defines change agents as individuals who influence, support, drive and sustain organisational change (Armenakis & Harris, 2009). These actors are commonly distinguished as formal or informal change agents based on their primary source of influence. Formal change agents derive authority from organisational position, while informal change agents exert influence through credibility, trust and embeddedness in informal relational networks within the organisation (Armenakis & Harris 2009; Koch & Fortkord, 2024).

Change ambassadors occupy a hybrid position within this distinction. Although they are often formally appointed as part of a change initiative, their effectiveness depends primarily on informal influence among peers. Ambassadorship is therefore best understood as a role that is formally assigned but informally enacted. Its informal dimension becomes particularly critical during and after implementation, when formal project structures and managerial attention tend to recede (Koch & Fortkord, 2024). Accordingly, this thesis examines change ambassadors primarily as informal change agents and analyses how their relational influence contributes to anchoring and sustaining change over time.

Research describes change ambassadors as trusted peers who operate close to daily operations and frequently occupy boundary-spanning positions across teams or units (Goodrich et al., 2020). Their relevance lies not in seniority or formal mandate, but in their capacity to connect

strategic intent with local meaning and action, positioning them as key actors in sustaining change as a relational and socially embedded process (Tann, 2021).

Although the literature uses different labels, such as *opinion leaders*, *champions*, *change ambassadors*, *translators* or *boundary spanners*, these roles refer to a common pattern of influence grounded in trust, relational credibility, and social positioning rather than formal authority (Battilana & Casciaro, 2012; Goodrich et al., 2020; Koch & Fortkord, 2024). Synthesising across these literatures, the core functions of change ambassadors can be grouped into four interrelated roles.

Firstly, ambassadors perform an interpretive role by translating strategic messages into locally meaningful narratives and clarifying what change implies for everyday work (Koch & Fortkord, 2024). Secondly, they enact a behavioural role by modelling desired practices and sustaining momentum through visible commitment, thereby contributing to the normalisation of new behaviours (Oxtoby et al., 2002; Drechsler et al., 2021). Thirdly, ambassadors fulfil a relational role by mobilising peer support, strengthening trust, and legitimising change through social endorsement within informal networks, where credibility outweighs hierarchy (Battilana & Casciaro, 2012). Finally, they perform a boundary-spanning knowledge role by connecting teams, disciplines or cultural domains, enabling knowledge to be transferred, translated and adapted across organisational boundaries (Goodrich et al., 2020; Carlile, 2004). Taken together, these functions position change ambassadors as key actors who embed change within everyday interactions, ensuring that new ways of working are not only implemented but reinforced and sustained over time.

The literature consistently shows that while formal position, tenure, and demographic characteristics may be considered in the selection of change ambassadors, they are not the primary determinants of suitability. Instead, informal influence within the organisation is central. Despite this insight, systematic approaches to identifying such individuals remain underdeveloped.

Koch and Fortkord (2024) demonstrate that influence during change emerges through everyday relational interactions rather than formal appointment. They therefore argue that change ambassadors are best identified by organisational leaders through observation of informal networks rather than by assigning roles based on hierarchy. Specifically, they propose two complementary selection criteria: *network position*, which indicates who colleagues turn to for advice and who bridges otherwise disconnected groups, and *interpersonal behaviour*, which reflects trust-building, communicative clarity, and sensemaking capability. This perspective suggests that while some change ambassadors may hold formal leadership roles, their effectiveness stems from where influence and credibility already exist in daily relational interactions. This view aligns with Weimann's (1994) argument that relational credibility and network position are stronger predictors of influence than formal status. How individuals are connected to others and how they behave within these relationships, better explains their capacity to shape behaviour and meaning than titles, seniority, or organisational rank alone.

The appropriateness of different ambassador profiles is further shaped by the change context. Battilana and Casciaro (2012) show that radical change benefits from change ambassadors positioned as brokers across networks, whereas incremental change spreads more effectively

through cohesive, trust-based groups. This highlights the need to align change ambassador selection with the nature of the change being implemented.

Beyond relational influence, psychological readiness is critical. Change ambassadors who do not believe in the necessity, appropriateness, or feasibility of the change are unlikely to advocate for it convincingly (Armenakis et al., 1993; Armenakis & Harris, 2009). Unlike general employee readiness, change ambassador readiness is particularly consequential because they are expected not only to adopt change themselves but also to legitimise, translate, and reinforce it for others. Diagnostic tools assessing readiness beliefs can therefore complement relational selection criteria by ensuring that ambassadors possess both influence and the cognitive and emotional commitment required to sustain change in practice (Holt et al., 2007).

Behavioural evidence further strengthens ambassador selection. Oxtoby et al. (2002) show that prior demonstrations of initiative, adaptability, and consensus-building are strong indicators of change ambassadorial capability. Bernardy & Antoni, (2021) extend this insight by highlighting perseverance as essential for maintaining effectiveness over extended and demanding change processes. Together, these studies indicate that effective change ambassadors combine observable action capacity with personal endurance, enabling them to support and sustain change over time. Crucially, it is not sufficient for ambassadors to express support for change; they must also have demonstrated in practice that they can enact and uphold it.

Synthesising the literature reviewed in this section, this thesis adopts the following definition of change ambassadors:

Change ambassadors are defined as organisational actors who are formally appointed to support a change initiative, but whose impact relies primarily on informal influence rooted in relational credibility, trust and embeddedness in everyday work. They operate close to daily operations, translate strategic intent into locally meaningful action, model and reinforce new behaviours. They also mobilise peer support and span boundaries across the organisation. Through these relational and practical activities, they contribute to embedding and sustaining organisational change over time.

2.1.2 Ambassadorship as an Evolving and Relational Process

Across concepts such as boundary spanners, champions, translators, and opinion leaders, the literature describes a consistent pattern of role evolution that is directly applicable to change ambassadorship. Rather than being static, change ambassadorial work develops as change progresses. Early phases are characterised by sensemaking and fostering connections, where change ambassadors help colleagues interpret change and reduce uncertainty. As implementation unfolds, their responsibilities shift towards mobilisation, reinforcing behaviours and facilitating coordination across groups. In later stages, change ambassadors increasingly contribute to institutionalisation by stabilising new practices and embedding them in routines and norms. This developmental trajectory is supported by research from Battilana & Casciaro, 2012, 2013; Carlile, 2004; Drechsler et al., 2021; Goodrich et al., 2020; Koch & Fortkord, 2024. Collectively, this literature shows that change ambassadorship is not a single intervention but an adaptive role that evolves to meet the changing demands of sustaining organisational change over time. These processes are fundamental to sustaining change, going beyond just facilitating initial adoption.

A second core insight is that the impact of change ambassadors cannot be captured through traditional performance indicators. Instead, ambassadorial impact is naturally relational. Research shows that ambassadors exert influence by shaping informal networks, building trust, and enabling coordination across organisational boundaries (Battilana & Casciaro, 2012, 2013; Koch & Fortkord, 2024). Their impact becomes visible through strengthened relationships, improved knowledge flows, reduced misunderstanding, and the gradual normalisation of new practices in everyday work (Carlile, 2004; Goodrich et al., 2020). Whether this influence operates through brokerage across disconnected groups or through cohesion within trusted clusters depends on the nature of the change being pursued (Battilana & Casciaro, 2012). Across these perspectives, impact is therefore defined not by individual outputs, but by ambassadors' capacity to shape relationships, align interpretations, and sustain behavioural change over time. This relational understanding helps explain why standard evaluation approaches often fail to capture the value of change ambassadors, and why the ongoing work of sustaining change through everyday interaction is frequently underestimated.

2.2 Sustaining Organisational Change Beyond Implementation - A Social and Relational Perspective on Change Ambassadorship

This chapter explains why sustaining organisational change is particularly challenging after formal implementation and why change ambassadorship becomes necessary in this phase. Rather than treating sustainment as technical or managerial task, this section conceptualises it as a distributed, social process shaped by sensemaking, emotional responses and informal influence in everyday work.

2.2.1 Implementation vs. Sustainment

Implementing change refers to the introduction of new systems, structures, or practices, whereas sustaining change involves ensuring that these new ways of working persist over time and become taken for granted (Buchanan et al., 2005). Research consistently shows that many change initiatives fail not during launch but in the post-implementation phase, when attention, resources, and leadership involvement decline (Kotter, 1995; Todnem By, 2005). Sustaining change therefore requires reinforcement, sensemaking and alignment across organisational levels rather than reliance on initial project success alone. This is why change ambassadors become a key component in sustaining change, receiving more responsibility as a reaction of the withdrawn resources from formal structures.

Naslund and Norrman (2022) describe this dynamic as an *implementation gap* between formally articulated change goals and how change is experienced in practice. This gap becomes especially visible after implementation, when urgency fades and employees struggle to connect abstract objectives to their concrete tasks. For change ambassadors, this gap constitutes the core terrain of their work. Ambassadorship becomes necessary precisely because strategic intent does not automatically translate into sustained practice. Without such translation, commitment weakens and new practices remain superficial.

Communication quality further clarifies why ambassadorship matters. Simões and Esposito (2014) show that one-way, monologic communication fails to sustain change because it does not support participation or shared meaning. In contrast, dialogic communication which is characterised by mutuality, empathy and involvement allow employees to co-construct the change narrative and reduces resistance. Change ambassadors are uniquely positioned to enact

this form of communication, as their influence operates through peer-level dialogue rather than formal messaging. Through everyday conversations, ambassadors legitimise change, address uncertainty, and sustain engagement long after formal communication channels fall silent.

Classic models of organisational change offer important insight into why sustaining change is difficult. Lewin's unfreeze–change–refreeze model highlights the need to stabilise new practices, while Kotter's (1996) framework stresses urgency, leadership coalitions and cultural anchoring. Both models suggest that change will not endure unless it is actively reinforced beyond initial implementation. However, they also implicitly assume that this reinforcement is primarily driven by formal leadership and top-down mechanisms. Research on change relapse consistently shows that transformation efforts lose momentum when leadership engagement declines, communication weakens, and strategic intent becomes disconnected from everyday work practices (Oakland & Tanner, 2007). For change ambassadors, this context is not incidental but defining. As managerial attention and formal project structures recede, ambassadors increasingly become the primary actors responsible for sustaining meaning, direction and engagement in daily operations. This highlights why ambassadorship is not an optional supplement to leadership, but a necessary mechanism for sustaining change beyond formal authority.

2.2.2 Sustaining Change as a Human, Emotional and Social Process

Research consistently shows that sustaining organisational change through people remains one of the most persistent challenges in change management. Change initiatives often fail not because the idea is wrong, but because new ways of working are not sustained in everyday work. As a result, recent research shifts attention away from linear, top-down change processes towards the human and relational dynamics that determine whether change is sustained. Sustained change depends less on formal structures and plans and more on trust, psychological safety and meaningful involvement (Armenakis & Harris, 2009; Battilana & Casciaro, 2012; Holt, 2007).

From this perspective, change is not a one-time event, but an ongoing social process shaped by how employees interpret, enact, and reinforce it in everyday work. Accordingly, the focus of change management has shifted from managing change for employees to enabling change with them. When employees are positioned as active contributors rather than passive recipients, resistance is reduced, ownership is strengthened, and change is more likely to be sustained (Armenakis & Harris, 2009; Holt, 2007).

Ambassadors as Sensemakers and Sensegivers

Organisational change does not become real through formal decisions alone, but through how people understand and interpret change in their everyday work. During periods of change, employees rely heavily on informal conversations, signals from colleagues, and established norms to understand what is changing and what it means for their roles. Because sensemaking is inherently social and context-dependent, different groups may develop different interpretations of the same change initiative, shaping whether change is perceived as clear, credible or threatening (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010).

In this interpretive process, change ambassadors play a central role by acting as both sensemakers and sensegivers (Gioia & Chittipeddi et al., 1991). These roles reflect two interconnected but distinct cognitive modes. Sensemaking refers to a cognitive process of

understanding: ambassadors first interpret the change themselves by reflecting on its purpose, implications, and alignment with existing practices. This internal meaning construction is crucial, as ambassadors cannot credibly influence others' interpretations without first forming their own coherent understanding of the change.

Once ambassadors have made sense of the change, they shift into a sensegiving role, which is action-oriented and focused on influencing others' meaning construction (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Sensegiving involves actively shaping how colleagues interpret the change by translating strategic intentions into locally meaningful, credible, and relevant narratives (Armenakis & Harris, 2009; Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). In this role, change ambassadors seek to guide others toward a preferred redefinition of organisational reality, rather than merely transmitting information.

Through this continuous interplay between sensemaking and sensegiving, change ambassadors shape employees' readiness for change, defined as the beliefs that determine whether employees accept or resist change (Holt et al., 2007). In particular, change ambassadors influence whether employees perceive the change as relevant and reasonable, feel capable of handling it, experience management support, and anticipate personal or professional benefits.

Importantly, this influence is exercised primarily through informal, everyday interactions rather than formal communication channels. Research shows that employees tend to rely more on trusted peers than on official messages when interpreting change, making collective sensemaking with colleagues especially powerful in reducing uncertainty and resistance (Armenakis & Harris, 2009; Holt et al., 2007). Through sustained sensemaking and sensegiving, change ambassadors contribute to shared understanding and help embed change beyond initial implementation.

Ambassadors as Sources of Emotional Support and Trust

Research shows that successful organisational change depends on employees' mental and emotional readiness. Feelings such as anxiety, doubt, and uncertainty are common during change and strongly affect how engaged employees remain over time. When negative emotions dominate, employees are more likely to resist or withdraw. In contrast, emotional support and positive feelings help employees adjust, learn, and stay engaged with the change (Holt et al., 2007).

Change ambassadors play a crucial role by supporting people emotionally and building trust during the change process (Battilana & Casciaro, 2012; Bernardy & Antoni, 2021). By building trust and psychological safety, change ambassadors enable open dialogue and reduce fear of negative consequences, helping to stabilise engagement during longer and demanding change efforts. From a relational perspective, resistance often reflects issues of trust, legitimacy, and credibility rather than simple opposition to change, highlighting the importance of emotionally grounded influence in sustaining change.

Importantly, readiness among change ambassadors is different from readiness among other employees. Change ambassadors are not only expected to accept the change themselves, but also to help others understand and commit to it. Because of this, their level of belief and emotional commitment has a stronger impact on overall engagement and is especially important for keeping the change alive over time (Armenakis & Harris, 2009; Holt et al., 2007).

Ambassadors as social connectors in informal networks

Research shows that influence during organisational change flows primarily through informal networks rather than formal hierarchies. Employees often turn to trusted peers and informal leaders, rather than managers, when interpreting change and assessing its legitimacy (Battilana & Casciaro, 2012). These informal networks shape which narratives gain traction and how new practices spread across the organisation.

Change ambassadors are effective because they function as social connectors within these networks. Their influence is grounded in relational credibility rather than positional authority, enabling them to connect groups, facilitate knowledge exchange, and align interpretations across organisational boundaries (Buchanan, 2005; Koch & Fortkord, 2024). Psychological safety further strengthens this influence by enabling open questioning, dialogue, and shared sensemaking without fear of negative consequences (Drechsler, 2021; Goodrich, 2020).

Taken together, the literature demonstrates that sustaining change depends not on formal authority alone but on socially embedded processes of sensemaking, emotional support, and relational influence. Change ambassadors are central to these processes because they operate at the intersection of sensemaking, emotional regulation, and informal networks. Through trust-based influence rather than hierarchical control, they play a critical role in ensuring that organisational change is not only adopted but sustained over time.

2.3 Organisational Conditions that Enable or Constrains Change Ambassadors

Sustaining organisational change is not only a matter of designing effective interventions but also of creating organisational conditions that enable new practices to persist over time (Stouten & Cremer, 2018). This section examines how organisational culture, structures, support networks, and leadership practices, shape change ambassadors' legitimacy, capacity to act and ability to sustain change in everyday work.

2.3.1 Culture Conditions Shaping Ambassadors' Legitimacy

Organisational culture is commonly defined as the shared, taken-for-granted assumptions that guide how groups perceive, think, and act in relation to their environment (Schein, 1996). Culture is particularly powerful because it operates largely beneath the surface, shaping behaviour without requiring explicit control. Many change initiatives fail because they focus on visible behaviours and formal systems while underestimating the deeper cultural assumptions that sustain existing practices. In change contexts, this makes culture both a stabilising force and a potential source of inertia. The informal role of change ambassadors becomes central around the impact of organisational culture.

Pointing out the relevance of interpretation, Schein (1996) argues through the *Three Cultures Model* how organisational change is shaped by deeply embedded assumptions within occupational subcultures. Different groups interpret and respond to change through its own priorities and logic. While these perspectives are individually rational, misalignment between them can hinder organisational learning and the diffusion of improvements across levels.

Change ambassadors' impact is therefore affected by the mindset and attitude from these subgroups. Legitimacy and recognition are central to whether ambassadorship can be sustained

over time. The literature shows that change ambassadors gain legitimacy primarily through visible relational contributions rather than formal status alone. When ambassadors successfully mobilise across networks, reduce friction between groups, and contribute to embedding new practices, their influence becomes recognised by peers and leaders alike (Battilana & Casciaro, 2012, 2013; Goodrich et al., 2020). Such recognition is further strengthened when organisations formally support ambassadorial work through role clarification, training, or explicit endorsement (Drechsler et al., 2021; Koch & Fortkord, 2024). Without this support, ambassadors risk role overload, declining credibility, or disengagement. Conversely, when informal legitimacy is combined with organisational recognition, ambassadorship becomes both sustainable and scalable, enabling continued reinforcement of change beyond formal implementation.

2.3.2 Structural and Resource Conditions Shaping Change Ambassadors' Capacity to Act

Beyond culture, organisational structures and resource conditions significantly shape the sustainability of change. Kotter (1995) highlights that formal systems, rules, and resource allocations can act as structural barriers when they prevent change ambassadors from behaving in ways that align with the change vision. Even when employees are motivated, misaligned structures can undermine sustained adoption. Gravenhorst et al. (2003) align with this take, conceptualising structure as a central component of organisational change capacity. This empirical study demonstrates that highly formalised, mechanistic structures tend to resist change due to rigid procedures and hierarchical control, whereas more organic structures support adaptability and learning. From a sustainability perspective, this suggests that change initiatives must be supported by structural adjustments allowing change ambassadors to navigate in their role and environment, having coordination mechanisms that reinforce new ways of working rather than contradict them.

2.3.3 Training, Support Networks and Communities of Practice

While formal structures set boundaries, sustained change also depends on how individuals are supported in developing new competencies and making sense of change. Stouten & Cremer (2018) emphasise that effective change requires both skill development and a supportive social context that enables learning over time. Training alone is insufficient if employees lack opportunities to apply new knowledge, receive feedback, and learn from peers.

Support is therefore often embedded in informal social networks and dialogic communication. Research on social networks shows that change agents derive influence not only from expertise but also from relational ties. Well-connected individuals and trusted peers play a critical role in guiding interpretation, reinforcing new practices, and legitimising change within everyday work. Dialogic communication, characterised by two-way interaction, transparency, and shared sensemaking, reduces uncertainty and fosters collective ownership of change initiatives. These processes contribute to the emergence of communities of practice, where learning becomes ongoing and embedded in daily interaction rather than confined to formal training events (Orlikowski, 2002).

Within this context, change ambassadors emerge as key actors who bridge formal change intentions with local learning processes. Positioned close to operational practice, they are able to translate abstract change messages into meaningful guidance, facilitate peer learning, and

sustain dialogue as formal support structures recede. This highlights why ambassadorship is not merely a communication function, but a central mechanism through which learning, sensemaking, and sustained change are enacted in practice.

2.3.4 Leadership Reinforcement and Organisational Learning Systems

Leadership plays a central role in shaping the conditions under which change is sustained. Oakland and Tanner (2007) argue that leaders are responsible for establishing purpose, aligning strategic intent with operational realities and reinforcing new practices until they become organisational knowledge. Without consistent leadership reinforcement, change initiatives risk losing momentum once initial enthusiasm fades. In such contexts, change ambassadors are left to align ambitious leadership narratives with operational realities, often without sufficient authority, reinforcement, or organisational backing.

Alvesson and Svenningsson (2015) provide a critical perspective on cultural change by showing how difficult it is to alter deeply embedded meanings and routines. In their case, observing a large-scale cultural change programme, leaders communicated an ambitious cultural vision supported by symbolic activities, yet employees experienced the programme as disconnected from everyday work. As a result, engagement remained largely symbolic, with new language adopted but behaviours left unchanged. In this type of context, change ambassadors can't operate effectively in translating ambition into real outcome. The change initiative existed on surface level but unsuccessfully altered the foundation of the organisational culture. Organisational learning was further constrained by limited opportunities for experimentation and reflection. Without time, space, and reinforcement for learning, cultural change remained abstract rather than enacted. With no structural system allowing for ways to inspire, change ambassadors impact becomes highly ineffective.

These findings reinforce the argument that culture cannot be changed through communication alone. Sustaining change requires leaders to model desired behaviours, adjust structures, and create continuous learning loops that allow new practices to be tested, adapted, and normalised. This example once again emphasises the relevance of change ambassador and their role of bridging vision with reality. As mentioned previously, having legitimate considered change ambassadors included in transformations bridges the gap between vision and reality and is an important function to consider when planning for change.

2.4 Theoretical Framework Used in This Thesis

This section outlines the theoretical framework that synthesises the core theories presented in this chapter. As illustrated in Figure 2.1, the framework conceptualises sustaining organisational change as a socially embedded process, driven by the everyday practices of change ambassadors and their capacity to influence others through informal, social and emotional mechanisms. At the centre of the framework is the role of change ambassadors, whose influence extends beyond formal authority and is enacted through daily interactions, sensemaking and relational work. Sustaining change is thus understood not as a linear or purely technical outcome, but as an ongoing process. The framework further emphasises that the effectiveness of change ambassadorship is contingent upon organisational conditions, which can either enable or constrain ambassadors' capacity to exert influence. Importantly, these conditions are not static; they evolve across different phases of the change process, shaping

both how the ambassador role is enacted and how its impact develops over time. The framework explains how change can be sustained beyond initial implementation.

Sustained change is conceptualised as the outcome of interaction between three analytical dimensions. First, ambassadorial practices capture what change ambassadors do in practice. Second, social and emotional influence mechanisms explain how ambassadorial influence works. Third, organisational conditions shape whether ambassadorship is enabled or constrained through culture, structure, leadership reinforcement, and support systems.

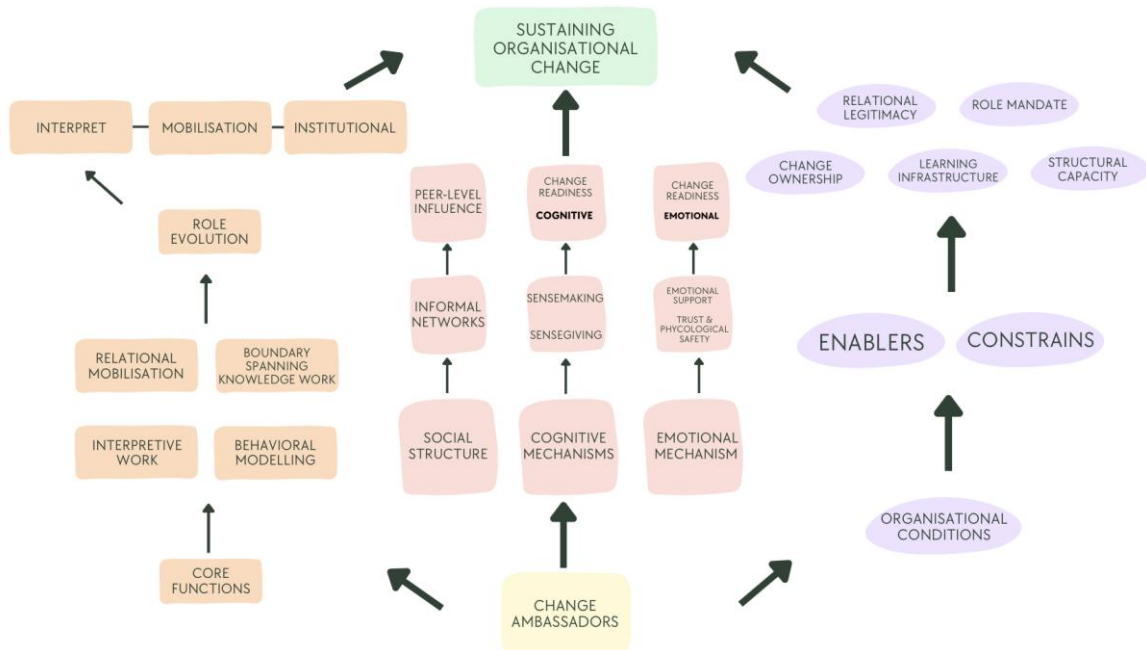


Figure 2.1: Illustration of the Theoretical Framework.

3 Methodology

This chapter presents the methodological approach adopted to address the aim and research questions of this thesis. The purpose of the study was to explore how organisational change can be sustained through people, with particular focus on the role of super users as operational change ambassadors within a large-scale transformation context. As the study seeks to develop an in-depth understanding of experiences, perceptions, and organisational conditions influencing change sustainment, a qualitative research approach was considered appropriate.

The chapter begins by outlining the overall research design and methodological orientation. Thereafter, the case context and research process are described, followed by an account of the pre-study and the main empirical data collection through interviews. The subsequent section explains the analytical approach applied to the empirical material. Finally, considerations related to research quality, ethical aspects, and the use of digital and AI-based tools are presented to enhance transparency and credibility.

3.1 Research Design and Methodological Approach

This chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted to address the aim and research questions of this thesis. The purpose of the study was to explore how organisational change can be sustained through people, with particular emphasis on the role of super users as operational change ambassadors within a large-scale transformation programme. Given the exploratory nature of this aim, a qualitative research strategy was considered most appropriate.

Qualitative research is particularly suitable for investigating complex organisational phenomena, as it enables in-depth understanding of how individuals interpret, experience, and make sense of their social reality (Bryman & Bell, 2019). In this study, sustaining organisational change was not approached as a purely technical or structural challenge, but as a socially constructed process shaped by interactions, perceptions, and organisational conditions. A qualitative approach therefore allowed the researchers to capture the meanings attributed to change by individuals occupying different organisational roles.

The study followed an inductive research approach, in which theoretical insights were developed progressively through engagement with the empirical material rather than derived from predefined hypotheses. As described by Eisenhardt (1989), inductive research supports theory-building by allowing patterns, relationships, and tensions to emerge from rich empirical data. While existing literature on organisational change, leadership, and learning informed the overall research design, the analytical framework was refined throughout the research process based on insights gained from the empirical findings.

In addition, the study adopted an exploratory orientation. Given the limited empirical research focusing specifically on super users as long-term change enablers, particularly within large-scale digital transformation programmes, an exploratory approach enabled openness to unexpected insights and supported the development of nuanced understanding of the organisational conditions influencing change sustainment.

3.2 Case Description

This thesis is based on a qualitative case study conducted within a large multinational organisation, referred to as the Case Company. The organisation was undergoing a comprehensive transformation programme aimed at introducing new ways of working, supported by digital systems and revised operational processes across multiple business units and geographical contexts. Central to the transformation was the introduction of super users, who were assigned responsibility for supporting implementation, facilitating knowledge sharing, and acting as local points of contact between the change programme and daily operations. While super users were formally positioned as operational support resources, their role evolved to include broader ambassadorial responsibilities related to sensemaking, translation, and ongoing reinforcement of change.

A case study approach was considered suitable, as it enables in-depth exploration of contemporary organisational phenomena within their real-life context (Stake, 1995). Studying the super user role within its organisational setting allowed the researchers to capture contextual dynamics, interdependencies, and variations across organisational levels that would have been difficult to observe through other research designs.

3.3 Research Process

The research process followed an iterative and partly overlapping structure, combining sequential and parallel activities throughout the thesis work. Initially, a pre-study was conducted to gain a broad understanding of the organisational context and to support the formulation of the research aim. This was followed by a main empirical phase consisting of semi-structured interviews. Data analysis and literature review were conducted in parallel, allowing theoretical perspectives to be refined in response to emerging empirical insights.

This iterative approach reflects the logic of qualitative research, where data collection and analysis often inform one another continuously rather than following a strictly linear sequence (Bryman & Bell, 2019). An overview of the research process is illustrated in Figure 3.1, which outlines the key phases from initial problem formulation to final analysis and conclusion.

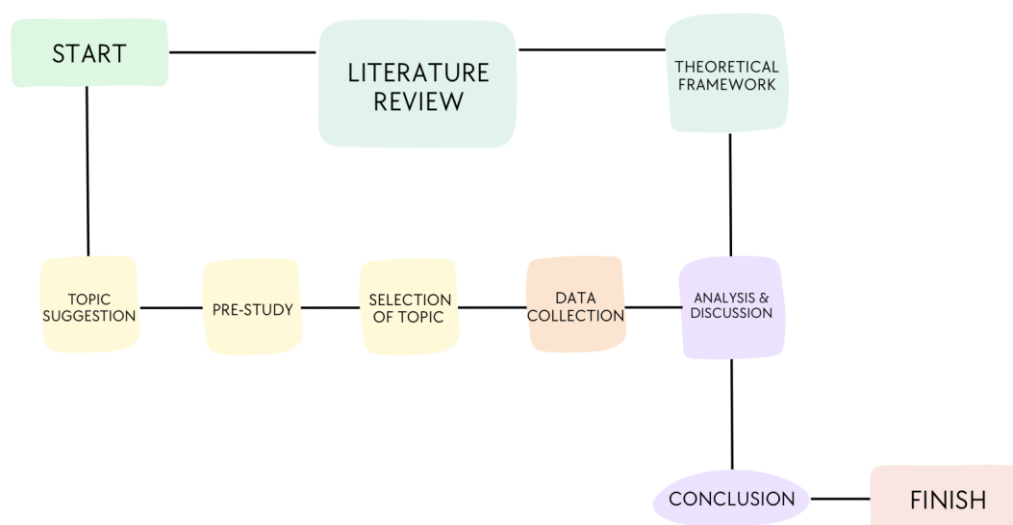


Figure 3.1: Illustration showing the research process.

3.4 Pre-study

Prior to the main empirical investigation, a pre-study was conducted to develop an initial understanding of the organisational change context at the Case Company. The purpose of the pre-study was to determine three key components: identifying central challenges related to sustaining change, to explore preliminary perceptions of the super user role and to support delimitation of the study's focus.

The pre-study consisted of three individual semi-structured interviews with representatives from the Change Programme and the HR function. These interviews provided early insights into organisational expectations, perceived challenges and areas of uncertainty related to change sustainment. The pre-study did not aim to generate empirical findings for analysis, but rather to inform the design of the main study. Insights from the pre-study contributed to refining the research aim, shaping the research questions and supporting the development of the interview guide used in the main data collection phase.

3.5 Data Collection – Interview Study

This section outlines how the empirical data for the study were collected. It provides an overview of the interview-based data collection strategy and introduces the rationale behind participant selection and interview design. The section is divided into subsections describing the sampling approach and the execution of the semi-structured interviews.

3.5.1 Selection of Participants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on individuals directly involved in or affected by the Change Programme. This approach enabled inclusion of informants with relevant experience and insight into both strategic and operational aspects of the transformation.

To capture multiple perspectives, interviewees were selected from three primary groups: programme managers responsible for the overall transformation, line managers responsible for daily operations, and super users actively involved in supporting change locally. Including participants from different organisational levels and geographical contexts enhanced the study's ability to capture variation in experiences and interpretations of sustained change. This approach aligns with Stake's (1995) emphasis on selecting participants who can provide rich, contextualised understanding of the studied phenomenon.

3.5.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

The main empirical phase consisted of 23 semi-structured interviews conducted over a period of approximately two months. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as they provide a balance between consistency and flexibility, enabling comparability across interviews while allowing participants to elaborate on relevant issues (Bryman & Bell, 2019).

Interviews were conducted both physically at the Case Company and digitally via Microsoft Teams, depending on participant location and availability. Both authors participated in all interviews, with one leading the discussion and the other taking supplementary notes. Interview durations ranged between approximately 30 and 60 minutes, with an average length of around 50 minutes. An overview of the conducted interviews, including participants' roles, dates, and duration, is presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Overview of the interviews conducted.

Stage	Interviewee	Roles	Date	Duration
Pre-Study	A	Programme Manager	2025.09.23	50
	B	Programme Manager	2025.09.24	60
	C	Programme Manager	2025.09.25	40
Main-Study	D	Line Manager	2025.10.22	40
	E	Line Manager	2025.10.23	40
	F	Line Manager	2025.10.27	45
	G	Super User	2025.10.27	50
	H	Super User	2025.10.27	40
	I	Super User	2025.10.29	50
	J	Super User	2025.10.29	60
	K	Programme Manager	2025.10.31	50
	L	Super User	2025.11.04	50
	M	Super User	2025.11.05	50
	N	Programme Manager	2025.11.05	40
	O	Super User	2025.11.06	30
	P	Super User	2025.11.06	55
	Q	Super User	2025.11.11	50
R	Super User	2025.11.11	40	
Workshop	S	Programme Manager	2025.11.14	40
	T	Line Manager	2025.11.25	35
	U	Programme Manager	2025.12.17	60
Workshop	V	Programme Manager	2025.12.17	60
	C	Programme Manager	2025.12.17	60

Two versions of the interview guide were used, adapted slightly depending on whether the interviewee held a managerial role or acted as a super user (see Appendices A and B). The core thematic areas remained consistent to support analytical comparability. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw and the anonymised use of their contributions.

3.6 Data Analysis

This section explains how the collected empirical material was analysed. It describes the analytical steps undertaken from transcription to interpretation and clarifies how thematic analysis was applied to identify patterns across the dataset. The subsections detail the preparation of the empirical material and the analytical logic underlying the coding and theme development process.

3.6.1 Transcription and Preparation

All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent. Recordings were transcribed using an AI transcription tool available on *Chalmers AI Portal* website. After using the transcription tool, the texts were manually reviewed by both authors of this report to ensure accuracy and contextual understanding. This also allowed for discussions on how to interpret the gathered data. Transcriptions formed the basis for subsequent analysis.

3.6.2 Thematic Analysis

The empirical material was analysed using thematic analysis, following the principles outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis was selected as it provides a flexible yet systematic approach for identifying patterns of meaning across qualitative data.

The analysis involved several iterative stages. Initially, transcripts were read repeatedly to develop familiarity with the data. Thereafter, initial codes were generated to capture recurring ideas, experiences and perceptions. These codes were subsequently reviewed and clustered into broader themes representing shared patterns across interviews. Throughout the analysis, continuous movement between empirical material and relevant literature supported refinement of themes and strengthened analytical coherence. The resulting themes formed the basis for the structure of the findings chapter, as seen in Figure 3.2.

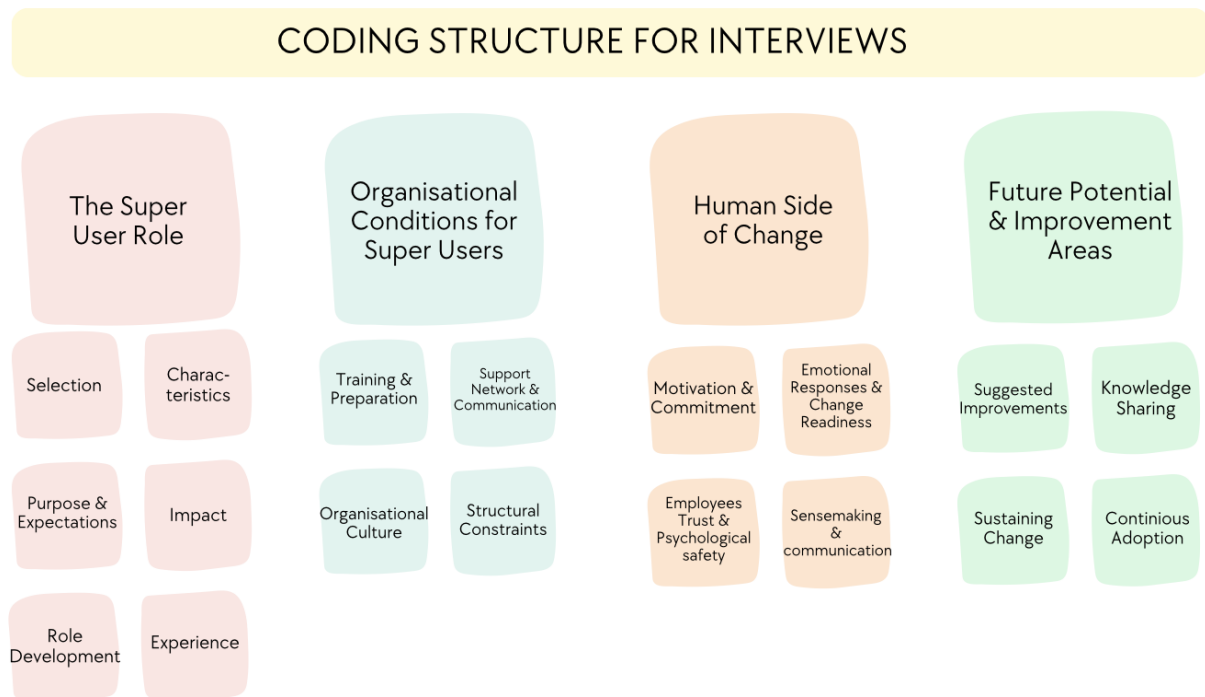


Figure 3.2: Illustration of the coding structure including both themes and sub-themes.

3.7 Research Quality

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study, several measures were applied in accordance with established qualitative research criteria (Bryman & Bell, 2019). Credibility was supported through prolonged engagement with the case organisation and inclusion of multiple participant groups. Transferability was addressed by providing detailed contextual descriptions, enabling readers to assess applicability to similar organisational settings.

Dependability was strengthened through transparent documentation of the research process, including interview guides and coding structures. Confirmability was supported through reflexive discussions between the researchers throughout data analysis, reducing the influence of individual bias.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles guided all stages of the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided informed consent prior to participation. Anonymity was ensured by removing identifiable information from transcripts and reported material.

All data were stored securely and handled in accordance with GDPR requirements. The Case Company is not identified in this thesis to ensure confidentiality and compliance with non-disclosure agreements.

3.9 Use of Digital and AI-Based Tools

Several digital tools were used to support the research process. Chalmers AI Portal was used solely for transcription of interview recordings. Although having complete full text transcriptions, each interview was re-listened to, making sure that the gathered information was correct. For transparency, AI-based language tools, including ChatGPT, Copilot, Grammarly and DeepL were used to support language refinement, structuring of text and grammatical consistency. This allowed the thesis to consist of a well-written and with unison language when combining the work of the two authors.

Litmaps is another tool which illustrated the most relevant literature connected to the topic in this thesis. This program allowed finding connected articles used between authors making the mapping of the literature more illustrative and holistically clear. In addition, Anara was also used as a literature research tool which assisted in translating key components of articles which then could be interconnected in the analytical context of the report.

Nevertheless, the authors emphasize being solely responsible for the production, structure and outcome of this report, but with improvements in grammar, flow and coherence, using technology as a strong tool used for increased clarity throughout this report, as well as improving the research process overall.

4 Results

This chapter of the thesis presents the interview findings from the 23 interviews, organised into four themes. Super Users as Change Ambassadors, Organisational Conditions Shaping the Impact of Super Users, The Human Side of Sustaining Change and finally, Super Users Role in Knowledge Sharing and Continuous Adaptation. The people interviewed included *super users, line managers and programme managers*. Although *end users* were not interviewed directly, their perspectives are reflected in this chapter through experiences described by the interviewees, particularly super users, who frequently referred to their interactions with and observations of end users.

4.1 Theme 1 – Super Users as Change Ambassadors

Theme 1 presents the findings related to the Super User role within the Change Programme. It first describes how super users were selected and the characteristics and forms of influence associated with those who were perceived as suitable in practice. The theme further outlines the purpose and expectations of the role as well as how these evolved over time. Finally, it highlights the influence of super users on adoption, stability, and continuity.

4.1.1 Becoming a Super User - Selection Processes, Role Fit, Characteristics and Informal Authority

Across the interviews, super users were mainly appointed by line managers or the change programme team, most often without formal application or interview processes. Although formal role descriptions and predefined selection criteria existed, selection was informal in practice. Decisions were shaped by managerial judgement, willingness to take on the role, and operational constraints rather than by structured recruitment procedures. A small number of super users self-nominated, driven by curiosity or a desire to contribute.

A recurring challenge concerned the difficulty of releasing highly skilled employees from daily operations. As a result, availability often outweighed ideal role fit. As one line manager explained, “you had to play with the cards you got.” In some teams, suitable candidates were considered obvious, whereas in others limited choice reduced alignment between the role’s demands and individual capabilities. Several super users questioned whether line managers always had full insight into who was most trusted within teams and suggested that peer nomination could support selection. At the same time, managers cautioned against selection based solely on peer nomination and instead advocated a balanced approach combining managerial judgement, peer insight, and dialogue with potential candidates.

Across all interview groups, participants emphasised the value of appointing more than one super user per team in order to share responsibility and balance different strengths. In practice, this was often restricted by limited resources. Super users who worked alone described the role as particularly demanding, both emotionally and in terms of workload. As one super user noted, “it’s so vulnerable when it’s one person... many have felt bad because they couldn’t keep up.” Several questioned why more super users had not been trained to support one another.

Super users who were considered a good fit were consistently described as combining strong interpersonal skills with sufficient technical and process knowledge. Formal qualifications were viewed as less important than informal authority, trust, and the ability to influence others without relying on hierarchy. Age and seniority were also seen as less important than credibility, courage, and a willingness to engage with uncertainty. Line managers frequently stated that they selected “their best people,” referring to individuals with strong process understanding, peer trust, and openness to change, while acknowledging that different teams required different profiles.

Informal authority emerged as a defining feature of the super user role. Super users were trusted and respected, which enabled them to influence attitudes and behaviours across organisational levels. Empathy and trustworthiness were considered essential when supporting end users through uncertainty, reinforcing the view that credibility mattered more than formal position. Managers also highlighted the importance of selecting super users with a positive attitude towards change, as such individuals were seen as especially influential in shaping local engagement.

High-performing super users were further characterised by proactivity and curiosity. They actively sought information, handled uncertainty, and took initiative rather than waiting for instructions. Analytical ability and the confidence to challenge solutions that did not fit local needs were also valued, as was comfort in interacting with senior stakeholders. While interpersonal skills were emphasised, technical understanding remained necessary to validate processes, train others, and identify dependencies. Most interviewees described effectiveness as a balance between the two. As one super user explained, “it’s fifty-fifty between soft and technical skills... if you don’t have the technical skills, it becomes more difficult to train others... if you have the technical skills but can’t talk to people, you won’t be able to spread the word.”

Resilience and emotional stability were highlighted as critical, particularly during prolonged periods of uncertainty. Super users were expected to remain calm, maintain engagement, and manage resistance while supporting others. Many also stressed the need to adjust communication and training to different learning styles. Taken together, these findings present the super user as an informal leader whose effectiveness depends less on expertise alone and more on social skills such as building trust, motivating others, explaining change, and guiding end users through the change process.

Expectations of the role were often described using the metaphor of a “Swiss army knife,” reflecting assumptions of wide-ranging skills and constant availability. This raised concerns about whether such expectations were sustainable. As one manager of the change programme team questioned, “Is the ask for super users too big?” Despite these concerns, interviewees consistently stressed the importance of the role. As another programme manager summarised, “without the super users, nothing would have happened... they are the anchor to success.”

4.1.2 Enacting the Role - Purpose, Expectations and Role Expansion Over Time

Across all interviews, the super user role was described as central to both the implementation and long-term anchoring of the Change Programme. Rather than being limited to technical support, super users acted as key links between the Change Programme and the wider organisation. Their responsibilities included explaining changes, coordinating activities,

providing training, and acting as change ambassadors. Super users were positioned as early adopters who received access to information and training ahead of others, allowing them to prepare end users and support the transition at local level. Given the scale and complexity of the Change Programme, involving the entire organisation at once was seen as neither practical nor effective. Super users therefore played a crucial intermediary role. As one programme manager explained, “The right super users can spark a chain reaction that helps the whole organisation move in the same direction.”

A defining feature of the role was its two-way communication function. Upwards, super users shared local experiences, operational challenges, and potential risks with the Change Programme team. Downwards, they translated overall programme goals into clear and concrete implications for everyday work, helping colleagues understand what would change and why. This translation work was repeatedly described as essential for reducing uncertainty and managing resistance. As one super user noted, “my role is to take away the fear... fear creates conflict and resistance.” Through this ongoing exchange, super users also helped assess whether new processes were workable in practice.

In addition, super users were expected to train colleagues and act as the first point of support before, during, and after implementation. This responsibility often continued well beyond the initial deployment, with many super users handling ongoing questions, solving problems, and contributing to further improvements. The role was also closely linked to ambassadorship. Super users were expected to model desired behaviours, build acceptance for the change, and actively influence attitudes within their teams. As several interviewees described, super users were “drivers of the car, not passengers,” expected to explain the reasons for change while responding to local concerns. However, the wide range of expectations placed on super users also created tensions, particularly as the role expanded in scope and intensity over time.

Despite general agreement on the importance of the role, interviewees across all groups described significant challenges. Super users were often seen as “all-knowing experts” and became the default point of contact, which many found overwhelming when it did not match their own sense of competence. These expectations created pressure, self-doubt, and feelings of isolation, especially when super users were expected to manage without support. As one super user explained, “it’s overwhelming to be seen as an expert when you don’t feel like one.” Others described being told that they “shouldn’t need any help because we are super users,” which left them feeling “very alone and abandoned.” Several super users also highlighted a gap between formal expectations and their actual experience. Although the role was initially described as alternating between part-time and full-time periods, in practice it often developed into a near full-time commitment for most of the phase. The workload exceeded what had been communicated prior to accepting the role, with some super users concluding that the complexity of the role had been underestimated by the change programme team. Furthermore, several reported that they had never seen a formal role description and instead described the role as “a journey of discovery.”

Over time, the role became more structured and better supported. Clearer documentation, more standardised routines, stronger peer networks, and dedicated spaces for super users contributed to a gradual strengthening of the role and helped build a shared sense of identity and community among super users. As they gained experience, several super users described a shift in how their

role was perceived, moving from being seen mainly as technical experts to acting more as mentors who supported colleagues as they developed similar levels of knowledge.

Despite these improvements, role boundaries remained unclear. Super user duties were often combined with regular operational work without backfill, meaning that core tasks were not reassigned while super users carried out their additional responsibilities. This led to ongoing time pressure and limited capacity. Information overload and unclear expectations further increased strain, forcing super users to find their own ways of coping with uncertainty. Both super users and programme managers linked these challenges to limited understanding among line managers of what the role involved. As one interviewee noted, “line managers didn’t fully understand the responsibilities a super user actually possesses.”

The emotional demands of the role were also considerable. Super users described carrying a strong sense of responsibility while needing to appear confident and reassuring to others. This highlighted the emotional effort involved in supporting colleagues through uncertainty and resistance. Although the role became clearer over time through experience and peer support, uncertainty remained around its long-term expectations and continuation after implementation. While the role was intended to continue beyond implementation, super users expressed mixed views about its duration, questioning whether they were “super users for life or not?”

4.1.3 Shaping Change Outcomes - Super Users’ Influence on Adoption, Stability and Continuity

Across the interviews, super users were consistently described as having a strong influence on how the change was understood, carried out, and sustained over time. Their impact extended beyond the initial implementation phase to shaping emotional responses, everyday use of the new system and longer-term stability. By adopting the system early and demonstrating its practical value, super users acted as role models and helped reduce fear and resistance, creating a reinforcing effect in which engagement gradually spread among end users.

In practice, super users helped turn abstract change into everyday routines by explaining what the change meant for daily work, reassuring colleagues and solving practical problems as they arose. Where super users were present and involved, super users described how end users showed clearer understanding of the change and smoother transitions. In contrast, limited super user presence was associated with greater uncertainty and disruption, which later required additional support resources to restore stability. After implementation, super users were viewed as important for maintaining new ways of working and preventing gradual drift away from agreed processes. Although, when a couple of super users left their roles without formal handovers, locally embedded knowledge was partially lost, which weakened continuity and increased reliance on reactive problem-solving.

Despite their influence, the super user role was rarely formally evaluated. In the absence of clear assessment methods, both line managers and programme managers relied on indirect signs, such as reduced confusion or smoother workflows, to judge effectiveness. Super users themselves assessed their impact through everyday interactions, viewing increased confidence among end users as a key indicator of success. Feedback from end users was limited, and feedback practices varied across the organisation. In several cases, immediate operational pressures took priority over reflection on less visible aspects of the role, as ongoing “firefighting” left little time for structured feedback. Members of the Change Programme team

acknowledged that end-user feedback could provide valuable insight into how well super users supported daily work. However, such feedback was usually considered only after implementation, when super users were already established in their roles. As a result, feedback mainly supported gradual improvement rather than early adjustment or more informed selection of super users.

4.2 Theme 2 – Organisational Conditions Shaping the Impact of Super Users

This theme captures how organisational conditions shaped super users' ability to support and sustain change at the line organisation level. Based on interview data, the findings highlight both enablers and barriers that constrained super users from embedding new ways of working, as well as factors that allowed for engagement and performance among both super users and end users in their work.

4.2.1 Organisational Constrains and Support Mechanisms

Structural conditions were the most frequently cited barriers across the dataset. Nearly all interviewees described how resource allocation and role design constrained their ability to sustain change. A recurring issue was workload underestimation. Super users were often allocated 20–30% of their time for super user tasks but reported frequently working for a longer duration, at times in the range around 60–80% with many super users describing the role as “impossible without overtime”. Overloaded work became particularly apparent during the *Testing Stage*, where super users practiced and simulated how to apply the new ways of working, before fully implementing the change in the local line organisation.

Several super users described holding both their regular role and the super user role simultaneously. This allocation was deliberate from the programme team, making use of already existing resources, often depending on a limited backfill, meaning no additional resources or people assigned to cover up for their ordinary position. One explained that “there was no backfill because the change in my area wasn't considered big”, which created pressure on the amount of working for super users when the programme team demanded full attention. Line managers were also described as surprised by the scope of the role, with one super user noting that “line managers are shocked by the percentage of time required”, with several reports of super users working over 100% during several phases. A small number of super users stressed the importance of more deliberate planning at business-unit level, particularly regarding the number of super users required to cover operational complexity effectively.

In some cases, an additional supporting role was introduced known as a *deputy*. Having a deputy working next to the super user assisted in answering the first line of questions from end users which often conflicted with other urgent matters. Having this type of supporting role could therefor improve the super users' position when it comes to workload and encourages more dedication towards more prioritised tasks. Another type of support function was the introduction of a *Global Super user expert*, as explained by a line manager. This role was repeatedly praised in one business unit as “crucial support”, providing clear direction and escalation paths. Uneven resources once again became apparent since only one business unit had access to this type of role, experienced as a great enabler. On the other hand, other business units with limited access to this type of support function instead experienced it as a barrier. One programme manager explained how it was due to difficulties in finding the right candidates for

this type of role in combination with limited resources as of why it wasn't implemented as a universal solution.

Misalignment between line duties and programme directives were also occurring with unclear responsibilities between global and local teams widely mentioned. Local issues were sometimes dismissed as resistance rather than system gaps, while some sites experienced difficulties with changes required for global standardisation. Participants highlighted the need for more site-specific support, stating that "each factory needs a specific approach" since not all solutions in the change implementation were directly applicable. This resulted in variations for super users and their degree of translating standardised directives into site specific solutions. Another difference in the setting for super users was the difference in market size which seemed to influence the ability to address improvement potential. Some super users noted that suggestions from business units in smaller markets risked being stalled or rejected if they conflicted with priorities in larger markets, where programme leaders focused on ensuring smooth progress.

Limitations in information also acted as major barrier for super users and their way to receive and convey change implementation. Firstly, long process instructions was a recurring theme expressed by several super users. Some super users and line managers argued that instructions needed to be thorough, while others felt that excessive details contributed to overload. This created tension, with some support functions suggesting that super users could solve issues themselves "if they just read the instructions more carefully". Opinions therefore differed among both managers and super users which in general highlighted the dilemma of finding the right balance of information. Connecting to this, fragmented information sharing further hindered sensemaking. One super user described how information "never got to everyone at the same time", leading to uncertainty since it resulted in teams not being on the same page. Some minor discussions emerged from both a manager and some super users how the potential of AI could assist in handling the information flows. This could be a potential tool in simplifying and structuring information. These tools were speculated to be a way to make information more accessible and reduce cognitive load, particularly for super users navigating large volumes of material.

4.2.2 Networks and Ways of Communication

Support networks were consistently described as a central enabler for conducting the super user role, although their functional effectiveness varied considerably between super users. Super user networks existed both as a formal and informal way of interacting and exchanging progress and information among super users in the same phase. The formal setting consisted of digital meetings frequently occurring, often biweekly or several times a month. These meetings had participating super users who each was part of the current phase or business unit undergoing the Change Programme directive together with programme team to follow up transformation progress. This way of communicating the change was generally described as helpful for sharing updates, discussing deviations, and seeking clarification. At the same time, approximately one-third of super users described formal meetings as "too large" or "mostly consisting of presentations", expressing a lack of interactive activities and options for knowledge sharing, limiting the meetings practical value. Some super users felt that it was "hard to know who the other super users really were and what they did", which reduced opportunities for problem solving by immediate contact. Cultural patterns also emerged, as both super users and programme managers noted that super users were less likely to speak up when participating in designated super user meetings held in large virtual settings. This behaviour was attributed to

cultural differences and individual communication preferences, particularly among those who felt more comfortable engaging in smaller, familiar forums. As a result, these super users' perspectives and concerns were less likely to be voiced in formal meetings, creating a barrier to knowledge sharing, collective learning and effective support during the change process.

Among super users themselves, the network functioned as a vital support system. Participants described it as a space for transparency and emotional reassurance: "we can be transparent with each other," and "this strong network helps us support each other." Highlighting it as a positive platform for the super user role. Similarly, some participants requested that meetings should include more explicit attention to wellbeing and interpersonal dynamics. One interviewee reflected positively on moments where teams actively checked in on each other, stating: "This I haven't encountered before, but in this project, we really cared about each other. I do miss this and hope it can be more involved in the future.", hinting towards a sense of social safety in though periods of the change transformation.

Because of these positive aspects, maintaining the super user network post-implementation was one of the most frequently suggested improvement areas. While these networks were described as highly valuable during implementation, many super users felt they dissolved too quickly afterwards. Several managers and super users proposed regular follow-ups, scheduled check-ins, or formalised time allocation to keep the network active and accessible. Prolonging this interaction was seen as a measure to sustain the change implementation with one super user suggesting how "they should kind of keep the super user network alive... if you have a session now and then, it will stay alive. But that is not happening.", pointing out missed potential in embedding the change outcome with more active participation of super users in post-implementation stages.

Another support structure enabling development of super user impact was the site visits. This type of interaction with other sites or parts of the organisation with experience of earlier implementation phases enabled cross-site knowledge sharing which further supported learning among super users by helping them conceptualise the scale and complexity of the change. In situations like this, most super users experienced moments of clarity by examining solutions hand on and connecting this to their own environment. One super user reflected that "when I started, it wasn't on the map that I would talk to someone from another department", yet collaboration later became "very important and interesting". Cross-site collaboration was described as essential from both managers and super users for identifying shared challenges, harmonising solutions, and avoiding redundant work. It was discussed how future waves could avoid early struggles by building on documented experiences from earlier sites. In addition to the practical value of cross-site collaboration, many super users highlighted the enjoyment of working closely with peers across the organisation, with collective problem-solving fostering a strong team identity. Another positive aspect promoting strong company culture.

When it comes to formal problem-solving function, a support ticket system was used where super users could submit reports or "tickets" containing a problem with relevant details in hope of receiving a solution or make the addressed matter universally known. Experiences with the support ticket system were occasionally described as frustrating. One super user explained how "you make a fault report ... and it ends up with someone who wants more feedback from me, but I don't know why it's happening", resulting in stalled problem-solving. In contrast, participants who could address issues directly through informal contacts described quicker

resolution and reduced dependence on the ticket system. One super user noted that being able to “handle problems hands-on” often prevented the need to create tickets altogether. This is why informal networks were consistently described to be a more effective support mechanism for super users in some cases. Team chats, ad-hoc calls and personal relationships enabled rapid problem-solving and emotional support which could decrease the stalling time when awaiting further assistance from centralised support networks. Because of this, several super users relied heavily on informal support networks with one super user elaborating how they “could call each other any time, that’s what got us through”, hinting towards benefits for super users in utilising their informal networks.

4.2.3 Preparation and Training

Training and preparation emerged as one of the most frequently discussed factors influencing super users’ ability to perform their role. Both programme managers and super users emphasised that initial introductions, including technical SAP training and clarification of role expectations, were essential for enabling super users to take on their responsibilities. At the same time, training was described as both a critical enabler and a significant barrier, depending largely on its timing, format, and alignment with system readiness.

Across interviews, super users consistently highlighted a lack of clarity during the early phases of the Change Programme. Initial training was often described as vague, theory-heavy, and insufficiently connected to practical work tasks. As a result, many participants explained that meaningful learning occurred primarily through hands-on experience rather than formal instruction. Nearly all super users emphasised that genuine understanding developed only once they were able to work directly in the system during the Testing Stage. Prior to this, training was perceived as overly abstract, frequently relying on slide-based and conceptual explanations that were insufficient for developing operational competence. Learning was instead described as a process of discovery, as one super user noted how “60–70% of the learning happens at work, while doing the actual work,” while another super user reinforced this by stating, “When you do it yourself, that’s when it becomes clear. Until then, it’s just theory.”

As a result, many super users reported feeling underprepared or overloaded when first assuming the role. Participants suggested improvements such as earlier clarification of responsibilities, more realistic forecasting of workload, and training that combined technical instruction with facilitation and communication skills. These competencies were viewed as increasingly important as super users were expected not only to understand the system, but also to support colleagues and explain new ways of working.

Limited prior exposure to SAP further intensified early uncertainty. Several super users described entering the system environment as overwhelming, particularly given the responsibility associated with supporting others. As one interviewee reflected, “Many of us had never worked in SAP... just entering that environment was like, wow,” adding that accountability felt heavy because “if something went wrong, it was on you.” This lack of familiarity made it difficult for super users to identify their own learning needs, as they did not yet understand what the role would require. Some also described emotional pressure linked to early expectations to identify system gaps, captured by one participant’s reflection of “how can we know what’s missing when we don’t even understand it yet?”

One line manager involved in the Change Programme highlighted the importance of structuring learning into manageable levels, such as basic, intermediate, and advanced usage, to avoid cognitive overload and support gradual adoption. As the manager explained, “they (super users) don’t need to know everything from the start. If you tell them everything, they will be overwhelmed and will not use it.” This perspective reinforced the importance of balancing information flow to support learning without creating stress or disengagement.

Despite these challenges, both managers and super users involved in later implementation phases reported noticeable improvements in training quality. Updated materials were described as more structured and supportive, reflecting learning within the programme team over time. However, even among these participants, a persistent gap between training content and real work situations remained. This indicates that, although preparation improved across phases, alignment between theoretical instruction and everyday practice was never fully achieved. Super users with experience from earlier phases described their role as evolving over time, with confidence and effectiveness increasing as knowledge accumulated through practice. Similarly, members of the programme team reflected a learning process in identifying suitable super users and providing more relevant information at appropriate stages. Together, these accounts illustrate that both individual capability and organisational support developed gradually, reinforcing the view that effective super user preparation is not a one-time activity, but rather an ongoing process shaped through experience.

Around half of the interviewees, both super users and line managers, noted the absence of training related to facilitation, communication, or leadership, despite the super user role consisting of leadership skills to successfully guide, support, and influence end users. Several super users described the role as being “more of a leadership job than a technical one”, yet training focused almost exclusively on system processes. This gap was also acknowledged by the Change Programme team who highlighted the need for clearer guidance on how to enact the super user role. One Change Programme manager described that “now there are more guides, more automation, more documentation... educationally the organisation has learned something, but there are still gaps in support around how do I become a super user, how do I handle uncertainty?” pointing out how there is a lot that has been learned throughout the change journey and how that knowledge is taught, but with room for more potential in developing personal skills which could benefit both the super users and the receiving end users.

4.2.4 Organisational Culture

Organisational culture was widely described by interviewees as both enabling and constraining the change process. A large majority highlighted cultural characteristics associated with openness, trust, and cooperation, often linked to what participants referred to as a “Nordic influence”. Flat hierarchies and managerial approachability were frequently described as key strengths. As one interviewee expressed it, “we work together... we know we have challenges, but we are working towards them together,” illustrating a collaborative climate where dialogue across roles was encouraged. On the other hand, while collaborative decision-making supported inclusion and dialogue, several managers argued that it sometimes delayed progress. Some managers expressed frustration that “too much time is spent aligning,” suggesting that in certain situations clearer direction should be prioritised to avoid loss of time and direction. Agreeing with this take, a few super users noted that during periods of high pressure, it could be helpful if the organisation explicitly stated, “this is how we do it now, end of discussion,” as compared to having tedious discussions resulting in losing valuable time.

The close interaction between super users, end users and line managers also contributed to a learning-oriented environment in which experimentation and imperfection were generally accepted. Several participants described a mindset where mistakes were viewed as part of the process rather than as failures. One super user explained how “maybe we didn’t do it right, but then we can improve next time... we need this learning culture.” This orientation enabled teams to adapt gradually and supported super users in navigating uncertainty, particularly during early stages of system use and new ways of working. Ultimately, the super users who expressed the most satisfaction of their role impact often correlated this outcome with close collaboration and involvement of the line manager. Early involvement of line managers was perceived as critical for aligning expectations, legitimising the super user role, and preparing local teams for upcoming changes. Where this engagement was lacking, super users often described feeling isolated or uncertain about priorities.

Despite a strong overarching organisational culture, variations across countries, business units, and legacy organisational structures shaped how the change was interpreted and enacted in practice. While the overall foundation was described as rooted in Nordic values, several super users and managers noted that local cultural characteristics often became more visible in daily operations. As one programme manager described it “send the same PowerPoint to 20 countries and you’ll have 20 interpretations” which pointed out how each site could interpret the provided information in various ways depending on the contexts. These differences were also linked to variations in digital maturity, decision-making traditions and legacy ways of working. Some business units were described as more decentralised and accustomed to autonomy, while others relied more heavily on hierarchical guidance. Such variation affected readiness for change and influenced how clearly expectations were understood by end users and super users alike.

Several employees, both managers and super users, reflected on broader cultural shifts within the organisation over time. These interviewees described a growing volume of information and increasing pace of work which made large-scale change initiatives more difficult to absorb. One super user explained that “the pressure on you as an employee... what you have to take in has increased enormously,” indicating how cognitive load had become a persistent challenge during transformation efforts.

Emotional aspects of the change process were also closely connected to cultural expectations of responsibility and performance. Some super users described a strong sense of duty associated with their role, particularly when supporting others. One super user stated that “if something went wrong, you felt an intense weight of responsibility in that position.” Others linked this emotional strain to the wider organisational context, noting that expectations had intensified over time. As one interviewee reflected, “the demands on you as a worker have grown significantly... a decade ago, things moved at a much steadier pace.”

Taken together, the findings show that organisational culture shaped both the conditions under which change unfolded and the everyday experiences of super users. While openness, trust, and collaboration supported learning and engagement, cultural variation, decision-making norms, and increasing organisational pressure simultaneously created constraints that influenced how change was lived and sustained in practice.

4.3 Theme 3 – The Human Side of Sustaining Change

Theme 3 presents findings on the commitment, emotional and relational dimensions of sustaining change. The theme focuses primarily on super users, while also incorporating how end users were affected and involved in the change process. It examines what sustained super users' commitment over time, how emotional responses influenced readiness for change and how trust, psychological safety and understanding shaped engagement. The theme further highlights the role of communication in helping super users and end users make sense of the change and continue to work with new ways of working beyond implementation.

4.3.1 What Sustains Commitment - Meaning and Engagement in the Super User Role

Across the interviews, commitment among super users was primarily described as intrinsic, rooted in personal meaning rather than external rewards. Super users frequently described the role as stimulating and meaningful, highlighting opportunities for problem-solving, learning, and helping colleagues. Several interviewees noted that being seen as reliable points of support, sometimes described by colleagues as “lifeboats” or “superheroes”, reinforced a strong sense of responsibility and pride in the role.

Commitment emerged as an important but fragile condition for sustaining change over time. Interviewees consistently emphasised that successful change depended less on technical solutions and more on how end users across the organisation understood, experienced, and engaged with the change. As one programme manager explained, employees often prefer stability and therefore “need to develop a personal commitment to the change or at least understand why change is necessary.” When such understanding was lacking, interviewees observed a decline in commitment, increased resistance and weaker engagement among both super users and end users.

Commitment was not described as a fixed personal trait but as a response to perceived meaning. Super users and end users were more willing to engage when they understood the reasons behind the change and could connect it to their own work. As one super user explained, “When people understand why the change is happening, they are more likely to feel committed and make sense of it.” In contrast, when the purpose of the change was unclear, interviewees described a tendency to fall back on established routines. As one super user noted, “humans naturally resist change and tend to squeeze in old ways of working.” Commitment declined particularly quickly when both super users and end users expected increased workload or greater complexity without clear benefits. Challenging long-established ways of working sometimes intensified tension, especially among those who had developed the previous processes and now had to change their mindset.

Collective engagement played a key role in sustaining commitment over time. Super users described a stronger commitment when their teams experienced the change as a shared effort, characterised by working together, solving problems collectively, and supporting one another during difficult phases. However, maintaining commitment became more challenging when benefits were delayed or not immediately visible. As one super user reflected, it was difficult to “motivate my co-workers to go through a change that will take a long time before seeing benefits.”

Recognition was repeatedly highlighted as an important source of commitment for super users. During the early stages of the Change Programme, super users were often described as “very important” and “special,” particularly during kick-off meetings, which created a strong initial sense of purpose. Over time, however, this recognition was perceived to fade, despite continued high expectations and ongoing responsibilities. Several super users expressed that more visible acknowledgement of their efforts was needed to sustain commitment throughout the lengthy change process. As one super user stated, the organisation “should celebrate more successes and acknowledge the importance of all super users in order for the super users to stay motivated over that long time.” The duration of the change programme itself was described as demanding, requiring endurance rather than short-term enthusiasm. As one participant noted, “this change programme is extensive... you need a lot of stamina.”

Commitment was further strengthened when super users experienced opportunities for learning, influence, and visibility. Many super users viewed the role as a chance to develop new skills, expand their understanding of the organisation, and contribute to meaningful improvements. Some super users also described friendly competition between different parts of the organisation as energising, referring to it as a “healthy competitiveness” that supported a shared ambition to move the organisation forward. Supportive conditions, such as trust from line and programme managers or protection of time, were described as important for enabling sustained commitment.

At the same time, several factors undermined commitment. Interviewees described frustration when technical priorities were perceived to outweigh attention to people. One super user remarked that “the technical aspects hold more importance than the human element,” expressing a need for greater focus on employees throughout the change process. Other demotivating factors included limited perceived benefits for end users, repeated system problems, missing formal incentives, and unsustainable workloads. Some super users also expressed concern that their expertise would be lost once they returned to their regular roles, which they viewed as a risk to long-term sustainability.

Despite these challenges, many super users described a strong sense of purpose. They viewed their role as essential in supporting colleagues, reducing anxiety, and limiting resistance. Several felt that their ability to influence how changes were implemented locally outweighed frustrations related to workload and uncertainty.

4.3.2 Emotional Responses and Readiness for Change Among Super Users and End Users

Across the interviews, the change process was described as emotionally demanding and closely linked to readiness for change among both super users and end users. Super users consistently reported that emotions such as fear, uncertainty, confusion, frustration, and resistance shaped how individuals responded to the change, particularly during early stages. Resistance was widely viewed as a normal and expected reaction rather than a refusal to change. As one super user explained, resistance was often “mistaken for unwillingness, when the real issue lies in insufficient concrete information.”

During the early stages of each phase, fear and uncertainty were particularly prominent. Super users described concerns among themselves and with end users about increased workload, loss of familiar routines, and job security after implementation. One super user reflected on worries

about whether they would “still have a job post-implementation.” Many interviewees noted that large parts of the organisation struggled to understand what the Change Programme involved, especially employees who were not directly engaged in the work. This lack of clarity further reduced readiness, as uncertainty made it difficult for end users to prepare for and accept the change.

As the change programme progressed and more information became available, emotional responses gradually shifted. Super users described a movement from fear and uncertainty towards confusion, as the complexity of the change became more visible. Only when outcomes and practical implications became clearer did some super users and end users begin to feel more confident and engaged. One programme manager described this emotional journey as a “normal distribution curve,” in which resistance gradually gave way to acceptance and, in some cases, increased commitment. Change management efforts therefore focused on reducing fear, setting realistic expectations, and openly acknowledging uncertainty and setbacks rather than presenting the change as smooth or uncomplicated.

Super users experienced a distinct emotional trajectory of their own. Initial pride in being selected for the role, often linked to being described as “superheroes”, was frequently followed by self-doubt, pressure, and information overload. Many super users described the emotional strain of being perceived as experts while still learning themselves. Feelings of isolation were common, particularly when super users worked alone. The emotional strain often decreased when more super users were appointed, as sharing the role made the work feel less heavy and less isolating.

Across business units, super users also described a sense of shared exhaustion. One super user noted that “there hasn’t been a lot to be cheerful about; mainly because we’re so tired,” while also describing how moments of humour and mutual support helped them cope. The Change Programme was frequently characterised as chaotic and demanding, involving “blood, sweat, and tears.” Several super users felt that the scale and resource demands of the change had been underestimated, with one stating that “they certainly haven’t taken into account how big the change would be.” Another one expressed, “The company tends to underestimate the time and resources needed for change initiatives. It feels like this change programme planned for fewer super users than were actually needed, since many people identified early on that they needed support and that more than one super user was required, for example.”

Readiness for change was particularly low in situations where super users and end users perceived few personal benefits and expected additional workload. Comparisons with previous systems were common among end users, reflecting a tendency to replicate old ways of working within the new system. Interestingly, super users reported that readiness improved when expectations were communicated clearly and honestly, even when benefits were limited. As one super user noted, “the best thing they did was inform us that we wouldn’t receive benefits.” Transparent communication helped reduce disappointment and allowed individuals to adjust expectations.

Over time, many super users described growing confidence in handling both the technical and emotional aspects of the change. While the process was frequently described as draining and, at times, “extremely disorganised and confusing from start to finish,” several super users noted that conditions had gradually improved. Nevertheless, fatigue remained closely associated with

the Change Programme, indicating that emotional strain persisted even as understanding and experience increased.

4.3.3 Building Trust and Psychological Safety Through Super Users

Across the interviews, trust and psychological safety emerged as fundamental conditions for meaningful engagement with the change among both super users and end users. Super users consistently described these conditions as essential for asking questions, admitting uncertainty, learning new ways of working, and sustaining motivation during a prolonged and demanding change process. Without trust and psychological safety, engagement was described as fragile and easily undermined among both super users and end users.

Trust was strengthened when ownership of the change was experienced as local rather than imposed from the change programme. Super users reported that acceptance increased when end users felt that the change was shaped and supported within their own teams. As one super user stated, “it is not the manager who should own the change... it is the people who are affected that need to own the change.” This sense of local ownership helped reduce distance between the change programme and everyday work and supported openness towards the change.

Transparent communication was repeatedly highlighted as a key factor in building trust. Super users stressed the importance of sharing information early, even when the message was negative or uncertain. Delayed decisions and unclear messages were described as particularly damaging, as prolonged uncertainty increased anxiety. As one super user expressed, “pull off the band-aid, experiencing uncertainty for a long time helps no one.” Honest communication, even when disappointing, was seen as preferable to optimistic messages that later proved unrealistic.

Psychological safety varied across national and organisational contexts. In more flat settings, questioning managers or change programme decisions was described as natural, whereas in more hierarchical contexts, open dialogue was more limited. In these environments, super users play a particularly important role in creating local spaces where end users feel safe to raise concerns, ask questions, and express uncertainty. One super user explained, “I try my best to make everyone feel comfortable reaching out to me immediately.” Through their local presence in everyday work, super users can lower the barrier to engagement, regardless of broader cultural constraints. For end users, this means easier access to support, greater willingness to ask questions, and increased confidence in engaging with the change process.

According to the super users, end users’ experiences of psychological safety were more closely tied to their relationship with their local super user than to the wider change programme. Super users reported that end users often expressed reassurance simply from knowing that a reliable and approachable super user was available for support. At the same time, this reliance increased the pressure on super users, who did not always feel confident in their own knowledge. As one super user noted, “they see you as the expert... but you don’t always feel like one.”

Approachability was consistently described as being just as important as technical competence as a personal quality of super users. Several super users explained that trust was a necessary condition for end users to ask questions or admit difficulties. They further explained that without trust, end users tended to avoid asking questions or admitting difficulties, which in turn slowed learning and increased frustration. Several super users described how they actively worked to create psychological safety by being open about their own uncertainties, paying

attention to quieter end users, and checking in emotionally with them during the change process. One super user reflected, “we really took care of each other in this change project.” Honesty, described as an important communicative approach adopted by super users, was also highlighted as a key trust-building strategy, particularly in relation to managing expectations. One super user explained that they deliberately avoided promising local benefits, stating that doing so would “set the wrong expectations for the end users.”

Job security emerged as an important boundary condition for psychological safety. Both super users and end users expressed concerns about their future roles after implementation, asking whether they would “still have a regular role post-implementation” Several super users felt that clearer assurances regarding job security would have enabled greater openness, engagement, and willingness to invest more effort in the change.

When trust and psychological safety weakened, the consequences were significant. Some super users described feeling isolated, overwhelmed, and uncertain about where to turn for support. Poor communication fuelled rumours, making it difficult to distinguish between facts and speculation. One super user noted that “eventually it became impossible to know what was rumour or truth.” Trust weakened further when senior management narratives conflicted with local experiences. Some super users described frustration when the change was presented as successful by senior management, while unresolved problems persisted locally. As one super user recalled, “it was a punch in the face when senior management says it’s so successful... but it doesn’t work for us at all.”

4.3.4 Creating Understanding Through Communication - A Core Function of the Super User Role

Across the interviews, communication was consistently described as central to creating understanding and sustaining change. Super users and programme managers emphasised that providing information alone was not sufficient. Instead, understanding depended on whether employees could grasp why the change was happening and how it affected their everyday work. Without this understanding, line managers, super users and end users struggled to engage meaningfully with the change.

An illustrative metaphor used by one line manager captured the practical challenge of learning new ways of working. The change process was compared to assembling IKEA furniture: even when instructions are available, “many people start building immediately instead of reading the instructions and then complain that it doesn’t work.” This metaphor reflected how misunderstandings arose for different reasons. Some super users deliberately skipped available information due to time pressure or confidence in their own experience, while others struggled because the information was not sufficiently adapted to their needs. The metaphor also highlighted the challenge of balancing the amount of information provided. When information was too extensive, it was often not read due to limited time; when too limited, super users and end users expressed frustration over missing guidance. Finding a workable balance was therefore described as difficult, particularly given the varied roles, experience levels, and expectations across the organisation.

Strong communication skills were repeatedly described as essential for super users. Several interviewees stressed that technical knowledge alone was insufficient if super users were unable to explain changes clearly. As one super user stated, “if you can’t communicate it properly, the

message is lost.” Programme managers noted that while technical competence could be developed over time, weak communication undermined the role’s effectiveness from the outset.

Understanding was described as particularly fragile during the change process. Super users explained that they often received instructions from the change programme regarding what to do, but without sufficient explanation of why those actions were required or what they would mean for their own and the end users’ daily work. However, many interviewees felt that communication from the change programme team focused too heavily on tasks and system functions rather than on the purpose and consequences of the change. As one participant observed, “you go directly to ‘what do we need to do’... but then it’s not clear why we are doing that, which I feel is very important for me and my co-workers to have knowledge about.” This gap contributed to ongoing challenges on both sides: the change programme team felt that messages had been repeated, while super users and end users continued to feel uncertain about the “why” behind the change.

Super users emerged as key translators of the change process. They played a central role in transforming abstract, system-level messages into concrete explanations linked to specific roles and everyday work practices. What the super users described highlighted a fundamental mismatch between the conceptual, system-oriented communication from the change programme and the super users’ and end users’ need for role-specific explanations grounded in daily practice. As one super user explained, “most misunderstandings come from a mismatch between abstract messages and the need for concrete explanations.” When confusion arose, end users frequently turned to their local super user for clarification, as these individuals were perceived as accessible and knowledgeable. One super user noted, “my colleagues see me as the one to ask... we have learned together through this change by investigating problems and questions together.” Communication thus became meaningful only when it was local, honest, and contextualised in everyday work.

Transparency was repeatedly highlighted as supporting understanding, even when messages were disappointing. Some managers and super users described deliberately communicating limited benefits to avoid unrealistic expectations. One interviewee explained that openly stating “don’t expect any advantage for you” helped reduce frustration and allowed both super users and end users to adjust their expectations more realistically.

At the same time, super users described significant challenges in fulfilling this communication role. Inconsistent information flows, delayed updates, and late clarification of dependencies left super users in what one interviewee described as a “detective role,” piecing together understanding over time. Barriers to understanding included excessive use of acronyms, inconsistent formats, and abstract terminology. As one super user noted, “you’d need a dictionary to know them all.” Even when super users attempted to simplify the change by describing it as “a new version of SAP,” this remained too abstract for many end users focused on daily operational tasks.

Several super users also described struggling with the communication role itself. Many had limited prior experience leading discussions or facilitating reflection and felt that they received extensive conceptual information about the change without sufficient guidance on how to apply it in practice. As one super user reflected, “when we don’t understand the information ourselves, how can we turn it into understanding for our colleagues?” The complexity of the change was

likened to “trying to design the car while driving it,” capturing the challenge of learning, translating, and communicating simultaneously.

4.4 Theme 4 – Super Users Role in Knowledge Sharing and Continuous Adaptation

This theme captures interviewees’ reflections on how the super user role could be strengthened in future change initiatives and how its impact could be sustained beyond formal project phases. Rather than focusing on shortcomings in earlier phases, participants emphasised forward-looking improvements aimed at enhancing organisational learning, clarifying long-term ownership, and enabling continuous adaptation. Across interviews, super users were described as holding a central position in connecting knowledge, experience, and practice over time. However, the findings also highlight that this potential was not always structurally supported, limiting the organisation’s ability to fully leverage the role in sustaining change.

4.4.1 Knowledge Sharing and Learning as Foundations for Sustained Super User Impact

Across interviews, both managers and super users emphasised the need for clearer organisational ownership once implementation phases were completed. A recurring concern related to what happened after the project team reduced its involvement. Several super users expressed uncertainty regarding who assumed responsibility for sustaining adoption, with one participant stating that “we don’t know whom to hand it over to.” Others described a perception that they had effectively become “super users for life” without receiving guidance on how the role should evolve or conclude. This ambiguity created uncertainty around whether the responsibility for sustaining change was temporary, permanent, or expected to transition into another function. This lack of clarity also affected knowledge sharing and continuous improvement. Both super users and managers described difficulties in raising suggestions or improvement ideas, as communication paths were experienced as long, fragmented or unclear. Super users were often uncertain whether feedback reached the appropriate decision-makers. As a result, learning from practice risked remaining local rather than contributing to broader organisational development.

In this context, all interview roles suggested the need for a more centralised support function or coordination role for super users. Such a function was described as a potential point of reference for templates, standards, escalation paths, and prior learnings. One super user explained that “it would have been good if there were a central person you could turn to... which template should I use? Am I doing this correctly?” This illustrates how clearer structures for accessing and sharing knowledge could reduce uncertainty and strengthen super users’ confidence in their role.

High workload further constrained knowledge sharing. Several participants noted that both super users and end users struggled to absorb information due to time pressure, leading to repeated questions and frustration. In some cases, improvements were never adopted simply because “people never got the information.” Despite this, participants consistently expressed a strong willingness to share experiences and successful practices. The challenge was therefore not motivation, but the absence of clear forums, routines, and ownership for knowledge exchange. Lessons-learned activities were also frequently described as dependent on individual initiative rather than embedded organisational routines. As one programme manager stated,

“there’s no mechanism automatically where we say now it’s time to reflect... lessons learned is just an individual initiative.” Consequently, insights were rarely consolidated or made accessible across phases. This fragmentation contributed to repeated mistakes, slower onboarding of new super users, and unnecessary learning curves in later waves. At the same time, examples of effective knowledge sharing did emerge. Site visits and peer exchanges between business units were repeatedly highlighted as highly valuable. One super user described such an exchange as “an eye-opener... it saved a lot of time,” illustrating how experiential learning across contexts supported faster understanding and reduced uncertainty. However, these initiatives were not systematically sustained after implementation. Knowledge sharing was therefore not only described as formal documentation, but also as relational and experience based. Informal networks established during implementation often remained active long afterwards, with super users reaching out to former peers when facing challenges. Yet, because these networks depended on personal initiative rather than organisational design, access to knowledge became uneven and fragile.

Time pressure further limited opportunities for reflection. Several super users described that they “don’t get time to reflect very often,” reducing the possibility of documenting and transferring experiential knowledge. In some cases, solutions made in early phases were later recognised as workarounds rather than standardised practices, creating confusion in subsequent phases. In this context, several participants suggested that super users themselves could play a more active role in capturing, synthesising, and sharing lessons learned across phases. In this sense, super users were viewed not only as receivers of knowledge, but as potential carriers of organisational learning, capable of transforming local experience into collective capability.

4.4.2 Continuous Adaptation Through Sustainment of the Super User Role

All the interviewed roles acknowledged how sustaining change requires long-term ownership beyond project completion. Several super users described a gap between implementation and operational stabilisation, where formal support decreased while new routines were still fragile. As one participant explained, “the project may end... but then the people are left behind. The change needs to be accompanied further on.” Without continued reinforcement, there was a perceived risk of reverting to previous habits. Managers also highlighted concerns about the emergence of local workarounds during the post-implementation phase. Super users were often expected to monitor adherence and support correct usage, yet without clear mandate or continued organisational backing, this responsibility became difficult to uphold. This uncertainty further illustrates how sustaining change depended on sustaining the super user role itself.

Across interviews, super users were widely described as a form of permanent change infrastructure rather than a temporary project role. Both managers and super users argued that the role should remain active after implementation to support continuous improvement, system updates and future phases. Several managers expressed disappointment when super users were expected to return fully to their original roles without defined responsibilities related to ongoing change. As one manager stated how “super users were valuable post-implementation and should remain active.” The loss of super users through role changes or turnover was also perceived as a significant risk. Much of the knowledge accumulated during the change journey was described as experiential and difficult to replace. Several participants including both managers and super users therefore suggested succession planning, deputy roles or structured handover mechanisms to reduce dependency on individuals and protect organisational memory.

A shared view among both managers and super users was that change should be considered as an ongoing organisational condition rather than a finite project. Each new phase introduced new challenges, yet experienced super users retained valuable competence in managing uncertainty, supporting learning and translating change into practice which is an internal capacity that should be harnessed. For this reason, several managers described deliberately reusing experienced super users in later initiatives, while others noted that key characteristics of the role had been replicated in subsequent projects due to its perceived effectiveness.

Taken together, the findings highlight that knowledge sharing, learning, and continuous adaptation are closely interconnected processes shaped by the super user role. Super users function as linking points between programme intentions, organisational structures, and everyday work. Through their position, they influence how knowledge is transferred, how uncertainty is handled, and how new practices are sustained. When the role is supported, clarified, and retained over time, it enables continuous learning and strengthens the organisation's capacity to sustain change beyond formal implementation.

5 Analysis and Discussion

In this chapter, the findings from the interviews presented in the results are analysed and discussed in relation to the literature review. The purpose is to explain what the findings reveal about how change ambassadorship works in practice and how it can be strengthened to support long-term change. Specifically, the chapter examines how super users took on change ambassador roles and how the organisational context shaped their ability to drive, embed, and sustain change over time. The chapter is structured around the study's research questions. Each section addresses a specific sub-research question, and together these contribute to answering the overarching research question.

5.1 Change Ambassadorship Enacted in Practice

This section addresses *research question (a)* by analysing how the super user role was enacted as change ambassadorship in practice. The findings show that super users were not primarily perceived as providers of technical support, but as relational actors who enabled and sustained change in the organisation through their presence in everyday work. Their role was enacted in practice as a bridge between the change programme and daily work. These finding highlights that change ambassadorship emerged through ongoing interaction with end users rather than through formal authority. Super users influenced others mainly through proximity, availability, and credibility. In this sense, while the super user role was formally assigned by management, its function as change ambassadorship was continuously constructed in daily work. Koch and Fortkord's (2024) conceptualisation of change ambassadors as relationally embedded actors helps explain why super users gained influence despite lacking formal power: their function came from being trusted peers rather than designated representatives.

The findings further show that influence operated horizontally rather than hierarchically. Super users shaped engagement by translating change into locally meaningful actions and by responding to uncertainty as it arose in practice. This aligns with Maitlis and Sonenshein's argument that organisational change develops through how employees interpret and understand change in their everyday work, rather than through top-down directives. From this perspective, the super user role supported change by helping colleagues understand what the change meant in practice and by translating it into daily work, rather than by acting as a formal extension of the change programme. Overall, the findings show that change ambassadorship took shape through relationships, ongoing presence and how the change was understood in everyday work. Super users therefore acted as trusted colleagues who influenced how end users made sense of, enacted and sustained the change in practice.

5.1.1 Selection and Suitability of Super Users

The findings show that selecting the right super users was critical for whether the role functioned as a genuine change ambassador or remained a narrow implementation support function. At the Company, selection relied largely on managerial judgment rather than systematically identifying informal influence. Managers prioritised individuals perceived as capable and reliable, but availability and operational constraints often dictated the choice. While practical, this approach sometimes overlooked the relational and ambassadorial qualities

that the literature identifies as essential. This suggests that practical operational considerations can conflict with the longer-term demands of sustaining change. Koch and Fortkord (2024) emphasise that formal appointment alone does not guarantee influence, and the findings confirm this: when managers prioritised availability over credibility, super users often failed to engage end users beyond the initial implementation. The implication is that formal designation is necessary but not sufficient for sustaining change.

Suitability also depended on closeness to daily work rather than hierarchical position. Super users embedded in day-to-day operations, who were trusted and accessible, exerted more influence than those located in the change programme team. This aligns with Armenakis and Harris (2009), who describe change ambassadors as hybrid actors: formally appointed but enacted through trust, credibility, and repeated interactions with end users. The findings highlight that technical skills or formal authority alone were insufficient; influence came from guiding, helping, and reassuring colleagues during uncertainty. Network position was equally important: centrality in informal networks mattered more for influence than formal status, supporting Weimann (1994) and Battilana and Casciaro (2012). This underscores that change is relational, and effectiveness depends on social positioning, not just title or expertise.

The type of change also shaped which ambassador qualities were needed. Super users in bridging roles were essential for coordination across teams or knowledge sharing, reflecting Carlile (2004) and Goodrich et al. (2020) on boundary-spanning work. Conversely, embedding routines in cohesive teams relied on credibility within local networks. This demonstrates that different types of change require different ambassador strategies, a nuance often overlooked in practice. The findings suggest that organisations need to consider both the nature of the change and the informal structures when selecting super users.

It became apparent that some super users were not ideally suited for the role. Those with strong technical skills but weak interpersonal abilities struggled to engage end users, particularly during uncertainty or frustration. Holt et al. (2007) emphasise that emotional and relational skills are crucial for legitimising change, which aligns with the findings that technically competent super users could solve problems but failed to foster understanding or acceptance among end users. Similarly, readiness mattered: super users who were themselves sceptical or unsure weakened their influence, supporting Armenakis and Harris (2009) on how a change agent's beliefs affect communication. These findings illustrate that super users' own confidence and attitudes directly shape end-user adoption, highlighting the relational and emotional dimension of sustaining change.

Overall, the analysis indicates that relational credibility outweighs formal qualifications in determining super user effectiveness. Trust, empathy, communication skills, and emotional stability were more decisive than job title, seniority, or technical expertise, confirming Battilana and Casciaro (2012) and Koch and Fortkord (2024). Technical competence was necessary to support training and problem-solving, but it only enabled the role, it did not define it. The most effective super users combined practical expertise with relational skills, creating a safe environment that facilitated end-user engagement and long-term adoption. This aligns with Goodrich et al. (2020) and Holt et al. (2007), demonstrating that sustaining change relies on relational skill as much as knowledge, and that influence is enacted through repeated interaction, trust, and accessibility rather than formal authority.

5.1.2 Four Core Functions of Super Users

The interviews findings show that super users enact ambassadorship through four interconnected functions:

Interpretive Work

The findings show that super users did more than communicate programme information, they actively translated it into actionable guidance for end users. This sensemaking involved ongoing negotiation of meaning and responding to new questions, not just delivering instructions or acting as technical support. Literature helps explain why this is crucial: Koch and Fortkord (2024) describe ambassadors as translating strategic goals into locally relevant narratives, and Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010) emphasise that interpretation is dynamic and co-created through interaction. These theories illustrate that the super users' work was not a one-time explanation but a continuous process. In practice, this means sustaining change requires repeated engagement and contextual adaptation; without this ongoing interpretive work, end users might misinterpret or resist the intended changes.

Behavioural Modelling

Once super users established meaning, they reinforced it through visible actions, demonstrating that the change was feasible. This aligns with Drechsler et al. (2021) and Oxtoby et al. (2002), who argue that modelling desired behaviours builds credibility and embeds new routines. The findings highlight that formal authority alone is insufficient; it is the repeated demonstration of behaviours that convinces others of the change's practicality. This connects with Gioia and Chittipeddi's (1991) concept of sensegiving through action, suggesting that behavioural modelling both supports interpretation and strengthens adoption. In other words, super users do not just tell people what to do, they show it in practice, which increases trust and uptake.

Relational Legitimising

Trust and relationships were central to super users' ability to influence and sustain engagement. End users were more willing to seek guidance and persist with new practices when they trusted the super user. This supports Battilana and Casciaro (2012) and Weimann (1994), who emphasise informal networks as a key source of legitimacy. The findings suggest that legitimacy is enacted through repeated interactions rather than assumed from formal role assignment. In practice, this means organisational change depends not just on formal structures but on cultivating relational credibility, highlighting the human and social dimensions of change that literature often underlines but can be overlooked in implementation plans.

Boundary-Spanning Knowledge Work

Finally, super users' ability to bridge boundaries and facilitate knowledge flows depended on the successful combination of interpretation, behavioural modelling, and relational legitimacy. They connected programme objectives with operational realities, clarifying, translating, and negotiating across teams and contexts. This aligns with Carlile's (2004) concept of boundary-spanning knowledge work and Goodrich et al. (2020) on ambassadors as connectors. The findings reveal that knowledge transfer was not linear; it required ongoing adaptation, attention to relationships, and sensitivity to context-specific nuances. This reinforces that ambassadorship is relational and adaptive rather than procedural, highlighting that successful change relies on social skill and contextual intelligence as much as on formal processes.

5.1.3 The Evolving Super User Role and Challenges of Evaluation

The evolution of super user work shows that change roles are dynamic, context-dependent and vary over time. In the early phase, super users were primarily problem-solvers, reacting to uncertainty and immediate issues. This reactive work reflects the challenges of early adoption in change processes, where routines are not yet established and uncertainty is high. From a theoretical perspective, this aligns with Drechsler et al. (2021) and Goodrich et al. (2020), who argue that ambassadorship develops over time, moving from hands-on implementation to institutionalisation, as the role becomes more embedded in organisational routines. The findings suggest that the super users' early problem-solving laid the groundwork for later stability, showing how different phases of the role build on each other. As the change progressed, super users' work shifted: they began mentoring colleagues, stabilising routines and focusing on embedding new ways of working. This illustrates not only the development of their responsibilities, but also the variation in the type of work they performed over time. Their role expanded in both scope and strategic importance, moving from reactive problem-solving to proactive facilitation and guidance. However, this growth also brought sustainability challenges. Super users' responsibilities increased in intensity, echoing Bernardy and Antoni (2021), who emphasise that demanding change roles require endurance and long-term engagement. Without recognition, clear role definitions, or protected time, super users risk burnout, a point supported by Battilana and Casciaro (2012) and Koch and Fortkord (2024). This indicates that while role development is natural and necessary, organisational support and resource allocation are critical to sustain super users' evolving responsibilities over time.

Furthermore, the absence of systematic evaluation of the super user role reveals a gap between strategic importance and organisational accountability. Managers often relied on indirect signs, like fewer questions or smoother routines, to measure the impact of super users in practice. This aligns with Battilana and Casciaro (2012) and Koch and Fortkord (2024), who note that relational work and knowledge facilitation are difficult to measure with traditional metrics. Carlile (2004) and Goodrich (2020) suggest that meaningful evaluation should consider softer outcomes, such as trust, knowledge sharing, and team problem-solving capacity. This implies that understanding the impact of super users requires moving beyond operational metrics to assess their role in fostering organisational learning and resilience.

5.2 Organisational Conditions Shaping Super Users Capacity to Sustain Change

This section analyses and discusses how organisational conditions influence super users' ability to support and sustain change over time which corresponds to *research question (b)*. While previous sections have highlighted the importance of the role of change ambassadors, this section will demonstrate how ambassadorship cannot function independently of its organisational context.

5.2.1 Organisational Ownership and Responsibility Distribution for Sustaining Change

The empirical findings show that leadership engagement played a crucial role in legitimising the super user role, particularly during early implementation phases. When line managers actively reinforced priorities, acknowledged the ambassadorial role and demonstrated visible commitment, super users experienced greater clarity, confidence and authority in supporting others. This aligns with Kotter's (1996) argument that leadership reinforcement is essential for

anchoring change within organisational routines. However, the findings also indicate that leadership attention declined as implementation milestones were reached. As programme intensity decreased, responsibility for sustaining change increasingly shifted towards super users. They became central carriers of meaning, problem-solving and emotional reassurance, often in the absence of continued managerial involvement. This dynamic reflects what Buchanan et al. (2005) describes as the hidden work of change, whereby sustaining efforts are informally delegated downward while remaining largely invisible within formal structures.

From an analytical perspective, this raises an important tension regarding organisational ownership. On the one hand, empowering super users enabled continuity during periods of reduced leadership presence. On the other hand, sustained reliance on their informal influence risked transforming ambassadorship into a substitute for ongoing leadership engagement rather than a complement to it. In such conditions, change became personalised rather than institutionalised, increasing dependency on individual commitment rather than organisational systems. This interpretation resonates with Oakland and Tanner's (2007) observation that misalignment between strategic intent and operational reinforcement often undermines sustainability. Although leadership support initially enabled ambassadorship, its gradual withdrawal weakened the long-term robustness of the role. Sustaining change therefore appeared less dependent on the presence of capable ambassadors alone, and more on the organisation's ability to continuously reaffirm ownership of change through visible leadership alignment.

5.2.2 Structural and Cultural Tensions Influencing Super Users Everyday Work

Beyond leadership practices, the findings reveal that structural and cultural conditions strongly shaped super users' capacity to sustain change in daily work. Structurally, a persistent gap emerged between formal role design and lived experience. Although time allocations were defined, super users were expected to combine extensive change-related responsibilities with full operational workloads, often without sufficient backfill. This reflects what Naslund and Norrman (2022) describe as an implementation gap between intended structures and actual practice. While such flexibility allowed organisations to mobilise internal expertise efficiently, it simultaneously transferred risk and pressure onto individuals. Retaining super users within their operational roles enhanced local credibility, yet also generated role overload, time scarcity, and emotional strain. Importantly, this tension was not temporary but persisted across phases, raising questions about long-term sustainability. From a critical standpoint, the findings challenge the assumption that ambassadorship can be layered onto existing roles without fundamental structural adjustment. As Gravenhorst et al. (2003) argues, organisational change capacity depends not only on willingness to change, but on structures that enable change to be enacted in everyday work. When such structures remain limited, ambassadorship becomes reliant on individual resilience rather than organisational design.

Cultural conditions further intensified these dynamics. Norms emphasising openness, trust, and collaboration supported dialogue and psychological safety, enabling super users to engage others in sensemaking processes, consistent with Schein's (1996) view of culture as shaping how change is interpreted and enacted. At the same time, these same cultural characteristics occasionally constrained progress. Extensive alignment processes and consensus-oriented decision-making delayed clarification and weakened prioritisation during critical phases. This illustrates that culture does not function as a unidirectional enabler of change. Instead, cultural strengths may become constraints when organisational demands shift. As Alvesson and

Svenningsson (2015) argue, cultural values risk remaining symbolic when not supported by situational leadership and structural clarity. Super users often found themselves navigating this tension, attempting to balance inclusion and decisiveness without formal authority to resolve it.

5.2.3 Informal Networks of Super Users Affecting the Sustainment of Change

The findings further highlight the central role of informal networks in sustaining change. Peer-level interaction, personal relationships, and ad-hoc communication enabled rapid problem-solving and emotional reassurance, often compensating for limited formal support structures. This supports Battilana and Casciaro's (2012) argument that influence during change primarily flows through informal networks rather than hierarchical authority. However, the analysis also reveals the fragility of such reliance. Knowledge continuity weakened when individuals left their roles, and access to support varied depending on personal connections. From a learning perspective, this raises concerns regarding organisational memory. While informal networks enhance adaptability, they are difficult to scale, govern, and institutionalise. Carlile's (2004) work on knowledge boundaries suggests that without mechanisms to retain and translate experiential knowledge, learning risks remaining local and transient. In this sense, informal networks functioned both as enablers of sustained change and as indicators of organisational vulnerability. They allowed ambassadorship to function in the absence of formal systems, yet simultaneously exposed dependency on individual relationships rather than durable learning infrastructures.

Overall, the findings indicate that super users did not struggle due to lack of motivation or competence. Rather, their ability to sustain change was shaped by organisational conditions characterised by enduring tensions. Leadership reinforcement enabled legitimacy but diminished over time; structural flexibility supported relevance but produced overload; cultural openness fostered engagement but could occasionally slow down decisiveness; and informal networks facilitated learning while undermining continuity. Sustaining change through ambassadorship therefore emerged not as a linear process, but as an ongoing negotiation between organisational efficiency, human capacity and structural design.

5.3 Relational and Emotional Mechanisms in Sustaining Change

This section explores the relational and emotional mechanisms that influenced how super users and end users engaged with and sustained change over time. Building on the previous discussion of change ambassadorship, the focus here is on the softer, interpersonal and emotional dimensions of change, in line with *research question (c)*.

5.3.1 Emotions, Perceived Resistance, and the Relational Role of Super Users in Change

In change processes, emotions function not only as individual reactions but as key drivers of readiness and commitment, with super users and organisational support playing a crucial role in channelling and regulating these emotions. The findings indicate that emotions were not merely secondary reactions to change, but central mechanisms that shaped and sustained both readiness and engagement. Across interviews, feelings such as fear, uncertainty, frustration, and fatigue strongly influenced the willingness of both super users and end users to engage with the change. This supports Holt et al. (2007) and Armenakis et al. (2009), who conceptualize readiness as the interplay between cognitive and emotional states. Negative emotions, they

argue, can limit attention, reduce learning capacity, and trigger defensive behaviours. In this study, emotions served both as indicators of readiness and as drivers of it, shaping how change was interpreted, enacted, and reinforced in everyday work. Emotional responses evolved over time, often shifting from fear to confusion, and in some cases toward partial acceptance. These shifts were neither automatic nor linear. Instead, they depended on continuous social support, guidance, and psychologically safe environments, conditions that are particularly critical in prolonged or complex change initiatives. Bernardy and Antoni (2021) argue that sustaining engagement during extended change efforts requires ongoing emotional and interpersonal support, rather than one-off communication initiatives. This highlights that readiness is relational: engagement depends not only on individual understanding but also on the emotional and social support provided by people in the surrounding work environment.

Behaviours that were initially perceived as “resistance” rarely reflected opposition to the change itself. Instead, they often expressed uncertainty about personal implications, such as competence, workload, or job security. Holt et al. (2007) and Armenakis et al. (2009) similarly suggest that such resistance often signals unmet conditions for readiness, while Battilana and Casciaro (2012) interpret it as reflecting gaps in trust, legitimacy, and clarity. Illustrating how resistance is more an indicator of underlying needs and uncertainties than full opposition of change. Super users frequently reframed these behaviours as indicators of emotional or informational needs. They responded with calm and approachable guidance, which reduced confusion and stress for the end users, and transformed uncertainty into reassurance and practical support. This approach aligns with Maitlis and Sonenshein’s (2010) understanding of sensemaking as an emotionally charged process, as well as Armenakis et al.’s (2009) emphasis on the importance of credible, relationally grounded influence in fostering readiness. This reflects how super users can turn perceived resistance or uncertainty into engagement by providing calm, supportive, and approachable guidance, reducing stress, promoting understanding, and playing a key role in fostering readiness for change. By doing so, super users functioned as both emotional and relational anchors, helping to stabilise understanding and promote engagement throughout the change process.

Further, this role carries a significant emotional burden. When trust and support were concentrated in only a few individuals, super users were expected to project confidence even while managing the change themselves. This highlights the importance of organisational structures that distribute responsibility and protect their well-being. Bernardy and Antoni (2021) caution that informal change roles can become unsustainable when emotional demands are high and organisational support is limited. Buchanan et al. (2005) also observe that informal change actors often bear disproportionate relational and emotional responsibility, as their influence depends on trust and credibility rather than formal authority.

5.3.2 Psychological Safety, Trust and Communication in Change

Trust and psychological safety emerged as central factors that help explain why learning, engagement and the gradual normalisation of new practices occurred or did not occur in this context. The findings suggest that end users’ willingness to ask questions, admit uncertainty and experiment was not merely a personal trait, but depended heavily on the perceived safety of the work environment, which in turn depended on the super users. From this perspective, Drechsler et al. (2021) provide a useful explanatory lens: normalisation of change is more likely when employees feel secure enough to engage continuously, adapt practices, and learn from experience. In other words, the presence of psychological safety can help explain why some

end users moved beyond superficial adoption to genuinely integrate new behaviours, while its absence contributed to avoidance, reliance on informal rumours, and prolonged uncertainty. Holt et al. (2007) and Armenakis and Harris (2009) help further explain this mechanism: readiness and engagement are shaped by perceptions of support, legitimacy, and relevance. Thus, in this study, engagement was lower in unsafe contexts because the necessary social and relational support was missing, not because end users were unwilling or unable.

Trust, as observed in the findings, was closely linked to clarity, transparency and consistency in communication. Delayed decisions or unclear messages from the change programme appeared to intensify uncertainty, particularly for super users who were expected to act as intermediaries. Holt et al. (2007) provide a theoretical explanation for this: unclear or inconsistent information signals weak organisational support, which reduces commitment and engagement. Similarly, Armenakis and Harris (2009) clarify that credibility during change depends on alignment between communicated messages and employees lived experiences. The findings suggest that uncertainty should therefore not be interpreted solely as a lack of information; it also functions as a relational signal that can undermine trust. Conversely, when communication was honest and transparent, even if the outcomes were disappointing, it strengthened trust, suggesting that trust is actively constructed through relationally credible behaviour. Battilana and Casciaro's (2012) relational perspective helps explain this: legitimacy and honesty have a stronger impact on trust than mere optimistic framing, highlighting why trust-building in change relies on both content and relational enactment.

5.3.3 Commitment as a Dynamic and Socially Constructed Process

The findings indicate that commitment among both super users and end users should not be understood as a stable individual state, but rather as a changing and context-dependent phenomenon. Variations in commitment were closely linked to how meaningful, manageable, and supported the change was experienced in everyday work. From a theoretical perspective, this pattern can be explained by Holt et al.'s (2007) conceptualisation of readiness as socially embedded, where commitment emerges through ongoing interactions rather than individual attitudes alone. Similarly, Armenakis and Harris (2009) emphasise that contextual and relational cues shape how individuals interpret and respond to change. Together, these perspectives help explain why commitment in this study shifted over time: it was continuously renegotiated through daily experiences of support, clarity, and relevance.

Super users played a pivotal role in sustaining commitment by translating strategic intentions into locally meaningful actions. Rather than functioning as passive messengers, they actively shaped how change was understood and enacted in practice. Koch and Fortkord's (2024) description of informal change roles helps explain this finding by highlighting translation as a core ambassadorial function. Gioia and Chittipeddi's (1991) concept of sensegiving further clarifies how this translation work influenced commitment: by framing change in ways that resonated with everyday work, super users made the change appear both achievable and relevant. When super users were visibly present and supported by management, this sensegiving process reinforced commitment. Conversely, when their involvement weakened or organisational support declined, the interpretive link between strategy and practice weakened, leading to reduced engagement. This suggests that commitment gradually declines not because individuals resist change, but because the relational infrastructure that sustains meaning and confidence breaks down.

Commitment also proved more lasting when change was experienced as a collective effort characterised by shared responsibility. Relational perspectives on change help explain this dynamic by emphasising that new practices become embedded through informal networks and trusted peer interactions rather than through formal authority alone. In this study, super users acted as social catalysts by reinforcing engagement through trust, recognition, and informal accountability. This clarifies why engagement declined when visible progress slowed and relational reinforcement weakened: without continuous social validation, commitment lost its collective grounding. In this sense, the findings extend Kotter's (1995) argument that momentum must be actively maintained, showing that momentum is not only structural or temporal but fundamentally relational.

From a sensemaking perspective, employees continuously interpreted the change through everyday interactions and shared narratives. Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010) conceptualise sensemaking as a collective process in which meaning is constructed rather than imposed, offering a useful lens for understanding why commitment fluctuated in this study. When anticipated benefits remained unclear or were delayed, end users reverted to familiar routines. Drawing on Carlile (2004), this can be interpreted as a failure to translate abstract change goals into locally workable practices. Importantly, this does not indicate that commitment disappeared; rather, it was temporarily paused until the change became intelligible and actionable within local contexts. Commitment, therefore, functioned as a conditional and relational outcome, dependent on continuous sensemaking rather than initial agreement.

5.3.4 Sensemaking and Sensegiving

Super users' capacity for sensemaking and sensegiving emerged as a key explanatory factor for engagement during the change process. Although central communications clarified *what* was changing, both super users and end users struggled to understand *what the change meant* for their daily work. This gap can be understood through Maitlis and Sonenshein's (2010) argument that information only becomes meaningful when it is connected to local practice. From this perspective, the challenge identified in the findings was not primarily informational, but interpretive. Sensemaking involved translating abstract change messages into concrete work-related implications, while sensegiving required articulating this understanding in ways that resonated with peers' everyday experiences. The findings thus suggest that engagement weakened when change messages remained abstract and detached from local practice, rather than when information was absent.

The findings further show that super users' ability to perform this translation work was constrained by time pressure and operational demands. Battilana and Casciaro (2012) conceptualise effective change ambassadors as relational translators rather than passive messengers, emphasising that influence depends on sustained interaction and credibility. Combined with Maitlis and Sonenshein's (2010) view of sensemaking as a social and dialogical process that requires time, interaction, and dialogue, this helps explain why sensegiving became fragile under constrained conditions. When time for interaction, reflection, and dialogue was limited, super users were forced to interpret and communicate change under pressure, reducing their capacity to collectively validate meaning with others. The findings therefore indicate that ambassadorial influence depends not only on access to information, but on having enough relational space to create meaning together.

Sensegiving was also shaped by super users' own sensemaking capacity. Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) describe sensemaking and sensegiving as interdependent processes, where the ability to influence others is contingent on one's own understanding. In this study, when super users lacked time or organisational support to make sense of the change themselves, their ability to guide and reassure others weakened. This can be explained through Armenakis and Harris's (2009) notion of readiness, which emphasises that influence during change relies on both understanding and relational credibility. Without adequate conditions for their own sensemaking, super users' readiness to act as effective intermediaries was reduced, limiting their impact on engagement.

Finally, the findings point to a structural capability gap that helps explain the emotional strain experienced by super users. While they received extensive technical training, they were given limited support in facilitating dialogue, managing uncertainty, or fostering shared understanding. Buchanan's (2005) concept of social navigation provides a useful lens for interpreting this imbalance: super users absorbed ambiguity from the change programme while simultaneously being expected to provide clarity to others. This imbalance placed them in a vulnerable position, where emotional and relational demands were high but organisational support was limited. From this perspective, sustaining change requires more than technical readiness; it depends on continuous relational work and organisational structures that enable ambassadors to revisit, renegotiate, and reinforce meaning over time.

5.4 Developing and Strengthening the Long-Term Impact of Super Users

Building on the identified organisational conditions, this section reflects on how the super user role can be developed beyond its current project-oriented configuration, as part of *research question (d)*. Rather than proposing prescriptive solutions the analysis and discussion explore how change ambassadorship may evolve into a more sustainable organisational capability.

5.4.1 From Project-Based Super Users to Enduring Change Infrastructure

The findings indicate that ambiguity surrounding the duration, ownership and future purpose of the super user role limited its long-term effectiveness. Although formally described as extending beyond implementation, organisational attention declined once implementation phases were completed. This reflects a broader tendency in change management to consider implementation success with transformation completion. Kotter (1996) cautions against this assumption, emphasising that anchoring change requires prolonged reinforcement before new practices become embedded. From this perspective, the super user role occupies a critical position between implementation and embedding change in everyday work. Repositioning ambassadorship as part of the organisation's permanent change infrastructure may therefore strengthen continuity, knowledge retention and learning accumulation across transformation cycles. However, this development also introduces an important paradox. Formalising the role enhances sustainability yet risks undermining the informality that grants ambassadors credibility among peers. This indicates that much of the super users' influence stemmed not from formal authority, but from their perceived proximity to everyday work and their identity as "one of us" rather than representatives of management. Several interviewees described how trust, openness and accessibility enabled end users to seek support without fear of judgement. This relational closeness allowed super users to act as effective translators of change, particularly in situations characterised by uncertainty or frustration. Excessive formalisation of the role may

therefore alter how super users are perceived, shifting their position from trusted colleague to organisational mediator. Such a shift risks weakening the very peer-based influence that made ambassadorship effective in practice. Further on, this suggests that developing the super user role is less about designing a fixed role structure and more about creating supportive conditions that allow informal influence to operate within a recognisable organisational framework. Rather than prescribing rigid role descriptions, organisations may benefit from offering flexible guidelines, continued leadership endorsement, and protected time, while allowing super users to retain their embedded position within operational teams. As Battilana and Casciaro (2012) also highlight, informal influence derives its power precisely from its non-hierarchical character. Strengthening ambassadorship thus requires balancing institutional recognition with preservation of relational legitimacy, rather than attempting to resolve this tension through rigid role formalisation.

5.4.2 Clarifying Mandate and Role Boundaries in Change Ambassadorship

The findings further reveal recurring uncertainty regarding mandate and decision authority. Super users were expected to translate and adapt change locally yet often lacked clarity regarding how far their autonomy extended. Developing the role therefore requires clearer articulation of expectations, decision boundaries and build-up. Such clarity can strengthen super users' legitimacy, reduce role ambiguity and support more consistent decision-making in everyday work. Without this, ambassadorship risks becoming dependent on individual interpretation rather than organisational alignment. As Buchanan et al. (2005) argues, informal change agents are most effective when organisational expectations are explicit, even when authority remains relational rather than hierarchical. In this study, the absence of such clarity contributed to situations in which super users carried responsibility for sustaining change without corresponding authority, increasing both role strain and vulnerability.

At the same time, the analysis highlights the extensive emotional labour embedded in ambassadorship. Super users absorbed uncertainty among end users, managed frustration and resistance, and projected confidence during periods of ambiguity, particularly in the post-implementation phase. Through this work, they stabilised others' experiences of change and contributed to maintaining engagement over time. However, this emotional labour also created strain for super users themselves, as responsibility for emotional regulation was informally transferred onto individuals without formal recognition or support. Alvesson and Svenningsson (2015) note that such emotional labour is frequently underestimated in organisational change, despite being central to translating abstract visions into lived practice. The same tendency occurred in this study, reinforcing this argument by demonstrating that emotional work was not a peripheral activity, but a core mechanism through which change was sustained. When this work remains invisible and individualised, it risks becoming unsustainable over time. Recognising emotional labour as organisational work rather than personal disposition therefore appears critical for strengthening long-term change capability.

Continuing along these lines, the findings invite reflection on how emotional support is positioned within organisational change. Rather than being formally acknowledged as part of the super user role, emotional labour appeared to emerge informally through everyday interactions. This suggests that emotional support was not explicitly designed for but developed as a response to uncertainty and ongoing adjustment in daily work. Such an arrangement raises questions regarding how responsibility for managing emotional responses during change is distributed within the organisation, particularly when this work becomes closely tied to

individual commitment rather than formal support structures. Facilitation training, reflective forums, and peer support structures may help distribute emotional responsibility more evenly and reduce dependency on individual endurance. In a similar way, the findings indicate that learning primarily occurred through experience rather than through formalised systems. While experiential learning enabled super users and end users to develop competence over time, it also limited transferability and continuity, as knowledge remained embedded in individual experiences. This observation aligns with Stouten and Cremer's (2018) argument that sustained change requires learning mechanisms that extend beyond individual sensemaking. From an analytical perspective, the reliance on experiential learning can therefore be understood as both an enabler of local adaptation and a constraint on broader organisational learning.

Taken together, these findings highlight that developing the super user role involves navigating ongoing tensions rather than implementing fixed solutions. Emotional engagement supported commitment and stability but also increased vulnerability when responsibility remained informal. Similarly, experiential learning facilitated flexibility while simultaneously limiting scalability. These tensions suggest that ambassadorship operates within dynamic organisational conditions, where its effectiveness is shaped by how learning, responsibility and support are continuously balanced over time.

6 Conclusion

In this final chapter, the main research question is answered by addressing the main findings in the analysis and discussion of the research questions. The conclusions are as follows:

First, super users functioned as change ambassadors who linked central change initiatives to local operational realities. They acted as bridges between management and end users by translating strategic intentions into meaningful, valuable and actionable practices. In doing so, they supported end users in interpreting change, mobilising engagement and embedding new ways of working. Super users also served as bridges between teams, enabling collaboration and knowledge sharing across the organisation. Furthermore, they acted as role models who influenced end users' attitudes and behaviours, thereby legitimising change through everyday behaviour. Super users were typically appointed by managers based on role descriptions, the individual manager's judgement, availability, perceived willingness and operational feasibility, rather than through formal recruitment processes. Participants highlighted the value of complementing managerial selection with peer insights, as well as appointing more than one super user per team to distribute responsibility and reduce vulnerability. The function of super users was shaped less by formal position and more by relational influence, credibility and informal authority. Their impact depended on balancing technical competence with strong interpersonal and emotional skills, particularly empathy, trustworthiness and emotional stability, alongside proactivity, communication skills and adaptability to tailor support to local needs. Overall, the findings indicate that organisational change is unlikely to take root or endure without skilled, motivated and well-selected super users. Positioned at the intersection of strategy and daily practice, super users emerge as a critical mechanism for long-term change sustainability.

Second, it became clear how super users' ability to support and sustain organisational change was primarily shaped by the organisational context surrounding their role rather than solely individual capability. The Company did not actively design for sustainment, but it rather emerged informally, which resulted in super users filling the gap unintentionally. Over time, this reliance on informal ambassadorship increases organisational dependency on certain individuals' commitment but will act as a barrier for resilience when super users' roles are changed or fluctuated. Therefore, asserting the right structural foundation for super users is the key to make the most use of their change ambassadorial skillset, having corresponding authority, time or long-term organisational backing allowing for their ongoing role as sustainers of change. On a similar note, super users' close connection to daily operations functioned as an enabler, fostering trust and accessibility among end users, it also occasionally placed them in demanding positions where expectations exceeded available support. Instead, clearer ownership of post-implementation adaption with assistance of managers in making the change embedded is important to consider. By enabling this setting, super users will have an overall stabilisation impact on the organisation throughout enduring change journeys, involving both uncertainty and stress, which proves that change ambassadorship acts as a catalyst for successful change implementation and sustainment in a long-term perspective.

Third, the findings show that relational and emotional mechanisms were central to how change was experienced, enacted and sustained over time. Viewing super users as relational facilitators rather than technical implementers highlights their role as social navigators who connected people, meaning and practice through everyday support, reassurance and continuity. By creating psychological safety and trust at the local level, super users help end users understand, accept and engage with change. Their support enabled end users to move from uncertainty to confidence and competence, particularly in long-term or ambiguous change processes, illustrating the significant impact the super users had on end users' engagement and readiness. Although programme-level communication clarified what was changing, super users helped end users understand what the change meant in their daily work. Through sensemaking and sensegiving in collegial relationships, they shaped the emotional climate of the change process and contributed to embedding new ways of working into everyday practice.

Finally, the super user role must shift from temporary project support to an enduring organisational capability which requires increased directive and encouragement from higher management. Developing ambassadorship as a long-term capability enables organisations to accumulate learning across initiatives rather than repeatedly restarting change from the beginning. At the same time, the findings highlight a central organisational tension in developing the role. Formalising ambassadorship can enhance clarity and stability, yet excessive formalisation risks undermining the peer-based legitimacy that enables super users to influence everyday practice, being one of the main strengths with change ambassadorship. Effective development therefore depends on how organisations balance formal structure with informal influence, maintaining flexibility while providing sufficient organisational support. In a clear majority of cases where super users experience successfully change outcome, managers were highly involved. Sustained leadership engagement is therefore essential to ensure that ambassadorship complements, rather than substitutes formal ownership of change. Aligning with the findings saying how successful super user worked closely with their managers. In addition, the findings emphasise the importance of supporting learning and reflection beyond individual experience. Capturing the valuable insights of super users in a more universally defined framework could allow the transition of local ideas for development into a broader organisational context as a collective capability. This is a development area which could bridge the gap between local solutions and universal applications beneficial in guidance for the whole organisation while eliminating person-dependency.

7 Recommendations

The following recommendations aim to inspire organisations in how to sustain change through their people. While these recommendations are grounded in a specific empirical context, the conceptual insights regarding super users as change ambassadors remain relevant across industries characterised by complex change initiatives and knowledge-intensive work.

- Super users should be positioned as long-term change ambassadors rather than temporary implementation support. Their value extends beyond technical guidance; they translate change into locally meaningful practices, reinforce new behaviours over time and provide continuous peer support. To be impactful, their roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined and communicated, ensuring expectations are explicit. Post-implementation, super users remain critical for adoption, harmonisation, and standardisation of change. They should be granted enough authority to legitimise their role while preserving their informal credibility.
- To reduce dependency on super users, organisations should establish mechanisms that convert locally developed knowledge into shared organisational competence accessible to all. Structured lessons-learned processes ensure that insights are documented and applied across the organisation, supporting continuous development for both future change initiatives and day-to-day operations.
- Super users' contributions should be regularly acknowledged and made visible through concrete recognition. This reinforces their commitment, strengthens the legitimacy of their role and signals the strategic value of people-driven change.
- The impact of super users depends heavily on who is selected. Interpersonal skills, particularly trust building, communication, proactivity, empathy, emotional stability and resilience, should be prioritised alongside technical competence. Training in communication and leadership is essential to complement technical training, enabling super users to meet the relational demands of the role and create value.
- Super users' success depends less on individual capability and more on organisational conditions. They enable change but should not be expected to carry it alone. Clear expectations, realistic workloads, protected time and sustained managerial support are therefore essential. Resilience can be further reinforced by appointing multiple super users and by establishing ongoing networks that provide support, collaboration and continuity.

Within this context, super users function as a critical bridge between strategic intentions and everyday practice, enabling adaptation and engagement over time. By recognising, supporting and developing this role beyond formal implementation, organisations can strengthen their capacity to sustain change across different contexts and initiatives. Based on this study, change appears to be sustained not by systems alone - it is sustained by people and the conditions that enable them to succeed.

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Appendix A. Interview Guide – Managers

1. Please tell us a bit about yourself and your role in The Change Programme?
 - *Particularly in relation to the super users.*

2. How would you describe the value of the Super User role within The Change Programme?
 - *Do you think this purpose aligns with how the role is practiced today?*

3. How are Super Users identified and selected? What qualities or competencies are prioritised?
 - *Technical vs. soft abilities?*
 - *Challenges when finding suitable candidates?*
 - *If you been personally involved in the selection process - how was that experience?*

4. Once selected, what types of training or support do Super Users receive before, during, and after implementation?
 - *Balance technical vs. leadership or soft-skill development?*
 - *Any other types of resources put into developing the role?*

5. From your perspective - what are the main challenges in driving change? How can Super Users help overcome these challenges?
 - *What aspects of the role are currently working well and not so well?*
 - *Balancing regular responsibilities with super user tasks?*
 - *Are some project phases more critical than others?*

6. How do Super Users influence employee engagement and organisational culture during the change process?
 - *In what ways do Super Users help shift mindsets and embed new ways of working beyond technical training?*
 - *Focus on organisational culture – embedded, long-term mindset and processes*

-
7. In your opinion, what are the key factors that determine whether a change becomes truly sustained in daily work practices?
- *Any existing assessment methods that evaluate the Super users long-term impact?*
 - *How do you decide if a super user has accomplished set expectations?*
-

8. What distinguishes a well-performing Super User from one that struggles?
- *What behaviours or attitudes make the biggest difference?*
 - *Could you share examples of particularly successful or challenging experiences with Super Users?*
-

9. From your experience - what additional support or organisational conditions would help Super Users perform more effectively?
-

10. If you could redesign the role of super users from your experience, what would you keep, change, or add to strengthen the super user impact in future initiatives?
- *Any “unnecessary” responsibilities for super users?*
-

11. Finally, is there anything else you would like to add or reflect on that we haven't covered today?
-

Appendix B. Interview Guide – Super Users

1. Can you start by telling us a little about your role at The Company and how you got involved in The Change Programme?

➤ *How long did you have the role of Super User, and what made you accept the assignment?*

2. What is the purpose of the Super User role according to you – why does it need to exist, in your opinion?

➤ *How does the role differ in practice from how it is defined on paper?*
➤ *How much is your role about technology/systems compared to supporting people in the change?*

3. How were you as a super user identified and selected? Which qualities or competencies do you believe are prioritized?

➤ *Technical vs. soft skills?*
➤ *Challenges in finding suitable candidates?*
➤ *If you have been involved in the selection process yourself – how did you experience it?*
➤ *Now afterwards, what qualities/characteristics have been most important for you in the role?*
➤ *Is this a role that people want to have?*

4. How do you feel that your colleagues viewed your role? (e.g., as an expert, support, role model, change leader?)

➤ *Do you think you have the opportunity to influence or inspire colleagues to embrace the new ways of working?*
➤ *Did you feel that you made a difference in your role? Example?*
➤ *To what extent do you feel like a "Change Ambassador"?*
➤ *Was it hard to be both a super user and also keep your old role within the team? How do you tackle that? The dynamic?*

5. How did you get prepared for the role of Super User? What kind of training or support did you receive before the implementation? Was it enough? Now, what would you wish for that you were given before/during?

➤ *Did you receive training in both technical parts, leadership, or communication with colleagues?*

- *Did you feel equipped enough to take on this role – need additional resources?*
-

6. How did you experience the support during the project? Did you get help, guidance, or input through networking meetings with other Super Users?

- *Was the network between super users easy for you to connect within?*
-

7. Which parts of the role work well compared to less well, in your opinion?

- *E.g., lack of time, unclear expectations, balance with regular tasks*
 - *Difficult to balance regular tasks with the assignment as a super user?*
 - *Is any phase of the work more critical in the role of super user?*
-

8. How did you deal with resistance or uncertainty among colleagues during the change process?

9. How did you collaborate with managers or project managers during the change process?

10. Do you feel that you through the super user role did get a better chance/position to influence within the organisation and specific during this change directive, or do you feel more like a middleman for communication between the managers and end users?

11. How do you feel and how would you describe The Company's organisational culture? Is it a culture that makes change possible, or do you have other thoughts about this?

- *Do you feel you were given the right conditions/environment for you to fulfill your role as a super user?*
-

12. What distinguishes a well-functioning super user from one who has a harder time?

- *Which behaviors or attitudes make the biggest difference?*
 - *Can you share examples of particularly successful or challenging experiences with super user?*
-

13. Measure the super user's impact.

What do you think is the most appropriate way to measure the impact of the role?

- *Difficult to measure soft properties?*
 - *Send out a survey?*
 - *Feedback - When can feedback come in? During? Afterwards? (To improve)*
-

14. How do you see the role of Super User today, compared to when the project started and everything was new?

15. If you could design the Super User role completely freely, what would you keep, change, or add?

16. What do you think would help future Super Users succeed even better?

- *Do you think the role should be given more recognition, time, or resources in the organization?*
-

17. Is there anything you want to add or comment on that we have not talked about today?

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