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Abstract

In today's fast-moving and unpredictable world, continuous change has become a permanent part of modern organizations, posing increasing challenge to the every day work of organizational members. Not surprisingly, it has put more and more emphasis on how and by whom change should be managed. By implication, the traditional top-management perspective is increasingly questioned as the only approach to managing change. Instead, more and more attention has been drawn to the role of middle managerial work and change agency amidst change. Yet, more research is needed to understand the role of managerial work amidst continuous change.

In an attempt to address this research gap, this study was conducted as a qualitative case study. The aim of this study was to examine 1) what middle managerial work is amid continuous change, 2) what middle managerial communication is amidst continuous change, and 3) what the role of middle managers as change agents is amid continuous change. The target group for the study was nurse managers at first-line and higher middle managerial levels, who work as direct managers at the Hospital District of Southwest Finland. In line with prior literature, the term middle manager was used to address both line and middle managers. This was justifiable because middle managerial work is conducted by both managerial levels in the case organization. The empirical data consists of eight semi-structured interviews, which were analyzed with a bottom-up approach following the Gioia method.

Based on the findings of the study, a dynamic model on the dimensions of middle managerial work is developed. The model suggests that middle managerial work amidst continuous change consists inextricably of managerial communication and change agency. Moreover, the model shows that the context of continuous change acts as an underlying force in the organization, constantly challenging and triggering middle managerial work towards a more efficient direction. Furthermore, it suggests that middle managerial work should be supported and constantly developed by the organization. All in all, this study generates new understanding on middle managerial work amid continuous change, and seeks to encourage further research on the role of middle and lower-level managers amidst continuous change.

Key words	middle managerial work, continuous change, change agency, managerial communication, middle management perspective
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Tiivistelmä

Arvaamattomassa ja nopeasti muuttuvassa maailmassamme jatkuvasta muutoksesta on tullut pysyvä osa nykyorganisaatioit, mikä asettaa lisä-haasteita organisaation jokapäiväiselle työlle. Sen myötä myös muutoksen hallintaan on kiinnitetty enemmän ja enemmän huomiota. Yhä useammin perinteinen ylimmän johdon rooli muutoksen hallinnassa kyseenalaistetaan, ja rinnalle ovat nousseet keskijohdon työn roolia korostavat lähestymistavat muutosjohtamiseen. Tästä huolimatta keskijohdon roolia jatkuvan muutoksen keskellä ei ole juurikaan tutkittu.

Moniselitteisen aiheen ja vähäisen aiemman tutkimuksen vuoksi tämä tutkimus toteutettiin kvalitatiivisena tapaustutkimuksena. Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli selvittää 1) millaista keskijohdon esimiestyö on jatkuvan muutoksen keskellä, 2) millaista keskijohdon esimiesviestintä on jatkuvassa muutoksessa ja 3) millainen keskijohdon esimiesten rooli muutosagenttina on jatkuvassa muutoksessa. Tutkimuksen kohderyhmänä olivat Varsinais-Suomen Sairaanhoidopiirissä toimivat lähi-esimiestason ja keskijohdon tason hoitaja esimiehet, joilla oli työntekijöitä suorassa alaisuudessaan. Tässä tutkimuksessa keskijohdon käsite laajennettiin käsittämään sekä lähi-esimies- että keskijohtotason esimiehet. Tämä oli perusteltua yhtäältä aiemman tutkimuskirjallisuuden valossa, ja toisaalta siksi, että kohdeyrityksessä keskijohtotason työtehtäviä suorittavat sekä lähi-esimiehet että keskitason esimiehet. Tutkimuksen empiirinen aineisto koostui kahdeksasta puoli-strukturoidusta teemahaastattelusta, jotka analysoitiin aineistolähtöisesti, Gioia-menetelmää seuraten.

Tutkimustulosten pohjalta kehitetään dynaaminen malli, joka kuvaa keskijohtotasoista esimiestyötä ja sen osa-alueita. Mallin avulla selvitettiin, että keskijohdotason esimiestyö koostuu esimiesviestinnästä ja esimiehen muutosagentti-roolista. Lisäksi mallissa esitetään, että jatkuvan muutoksen konteksti toimii taustalla vaikuttavana voimana jatkuvasti esimiestyötä haastaen ja tehostaen. Toisaalta malli myös korostaa esimiestyön tukemisen ja jatkuvan kehittämisen merkitystä. Kaiken kaikkiaan tämä tutkimus lisää ymmärrystä keskijohdon roolista ja esimiestyöstä jatkuvan muutoksen keskellä. Lisäksi se pyrkii innoittamaan lisätutkimusta keskijohdon ja lähiesimiesten roolista ja esimiestyöstä jatkuvassa muutoksessa.

Avainsanat	jatkuva muutos, keskijohdon rooli, esimiestyö, muutosagenttius, esimiesviestintä
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**UNIVERSITY
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Economics

MIDDLE MANAGERIAL WORK AMIDST CONTINUOUS CHANGE

Case: Hospital District of Southwest Finland

Master's Thesis
in Management and Organization

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12.12.2019
Turku

The originality of this thesis has been checked in accordance with the University of Turku quality assurance system using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

As the Ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus philosophized, change is the only constant in life. These words still provide a pertinent description of the world we live in and the structures we act in. In the same way, change is constantly present in modern organizations; change has even been argued to have become a necessity for the development, a prominent part of the operational environment, and a prerequisite for retaining the competitiveness of organizations (e.g. Barrett 2002, 219). Whatever the impetus to change is, organizational change is often challenging and complex in nature (e.g. Barrett 2002). In fact, statistics show a rough estimation of up to 70 % of all kinds of change initiatives failing (e.g. Beer & Nohria 2000; Burnes 2004a; Franken, Edward & Lambert 2009; McKinsey & Co in Umble & Umble 2014). Although change-related phenomena are being increasingly investigated, it has not seemed to significantly reduce the number of failures in managing change thus far. Failures in change initiatives tend to bear a negative impact on employee motivation and engagement (Umble & Umble 2014,) and ultimately on the entire organizational culture.

Over the past few decades, there has been a lot of debate over the most appropriate approach to organizational change; previous research has examined change from various perspectives and through numerous terms (Burnes 2004a). However, two approaches to change can clearly be identified: episodic and continuous change approaches. (Burnes 2004a, 887.) Episodic change refers to an organizational change that is infrequent, discontinuous, intentional and often dramatic in nature (Weick & Quinn 1999). It is often considered as an emergency state that disrupts the normal operations in an organization (e.g. Mintzberg & Westley 1992; Weick & Quinn 1999). Continuous change, in turn, refers to organizational changes that are ongoing, evolving and cumulative in nature (e.g. Weick & Quinn 1999; Weick 2000). It is continuous adaptation to changes and discovery of opportunities in everyday working environment, which has the potential to ultimately create fundamental change without planned intention (e.g. Burnes 2004a, 889; March 1981). Over the past 20 years, continuous change has increasingly established its position as the most prevalent approach to examining organizational change (Burnes 2004a, 886) as change is nowadays increasingly continuous and unpredictable in nature (Gilbert 2009).

Change management has been traditionally examined from the perspective of top management and in the context of non-continuous, one-time episodic change (Burnes 2004b; Burnes 2014; Wooldridge et al 2008). As a counter-argument for this, there is a growing

body of research suggesting that middle managers play a crucial and pro-active role as change agents in managing change, not just as implementors but as initiators, facilitators and creators of strategy and change (e.g. Burgelman 1983; Balogun 2003; Rouleau 2005; Pappas & Wooldridge 2007; Mantere 2008; Conway & Monks 2011). This approach has been broadly referred to as middle management perspective (e.g. Wooldridge et al. 2008), which can refer to any manager that has a central position between top management and the operational level, even if they do not exactly sit in the middle of organizational hierarchy (Wooldridge 2008). Following this broad definition, this study includes both first-line and higher middle managers in the middle management perspective taken in this study. Despite the recognition of, and attention drawn to the role of middle managers in change management in general, limited research has been conducted on middle managerial work amidst continuous change in particular. Thus, the aim of this study is to address this gap and contribute to an enhanced understanding of middle managerial work amidst continuous change.

1.2 Purpose and structure of the study

The purpose of this study is to find out what middle manager communication is amidst continuous change. The research topic is examined through the main research question: *What is middle managerial work amidst continuous change?* The main research question is approached through the following two sub-questions: 1) *What is middle managerial communication amidst continuous change?* 2) *What is the role of middle managers as change agents amidst continuous change?*

The theoretical background for this study consists of two parts. The first is built on management literature and research discussing managerial work and communication. At this point, it is worth to note that possibilities to review leadership literature were acknowledged. However, within the limited frames of this Master's Thesis, the theoretical part has been restricted to discussing managerial work and communication only from management literature perspective. The second part of the theoretical background is based on academic research and literature on episodic and continuous change and change agency. Continuous change represents the research context for this study.

The study is conducted as a qualitative single-case study. It is carried out as a part of a one-year Change capability project at the Hospital District of Southwest Finland (HDSF). The target group for the research is nurse managers at first-line and higher middle managerial levels, who work as direct managers at HDSF and have participated in one of the two Change communication training programmes organized in February and March 2019. The training programmes were organized as part the Change capability project that took place between Autumn 2018 and Autumn 2019. The data is collected through semi-

structured interviews, which are analyzed with a bottom-up approach following the Gioia methodology (see Gioia et al. 2012).

This thesis is divided into six chapters. This chapter introduces the reader to the background of the research topic and research gaps. Furthermore, it presents the purpose of the study, research questions, the theoretical background and the course of the thesis. The second chapter presents the first part of the theoretical background for this study by reviewing prior research literature on managerial work and communication. The third chapter discusses the second part of the theoretical background which is based on previous research on episodic and continuous change, change agency and middle management perspective. After this, chapter four presents the case organization and discusses how the studied phenomenon is linked to it, after which it describes the research process and presents the applied research methodology. The results of the study are presented in chapter five. Finally, the conclusions on the theoretical and managerial contributions are discussed in chapter six.

2 MANAGERIAL WORK AND COMMUNICATION

2.1 Defining managerial work

What managers do in their everyday work has interested and puzzled researchers throughout the 20th century to this day. Definitions of and approaches to the manager's role vary greatly, which suggests that it is a rather multidimensional concept, and thus, complex to understand and define. (Nyström 2005, 9; Burnes 2014, 497; Carrol & Gillen 1987, 23; Hales 1986, 1999; Raelin 2012.) Due to the large number of available definitions and the rather limited scope of this Master's Thesis, only the definitions and approaches by some of the most acknowledged researchers and authors on managerial work will be discussed. Theories on managerial work have been selected in terms of general recognition in the field and relevance of this study. The purpose of presenting some of the most influential studies and definitions on managerial work is to help us develop a general understanding on the nature of managerial work and the intertwined link of managerial communication to the overall role and work of a manager, which are at the core of this study.

It is generally approved by scholars that attempts to define the role and functions of a manager date back to as far as 1916, when Henri Fayol's pioneering book *General and Industrial Management* was published first in French and later in English in 1949. (Carrol & Gillen 1987, 38; Lamond, 2004; Burnes 2009, 497.) In his afore mentioned book, Fayol distinguishes five key managerial functions, which are considered the manager's main duties: planning, organising, commanding, coordinating and controlling. (Burnes 2009, 23, 479; Carrol & Gillen 1987, 38.) The five Fayolian managerial functions are described in Table 1.

According to Fayol, mastering these five key functions well would ensure the accomplishment of a well-managed organisation whichc in the Fayolian view come down to 14 universal principles (Burnes 2009; 23). These 14 principles of organization include, for example, division of work, authority and responsibility, discipline, unity of command, unity of direction, scalar chain order, equity, stability and order of personnel, initiative and esprit de corps. (see Mullins 1989 in Burnes 2014, 24.) Despite its rather early publication year, many of the propositions for managerial work presented in Fayol's publication are still taught and practiced today. (Fells 2000; Lamond 2004; Burnes 2014.)

Table 1 List of Henri Fayol's five key managerial functions (Burnes 2014, 23)

Managerial function	Description
Forecasting and planning	Considering the future, deciding what needs to be done and developing a plan of action.
Organizing	Bringing together the human and material resources and developing the structure to implement the activities of the organization
Commanding	Making sure that all employees perform their jobs well and in the best interest of the organization.
Coordinating	Verifying that the organizational activities work collectively to achieve goals.
Controlling	Ensuring that all actions are carried out correctly and according to established rules and given commands

As noted by, for example, Burnes (2014, 497), Nyström (2005, 9) and Raelin (2012), since Fayol's publication, many scholars have attempted to further define what manager's do. (e.g. Mintzberg 1971, 1973, 1975; Drucker 1955, 1985, 1993; Brewer and Tomlinson 1964; Kotter 1982, 1990; Hales 1986, 1999; Horne and Lupton 1965; Nyström 2005.) Many researchers on the field refer to Henry Mintzberg's (1973) classic book *The Nature of Managerial Work* as one of the corner stones in defining managerial work (Raelin 2012, 819), as well as the first clear association between the notion of role and managerial research. (Nyström 2005, 9.) The book is based on a broad study of the research literature on management, as well as on Mintzberg's own research on managerial work, especially on his 1968 doctoral dissertation. (e.g. Mintzberg 1968, 1970.) Tengblad (2006, 1438) suggests that one of the reasons for the recognized status of Mintzberg's book over time is the fact that Kurke and Aldrich (1983) conducted a replicating study that confirmed Mintzberg's results on the nature of managerial work. Furthermore, as expressed by Burnes (2014, 501) Mintzberg's observations have been supported by other studies as well (e.g. Kotter 1982).

In his classic study, Mintzberg (1968) studied and observed the activities of five chief executives and their mail for one intensive week. The observed executives worked in different large organizations within different industries: a consulting firm, a teaching hospital, a school system, a high-technology firm, and a manufacturer of consumer goods. (Mintzberg 1968, 1973, 1975, 1989). The brevity of the time frame was justified by the interest of the study lying more on understanding the pace and nature of work rather than development of managerial actions in the long term. (Mintzberg 1989, 8.) In spite of the

shortness of the observation time, the data gathered for each of the five executives were considerably similar (Mintzberg 1968, 3).

Based on his study, Mintzberg defines the manager “as that person in charge of an organization or subunit” (Mintzberg 1975; 1990), and this definition would include managers at all levels, from CEOs to foremen and sports team coaches. He argues that what is common to all managers is that they have formal authority over an organizational unit, which brings about status. Status, in turn, leads to various interpersonal relations, and ultimately to a wide access to information, which empowers managers to make decisions and strategies for their unit (Mintzberg 1975; 1990).

Mintzberg distinguishes ten roles that managers perform and alternate between in their daily work (see Table 2). These ten managerial roles were divided into three interconnected categories: interpersonal, informational and decisional roles. *Interpersonal roles* stem from formal authority and status – characteristic to a manager’s position within an organization – and are concerned with interpersonal relationships. The interpersonal roles include the roles of *figurehead*, *leader* and *liaison*. Then again, *Informational roles* stem from the interpersonal roles, placing the manager in a special position within the organization and making him a central point for organizational information. The informational role category is formed by the manager’s roles as a *monitor*, *disseminator* and a *spokesperson*. Finally, the manager’s extensive access to information, together with their authority, gives them a significant role in organizational decision-making. The category of *decisional roles* of the managerial work include the roles of *entrepreneur*, *disturbance handler*, *resource allocator* and *negotiator*. (Mintzberg 1973, 56–57). A short description of the ten roles within the three categories is described in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Mintzberg's Managerial Roles (Mintzberg 1973; 1990; Burnes 2014, 500; Yukl 2013, 30–31).

Category	Role	Description
Interpersonal	Figurehead	⇒ A formal representative of organization
	Leader	⇒ To members of a group in the organization (e.g. guidance to subordinates)
	Liaison	⇒ Forming connections outside the organization
Informational	Monitor	⇒ Searching, receiving and storing information for the organization.
	Disseminator	⇒ Passing useful information to subordinates.
	Spokesperson	⇒ Communicating information to relevant external and internal groups.
Decisional	Entrepreneur	⇒ Initiator and designer of change and improvements by scanning activity.
	Disturbance handler	⇒ Handling crises effectively, responding to pressures.
	Resource allocator	⇒ Budgeting and allocating resources.
	Negotiator	⇒ Managers have necessary information and authority to carry out this role

Mintzberg concluded that, against the universal perception of managerial work as a planned and systematic process, the manager's job is, in fact, characterized by brevity, discontinuity and variety. Furthermore, his findings suggest that managerial work is oriented to reactive action, rather than reflective planning, often preferably through oral communication. (Mintzberg 1968, 1973, 1989, 10.) Furthermore, Mintzberg argues that in spite of the rather limited basis for the results of his study, there is extensive empirical evidence to support the argument that these ten roles characterize managerial work in all levels, including middle managers and first-line managers (Mintzberg 1973, 55–56). This is also relevant to note in the scope of this study that focuses on middle managerial work amidst continuous change. However, Mintzberg does suggest that whereas top executives

tend to focus more on external roles, such as liaison, spokesperson and figurehead, managers at lower levels tend to focus more on real-time internal roles, such as disturbance-handler and negotiator. He also states that managerial work at lower levels is more characterized by brevity and fragmentation (Burnes, 2014, 501).

Mintzberg's view on managerial work was considerably later supported by Yukl (2013, 24–28) who came to similar conclusions on the characteristics of managerial work in reviewing literature on management. Similarly to Mintzberg, he argues that managerial work is varied and fragmented, many activities are reactive, interactions often involve peers and outsiders, many interactions involve oral communication, decision processes are disorderly and fragmented and most planning is informal and adaptive Yukl (2013, 24–28). Moreover, Yukl also confirms Mintzberg's division of ten central managerial roles grouped under three categories (Yukl 2013, 29–30). Furthermore, in their attempt to evaluate the usefulness of the classical management functions perspective, Carroll and Gillen (2011) conclude, that the classical managerial functions and roles seem to represent the most suitable way of portraying the manager's work today.

The views of Mintzberg and Fayol may seem to differ from each other at first; Fayol's work is often considered as a more classical and theoretical approach (Burnes 2014, 22–24,) whereas Mintzberg's work is considered as a more descriptive and practical approach (Yukl 2013, 29). Moreover, compared to Fayol, Mintzberg distinguishes clearly broader managerial roles, and highlights more the interpersonal relationships, communication and the disruptive nature of managerial work.

Despite this, the two views on managerial work have, in effect, been argued by various researchers to be linked (e.g. Tsoukas 1994; Lamond 2004; Fells 2000) and even reconciled (Lamond 2004.) In fact, Mintzberg's research has been argued to have brought practicality and clarity to Fayol's rather abstract functions, and thus elaborated the functions of the managers through the roles that managers perform. (Hales 1993, 13; Lamond 2004, 334). Consequently, as Lamond (2004) suggests, the difference, rather than competitive nature, between these two views on management is that while Fayol presented us management as it would ideally be, Mintzberg provided us with management as it is in practice (Lamond 2004, 330.)

As argued by Tengblad (2006, 1468), Burnes (2014, 498) and Carroll and Gillen (2011), the studies by, for example, Mintzberg (1973), Kurke and Aldrich (1983), as well as Fayol (1949), represent the more classical approach to management. Namely, they portray managerial work similarly over time, and organizations as rather stable and hierarchical, having a single purpose. On the other hand, both Tengblad (2016) and Burnes (2014) suggest that there is another group of researchers in the field who take a distinctly different approach in defining the complex nature of managerial work. They represent a more modern view on management. This group of theorists

claim, for example, that managerial work has faced rather dramatic changes over the last few decades. Furthermore, they see organizations as being more subject to change, becoming less hierarchical and flexible, as well as increasingly based on interconnected relationships and multiple objectives. The manager's role in this context is seen more connected to the organizational purpose and values, focusing on the question why managers do what they do (e.g. Drucker 1954, 1988; Kanter 1989; Peters 1987; Handy 1984; 1985), instead of exploring in Mintzberg's way merely what managers do (Lamond 2004.)

Peter Drucker (1954, 1974, 1985), who is often referred to as the 'father of modern management' (Burnes 2014, 498), introduced the well-known concept of *management by objectives* in the 1950's (Drucker 1954, 2007, 2008). Based on it, he distinguished a set of five managerial tasks (see Table 3 below). Drucker's philosophy on management is based on the idea that all members of an organization should work seamlessly towards a common goal through working towards their own objectives, ultimately producing a whole. Thus, each manager's work, at all times and at all levels, should consistently contribute to the success of the organizational whole. To achieve this, the manager should set their own objectives in parallel with the organization's overall goals.

Drucker emphasizes that the manager must be fully aware what the organizational goals are, understand how they are expected to perform and clearly comprehend what is considered unethical or unprofessional within the organization. Consequently, he highlights the interconnectedness of divisions and members of the organization, by arguing that not only the manager should be aware of what is expected of them, but also their superior should know it. Likewise, the manager should be aware of what is expected from their subordinates. However, the manager should be free to decide within the given organizational frames what they have to do. This, according to Drucker leads to more effective control from the inside and motivates the manager to act based on his own objectives – not because their superior told them to take action in a certain manner. (Drucker, 2007 84–94).

Drucker (1989, 214) highlights the role of change within an organization by stating that a manager's fundamental task is to help their subordinates to perform and respond to change through common goals, values, the right structure as well as training and development. As part of his concept of management by objectives and his overall management philosophy, Drucker also emphasizes the role of both downward and upward managerial communication as an enabler for the interconnectedness and interrelationships of the members of organizations on different levels, and suggests that successful communication, in fact, requires a shared experience (Drucker 2007;

2008). Drucker's view on managerial communication will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2.3.

Table 3 Drucker's Managerial Tasks (Drucker 1989, 337–338).

Managerial Tasks

Sets objectives

Organizes

Motivates and Communicates

Measures

Develops people

Recent perspectives and definitions of managerial work tend to shift the managerial role even more from the traditional management by control and commands to the direction of education, development and facilitation, that is, resembling the roles of a coach (e.g. Goggin 2000; Ladyshevsky 2010; Gilley et al. 2010; Kim et al. 2013), teacher, educator, developer and facilitator (e.g. Ellinger & Bostrom 1999; Raelin 2012, 818–819). These perspectives on the manager's work define the manager's role increasingly through empowering and encouraging employees to be self-directed and autonomous over decisions that affect them immediately (Ellinger & Bostrom 1999; Goggin 2000; Raelin 2012). In this kind of managerial process, the role of communication and interaction becomes central. (e.g. Raelin 2012; Goggin 2000)

When discussing managers using coaching as a style, Goggin (2000) states that fewer conflicts start when employees are managed with a coaching style because the employees are empowered, not commanded. In line with this, Kim, Egan, Kim et al. (2013) found that managerial coaching has a direct effect on employee satisfaction with work and role clarity, and an indirect effect on satisfaction with work, organizational commitment and work performance. Some of the forms of acting as a coach identified by Goggin (2000, 160–161) include endorsing employees, commenting on their behavior instead of character, listening, focusing on and acknowledging employees' strengths, as well as acting as a role model. Furthermore, in her review on managerial coaching literature, Hagen (2012) suggests that the manager can act as a coach through the following behavioral means: 1) communicating openly with employees, 2) helping employees to better understand the organization by providing adequate information 3) evaluating the performance of employees 4) empowering employees, 5) challenging employees 6) providing employees with development and learning opportunities 7) role-playing with employees to help them

solve problems 8) assigning important tasks for employees to develop new skills, 9) giving and soliciting feedback from employees (see e.g. Graham, Wedman & Garvin-Kester, 1994; Ellinger & Bostrom 1999).

As another example of the recently discussed managerial roles, Raelin (2012) discusses the manager's role as a facilitator for dialogue. He suggests that in this role the manager aims to break detrimental routines that uphold hierarchical or lateral dominion and smother employees' personal professional growth. Moreover, according to Raelin (2012), the manager ideally facilitates constructive dialogue by using critical discursive practices to foster critical and collaborative engagement. He explains that the manager should take a neutral stance on the content of the discussion between members, allowing them to examine their values and assumptions critically. However, at the same time the manager should try to proactively create an environment where members would feel comfortable engaging in critical discourse, which is seen as a driving force for development.

To conclude this section, there seems to be an interminable number of definitions of managerial work, each of them focusing and highlighting specific aspects of the managerial role. However, there are some aspects that are recognized in most of the definitions. Namely, a manager is a person who has subordinates, a team or group under direct supervision, in order to achieve a certain output. The task of a manager is leading a group towards the right direction and directing resources into the right issues. Managerial work is working with people and with it, always comes responsibility. The manager is responsible for the execution of the tasks delegated for them. The manager does not act alone; they work in a work community where the manager has to take into account not only their subordinates but also their own manager, their colleagues at the same organizational level, the demands posed by the working process, the arrangements of the work community and the prevailing management systems. (Åberg 2006, 63–64; see e.g. Mintzberg 1973; Drucker 1989; 2007; Nyström 2005; Raelin 2012; Yukl 2013.)

2.2 Managerial communication

Managerial communication has been regarded as a crucial part of the manager's everyday work by many researchers and authors (e.g. Mintzberg 1973; Kotter 1982; Drucker 1989; 2008, 317; Kanter 1989). Presently, it can be argued that its importance is emphasized more than ever before, as organizations, and consequently the context where managers work, are continuously changing (e.g. Nyström 2005; Van Vuuren et al. 2007; Barrett 2002; Yukl 2013; Conway and Monks 2011; Heyden et al. 2017, Dasgupta et al. 2012, 2014). On a more general level, it has even been argued that communication is the glue holding an entire organization together (Barrett 2002, 231), a requisite for the existence of organisations (Keyton 2005, 12; Van Vuuren and Elving 2008) and that organisations

ultimately emerge from the communication of its members (Taylor and Van Every 2000, 82).

2.2.1 Importance of communication in managerial work

Managerial communication plays a crucial role in the communication and information flow between organizational members due to the manager's central position in the organization, as well as the fact that they are often seen by subordinates as representing the organization (Van Vuuren et al. 2007, 117, 124.) According to Mintzberg (1973, 47) managers act as information filters selectively forwarding information between the groups the manager maintains communicational relationships with. This is in line with the view of Ponteva (2010, 53) who argues that the manager acts as an instrument between the upper management and subordinates helping them to build common understanding. The manager does this by both interpreting the upper management's speech to subordinates and bringing the thoughts and questions of employees to the notice of upper management (Ponteva 2010, 53). Related to this, enabling communication between various organizational groups is essential also in strategy implementation (Saunders et al. 2008), where mid- and lower level managers play a central role (Saunders et al 2008; Rouleau and Balogun 2011; Salih 2012). Weiss (1998, 12) emphasizes the importance of managerial communication by implying that businesses and industrial operations could not function efficiently without continual communication between the manager and the supervisor. Furthermore, Viitala (2007, 278) argues that the building of common understanding is influenced by managers in both informal and formal encounters with subordinates.

The manager usually communicates with and acts as a link between three groups: superiors, outsiders and subordinates (Mintzberg 1973, 44). The centrality of the communication between the manager and their immediate subordinates has also been emphasized in numerous studies showing that managers spend between one-third to two-thirds of their time communicating with subordinates (e.g. Mintzberg 1968; 1973, 45; Brenner and Sigband 1964; Lawler et al. 1968), making the manager-subordinate relationship essential.

Furthermore, managerial communication has also been recognised to be central from the subordinate's perspective. For example, Allen et al. (2007), in line with Therkelsen and Fiebich (2004, 126), emphasize that the direct manager, together with colleagues, is considered the most relevant and preferred information source for subordinates, regardless of the issue. Moreover, Van Vuuren et al. (2007, 117) emphasize the effects of managerial communication on reinforcing organizational commitment, and attitudes about the organization, while De Nobile and McCormick (2008) emphasize the importance of communication in the workplace and its cruciality to maintaining employee job satisfaction.

This is in line with the findings of Dasgupta et al. (2014, 289) who argue that the more satisfied the subordinates are with the communication of their direct manager, the more emotionally attached to the organization they are, whereas emotional contentment has been found to be one of the most crucial factors behind employee motivation (Bardwick 2007).

2.2.2 Communication as a two-way process

Numerous researchers point out to the importance of drawing a clear distinction between communication and information (e.g. Drucker 2007; Quirke 1995; Elving 2005; Van Vuuren & Elving 2008; Bull and Brown 2012). Communication is a two-way process, and contrary to information that can be simply transmitted from one person to another, it has to be shared (Quirke 1995), making communication a transactional process between two or more parties through which individuals share meaning (Holm 2006). Furthermore, as Drucker (2008, 317) states, information presupposes communication because information is coded, and for that information to be received and used, the recipient must be familiar with and understand the code. That is, communication has to be done in the recipient's terms and fit their expectations, values and purposes in order for it to be received and powerful (Drucker 2008, 318). Thus, plain information is unidimensional, e.g., newsletters or intranet bulletins (Van Vuuren and Elving 2008, 315), whereas communication aims for creating a shared experience and a mutual understanding about reality (Elving 2005; Nyström 2005; Åberg 2006; Drucker 2008, 320; Juholin 2007a), and is participative in nature (Nutt 1999). Furthermore, Quinn (1996) concludes that successful discussions in the context of organizational change are vocal, reciprocal, problem-oriented, rational, imaginative and honest.

Managerial communication, and more specifically, the manager-subordinate communication has typically been studied and presented in a unidimensional way, and thus the focus has been dominantly on downward communication, i.e. from the manager to subordinates (Bisel et al. 2012, 129). However, as in communication of any kind, researchers have increasingly argued for a two-way approach in managerial communication as well, where communication would be both upward and downward and a shared experience where mutual understandings and trusting relationships are built (e.g. Weiss 1998; Therkelsen and Fiebich 2004; Smith 2006; Drucker 2008, 318; Van Vuuren & Elving 2008; Bull & Brown 2012; Bisel et al 2012).

As Åberg (2006) argues, managerial communication is interaction, not forwarding information from up to down. Such interactions are crucial for reaching the overall organizational goals (Van Vuuren and Elving 2008, 350). Consistently, Therkelsen & Fiebich (2004, 126) argue for the importance of two-way communication by concluding that the

organization with the greater level of two-way communication, expressed through face-to-face forums or media will be more successful, with less need for one-way communicational means such as newsletters. Moreover, according to Drucker (2008, 318), managerial communication has to be upward in that it should start with the recipient, i.e. the subordinate, rather than the emitter, i.e. the manager. Consequently, the manager should focus on understanding what the subordinates are receptive to, which is the basis for the manager's ability to listen (Drucker 2008, 319).

Drucker (2008, 319) links two-way communication, i.e. both upward and downward, and the idea of communication as a shared experience to his broader theory of management by objectives discussed earlier in chapter 2.1, according to which, each member of the organization, at all levels should work towards a common organizational goal. This entails the conception that each member, including managers and subordinates at any level should on one hand know what their tasks are and on the other hand, contribute to their superior's understanding of their work through upward communication – from subordinate to the manager. Drucker points out that despite it is often the case that there is divergence in the perceptions between the manager and the subordinate, the mere realization of the fact that they may see the same reality differently is in itself communication, and the starting point for a shared experience and ultimately, a mutual understanding. This gives the subordinate access to the manager's point of view and may help the subordinate understand the complexity of a manager's position including, for example, the decision-making process and the choice of a manager between what they want to do and what the situation requires. (Drucker 2008, 319–320.)

2.2.3 Multi-channel communication with a preference for oral media

According to Mintzberg (1973) the manager communicates through five basic media in their daily work: the mail (i.e. written), the telephone (i.e. oral), the unscheduled meeting (i.e. informal face-to-face), the scheduled meeting (i.e. formal face-to-face), and the tour (i.e. observational) (Mintzberg 1973, 45). Moreover, Bull and Brown (2012) found that the provision of timely and relevant information communicated through a range of mediums is beneficial to the manager and positively affects staff satisfaction, which becomes particularly highlighted in the context of change (Bull & Brown 2012, 135). Consequently, it is suggested that the use of a variety of media rather than only one medium would be beneficial in managerial communication in all levels.

Out of the five identified basic media, Mintzberg (1973, 45; 1975) suggests that managers have a strong preference for the three verbal media, i.e. telephone conversations, as well as formal and informal meetings over written media. To clarify, by verbal communication, Mintzberg refers to oral communication (Mintzberg 1975). More precisely, oral,

face-to-face communication seems to be the dominant mode of interaction between the manager and the employees, managers spending between 55 and 90 percent of their time in face-to-face conversations according to numerous studies (e.g. Burns 1954; Rosemary Stewart 1967; Mintzberg 1968, 1973, 45; Brenner and Sigband 1964; Lawler et al. 1968). When it comes to the effectiveness of oral managerial communication, Therkelsen and Fiebich (2004, 126) argue that direct face-to-face communication from the immediate manager to the employee is not only often the preferred but also the most effective means to increasing trust, satisfaction and loyalty among employees.

A slightly different observation was done by Russ et al. (1990, 151; 170) who found, studying the communication patterns of 94 managers, that managers are in the habit of choosing face-to-face communication for matters that are highly equivocal, complex, emotional, controversial or subjective. In contrast, they found that for communicating clear, well-understood, objective messages, managers tend to prefer written communication, and that using face-to-face communication or telephone for this kind of matters might not be efficient and add excess of cues, thus making the risk of misunderstanding higher (Russ et al. 1990, 151; 170.) Thus, Russ et al. (2012) support the view that managerial communication should be multi-channelled. However, they suggest that the manager's ability to select media correctly, i.e. to fit the ambiguousness of the message, plays a crucial role in effective managerial communication, consequently making it an important factor to consider in this study as well. Moreover, according to them, the correctness of selecting media leads to a higher probability of reaching a mutual understanding between the manager and the employee. Russ et al. (1990, 158; 170.)

2.2.4 Listening and feedback

As part of the suggested interactive, two-way nature of managerial communication between the manager and the subordinates, research suggests that manager spends a considerable part of their time listening, which often even outweighs the amount of time spent in speaking, reading and writing (Lobdell et al. 1993) Furthermore, numerous scholars argue for the significance of the manager's ability to genuinely listen and be receptive to their subordinates (e.g. Drucker 2008, 219; Roper 2005; Smith 2006; Van Vuuren et al. 2007; Bull & Brown 2012; Yukl 2013, 160). For example, Roper (2005) argues that the manager needs skills such as active listening and adaptability to be effective communicators, which is supported by the findings of Willemyns et al. (2003) in their study on trust and power in manager-subordinate communication.

Closely related to the importance of the manager's listening skills, often in fact discussed inseparably in research, is the manager's ability not only to give but also to receive and to be open to feedback from subordinates. That is, together with listening, feedback

is considered an important feature in manager-subordinate communication in research. (e.g. Weiss 1998; Bull & Brown 2012; Van Vuuren et al. 2007.) For example, Weiss (1998) argues that managers should not only provide feedback with respect but also take time to listen, be available to and discuss the issues alone with the subordinate. Consistent with this, Van Vuuren et al. (2007) argue that feedback, followed by the act of the manager listening to the subordinate, are considered the most essential elements in the communication between the manager and subordinate. Furthermore, in their study on the impact of managerial communication to employee satisfaction, Bull and Brown (2012) found that ensuring there was a possibility to participate in meaningful feedback was relevant for the general employee satisfaction. Also Smith (2006) draws attention to the importance of two-way feedback over unidirectional statements by the manager, and argues that it is crucial that the manager takes time to both listen and communicate. In addition, Weiss (1988) emphasizes that managers should be considerate when giving feedback, and be careful to give it with respect and constructively, instead of severe criticism, always demonstrating to the subordinate the aim of developing a common understanding and a sound solution to the problem. Listening and giving feedback are, in fact, effective ways for the manager to promote upward communication from subordinates, which is ultimately to the manager's advantage as well.

2.2.5 Assertive style of communication

Managers use various styles in their daily communication with employees (Dasgupta et al. 2012, 176). Communication style has been defined as “the way one verbally, non-verbally and para-verbally interacts to signal how literal meaning should be taken, interpreted, filtered or understood” (Norton, 1983, 58). As Dasgupta et al. (2012) found, communication style, together with what is communicated, affects considerably employees' interpretation of supervisory communication. Their findings also indicated that employees who are satisfied with supervisory communication tend to develop a stronger bond with the organization (Dasgupta et al. 2012, 173).

Research suggests that openness is one of the key factors in forming an effective general organizational climate (Jablin 1979). As previously discussed, managerial communication has been proved to influence the general organizational climate and employee satisfaction (Weiss 1998; Van Vuuren et al 2007; De Nobile and McCormick; Dasgupta et al. 2012; Dasgupta et al. 2014). Thus, in other words, research suggest that openness of communication is a central feature of managerial communication, making employees more satisfied when the communication between them and their superior is open in nature (Jablin 1979, 1204; 1215).

Closely linked to openness, research suggest that other factors such as consistency and honesty play a central role in successful managerial communication. For example, Smith (2006) suggests that to be effective, managers should communicate in a regular, timely, honest, clear and easily understandable manner. In line with this, Therkelsen and Fiebich (2004) argue that respect and honesty are the foundations of successful communication, which can be encouraged by open, consistent and patient communication in all interactions between the manager and the subordinate. They argue, moreover, that openness, consistency and honesty in communication, without distorting information or sending mixed messages has an impact on trust-building between the manager and subordinate. In contrast the lack of openness, inconsistency and honesty is regarded as reducing the trust in the manager-subordinate relationship. Also scholars such as Weiss (1998), Beer and Eisenstat (1996), Beck and Hillmar (1992) and Nyström (2005) support the view that consistency, honesty and clarity are beneficial to the success of managerial communication.

The findings of Dasgupta et al. (2012) are consistent with the previously discussed research managerial communication styles. Their results revealed that an assertive style in managerial communication, in particular, contributes positively to perceived supervisory support, which in turn enhances employee satisfaction with supervisory communication. (Dasgupta et al. 2012, 173.) The manager's assertive communication style is described as honest, open, objective, accurate, respectful and tolerant in nature (Dasgupta et al. 2012, 176). Moreover, an assertive style in managerial communication can help to create a ground for two-way interaction and thus facilitate reaching a shared understanding (Lwehabura & Matovelo 2000). Furthermore, as Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000, 571) suggest, the more accurate, open and straightforward the communication style of the manager is, the more trustworthy the manager is perceived as by the employees.

3 CHANGING ORGANISATIONS: APPROACHES AND CHANGE AGENTS

Change has been examined through various approaches and terms in research over the past few decades (Burnes 2004a). According to Weick & Quinn (1999) there is a pervasive distinction drawn between the terms of the more traditional episodic, discontinuous and intermittent change, and the terms of continuous, evolving and incremental change in research literature (Weick & Quinn 1999). Similarly, Burnes (2004), using different but closely linked terms to discuss the same distinction, argues that two approaches to change have clearly become highlighted in research on change: planned and emergent change. Due to the centrality of this distinction made in recent research, and in order to fully comprehend organizational change, it is necessary to define both approaches and their differences (Weick & Quinn 1999; Burnes 2004a).

The distinction is considered crucial in the scope of this study as well, in order to understand the context of continuous change that is particularly relevant for this study. The two approaches are defined in the following sections 3.1 and 3.2, starting from episodic change. Furthermore, closely linked to the terms of episodic and continuous change is managerial change agency, which is recognized in both the episodic and continuous change context but are different in nature. (Weick & Quinn 1999.) Managerial change agency will be discussed in chapter 3.3. through a middle management perspective with a particular focus on change agency amidst continuous change.

3.1 Episodic change

The term episodic change is used to refer to an organizational change that is rare, discontinuous and intentional, often dramatic in nature (Weick & Quinn 1999, 365). Moreover, it is more centralized and more easily controlled by top management (Weick 2000, 238). The infrequency and slowness typical to episodic change is due to the wide scope of the change. Episodic change is often strategical, formal and disruptive because whole organizational processes are replaced rather than renewed or altered. (Mintzberg & Westley 1992.)

In the episodic change approach, organizations are viewed as inertial and static, and change, in turn, is seen as linear (Weick & Quinn 1999). Organizational inertia is considered to play a crucial role in organizational effectiveness (Weick 2000, 223), and organizations are seen as building up and held in place by inertial structures (ibid, 228). Organizational inertia has been defined as organizations' inability to change at a similar pace with the environment in which they operate (Pfeffer 1997, 163; Weick & Quinn 1999).

In planned change the structures of inertia are seen to lie in solid, interrelated patterns that can only be changed forcefully from the outside (Weick 2000, 231). Thus episodic change is considered as a state of divergence from the organization's equilibrium, happening in a distinct period of time and often driven externally. (Weick & Quinn 1999, 365–366.) In other words, episodic change has a clear beginning and ending. Episodic change is closely associated with the terms planned and intentional change because of the fact that it requires breaking the equilibrium as well as moving to a new equilibrium (Weick & Quinn 1999). In this paper the terms planned and episodic change are discussed as inseparable terms.

Planned, episodic change is often described in research literature through Kurt Lewin's three-step model of change: unfreeze-change-refreeze (e.g. Burnes 2004a; Weick 2000, 235), which is based on field theory, group dynamics and action research (Liebhart & Garcia-Lorenzo 2010). In fact, the planned, episodic approach to change has been argued to have originated from Lewin's work in 1947, and he has even been named as the father of planned change in organizational studies (Liebhart & Garcia-Lorenzo 2010). The Lewinian approach to change dominated the field of organizational change from the 1950s until the early 1980s (Burnes 2004a, 887). Later on, until today, Lewin's approach to change, and particularly the 3-step model, has been widely criticized. Mainly, his work has been criticized for being too simplistic, inefficient and slow an approach to change (Burnes 2004a), for assuming organizations function in a stable state, for being top-down driven (Burnes 2004b), and for presuming high resistance to change that needs to be tackled (Weick 2000).

The first step of the model, *unfreezing*, is based on Lewin's belief that there is a static equilibrium in an organization that needs to be destabilized (unfrozen) in order to replace old behavior with new (Burnes 2004a). The unfreezing stage is where the motivation for learning is created but the direction is still unknown (Schein 1996, 62). In the second phase, following unfreezing, comes the step of *moving*. In this step, groups and individuals move towards a new, more appropriate set of behaviors. These sets of behaviors should be reinforced to prevent the change for being short-lived. (Lewin 1947a in Burnes 2004b.) It is about cognitive restructuring, transition, semantic redefinition, conceptual enlargement and new standards of judgement (Weick & Quinn 1999, 366) Step three, refreezing, is the final step in Lewin's model. In this step, the new group level behaviour is stabilized into a new quasi-static equilibrium (Burnes 2004b). In Lewin's approach successful change lies primarily in the group-level, after which the individual level follows. That is, individual behavior can only be changed if norms and routines are changed in the broader group level (Burnes 2004b).

As concluded by Weick and Quinn (1999), episodic change crystallizes into three terms: inertia, triggers for change and replacement. That is, in episodic change, inertia is

seen as a building force that has to be dealt with, which is eventually disturbed by an external trigger that often provokes an episode of replacement. They highlight that in order to understand episodic change, one has to understand inertia, triggers and replacements (Weick & Quinn 1999, 370). What is more, they suggest that as change often occurs due to the organization's failures to adapt to changing environments, the ideal organization is a continuously adapting one, despite the focus of change being episodic or continuous (Weick & Quinn 1999, 371).

3.2 Continuous Change

The term continuous change refers to organizational changes that are ongoing, evolving and cumulative in nature (Weick & Quinn 1999, 375; Weick 2000, 225). The key terms for episodic change, i.e., inertia, triggers and replacements are less prominent in this approach. In continuous change, organizational inertia is seen as peripheral and rather than strategies of unfreezing, intervention strategies of rebalancing are considered central (Weick 2000, 223). Namely, whereas episodic change is mostly caused by inertia and failure to keep up with the changing environment, continuous change is created by alertness and incapability to stay stable. (Weick & Quinn 1999, 379). Thus, in continuously changing organizations there is no endeavour to reach a quasi-static equilibrium point as in episodic change, but rather ongoing change is considered an essential part of the organization's competitiveness (Brown & Eisenhardt 1997).

Continuous change is often considered as emergent because it develops from simultaneous continuous micro-level adjustments across units that accumulate over time, which together have the potential of creating considerable change (Weick & Quinn 1999, 375). For its cumulative nature, it is often more difficult to notice than episodic change (Burnes 2014, 889; March 1981) and rather than linear, the development of change is process-based, and often non-linear, spiral or open-ended (Weick & Quinn 1999, 382). The challenge of continuous change is to gain organization-wide acceptance so that the small cumulated changes and improvements would spread wider, throughout the organization (Weick & Quinn 1999, 381). Not surprisingly, Brown and Eisenhardt (1997) found that in order to harness the full competitive potential of continuous change, there needs to be extensive communication within the organization which promotes the accumulation of innovations and ultimately the realization of possible substantial changes.

In continuous change, the perspective is shifted to a micro-level one, and there is a presumption that everything changes all the time (Ford & Ford 1994). Unlike episodic change, continuous change is not deliberately planned and does not cause dramatic discontinuity or replacement. Rather, change is created in repetitive variations in practice,

and each change in practice creates the context for unforeseen outcomes and improvements, which are again altered with more variations. This cycle of variations is continuous, and thus as the name continuous change suggests, the change process does not have a beginning or an end. (Orlikowski 1996, 66).

Continuously changing organizations are seen to be built around the concepts of improvisation, translation and learning (Weick & Quinn 1999, 375) and rather than following the Lewinian model of unfreeze-move-freeze, continuous change follows the sequence freeze-rebalance-unfreeze (Weick & Quinn 1999, 361). *Freezing* in continuous change means to make existing patterns visible and known, *rebalancing* means to interpret, define and sequence these patterns in a new way, and finally *unfreezing* means to restart the process of improvisation, translation and learning in more conscious ways (Weick & Quinn 1999, 380). Thus while planned change efforts are often about diminishing the restrictive contextual forces, emergent, continuous change focuses on identifying the driving forces and reinforce them (Livne-Tarandech & Bartunek 2009, 13)

In the last couple of decades, there seems to have been a shift towards continuous change over episodic change as the most appropriate approach to change (Burnes 2004a). However, an alternative view suggests that episodic and continuous change are not necessarily mutually exclusive competitors, and may even be connected (e.g. Burnes 2004a; Weick 2000). In fact, Weick (2000, 227) suggests that creating emergent, continuous change may increase the organization's receptiveness to a more radical planned, episodic change (Weick 2000, 227). Similarly, Burnes (2004a, 887) questions the double-edged notion of the one and only appropriate approach to change and suggests that the two approaches to change are allied, each of them being applicable for particular change situations, and in some cases even capable to be combined.

3.3 Line and middle managers as change agents in continuous change

In many contexts of change, there is need for change agents, who according to Burnes (2014, 319) can be practically anyone with any title, from team leaders and coaches to change consultants and project managers. However, for the sake of clarity, the term of change agent is used to refer to any individual who has the skill and position to facilitate (Cameron & Green, 2004) encourage and manage the changing conditions (Lunenburg 2010), and whose central tasks are establishing the level of readiness for change and ensuring that change takes place (Burnes 2014, 319).

The term of change agent originated with Kurt Lewin's (1947) planned change approach that has been considered as the foundation for the organizational development (OD) movement (Westover 2010; Burnes 2014, 319). Furthermore, the concept of change agency has been considerably developed in the OD tradition (Burnes 2014). However,

consistent with the emergence of new perspectives to change over the past few decades, in particular the division between episodic and continuous change (Weick & Quinn 1999; see chapter 3.1 and 3.2.), and the shift of focus from the former to the latter (see chapter 3.1), the concept of the change agent has evolved, too, and newer perceptions on the role of a change agent have emerged (Burnes 2014, 319). As discussed in sections 3.1 and 3.2, these newer perspectives consider change as continuous, complex and a normal state of the organization and its everyday reality. Therefore, also the role and everyday work of managers at all levels has become highlighted when discussing change agency. (Clarke 1994 in Burnes 2014, 319.)

The traditional approaches to change and change agency, i.e., proponents of strategic or episodic change, have been criticized for presenting change as driven by a top-down perspective, i.e., by the approach of top management (Burnes 2014, 354), where mid- and lower level managers mainly take direction from, and add input to top management efforts (Wooldridge et al. 2008). The top-down approach has also been referred to as an upper echelon perspective (Wooldridge et al. 2008).

The newer perspectives of change and change agency deviate rather significantly from the more traditional perspectives that consider change agents to be specialists and experts of change (Clarke 1994 in Burnes 2014, 319) and to have a directive rather than participative role over employees (Bullock and Batten 1985). In fact, the top-down perspective has been questioned by an exhaustive body of research calling for line and middle managers to act as change agents, emphasizing the central pro-active role of non-senior managers, not just as implementors but as initiators, facilitators and creators of strategy and change (e.g. Burgelman, 1983; Huy 2002; Caldwell 2003; Balogun 2003; Balogun and Johnson 2004; Pappas and Wooldridge 2007; Mantere 2008; Wooldridge et al. 2008; Franken et al. 2009; Rouleau and Balogun 2011; Conway and Monks 2011). This research represents what, for example, Wooldridge et al. (2008) call a middle management perspective.

As argued by Wooldridge (2008), the middle management perspective and the term middle management is understood rather widely, and is not very sharply defined in academic research and literature. The key defining factor, therefore, is not so much where the manager sits in the organizational hierarchy. Rather, the manager's central position between top management and the operational level, and their access and knowledge of both is the determinant factor. (Wooldridge 2008.) It is the position in the centre of these two processes and the combination of them that makes the manager work as an agent between strategy and daily work (Nonaka 1994), as a mediator between levels and units (Floyd and Wooldridge 2000; Balogun and Johnson 2004), while playing an active role in the creation and development of strategy, knowledge and core competence (Wooldridge 2008). In this thesis, the term middle management perspective is understood

in the afore presented way, that is, broadly, with the focus on the manager's position under top-management but over the operational level, and operating between these two organizational layers.

As discussed earlier (see section 2.2.1), the direct line manager is considered the most important and preferred information source for employees, regardless of the issue (Allen et al. 2007; Therkelsen & Fiebich 2004). Research on the role of direct managers suggest that the direct manager's role is central in providing information and encouraging conversation about what the ongoing changes and strategy would mean in the daily work of employees (Allen et al. 2007). The key position as the preferred and most credible source of information of the direct manager is crucial in the whole context of organizational change also in that the success of the message is positively related to the perceived credibility of the change agent (Therkelsen and Fiebich 2004, 124). However, both Van Vuuren and Elving (2008, 355) and Radaelli and Sitton-Kent (2016) argue that there is surprisingly little research on the roles of line managers in the context of change despite the suggested central role of direct managers as sources of information of ongoing changes.

On discussing change agency particularly in the context of continuous change, Weick & Quinn (1999) argue that the manager's role as a change agent is realized through influencing and managing the use of language and dialogue within the organization. By interpreting and explaining ongoing change dynamics in the organization (Weick & Quinn 1999), change agents and their ability to make sense of the changing reality becomes central (Weick 1995). That is, change agents explain and recognize the ongoing disorder, interpret their direction and probable outcomes (Weick & Quinn 1999), while making emergent changes more salient, constantly reframing them and determining their preconditions (Bate 1990). Consistent with this, Dunford & Jones (2000) claim that one of the manager's central tasks is to interpret and make sense of the changes to the employees, and that the manager's use of language and way of communication has a remarkable impact on how employees interpret and respond to change. Moreover, Brown and Eisenhardt (1997) highlight the role of the manager as a change agent in maintaining the state and encouraging the evolvement of continuous change by reporting regularly on the present and upcoming projects, making new developments visible and, in that way, maintaining the speed of change. Ponteva (2010, 53; 60–62), in turn, emphasizes the ability of the manager to remain calm and be present in the midst of change, and argues that it is only by remaining calm that the manager can be beneficial for employees. The manager has to anticipate and be simultaneously prepared for everything and for nothing because, as Ponteva (2010) argues, when dealing with persons, one can never be ready for everything but at the same time has to be prepared to receive and face anything that comes along the change.

Closely linked to the focus of this thesis and on managerial communication (discussed earlier in chapter 2.2), different modes of interaction and discourse have been argued to be central in change and change agency as well (e.g. Schein 1993; Barrett et al.1995; Rouleau 1995; 2005; Quinn 1996; Weick & Quinn 1999). In fact, Barrett et al. (1995) argue that the greatest part of change interventions take place in the organization's everyday conversations, and that these interventions are often the most powerful. Similarly, Ford and Ford (1995) maintain that communication is the main arena in which change occurs. Also Schein (1993) argues for dialogue as a means to reach and develop a shared understanding through the gradual development of a shared set of meanings. He argues dialogue to be a vital factor in any model of organizational change, that is, including the concept of continuous change. By dialogue, Schein (1993) means interaction that creates common thinking processes within the organization. Moreover, according to Ford and Ford (1995), managers as change agents can create change through five different speech and conversational means: 1) confident assertions or claims, 2) guidelines or requests, 3) commissions or promises 4) expressions that communicate an affective state, and 5) announcements of new possible ways to operate. According to them, these five speech and conversational means are realized in four types of conversations: conversations on initiating change, on building a shared understanding of change, on employee performance, and on closure, e.g., what has been achieved and contributed to.

Having now reached the final point of the theoretical background for this study, some observations in relation to the presented literature review will be next discussed. Based on the reviewed research literature on managerial work, managerial communication, change and change agency, it is suggested that more research is needed on middle managerial work, particularly in the context of continuous change. As discussed in chapter 2 and 3, managerial work, change management and change agency have been traditionally examined from the perspective of top management and in the context of non-continuous, one-time episodic change (Burnes 2004b; Burnes 2014; Wooldridge et al 2008). As noted earlier in this section, there is a growing body of research that highlights the middle management perspective on change agency as a response to the dominance of the traditional top management approach (e.g. Balogun 2003; Rouleau 2005; Pappas & Wooldridge 2007; Mantere 2008). Furthermore, as discussed in section 3.2, there has been an increasing shift towards continuous change as the most appropriate approach to investigating change (Burnes 2004a). Yet, despite all this, little research has been conducted on middle managerial work amidst continuous change.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Case organization

This study examines middle managerial work in the context of continuous change. The phenomenon is investigated within the Hospital District of Southwest Finland (HDSF) which was chosen as the case organization of this study. HDSF is a public joint municipal authority that offers specialized health care services in its several hospitals in the region. The hospitals in the district are Turku University Hospital (Tyks) in Turku, Raisio, Salo, Loimaa and Uusikaupunki, as well as Halikko Hospital (in Salo) and Turunmaa Hospital (in Turku). The district is a public organization, meaning that a large part of the patients' service fees is paid by the tax revenue paid by the patient's municipality of residence and collected from the residents. Furthermore, the district consists of 28 member municipalities with a total of over 470 000 residents. The services of Turku University Hospital are used by more than 200 000 people a year (VSSHP, 2019). As one of the 21 public hospital districts in Finland (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2019), HDSF is a remarkable actor in the Finnish health care sector.

HDSF was considered as a suitable case organization for the case study because there is evidence that it operates in the midst of continuous different types of changes. The Finnish healthcare sector has been subject to long-term and diverse change turmoil. Among other factors, the Regional Government Reform and the National Healthcare and Social Welfare Reform together with digital transformation and the increased competition with private health service providers are constantly transforming the Finnish public health sector. This context, shaped by constant change, has become part of the daily working context of HDSF, which impacts the everyday operations and work at the hospital district. In its strategy for the years 2019–2020, HDSF has defined six factors as the main trends shaping the operational environment in the strategy period illustrated in Figure 1. This could be interpreted as an indicator of continuous change being a considerable part of the operational context of HDSF. In fact, these factors could be called the main drivers of continuous change in HDSF.



Figure 1 Identified trends shaping the operational environment of HDSF in the strategy period of 2019–2020 (as defined in the HDSF Strategy for 2019-2020).

4.2 Research strategy

This study is conducted following a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research aims to describe the complexity of real life phenomena and to study the subject as comprehensively and holistically as possible (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 5; Hirsjärvi, Remes & Saajavaara 2015, 161). Therefore, it is more concerned with understanding and interpreting reality, rather than with testing of hypotheses or statistical analysis (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 5). A qualitative approach was chosen to support the aim to interpret and describe middle managerial work in the complex context of continuous change. Another important factor for the choice of a qualitative approach was the fact that relatively little prior research has been conducted on middle managerial work amidst continuous change. Thus, a qualitative, exploratory approach, based on grounded theory (see Glaser & Strauss 1967; 2006), was taken to be able to explore the new phenomenon openly, in its manifold (Glaser & Strauss 1967; 2006; Gioia et al. 2012). Grounded theory is based on the idea of discovering theory from empirical data (Glaser & Strauss 1967; 2006, 1–2), which means that the new discovered concepts from the data are systematically developed in relation to the data during the process of research (Glaser & Strauss 1967; 2006, 6). Thus the aim of this study was to generate new theoretical understanding on middle

managerial work amid continuous change rather than to verify prior theories (Glaser & Strauss 1967, 1), which puts the empirical evidence and observations drawn from its analysis in a central role.

Out of different qualitative research approaches, a holistic single-case study was chosen as the research strategy (see Yin 2003, 42). A research strategy is the way of investigating an empirical topic by following a set of predefined procedures (Yin 2003, 15). It is how the research problem is approached (Hirsjärvi et al. 2015, 132). In other words, it is the combination of the chosen approach and methods to answer the research questions. A case study has been defined as an empirical investigation that examines a current phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin 2003; Saunders et al. 2003, 93), particularly when the borders between the investigated phenomenon and the context are unclear (Yin 2003, 12). As the name suggests, a single-case study refers to a case study that involves only one unit of analysis (Yin 2003, 42–43). It is an intensive study of an individual entity, with the aim to generalize and apply the findings to larger sets of entities (Gerring 2004, 341).

Qualitative case studies are particularly useful for studying complexity, context, ambiguity and chaos, with a systemic and holistic approach (Gummersson 2007, 229). Therefore, they are argued to be useful for revealing possible underlying interconnections between the phenomenon and the context, and in this way contribute to the development of theory and practice (Lee et al. 2007, 172;170). Moreover, the case study has been argued to be useful for approaching holistic and meaningful aspects of real-life phenomena, such as organizational and managerial processes (Yin 2003, 2). It has been suggested that qualitatively researched case studies give room for minority voices, which may be of particular value when examining the meaning and significance of organizational events and processes (Llewellyn & Northcott 2007, 195; Gummersson 2000, 96). The single-case study was considered to best serve the purpose of this study because it aims to profoundly understand middle managerial work in the context of continuous change within HDSF as the researched individual representative organization (Yin 2003, 41). Furthermore, the case study strategy is considered appropriate to respond the “how” questions of this research (Yin 2003, 22).

The study was carried out as a part of a broader change capability project in the Hospital District of Southwest Finland (HDSF). It was led as a collaboration by HDSF, Turku School of Economics and Personnel Ltd., which started in autumn 2018 and finished in autumn 2019. The aim of the year-long project was to increase organization-wide readiness for and capability to change, and train managers to act in the midst of continuous change. The project included several training sessions and so called clinics on change and change communication for managers at HDSF.

The research process unfolded in the following order. At the beginning, I familiarized myself with relevant research literature on managerial work and communication and their suggested features, which provided me a general understanding of the topic. Then, I familiarized myself with relevant research literature on change in general and continuous change and change agency in particular. This helped me to develop a general understanding on continuous change context and what forms managerial work and communication could take through change agency. The overall focus of the literature review was on middle management perspective as it was considered adequate for the purpose of this study which focuses on examining managerial work and communication from the perspective of line and middle managers. As discussed before in section 3.3, the middle management perspective can be understood and applied rather broadly, and thus, in this study both line and middle managerial work and communication are approached from this perspective. Furthermore, the organizational hierarchy in the hospital context is rather ambiguous, and it does not seem to be crystal clear where some of the managers are situated in the organizational hierarchy. Before data collection, I also participated in one of the change communication clinics, which gave me information on the topics introduced to the managers. It served more as a personal introduction and warm-up to the whole project. In addition I met representatives of HDSF several times as a follow-up for the progress of the study.

The study was conducted with a combination of abductive and bottom-up approach (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009; 95–96). That is, first I wrote an initial theoretical background for the study, which helped me in the collection the research material through interviews. After that, I analysed the empirical material with a bottom-up approach (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 95) and the related Gioia method (see section 4.3). After the analysis of the empirical material, I abductively completed the initial theoretical background by searching for more research literature to support the results found in the analysis. The conclusions of this study are based on the connections I made between the results of the analysis and the reviewed extant research literature.

4.3 Data collection

The research material for this study was collected through semi-structured interviews that were based on predefined themes rather than detailed questions (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 75; Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2010, 47–48). However, a set of initial questions was made under each theme before starting the whole interview process (see Appendix 1) but their form and order could vary from interview to interview, according to the situation (Saunders et al. 2003, 246; Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2010, 48). Moreover, both the interviewer and the interviewee could pose specifying questions, and also in this way deviate from the initial interview frame (Saunders et al. 2003, 247; Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2010, 208). The themes

and questions were formed based on the initial research questions and the theoretical background (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 75). The semi-structured, theme-based interviews allowed me, as the researcher, to understand the genuine experiences of the interviewed managers in relation to the predefined themes and make room for the voice of the interviewees (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2010, 48).

The interviewees were chosen among the nurse managers who had participated in one of the two change communication clinics held in February and March 2019. A list with the participants' names, titles and e-mail addresses was provided by the human resources services of HDSF, from which I chose the interviewee candidates. Additionally, a prerequisite for the election was that the interviewees worked either as line managers or middle managers and had employees under their direct supervision. I verified this by asking each of the interviewee candidates directly on the matter. Although it was not an intentionally set prerequisite, the chosen interviewees worked in different units and locations, in both the main Turku University Hospital in Turku and other hospitals in the region (see section 4.1) which operate as part of Turku University Hospital and the Hospital District of Southwest Finland. This presumably provided a more holistic understanding of the state and nature of middle managerial work in the whole organization. However, there is no distinction drawn between the interviewed managers' unit or physical location in the analysis.

In terms of sampling interviewees, it was agreed with the case organization to study two types of managers, namely, line and middle managers. In practice, middle managerial work in the case organization is conducted by line managers and higher level middle managers. Both can be categorized under the broad term of middle manager according to literature (e.g. Wooldridge 2008).

I thus interviewed eight managers in total, of whom four were line managers (LM) and four middle managers (MM). Initially the plan was to interview at least ten managers. The interview invitation was sent to a total of 15 managers by e-mail. However, the busy schedule of some of the managers, and the rather limited number of participants in the second Change communication training posed limitations on the sampling. Thus, it turned out challenging to get more than eight interviewees. However, in the end, the total of eight interviews was considered enough for reaching sufficient saturation of empirical data as the answers of the interviewees began to get repeated on many aspects (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 88).

The chosen four line managers worked under titles of Nurse Manager and Assistant Nurse Manager. The four middle managers, in turn, carried titles of Administrative Nurse Manager and Head Nurse. The distinction of line and middle managers was done based on received guidance from the case organization's Human Resource services. However, when asked, many of the interviewees found it rather challenging to position themselves

strictly in one of the two hierarchical categories. Thus, for clarity reasons and in line with extant literature, the term middle manager will be used after this section to refer to both line managers and middle managers, except from some occasions where the distinction is necessary and serves the purpose of the study.

At some point of the research process, one option was to compare the managerial work and experiences of line managers to the ones of middle managers. However, the analysis of the data showed no clear differences between the two groups. Nevertheless, for clarity and transparency reasons, the abbreviations LM (line manager) and MM (middle manager) will still be used to refer to the interviewee quotes in the analysis (see chapter 5). The interviewed managers are listed in Table 4.

Table 4 The Interviewees

Job Title, Line Managers	Reference	Date	Duration of Interview
Nurse Manager	LM1	15.4.2019	41min 20sec
Nurse Manager	LM2	3.5.2019	20min 52sec
Nurse Manager	LM3	29.4.2019	29min 38sec
Assistant Nurse Manager	LM4	11.4.2019	41min 20sec
Job Title, Middle Managers	Reference	Date	Duration of Interview
Administrative Nurse Manager	MM1	15.4.2019	39 min 42 sec
Administrative Nurse Manager	MM2	25.4.2019	58 min 12 sec
Head Nurse	MM3	25.4.2019	50 min 9 sec
Head Nurse	MM4	25.4.2019	58 min 8 sec

The interviews were conducted during the interviewees' working hours. Most of them took place at the interviewees' own office rooms at times when privacy was guaranteed to avoid disruptions. Two of the interviews were conducted remotely, one over Skype for Business and the other over the phone, according to the interviewees' wishes. I did not know any of the interviewees beforehand, although some of them recounted having seen me at the change communication clinic which I had attended. At the beginning of the interviews I first told the interviewees about the research topic and the purpose of the study. Secondly, I told them about the confidentiality of the interview situation and encouraged them to tell about their views and experiences as genuinely and openly as possible. The average duration of the interviews was 42 minutes, 25 seconds. I recorded the interviews using the iPhone 8's standard voice recorder app, after which I transcribed them on my computer.

As regards the interview process, I proceeded as follows. I created and grouped the interview questions (Appendix 1) under introductory background questions and three main themes. I created the themes and questions focusing on the research questions, and made sure they were exhaustive, yet not leading-the-witness type of questions (Gioia et al. 2012, 19). First, I asked general background questions about the interviewee's position in and personal history with the company. This served as an introduction to the following main three themes, and helped the interviewees engage in the discussion naturally. The background questions were, however, important in order to develop a thorough understanding about the managers' work and role in the organization. The first main theme of the interview structure was about managerial communication and its role in managerial work. The aim of the questions was to understand how the interviewees saw themselves as communicators, how they communicate in their managerial roles and how they see ideal managerial communication and its significance in managerial work. The second theme of the interview was about managerial work and communication in the context of continuous change. The aim was to understand how the interviewed managers experienced and saw their roles as managers in the midst of continuous change, how continuous change manifests itself, and how it affects managerial work. The third and last theme of the interview was the development of middle managerial work. The aim was to understand how middle managerial work could best be developed and supported amidst continuous change. The interview questions focused on understanding how the managers had experienced the organized trainings as part of the year-long Change capability project, how they thought these trainings had served as development and support for their work and how they thought managers could be best supported in their work. At the end of the interview I gave the interviewees the opportunity to express any thoughts or ideas on the research topic that had not been covered during the interview or which they particularly wanted to highlight. The interview structure and the created themes turned out to be a useful way to collect data and, therefore, to serve well the purpose of the study.

4.4 Data Analysis

Before collecting the data, I had familiarized myself with relevant research literature and written an initial theoretical background for this study. After this, I conducted the interviews and analysed them. I analysed the material with a bottom-up approach (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 96). The aim in a bottom-up approach is to develop new theoretical concepts from empirical data that would not be guided by the already known but explains the phenomenon of theoretical interest (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 95; Gioia et al. 2012, 16). Consequently, the units of analysis were selected and formed from the empirical data, based on the purpose of the study. Thus, prior research and my previous knowledge on

the topic had no role in the analysis. After the analysis, I completed the initial theoretical background by adding research literature references supporting the results of the analysis. However, to a large extent, the initial theoretical background turned out to support well the results while also leaving some room for new findings.

To begin with the analysis, I transcribed all the eight interviews. I started the transcription process right after the last interview, in early May 2019, and finished it in mid-June 2019. All in all, there is 64 pages of transcribed material. I started making notes on the most relevant and interesting points already during the transcription process. I took all interviews into account in the analysis and aimed at quoting the interviewees without preferring one interviewee over another to exemplify the results of the analysis. The interviewees are coded with LM1–4 and MM1–4 tags, following the order of Table 4. The coding made it possible to preserve the anonymity of the interviewees.

The method of analysis, the illustration of it and its results followed the principles of the Gioia Methodology as discussed by Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2012). The aim was to proceed to a systematic, holistic and rigorous approach to the analysis and the presentation of the data analysis process, in order to develop credible interpretations of data as well as plausible and defensible conclusions. (Gioia et al. 2012). The analysis focused on understanding and interpreting the experiences of people who are considered as ‘knowledgeable agents’, knowing what they aim to do and how to explain their thoughts, intentions and actions. Moreover, imposition of prior theories or constructs on the interviewees as preferred explanations of their experiences was consciously avoided. (Gioia et al. 2012, 17.) The choice of this method was triggered, first, by the aim to develop new concepts that would not be too strongly rooted in the already known, yet explains the phenomenon of theoretical interest (Gioia et al. 2012, 16). New concept development is crucial for this research as much is known about managerial work and communication in general but little is known how it is in the context of continuous change in particular. Thus, by using this method, I intended to diminish the possible impact of what I already knew about managerial work and communication on the analysis, yet acknowledging it. Another contributing factor for choosing the Gioia method for the analysis was the frequent critique qualitative research has been subject to as being too subjective, incapable of adequately justifying its assertions and lacking in scholarly rigor (Gioia et al. 2012, 15–17). That is, the method makes the whole analytical process more transparent to the reader.

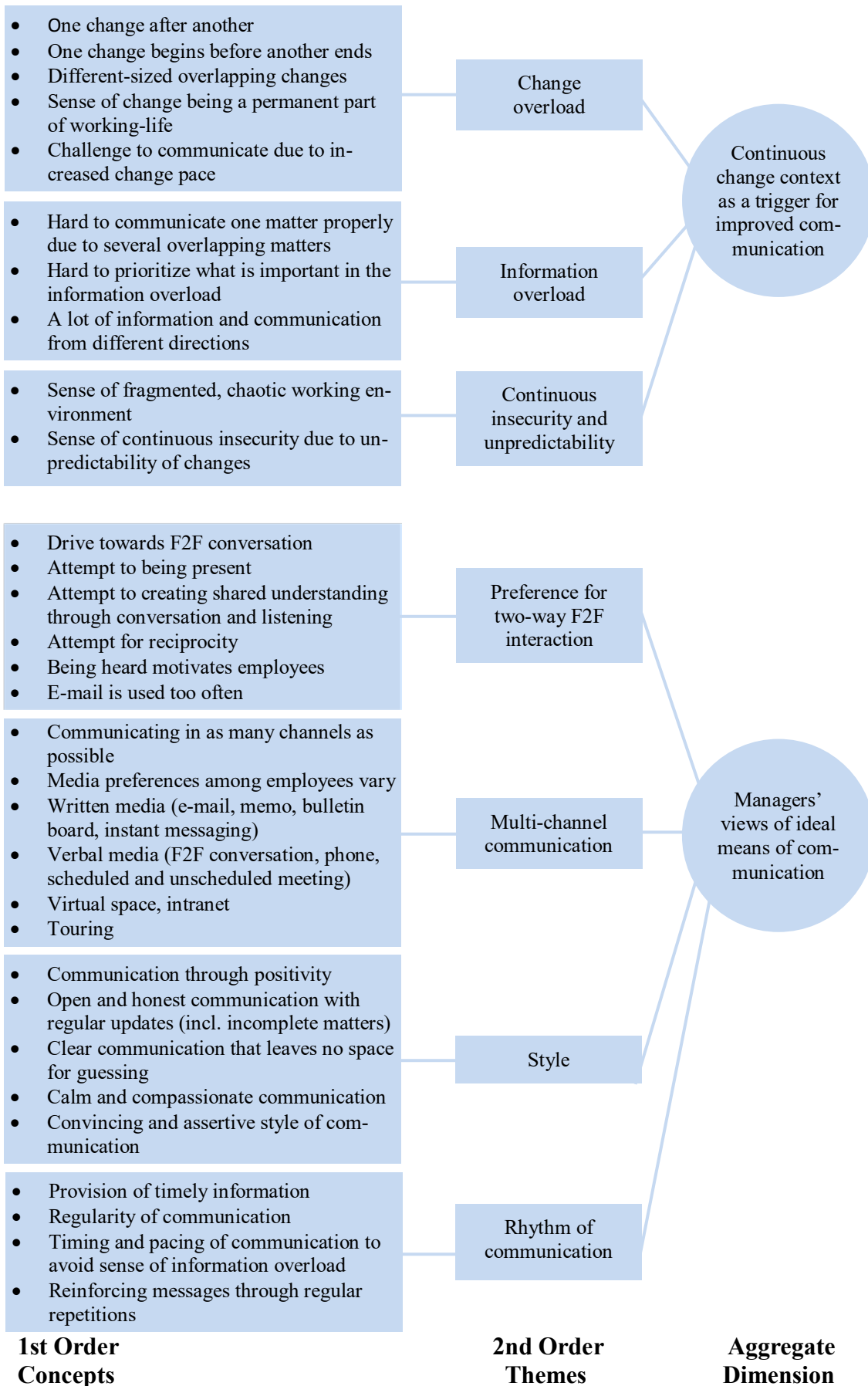
Following the Gioia method, I started by organizing the data into 1st order categories. I went through all the interviews and began listing emerging categories based on the terms used by the interviewees (Gioia et al. 2012, 20). I did this by copy-pasting quotes from the interviews on a Word Document and added a set of key words to describe them. At this point, there was no attempt to link or group the emerged categories together, so the

number of listed categories was rather large (ibid). After this, I started the 2nd order analysis, trying to group together the many 1st order categories based on their similarities under fewer categories. These 2nd order categories were named by labels that would unite the grouped categories and crystalize their core essence (ibid). I went through all the 1st order categories listed on the Word Document and started grouping similar quotes together with the help of the marked keywords of the 1st order analysis. After this, still working on the same Word Document, I created labels that would capture the essence of the grouped quotes. If one label turned out not to be sufficient to describe the formed group of quotes, I divided the quotes into more groups and labelled them accordingly. As the final part of the analysis, I went through the labelled groups of quotes again, and grouped them further into 2nd-order “aggregate dimensions” (Gioia et al. 2012, 20). The whole analysis process is presented as a data structure and illustrated in Figure 2, as suggested by Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2012). The results of the analysis in chapter 5 are resented following the data structure. After this, a more illustrative model (see Figure 3) based on the data structure is presented in chapter 5.5. The model shows the dynamic relationships between the emergent themes and aggregate dimensions, and serves as an illustrative explanation of the studied phenomenon (Gioia et al. 2012, 22).

**1st Order
Concepts**

**2nd Order
Themes**

**Aggregate
Dimensions**



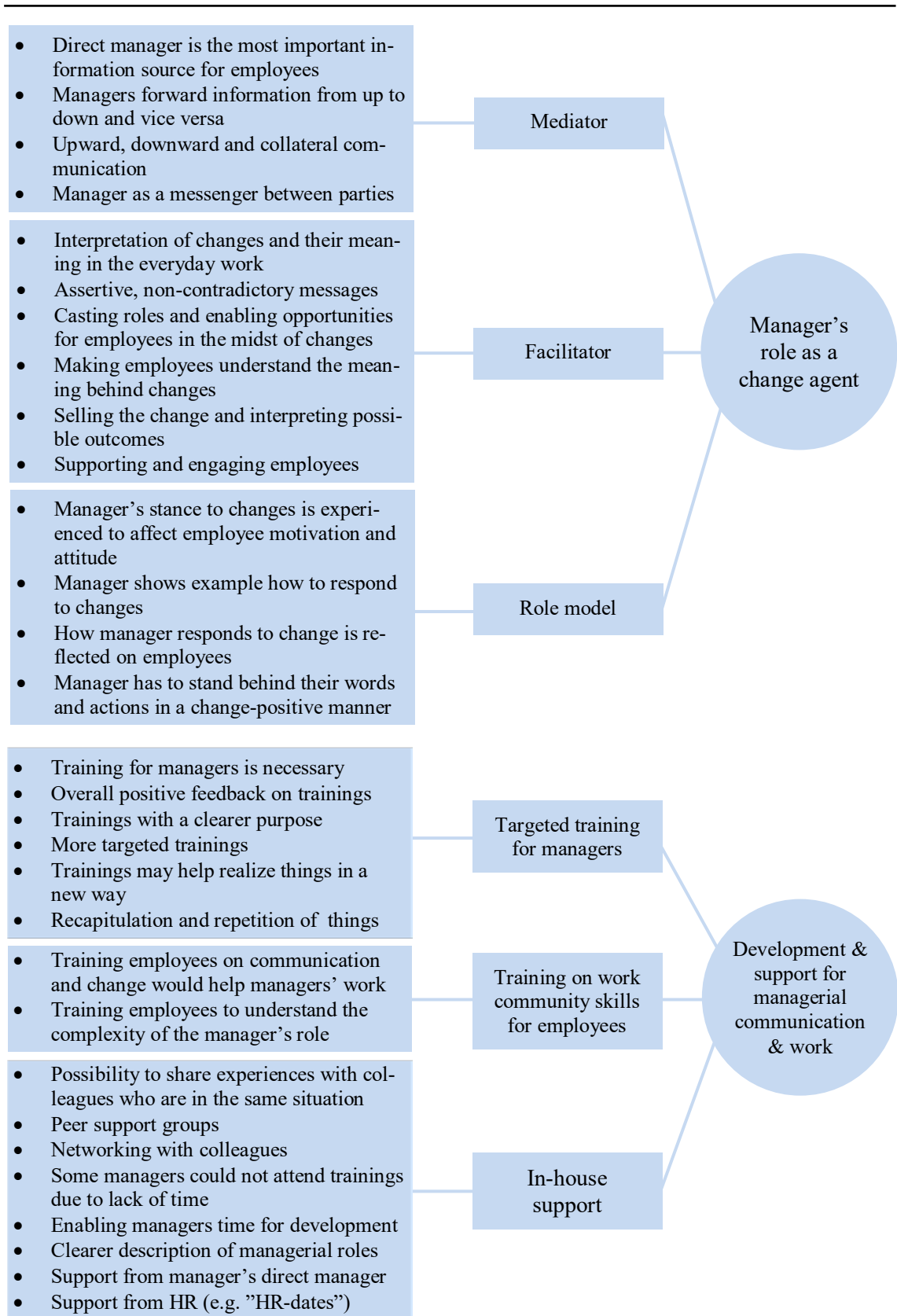


Figure 2 Data structure (after Gioia, Corley & Hamilton 2012)

4.5 Evaluation of the quality of the study

Reliability, validity and generalizability are commonly used quality criteria in research (Gummersson 2007, 232; Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008; 291). Even though reliability and validity are usually associated with quantitative research, they are central concepts for the quality evaluation of a qualitative research as well as all research should be evaluated in terms of its reliability and validity. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2015, 232). Another option is to assess the trustworthiness of the qualitative study through its dependability, transferability, credibility and conformability (Lincoln and Guba 1985, 294–328; Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008; 294). The terms will next be defined and then discussed in the light of this specific study.

The reliability of a study refers to the repeatability of the study. That is, a study is reliable if similar or consistent results would be found by repeating the operations of the study. (Yin 2003, 34; Hirsjärvi et al 2015, 231.) However, exact replication may be problematic and usually not achievable in qualitative studies examining complex phenomena, particularly, if change is a major force in it (Gummersson, 2000), as is the case in the phenomenon investigated in this study. In such cases, the reliability of the study can be improved by providing the reader with a detailed and transparent description of the conducted research process and its phases throughout the study (Hirsjärvi et al. 2015, 232).

Validity means the adequacy of the chosen research methodology to describe the studied phenomenon. It refers to the scope to which the conclusions drawn in the study provide an accurate description or explanation of the phenomenon and how well the findings are backed up with evidence. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 292.) Validity is crucial in case study research to determine if the conducted study has been able to capture the phenomenon that was initially chased or if it has eventually studied something else instead. (Gummersson 2007, 232)

There are somewhat differing definitions of dependability, transferability, credibility and conformability in the existing qualitative research literature (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2012). Here the terms are defined following the definition of Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008). Dependability refers to the responsibility of the researcher for providing the reader with a description of the research process that is logical, traceable and documented. It is closely related to the term of reliability and establishes the trustworthiness of research. Transferability, in turn, is linked to connecting their research to previous research and whether the results would be transferable to other research contexts. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 294.) The transferability of a case study can improved by providing a thick description of the research setting, which serves as useful information and a base for appropriate judgement for anyone interested in transferring the study to another context (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 124; 359)

Credibility is concerned with, for example, whether the observations have been logical, whether the data used in the study is sufficient to merit the conclusions and whether any other researcher could come to relatively similar interpretations and conclusions on the basis of the same materials. Lastly, conformability refers to the degree others agree with the research and its results. It is about connecting the findings and interpretations to the data in a clear, easily understandable way to others. (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008, 294).

The quality of this study will now be assessed through the above mentioned terms. To reinforce the reliability and dependability of this study, different parts of the research process have been described as logically, clearly and as much in detail as possible throughout the study, to ensure that any reader is able to follow and find logic in how the conclusions of this study have been come to. Furthermore, the process is described in detail so that any other researcher could trace and follow the exact steps that have been made in this study and most probably find consistent, if not the same, results to the ones found in this study. Additionally, the documented and transparent description of the whole research process has also contributed to diminishing the influence of the researchers subjectivity in making conclusions, which qualitative research has often been criticized for (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2010, 35). However, it is still likely that the reliability of this study could have been further improved by conducting the analysis with a research partner or group.

Furthermore, in order to increase the reliability of this study, the eight interviewees were chosen carefully among line and middle managers who acted as direct managers at the research moment and had participated in one of the two change communication clinics during Spring 2010. All interviewees were interviewed based on the same semi-structured list of question, which could be used to repeat this research. Similarly, all interviews were transcribed precisely word by word from the recordings. In order to facilitate the transcription and make sure all the words were understood correctly, a phone application was used to slow down the pace of speech in the recording. It is noteworthy, that the reliability of this study could have been further improved by interviewing a considerably higher number of managers. Unfortunately, this was not possible in this study, on one hand, due to difficulties for some of the candidates in finding time for the interviews. On the other hand, interviewing a considerably higher number of managers would have been challenging in the limited scope of this Master's Thesis study.

To ensure the validity of the study, the research methodology was carefully chosen to be adequate to describe the studied phenomenon profoundly and accurately. A qualitative single case study was chosen as the research strategy for being able to examine and analyze managerial work and communication and continuous change context in the case organization. A single case was chosen for this case for two reasons: first, the study was

conducted as part of the Change capability project within the case organization, so it was a natural choice. Secondly, in the scope of this study which as a Master's Thesis is rather limited, an in-depth examination of the studied phenomenon in the context of a single organization seemed more purposeful. It allows the researcher to examine the case organization deeper than if there were two or more case organizations, which is considered as an advantage for developing new understanding on a rather complex phenomenon in the limited frames of a Master's Thesis. Lastly, in order to improve the validity, the found results were carefully connected and backed up with existing evidence (see chapter 5 and 6).

To strengthen the credibility and conformability of this study, the analysis and its results were illustrated in the form of a data structure (see Figure 2). Furthermore, original interviewee quotes were used to exemplify the findings (see chapter 5). These actions aimed to show the logic of the interpretations and observations drawn from the analysis of the data, and to connect the results and interpretations to the data in a way that would be clearly and easily understood by the reader. After the analysis, the findings were also consistently compared and linked to existing research literature.

To improve the transferability of the study, everything that was considered necessary for the reader to understand the results of the study was specified, following Lincoln & Guba's (1985; 359) proposal on providing a thick description on the research context. This description included where and when the interviews took place, how they were conducted, how long they lasted, and if there were possible distractions that could have predisposed to misunderstandings and how these distractions were taken care of. Additionally, a detailed description of the case organization was provided. The descriptions are useful for anyone interested in transferring the study to another context (Lincoln & Guba 1985, 124).

Lastly, in relation to the overall trustworthiness of this study, it is noteworthy that as a researcher, I was a stranger to the interviewees. In spite of some of the interviewees having seen me attend one of the Change communication clinics in February 2019, our interaction was very limited, as I mostly sat on the side of the room, apart from the rest of the group. Moreover, the only previous understanding of some of their experiences was based on what I had heard some of them speaking in the change communication clinic. However, it is noteworthy that I attended the clinic only to have a personal introduction to the research topic, not to observe the participants. On one hand, being a stranger to the interviewees and external to the organization helped me approach the phenomenon more objectively. On the other hand, I found that this position helped me collect more authentic and trustworthy data as the interviewees knew I was completely external to their working context and personal life, and guaranteed them total confidentiality. To my experience, this helped the interviewees describe their experiences openly, genuinely and truthfully.

5 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Continuous change context as trigger for improved communication

The first aggregate dimension drawn from the analysis of the data is *Continuous change context as a trigger for improved communication* (see Figure 2). The interviewed managers shared a strong sense of working in a context where change has become part of everyday working life, which may bring about increased unpredictability and insecurity. Many managers also suggested that the constantly changing nature of the working environment has caused the managers to deal with more information than ever before. Consequently, this aggregate dimension is divided into three second order themes: 1) Change overload, 2) Information overload and 3) Continuous insecurity and unpredictability.

5.1.1 Change overload

The conducted interviews suggest that continuous change has become the prevailing context where managers, employees and the entire case organization operates. Managers with a longer career history describe a clear change in speed and frequency of changes taking place in the organization over the past years. In fact, change is experienced by many to have become a permanent part of everyday working life. Similarly, as Burnes (2004) notes, there has been an increasing shift towards continuous change as the preferred approach to change also in research in the past years.

All in all, most of the managers seem to respond to continuous change positively and consider it as inevitable for development. Consistent with this, Brown & Eisenhardt (1997) argue that continuous change contributes to the organization's competitiveness and development. Moreover, some managers expressed they proactively aim to streamline and adjust functions through constant evaluation, thus practicing the entrepreneur role by Mintzberg (1973;1990). As an entrepreneur, the manager initiates and designs improvements by scanning activity (see Table 2). As previous research suggests, continuous change is created by alertness and incapability to stay stable (Weick & Quinn 1999, 379). Change often emerges from simultaneous micro-level adjustments and variations in practice across units that accumulate over time, potentially creating substantial, organization-wide change (Weick & Quinn 1999, 375; Orlikowski 1996, 66). Consequently, based on the interviews and research on continuous change, it is suggested that Mintzberg's entrepreneur role becomes particularly highlighted in managerial work in the

context of continuous change. In the following quote a manager says they aim to streamline functions:

(1) Yeah, yeah, so we see that hey, if we do these tasks like this, they become more efficient. I am always very excited about this kind of lean-thinking, where you try to streamline functions, and think if you are doing things the way they should be done or are we doing something unnecessary in the process. I have always liked lean, and I think I have always practiced lean even though it didn't carry the name back then, as now it is called lean. – MM3

Despite of the general positive attitudes towards change, many of the managers recount experiencing a sense of change overload due to several overlapping, different-sized changes taking continuously place within the organization. Some of them subtly questioned the real necessity of the current frequency of changes but admitted that usually outcomes had been positive. In other words, many of the managers shared an experience that there is one change announced after another, which in turn makes managerial work and communication more complex, challenging, and demanding, with less time left to focus on the actual health care work.

Next quotes 2 and 3 capture the described sense of change overload in the context of continuous change and reveal the contradictory feelings many managers recounted having towards change, even though they recognized its potential for positive development:

(2) It [change] is a strong part of everyday work life because there is change all the time, and now [as there is this big project here] I feel that there isn't a single moment when an issue wouldn't be like related to it... and this one is a big change. Like sometimes there are also changes happening in the nurses' everyday work, like sometimes for example guidelines related to cannula or medication are specified. Like just the fact that the basic medical assortment is changed every two years causes that names of drugs are different or something... work colleagues change, it is a big unit so change happens in many forms and ways, like the change happens all the time... smaller and bigger changes.. Indeed, the aim in many changes is to improve things, like all these forms and so on, like certain changes are good, so that we wouldn't live in the past, but well, there should be something, like it should be somehow more controlled.. – MM 1

(3) *Yeah, many things have changed and of course are changing all the time, and many times you find yourself thinking if there is change just for the sake of having it. But well, they always lead to something, and then if you look back to the past, and think about something that has changed from those days, and there was quite a lot of resistance and many other issues, you notice that it has indeed changed for the better, like nobody would return to the old way of doing it. – LM 1*

5.1.2 *Information overload*

As part of, and probably to a considerable degree caused by the prevailing context of continuous change in the case organization, managers recounted experiencing significant information overload. According to them, one factor explaining this is that managers receive a vast amount of information from multiple sources at the same time. Consequently, this makes it rather challenging to prioritize the most relevant messages from the less important ones, which, in turn, is important for reducing the flood of information toward employees. Thus, in the light of the interview answers, it could be argued that the three informational roles of the manager distinguished by Mintzberg (1973; 1990) become particularly salient in the context of continuous change. As shown in Table 2, the informational roles of a manager include acting as a monitor, disseminator and spokesperson between organizational members and groups. Another factor behind the described sense of information overload is the dynamic and high-tempo working environment where managers and employees operate, which makes it challenging for managers to communicate to employees, even-handedly meeting individual needs.

Next, quote 4 illustrates the strong sense of information overload managers experience in their work, whereas quote 5 shows the business of the working environment that contributes to the information flood:

(4) *This is also so fragmented when you think that there are these support services, and then there all these personnel operations and all. There are like so many things and everyone sends you information, like I don't know, like I guess nobody really understands how much information we receive all the time, as everyone views it from their own perspective. – MM 1*

(5) *There is a lot of communication, and there is the fact that the staff doesn't have time to read all the messages, so it's challenging that people are surrounded by a large flood of information coming from*

different directions. And nowadays there should of course be these kinds of short messages sent, not anything long, like we are all in the same situation, the food of information is so large. – LM 2

5.1.3 Increased insecurity and unpredictability

Although the majority of the interviewed managers generally consider change as a positive driving force to move forward, some recount having rather mixed, even negative feelings about it. Furthermore, half of the managers describe their working environment as fragmented and chaotic in consequence of the prevailing continuous change context and the complexity and dynamism characteristic to it. The managers recounted experiencing this as continuous insecurity and unpredictability of changes. These observations of increased insecurity and unpredictability are arguably results of the constantly ongoing, evolving and cumulative nature of continuous change, (Weick & Quinn 1999, 375) having no clear beginning or end (Orlikowski 1996, 66), and making organizations work more and more on improvisation (Weick & Quinn 1999, 375).

Quote 6 below illustrates the sense of increased insecurity and unpredictability experienced in the working environment:

(6) Well yeah, especially in relation to, like it always evokes a feeling, you immediately think what will it mean for us, are our functions going to continue or end. So so... it nevertheless carries insecurity. Like even though the employees often tell me how they are so used to it and this is continuous change and so on, they nevertheless have this kind of fear at the back of their head as well. So it is quite a challenging working environment nowadays, so yeah, this working environment is quite fragmented. – LM 3

5.2 Managers' view of ideal communicational means

The second aggregate dimension, *Manager's view of ideal communicational means*, drawn from the data analysis consists of four 2nd order themes 1) Preference for two-way face-to-face communication, 2) Multi-channelled communication, 3) Style and 4) Rhythm of Communication. These are discussed next.

5.2.1 *Preference for two-way face-to-face interaction*

Based on the conducted interviews, even if it is not always possible, managers have a clear drive for oral face-to-face conversation and a genuine attempt for reciprocity in the interaction with employees. However, the use of e-mail is generally recognized as a widely used communicational means but its frequent use is lamented by many of the interviewed managers. Numerous studies on managerial communication have found that managers tend to prefer oral, face-to-face communication (e.g. Burns 1954; Mintzberg 1968; 1973; Brenner & Sigband 1964; Lawler et al. 1968). In addition, many scholars increasingly argue for the importance of two-way, interactional approach in managerial communication, including both upward and downward communication between the manager and employee (e.g. Weiss 1998; Smith 2006; Åberg 2006; Van Vuuren & Elving 2008; Drucker 2008). Furthermore, as Therkelsen and Fiebich (2004) concluded, the organization with the greater level of two-way communication, expressed through face-to-face forums or media will be more successful. Consequently, the interactional and reciprocal nature of communication is particularly highlighted in the context of organizational change (Quinn 1996).

Next, three quotes are provided to illustrate the manager's preference for oral, face-to communication and two-way interaction:

(7) As I said in the beginning, e-mail gets sent all too often, unfortunately ... it is in face-to-face interaction where there is interaction, which is important – LM 1

(8) We aim for dialogue and a very reciprocal communication, so that everyone has equal opportunities to communicate. – MM 5

(9) Generally, e-mail is used all too often as a communicational means. Here we highlight more oral communication, and I like to communicate orally because I can express myself better orally than in written ... Of course there are some things that come from top management that just need to be forwarded unilaterally as announcements, but the aim is to communicate in a conversational way, when possible – LM 4

The interviews show that the manager's aim for reciprocity and interaction is more specifically realized in the manager's attempts to actively create a shared understanding between them and employees, and to make employees feel that they are heard. Good communication is participative in nature (Nutt 1999), and aims at creating a shared experience about reality between parties (Elving 2005; Drucker 2008; Juholin 2007a). The

manager should aim at understanding what the employees are receptive to, which is the foundation for the manager's ability to listen (Drucker 2008). Thus, interaction is a potential means to create a shared understanding and is consequently regarded as a vital factor in any context of organizational change (Schein 1993) and crucial for reaching the overall organizational goals (Van Vuuren & Elving 2008).

Below, quotes 10 and 11 describe the manager's aim for reaching a shared understanding with employees:

(10) *You feel more likely that you have succeeded when it is two-way, like you can discuss a matter and get to open that matter, and we get a mutual understanding even if it was... not that pleasant a matter always, it has indeed succeeded, it makes you feel good... a communication taking place face to face is always more successful – MM 1*

(11) *Well, when you talk face to face, they feel they are being heard, or that is at least what I think ... and you get more out of it... like you get better to a mutual understanding or like to move forward in the matter when you have talked about it face to face. – LM 2*

The interviewed managers see interaction and being heard as leading to better employee motivation, satisfaction and engagement. Similarly, previous research has found that managerial communication has a significant effect on employee commitment, attitudes towards the organization (Van Vuuren et al. 2007, 117) and maintaining employee satisfaction (DeNobile & McCormick 2008). Furthermore, previous research suggests that there is a strong correlation between how contented employees are with the communication of their direct manager and the level of emotional attachment they feel towards the organization (Dasgupta et al. 2014 289). Emotional contentment, in turn, has been found to be one of the most central factors behind employee motivation (Bardwick, 2007).

Quote 12 illustrates how interaction is seen as to lead to better employee motivation and engagement:

(12) *And because it is known that being heard is very important for people, and it motivates and helps, too... it helps in that things move forward and people get involved in different changes more easily when they have had a say on the matter... and they feel that they have been listened to. – LM 4*

Consequently, according to the interviews, the manager's interaction skills, such as the ability to listen and to be present, are seen central. This is consistent with previous research that suggests that the manager's ability to genuinely listen and be receptive to the employees plays a key role in managerial work (e.g. Willemyns et al. 2003; Roper 2005; Smith 2006; Drucker 2008; Van Vuuren et al. 2007; Bull & Brown 2012; Yukl 2013, 160). In addition, the manager's ability to be present and available for the employees has been found to be crucial in managerial work in general (Weiss 1998), and in managerial work in the midst of change in particular (Ponteva 2010, 53; 60–62). Moreover, the interviewed manager's recounted feeling like they had succeeded as managers when they had managed to listen to and communicate in a two-way manner with employees. This is in line with Weiss (1998) who states that listening and giving feedback are effective ways to encourage two-way communication, which is ultimately to the manager's advantage as well.

Next, quote 13 and 14 show why listening to the employee is important, whereas quotes 14 and 15 illustrate the importance for the manager to be present in the midst of continuous change:

(13) *There needs to be conversational communication, and especially the feeling of being heard plays a key role in it, that communication should not be waterfall-modelled, like the information is just thrown on the employee in a take-it-or-leave-it manner. It is so that if you want to reach something, the way to it is conversation, through conversation – LM 4*

(14) *When I see people I try and I think that it feels quite natural to me, asking the person more than telling them things... we aim for dialogue then, and I try to highlight face-to-face communication, like you tell me how you are, what is wrong, and like what is it with you... to be on the pulse of the person in a way [...] Being present with the person is probably the best communicational channel – MM 2*

(15) *Well, in my experience interaction skills do get even remarkably highlighted, like the ability to read people, umm... and on the other hand the ability to be present when you are present, even if your own job is divided into many tasks and duties. Like I don't think that being present would require in itself so much time, but if you have agreed*

with an employee that you have five minutes to discuss a certain matter, then you should be fully present for the matter and in that way build trust, that I do hear, listen and hear what you say. – MM 4

5.2.2 Multi-channel communication

The conducted interviews show that when communicating with employees, the manager uses multiple channels simultaneously and on a regular basis. This is consistent with the findings of Mintzberg (1973) who concluded that the manager uses a total of five basic media for communication in their daily work. Moreover, as Bull and Brown (2012) suggest, communication through a mixture of media is beneficial to staff satisfaction and becomes particularly highlighted in the context of change.

Based on the interviews, a total of 11 different media for managerial communication were identified, of which six are written and five are oral. The written media include: the e-mail, the meeting memo, the bulletin board, the instant messaging and the intranet. In contrast, the oral media include: the unscheduled meeting (informal face-to-face), the scheduled meeting (formal face-to-face), the phone and the tour (informal face-to-face, observational). The number and types of identified media differs from the findings of Mintzberg (1973) who found that the manager communicates through only five basic media: the mail, the telephone, the unscheduled meeting and the tour. However, the difference in findings can be argued to be due to the emergence and development of modern information technology, such as the computer, the Internet and the World Wide Web. This has not only created more channels and media available for managerial communication, such as the e-mail, instant messaging and intranet, but also largely replaced some more traditional media such as the traditional mail with modern and quicker alternatives such as the e-mail and instant messaging. In addition, despite the rather high number of identified media in the interviews, only some of them were clearly highlighted in the responses by the interviewees. In fact, in the light of the conducted interviews it can be argued that the manager's most used media are the e-mail, the scheduled meeting, the unscheduled meeting and the meeting memo.

Below, quotes 16 and 17 show an example of media first-line and middle managers use for communication in their daily managerial work:

(16) *But well, e-mail is certainly a general means, but then I also go and meet people, and then there are of course meetings [...] and there we go through matters... then I also communicate through meeting memos... umm... and and ... then there are all kinds of like common,*

let's say a little more informal meetings or such that we meet or agree on a meeting in the context of a certain matter. – LM 1

(17) *We have a lot of face-to-face communication because we are physically close to each other, and then there are the express meetings every Monday where we go through urgent things face to face. And of course we have these legal workplace meetings and such... e-mail is of course quite relevant, some of the messages go directly forwarded to the employees from some other party. And then we have this Santra, our own virtual workspace on Santra, where we save and collect for example our meeting memos and that kind of material that require some space ... so we have a common space through which we can also communicate in a way that now this meeting memo has been uploaded there, go and check out the video, go have a look... like it is a workplace where everyone has the right to produce information, that everyone can comment [...] Plus we have a lean daily management board that we update together and use to recognize what needs to be further developed – MM 4*

Based on the interview answers, one of the main reasons why the managers tend to communicate through as many channels as possible is to ensure that their messages get received. Namely, many of the interviewed manager's recount having the experience that different employees prefer different media and read media in a different way. Thus a multi-channelled communication seems to serve the managers' purpose of successfully delivering the messages they communicate. The existence of many types of media and communication within the organization has been found to be vital for successful managerial communication and general information flow (Russ et al. 1990).

Next, the quotes 18 and 19 show that managers believe that multi-channelled communication enables them to reach employees better:

(18) *Yeah, there are many types [of channels], everyone gets the information from the channel they prefer – LM 1*

(19) *When I started as a nurse manager, I actually did a plan about which channels... that I will put all the information in as many channels as I can... I, myself, did adhere to it but then, as people roll in three-shift jobs, there is always something that comes as a new to them, but I knew myself that this has been communicated in six different*

channels and maybe you had even seen the person listening to you ... but of course, it is anyway new as a matter and experience to the person, so has it been successful or unsuccessful? – MM 2

However, the interviewed managers recounted having some criteria for selecting media for different matters and occasions. Oral, face-to-face media was preferred for matters that are more unclear, ambiguous and personal, as they could possibly arouse more negative or mixed emotions, and thus carry more risk for misunderstanding. In turn, written media was preferred for forwarding and communicating information that is clear and unambiguous. The use of written media was also preferred when communicating or delivering information quickly to a wide audience. This is also in line with the results by Russ et al. (1990) which indicated that manager's had the habit of selecting face-to-face media for highly ambiguous communication and written media for clear, objective communication. Moreover, the manager's ability to use different media and select media correctly has been found to be a central part of successful managerial communication. These abilities serve the manager's goal of successfully delivering the messages they communicate, which ultimately increases their chances to reach a better shared understanding with employees. (Russ et al. 1990 158; 170.)

In the next quote, a manager explains their criteria for selecting media:

(20) *If it is a matter that requires conversation, I at least call the person if I can't arrange a face-to-face meeting. Like I try to avoid communicating by e-mail any messages that are... well let's say ambiguous or easily misunderstood messages MM 2*

5.2.3 Style

The interviewed managers argued that the style of communication plays a key role in how successful managerial communication is. Thus, how a message is communicated is considered relevant in addition to what is communicated (Dasgupta et al. 2012), and through which and how many channels it is done. In their responses, managers highlighted particularly style features such as communication through positivity or in a positive tone, open and honest communication, clear expression and assertive argumentation, as well as communicating calmly and compassionately.

Next, in quote 21, a manager explains why style is a significant factor in managerial communication:

(21) *It is also significant, how you respond to it, and how you communicate it, in what tone you communicate it, so it does have a huge significance... you do get people involved, some of course may be slower to warm up, and others faster. – MM 4*

Based on the interviews, communication through positivity is central in managerial communication in that it affects how seriously and effectively a message is received by employees. For the interviewed managers, positivity in managerial communication means communicating possibilities over threats. It can be done, for example, by expressing even small positive things when possible, as well as communicating in a positive, hope-inspiring and encouraging tone even about changes that may not first seem entirely positive. Interestingly, even though existing research highlights the importance of style in managerial communication in general, communication through positivity does not seem to have been particularly emphasized in the reviewed literature.

The following quote illustrates the impact of communication through positivity:

(22) *I have now learnt to pay more attention to myself, like before I... didn't somehow pay so much attention to the tone I told things to employees, but now I have learnt to consider it [...] That if I introduce something... like slightly in a negative tone or like chuckle and say that well, let's see about this, it does affect immediately, it is not taken so seriously at all compared to me telling about an issue in a positive tone, that hey this is a good thing, this is great, this will be nice, we will manage, and all, so it does lead to a different outcome. – LM 3*

In addition to positivity in all managerial communication, the managers argued that good managerial communication should also be clear and concise in order to avoid the formation of rumours and guessing. Rumours, in turn, could result in negative outcomes, such as disbelief, suspicion, confusion or disengagement among employees. These findings are largely in line with existing research that has found that managerial communication should aim to be clear and easy to understand (e.g. Weiss 1998; Smith 2006; Beer & Eisenstadt 1996; Beck and Hillmar 1992).

Next, two quotes are provided to illustrate the importance of clear (quote 23), and concise (quote 24) communication in managerial work:

(23) *Well, like I intend it [communication] to be like... clear, that the things come in a way that there is nothing doubtful left in it, that an issue is clearly expressed, and of course, it has to be timely in the way*

that they haven't heard anything in corridor conversations or about something that is about to change – LM 1

(24) *... if you can express an issue concisely... umm... in my case it is often that I express things perhaps too concisely, I don't feel like explaining too much gobbledygook and unnecessary things, but I know that some colleagues can't get down with the issue in the first place, but spend a lot of time wording and formulating here and there, and when it has been going on for quite a while, some employees don't care to listen anymore, after which they are like... and then they don't even hear what they were told, and then the result is that nobody actually knows what was said... like I think the general aim could be to try to keep the communication, and what you say concise, but at the same time, however, soft and clear – MM 3*

Furthermore, the interviewed managers argued that openness and honesty plays a key role in managerial communication, even if it sometimes may feel challenging. Especially the importance of open and honest communication even on incomplete matters, followed by regular updates, was highlighted. Consistent with the interviews, open style in managerial communication has been found to make employees more satisfied at work (Jablin 1979) and see the manager as more trustworthy (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy 2000). Moreover, as Therkelsen and Fiebich (2004) argue, honesty has been recognised as one of the foundations of successful communication, which in turn can be fostered by open and consistent communication in the interaction between the manager and the employee. Moreover, openness, consistency and honesty in communication has been found to have an impact on trust-building between the manager and employee (Therkelsen & Fiebich 2004). Based on manager's experiences some of the challenges to communicate openly are the risk of incomplete, ambiguous information being altered and some employees still preferring having only complete, ready-made information packages on changes. Next, several quotes are provided to illustrate the importance of open and honest communication.

Quote (25) below illustrates the need for honest communication. Quotes 26 and 27 explain why it is important to communicate openly, while quote 28 exemplifies a challenge for positive communication:

(25) *... and yet a calm, honest, clear message about the current issues, and a kind of assertiveness if there are things that need to be lead, so you should stick to these things as a manager. – MM 2*

- (26) *There needs to be a kind of open communication, you should be able to tell employees about those things honestly and provide real-time information. And nowadays, there are very few issues coming, for example, from the top that the manager wouldn't be allowed to share with employees. – LM 4*
- (27) *Also in a way it has gone to the direction that even when a matter is still a bit incomplete in the administration, it is good to start to tell about it to employees... that this thing may be coming, that I am not quite sure, that I have heard, have you heard... because then the anxiety level may be lower when the thing may eventually change or something. – LM 1*
- (28) *...and then they ask you thousands of questions, what do we do with this and this, so then I sometimes say that look, I don't know yet, good that you asked this thing as well, that we have to plan this together... You really have to stick your neck out, like you can't just think that I tell people how things are and how they will go from here, instead you should just say that look, I really don't know this yet, time will tell... like the incompleteness, yes that's it... some can't stand it well and would like to have a ready-made package... and others who want to develop their work and tasks would be very resentful if they were given a ready-made information package about a new matter. – MM 3*

In order to convince employees about the possibilities a change can bring about, communication in an assertive and coherent style was considered important. This is in line with Ford and Ford (1995) who listed the use of confident assertions or claims as one of the five conversational means that managers can create change. Moreover, assertive style in managerial communication may facilitate building a mutual understanding (Ford & Ford 1995; Lwehabura & Matovelo 2000) and trust-building between the manager and employee (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy 2000). Furthermore, the managers assertive communication style has been found to contribute positively to employee satisfaction with supervisory communication, and ultimately with the organization (Dasgupta et al. 2012). Assertive communication style is honest, open, objective, accurate, respectful and tolerant in nature (Dasgupta et al. 2012).

The next two quotes 29 and 30 describe why assertive style in managerial communication is central:

(29) *Well, in my opinion things like having kind of confidence when you present things, and that you would present your thing in a convincing way, so these kinds of things get highlighted. [...] That you would know how to tell employees like... very like... fluently and clearly about something related to change. – LM 3*

(30) *I still need practice like in some kind of assertiveness, like that I need to, like I notice clearly that I find it very nice to, very nice to speak about nice things and issues but for matters that are a bit more serious I should take a more assertive approach. I think they are always a bit challenging and difficult situations, when it is not just a nice thing that we need to talk about. – LM 4*

Lastly, while there is a need to communicate clearly, concisely and assertively, managers viewed that communication with employees should also be calm and compassionate. Similarly, Ponteva (2010) emphasizes the manager's ability to remain calm in the midst of change, and argues that by remaining calm the manager can best serve the employees. Moreover, closely linked to compassionate style, Ford and Ford (1995) suggest that the manager can contribute to creating change through expressions that communicate an affective state, among other conversational means. Interestingly, however, calm and compassionate style in managerial communication was not particularly highlighted in the overall reviewed research and literature in managerial work and communication.

Next, quote 31 illustrates the importance of communicating compassionately with employees:

(31) *[...] and of course sometimes it is also about wishing people a good weekend and such, like it's in a way human and compassionate, and good in that way good ... at least I would experience it like that. Like erm, even if it goes jointly to a big group, that everyone would feel that it is even slightly personal, too. – LM 2*

5.2.4 Rhythm and pace of communication

As the last feature of ideal communicational means, the interviewed managers pointed out to the importance of rhythm and pace of communication. Firstly, the managers highlighted the importance of providing timely, up-to-date information, on a regular basis to employees. This is in line with existing research and literature that suggests that regular

and timely communication are some of the key factors in effective managerial communication and becomes particularly highlighted in the context of continuous change (e.g. Brown & Eisenhardt 1997; Smith 2006). Based on the interviews, the timeliness of communication is closely related to openness of communication and provision of incomplete information as well.

Below, quote 32 explains how providing timely information has an impact on getting employees involved in the change process, while quote 33 illustrates how real-time, up-to-date communication plays a central role in managing rumours and negative feelings among employees. Quote 34, in turn, shows why pacing the information and changes is relevant for employee-satisfaction:

(32) *It is just the timeliness of the communication [...] I really communicate to them all the time, so that they can in a way have an effect on it as well. Like if we think about the past changes, it would mean being able to inform employees all the time on where we are in the process, like that they would have the chance to participate in it through conversation and bring up their own views on the matter, like getting them into it. – MM 1*

(33) *Well it [managerial communication] has a great significance... because particularly in a bigger work community when rumors start to spread easily, and then the messages change along the way, it is like very important to communicate about matters in an real-time manner, to avoid employees hearing about the issue at stake from elsewhere and then having the meaning changed. There are multiple examples of these situations, like, now we have taken the line of communicating everything we know related to an issue, even if we didn't necessarily know everything there is to know yet, and we do it in a way that we don't just wait for the thing to start changing a little and living its own life... yeah like that, and simply that people can trust they continuously have the up-dated, real-time information, as it hasn't always been the case... which has created insecurity for them on what actually is up-to-date information and what's not, and so on... so now they can at least in a way trust that we tell everything that we can and know that is currently happening right away to them, so it really has a great significance – LM 4*

(34) *And of course like... umm... in the midst of change the manager's role is to pace the change... like if you think that too much is too much, so the manager has to be sensitive and listen carefully to the situation like how, like you can't just keep throwing more and more information to be assimilated and learnt, and new changes, like it's very important that you listen carefully all the time... and I learnt from a training some time ago that a unit like this can take up to some three bigger changes in principle [...] and then we [managers] continuously evaluate the situation, and determine what the issues are that need to be developed and what needs to be changed, but in what time span, that we can postpone these because now the time is just not good – LM 4*

Secondly, in order to avoid the sense of information overload among employees, the manager's ability to time and pace communication was considered crucial for a successful outcome. Moreover, instead of communicating a whole entity of information at once, dividing the communicated information in smaller quantities was considered important, as some of the employees may need more time to process information than others. In this way, too, the sense of information overload can be diminished. Contrary to the conducted interviews, the reviewed literature did not highlight timing and pacing of communication as crucial factors in managerial communication, making it an interesting finding in this study.

Quote 35 shows how pacing information instead of pouring everything at once may help employees respond to changes better, while quote 36 explains why pacing may be crucial for taking into account the individual differences of employees:

(35) *Yeah, on the other hand it makes it a little easier if you have some information to share already before, even the slightest piece of rumour that they are planning something like this or something, like if you can divide the amount of information into smaller pieces and share them then to employees, it is clearly easier for them to receive and respond to it – LM 4*

(36) *Well, mercifulness to oneself but, above all, to others... that not everyone thinks and acts in the same pace, that you give space to people and take it into account in communication as well. – MM 2*

As the last point, in order to ensure the effectiveness and successful reception and adoption of the communicated information, in some of the interview answers it was suggested that the manager should reinforce their messages through regular repetitions. Contrary to this observation, the reviewed literature did not highlight repetition of messages as a means for assuring employees successfully receive and understand the communicated information.

The following quote crystallizes the importance of repetition in managerial communication through a real-life example:

(37) *Probably the fact that you have to have the patience to repeat things many times... I have an example from years ago that we had an operation unit, and it was known it was going to be shut down... and I began to communicate to employees about it. There were 20 people in total working in this unit. I started telling them that yeah, the case is such that this unit is going to be shut down, and your work will move to Turku. I communicated to and informed them of it for like maybe 2-2.5 years, after which then, well,, they hadn't wanted to hear it at all, they had just been saying like 'yeah, yeah okay, yeah'. And it was so funny because we had had this development day on a cruise, and they had all been there and we talked about the shut-down of the unit there, what it means and what we are going to do... Then, when 2.5 years had passed from these first conversations on the cruise, they come and ask me why they had not been told anything about this... like they had rejected everything, and I was like 'hello, do you remember that we were on this cruise and talked about this, and it was this and this time ago'... – MM 3*

5.3 Manager's role as a change agent

The second aggregate dimension drawn from the data is 'the manager's role as change agent'. That is, based on the interviews, it is suggested that in order to be a good communicator in a continuously changing context, the manager should embrace the broader role of a change agent. The role as a change agent together with good communicational means forms the entity of good managerial communication in continuous change context. This finding is in consistent with a growing body of research that highlights the change agent role of line and middle managers in the midst of change. This research suggests that non-senior managers play a crucial role not only as implementors but as creators of change. (e.g. Huy 2002; Balogun and Johnson 2004; Rouleau 2005; Pappas and Wooldridge 2007;

Rouleau and Balogun 2011.) Moreover, management of different types of interaction and conversational means have been argued to be relevant in the change agent role (Barrett et al. 1995; Ford & Ford 1995; Weick & Quinn 1999).

Based on the interviews, the manager's change agent role is divided in three sub-roles: 1) *mediator*, 2) *facilitator*, and 3) *role model*, which will be discussed in more detail in the following sub-sections. The three roles are tightly intertwined and may in some cases even seen to overlap to some degree.

5.3.1 *Mediator*

Based on the answers of the interviewed managers, line and middle managers can be argued to have the role of a mediator in the organization, as a part of their broader change agent role in the context of continuous change. In the interviews, the manager is seen to act as a messenger, negotiator and listener between upper management and employees, forwarding information from up to down, as well as collaterally sharing information to manager colleagues. This is consistent with existing research, according to which middle managers work as mediators between levels and units (Floyd & Wooldridge 2000) and are considered central agents between the top management and operational level (Wooldridge 2008). In other words, managers act as instruments between upper management and employees, helping them build a common understanding, (Ponteva 2010, 53) and as information filters between the two parties (Mintzberg 1973, 47). In the next quote, a manager describes their role as a mediator:

(38) *Well, it's an important role that you can tell things, like as a messenger and listener – LM 2*

According to the interviews, and consistent with Therkelsen and Fiebich (2004) and Allen et al (2007), the direct manager is considered to be the most important and trusted information source for the employees. Reciprocally, the interviewed managers consider their direct subordinates as being clearly among their most central target group for communication. In line with this, managers have been found to spend between one-third and two-thirds of their time solely communicating with employees (Mintzberg 1968; 1973, 45; Brenner and Sigband 1964; Lawler et al. 1968). However, the interviewed managers considered also other parties central target groups for managerial communication, such as the their own direct manager or collateral actors or groups. Consequently, the manager's role as a mediator between parties in the organization can be argued to be particularly relevant in order to make information flow efficiently through all the organizational

levels and units (Floyd & Wooldridge 2000; Van Vuuren et al. 2007), such as, for example, when messages from the top management need to successfully reach employees lower in the hierarchy and vice versa.

Next, several quotes are provided. Quote 39 shows the manager's significant role as the main information source for employees. Quotes 40 and 41 are provided to further exemplify the central role of both first-line and middle managers as mediators between upper, lower and collateral levels of organization, including employees, their own direct managers and collateral colleagues or groups, e.g., multi-professional groups

(39) *It has a huge significance in the way that I am their direct manager, so they don't get the information from anywhere else, like these kind of general information... and if there is an important matter, the kind that you need to get it communicated to all employees, they of course get it through me – LM 1*

(40) *Well, I communicate of course to my own team here, that is, these nurses, and of course then to our nurse manager who is my direct manager, so I act here in-between in a way, like towards both directions... I communicate, so these are my main directions of communication – LM 4*

(41) *Yeah and well, I communicate upwards in all directions here in the middle... and then I communicate about these statutes and the like that you need to take into account in your work to employees and in general people that work with patients [...] A care work manager's role is to be a general information coordinator and inform the multi-professional teams on certain matters... like there are people that are not my direct subordinates, they are doctors, psychologists, social workers, my own role is, then, to forward information to them as well... So, yeah, to every direction. – MM 2*

Not surprisingly, the managers describe their position as a mediator between parties as rather challenging, for example, due to possible tensions between parties and the difficulty for the manager to prioritise the most relevant information from the vast amount of available information. Consistent with Smith (2006), Drucker (2008, 319) and Bull and Brown (2012), the interviewed managers stated that as a mediator, the manager should

also be receptive and listen to the reactions of employees. The interviewed managers considered these abilities important particularly in order to pace the changes according to the employee's change capacity.

Next, quotes 42 and 43 exemplify the challenging role of acting as mediators between parties, while quote 44 illustrates the managers challenge to notice when the change pace is too rapid for employees:

(42) *We are a little bit like between a rock and a hard place – MM 3*

(43) *Yeah just like dealing with more difficult matters, it can be a bit hard to bring them up because you know it already beforehand that this message here will raise a lot of emotions in people, and just the fact that there are also like a little stronger characters among the nurses who... in a way you think that well, when I communicate as a manager, I have to remain formal and cannot let myself be provoked and I have to give arguments, but then again it is a rather unfair situation, as the same doesn't apply the employee, like the employee can throw up their own irritation and bad feelings on me, even though in a way I am just the messenger the situation, so that is always quite challenging – LM 4*

(44) *When there is too many changes going on, you do notice in the employees that well-being at work is not as good as it used to be and people are tired, and luckily we have a good work community after all, and they actively communicate, too, and make the manager aware that now, now we are just too tired. – LM 4*

5.3.2 Facilitator

The conducted interviews suggest that the second sub-role of the manager's broader role as a change agent is to act as a facilitator in the midst of continuous change. As the name suggests, as a facilitator, the manager aims at making change easier and increasing change receptivity, readiness and capability among employees. Research has shown that the middle manager has a central role in both the successful implementation and initiation of change (Huy 2002; Balogun and Johnson 2004; Rouleau and Balogun 2011; Pappas & Wooldridge 2007).

Firstly, based on the interviews, the manager facilitates change by interpreting upcoming and ongoing changes and their outcomes to employees. This is consistent with the

findings of Balogun (2003) that suggest interpretation of change is the key task for middle managers. Moreover, previous research suggests the direct manager's role is central in the provision of information and encouragement of conversation about the ongoing changes and their impact on the daily work (Allen et al. 2007). Furthermore, as both Weick and Quinn (1999) and Dunford & Jones (2000) argue, the manager explains the ongoing change, as well as interprets the direction and possible outcomes of it in regard to the everyday work of the employees. In this way managers have an important role for not only helping employees receive, accept and understand the changes and their impact to their own work but also understand the deeper meaning behind changes and what the changes mean at the organizational level.

Next, quotes 46 and 47 illustrate how both mid- and first-level managers interpret, explain and clarify upcoming and ongoing changes to employees, while middle managers tend to be deeper involved in guiding strategy implementation:

(45) *Well, in my experience, the role is related to clarifying the actual strategy together in groups, opening it at the level of concreteness, what it means to us, as we at this level set targets to our own action, so the thing is how we link it to the upper level strategy and get them so that the target really stays clear. So it is about conversing and straining together. My task is, then, to follow what else there is addition to strategy that needs to be brought into practice. – MM 4*

(46) *I always try to think about those things, of course I need to process them on my own and find like the point in it and figure out how this change is going to make our daily work easier, what its meaning is, and of course there are changes that you need to ponder for a longer time in order to find the point that what its positive meaning is. – LM 4*

Furthermore, according to the interviews, the manager facilitates change by not only interpreting but also actively selling the change to the employees. This implies the use of persuasive and convincing rhetorical means as well as clear, non-contradictory messages. Although the reviewed literature does not mention directly the manager's act of actively selling ongoing changes to the employees, it does highlight a carefully managed use of language and dialogue by the manager (Weick & Quin 1999; Dunford & Jones 2000) as well as the manager's ability to make sense of the changing reality (Weick 1995; Dunford & Jones 2000). Moreover, the use of the five conversational means identified by Ford &

Ford (1995) could be argued to benefit the manager in trying to sell ongoing changes to employees.

Below, in quote 47, a manager explains how they try to sell announced changes to employees in a convincing way even if employees question the benefit of the change:

(47) *I should in a way get it sold to the rest of the staff, like find how we carry the change through, and what is it about, and why is it coming, and will it benefit us in some way, and so on, in a way as a seller of matters, that would be my role for the most part. [...] Although I do get asked sometimes that ‘are you really serious now’ when I really try to hype something like this, so I get asked if I’m really sure that this will benefit us. So I say: ‘Yes, I am, in the end it will be beneficial!’, I try to say it in a very convincing manner even if at the back of my head I may be like ‘hmm, well, well. I don’t know’. – LM 3*

Secondly, it is suggested that the manager has a central role in supporting and engaging employees in continuous change. The analysis of the interviews shows that the manager engages employees, for example, by casting roles and delegating responsibilities to employees in the midst of changes, as well as giving them the sense that they can participate in, give feedback about and influence decisions and changes related to their work. In line with this, the manager’s participative role is highlighted in newer perspectives of change and change agency (Bullock and Batten 1985). Moreover, as Bull and Brown (2012) found, ensuring there was a possibility for employees to participate in meaningful feedback is relevant for the general employee satisfaction. On the contrary, engagement through casting roles and delegating specific responsibilities to employees was not highlighted in the reviewed literature, making it a particularly interesting finding.

In the following quote, a manager explains how engaging employees and guiding them in the change process by giving them particular roles and responsibilities related to the change:

(48) *What is highlighted in managerial communication in the context of continuous change is to engage the personnel, in the way that you cast different roles to people in different changes. We have named so-called primary nurses and... and like some matters are actually first communicated by the named primary nurses because we believe in a way that the message is more attractive communicated by a primary nurse than by the nurse manager ... especially if it is about a change related to a specific task or issue – MM 1*

In addition to engagement, the interviewed managers consider supporting employees crucial in making employees feel motivated, capable and empowered to act in a continuously changing work context, and encourage them to develop themselves as professionals. As stated by Drucker (1989, 214), the manager's fundamental task is to help the employees to perform and respond to change through common goals, values, the right structure as well as training and development. In fact, motivating and developing employees are two of the five managerial tasks distinguished by Drucker (1989, 337–338). Perceived support from the manager has been found to enhance employee satisfaction with supervisory communication, which in turn tends to develop a stronger bond with the organization (Dasgupta et al. 2012).

Next, quotes 49 and 50 are provided to illustrate the importance of managerial support in the present work context, while quote 51 exemplifies how managers should support employees' professional growth:

(49) *And also the fact that you do have to support people, and in a way make them feel that they can also influence something, so that's very important... that not everything would come dictated to them. – MM 1*

(50) *People of course have their own things, and nowadays life situations have quite an impact on working, but also working-life is full of challenges where you have to support employees. In my case at least, meetings related to work-wellbeing and to evaluations of work ability have become considerably more frequent, and they take a lot of time and they are challenging situations. There are the human and the organizational side that you have to take into account in this position – MM 2*

(51) *We have to reach a point where, in a way, the personnel gets to grow and flourish somehow through their own competence, no matter what the job description is, but that they would really get how this could be improved and still made a couple of grades better. And that requires quite diverse competence from the manager in order to be able to push a matter forward in an adequate pace, like not pushing people over their limits by demanding anything impossible if the starting point is quite different, but by genuinely giving space and enabling personal professional growth. – MM 4*

Furthermore, as argued by one of the interviewed managers, the manager can support their employees, for example, by creating safe routines and the feeling of permanence in the midst of continuous change. However, it is suggested that these routines and rules should not be too rigid, but leave room for renewal and flexibility, in order to be able to successfully act in the continuously changing everyday work-life. In this way, it can be argued that the manager can facilitate change through employee support and engagement, as is conveyed by one of the interviewed managers:

(52) *As a manager you try to support those for whom change feels heavy by creating safe routines that we, people, need to a certain point, but the less they are there to hinder, the easier and more flexible it is to change them. And I think that for an expert or the like, some basic principles on work take them far, whereas on a team level, it is the commonly set and respected rules which can also be annually be revised, but that there are set meeting times and so on... things like this create safety and permanence in the midst of the continuously changing everyday work-life... but not anything written on stone either... even though I know that many long for it, and that is alright. But I personally think that the more you can give up on that kind of thinking, your lane gets wider and you have more possibilities to act in this environment and zoom into your own action, so that you recognize that yes, the walls around me are falling but hey, I can handle this task, and then I have done my work.*

– MM 2

5.3.3 *Role model*

Based on the interviews, the manager's third sub-role as a change agent is to act as a role model for employees (Balogun 2003), showing and leading them by example in the context of continuous change. The interviews show that the manager's stance and attitude towards changes has a direct impact on how employees react to and perceive changes as their attitudes may easily get reflected upon employee behaviour. That is, one of the manager's roles as a change agent is to show example on how to respond to changes by communicating about the change in a positive, yet credible and coherent style. More precisely, according to the interviews, the manager should communicate in a change-positive way, stand behind their words and actions, and avoid sending a controversial message about an upcoming change. Communicating in a positive, non-controversial way may become particularly crucial in a situation where a manager personally disagrees with an announced change and does not see a positive influence from it. In these situations,

some of the interviewed managers suggested that the manager should deal with their own negative feelings elsewhere, that is, not in front of employees, and try to make sense of the change and convince themselves first about the possible positive outcomes that the changes may bring about.

As the preferred and most credible source of information for the employees (Allen et al. 2017), the manager has a key position in how successfully a message is received by employees, as the success of the message has been found to correlate with the perceived credibility of the change agent (Therkelsen and Fiebich 2004, 124). Thus, a manager who is negative about a change, and acts or communicates accordingly, may have a negative impact on employee response to the change (Balogun 2003). In addition, and consistent with the findings, Therkelsen and Fiebich (2004) also suggest that managers should communicate consistently and patiently, and avoid sending mixed messages to employees.

Next, three quotes are provided to illustrate how a manager's example and the communication influenced by it is essential for making employees respond positively to change:

(53) *Well, the example is of the essence in fact ... so you have to stand behind your words, so you have to prepare the issue well and be ready to justify it, and to justify and rationalize it to yourself as well, like how this is good even though sometimes with many new things you may at first think to yourself that oh no, but when you start to ponder over, think about and rationalize it to yourself well, I do believe that I have succeeded in these kinds of situations ... mostly, so that in a way you don't communicate in a contradictory manner – MM 1*

(54) *The example shown by the manager and the manager's attitude towards change certainly has an impact, despite the fact that you repeat or forward matters. But when it comes to the anxiety caused by it, the manager has to deal with it elsewhere, so that others couldn't notice it even if deep inside you feel it... and yet a calm, honest, clear message about the current issues, and a kind of assertiveness if there are things that need to be led, so you should stick to these things as a manager. – MM 2*

(55) *The example of the manager is, it is indeed very important, and particularly how the manager reacts to the matter, as it gets mirrored... or like it gets well reflected on employees... so like the example the manager shows is very important [...] Like if you, yourself, are*

very... like I know some work units where managers are, are already, like they go in front of the employees and say that well, there is this, yet another change that we should carry out [sneering tone], and of course you don't always find the energy. And sometimes when I attend these nurse manager meetings, I notice these people there, and well, it can be seen that these units are not the most innovative ones, nor are they the most change-positive, for sure, either. – LM 4

In addition to just showing example and letting employees interpret the manager's words and behaviour, one of the interviewed managers suggests that the manager could also proactively bring up a discussion with employees on how changes would best be reacted to and dealt with (see quote 57). Similarly, Allen et al. (2007) highlight the direct manager's role in encouraging conversation about change. By bringing up conversation, the manager would not only explicitly express their own attitude towards change and act as a role model to the employees, but also help the employees reflect on their own general attitudes towards change.

(56) Our nurse manager has fortunately done quite a good job also in that (s)he has like, (s)he talks a lot about change in general with people. Like also now that we have ongoing development discussions, (s)he told me that (s)he has brought it up as a discussion topic as part of the development discussion... like how, umm, they should in a way, like what are the best ways to react to and deal with change. – LM 4

5.4 Development and support for managerial work

The third aggregate dimension that emerged from the analysis of the data is called 'development and support for managerial work'. The aggregate dimension consists of three second order themes: 1) Targeted training for managers, 2) Training for employees and 3) Organizational support. Overall, the interviewed managers viewed that managerial work and communication in the midst of continuous change should be developed and supported in a way that takes into account both the manager and the employee, and by facilitating collateral interaction between manager colleagues and self-development. Topics on development and support for managerial communication were not covered in the reviewed literature. Most likely it is because the focus in the reviewed literature was on the features of managerial work and communication rather than on how managerial work and communication could be developed.

5.4.1 Targeted training for managers

Based on the conducted interviews, trainings provided by the organization to managers are regarded necessary and appreciated for developing managerial and communication skills in the context of continuous change. When particularly asked about the change capability clinics and change communication training sessions the case organization had organized during the years 2018–2019, managers expressed overall positive feedback on them. The training sessions were considered to have the potential in being useful to help the manager develop new perspectives and to realize things in a new way, as well as to reinforce and recapitulate already known concepts.

Next, quote 57 illustrates how regular training sessions for managers are useful for supporting and developing managerial in the context of continuous change. Quote 58, in turn, serves as a good example how the training sessions can help managers to gain new insights and perspectives:

(57) *Managers are trained here at the Hospital District very well to face and manage change, and they organize change communication and other type of trainings [...] I may be in quite a lucky position myself for having already attended many training sessions as a manager, which prepare you to receive and react to change and so on, so that has made change feel less dramatic to me... like erm, it's kind of like part of everyday life, so you don't think about it that much. – LM 4*

(58) *Yeah, the clinics, two times, which I attended for two hours, of course not much in that time but they did awake thoughts, in a way that I started to think that aha, you can think like this as well... insights on positivity and like questioning your own ways of acting, like what if I don't do like this, or should I try doing like that... And they were not unconditional either, but gave you possibilities to ponder over some things. – LM 1*

However, some of the more experienced managers expressed that they had already been well familiarized with most of the topics discussed in the training sessions. These managers, in particular, called for the need for organizing trainings with a clearer, more specific purpose, designed for more specific target groups by, for instance, dividing trainings into beginner and advanced level groups.

In the following quote, a manager explains how it would be beneficial if trainings were more targeted and clearly defined:

(59) *I would pay attention to it, like I kind of understand if you think that it's good that there are people with different experiences, and they can exchange their experiences and thoughts, but it does leave the content quite thin for the ones that are more experienced and have tackled many changes. And I would hope to see maybe a little bit more consideration on target groups, like what and for whom. What happened with the trainings was that it was not quite clear why and for what needs this responds, whose needs is this based on, what is wanted, what the target is, like is it just general reinforcement of change capability or what. Well, this serves more as a feedback for the past series of trainings – MM 4*

5.4.2 Training for employees

Some of the interviewed managers argued that besides providing managers with training opportunities, the organization should organize training for employees as well. They recounted having been in situations where they felt some employees did not understand the complexity and value of the manager's role and work. These managers suggested that trainings would improve employees' understanding and appreciation towards the manager's work and role and in this way bring the two parties closer to one another. Quote 61 exemplifies the need for trainings for employees as well:

(60) *I have many times thought that it would be good to organize kind of subordinate skill trainings, like ... it may relate to other things but that kind of trainings, and precisely the dilemma of how to make your own work as a manager visible... as there are still some people coming to my room and asking if I could call to the service number as I don't have anything else to do... So at times like this I feel that I have completely failed to tell them why I am here and what I do [...] I would hope that the personnel would understand our position here like between a rock and a hard place. So the understanding from their part, as I do try to pursue things to their benefit, as I'm here for them in the first place. – MM 1*

Moreover, some of the interviewed managers expressed a sense of imbalance in general expectations how the manager should behave in sensitive or conflictive situations compared to what is generally expected and accepted from the employee. In other words, some of the managers felt that when faced with an unpleasant event or situation, some

employees may easily forget the general good manners in the work place, whereas the manager is always expected to stay calm and act correctly, as illustrated in the following quote:

(61) *In a way you think that well, when I communicate as a manager, I have to remain formal and cannot let myself be provoked and I have to give arguments, but then again it is a rather unfair situation, as the same doesn't apply to the employee, like the employee can throw up their own irritation and bad feelings on me, even though in a way I am just the messenger the situation, so that is always quite challenging [...] But then again there are almost no trainings for employees, and somehow I would hope that also employees would be offered this kind of training. It would make the manager's work easier, Like if there was training targeted for employees inside the organization [...] On the other hand I would hope for a kind of communication training also for employees. And well, something that I have thought to myself is that employees could be provided with a kind of training for adaptation to change. – LM 4*

Thus, based on the interviews, it is suggested that organizing training on work community and communication skills for employees would potentially have a positive effect on these kinds of scenarios. Drucker's (2008, 319–320) concept of management by objectives emphasizes that an effective organization is one where each member of the organization works towards a common goal. Furthermore, also Drucker recognizes that there may often be differences in perceptions between the manager and the employee. He argues, however, that simply the mere realization of this difference in perspective is the starting point for building a shared experience and mutual understanding. By bridging the gap between the perspectives of the manager and employee, the employee may be able to realize the complexity of the manager's position and to understand, for example, the difference between what the manager wants to do and what the situation demands them to do. (Drucker 2008, 319–320). Consequently, basing on Drucker's theory and the conducted interviews, it is suggested that the organization should aim to bring the employee and the manager closer to one another and encourage seamless collaboration between the two parties. This could be done, for example, by organizing common training sessions or workshops for managers and employees. In this way the organization could help increase the employee's awareness of the manager's role and difference of perspectives. This, in turn, could contribute positively to the building of a shared experience and mutual understanding and thus, make employees take more responsibility of their behavior in encounters and interactions with managers.

5.4.3 *In-house support*

In addition to organized trainings for both managers and employees, the interviewees stated that also other types of organizational support are of considerable relevance for the development of managerial work. All the interviewed managers argued rather unanimously that enabling managers to have peer support in their daily work, as well as to network and exchange experiences with their colleagues on a regular basis is perhaps the most effective and valuable type of organizational support work managerial work. Also Drucker (2007, 84–85) highlights the importance of interconnectedness of divisions and members of the organization. Thus it could be argued that through encouraging interconnectedness, such as networking and exchanging ideas with colleagues, the organization could facilitate the fulfilment of Drucker's philosophy of management that all members would work seamlessly towards a common goal, each of them working towards their own objectives but ultimately producing a whole (Drucker 2007, 89–91).

Next, two quotes are provided as examples of the importance of enabling peer support and networking with colleagues to support and develop managerial work. Moreover, quote 63 illustrates how peer support could be activated by the organization by organizing peer support groups at regular intervals:

(62) *When we made this big organizational change, the case was, as I just said that we were three senior nursing officers, so in the worst case two of us were ready to give up and thought this is not going anywhere, but one of us still had faith in it and suggested that 'listen, what if we tried this!'. So in a way, I remember in a way that we stood like this, we were out of this office like in the corridor and thought that hey now this is like this, and oh no, oh dear and so on... and it was usually the case that two still had the energy and faith to go on and one said they don't have the energy to go on, but this one time there was such a critical situation that two of us said they would now throw in the towel because this is not going to work out, but one of us still went on ... saying 'well what if we still tried'. – MM 3*

(63) *I think the value delivered by the trainings is especially in networking with other nurse managers that are in the same situation as you. [...] I would hope that there was, like I reckon that group talks would be the best in the way that well, you could talk and discuss and go through challenging situations and, and you would hear what others have faced. Like many times you hear experiences that aha, the same ones as I had, which alone makes relieved, just to know that someone*

has the same problems as you. As you are completely alone here, it feels like you struggle with the same things... so these kinds of peer support discussions. One-on-one discussions are good as well, but also some kind of group would be good. I would hope there was some kind of regular... actually we had a kind of peer support group for nurse managers we could attend, it was organized regularly and you could attend if you wanted, but it was a kind of a project or the like and it finally ended. I was supposed to be continued informally but then it died away, so for some reason it doesn't go on any more, but I would hope there was something like that. – LM 3

Furthermore, in addition to having peer support, also support from above was considered significant. For example, many of the interviewed managers expressed the importance of their direct manager's support towards them in order to succeed in their own role as a manager (see quote 65). Also Drucker (2007, 84) recognizes the role of the manager's superior in supporting the manager at his work, and the interconnectedness of the two. Moreover, the support received from Human Resources was mentioned by several interviewed managers as having been useful for them (see quote 65):

(64) I do feel I receive very good support from my own manager, like these discussions are of great help. – MM 1

(65) Surely they have paid attention to supporting managers, for example the manager dates organized by HR, or wait did they change, and these HR messages, no I think they changed their name, but well, I consider it as good, as a good characteristic in the support for managers. – MM 5

Based on the interviews, another way for the organization to support development of managerial work include enabling managers to develop themselves professionally. The organization could, for example, ensure that managers have the time needed for self-development, such as attending the training sessions provided by the organization (see quote 66). Moreover, it was considered crucial that the organization made sure managers have the time to be sufficiently present and available for employees (see quote 67):

(66) Well, the only thing is that as I also attended these clinics, so it was quite regrettable that many managers from my unit couldn't attend them, like they had signed up for it but they were so busy that they

couldn't make it. So in this sense it is regrettable that if these kinds of trainings are organized and yet almost nobody can attend them because they are too busy. So I would hope for that kind of development time for managers... like that kind of resources. – LM 1

(67) *I have been thinking that managerial work could be supported by being present, or like by making it possible for the manager to be easily available. – MM 3*

Moreover, some managers found the current description of managerial positions too vague, and thus, expressed a need for more accurate descriptions for managerial positions, more clearly defined objectives and expectations from the organization, and a more systematic and multi-professional approach to managerial work. This is in line with Drucker's (2007, 84–93) concept of management by objectives in which he underlines that in order to work successfully and set their own objectives correctly, the manager must not only understand what the organizational goals are but also how they are expected to perform as managers. Furthermore, it was suggested that all managerial roles, including the first-level managerial roles, should be developed into more coaching type of roles where employees are empowered and given more authority to develop their own work (Ellinger & Bostrom 1999; Goggin 2000; Raelin 2012). The following quote explains the need for updated role descriptions and a shift to a more coach-like role in all managerial positions:

(68) *also the concretization and clarification of what it means to be a direct manager, what their job really is... like somehow more standardization to managerial work. Because now, I think everyone does it based on what comes to their mind or how they think it is best done, so like now the work could be somehow more supported and systematized, so that there would be a common reporting style and who you report to and on what. Like somehow bringing kind of more structure to it, and concretizing it, and also what is really expected, like now there are these job descriptions as well, but like is it really so, or are they more like descriptions of the current state, now that they did the job descriptions for direct manager, or mainly for nurse manager. Or should the aim also be at defining how these roles should be developed? And now I refer to the fact that we should like genuinely support managers more towards taking more of a coach-like role, instead of*

sticking to the very traditional role fiddling with duty rosters and putting out flames. I think the role hasn't really evolved even though it should evolve to one where you give more like authority to employees to develop their own work and so on, and like then again highlighting multi-professionalism also in managerial work. [...] Like I feel that especially managers are faced by high requirements, and it is exactly like being caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, and there are probably a lot of things gnawing at the work wellbeing, but like maybe it could be supported by clarifying actions, so in other words, we need a cultural change, just a small thing like could we just move to coaching in managerial work? And do it so that it would be in a way, it should then be in line with all levels of management, so that like our entire hierarchical system would be synchronized with what is really expected from managerial work. – MM 4

(69)

5.5 Dynamic model of middle managerial work amid continuous change

As shown in the data structure drawn based on the findings of this study (see Figure 2), four aggregated dimensions were formed based on the analysis of the empirical interview material: 1) the continuous change context as a trigger for improved communication, 2) managers' views of means of ideal communication, 3) manager's role as a change agent, and 4) support and development for managerial work. In this section, the aggregated dimensions are brought together and discussed through a conceptual model that aims to show the dynamic relationships among the aggregated dimensions (Gioia et al 2012, 22). The four aggregated dimensions and their interrelationships are illustrated in Figure 3:

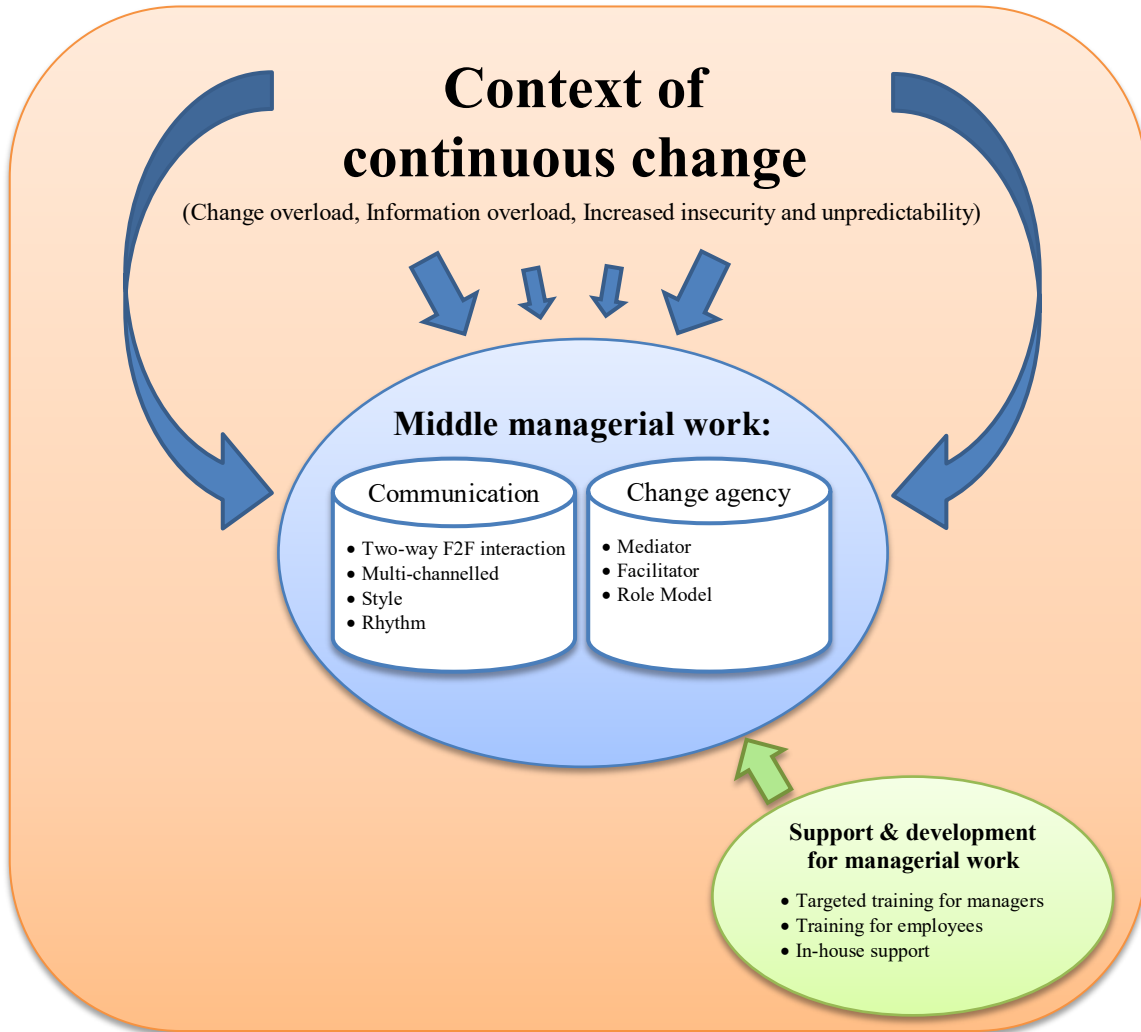


Figure 3 Dimensions of middle managerial work in the context of continuous change

As illustrated in Figure 3, the case organization operates in the broader context of continuous change, which gets manifested as a collective sense of change overload, information overload and continuous insecurity and unpredictability. The context of continuous change surrounds and influences all operations of the case organization, including managerial work. The continuous change context influences and challenges managerial work by sending constant stimuli in the form of different sized changes with no clear end and beginning. This is illustrated in Figure 3 via different sized blue arrows. In this way, the continuous change context works as a trigger for improved managerial work and communication. Thus, in order to successfully act as a manager in the ever-changing environment, the model suggests that particular attention should be paid to the quality of managerial work.

As shown in Figure 3, in the context of continuous change, middle managerial work consists of managerial communication and the manager's change agent role. Effective managerial communication is, on one hand, two-way interaction that takes place face-to-face between the manager and the employee, when needed. On the other hand, it is multi-channelled and a combination of both written and oral media. Furthermore, the communication should be paced, and timely updates on upcoming and ongoing issues should be provided on a regular basis to employees. Lastly, the results of the analysis suggest that managers should aim to communicate in a positive, open, honest, calm, personal and assertive style in the context of continuous change.

In addition to the described managerial communication, the dynamic model suggests that the managers should adopt and include the role of a change agent. The manager adopts this role through three sub-roles of change agency. Firstly, the manager acts as a mediator between parties, such as employees and top management. Secondly, the manager acts as a facilitator in the midst of change, for example, by interpreting and selling changes and their outcomes to employees, by supporting and engaging employees in the changes and by casting roles to employees and enabling their professional development. Moreover, as a facilitator, consistent and assertive communication is crucial. Thirdly, the manager acts as a role model by showing example on how to respond to change, always sending non-contradictory messages and standing behind their words.

In order to make sure that managerial work responds to the needs, challenges and dynamic speed of continuous change, middle managerial work should be supported and developed consistently and continuously. Firstly, targeted, specified trainings are essential for supporting and developing middle managerial work in the case organization. Secondly, the model suggests that not only managers but also employees should be offered trainings on responding to continuous change and on work community skills, which would support both the manager's and employee's work. Thirdly, apart from trainings to managers and employees, other types of in-house support should be offered and encouraged. Enabling peer support and networking with colleagues were the most highlighted forms of in-house support forms. Furthermore, the organization's responsibility to ensure that managers have time for self-development and to attend the offered trainings was considered crucial. Moreover, support from other organizational members, such as the manager's own manager and a Human Resources representative was considered valuable.

6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Theoretical contributions

The purpose of this study was to examine and describe middle managerial work in the context of continuous change from a middle management perspective. The research topic was first discussed based on a combination of existing academic literature on managerial work, managerial communication, continuous and episodic change as well as change agency. Change agency was discussed particularly from a middle management perspective. Secondly, the phenomenon was investigated through a qualitative, holistic single-case study in order to get a deep understanding of middle managerial work within the context of the Hospital District of Southwest Finland (HDSF). The HDSF turned out to be a sensible choice as the case organization as it has been subject to long-term and diverse change turmoil due to reforms and changes on the Finnish public health and social care sector. The main research question of this study was: *what is middle managerial work amidst continuous change*, which was followed by two sub-questions: *what is middle managerial communications amidst continuous change* and *what is the role of middle managers as change agents amidst continuous change*. In this section, the research questions are answered and reflected upon existing academic research and literature.

Next, the answer to the main research question is explored. The findings of this study suggest that middle managerial work amidst continuous change consists of two core dimensions: managerial communication and change agency (see Figure 3). That is, in order to succeed in their managerial work amid continuous change, middle managers should not only communicate fluently but also act as change agents.

In the next two sub-sections, these two core dimensions of middle managerial work are discussed and explored in more detail and the two sub-questions on managerial communication and agency are answered. Only by answering the two sub-questions, can we ultimately enhance our understanding on what middle managerial work is amid continuous change.

6.1.1 Managerial communication

As an answer to the first sub-question, i.e. what is middle managerial communication amidst continuous change, several characteristics of ideal managerial communications were identified. First, this study found that ideal managerial communication is, two-way

interaction between the manager and the employee. This finding is in line with the existing academic literature on managerial communication that argues rather unanimously for the importance and successful nature of two-way, interactional approach in communication between the manager and employee (e.g. Weiss 1998; Smith 2006; Åberg 2006; Van Vuuren & Elving 2008; Drucker 2008). In fact, two-way face-to-face interaction has been found to contribute to the overall success of the organization (Therkelsen & Fiebich 2004) and become particularly crucial in the context of continuous change (Quinn 1996). Furthermore, the findings of this study suggest that, time and number of receivers permitting, managers generally prefer oral, face-to-face interaction with employees. Similarly, several previous studies have found that managers tend to prefer face-to-face interaction in general with employees (e.g. Mintzberg 1973; Brenner & Sigband 1964; Lawler et al. 1968). More precisely, consistent with Russ et al. (1990), this study found that managers prefer oral, face-to-face interaction particularly when communicating sensitive, ambiguous or personal matters in order to avoid misunderstandings, while written media are preferred when communicating clear, well-understood, objective messages.

Secondly, managerial communication was found to be ideally multi-channelled, and a combination of oral and written media. Similarly, Mintzberg (1973) found that managers use five different channels for communication in their daily work, including both written and oral media. In this study, however, the number of identified media was higher than Mintzberg's (1973) findings suggest, which was argued to be mostly due to the emergence and development of modern information technology and digitalization. Furthermore, the results of this study suggest that in a context shaped by continuous change, there is a constant flow of information which the managers should successfully communicate to employees with individual preferences for media. The use of multiple channels including both written and oral communication was found to be the best way to communicate successfully with employees in a context where change is continuous, diverse and unpredictable. This finding is in accordance with Bull & Brown's (2012) observations that multi-channel communication increases staff satisfaction and becomes particularly highlighted in the context of change.

Thirdly, the use of appropriate styles of managerial communication was found to be crucial, which is in accordance with the findings of Dasgupta et al. (2012). The most effective styles of managerial communication were found to be positive, clear, consistent, open, honest, calm, compassionate and assertive styles. Similarly, previous research has found that managers should aim to communicate clearly (e.g. Weiss 1998; Smith 2006; Beck & Hillmar 1992; Beer & Eisenstat 1996), openly (e.g. Jablin 1979; Therkelsen & Fiebich 2004), honestly (e.g. Beck and Hillmar 1992; Therkelsen & Fiebich 2004; Dasgupta et al. 2012), consistently (e.g. Beer & Eisenstat 1996; Therkelsen & Fiebich 2004), calmly (e.g. Ponteva 2010), affectionately (e.g. Ford & Ford 1995) and assertively (e.g.

Ford & Ford 1995; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy 2000; Lwehabura & Matovelo 2000; Dasgupta et al 2012). Assertive communication style was defined as a mixture of honest, open, objective, accurate, respectful and tolerant communication styles (Dasgupta et al. 2012). Thus, even though the reviewed literature did not cover openness of communication separately but as a part of assertive style, it is interpreted that the existing academic literature supports this study's finding that good managerial communication style is open in nature. Previous research has found that the above-mentioned communication styles promote employee satisfaction (e.g. Jablin 1979), trust-building between the manager and employee (e.g. Tschannen-Moran & Hoy 2000; Therkelsen & Fiebich 2004), the development of a shared understanding between the manager and employee, and lastly, the creation of change through conversational means (e.g. Ford & Ford 1995).

Lastly, it was found that managerial communication should be paced and information should be communicated in a timely manner with regular updates, even on incomplete matters. Existing research and literature suggests that regular and timely communication are some of the key factors in effective managerial communication and that it becomes particularly highlighted in the context of continuous change (e.g. Brown & Eisenhardt 1997; Therkelsen & Fiebich 2004; Smith 2006).

6.1.2 *Managerial change agency*

In addition to the described means of managerial communication (see 6.1.1), the findings of this study call for middle managers to proactively adopt the role of a change agent as part of their managerial work. Thus, this study contributes to the exhaustive body of research that suggests middle managers have an active role not only as implementors but as creators and facilitators of change. (e.g. Huy 2002; Balogun and Johnson 2004; Rouleau 2005; Pappas and Wooldridge 2007; Rouleau and Balogun 2011.) Next, the second sub-question, i.e. what is the role of middle managers as change agents amidst continuous change, will be answered in detail.

All in all, this study found that the middle manager tends to adopt the role of a change agent through three sub-roles. Firstly, the results of this study suggest that middle managers tend to act as mediators between parties, such as employees and upper management (e.g. Floyd & Wooldridge 2000; Wooldridge 2008; Ponteva 2010; Mintzberg 1973). Secondly, the findings suggest that the middle managers act ideally as facilitators amid continuous change. In concordance with previous research, this study found that the middle manager can facilitate change by supporting employees (e.g. Drucker 1989; Dasgupta et al. 2012), by engaging them throughout the change (e.g. Bullock & Batten 1995; Bull & Brown 2012), by enabling employees' development (e.g. Drucker 1989) and by interpreting changes and the possible outcomes for them (e.g. Weick 1995; Weick & Quinn 1999;

Allen et al. 2007). Closely linked to interpretation, it was found that middle managers can facilitate change by actively selling changes and their possible outcomes to employees and by communicating consistently and assertively. Overall, the manager's skilled use of language, dialogue and conversational means (e.g. Barrett et al. 1995; Ford & Ford 1995; Weick & Quinn 1999), and the ability to make sense of the changing reality (Weick 1995; Rouleau 2005) is highlighted in the reviewed research literature. As the last identified way to facilitate change, this study suggests that the middle manager can assign meaningful change-related roles to employees in the midst of continuous change. The concept of assigning roles to employees is closely related to empowering and encouraging employees to be self-directed and take authority over decisions related to their work (e.g. Raelin 2012), which has been increasingly highlighted in the recent research literature on managerial work.

Thirdly, the findings suggest that the middle manager acts inevitably as a role model to the employees, as their non-verbal and verbal expressions and actions were found to get reflected upon employees rather easily. Thus, the middle managers are argued to have an important role in showing example to the employees on how to respond to change. Moreover, it was found that middle managers should aim to communicate in a change-positive manner and act in accordance with their words. In line with these results, previous research has found that the direct manager is the most preferred and credible source of information for the employees (Allen et al 2007). The success of the communicated message has, in turn, been found to correlate with the perceived credibility of the communicating manager (e.g. Therkelsen & Fiebich 2004). Thus, similarly to the findings of this study, previous research suggest that managers should communicate consistently and avoid sending mixed messages (e.g. Therkelsen & Fiebich 2004). Consequently, it is argued that the middle manager's attitude towards change, how they talk about and react to it affects how employees respond to change.

The findings discussed in this chapter show the inevitable interconnectedness of the two core dimensions of middle managerial work, i.e. managerial communication and change agency. Namely, many of the identified means of managerial communication were found to be crucial for successfully acting as a change agent amidst continuous change.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that middle managerial work that consists of effective managerial communication and change agency brings clarity and acts as a response to the challenges of working amid continuous change. The identified challenges of the continuous change context included a collective sense of change overload, information overload and continuous insecurity and unpredictability. Based on these findings, it was interpreted that continuous change acts as a trigger for improved middle managerial work, which in turn facilitates operation in an ever-changing context.

All in all, this study broadens the understanding of middle managerial work particularly in the context of continuous change through the developed model on the dimensions of middle managerial work (see Figure 3) which shows the interrelationships of the discovered dimensions.

6.2 Managerial implications

A number of managerial implications can be identified from the findings of this study. The main identified managerial implications are based on the findings of this study that suggest that the organization should provide constant support for the development of middle managerial work in the context of continuous change. Next, a set of recommendations is suggested based on the identified managerial implications. The purpose of these recommendations is to help organizations plan and execute development and support for middle managerial work in a way that would improve middle manager's work and collaboration with employees in the challenging context of continuous change. Ultimately, this would work for the benefit of the organization as well (see e.g. Drucker 2008).

The first set of recommendations is related to supporting and developing middle managerial work through targeted trainings for managers. To begin with, in the light of the findings, it is suggested that the organization should provide managers with trainings that have clearly defined goals. This would help the managers understand the deeper purpose of the training session better, which in turn would arguably support learning and facilitate the application of the learnt things into their practical managerial work.

Moreover, it is suggested that the managerial trainings would take into account the possible differences in previous knowledge and levels of experience of the trained managers. This would make attending trainings more fruitful and support professional development for more experienced managers as well. Furthermore, it is encouraged that top management would try to ensure everyone has the possibility and time resources to attend the organized trainings. It is also advisable that the organization would proactively encourage prioritization of attendance to the trainings and communicate their value and importance for the professional development of the managers. This could encourage managers to make attendance to trainings a top priority and support them in taking the time to attend trainings.

Furthermore, in the light of the findings, it is recommended that the trainings for line and middle managers would be planned around topics related to managerial communication and change agency, as part of the broader managerial work. Recommended training topics related to managerial communication include encouraging two-way interaction with employees, using multiple channels efficiently, the importance of style of communication, and lastly, setting the right rhythm for communication to manage the sense of

information overload. Furthermore, it is recommended that line and middle managers would be trained not only on how to communicate effectively but on how to act as change agents as part of their daily managerial work in the midst of continuous change. Discussing change agency and communication together as part of managerial work would ensure line and middle managers acknowledge the essential interconnectedness of the two core dimensions of managerial work (see Figure 3). Moreover, it would help managers become aware of the three central sub-roles of change agency identified in the findings (i.e. facilitator, mediator and role model) and guide them on how to apply these roles in their daily work through examples.

The last recommendation related to managerial training is to promote peer support in the trainings, and as part of the overall organizational support provided for middle managerial work. The results of this study suggest that peer support is one of the most preferred and effective ways to support middle managerial work. It is thus recommended that training sessions would be interactional and allow managers exchange ideas and experiences with each other. Moreover, encouraging overall networking and peer support among managers as part of the regular daily managerial work is also recommended. For example, the organization could initiate regular peer support groups, organized at specific intervals, where managers could get support for their daily challenges from their colleagues and share experiences with them.

The second set of recommendations relate to training employees, which based on the results would ultimately facilitate middle managerial work as well. In the light of the findings, it is recommended that employees would be provided with training on general work community skills. This would contribute to a pleasant and fluent working within the work community. For example, through provision of trainings, employees could be guided to act in a constructive, responsible and respectful manner in conflict situations with their direct manager. Furthermore, based on the findings of this study and the reviewed literature, it is suggested that the organization could plan training sessions or workshops addressed for both employees and the managers. Bringing the managers and employees together through a common training or workshop session would encourage intercourse and two-way communication between the two parties and bring their different perspectives closer to each other. This in turn, would ideally facilitate bridging the gap between managers and employees, and help them build a shared understanding, which could ultimately help the employees understand the complexity of their direct manager's position (see e.g. Drucker 2007; 2008). Thus, at best, the common trainings would encourage seamless collaboration between the managers and employees, which would not only support fluent middle managerial work but also arguably increase employee satisfaction.

The last area of managerial implications is related to other types of in-house support provided by the organization. Firstly, the organizations should encourage and enable peer support. Enabling and promoting peer support for line and middle managers was found to be one of the most meaningful ways for support and development for managerial work. The importance of interconnectedness of members of organization for managerial work has been highlighted in previous research as well (e.g. Drucker 2008). In the light of the findings of this study, peer support means, for example, exchanging ideas and experiences with colleagues and networking with them on a regular basis. Peer support could be encouraged by organizing peer support groups or other networking events for managers at specific intervals.

Secondly, it is recommended that both line and middle managers would be provided with updated clearly defined descriptions of their managerial positions. These descriptions would help them clearly understand how they are expected to perform and what objectives and tasks their managerial roles include (Drucker 2008). Based on the findings and existing academic literature, this would ultimately have the potential of making middle managerial work more uniform throughout the organisation (see e.g. Drucker 2008). Moreover, based on both the reviewed literature and the findings, it is suggested that both line and higher middle managerial roles should be further developed in the direction of more coach-like positions where the middle manager would act as a coach to employees, by empowering and supporting their professional growth and giving them more authority to develop themselves and their work (see e.g. Ellinger & Bostrom 1999; Goggin 2000; Raelin 2012). This is closely related also to the findings of this study that argue for the adoption of the change agent role as part of general middle managerial work. Consequently, it is suggested that the concepts of coaching and change agency would be included already in the official descriptions of both line and higher middle managerial positions, and further discussed in trainings, to facilitate the adoption of these roles by managers.

Furthermore, it is recommended that managers could have in-person support from the Human Resources when needed. This could be organized, for example, as meetings with representatives from Human Resources organized at specific intervals. Lastly, and closely related to all the above-identified managerial implications, the findings of this study suggest, that the organization should ensure that managers have enough time for professional development, for attending the organized trainings and for being present and available for employees.

6.3 Limitations and suggestions for further research

As any research, this study has a number of limitations. It was conducted within the Finnish healthcare industry, which sets two limitations to be taken into account. First, the study may not be directly applicable to other industries without further research. Secondly, the findings of this study may not have been similar within the healthcare industry in other countries with not as many recently planned reforms taking place on the national level. Thus, to assure the applicability of the findings of this study to healthcare contexts outside of Finland, further research would be needed. Moreover, the scope of the study was limited to investigate managerial work through managerial communication and change agency. Consequently, it may have left other significant features of managerial work in the context of continuous change uncovered. Another limitation of the study is the number of the interviewed managers, which may have distorted the significance of some of the findings of this study, and thus affect their reliability.

Despite the discussed limitations, the results of this study provide meaningful insight on line and middle managerial work, in general and on managerial communication and change agency in particular. Moreover, it contributes to our understanding on how managerial work is shaped by the complex context of continuous change. Consequently, it serves as a foundation for both qualitative and quantitative future research on first-line and middle managerial communication and work in continuous change context.

An interesting further research topic would be to conduct a similar study in an organization outside the healthcare industry and see how results would compare to the findings of this study. On the other hand, it would be interesting to examine the same phenomenon in another hospital district both in Finland and outside of Finland. Moreover, future research could examine managerial work and its features further in continuous change context, in order to find out possible additional dimensions or sub-dimensions of managerial work that were left uncovered in this study due to its limited scope. Lastly, another interesting suggestion for future research would be to study in more detail the specific methods for developing the work of line and middle managers.

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APPENDIX 1 STRUCTURE OF THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

Background information:

- How would you describe the Hospital District of Southwest Finland as a working environment now, in 2019?
 - How has it changed over the years?
- Tell me about your managerial role at HDSF
 - What is it like to be a direct manager?
 - What kind of challenges have you faced in this role?
- What kind of group of employees do you supervise?
 - How many employees are there in this group?
- How would you describe the work community under your management?

Managerial communication:

- With whom do you communicate?
- How do you communicate in your managerial role?
- How do you communicate to your team or group of employees?
- What does managerial communication mean to your subordinates based on your own evaluation?
- With your own words, tell me what kind of ways, means or aspects become highlighted in your managerial communication?
- What kind of channels or communicational means do you use in your managerial work, when you communicate with employees?
- Do you think there is a difference between face-to-face or non-face-to-face communication when communicating with employees?
 - Which one do you prefer when communicating to employees, and why?
- What kind of communicational means do you find important in managerial work in a constantly changing everyday work life?
- What kind of challenges have you faced in communication?
 - What about feelings of success?

Managerial work in continuous change:

- Do you experience continuous change as a part of the everyday work-life in your organization?
 - How does it come out?
- What kind of feelings does it arouse in you?
- How do you experience your role as a manager amidst continuous change?
- What kind of effect do you think your own example and communication has on encouraging change capability in your work community?

Development of managerial work:

- Do you think your communication skills improved, having attended some of the change capability and communication training sessions organized by HDSF?
 - How? Why?
- How do you think managers could be supported in their work?
- What else would you like to share on this subject?
- Would you like to add something to what we have already discussed?

