Examination Question Paper

Preliminary Master thesis:
Knowledge and other factors influence organizational change

Hand-in date:
16.01.2016

Date of submission:
17.01.2016

Campus:
BI Oslo

GRA19502 Master thesis

Master of Science in Leadership and Organizational Psychology

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Content

1 Introduction

Change is vital in order for organizations to adapt to global and geopolitical developments, and to stay competitive (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2013). Such change efforts often include total quality management, cultural change, restructuring or turnaround (Kotter, 2007). Previous research show that only a few of such change processes ends in success, whilst most ends in failure (Kotter, 2007; Beer & Nohria, 2000; Buchanan & Huczynski, 2013). Beer and Nohria (2000) state that "the demands of an ever competitive and changing environment are increasing the need for knowledge about how to lead and manage organizational change rapidly, efficiently, and effectively". (p. ix). Moreover, how organizations communicate change initiatives, how they facilitate for new knowledge as well as the existing knowledge to be acquired, can be important factors for change to occur, and for successful implementation. It is difficult to change an organization when its participants have poor understanding of how it functions, thus, knowledge, sensemaking and sensegiving, and learning, are key factors in getting participants to accept and implement change (Dupuy, 2004; Lines, Stensaker & Langley, 2006; Mills, 2003).

It is important to emphasize that there are various types of change, however, which change process we base our thesis on will depend on the change process that we get insight into. Although knowledge is a broad concept including different knowledge processes, we limit our review, discussion and thoughts to the process of knowledge transfer and sharing given the purpose of this preliminary research (Park & Kim, 2015, p. 773).

The preliminary thesis is organized in the following way: Chapter two presents the preliminary theoretical literature, which sets the bases for our preliminary conceptual model and approach. Chapter three is devoted to the methodological approach that we intend to use throughout our thesis. First, we present research design and strategy, and research method, that include an inductive approach for qualitative research, with an emphasize on interviews for data collection. Lastly, chapter four will give a detailed overview of the thesis progression.

1.1 Preliminary research question

Organizational change is a topic that have been reviewed from many different perspectives, e.g. how organizations prepare for, implement and react to change

(Oreg, Vakola & Armenakis, 2011). Furthermore, it has been discussed in respect to various factors. However, we have not been successful in finding literature that include all factors that have been perceived as important in relation to organizational change, i.e. knowledge transfer and sharing, sensemaking and sensegiving, and learning.

As previously mentioned, knowledge is a broad and difficult concept to measure. Although most literature of knowledge is based on quantitative research, thus, more qualitative research in the field of knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing is needed as it provides in-depth examination of the organizational context in which this occurs (Wang & Noe, 2010, p. 126). Regarding sensemaking and sensegiving, Stensaker (2002) propose the need for further research concerning employee's reaction and understanding of change, in several institutions (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). However, as we have not succeeded in finding literature that investigates these factors together with organizational change, i.e. knowledge transfer and sharing, sensemaking and sensegiving, and learning, we aim to do so through a practical lens, thus, qualitative research approach.

Based on the arguments above, the preliminary research question addressed is the following: "How will knowledge sharing and other factors influence organizational change?"

2 Preliminary Theoretical Framework

This chapter of the preliminary thesis is devoted to relevant literature for understanding our topic of research. First, different aspects of organizational change will be emphasized. Since the phenomenon is quite complex, it can be preferable to describe the underlying premises behind the concept. Therefore, we present different types of organizational change, followed by various approaches, different phases, possible reactions and the importance of leadership in change processes.

The second part in this chapter is dedicated to the importance of knowledge during organizational change. Since knowledge is a vague concept, this part will give a brief description of the concept before providing different perspectives of knowledge. Knowledge management is a concept that is comprised of different processes, however, in this preliminary thesis we consider knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing to be the most prominent in relation to change processes. Thereafter, we touch upon potential factors that can contribute

to the willingness to transfer or/and share knowledge. Lastly, the third part in this chapter will briefly explain other factors that we believe will have an impact on organizational change, i.e. sensemaking and sensegiving, and learning.

2.1 Organizational change

2.1.1 What is organizational change?

It has been common to characterize an organization as something safe, stable and predictable (Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2013). Nevertheless, several authors and researchers tell a different story and characterize the organization as "changing", and use claims like "change or disappear" (Greenberg, 2011), "innovative or perish" (Daft, 2013) or "change and die" (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Everything is in a state of constant change and the business environment in particular. "Changes in the industry environment is driven by the forces of technology, consumer need, politics, economic growth and a host of other influences". (Grant, 2010, p. 270). Change is the process of moving from one state to another (Beer & Nohria, 2000), in which it includes the ability to adapt to its surroundings or improve organizational performance (Pardo del Val & Fuentes, 2003). Thus, change can take many forms and contribute to the organization's structure, culture, tasks, strategies, goals or technologies (Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2013, p. 385-386).

Porras and Robertson (1992, as cited in Weick & Quinn, 1999, p. 363) defined organizational change through the following: "a set of behavioral science-based theories, values, strategies, and techniques aimed at the planned change of the organizational work setting for the purpose of enhancing individual development and improving organizational performance, through the alteration or organizational members' on-the-job-behaviors".

2.1.2 Types of change

Weick and Quinn (1999) distinguish between two types of change: *episodic change* and *continuous change*. Episodic change is often used to group together organizational changes that tend to be infrequent, discontinuous, and intentional, whilst continuous change is emergent, self-organized and evolving (Weick & Quinn, 1999). The main distinction between them lies in how the process of change is characterized, and which setting the content of change belongs to. Moreover, the intervention theories between them is quite different where

episodic change is created by intention and have the structure: unfreeze-transition-refreeze, whereas the continuous change is a redirection with the following structure: freeze-rebalance-unfreeze (Weick & Quinn, 1999, p. 366). There are also different perspectives regarding which role a leader should play in the change process. Further, Weick and Quinn (1999) claim that in an episodic change process the leader function as the prime mover and creates the change, whilst in a continuous change process the leader can redirect employees and facilitate sensegiving.

Nadler and Tushman (1990) present two dimensions where change may occur: *incremental* or/and *strategic change*, and *reactive* or/and *anticipatory*. Incremental change is characterized by change that happens all the time within the organization's existing frame, it aims to enhance the organization's effectiveness, whereas strategic change often has a larger scope and affect the organization as a whole. Furthermore, strategic change happens rapidly and within a short period of time. These types of changes can redefine the organization's structure, strategy and core values (Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2013). On the other hand, change can be perceived as either reactive or anticipatory. The former refers to a direct response of an external event, whilst the latter refers to changes where senior managers anticipate for future events, in which the change itself can provide competitive advantage (Nadler & Tushman, 1990, p. 79). Moreover, Nadler and Tushman (1990) further divide the two dimensions into four types of changes including *tuning*, *adaption*, *reorientation* and *recreation*. Tuning include change that is characterized by incremental and anticipatory change, in which small moderations in the organization adapt to what is expected to be important in the future. Secondly, adaption include change that is characterized as incremental and reactive, in which smaller changes are made internally or externally. Thirdly, reorientation include changes that are strategic and anticipatory, where a typical example could be change of staff members. Lastly, recreation change includes strategic and reactive change, and is often prompted by immediate demands as an outcome of for instance external threats (Nadler & Tushman, 1990, p. 79-80).

2.1.3 Implementing change

Many ways of implement change have been used throughout the history, some with success and some without, however, Buchanan and Huczynski (2013) argue that they all offer quite the same guidance. It has been common to see change as a

process, something dynamic and fluent (e.g Weick & Quinn, 1999; Lewin, 1951; Schein, 2006). Lewin (1951) developed one of the most prominent models of the implementation of change initiatives. First, the model describes a unfreeze phase where the employees realize the need for change. The process of unfreezing is not an end in itself, but rather a process with intention to motivate to learn (Schein, 1996, as cited in Burnes, 2004). The change occurs in the second phase, followed up by refreezing where the new changes get incorporated in practice. However, the model has gotten much criticism in which it assume organizations as stable structures, it is perceived as only suitable for small changes, it ignores organizational power and politics and lastly, it perceives change as top-down and management driven (Burnes, 2004, p. 977). Burnes (2004) further argue that although Lewin's theory can be criticized based on many failures of implementation, it remains as one of the most important theories within the field (Burnes, 2004). Lewin have argued that it is difficult to understand a system until you try to change it
(Schein, 1996, as cited in Weick & Quinn, 1999, p. 363).

Another contributing models for implementing change is Kotter's eight step-model. It is still popular, although it has received major criticism (Abbelbaum, Habashy, Malo & Shafiq, 2012). Kotter (2007, p. 97-103) argues that most transformational efforts fail due to skipping essential steps in the organizational change process. The first step aims to identify possible threats for instance creating urgency, following the development of a guiding coalition in order to develop excitement and cooperation among participants. The third step consists of the development of the strategy that will ensure common vision and goals. Furthermore, the fourth and fifth steps include the facilitation of internal communication and change. Planning and short-term wins are of importance. In the seventh and eighth step the organization have to recruit and promote employees who can function as change agents, in which they contribute to the implementation of vision and in the institutionalizing of new approaches. However, Kotter (2007) uses this framework as a guideline for reducing errors, although it cannot guarantee for success. In sum, the steps stress the importance of the involvement of people at the workplace, sensemaking of the change process, the importance of a good strategy and vision, communication and lastly anchor it all in the culture of the organization.

Organizational culture is broadly defined as "the pattern of shared values and norms that distinguishes one organization from each other where the shared values and norms provide direction and create meaning". (Higgins & Mcallister, 2004, p. 66). Moreover, Shrivastava (1985, as cited in Higgins and Mcallister, 2004, p. 64) stresses the importance to take culture seriously in change processes in which the organization have to change the cultural artifacts, e.g. those sets of attributes, objects and behaviours that help definitively characterize one organization as opposed to another. Further, values and norms, myths and sagas, language systems and metaphors, symbol rituals and ceremonies, and the use of physical surroundings are of importance (Shrivastava, 1985, as cited in Higgins & Mcallister, 2004). Therefore, how the organizational culture is managed through the change process might be essential for its success.

2.1.4 The role of leadership during change

Leadership is about influence others directly through for instance conversations, inspirations, rules, and regulations (Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2013). Yukl (2012) argues that an important requirement for successful change is how the leaders manage the process, and which role they play when employees is going to change. Previous research have found that the most prominent leadership styles during organizational change are democratic and relational, in contrast to authoritative and task oriented leadership (Stogdill & Coons 1957; Likert, 1961, as cited in Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2013). The different forms of leadership are not mutually exclusive and might be combined. Which leadership style that is chosen is crucial for the success and it is highly situation committed and context based.

Conger (2000, p. 97) argues that restructuring or reengineering cannot be entrusted to people lower down in the organization, as they usually do not have an organization wide-perspective, necessary resources, or the political power to introduce such system-wide changes. On the other hand, Schein (2006) argues that it is difficult to claim whether it is the individuals, the group, the organization as a whole or the society, that influence the need for change. Change cannot be understood without the understanding of the interactions between the different parties, i.e. system and the individual, as they are dynamic and in a continuous cycle. These factors will contribute to the creation of leaders, e.g. their position during the change process. Thus, concerning a successful implementation of change initiatives the organization is dependent on all levels in order to implement

these changes (Beer & Nohria, 2000). Higgins (2005, as cited in Schein, 2006) argue that during a change process, the change agents impose their personal values and assumptions on their colleagues. However, as the organization develops a shared view tension can occur due to the leaders perceptions and influence on their employees.

2.1.5 Reactions of change
Different theories of organizational and industrial change emphasize various barriers including organizational routines, social and political structures, conformity, limited search and lastly, complementaries between strategy, structures and systems (Grant, 2010, p. 281). Schein (2006, p. 292) argued that motivation for change will only be accepted if the change targets feel secure and perceive the changes as feasible. Moreover, the change targets are more prone for new attitudes or values without feeling lost.

There are no universal definition of the term resistance. Researchers have perceived it as consisting of a variety of behaviours, moreover, what is resistance may be highly subjective (Ford & Ford, 2010). Further, Ford and Ford (2010) claim that resistance is a concept that includes behaviours and communications that managers perceive as dysfunctional for the change process. Resistance can arise from a number of reasons, e.g. increased workload, fear of the unknown, changing structures and power relations, loss of identity or uncertainty about consequences for personal life (Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2013, p. 392-395).

Previous research on resistance to change perceive is as a common issue for most organizations (Yukl, 2013; Hughes, 2006; Lawrence, 1954, as cited in Thomas & Hardy, 2011; Ford, Ford & D'Amelio, 2008). However, more recent research celebrates resistance and claims that it can be an important factor in successful change processes (Thomas & Hardy, 2011, p. 324). From the latter perspective, resistance can function as a valuable resource for change agents as it keeps the conversation of change active (Ford & Ford, 2010), it can contribute to improving the process and conduct of change through challenging assumptions that are taken for granted (Amason, 1996; Schweiger, Sandberg & Rechner, 1989, as cited in Ford et al., 2008, p. 369; van Dam, Oreg & Schyns, 2008, as cited in Thomas & Hardy, 2011) and in providing feedback on recipients engagement (Ford et al., 2008).

2.2 Knowledge

2.2.1 What is knowledge?

Knowledge is the "possession of human mind and treated as a cognitive capacity, or resource, that can be developed, applied and used to improve effectiveness in the workplace". (Newell, Robertson, Scarbrough, Swan, 2009, p. 3). The concept of knowledge is rather vague and difficult to define (Gooderham, 2007). Most researchers distinguish between explicit and tacit knowledge (e.g. Polyani, 1966), where the former is found in words, sentences, documents, organized data, computer programs and other explicit forms (King, 2009, p. 4). Thus, explicit knowledge can easily be shared and expressed through language, communication or explanations (Filstad & Blåka, 2007). On the other hand, tacit knowledge is more subjective and explorative, thus, hard to formalize and often difficult or impossible to articulate (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka, Toyama & Nagata, 2002, as cited in Gooderham, 2007; King, 2009). Although most scholars distinguish between these two types of knowledge, Botha, Kourie and Snyman (2008) argue that explicit and tacit knowledge should be perceived as a spectrum, rather than definitive concepts. The reason for this is that most organizations include a mix of both knowledge types, rather than one over the other, which can result in creation of new knowledge (Filstad & Blåka, 2007).

2.2.2 Perspectives on knowledge

Chiva and Alegre (2005, as cited in Filstad & Blåka, 2007, p. 99) distinguish the concept of knowledge into three parts consisting of individual, connectionist and social-process learning. Individual knowledge is based on cognitive psychology, and perceives knowledge as an objective representation of the world. Further, knowledge is universal, abstract and dependent on what it is seen in relation to. From the connectionists perspective, knowledge is derived from networks and not only individuals, thus, it is found in the connections of individuals, organizations and their environment. On the other hand, from the perspective of knowledge as a social process, knowledge is an act of construction and creation where it is based on social interaction and discursive behavior. Here, the emphasis is placed on development of knowledge, thus, the knowing.

According to Newell et al. (2009) structural perspectives on knowledge can help to provide different types of knowledge. Nonaka (1994, as cited in

Newell et al., 2009, p. 7) presented the SECI-model as the conversion process where knowledge creation took place. However, we see it as more appropriate to look at knowledge from a process and practice perspective, as it focuses more on social interaction in particular contexts, and sensemaking (Newell et al., 2009, p. 14). According to this perspective knowledge is dynamic, i.e. accepted meanings can change due to changes in actors and contexts, equivocal, i.e. knowledge is subjected to different meanings and interpretations, and context-dependent, i.e. knowledge is difficult to separate from the context that it is produced within (Newell et al., 2009, p. 14).

Knowledge is perceived as one of the key competitive assets in an organization's ability for growth and sustainable competitive advantage (Grant, 1996, as cited in Almeida, Hohberger, Parada, 2011, p. 383; Yang & Wu, 2008), thus, it often functions as a source of change and innovation (Hargadon & Fanelli, 2002). For organizations to gain knowledge, they are dependent on recruiting and selecting people with necessary skills, experience and competencies, or facilitating for knowledge for employees to acquire them (Brown & Duguid, 1991, as cited in Wang & Noe, 2010, p. 115). At the same time, it´s important to explore and exploit the existing knowledge within the organization, but also consider how to transfer expertise and knowledge from experts, to novices who need to acquire it (Hinds, Patterson & Pfeffer, 2001, as cited in Wang & Noe, 2010, p. 115).

2.2.3 Knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing

Knowledge management refers to a broad range of dimensions that includes different strategies, approaches and technologies (Alavi & Denford, 2011). According to Alavi and Leidner (2001, as cited in Alavi & Denford, 2011) organizations are knowledge systems that include four knowledge processes: creation, storing, retrieving, transferring and sharing of knowledge. Concerning the purpose of our study, to investigate the distribution of knowledge, we limit our review to look further into the fourth process.

Knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing are often intertwined concepts (Alavi & Denford, 2011; Park & Kim, 2015). Although it is discussed whether to separate these into two concepts, and adequate term for the combination is knowledge exchange. There are three modes for knowledge exchange within an

organization: knowledge exchange between individuals, between individuals and repertoires, and between repertoires. Each of these modes can take form as knowledge transfer or knowledge sharing (Alavi & Denford, 2011). On the other hand, Wang and Noe (2010, p. 117) claim that knowledge exchange includes knowledge transfer and knowledge seeking, the latter being the process where employees search for knowledge from others.

Knowledge transfer can be referred to the movement of knowledge between units, divisions, or organizations (Wang & Noe, 2010, p. 117). Furthermore, it can be explained as the transmission of knowledge from a giver so that the knowledge is learned and applied by the receiver (Ko, Kirsch & King, 2005, as cited in Alavi & Denford, 2011; Bresman, Birkinshaw & Nobel, 2010). For instance, one manufacturing team may learn how to better construct a product from another manufacturing team (Argote & Ingram, 2000, p. 151).

Knowledge sharing refers to a process of interactions among people (Yang & Wu, 2008), where the interaction includes provision of task information to help and collaborate with others to solve problems, develop ideas, or implement policies or procedures (Cummings, 2004; Pulakos, Dorsey & Borman, 2003, as cited in Wang & Noe, 2010). Previous research show that knowledge sharing often can face both individual or organizational barriers such as trust (Barson, Foster, Struck, Ratchev & Pawar, 2000, as cited in Hong, Suh & Koo, 2011, p. 14417), a gap in awareness and knowledge, conflict avoidance (Bures, 2003, as cited in Hong et al., 2011, p. 14417), and distance (Nonaka, 1991, as cited in Hong et al., 2011). Hong et al. (2011) further claim that in order for effective knowledge sharing, one is dependent on appropriate solutions and sequence of activities, but also a giver who is interested in transmitting the knowledge, and the receiver to apply and use it (Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2011, p. 407).

According to Filstad (2010) transfer and sharing of knowledge is a time consuming process, and require both trust and confidence in acknowledging the importance of such processes. Trust has been considered to reduce the perceived costs of sharing knowledge (Kankanhalli, Tan & Wei, 2005, as cited in Wang & Noe, 2010). Further, Lin (2007) claims that "trust exists when individuals perceive that their co-workers possess such qualities of trustworthiness and believe that the co-workers would repay them by doing the same thing when they share knowledge with others". (p. 415).

When considering trust in organizations, it is important to remember that it is a subject that affects all levels; from supervisors to ground-floor workers. When incorporating new knowledge or implementing change, trust can be an important resource in reducing perceived uncertainty, or facilitate risk-taking behaviour and foster constructive orientation (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, as cited in Lin, 2007, p. 415). Furthermore, Kotter (1996, as cited in Hughes, 2015, p. 454) claims that trust is often an absent construct in many organizations, and that the reason why most participants are not committed to change processes, is because of the lack of trust in other departments, divisions or fellow executives. Thus, in order for success in implementing new knowledge, organizations are dependent the creation of trust among all levels, so that individuals are committed to the change process, and in doing what is required of them.

2.3 Other factors

2.3.1 Sensemaking and sensegiving

"The basic idea of sensemaking is that reality is an ongoing accomplishment that emerges from efforts to create order and make retrospective sense of what occurs". (Weick, 1993, p. 635, as cited in Maitlis, 2005). Sensemaking is often triggered by events that are perceived as ambiguous, novel or problematic, and results in a process where people work to understand such issues or events (Lines, Stensaker & Langley, 2006; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Maitlis, 2005). During uncertain events such as organizational change, it is important that all participants engage in sensemaking activities in order to find a meaning of it (Bartunek, 1984; Ranson, Hinings & Greenwood, 1980, as cited in Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 434), but also for the benefit of reducing uncertainty to a comfortable level (Lines et al., 2006). On the other hand, Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) define sensegiving as "the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality". (p. 442).

How organizational members make sense and interpret external and internal sources, can influence both decisions and change processes (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Smircich & Subart, 1985; Thomas, Clark & Gioia, 1993, as cited in Maitlis, 2005, p. 21). According to Lines et al. (2006) change is perceived as an external stimulus that, in addition to past experience, develops different meanings

with the organizational members and sets the basis for sensemaking. Although a strategic change may make sense for managers and the administration, it will not necessary be clear for the whole organization. Questions related to for instance workload, structure, autonomy, will often arise during times of change. Thus, sensemaking is an important determinant for how participants react to change, hence, it is important for organizations to understand which factors to concern in change processes (Lines et al., 2006, p. 229-230).

2.3.2 Learning

Learning can be explained as a change in organizational knowledge as a result of experience (Fiol & Lyles, 1985, as cited in Argote, 2012, p. 31). Buchanan and Huczynski (2013) define learning as "the process of acquiring knowledge through experience which leads to a lasting change in behavior". (p. 155).

Organizational learning has been under extensive discussion for a long period of time, and there are various perspectives of the topic (Crossan, Lane & White, 1999), however, there are some contradictory perspectives on how to define it, where and when it occurs and what it is a result of (Filstad & Blåka, 2007, p. 54). Bower and Hilgard (1981) claim that the traditionally perspective on learning explains it as the process where information is delivered from a knowledge source to an individual that learns through the use of their cognitive systems, and is stored in their memory for usage (as cited in Filstad & Blåka, 2007, p. 54). Nonaka (1994) are one of the most prominent researchers within the field, in which he is concerned with product innovation. Furthermore, March and Olsen (1991, as cited in Crossan et al., 1991) were interested in manager's' role in affecting learning, whereas Huber (1991, as cited in Crossan et al., 1991) sees organizational learning as an information-processing-activity.

Regarding the field of organizational learning, it is common to distinguish between two main approaches: cognitive approach and behaviorist approach (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2013). The former approach explains learning as variations in performance due to changes in individual's knowledge structures, and is seen as a precondition for performance improvement (Lines et al., 2006). According to Huber (1991, as cited in Fuglseth & Grønhaug, 2006) learning occurs when knowledge about the organization is acquired, when members of the organization obtain the knowledge and develop different interpretations of it.

Further, it requires a change in or the development of knowledge and information processes. On the other hand, "behavioral theories attempts to explain learning as a result of training or reactions to performance feedback". (Fuglseth & Grønhaug, 2006, p. 185). Further, this approach focuses more on learning through observation and copying of others behaviors (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2013, p. 167). Learning can occur through single-loop or double-loop processes, where the emphasis is on learning from changing environments (Fuglseth & Grønhaug, 2006, p. 186).

One of the most comprehensive theories on learning were developed by Crossan, Lane and White (1999) and includes 4 i's: intuiting, interpreting, integrating and institutionalizing. Moreover, organizational learning can occur at three levels including individual, group and organizational level. At the individual level, the focus is on intuiting and interpreting with emphasis on recognition of similar patterns that often resulting in tacit knowledge, in addition to the process of making subconscious knowledge conscious in order to change individuals' understandings and actions (Crossan et al., 1999, p. 526-528). The process of integration requires a shared understanding of by members within the same group for instance through continuous dialogue among members or shared practice (Seely-Brown & Duguid, 1999, as cited in Crossan et al., 1999). Lastly, the process of institutionalizing emphasizes the leveraging the learning of individuals within the organization, and that what is learned is stores in routines and practice (Crossan et al., 1999, p. 529-530). Considering the process of learning, one is dependent on organizational members willingness to share knowledge and create solutions for making processes more efficient and effective (Carmeli, Brueller & Dutton, 2009, p. 82).

As the economy is dominated by knowledge work, and rapid change, it is crucial for individuals and organizations to have the ability to learn, and to continue learning (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2013, p. 154). Thus, learning can be a helpful resource in making sense of the ambiguous and uncertain events that organizations face. Furthermore, it is an important activity for both individuals and the organization as a whole, as it can affect management practices such as the design and delivery of job training, creation of learning organizations, and design and operation of knowledge management systems (Filstad & Blåka, 2007; Huczynski & Buchanan, 2013).

2.4 Conceptual model

A conceptual model will give a visual understanding for the aim and purpose of this thesis. In this model, knowledge exchange and other organizational factors, the circles, are the independent variables, whilst organizational change, the square, represents the dependent variable. The arrows explains the way that the relationship between them goes. The underlying idea behind the model is the belief that knowledge exchange and other organizational factors are important for the success or failure of change processes.

Figure 1: Knowledge and other factor's influence on organizational change
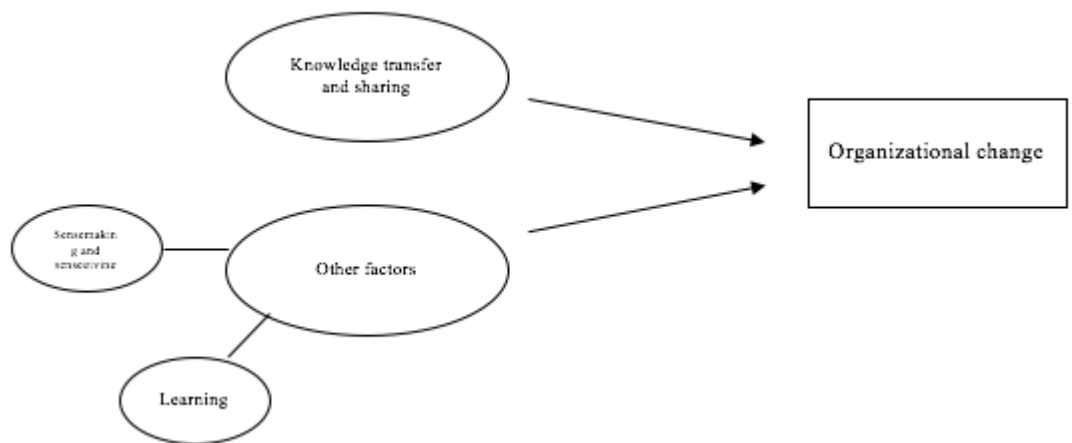
3 Methodology

We have now presented the theoretical grounding for our research approach. In order to identify the extent that knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing, sensemaking and sensegiving, and learning have an impact on organizational change, our aim is to get insight into knowledge-intensive firms, e.g. STI Norway. These types of organizations are located within a business arena that are changing rapidly due to for instance innovations and new technology, and their competitiveness are dependent on their ability to adapt and respond fast. Regarding our thesis, we believe that such organizations are valuable sources for information as they emphasize the importance of knowledge and learning for organizational performance.

This part of the preliminary thesis is devoted to describing and explaining the preliminary theoretical basis for our decisions, regarding method and research design that we intend to use throughout our studies. Further, we present the

conduction and feasibility for our research, in addition to method and design for collection and analysis of data.

3.1 Research strategy and design

Based on our preliminary literature, our aim is to explore the topic of organizational change further, thus we use an inductive research approach. Inductive reasoning is a more exploratory and open-ended approach, contradictory to deductive reasoning (Fisher, Buglear, Lowry, Mutch & Tansley 2010; Bryman & Bell, 2011). Our aim is to collect data to build theory, rather than testing it. Further, our research is based on people and their social organizations, which determines our approach to be explorative (Fisher et al., 2010). Through an iterative approach we get the opportunity to go back and forth between theory and data, i.e. we analyze some of our findings and may collect more literature in order to make sense of it (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 573).

Most inductive strategies of linking theory and research are associated with qualitative research approach as the intention is to explore social practices with the aim of developing theory as the outcome of research, thus, drawing inferences out of observations (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 12-13). However, holding such an approach for research is not without problems. For instance, qualitative research often entails problems regarding external validity, in which the investigation of one simple organization can be difficult to generalize across social settings. At the same time, the outcome of our study may not be valid as we only get the interviewees subjective perceptions and meanings. However, Fisher et al. (2010) argues that findings in fact can be true as the researcher's interpretations and conclusions that are withdrawn, are derived from the research findings.

3.2 Research method

"Exploratory research may involve the use of a battery of research methods: interviews, observation, documents and so on". (Fisher et al., 2010, p. 182). As we aim to hold an inductive and exploratory approach, our main method for data collection will be to conduct interviews. Interviews are an adequate method for data collection, as it gives insight into the way that the interviewees talk about circumstances about the organization. Further, interviewing is perceived as an

useful method in understanding the social context and the way that organizational relationships are constructed (Heizman, 2011). This method provides rich and detailed answers, insight into individual's perspectives, flexibility and the opportunity to interview the interviewee over more than one occasion (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Fisher et al., 2010). Further, Fisher et al. (2010) distinguish between planning and organizing the interview process. The first part emphasizes important steps for successful interviewing including listing areas and prioritizing of questioning, considering methods for analyzing the questions, in addition to deciding which questions should be open or closed, and lastly, control for the questions relevance for our aim of topic. The second part offers steps for successful organization of the interview, which requires us to control for different elements in our interview guide before presenting this to the interviewees. Evaluating and planning for language, time and place and interview schedule are essential elements. Moreover, it can be necessary to pilot the interview to co-workers or co-students, as this can increase the quality of our method (Fisher et al., 2010). When conducting the interviews, one of us takes the part of the interviewer and thus, handles the questions, whilst the other person records notes and observations of the interviewee (Eisenhardt, 1989). An audio recorder will be the main resource in collecting data, at the same time as writing notes.

Concerning the insurance of the main issues and topics that need to be covered by the interviewee, we conduct a semi-structured interview (Fisher et al., 2010). An interview guide with fairly specific questions will set the bases for the structure of our interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2011), however, we aim to find a balance between asking questions and in the interviewees latitude to answer in accordance with their own reality. Moreover, a semi-structured interview set the basis for an inductive analysis (Heizman, 2011). With respect to our preliminary research question and the potential factors, we see the necessity of including members from all levels within the organization under investigation: top managers, middle-managers and ground-floor-employees. In this way, we are provided with valuable insight from the whole organization, which can give us a better understanding of their perspectives on organizational change and the factors that can have an impact. On the other hand, as with most other methods, semi-structured interviews may carry potential issues, e.g. social desirability bias (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Interviewees may answer according to what they believe is appropriate from the organization's perspective, as well as what is socially

desirable. At the same time, it is important to remember that interviewees can communicate in ways that are difficult to interpret, which can result in the inclusion of our own subjective interpretations during the transcriptions.

There are many methods that can be used to reveal evidence about how people interpret and react to their organizational and work worlds, for instance formal and informal documents (Fisher et al., 2010). This method can provide us with the individual's personal reflections about the change process (Hope, 2010). If the interviewee is perceiving the topic of research as sensitive, such documents can be beneficial in making them express their feelings and opinions about for instance the facilitation of knowledge, or opinions about their leader, within the change process. Other documents that can be of importance is formal documents and reports about the change process, which will give a clearer understanding of the direction and process itself.

3.3 Pre project

We have now set the basis for the intended research approach regarding our thesis. Our method design will mainly consist of two parts including a pre project and then a more extensive data collection. First, we have to learn more about the potential organization in order to choose relevant projects, people and arenas (Brøndbo & Aarrestad, 2013), therefore, we wish to conduct a modest pre project with the preferred organization of investigation. We intend to execute 2-3 unstructured interviews with the organization's managers and employees, i.e. informal conversations. During these interviews we will prompt the interviewee to deal with a particular topic, in this case organizational change, and allow the interviewees to talk freely and lead the direction of the interview (Bryman & Bell, 2011, Fisher et al., 2010). Further, we wish for a better understanding of the interviewees perception about the completed, ongoing or intended change processes, depending on which type of change process we can get insight into. The aim of the pre project is to get a better understanding of the organization's change process, and which factors may play a role in practice. Although literature have proven that our preliminary factors actually have an impact on organizational change (e.g. Wang & Noe, 2010; Balogun & Jenkins, 2003; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), we want to check whether this is perceived in practice in a large

Norwegian organization. Moreover, pre interviews can give us an idea of potential sub-questions that will complement our overall research question.

3.4 Ethical considerations

When performing qualitative research, we have to consider potential ethical issues that may arise (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Fisher et al., 2010). Prior to the research project all the participants will be offered a consent form where we provide information about volunteerism, ensured confidentiality and anonymity, and the possibility of withdrawal at any time during our study. All recordings through audiotape or other instruments that can identify the interviewee, will be deleted after transcription. Confidentiality of the thesis must also be under consideration, depending on the organization's thoughts about publishing information that can be of concern, e.g. firm name or the collected research data.

4 Plan for thesis progression

This part of the preliminary thesis is devoted to give an overview of the next phases regarding the conduction of the final master thesis. First, we will provide a detailed plan for progression, before presenting a visual table that will show the estimated time periods for each task.

4.1 Progression

As presented above, the thesis will include two phases. In the first phase we conduct a pre project in order to get a better understanding of the organization of investigation, in addition to potential factors that the individuals perceive as having an impact on the outcome of change processes. Thus, the pre project may allow us to probe on emergent themes or take advantage of special opportunities that may arise during a given situation (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 539). We take our pre findings into consideration when determining and formulating the final research question. Further, our pre findings can also determine potential sub-questions that can contribute to find information and develop theories related to our overall research question. Prior to the second phase, we will develop an interview guide that we will pilot on individuals who are excluded from our research study. The second phase of our thesis will include a more extensive data collection. We plan

on conducting interviews between February and March 2017, although it can be necessary to dedicate even more time to this phase.

After collecting what we believe is an adequate amount of information, we will begin to transcribe our findings. When transcribing we can correct our memories and intuitive thoughts about the interviewees responses, we are provided with a more thorough and repeated examination of their responses, thereby, reducing potential accusations based on our values and beliefs as researchers (Heritage, 1984, as cited in Bryman & Bell, 2011). Transcription is very time-consuming, thus, we will devote 2-3 months to analyzing our findings. The last months are devoted to writing the thesis, with aim on handing in the thesis in July 2017. Based on our iterative approach, we will continue to look for relevant literature that can complement our preliminary literature review, during the whole process of writing this thesis.

4.2 Visual table of thesis progression

Table 1: Table presenting tasks

Tasks and months	January	February	March	April	May	June	July
Preliminary master thesis	X						
Meet with organizations	X	X					
Pre project		X					
Read more literature	X	X					
Review and develop research approach		X					
Data collection		X	X				
Transcription of interviews			X	X	X		
Data analyzing			X	X	X		
Write thesis					X	X	X
Hand in thesis							X

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